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TWO CULTURES, ONE IDENTITY: BICULTURALISM OF YOUNG MEXICAN AMERICANS

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Community and Leadership
Development in the
College of Agriculture, Food and Environment
at the University of Kentucky

By
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2019

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

TWO CULTURES, ONE IDENTITY: BICULTURALISM OF YOUNG MEXICAN AMERICANS

The purpose of this study was to explore the daily life of the younger generation of Mexican Americans through a phenomenology design. Specifically, in regard to how the culture-sharing pattern of biculturalism is reflected in their lives and the way they construct their bicultural identity. The study utilized rich qualitative data to paint a clear and descriptive picture of the internal process of biculturalism within eight Mexican American college students. Ultimately, the data analysis aimed to collect and reflect their voices and the stories. This was done through three distinct data methods that complemented each other: interviews (oral), photo elicitation (visual), and document analysis (written). Results indicate that, the way bicultural individuals organize and respond to their culture in terms of behavior and cognition, is independent from the feelings they experience while engaging in cultural frame switching. No matter how well the participants are able to organize their dual cultures and compartmentalize them in their life, they still struggle with conflicting and opposing feelings. Nonetheless, even though their cultures and ideologies can clash at times and feel contradictory, this young generation can still manage to respond and function in both cultures, but to varying degrees.

KEYWORDS: Biculturalism, Mexican Americans, Emergent Adulthood, Cultural Identity, Immigration

Janela Aida Salazar

06/21/2019

Date

TWO CULTURES, ONE IDENTITY: BICULTURALISM OF YOUNG MEXICAN AMERICANS

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DEDICATION

To all those of Mexican descent living in the United States. Those who are currently at the center of a turbulent political climate that incites anti-immigrant sentiments against them and generalizes all immigrants as “faceless, nameless” individuals or “bad hombres”. I believe in you, I believe in us, and the stories we have to tell. I believe in your sacrifice as you crossed the border and the love you have for your family that pushes you each day to be the best you can be. I believe in this young generation that continues to prove their worth to themselves and to all those who surround them.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The multicultural landscape that encompasses the United States is rapidly growing as people seek better opportunities for themselves and their families. Although a sizable proportion of these individuals may be adept at functioning in both cultural contexts, effectively capturing the complexities of biculturalism remains a challenge (Basilio et al., 2014). Nonetheless, finding ways to adapt to the host culture becomes a necessity as individuals who perceive the cultural meaning systems that are intersecting in their multicultural contexts, as compatible and integrated, are better adjusted than those who perceive these contexts as opposing (Chen, Benet-Martinez, & Bond, 2008).

In effect, the challenge of biculturalism is intensified when the minority lives among people of their same heritage. Notably, Hispanics represent the largest ethnic or racial minority, amounting to 17.8 percent of the nation's total population. Furthermore, those of Mexican origin constitute 63.4 percent of the Hispanic population (United States Census Bureau, 2017). In light of this, the study of biculturalism in a "minority" such as Mexican Americans, becomes pertinent as they've become one of the largest and fastest growing ethnic groups because of their close proximity to the United States.

Studies related to biculturalism in Mexican Americans tend to be approached in quantitative measures that concentrate and reflect on solely the effects that integrating both cultures can have on the individual, such as how language acculturation is positively associated with self-esteem (e.g., Meyler, Stimpson, & Peek, 2006; Marsiglia, Booth, Baldwin, & Ayers, 2013); how Mexican Americans become more likely to adopt egalitarian gender-role attitudes as generation progresses (Su, Richardson, & Wang,

2010) and the role ethnic differences and familism play in adolescent development (Baer & Schmitz, 2007). Other studies focus on conflicts that arise with the acculturation gap between parents and children (Marsiglia, Kulis, FitzHarris, & Becerra, 2009; Telzer, Yuen, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2016; Rogers-Sirin, Ryce, & Sirin, 2013); while some seek to provide scales and measurements to assess levels of biculturalism (Basilio et al., 2014; Buriel, 1993).

All in all, these various approaches have been used to examine the levels of biculturalism and the effects it has in the individual and in their interaction with others and the host culture, demonstrating overall a positive correlation of biculturalism with well-being, self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. At the same time, the evidence suggests that children are able to acculturate much faster than their parents to the new culture which also leads to a higher sense of belonging for the younger generations.

Despite there being numerous studies about biculturalism in Mexican Americans, there seems to be a focus on effects that can be quantified. This ultimately inhibits the opportunity to provide a more in-depth look at biculturalism from a qualitative approach. Likewise, these studies show the outcome but not the process of how the two cultures are intertwined and experienced within the individual.

Being bicultural proves to be a complex process, as the dual identities are constantly clashing and seeking harmony within oneself. This can be challenging for anyone, but especially for young adults as they are undergoing significant life changes. Because of this dynamic and influential period of identity formation and development, exploring the daily life of the younger generation of Mexican Americans through a

phenomenology design offered a holistic view of biculturalism as a central phenomenon in this globalized nation.

Finally, this study was important as it added to the scholarly research and literature by complementing the amounts of quantified data that already exist. At the same time, it provided a rich detailed picture of what biculturalism means for these young adults, both through a first-person narrative account and through the description and interpretation of their lives, and of the significant and unique role each culture plays within themselves.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Moving to a new country can be an exciting and nerve wracking adventure for many, as they are going to be thrown head first into a different lifestyle, way of viewing the world, customs and practices that are completely unknown. It is then when it becomes pertinent for the individual to find a way to "survive" and adapt to the host culture, but the reality is that your culture and traditions are part of you, no matter where you go. People can't simply forget who they are and what comprises their identity and ethnicity.

In light of this exposure to a duality of cultures that intertwine in their daily life, individuals go through a complex process to adhere to the host culture, while being true to who they are and maintaining their own customs and traditions alive. With the ever-increasing number of minorities found within the United States, the study of biculturalism becomes relevant as it represents an adaptive strategy in which individuals know and understand two different cultures and may alter their behavior to fit a particular cultural context (LaFromboise, Coleman, Gerton, & Steinberg, 1993).

Culture

When one comes into contact with an individual from a different country, one of the first questions that arises is one associated with their respective culture and traditions. But, what exactly does one mean when referring to "culture"?

According to Williams (2001) there are three general categories in the definition of culture. The first is referred to as the 'ideal', in which culture is a state of human

perfection, relating to absolute or universal values. Second, there is the ‘documentary’, in which culture defines a body of intellectual and imaginative work where human thought has been recorded. Finally, there is the ‘social’ definition of culture that describes a particular way of life, the clarification of meanings and values implicit and explicit of that culture.

It is important to note that, for the purpose of this literature review, when referring to culture, the ‘social’ definition will be utilized as the researcher’s objective is to describe a particular way of life. This set of social norms, beliefs and values also encompass familial roles, communication patterns, affective styles and values regarding personal control, individualism and religiosity (Stone, Johnson, Stone-Romero, & Hartman, 2006; Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1994). Additionally, Matsumoto (2000) stated that within a culture, particular traits and characteristics are held in common within that environment and are commonly passed on generationally (as cited in Hagan, Flanagan, & Witta, 2012).

Despite the fact that culture is shared within a specific environment, today it has begun to trespass physical boundaries and has traveled to other countries in the form of immigration (people seeking asylum, refugees, etc.), education and job opportunities, as well as relationships. Nevertheless, culture will always remain an inherent part of the identity of each individual and, no matter the distance, it’s what connects them to a greater whole.

In light of this, individual behavior and attitudes are the cumulative total of experience, learning, attitude and culture (Hagan et al., 2012). For this reason, culture becomes an important factor in determining the diversity in ideas and opinions that can

exist between people who were raised in different cultural backgrounds but now coexist in a same environment. Since their past experiences vary, their behaviors and attitudes can also differ in certain situations.

Diversity and Multiculturalism in the United States

In this globalized world, where everything and everyone is connected, multiculturalism has become the *status quo* in mostly every country, as each becomes witness to an increasing diversity in their societies (Matsumoto, 2002; Morrison, Plaut, & Ybarra, 2010). This social penetration has become much easier, affordable and frequent because of the improvements in communications technologies and transportation.

As stated before, culture refers to the meanings and values of a particular way of life. In contrast, multiculturalism is defined as the presence or support of a diverse number of cultures within a society. Furthermore, Fowers and Richardson (1996) coined multiculturalism as a "social-intellectual movement that promotes the value of diversity as a core principle and insists that all cultural groups be treated with respect and as equals" (p. 609).

All in all, multiculturalism seeks to foster understanding and appreciation of ethnic diversity by acknowledging and respecting minority group identities and cultures (Verkuyten & Dovidio, 2005). Regardless of whether concrete forms of multiculturalism are framed as policies or as learning opportunities, the core principle behind the ideology is that differences between groups should be recognized and celebrated (Rios & Wynn, 2016).

At the same time, Bartochevies (2013) explained that, in order to understand multiculturalism as a phenomenon of reality, it is important to realize that it is an inevitable evolution of humanity. He emphasized that multiculturalism can either be a cause for a boost in economic and cultural development, or otherwise be a cause of social conflicts. Likewise, the position of multiculturalism as either positive or negative for society has been endlessly debated in the literature.

Despite its positive consequences, multiculturalism is often met with resistance among majority group members, particularly those whose race or ethnicity is central to their self-concept (Rios & Wynn, 2016; Morrison et al., 2010). Nevertheless, there is research that sustains that being exposed to racial and ethnic differences on a regular basis causes dominant group members to develop more inclusive attitudes over time (Morrison et al., 2010; Berry & Kalin, 1995).

In either case, racial and ethnic minorities are projected to outnumber White Americans and become the "new majority" in the United States by 2043 (Yen, 2013; Ortman & Guarneri, 2009). In light of this, it has become more and more relevant to acknowledge and appreciate the diversity that surrounds us, while seeking to promote harmony among all.

Hispanic, Latino and Latinx Population

Within the multicultural landscape in the United States, the Hispanic population is the fastest growing ethnic group and is expected to account for 25 percent of the nation's population by the year 2030 (United States Census Bureau, 2017). This group has

notoriously become predominant in size and heterogeneity, as it encompasses all the Spanish-speaking countries.

Additionally, the term Hispanic was coined by the US government in order to identify and categorize this increasing population of Spanish-speaking people (Passel & Taylor, 2009). It is important to note that the term Latino and Hispanic can sometimes be used interchangeably in the literature because individuals in this group share many similar cultural characteristics (Katiria Perez & Cruess, 2014; Almeida, Molnar, Kawachi, & Subramanian, 2009; Elder, Ayala, Parra-Medina, & Talavera, 2009). The concrete difference between the two is that Latino refers to people from the countries comprising Latin America and Hispanic refers to Spanish-speaking countries.

Nonetheless, the term Latino has seen a transition into 'Latinx', which has recently begun to be used to refer to people from Latin American in an inclusive way. Ramirez and Blay (2017) stated that the word has existed online since at least 2004 by queer communities, but saw a rise in popularity in late 2014, and that in 2015 Google searches increased and Latinx officially "became a widely-used identifier on both social media platforms like Tumblr and in scholarly work".

Similarly, in a book review of *Latinx: The New Force in American Politics and Culture* written by Ed Morales (2018), it is explained how, when reading Morales' dissection on Latinx identity formation:

> One begins to believe that the x in 'Latinx' is more than just a means of providing gender-neutrality. As in algebra, the x is variable. How a Latino or Latina perceives himself or herself – and how he or she is perceived by others – often depends on context… Latinos can be black, white, brown, or anything in between.

> Skin color, national origin, whether one lives in the mainland United States or outside of it, and one's ability to speak Spanish, not to mention gender and sexual orientation, all play a role in one's self concept. (Castro, 2018)

Aside from this, the 'x' is seen by many as a way of rejecting the gendering of words since Spanish is a gendered language, in which the masculinized version of words is considered gender neutral. Likewise, it is seen as a way to reclaim identity from the colonization and legacy of European languages and traditions, as well as an evolution of language to accommodate to the times (Ramirez & Blay, 2017).

It is important to state that, within this literature review, the term Hispanic will be used to maintain consistency. Regarding Hispanic population, there seems to be an emphasis on the cultural stressors that can negatively impact their self-esteem and socialization. Furthermore, it has been found that strategies to adapt rapidly to the dominant culture are mostly to seek approval from others, instead of achieving a healthy, voluntary adaptation and integration, which could in turn diminish psychological distress (Wang, Scalise, Barajas-Munoz, Julio, & Gomez, 2016). Even though adaptation to another culture is experienced and achieved at a different pace for every person, it is known that the Hispanic population tends to be positive, kind and happy in their interactions with others. Likewise, research has shown that the Hispanic population are more likely to retain their cultural values and traditions, in comparison to most of the other groups (Fry & Lowell, 2002).

As stated before, Hispanics seek to preserve their culture, while also trying to become an integral part of American society (Hernandez, Cohen, & Garcia, 2011). These findings tie into the fact that most members of the Hispanic subgroups share the same

cultural values, such as familism, collectivism, power distance and a present time orientation (Stone et al., 2006). These values are exemplified strongly in their lives by taking an active role in their interactions with others, decision-making and perspectives.

In regard to familism, in their review of literature, Katiria Perez and Cruess (2014) concluded that there is indeed evidence that links the Hispanic familism values to physical and mental health status, but despite there being documentation about it, the specific health consequences that arise from this familial altruistic behavior remain unclear. On the other hand, in respect to collectivism, Stone et al. (2006) described that Hispanic Americans tend to have high levels of personal interdependence, are willing to sacrifice for the welfare of the group, and care about the quality of relationships. The preference for collectivism, rather than individualism delineates the pursuit of positive, caring and nurturing relationships. Despite there being many countries that encompass this population and, while all have their own distinct traits and traditions, it can be inferred that, overall, Hispanic Americans have a strong culture, in which values, family and the importance of togetherness prevails.

Mexican Americans

The focus of this literature review is focused on the Hispanics of Mexican origin, who account for 63.3% (36 million) of the nation's Hispanic population in 2015, by far the largest share of any origin group (Flores, 2017). Specifically, they have the longest history of U.S. settlement, as they lived in the Southwest before it was annexed by the United States in 1848 (Landale & Oropesa, 2007). It is important to mention that the term

“Mexican American” has come to refer to those either born in Mexico or with a family origin from Mexico, that have lived in the United States for the majority of their lives.

Conversely, no other language is heard more often on street corners and in the workplace than the Spanish language -and no immigrant group stands out for its sheer size and sweeping presence like the Mexican immigrant population (Foley, 2014). With this in mind, the following sections have taken into account the characteristics and concepts that are attributed to Mexican Americans in the research realm.

Familism. Within the review of the literature, one of the most predominant terms that arise in regard to Mexican Americans is the concept of familism. This is described as a phenomenon characterized by positive interpersonal family relationships, high family unity, social support and interdependence, and is considered a cultural characteristic (Romero, Robinson, Haydel, Mendoza, & Killen, 2004). Aside from this, familism is characterized by supporting the family emotionally, physically and financially; having a sense of obligation toward the family; and incorporating the family as part of the self (Knight et al., 2010).

As mentioned before, the Hispanic population are collectivistic cultures and, in this same sense, familism is a construct that reflects this very nature: the orientation toward the welfare of the group (Romero et al., 2004). This awareness of others and seeking the common good can be indicators for prosocial behavior tendencies, which are actions intended to benefit others. Recently, the field has begun to explore the role that familism can play in determining these behaviors in children and adolescents.

On this note, Calderón-Tena, Knight, Carlo, and Zárate (2011) examined the cultural socialization of prosocial behavioral tendencies through family relationships. In

this study, 204 Mexican American mothers and their adolescent children completed measures of familism values, prosocial parenting practices, and prosocial behavioral tendencies. The researchers found that the transmission of familism values indeed serve as a social medium to develop prosocial behavior. It is significant to point out that family cohesion is believed to facilitate adolescent development through parental attachment, emotional closeness, and a sense of support (Baer & Schmitz, 2007).

Moreover, a longitudinal study conducted at a later date with a sample of 749 Mexican American adolescents in a range from 5th to 10th grade, found that at 12th grade, these adolescents endorsed higher levels of compliant, emotional, dire, and altruistic prosocial tendencies. This could be because public prosocial tendencies are linked to gaining the approval of others and, during familial socialization, children are encouraged to be attentive to others' needs as they also seek to gain the approval of their parents (Knight, Carlo, Mahrer, & Davis, 2016).

All in all, the role of familism in a Mexican American's life correlates extensively to the positive values that shape their day to day interactions and guide their life. Specifically, findings illustrate that the support, caring nature and unity within the family forms the basis for personality development in the child as they learn to respond to the needs of family members and internalize these values into prosocial behavioral tendencies (Calderón-Tena et al., 2011).

Character. Mexican Americans value the pursuit of harmonious interpersonal relationships and seek to keep their emotions in check when interacting with others, as that they favor politeness, pleasantness, agreeableness, keeping one's temper, and passively enduring stress (Triandis, Marín, Lisansky, Betancourt, & Hogan,

1984). The cultural norms of Mexican Americans focus heavily on manners and courtesy, and establish that a direct argument of contradiction is considered rude. Thus, a person will tend not to disagree unless they can do it in a proper and sensitive way. Specifically, it moves the individual to show a certain level of conformity and empathy for the feelings of others (Castillo, Perez, Castillo, & Ghosheh, 2010).

As a result of these cultural values that are so entrenched in their personality traits and interpersonal relationships, every Mexican American faces a complex duality when trying to experience both cultures. In one part, they seek to maintain their values and traditions, while at the same time, adapting to the host culture, the social norms and expectations. This phenomenon is often referred to in the literature as biculturalism, which is later explained in further detail as it forms the basis of the conceptual framework.

Generations. Within the vast quantity of Mexican Americans currently residing in the country, there are significant differences in relation to how long it's been since they arrived. Some were born in Mexico and came as babies, others as adolescents, adults and, some were born and always raised in the United States.

Due to this, it is important to make the distinction: first-generation were born in Mexico, second-generation were born in the United States but had one or both parents born in Mexico, while third-generation were born in the United States and also had both parents born in the United States. In a relevant study in which Buriel (1993) sought to examine first-, second-, and third-generation of Mexican Americans and Euro American school children in relation to their respect for cultural differences and biculturalism. 80 children participated and were measured against teacher ratings using the Bicultural

Identity/Respect for Cultural Differences Scale. The teachers were trained and instructed on how to use the scale that utilized four dependent variables: identification with Mexican American culture, identification with Euro American culture, respect for cultural differences and, biculturalism.

One of the findings illustrated that a strong identification with Mexican American culture did not prevent development of identification with Euro American culture, thus supporting the view of biculturalism. This study is pertinent to researchers that value biculturalism over acculturation, as a process of adapting to a new culture, without losing cultural identity and ethnicity. This two-directional model of adopting both cultures, came as a much needed response to the multicultural demands of the globalized world.

Upon review of the literature concerning the distinct generations that conform Mexican Americans in relation to biculturalism, there was a lack of information found. Thus, there is a need to dive deeper into this particular field as the variation in the exposure to the mainstream culture and years lived within the country can potentially play a role and impact the levels of biculturalism that these individuals have. Before one can begin to understand the reasons people migrate and the effects discrimination and racialization can have on someone, it is important to provide some historic background about the Mexican-United States border and the political climate of recent decades.

Mexico-US Border

In 1846, the United States incited Mexico to war. The troops invaded and occupied Mexico, and they were forced to give up almost half of its nation, what is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and California (Anzaldúa, 2012). With this

victory, Anzaldúa indicated that Americans pushed the Texas border down 100 miles and the border dividing the Mexican people was born on February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo.

In 1917, U.S. farmers and manufacturers need labor, so immigration of Mexicans into the U.S. is encouraged as they were seen as a solution to labor problems in the country (Cromer, 2017). A few years later, with the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act, the Border Patrol was created and thus, one of the first steps toward the hardening of the boundary (Arreola, 2010). Despite the need for Mexican workers, as soon as the Great Depression hit and there was an economic crisis, the livelihoods of these workers didn't matter anymore and "thousands of Mexicans were unofficially 'repatriated' by city, state and federal governments of the U.S. and sent back to Mexico" (Cromer, 2017). Similarly, throughout the years, the U.S. government's stance on immigration has vacillated from welcoming to restrictive, and the majority of the times this has been directly correlated with how the economy is performing. This wavering stance ultimately set the stage for an unfair situation for Mexican workers, who one day were wanted and the next were sent back home.

Similarly, Arreola (2010) explained that until Prohibition was repealed, border enforcement had a lot to do with the smuggling of alcohol across the border. Nonetheless, when the Bracero Program ended in 1964, a program which had allowed Mexican workers temporary residence in the US, the Border Patrol shifted its efforts on preventing unauthorized immigration from Mexico and "set the stage for what has become a stunning militarization of the boundary" (Arreola, 2010, p. 340).

> The Mexico-US borderland is a tricultural zone -Native, Hispanic, Anglo- cut by a boundary line. For much of its one hundred sixty-two year political history this zone was without significant formal bounding, and only recently has the line become material through construction of a fence along much of the divide. The 200-kilometer-wide (124 miles) zone -100 (62.5 miles) on either side of the international boundary- was declared an official borderland by Article 4 of the 1983 La Paz Agreement. (Arreola, 2010, p. 331)

In his narrative of the borderland, Arreola (2010) exemplified how, to Spanish speakers, the border is *la frontera*, literally the frontier, a term characterized by optimism and opportunity and a very different vision of the region than English speakers, who simply see it as a geographic term that suggests the opposite of heartland: a cultural uneasiness. Along these same lines, Anzaldúa (2012) related her experience growing up as a border girl and illustrated how this border *es una herida abierta* -an open wound- where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. She goes on to explain that "borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*" (p. 25).

Political climate and immigration. Over the course of the years, state and nationwide level restrictive immigration policies have been implemented placing the lives of immigrants and their children in a precarious state (Ayón, Ojeda, & Ruano, 2018). In 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed an immigration reform bill into law – Immigration Reform and Control Act- tightening the security at the Mexican border but also allowing any immigrant who had entered before 1982 to be eligible for amnesty. A couple of decades later, President George W. Bush proposed changes to US immigration

law that would make it easier for people to cross back and forth over the border to work legally in the country (Gonyea, 2018). His “compassionate” stance was influenced by him previously being a border governor who had personally known and seen the stories of many immigrants.

In 2012, President Barack Obama issued an executive order deferring deportation for all those who were brought to the United States as children, these Dreamers, as they were commonly referred to as. The order was called DACA, an acronym for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, and it had protected more than 800,000 Dreamers from deportation and granted them work permits (Gomez, 2019). In actuality, current President Donald Trump has tried to end the program, only to be blocked by federal courts. Despite this victory, as of April 2019, DACA continues to be in a state of uncertainty, in which “unauthorized immigrants who had DACA protections before Trump tried to rescind them are allowed to keep renewing but are forced to continually consider how to maximize the time they’ll be protected if the Supreme Court sides with Trump” (Lind, 2019). Aside from this, Trump also aims to switch merit-based immigration from family ties to a system based on the education, language skills and the immigrant’s ability to contribute to the economy.

Since campaigning for presidency, Trump’s platform has been one that centers on combating immigration and he’s charged full force into this the moment he got elected. From wanting to build a wall and make Mexico pay for it, to implementing a “zero-tolerance” policy and calling all Mexican immigrants “bad hombres”, racialization has significantly increased in the past years and has been at the forefront of every media coverage regarding the United States and its president. Because of this, the current

political climate has been disruptive and discouraging to immigrant families who have called the United States their home for decades. The fact that their fate lays at the hands of a constant tug of war of political power leads to an overwhelming uncertainty in which one day they might feel secure in their rights, while other days they live with a constant fear of deportation.

Regardless of the policies that are put in place and the many sanctions, barriers and hardships that people might face when attempting to cross the border, those who desperately need to, will ultimately find a way. As Anzaldúa (2012) pointed out, "faceless, nameless, invisible, taunted with 'Hey cucaracho' (cockroach). Trembling with fear, yet filled with courage, a courage born of desperation" (p. 33).

Reasons for immigration. In regard to the reasons why Mexicans seek to migrate to its northern neighboring country, some specified that this is due to experiencing fear, economic insecurity, drug violence, and extortion in their home country (Contreras, 2014). Despite there being different options for them to come live and work in the United States, such as permanent residence, temporary work visa or student visa; the most common form of entry is as an undocumented immigrant (Hanson, 2007). This is due to the fact that those seeking better opportunities tend to have low education levels and thus, may not qualify for work visas.

Even though Mexico is not the only country that has people migrating illegally, its close proximity to the U.S., the use of Spanish and the similarities with other Latino and/or Hispanic countries has led many to generalize this diverse population as all being Mexicans. This point is emphasized by Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, and Abdulrahim (2012) who argued that "in the popular imagination, all Latinos and/or Hispanics are perceived

to be Mexican, all Mexicans are seen as immigrants, and they, in turn, are all cast as undocumented" (p. 2103). This racilization has recently increased in light of anti-immigrant policies, extending its effects to both documented immigrants and their U.S.-born co-ethnics. What does this increased racialization and judgment mean for their health and well-being?

Effects of anti-immigrant policies. Once undocumented Latino immigrants arrive in the country, they encounter anti-immigrant policies and sentiments. Likewise, a myriad of factors create risk for families, including poor living conditions, lack of job opportunities, discrimination, lack of access to services and education, and deportation or detention for those who are arriving without permission (Foster, 2001). At the same time, it is important to consider that the trauma for immigrants start even before they begin their dangerous journey into the country. Moreover, Torres, Santiago, Walts, and Richards (2018) stated that:

> The effects of immigration policies and practices range from discrimination, fear and mistrust, poverty, limited access to services, and family separation on youth and family mental health. Although some stressors may disproportionately affect undocumented individuals, many stressors can have a deleterious effect regardless of documentation status. (p. 5)

As stated before, discrimination happens in Mexican Americans regardless of their documentation status (Salas, Ayon, & Gurrola, 2013; Torres et al., 2018). For example, children that are citizens have the constant fear that their Mexican parents could be deported at any moment. In regard to this, Ayon et al. (2018) have reported studies

that estimate that at least 9 million people live in “mixed-status” families, with at least one unauthorized adult and at least one U.S.-born citizen child.

Correspondingly, a study found a link between “the social, economic, political and historical circumstances” into which Mexican immigrants arrived in the United States and the number of depressive symptoms they experienced later on in their lives (Miranda, Schulz, Israel, & Gonzalez, 2010). Furthermore, it was found that the policies that were in place at the time of immigration may affect mental health with subsequent implications for physical health over the life course (Montgomery & Foldspang, 2008; Muntaner, Eaton, Miech, & OCampo, 2004).

In a study by Salas et al. (2013), the authors sought to examine the effects of immigrant legislation on Mexican immigrant families’ health and mental health. Throughout focus groups the main themes that emerged “revealed the isolation, powerlessness, frustration, fear, trauma, stress, and dangerous conditions that these immigrant families experienced as part of their everyday life”. Moreover, participants expressed that the constant fear of being arrested and deported led them to live a significantly restricted life at times. Not only that, but the fact that you have to constantly be on the lookout because you never know who might be against immigrants or Mexicans.

Aside from this, a significant discovery is the contradictory policies and practices that these people encounter: a formal political system that does not support undocumented entry into this country and an informal system that recruits undocumented workers and benefits from their labor (Ayon, Gurrola, Moya Salas, Androff, & Krysik,

2012; Salas et al., 2013). This only adds to the confusion and fear of not knowing who to trust and where to go.

The combination of parental arrest, family separation, lost work and income, food hardship, housing instability, and worries about their family's future leads to increased stress, anxiety and other mental health challenges (Chaudry, 2011). This stress and fear is reflected and lived daily in both mothers and fathers. Through their qualitative interviews, Salas and colleagues (2013) illustrated how some fathers feel powerless at not being able to provide for their family, at losing jobs and facing economic hardship; while others prefer to deal with stress by not sharing anything and closing themselves up to their wife and family. Most of the fathers interviewed express that they just hold their head and try to endure.

On the other hand, mothers feel so stressed all the time as they fear their husbands will be deported and their family could be separated (Salas et al., 2013). They not only depend on them financially, but they see them as the providers and spiritual leaders of the household. It is important to note that, in Mexico, cultural norms state that women must provide physical and emotional support for the family, while men embrace the roles of being a financial provider and a family leader (Castillo et al., 2010).

At the same time, they experience challenges in accessing health care, sometimes related to their economic position, their undocumented status or their lack of knowledge of English. Not to mention that, despite the far-reaching expansion of health care under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2010, the ACA prohibits undocumented immigrants from purchasing health insurance coverage and they continue to be excluded from most public forms of health care (Torres et al., 2018). Moreover,

some parents expressed how, despite their anxiety over applying for social services for their children, you have to do it for them and seek to benefit them in any way possible, even if something happens to us (Salas et al., 2013).

All in all, it is clear that parents deal with a number of stressors that affect their mental health and have them on high alert at all times. Regardless of this and the uncertainty they have about the future, what they carry most is feeling a "sense of failure in achieving the hopes and dreams that brought them to the United States in the first place" (Chaudry, 2011).

In regard to the effects that this has on the children, it is important to note that there are an estimated 5.5 million children with undocumented parents, approximately three quarters of whom are U.S. citizens (Chaudry, 2011). In light of this, the author also exemplified that deportation of parents or other family members presents a serious risk to the safety, economic security and well-being, as children are separated from the parents during critical stages of development.

In the focus groups conducted by Salas and colleagues (2013), participants expressed how their kids are in this constant state of fear and anxiety. One shared that her daughter asks daily what time her dad will be home from work since the father of her friend was deported, so she is afraid that her dad might one day not come back. Other adolescents shared their inability to concentrate in school because of this concern and, at the same time, their fear that their dreams would not be fulfilled because of a lack of opportunities.

Similarly, a study found that children of undocumented Mexican migrants have significantly higher risks of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems than their

counterparts with documented or naturalized citizen mothers (Landale, Hardie, Oropesa, & Hillemeier, 2015). All these circumstances have led children to confront their parents in various ways -ranging from aggression and withdrawal- as well as acting out their fears and concerns in, sometimes, creative ways (Chaudry, 2011).

This point is further emphasized by Dreby (2015), who illustrated that the fear of deportation and lack of trust in the government can increase the risk for mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, and difficulties in academic performance among youth. Moreover, families report fears of performing everyday activities and also restricting their children's involvement in a community out of worry instigated by immigration policies (Chavez, Lopez, Englebrecht, & Viramontez Anguiano, 2012).

Overall, Chaudry (2011) emphasized that the separation of family members combined with economic hardship and the stigma of arrest and detention tend to generate substantial psychological stress for both parents and children.

Emerging Adults

The transition from being a child, dependent upon one's parents, to an independent and self-reliant adult represents one of the most dynamic, broad and influential periods of human development (Quas, 2014). Not only is it a defining stage in life, but Arnett (2010) also explained that, for today's young people, the road to adulthood is actually a long one. The unique thing about this long road to adulthood is how drastically different it is from past generations, such as our parents. Arnett (2010) stated that, as recently as 1970, the typical 21-year-old was married or in a serious

relationship, caring for a newborn or expecting, probably finished with his education and settling into a serious job.

Nonetheless, today those in their late teens to their late twenties utilize this time in their lives to explore all the possibilities available to them, making constant switches in jobs in order to find a fulfilling one, waiting to be more established before marrying, and traveling around the world. Despite the freedom that comes from no longer being a child, Arnett (2010) explained that today's generation "struggle with uncertainty even as they revel in being freer than they ever were in childhood or ever will be once they take on the full weight of adult responsibilities" (p. 3).

With this in mind comes the realization that adulthood is now starting later in life but this unique period cannot simply be considered an "extended adolescence". Because of this, Arnett (2010) coined the term "emerging adulthood" to describe this stage in life. The author goes on to describe that the obligations and responsibility that comes with adulthood can offer security and stability, but it also represents a closing of doors, as many see it as the end of their independence, spontaneity, and wide-open possibilities.

It is important to mention that Erikson (1968) asserted that one of the main tasks for adolescents is to develop a coherent sense of identity. Not only that, but he established that culture influences deeply the development of the individual, and that one cannot be understood apart from his or her social context. If adulthood is now starting later in life, how is this affecting the identity development of young people?

This theme is explored by Arnett (2010) who remarked that, despite the fact that Erikson's research on identity has been on adolescence, the developmental psychologist also indicated the phenomenon of "prolonged adolescence" typical of industrialized

societies during which the young adult experiments freely in order to find their role in society. Moreover, Arnett asserted that identity achievement has rarely been reached by the end of high school and that it continues through the late teens and the twenties.

Building on Erikson's discussion of identity, in 1969 Chickering provided his theory of psychosocial development describing the developmental issues that are faced by college students as he noted that the "establishment of identity is the core development issue with which students grapple during the college years" (Evans, 2010, p. 36).

In 1993, and after many years of research, Chickering revised his theory in order to incorporate new findings. In this, the author presented seven vectors to paint a comprehensive picture of psychosocial development. He called these vectors of development because each seems to have direction and magnitude, and these move more in spirals or steps, rather than by a straight line (Chickering & Reisser, 1993):

1. Developing Competence
2. Managing Emotions
3. Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence
4. Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships
5. Establishing Identity
6. Developing Purpose
7. Developing Integrity

Developing Competence. Within this vector, three parts of competences were being assessed by Chickering and Reisser (1993): intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence. The first of these is related to acquisition of knowledge, subject matter, culture, and critical thinking; the second has to

do with athletic and recreational activities, as well as more artistic and manual activities; while the last one is related to communication skills, leadership and working with others.

Managing Emotions. Evans (2010) explained that, in this vector, students begin to develop the ability to recognize and accept emotions, as well as to appropriately express and control them. These feelings range from anxiety, depression, anger, shame, and guilt, as well as positive emotions such as caring, inspiration and optimism (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence. Within this vector, development results in increased emotional independence (Evans, 2010). At the same time, students not only become more self-directed and value their independence, but they also begin to comprehend and value interdependence and connectedness with others.

Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships. In regard to this, Evans (2010) established that experiences with relationships contribute significantly to the development of a sense of self (p. 39). Within this, the author mentions that there's a need to develop intercultural and interpersonal tolerance, appreciate differences, and build the capacity to create lasting and healthy relationships.

Establishing Identity. It is important to note that, for one to establish their identity, students have to build on all the vectors that came before it. Aside from this, Evans (2010) remarked that, within this vector, one has to acknowledge differences in identity development based on gender, ethnic background, and sexual orientation. Correspondingly, identity also includes feeling comfortable with one's body and

appearance, a sense of one's social and cultural heritage, and feeling secure in who they are despite feedback from significant others.

Developing Purpose. In regard to this vector, it consists of developing clear vocational goals, making meaningful commitments to specific personal interests and activities, and establishing strong interpersonal commitments (Evans, 2010, p. 40). Likewise, this includes the importance of finding a sense of meaning and fulfillment in life.

Developing Integrity. This vector includes humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence. Chickering and Reisser (1993) explained that students progress into a more humanized value system where they realize that the interests of others can also be balanced with one's own, they begin to consciously affirm their values, and have these align and become congruent with their actions.

Emerging Adults and Biculturalism

Aside from these vectors, the developmental changes of early adulthood in complex societies require, encourage, and support sophisticated forms of cognition, advanced levels of moral understanding, and self-constructed identities (Moshman, 2005). The complexity of this identity formation is also due to the historical, socio-cultural, and developmental traditions that have risen to account for various dimensions of human development (Kroger, 2004).

Within this process of establishing a sense of identity, those who are part of a minority group or are bicultural, also have to deal with the knowledge and sense of ethnic identity. Additionally, biethnic adolescents and young adults are "likely to have unique

experiences related to ethnicity that significantly alter the course of their ethnic identity formation as a result of their multiethnic, and thereby multicultural family context and its interaction with individual-level characteristics and ecological context" (Gonzales-Backen, 2013, p. 92).

Similarly, Jimenez (2010) defined ethnic identity as the subjective understanding that Mexican Americans have of their ethnic group affiliation and the ways in which Mexican Americans express this affiliation. Moreover, the author explained that the assertion of one's identity depends upon the ways in which others assign an identity to you.

Despite the challenges that come from trying to assert an identity, such as defining if one feels Mexican, American, Mexican-American, Chicano, Latino or Hispanic; the reality is that reaching a point where one feels comfortable in their ethnic identity can have a profound effect in the individual. Gonzales-Backen (2013) stated that the positive psychosocial outcomes that can come from this are high self-esteem, lower depressive symptoms, as well as the ability to act as a buffer to the negative influence of cultural stressors on well-being.

Conceptual Framework

In determining the conceptual framework for this study, the researcher saw it as pertinent to ground it in the cultural process of biculturalism, as the literature identifies it as the optimal and desired relation when one comes to live in a new country. Moreover, as societies are no longer culturally homogeneous, it is now being considered that biculturalism may be an asset for interpersonal success, corporate success, intercultural

relations and communication (Nguyen, Huynh, & Benet-Martinez, 2009). Moreover, Buriel (1993) affirmed that:

> In areas of the country where ethnic minorities represent a significant proportion of the population, there are likely to exist persistent pressures to maintain ties to the native culture while adapting to the dominant culture. Under these conditions, adopting a bicultural orientation represents a psychologically advantageous response to the multicultural demands in the environment. (p. 542)

For the purpose of this paper, biculturalism was defined as a psychological construct that characterizes the degree to which individuals have internalized aspects of two cultures in terms of their identity, behavior, beliefs, attitudes, values, and worldview, and can respond functionally to both ethnic and mainstream cultural cues (Basilio et al., 2014; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Nguyen et al., 2009; Padilla, 2006; Schwartz & Unger, 2010).

Before the term biculturalism began to be identified in the literature, there used to be a mixture of concepts relating to minorities adjusting to host culture and the psychological distress that this duality caused for them. Furthermore, the notion of being able to coexist in a duality of cultures could not even be conceived in the past century as Park (1928) and Stonequist (1937) had put forth the idea of the “marginal” man, a person who found himself or herself between and betwixt two cultures (as cited in Padilla, 2006, p. 469).

It was not until the latter half of the 1900’s when psychologists began to make reference to individuals who were able to successfully navigate two cultures and, in contrast to Park (1928) and Stonequist (1937), not be described in a negative light: as a

marginalized person with low-self-esteem. Rather, the bicultural person is well adjusted, open to others, and can switch from one culture to another with “native-like facility” (Padilla, 2006, p. 471). Nonetheless, these individuals do face the challenge of negotiating between multiple, and sometimes conflicting, cultural identities and value systems in their everyday lives (Huynh, Benet-Martinez, & Nguyen, 2018, p. 1582).

Although some biculturals perceive their cultural identities as compatible and complementary, others tend to describe them as oppositional and contradictory. In their study, Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, and Morris (2002) called this individual difference bicultural identity integration (BII) and proposed a theoretical framework for understanding the distinct ways and variations in how each individual cognitively and affectively organize their cultural identities (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Huynh et al., 2018). BII consists of two components: cultural blendedness versus compartmentalization, and cultural harmony versus conflict. The first is related to the degree of overlap versus dissociation perceived between the two, while the latter captures the degree of compatibility versus clash (Huynh et al., 2018).

Upon reviewing these components, the authors realized they had confounded the experience of cultural blendedness and cultural harmony. Thus, in an effort to further improve their understanding of BII, their research led them to understand that cultural blendedness captures the more cognitive and behavioral aspects of the bicultural experience (e.g., trait of openness, linguistic fluency, living in a culturally diverse enclave), while cultural harmony captures the affective component of managing two cultures (e.g., emotional stability, positive intercultural relations, lack of identity protection concerns) (Huynh et al., 2018).

In essence, what Huynh and colleagues (2018) found in their study was that "the feelings associated with being bicultural (cultural harmony vs. conflict) are relatively independent from the ways in which bicultural individuals perceive and organize their cultures (cultural blendedness vs. compartmentalization)" (p. 1593).

Aside from this, according to Triandis (1980) the two factors that determine and boost a successful adjustment are self-awareness and the ability to analyze social behavior (as cited in LaFromboise et al., 1993). With this, it is argued that one needs to be confident in who they are, as well as their ethnic identity, in order to be fully comfortable interacting and being part of both cultures. At the same time, Schwartz and Unger (2010) coincided that, in order for biculturalism to emerge, the individual must be embedded in a community that integrates the heritage and receiving cultural streams, and where comfort with both cultures is essential for day-to-day living.

A recent study of 20 Mexican-origin college students, sought to identify key elements of the cultural adjustment process that lead to positive outcomes for this minority. Through in-depth written surveys with open-ended questions, the aim was to gain a deeper understanding through the detailed experiences and insight of high achieving Mexican-American adolescents (Nelson & Infante, 2014).

In regard to these findings, food, music and language were described as important to construct both identities. Nevertheless, seven of the 20 participants mentioned family as the main difference between the two cultures, emphasizing that the Mexican culture is more family-oriented. At the same time, friendship was counted as one of the key factors to help them adapt to both cultures as Mexican-origin friends give a sense of belonging and American friends help in learning the new culture (Nelson & Infante, 2014).

Given the rising importance of biculturalism and the vast number of Mexican Americans in the United States, Basilio et al. (2014) established that there is a lack of quality measures of biculturalism. Thus, they decided to create the Mexican American Biculturalism Scale (MABS), as an alternative approach to the assessment of biculturalism among Mexican Americans while proposing that this tool is more congruent with conceptual definitions of biculturalism as a psychological construct. The MABS includes three subscales: bicultural comfort, bicultural facility, and perceived bicultural advantages. Bicultural comfort relates to how the individual feels about navigating their dual cultural world, bicultural facility is in regard to how they respond to the behavioral demands of their dual worlds, and bicultural advantages is in response to how they perceive the inherent advantages in being bicultural (Basilio et al., 2014).

The results from the study gave credence to the hypothesis that biculturalism is a multifactor construct, as there is evidence that demonstrates that culture impacts on different factors such as emotion, behavior and cognition (Basilio et al., 2014). Specifically, the authors stressed the importance of biculturalism as a process of cultural adaptation, rather than a simple demographic characteristic, meaning that every individual can have differing degrees of biculturalism.

The following model provides an accurate representation of how the author defined biculturalism within her study (see Figure 1).

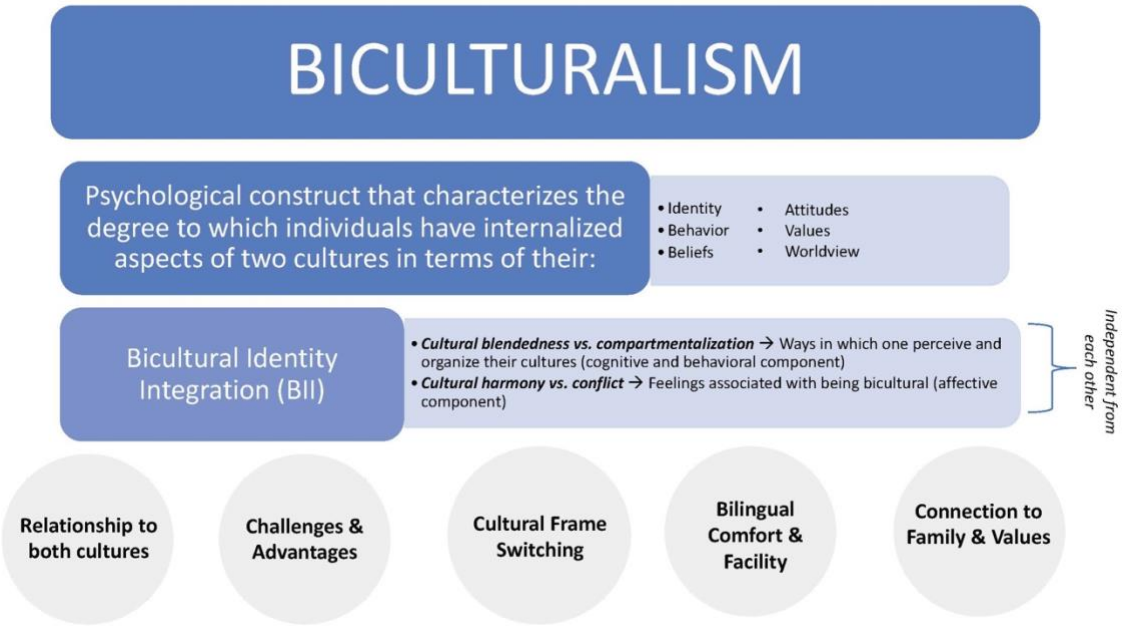

Figure 1. Biculturalism Model.
(Adapted from Basilio et al., 2014; Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Huynh et al., 2018).

All in all, studies related to biculturalism posit that bicultural competence can be achieved through the following:

(a) being knowledgeable about cultural beliefs and values; (b) having positive attitudes toward both cultural groups; (c) having bicultural self-efficacy, which is the belief that one can effectively function in both cultures; (d) being able to communicate with members of both cultural groups, including language competence and nonverbal communication; (e) possessing a repertoire of culturally situated roles; and (f) being grounded in both cultures through social networks. (Basilio et al., 2014; David, Okazaki, & Saw, 2009; LaFromboise et al., 1993)

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of the younger generation of Mexican Americans through a phenomenology design that could offer a holistic view of biculturalism as a central phenomenon in a globalized nation.

A qualitative approach was chosen as Basilio et al. (2014) emphasized biculturalism as a more meaningful conceptualization as these internalized aspects are inherent to the individual, thus they can only be identified and understood through a qualitative approach in which the participant has a role and a voice. In regard to qualitative research, Creswell (2014) argued that the value of this design lies in the particular description and themes developed in the context of a specific site. Likewise, Saldaña (2011) explained that:

> The information or data collected and analyzed is primarily nonquantitative in character, consisting of textual materials such as interview transcripts, field notes, and documents, and/or visual materials such as artifacts, photographs, video recordings, and Internet sites, that document human experiences about others and/or one's self in social action and reflexive states. (pp. 3-4)

Within the different qualitative designs, phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved (Welman & Kruger, 1999). Correspondingly, Vagle (2016) remarked that phenomenologists are interested in how one finds him or herself in relation to the world that surrounds them; they want to slow down and open up an outlet to see how things are

experienced. An example the author gave is how the researcher is not primarily interested in what humans decide, but rather how they experience their decision-making. What is that process like? What emotions is the person feeling? How are they transmitting them?

At the same time, phenomenological research concerns "the ways in which ordinary members of society attend to their everyday lives (Gubrium & Holstein, 2006). The purpose of this research being to describe an experience through the lenses and perspectives participants.

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of eight Mexican Americans college students between the ages of 18 to 21. During the Fall of 2018, the students were all enrolled in a Hispanic focused first-year course at Bluegrass Community and Technical College in Lexington, Kentucky. The professor of this course served as the identified 'gatekeeper' who provided access to the classroom.

Through this connection, the sampling method utilized was reputational case selection as the professor filled the role of the expert who identified suitable individuals that fit the criteria for the study (Schensul & LeCompte, 2012). The authors explained that this sampling method is considered a form of criterion-based selection, in which the purpose is not to create random samples or generalize the findings to a whole population without further research. Rather, the decisions for choosing the population are based on criteria that establishes the reasons why the particular population matches with the theoretical or descriptive interests of the researcher (Schensul & LeCompte, 2012).

In this study, the only requirements, or criteria, to participate were to be older than 18, and their ethnic background was required to be Mexican Americans (either first, second or third generation). As it was stated before, the researcher defined Mexican American as those either born in Mexico or with a family origin from Mexico, that have lived in the United States for the majority of their lives.

To maintain confidentiality of participants, individual names will not be identified and an alias will be used (see Table 1):

Table 1. Participant Categorization

Gender	Age	Alias	Generation
M	19	P1	First
M	19	P2	Second
F	19	P3	First
F	18	P4	First
M	19	P5	Second
F	19	P6	First
F	19	P7	First
F	18	P8	First

Research Questions

The primary question guiding this research is:

- How is the culture-sharing pattern of biculturalism reflected in the lives of young Mexican Americans?

The sub questions associated with the overarching research question are:

- In which way do they construct meaning and identity out of their two cultures?
- How do they sustain their culture while adapting to the host culture?
- How is their identity, behavior, beliefs, attitudes, values and worldview influenced by each culture?

Role of the Researcher

One of the distinguishing characteristics of qualitative methods is the primary role the researcher has as the key instrument for collecting data. Because of this, Creswell (2014) emphasized that reflexivity must be embedded throughout the whole process as the researcher must constantly reflect about how their "role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations, such as the themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to the data" (p. 186). Furthermore, Creswell (2014) also argues that humans engage and make sense of their world based on their historical, social and cultural perspectives.

Regarding the steps followed by the researcher, she first contacted the 'gatekeeper' to gain access to the classroom. Aided by the professor, she met the suitable individuals for the study and presented them with the purpose of the study. Those who agreed signed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent form, and the researcher conducted first person interviews with them; these were recorded and later transcribed.

Aside from this, the researcher received their photo elicitation and reflections, attended the end of the year class presentations, and met with the professor to receive the class essays that would serve as document analysis. It is important to mention that, since the information gathered was intimate in nature, the researcher also had the responsibility of safeguarding the participants and the data that was collected.

In order to be reflexive and acknowledge inherent biases, throughout the whole process, the researcher attempted to write analytic memos to reflect on her thoughts and feelings regarding the interactions, interviews and overall experience. Esterberg (2004) noted the importance of paying attention to your emotions as they can indeed play a role in shaping research. While some advocated the numbness of emotions to ensure objectivity, ignoring them does not guarantee that these won't affect your research, it just means that you won't know exactly how.

Researcher Perceptivity

Being a qualitative study, the researcher perceptivity had to be delineated clearly, especially considering the fact that the researcher is also Mexican. Esterberg (2004) remarked that it is necessary to think about your own personal characteristics and how these might shape how your participants view you and what kinds of access you get.

For instance, the cultural background and bilingual facility of the researcher aided in connecting her to the participants, providing the expertise needed for understanding the culture, traditions, and values that they relate to, as well as understanding the use of slang and Spanglish. Despite these personal characteristics situating her as an expert, the researcher had to be aware of her own bias and preconceived notions, as to not let this interfere with the objectivity that must prevail. Thus, it was pertinent for the researcher to

reflect that, even though she is also Mexican, there are experiences that will connect her to the participants while others might be significantly different.

One thing to consider is the fact that the majority of the interviewees were either brought to the United States at a very young age or were born here, making them Mexican American (though each participant chooses how to identify themselves, the label Mexican American was chosen by the researcher to maintain continuity). Contrary to this, the researcher has lived most of her life in Mexico and only recently moved to the United States. All in all, Roger et al. (2018) noted that "elements of our qualitative researcher identity can provoke certain stereotypes, but reflection between us also substantiates our sense of value of doing good qualitative research" (p. 543).

Data Collection

The forms of data collection used were semi-structured interviews, photo elicitation and document analysis. The interviews lasted around 30 to 60 minutes, and the questions were aimed at understanding how the Mexican American young adults navigate the world integrating both cultures, as well as how they construct their identity, values, beliefs and behaviors, and how this all impacts their day to day life.

Conversely, Creswell (2014) urged researchers to also "include data collection types that go beyond typical observations and interviews" (p. 190). With this intention, another method that proved useful for collecting data was photo elicitation. This visual method was able to more actively and creatively take into account each individual, as they were asked to take a picture(s) of what it means for them to be bicultural. The picture was taken with the camera application located in their personal cell phones and a

small reflective paragraph was written to accompany the photo. In that reflection, the participants were asked to describe and reflect on what that photo means to them and the reasons they chose to photograph that particular aspect of their bicultural experience. Lastly, document analysis came in the form of analyzing essays and reflections they have written for class in order to identify common, complementary or diverse themes. It is important to mention that these documents were provided by the professor with the consent of the students.

The purpose of using these three distinct methods was to triangulate the data acquired from oral materials (e.g., interviews), with the data acquired from both visual materials (e.g., photos) and written material (e.g., reflection from photos and class essays). Furthermore, the use of multiple methods about the same phenomenon provides a comparison, combination and convergence of the data, which can ultimately lead to an iterative process, in which phenomena is explored more deeply, an enhanced understanding of the context of the phenomena, and an enhanced trustworthiness of findings (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014).

Data Analysis

Recordings from the eight interviews were first transcribed. It is important to mention that the researcher is bilingual, which served well as the participants at points utilized Spanglish when expressing themselves. These instances of Spanish or Spanglish were kept intact in the transcription, but a translation was also provided for English speakers.

Once the interviews were transcribed, “creating the categories for sorting, organizing, and coding data is a cognitive process that must be carried out by the researcher” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 196). Therefore, the researcher began to identify themes while coding the data, seeking to compare, contrast, look for linkages, and find sequences for patterns to emerge among the distinct participants. At the same time, the photos and reflections from the photo elicitation, as well as the class assignments, were organized by participant and coded alongside the interviews.

The data was analyzed using first cycle, *In Vivo Coding*, and second cycle, *Focus Coding*. In regard to In Vivo, the researcher carefully chose this method as Saldaña (2011) emphasized how In Vivo is particularly useful with youth, as their voices are often marginalized, and “coding with their actual words enhances and deepens an adult’s understanding of their cultures and worldview” (p. 91). Furthermore, Focus Coding aided in identifying the most salient and reoccurring categories.

At the same time, the data was themed utilizing “extended thematic sentences instead of a shorter code” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 175). Likewise, themeing the data serves this phenomenological study as it transforms simple categories or codes into a meaningful, interpretative and descriptive whole. Lastly, the data from all three sources was triangulated to enhance the credibility and provide a more in-depth look into the patterns that emerged. All in all, LeCompte and Schensul (2010) explained that the end product of the analysis is a set of results that can be shaped into a story that answers the concrete questions that guided the study.

Limitations

Due to the specific time and place in which the study was conducted, the data gathered is limited by the thoughts and views of the participants at that particular point in time. At the same time, the small sample size indicates that the findings cannot be extended to a wider population. Nonetheless, the purpose of the study was not to generalize but rather to provide in-depth rich data that could reflect the particular emotions, beliefs and day-to-day lived experiences of Mexican American youth as they deal with their bicultural identity.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Introduction

Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to explore how the culture-sharing pattern of biculturalism is reflected in the lives of young Mexican Americans. Specifically, the researcher focused on how they navigate their day-to-day life, their perspectives and the way they construct their bicultural identity.

The eight participants that were interviewed ranged in age from 18 to 19 years old, three males and five females. Two of them were second generation Mexican Americans, as they were born in the United States. The other six participants were born in Mexico, either in the state of Veracruz or Aguascalientes, and their arrival to the U.S. happened before the age of seven.

As mentioned above, after the data was coded and analyzed, extended thematic sentences were used to further describe the phenomenon. Twelve themes emerged from the data analysis so, in an attempt to organize the vast amount of rich qualitative data, the researcher grouped these themes in five overarching categories. These categories chronologically encompassed the journey, as well as the feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and reflections of this young bicultural generation: (a) Beginning a Journey Full of Hope; (b) Encountering Borders on the Other Side of the Wall; (c) Adjusting to a Bicultural World; (d) Setting the Tone in a Bicultural Home; and (e) Learning to Embrace It All.

In an effort to further situate the stories of these individuals within the larger context of Mexico's history with immigration, each of the five main categories are introduced with a quote by Gloria Anzaldúa to shape the themes that will be touched

upon. The 25th anniversary edition of Anzaldúa's (2012) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* documents the author's experience as a Chicana, a lesbian, an activist and a writer. She dedicated this book to all Mexicans on both sides of the border, and sought to challenge the way we think about identity and our understanding of what a 'border' is. On the back cover of her book, Anzaldúa (2012) presents a border, "not as a simple divide between here and there, us and them, but as a psychic, social and cultural terrain that we inhabit, and that inhabits all of us".

Lastly, it is important to mention that the data collected from the three methods was not only triangulated, but also intertwined throughout the categories. The use of visual, oral and written material served to shape the story that LeCompte and Schensul (2010) advocate as essential for qualitative data.

Beginning a Journey Full of Hope

> *Today thousands of Mexicans are crossing the border legally and illegally; ten million people without documents have returned to the Southwest… Trembling with fear, yet filled with a courage, a courage born of desperation. Barefoot and uneducated, Mexicans with hands like boot soles gather at night by the river where two worlds merge creating what Reagan calls a frontline, a war zone. The convergence has created a shock culture, a border culture, a third country, a closed country.* (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 33)

Achieving the "American Dream": A search for a better life. As Anzaldúa (2012) stated, there's "a courage born of desperation" that leads many to seek better opportunities, no matter the cost. The majority of the time it's the parents seeking out a better life for their children. They might not know what's on the other side of the border, they might not even know the language, but they've heard about the "American Dream", so they set out to get it. Similarly, all of the people interviewed in this study mentioned this as the reason their parents came to the United States.

In regard to this, Participant 7 (P7) expressed how her dad *se venía de mojado* – or came as a wetback – all the time and would just come back and forth until her mom got tired of being without him. Because of this, they set out to cross the border, holding her as a tiny baby in their arms the whole way there – even losing her at some point – as P7 recalled the stories her parents told her of that "crazy and scary" border crossing. Above all, they just wanted to give her and her siblings the option of a better future, "my dad just thought it was a good idea because maybe I would have more of an opportunity to like be somebody here, but he didn't really think about, you know, the whole legal status and all that stuff here" (P7).

At the same time, Participant 1 (P1) pointed out that his parents "came here for me… they were just having like a tough time and realized they had to make some moves". Likewise, Participant 5 (P5) echoed the same sentiment, "the reason they came here to the U.S. is because there was no money back home and, since they wanted to start a family, it wasn't ideal". On the other hand, Participant 3 (P3) realized she actually wasn't sure of the exact reason why her parents brought them to the U.S. and reflected on

the fact that, “he always told us that for a better life, but I don’t know if there were any like financial needs in Mexico or if he just wanted to live in the United States”.

Regardless of the different financial situations and backgrounds, all the participants expressed their parent’s desire to give them a much better life than what they had. A good point was brought up by P7 about the lack of concern or knowledge about requiring a legal status in order to work in this country. The reality is that, when one is desperate, thinking about the small details becomes an afterthought as people trust that they will find a way to make it work. In relation to this, Salas et al. (2013) stated the difficulties of achieving visas to legally enter the country as, “authorized entry to the United States is limited by a quota system and that preference exists for immediate family members or high-skilled workers, entry as an undocumented immigrant is the most common option for Mexican individuals” (p. 1006). All in all, Participant 8 (P8) blankly stated why she believed her family moved here when she was just two years old, “it was just the next step, everybody just ends up coming over here. I never really asked why”.

Encountering Borders on the Other Side of the Wall

> *Those who make it past the checking points of the Border Patrol find themselves in the midst of 150 years of racism… Living in a no-man’s-borderland, caught between being treated as criminals and being able to eat, between resistance and deportation, the illegal refugees are some of the poorest and the most exploited of any people in the U.S. It is illegal for Mexicans to work without green cards. But big farming combines, farm bosses and smugglers who bring them in make money*

off the "wetbacks" labor – they don't have to pay federal minimum wages or ensure adequate housing or sanitary conditions. (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 34)

Swim or drown: Struggles of a new immigrant. The journey into the U.S. begins in a complicated manner with many obstacles to overcome, but with a sense of relief and renewed excitement once you successfully cross the border. But, what happens once you arrive to a new country with a different culture, language and legalities? How does one learn to cope and navigate this new system?

The participants in this study expressed how hard it was when they first arrived to the country, as many of them struggled with learning the language, comprehending what it meant to be an immigrant, being labeled, adapting to a new school system, and seeing firsthand how hard it was for their parents to achieve what they came here for. Participant 6 (P6) noted how difficult it was for her to watch her parents:

> Going from job to job like day and night. I guess that's a struggle because they, if we did have that, if my parents were born here or they did have like a green card - my mom does now-, but my dad still doesn't. If they did have that, then they could have gotten better jobs. They could have learned the language better. They would have time to learn it.

In like manner, P5 explained that when his dad arrived to the U.S. he was the first one of the family to arrive. "He was alone and he didn't speak any English, didn't know how to drive or basically how to do anything. So he arrived and he started working in a restaurant, and that's where he learned everything he knows" (P5). At the same time, P3 pointed out how her parents hadn't finished middle school and didn't know the language

either, so she became very independent since “they really didn’t know how to help me in school since the system is very different”.

The theme of language became a constant one throughout the interviews, as P1 expressed that “as a kid like, I obviously had to talk to other kids. I don’t know, I just had to like… you either had to swim or you just gonna sit there and drown as a kid. I remember it was bad, it was terrible”. Echoing the same sentiment, P7 stated that language was always a barrier, so whenever she went to school “it was a bit harder for me to actually like associate with kids and get in the whole roll of learning how to speak English.... I also grew up like just translating for my parents so that was difficult”. Similarly, Participant 2 (P2) illustrated how he didn’t really know English so he actually failed third grade because of that:

> They said I wasn’t on the right level, so that’s why I’m behind. The good thing was that they had some Spanish speaking people that I could talk to, but I felt like I could only talk to half of the people there.

Not being able to communicate with your peers can become a barrier for developing positive social relationships and also a source of insecurity and isolation for kids. Similarly, Participant 4 (P4) pointed out how she was bullied and made fun of because she couldn’t speak English right, while P3 mentioned how “there were a lot of times where I couldn’t say a lot of words and some kids would laugh at my accent”. At the same time, P3 recalled how being in the U.S. and having to learn a whole new language constantly led her to wonder “which language do I choose? And like, why am I learning two different languages? So it was very conflicting as a first grader”. She

remembered how her parents would get letters in the mail saying how she wasn't progressing in English, but she also wasn't progressing in Spanish either.

Equally important is the struggle that comes with comprehending what it means to be an immigrant and being labeled as one. In regard to this, P3 stated how in middle school she began to get to know what immigrant meant "when others would say to me '*oh no tienes papeles'* – you don't have papers – 'you're an immigrant'". Correspondingly, P4 continued to struggle with bullying as other kids would tell her to go back to Mexico:

> They would be like 'you can't be here because you're Mexican'. Back then I was like very dark and stuff… I was *flaquita* -skinny- because over in Mexico we didn't have stuff to do, we were poor. And they would tell me that I looked like *una niña de la calle* -a homeless girl- and they were like 'we don't want people like that'.

As can be seen, there are numerous struggles that the participants endured when they first arrived in the country. From encountering a culture and language shock, seeing their parents work multiple jobs with minimum English in order to provide for them, to trying to understand what it means to be an immigrant. Significantly, the baggage this label imposes on them, and the experience of being called out for looking different and coming from another cultural background. P3 recalled how she vividly remembers "coming into the class and like just seeing a room of kids and thinking 'no one here looks like me'". In the same fashion, through the document analysis, P7 reflected on a significant border in her life: racism. She stated that:

> Being ‘different’ in this country means that if you’re not white, you’re black. If you don’t speak English, you’re not American. If you wear different clothes you could be a terrorist, a drug dealer, or like Trump said ‘a bad hombre’... Nonetheless, being different has opened a lot of doors for me but has also closed many others. Racism creates a large wall in the middle of two communities.

Comparatively, the document analysis of P8’s essay illustrated the same sentiment of anger and frustration towards the racism that continues to exist:

> I know there are people who have come to this country under the pretext of finding a better life. I think the border lies between people who have lived here long enough and still believe that, and people like me, that know that a better life does not exist in a country like this that has racism that holds up its foundation. (P8)

Missed opportunities: Barriers of an immigrant. As has been previously stated, coming to terms with being an immigrant and the baggage that word carries has proven to be significantly difficult for many of the participants. Specifically, when it means not being able to leave the country until you achieve a certain legal status - if you’re one of the lucky ones that qualify for one. For instance, P5 observed that she didn’t really understand what it felt like to be an immigrant until she was older and realized she didn't have anything:

> I didn’t have papers until literally a year ago. When I was 15, I applied for DACA and received it. But [before] just not being able to go back to Mexico and like visit your family, having over fifteen years of not seeing them is so hard.

In relation to this, P3 completely related to the sentiment of being Mexican but not being able to go back to visit, “since I’m in DACA I can’t leave the country so it’s always hard because at one point a family member was going through the toughest time and it was hard not knowing about it until months later.” Identically, in her personal reflection, P7 shared how the Dream Act was truly a dream come true, since she used to cry thinking she could one day be deported. Regardless, the current President has threatened to remove DACA and no decision has yet been made, “we are referred to as ‘aliens’, and now all of us Dreamers live with the fear that one day we’ll be taken from our family and we’ll have our dream of being someone in life ripped away from us” (P7).

At the same time, other themes that emerged during the interviews reflected the constant fear that this young generation has of having their family being detained and deported, how limited their parents are in job options, the hopes for achieving a legal status, and the missed opportunities that come from being undocumented.

In relation to the fear of detainment and deportation, P2 somberly recalled the moment his dad was deported when he was in the seventh grade:

> When I was asleep, my dad left me at my mom’s house, and when I came back I saw the cops. They had my dad, and I saw my mom… and I knew something had happened. And then from there, I never saw him after that. It was crazy, it was rough.

A similar experience was had by P3, who shared the time when her dad was almost detained by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) when she was in the fifth grade. She went on to explain how she didn’t know what that was and simply thought it was jail:

> My dad always tells us the story, that he told his manager – when they were taking him out in handcuffs – he was like 'go get my children, take care of them and I will send you money so you can send them back to Mexico'. But then the ICE agent who was arresting him at the time -it wasn't as bad as it is now-, he asked the manager [to translate] ... Then they were like, 'oh, you have kids. We'll let you go. We're gonna set a court date and you come and we'll see what happens next'.

Despite being grateful for the favorable outcome, P3 explained how her dad went through five years of court cases in an attempt to get residency. She remembered going through that process when she was in middle school and "not being able to go to overnight field trips because I was afraid that I wouldn't see my dad or afraid of what they would tell him in court… there was always this fear of what's going to happen next" (P3). They remained hopeful but a confusion in dates from their lawyer cost them the residency and thousands of dollars, as once you're denied you can't apply again:

> He couldn't get his residency and we were so hopeful, like my dad had been here for... He's been here for almost like 25 years and, you know, he was hopeful that he would be able to get some legal status for him and his children because... I feel like as we grew up, my dad knew that we weren't going to have many opportunities as undocumented children and as immigrant children, so he was trying to do whatever he could, but it didn't work out the way he wanted to. (P3)

Correspondingly, P5 suffered a similar experience when extended family members were caught by ICE and taken, leaving his immediate family to care for the children they unexpectedly had to leave behind:

> So we were left with baby triplets and two other toddlers. And we couldn't put them in the taxes because technically they didn't exist in the country, so… All of this happened while my aunt and uncle were back in Mexico trying to find where to live, so we had them all that time. I'm actually considered a primary breadwinner [in my family], so that's also why I haven't left my house because we have a system that works for us.

It is important to note that P5 is considered a primary breadwinner since he's a citizen. He's only one of two interviewed that was born in the United States; for instance, also being a citizen, P2 explained a barrier the rest of his family faces in relation to the airport, "my mom can't ever board a plane because she doesn't have an ID since she's not legal." On the contrary, the rest of the participants that weren't born in the States have had a harder time because of their legal status, "I can't go to the doctor as soon as I get sick because I don't have like Medicaid and stuff" (P4). Likewise, P1 expressed how his mom has been working in the same daycare for almost 20 years, "it's kind of sad because I know like immigrant parents have like limitations, period. There's limitations and I get that, but my mom has been working so hard all these years and simply can't advance".

Missed opportunities also come in the form of education and the ability to receive financial help to continue their studies. P3 narrated how Kentucky high school students who are permanent residents and citizens can get up to 500 dollars for every A they get in each class -this is part of the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship (KEES). She had already been told by her older brother that they didn't qualify for it, but other undocumented students were given false hopes and misinformation about being able to get this money no matter their legal status:

> So imagine telling them that you can and then, when it's your senior year, they're trying to get that money out, but you don't have it in your account because you don't have a Social Security number. So that was like... it really angered me inside and I was like ‘my own educators’. (P3)

The same obstacle was faced by P6 who mentioned how she worked so hard but in the end there was in fact a wall that kept her from receiving the help she needed in education, like KEES money and knowing how to apply for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA). In regard to this, P3 had taken it upon herself during her high school years to advocate and figure out what minority students needed to be better prepared for college. “I remember like, even for me, I never really knew how to fill out the FAFSA because it’s very different for undocumented students and DACA students and no one really was helping me because they also didn’t know” (P3). The misinformation, ignorance and lack of knowledge regarding the access (or lack thereof) and rights that immigrants possess, continues to be a blurry line that can lead to many missed opportunities, academically and professionally, for this young generation.

Trying harder but only getting halfway: Pressure to succeed. The theme of education and the obstacles undocumented students face within the school system is an important one, as P3 strongly illustrated how she feels about this in her essays that served as document analysis:

> In the Latinx Community we have a lot of borders that I could not even think of, but I think some of the biggest borders we have are based in the education system. As students of color we are already stereotyped as soon as we step a foot in a public school. No matter the age you are. If you are a brown and black student,

> you automatically get labeled as a "trouble maker." This label is engraved in us so much that at some point we start believing it and we adopt it. That is just the start as you further in your education career and as you progress in this system that is set to only benefit white students, you start to uncover how much more you have to work to earn the same respect and assistance as any other student. This is one of the borders that damages our community. Sure, it's not bad to work harder for things but it is wrong when the outcome is different only because you have a different skin color than others. Working twice as hard becomes a bad thing when you are rewarded less for work you've done, but then the white kid that sits next to you in Spanish class gets rewarded with a full ride to the one big university you were accepted to. There are a lot of more borders that we face as a community and there are many more borders that we face as individuals but, will there ever be a time in which we live without borders? (P3)

This same sentiment was felt across all the interviews, as each one related the immense pressure they feel to succeed as a minority. P1 emphasized how he hopes that people will be able to see all he's attempting to do, "in the sense of like 'oh, this kid is Mexican, this kid is doing something. He's actually trying at something". By the same token, P6 expressed how she found comfort thinking that there are other people who also have DACA and have managed to be successful, but "I just had to navigate myself by working harder in school". Along the same lines, P2 stated how, just because he's Mexican, he feels that he always has to try harder:

> I feel like if I have C's and I'm a regular person, then there's nothing wrong with it. But just because I'm Mexican they're like, 'oh you have to keep standing out

> more, you have to keep trying'. It's like double the effort, that's why I've been stressing out so much this semester.

All things considered, and despite the obstacles they face, there is an unwavering drive for these minority students to show themselves, and those around them, all that they're capable of. And, sometimes, all they need is someone to believe in them. With the hopes of empowering them, the Latino Leadership and College Experience Camp (LLCEC) was created in 2006 and is held every summer in Kentucky. Interestingly enough, the professor that served as the 'gatekeeper' for this study is also the director of LLCEC. As both a mentor and professor, she has played a big role in the lives of these students and has a deep connection with them that goes beyond the classroom. The majority of her students have first gone through this summer camp and have then pursued college. Ultimately, they end up wanting to take the courses she's a professor in.

LLCEC seeks to provide Latino youth the opportunity to experience mock college classes, get in touch with representatives of universities and colleges in Kentucky, have social justice and leadership workshops, as well as delve deep into the cultural and historical roots of African American and Latino American people (LLCEC, 2019). In regard to this, P5 expressed his gratitude to this camp and stated that, "that's the only reason why I'm still in school, because of the director of LLCEC. For the simple reason that her camp seeks to push us to continue in school and tell us that we can do it". Identically, P3 also credited LLCEC for the impact it has had on her life:

> I remember I got my crap together after going to LLCEC and after my teacher back then like sat me down and gave me a pep talk. She told me like 'you need to

redefine those stereotypes and you know, everyone's like giving you the stereotype but don't fall into it.

Adjusting to a Bicultural World

> *Because I, a mestiza, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time… Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision.* (Anzaldúa, 2012, pp. 99-100)

Defining oneself: A roller coaster ride. The duality of worlds that these individuals navigate can become an added pressure as they continue to figure out who they are. While trying to put into words how they see their bicultural identity, the themes that emerged reflected how it can be conflicting, a roller coaster ride, hard dealing with both identities, a journey that is still ongoing, a feeling of pride, a nice blend of cultures, a feeling of uniqueness, and just plain confusing at times.

In regard to being bicultural, P5 creatively expressed through his photo elicitation, a painting he made dividing the Mexican and American sides with different symbols representing each one (see Photo 1). Within this he stated that “being bicultural to me is

both a blessing and a curse. It provokes an inner personal clash with history and identity where it it is hard to fit perfectly as a piece of one puzzle". Moreover, in his interview P5 emphasized how he's never felt ashamed of where he comes from, "my parents have taught me to be proud of both cultures. I think that I've never wanted to separate myself from either cultures because I am American with Mexican blood".

Photo 1. Photo Elicitation chosen by Participant 5.

Interestingly enough, several participants illustrated the conflicting feelings of knowing they're from Mexico, and feeling Mexican, but having no memory or knowledge of their home country since they left when they were so young, and some have not been able to go back. This is expressed by P6:

> I always say I am Mexican, even though I don't relate much to like growing up there or like a lot of the culture... But I also can't say that I'm from here because

> I'm not, even though this is where I was raised, I'm not from here and I feel like Mexico is my home. But when I did go to Mexico it just felt different... Before I would say that's my home but now, if I think about it, this is really where I've lived my whole life and this is where I grew up and I honestly wouldn't want to change it because I've gotten so many great opportunities here that I probably wouldn't have gotten in Mexico.

After reflecting on this, she seemed conflicted when she realized that "the inner part of me, and the Mexican in me, wants to say Mexico but in reality the U.S. is my home" (P6). Likewise, P8 had a similar train of thought when trying to think of how she identified herself:

> I don't identify as American at all... I'm Mexican because I was born there. I know that if I go back I will be accepted… well, there's a lot of weird politics with living here and then going back but I know that's my spot and I don't think this is my spot… I think [I'll feel more comfortable]. I wouldn't know, I've never been there. I just kind of… in theory? Yeah. In practice? Maybe not, maybe I'll feel worse… but yeah, if anyone ever asked me: I'm Mexican.

Once their thoughts were verbalized in regard to their identity, what the participants expressed sometimes showed a conflicting and clashing of ideas. In like manner, P3 established that for her, "it's definitely a roller coaster ride really figuring out what you identify as". She expressed how it wasn't up until recently that she began to embrace the term Mexican American, "and I was like, 'this feels nice, it feels like the perfect thing'. I am Mexican, but I'm also American so it's definitely still a journey" (P3). Moreover, she reflected on how she didn't feel comfortable just saying Mexican

since she had been raised in the U.S., and even though she sometimes did feel more comfortable using American, "I felt that I'd be denying my Mexican identity and I didn't want that" (P3).

Comparatively, P7 shared how she identifies more on the Mexican side and sometimes even considers herself Chicana, even though she wasn't born in the U.S.:

> I have roots from both sides; I am cultured from both sides so it's weird. Sometimes I do say, 'oh I'm full blooded Mexican. I don't care, I wasn't born here. I just know the language; I just know the culture'. But it's hard to identify yourself, it's so confusing at times.

In contrast, other participants bluntly expressed a dislike for the U.S. and how they would never identify themselves as Americans. P2 related how he feels "proud to be Mexican because not a lot of people are Mexican… I know Spanish, I like being Mexican, I like more Mexican food. America sucks, so…". Ironically, P2 is one of the two participants that were actually born in the United States, but throughout the interview he always emphasized a bigger identification towards the Mexican culture. Similarly, P8 shared how she doesn't identify as American at all even though "my sister in law is American and she's like 'to me you're American', and I was like 'never, I'm not American at all". Although she expressed this in her interview, in the document analysis, P8 wrote that when she was younger she always assumed that:

> Eventually, somehow, I would be American too. I realize now that it isn't because there's anything truly appealing to being American, but because of the disconnect I feel towards being Mexican. I think there's an undeniable pride and

love every Mexican has towards their home country, but I also feel anger. I feel like that anger itself is a border between me and immigrants like me.

These conflicting and opposing feelings reflect the roller coaster ride that the participants go through daily in their identity. Coupled with this is the struggle of "having to live two lives and having to fit both of those cultures. Having dreams in a country that makes it difficult to achieve them, yet conquering every obstacle along the way" (P6). In her photo elicitation, P6 reflected on this sentiment while choosing to photograph a painting made by a friend that depicts Mexican parents struggling and working hard while carrying the American dream: their kids graduating and succeeding in life (see Photo 2).

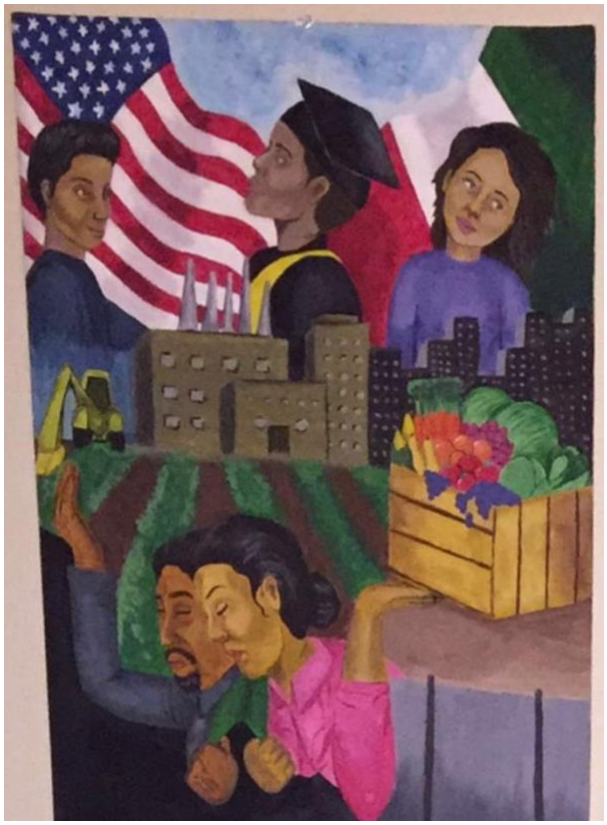

Photo 2. Photo Elicitation chosen by Participant 6.

Despite many feeling conflicted, there are some who, like P2, feel an absolute sense of pride in being Mexican. For example, P4 pointed out that she will never consider herself Mexican American since she feels proud of being Mexican because it makes her feel unique. “I have my culture everywhere I go. I know I’m different from other people because many people say they’re Mexican but they don’t actually have their culture. They don’t talk the language or don’t like to speak it” (P4).

All in all, P3 perfectly described in her photo elicitation reflection what it means for her to be bicultural. For this, she chose one of the first pictures taken of her when they arrived to the U.S.:

> Being Mexican American isn’t about fitting into one culture or another. It’s about remembering where you came from and who you are now. It’s about creating a perfect blend between both cultures but that perfect blend looks different for everyone. For me personally, I try my best to embrace my Mexican side as best as I can, in a way that’s also comfortable for me. Both cultures have different ideas and values that I might not like so I throw those things away and just keep the good from both sides. For me being Mexican-American is accepting these two sides of my identity and embracing them in my own perfect blend.

Switching back and forth: An easy but sometimes inauthentic transition. Despite the majority of the participants feeling conflicted in their identity, they all agreed that, in this stage of life, they’ve all reached a point in which they feel comfortable switching back and forth between cultures and languages. Nonetheless, several of them indicated that it depends a lot on the environment they’re in

and how that cultural frame switch can sometimes lead to them feeling inauthentic and trying hard to fit in.

In the first place, P4 expressed that, now that she's older, it's easier for her to control and know that she has to speak English in a certain group, "I can't like blurt out a word in Spanish because no one would understand so yeah, I can control most of it. It's easy for me now since I know the language". Similarly, P3 established that for her it is a pretty easy transition, but it also depends on the atmosphere and environment, "I love teaching people about my culture, if they appreciate it, but sometimes those situations can be uncomfortable".

In regard to feeling inauthentic when switching cultures, P2 mentioned that he doesn't think he's funny "with regular American people. I feel like I'm more funny with Mexican people. I blend in more with them. I'm usually more quiet when I'm with other type of people". In like manner, P7 shared that she does feel comfortable, but:

> It's just hard sometimes because, when you're from a different ethnicity, you have to act different around certain people or you have to... You have to control what you say, control every little thing that you do. For example, the way that I am with all my Mexican friends, I'm not with my American friends. I'm more, you know, sophisticated. I'm more calm, you know, I follow you know... I follow what they do, I just kind of… I just follow their society norms, you know.

Along the same lines, P3 also explained the different ways she compartmentalizes and adapts her behavior to each particular culture. For example, she illustrated how it's sometimes a struggle for her to blend into the American culture when she needs to:

> Like going to the airport, I have to try to look more white so I don't get extra checked, like I do the whole thing. I wear the Uggs and like leggings and cardigans, and my hair straight just to try and look a bit more white. So there's always these things for sure… Or if I'm at a conference or a meeting, I make sure that they don't hear my accent as much, make sure I'm more presentable. But if I am in class, I don't care *que se me salga cualquier cosa en español* -if I say something in Spanish-. So yeah, it always depends on where I am. (P3)

Relating to both cultures: A constant tug of war. The opposing messages that come from living in a bicultural world can indeed lead to a cultural collision. Nonetheless, each individual has a different relationship with each culture and varying degrees of biculturalism. In relation to this, the participants were asked to describe their relationship to each culture and whether they perceived them as compatible and complementary, or oppositional and contradictory within their life.

The majority of the participants struggled to define their relationship, going back and forth between it being compatible or oppositional. P3 illustrated that for her, she feels like they're very contradicting "but somehow a lot of us who are defined as Mexican American find a great blend between them. We figure out what it means to be Mexican in the American culture and what it means to be American in the Mexican culture". Nonetheless, she pointed out how it can also be conflicting from the political side, "you have to sort of check yourself before you go into a place and see what's safe for you to do and say" (P3).

Similar to this, P1 also identified politics as a strong point of contention between cultures. He mentioned that the culture has created beautiful things, but at the same time "it's very conflicting just because of like the times that we live in, I guess… not everybody but there has been a lot of racial remarks in the past years and like politics and stuff" (P1). Furthermore, P7 established how racism does play a big part in her relationship with each culture:

> I mean, I live in America so it's... I have to be with, you know, the culture at times just so then... That way I won't have nobody actually come up to me and like say something racist or stuff like that… It's difficult. I don't know. It's just different than somebody who is born here... it's weird. So it's difficult. It's difficult choosing one or the other. It's just... you like, living here... it's more of you want to fight to like find your identity.

In contrast, others definitely feel like both cultures are compatible within their life. P5 expressed how, in his experience, "I feel like they complement each other. I feel like the fact that I know two languages gives me another perspective, it makes me think differently". At the same time, some participants expressed that, for them, whether complimentary or opposing, it doesn't bother them. For instance, P8 emphasized that she seems them as oppositional, "but for me that's not a problem. Like it's annoying, it's like a thing. It's annoying, but whatever. It doesn't hurt my feelings". Similarly, P2 noted that he feels like the Mexican culture has to blend more towards the American side and that he's observed that in his family, but not in himself. "I feel like my family had to do a lot of adjustment to be here… Though I don't feel like I'm struggling with my identity, so maybe they do complement each other… in my life I see both of them just fine" (P2).

Another key point was brought about by P6, who had initially mentioned that she didn't see much difference between each culture and found them to complement each other. Nonetheless, further along in the interview she pointed out how hard she worked in high school to get good grades but would constantly find herself thinking that maybe all her hard work would not pay off in the end. She emphasized how "it's kind of eye-opening as well, because you can't relate completely to this culture either. Even though you've lived here your whole life, you've done everything here" (P6). Regardless of those conflicting feelings, P6 illustrated that she does love being able to speak two languages and being able to connect to both cultures, "even if you don't fully connect to both of them completely, you still have a piece of both cultures in you".

Setting the Tone in a Bicultural Home

> *Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity – we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness.* (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 85)

Closeness in family: A sense of Mexican identity in an American world. The synergy of two cultures can result in something wonderful or it can become a recipe for disaster if not threaded carefully. Those varying degrees of Mexicanness and Angloness between the distinct generations living within a home can create a bicultural household that takes from each culture and builds upon it, or a divided

household in which languages cause gaps and diverging values lead to conflict, distancing, and misunderstandings. Seeing how this young generation of Mexican Americans deal with their identity, it is important to delve into how their identity intersects within their family life.

Since family is one of the main components of Mexican culture and an essential part of who they are, the perception of this core value from a younger bicultural perspective becomes pertinent. In general, the majority of the participants expressed how much they prioritize family, how family is always there, the importance of respect and forgiveness, the connection and closeness that is established, as well as how they become their main support system.

Regarding this, P5 related that he thinks the Mexican culture does play a big role in how you look at family, "the respect you have for your parents, also how close you feel to your siblings. Even though some may do things we don't agree with, it doesn't mean we don't love them. They'll always be family". Identically, P2 asserted that family will always be there for you no matter what:

> I do agree that family is a really important thing for us Mexicans, because even though I don't get along with my mom's side, they always invite me to everything and you have to go through the whole line of saying hi to everybody. Even if there are problems, they actually do still care just because I'm related to them.

In light of this, P1 pointed out that most of his extended family is back in Mexico and, even though he vaguely remembers them, they always want to keep in contact and know about his life, which is something that amazes him. "We'll have conversations

about life… it's just, I was there as a kid so I have no memory of those times… but it's great though, I love talking to them. They're great people" (P1).

The sense of closeness and connection also plays a big role in family life, as P6 expressed her fear of moving away from home:

> I'm terrified to move out still because I'm just so connected to them, to my parents and my sisters and even though I'll still be connected to them even if I moved out, it's just like that sense of like still being their little girl. I just don't want to get rid of that.

By the same token, P7 emphasized how Mexican families are so close, "they are just so warm… and they're always there for you to support you, they're your support system… I feel like we're close, we're loving people, we care about family". Equally, P8 stated that she talks to her brother every single day, "[with family] we actively make decisions… like I invite them to every event that I have". Likewise, P4 drew from Mexico's customs to emphasize that she grew up abiding to certain rules about family, like respecting the elders, "they're always like 'family comes first', and I mean, you can never feel like you're just by yourself. You have people that are in your family that can help you out".

Despite the overall positive attribute that family has in these participant's life, there was one interviewee who deviated from the norm and shared that, in her life, family is not a priority. In relation to this, P3 established that she sometimes blames the influence of American culture for her divided family and the divorce of her parents when she was a little girl. "I just didn't have the greatest family because… I say because we moved to the United States, maybe I didn't have the greatest family connection" (P3).

Nonetheless, she does agree with it being a cover value for Mexicans, "I think it's great for people that it works for, but I feel like it should be able to be changed if it's not for you… especially in the Mexican American culture" (P3). Moreover, she explained that she attributes her failed relationship with her parents to growing up with a different culture and values:

> For them, redefining those values affected them in a bigger way… I remember going to family gatherings and not wanting to like *saludar a todos* -say hi to everyone-, and even with my own family sometimes I did not like spending that much time with them. So it was really hard for them to understand why. Why isn't she like us? My dad would say, you know, 'we're all about *familia*, you have to have your *familia*'. I'm like 'yes, but I also have my other *familia* that I've made on my own'. So that was hard. (P3)

All in all, familism seems to remain an important component of first and second generation Mexican Americans. P7 expressed that, even though they sometimes go through tough times as a result of the lack of opportunities available due to legal status:

> We're hard working people, you know, our families are always living paycheck-to-paycheck. We're, you know, kind of struggling to get by but we make it work and, you know, if one falls, we all fall. I feel like family is everything… it affects your relationships; it affects your life in general.

At the same time, during her photo elicitation reflection, P7 chose a picture of her high school graduation with her parents. She expressed how they're the main reason why culture will always be important to her and they're why she fights every day to achieve

the future her parents have dreamed for her. This is with the hopes of one day being able to better their lifestyle and financially help them out.

Moreover, P7 reflected how, thanks to the interview, “I analyzed why my family is the most important thing in my life. At the same time, I realized that even though my roots are pure Mexican, I also feel and can now identify as Mexican American”.

Stuck between two languages: A reality. Although P3 was the only one who mentioned the direct negative effects that biculturalism has had within her family, there were many participants who have seen these effects reflected specifically in the language dynamic between themselves, their siblings and parents. Moreover, the interviewees expressed the level of comfort they feel speaking each language, for what purpose they use each, and the role it has within the household.

In regard to the lived experience of switching between two languages, P3 summed up that for her:

> I mean, sometimes I find myself in uncomfortable situations with both languages, like sometimes I can't... my tongue doesn't know what to do between English and Spanish. So I do feel more comfortable with English, but sometimes when I get like, put it out on certain things that I don't say right or my accent, it definitely puts me in an uncomfortable spot. And then with Spanish, I just know that I can have the potential to just butcher everything in that language. So I only use Spanish when I'm talking to someone who only understand Spanish. In my job, I usually ask them like what are you more comfortable with? Because I can go switch between doing that. I mean it won't be as easy as someone who's very fluent in Spanish, but I can still switch and you know just... Every day is very

> different between what language I'm going to speak today. So, you know, sometimes I could be like, okay, I'm feeling a little more comfortable with Spanish because my English isn't working but, like right now it's just chilling back there. But some days I'm just gonna speak full on English and sometimes it's just Spanglish because that's what feels more comfortable that day. (P3)

Furthermore, P3 explained that, even though she does feel comfortable with both languages, she has a bit more trouble expressing herself in Spanish. She emphasized that her Spanish is very "Kitchen Spanish", since her dad tried to enforce Spanish in the house, but she and her brother preferred to speak English and Spanglish to each other. Over time, her dad simply gave up and listened to them in English while he answered back in Spanish, but with her mom that was much harder since she barely understands English. Looking back now, P3 stated that she now comprehends why her parents wanted her to speak Spanish, "because now I'm losing some of it but… [back then] I never understood why it was so important to speak Spanish at home". As a matter of fact, P3 established that she considers Spanglish her first language and she is not alone in that feeling as P5 defined Spanglish as "a bridge where I mix both languages to where I can efficiently communicate with someone without having to pause and think of something to say". It is important to note that in his document analysis, P5 noted how Spanglish became that bridge since growing up his parents only taught him Spanish and:

> When I entered school it was very difficult for me to learn and master a second language when I had not yet mastered a first one. To this day there are certain words that I struggle with and it affects me in my workplace whenever someone

> tries to carry a conversation with me in either language, I struggle to correctly or properly phrase things.

In regard to what language bicultural kids should speak at home, there exists an internal debate within several of the participants. On the one hand, some of them stated that they wished they'd listened to their parents and learned to speak Spanish at home. On the other hand, others want to teach their younger siblings English so that they'll do well in school and not suffer like they did. For instance, P2 confronted his mom when asked why he only spoke English with his four-year-old sister:

> My mom was like, 'talk to her in Spanish because she's going to learn English at school. But I was like, 'that's what they said about me and look, I ended up failing a grade'. Do you feel me? So now I talk to my sister in English, but it's hard because she now knows more English than Spanish. I mean, she knows Spanish but she doesn't understand my mom as much as she understands me… I guess it's hard for my mom now to communicate with her.

Likewise, P3 pointed out that she tried to teach her nephews English because her sister and everyone in the house only spoke Spanish, "but I wanted them to do well in school so I was trying to teach them English instead of really teaching them Spanish, because they're going to lose it". Then again, now she doesn't truly know what option is better and stated that "it's such a back-and-forth thing" for her. Correspondingly, P7 noted that her younger sisters, who were both born in the U.S., only know how to speak English and just understand a little bit of Spanish. She related how language has become a barrier with her parents as "sometimes whenever they're speaking something, my

parents do feel like they're saying something about them or they feel excluded… so it's just kind of… I don't know, we cope with it" (P7).

At the same time, participants whose both of their parents only spoke "broken English", had no choice but to speak Spanish at home. P1 observed that he spoke Spanish because it was the only language his parents knew, so when he was a kid "the American culture crept up on me because like I didn't… I had no siblings. I had to go to ESL classes, like English was of course going to be my second language". Identically, P4 expressed how hard English was for her because she lives "in an all-Spanish household because my mom doesn't like speaking English… well, she can't speak it [so] she doesn't really help me like keep going with English… I'm okay at it, I guess".

Similar to her conflicting experience identifying herself, and realizing she was more American, P6 struggled coming to terms with the fact that English is actually her first language, despite the fact that she desperately wanted to say it's Spanish:

> So my boyfriend always asks me like 'what's your first language?' and I always say Spanish because that's just... That's where I'm from, Mexico, and they speak Spanish over there. But he's like 'no, you're not. Like, that's not your first language', and I'm like 'why not? That's my culture'. He's white and he tells me this all the time and I'm just like, 'no, no, it's Spanish'... but in reality, like I feel way more comfortable speaking English and he tells me 'well, what numbers do you count? What do you count in your head? Is it Spanish or English?'... Yeah. It's definitely English. So he's like 'well, there you go. That's your first language', and I'm just like 'no, I can't'... [About Spanish] I'm really, I'm getting better at it. I can't really write. Well, I can write better than I can read in Spanish and I'm trying

> to work on it. But yeah, I would definitely say... English, like in reality English would have to be my first language.

The conflicting duality between both languages can become a constant pressure for many bicultural people and a source of frustration when seeking to communicate and relate to others, as P3 vividly explained that sometimes she feels like she's "stuck between two languages". Regardless of the stress this can sometimes cause, P7 vividly illustrated how, even though she felt like she struggled a little bit with both languages, she tried to work with what she had and, specifically, she sought to help translate and make life easier for others:

> I use them more for communicating and translating, helping my parents out a lot. Sometimes even just expressing myself, whether it's a poem, whether it's you know in a paper, either or. This is both in English and Spanish. It's either or... I don't identify myself as speaking more English than Spanish, or Spanish than English. It's, you know, both. I don't know either language as much as I should, but I work with what I got and I use the language by translating and helping others that need the help or, you know, translating… [for] friend's parents, family friend's doctor's appointments... That's what I use language for and just kind of expressing myself in general because that's who I am.

Overall, every participant has had a different experience managing each language but, despite their distinct levels of fluency, all agreed on their desire to not lose Spanish. Even though they might have not worked as hard at learning the language when they were younger, they're now seeking to grow closer to their culture and fully embrace their mother tongue. In effect, P8 recently decided to major in Spanish:

> I don't know a lot of words in Spanish... I haven't even started on my Spanish at all… I'm not worried but I do think it's going to be a thing, like it's going to be hard. It'll be worth it in the long run. I want to be able to speak Spanish.

Learning to Embrace It All

> *The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in a Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else.* (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 101)

Advantages of biculturalism: A bridge for empathy, understanding and connection. That tolerance for ambiguity and the juggling of cultures that Anzaldúa (2012) so clearly expressed can become the bridge that allows bicultural people to truly thrive, express themselves, be comfortable in their identity and connect to those around them. Knowing that biculturalism is such a complex process, it can sometimes be easy to dwell on the conflicting parts of being bicultural, so it also became pertinent to ask the participants what advantages they perceive to being bicultural and, more specifically, what motivates them to be a bicultural and bilingual individual. In regard to this, the themes that emerged mostly had to do with building relationships, such as the ability to connect with more people, build bridges, understand, empathize, relate,

see different perspectives and help others. At the same time, other themes related to individual benefits, such as professional opportunities and the opening of doors.

For one thing, P1 pointed out that, by knowing both languages, you have a greater "ability to connect with certain social groups… it builds a connection between people who can relate". Similarly, P2 believed that this connection between certain groups can become a very powerful movement:

> I don't know if a white person would understand the things we do and where we come from. I can see all that. It's like a switch that I can't turn on and off. I like that people are pushing the Latino movement, I like that they're pushing us to be more successful.

Aside from this, the desire to help others and translate for them is a big reason for many participants. P4 expressed that there's advantages to speaking both languages since you can help so many people out, moreover she stated that she felt like she could "relate to them because like, whenever I got here, I didn't know as much English either. So I feel like I can be there to tell them, 'I went through that', and be there". Consequently, P2 agreed that being bilingual puts him in an advantage professionally and as a person, "I feel like I can connect and understand more where they're coming from. I can translate and help them out". This sentiment is shared by P7 who illustrated that her parents have always been a big motivation for her to learn both languages, "even if I didn't learn them like the right way, full on.... Just kind of seeing people struggle on a daily basis. It motivates me to become a better person to help my community".

Furthermore, P8 advocated the importance of adequate translators for doctor appointments. She mentioned that she wants to be able to translate on her own because

when she went to therapy she used to have a translator and, “I know that a lot of it got lost in translation, so I was like ‘this is literally the worst thing ever’” (P8). On the contrary, when one is able to comprehend both languages, “it does build a sort of perspective… not just that, it does also build bridges for people… just to connect, connect not just in conversation but just impossible situations” (P1). In addition to this, P6 expressed that:

> You should definitely learn like the culture here as well, and also still have pride for where you came from... If you're educated in both, you're able to understand both sides of this, you know, you're able to understand both sides of the stories. You're able to empathize with both since you can see both struggles.

All things considered, P3 described it as “the best of both worlds, having two cultures as one”. Correspondingly, P7 expressed the freedom that comes with being bicultural and the meaningful connections it can build with others:

> You can be whatever you want. You can be whoever, like in general you can choose to like... It's funny because you can actually choose to like mask yourself with them like in it... Like to be an American or you can one day feel, ‘oh, I'm you know, I feel more of like in touch with my Mexican roots’, or some days you're just kind of crazy and all over the place and just kind of like, you know, either or. But the advantages, I feel like, you know, foreign languages, you can connect with different people, you can talk to different people, you can actually connect with people throughout their struggles, throughout so much stuff that they go through on a daily basis. You can talk about, you know… Everyone goes through racism at one point in their life and it's just kind of like... You can

> connect with people through that. You can connect to people through a lot of ways, which is pretty neat, because in reality, sometimes even though you feel alone, you know that there's people out there just like you, so that's pretty comforting. But just being here and being a Latina or Hispanic person of you know, whatever race... It's cool because you're not like everyone else, you're different.... And professionally, you have a lot more opportunities with jobs, you get higher pay as well if you are bilingual. Just for the fact that it's just another service... you're able translate, so you have more opportunity to connect with clients, guests, customers, whoever it is and you kind of, you have the opportunity to kind of like make them feel... well, you have the opportunity to not, like, to help them not panic.

Embracing their roots: A slow but deliberate process. Throughout the data collection process, it became evident the craving that many of these participants felt towards their Mexican culture as they became older. Embracing your roots, who you are and where you came from, is the first step towards becoming a more wholesome and confident bicultural individual.

In the first place, P3 credited LLCEC camp for this deliberate change that has begun within her, “I really have been wanting and I’ve been craving this knowledge of my culture and been wanting to really speak more Spanish and hang out with more like Latino or Hispanic students”. Similarly, P8 expressed that, when she was younger, she was not “even slightly in tune with Mexican culture”, but now she’s stepping back into and also credited LLCEC for that change:

> A lot of it started when I went to camp, like in the summer I was like 'wow, there's so much more [about Mexican culture] than I ever thought that I ever wanted to know'… and then all this like immigration stuff started popping up so I was like, 'I should probably know a little more about myself before I start like protesting'. So I looked into that… [LLCEC] is a space that like you *can* learn about that stuff and it's *fine.* It was cool. (P8)

Furthermore, P1 remarked how embracing his Mexican culture is "literally everything just because it's like… I want Hispanic culture to kind of rise over all, so I'm one of those people". Moreover, P6 shared her desire to speak more Spanish and feel proud of her roots since "you could take us out of Mexico, but you can't take the culture out of us. That's always going to stay with us".

At the same time, participants expressed how this renewed interest in their culture is also linked with the legacy that they want to leave and the future they want for their children. For instance, P5 pointed out that for him it will be very important to be able to "share both languages and cultures with my family. I know that, personally, when I have kids… before they start going to school I want them to learn Spanish, so they can communicate with their grandma and other family members". Likewise, P7 indicated that her family will never lack their Mexican roots and that, the older she gets, "the more stuff I learn so it becomes easier for me to choose and pick what type of stuff I want my children to kind of learn", but she especially concluded that her main priority will be "to keep my family close together… I feel like that's one tradition that I just want to keep going. You know, that has to stay" (P7).

Comparatively, P1 was able to realize the many benefits being bilingual has, and because of this:

> I do want to teach my kids Spanish, period… they have to learn it, just because they're going to need it. They're going to see how much of a benefit it is and how much like the world will open to you and how many opportunities are going to be able to come in.

Similarly, P2 wanted to also speak to his children in Spanish, he mentioned that "it's better to keep it going because… I don't want it to stop. Those Mexican American families that also speak Spanish, it's an advantage in life". Additionally, P4 expressed that if she gets married to an American person, "I want to have like some part of my culture, I want to combine at least both". Along the same lines, P6 stated that if she has a biracial family she still wants her kids to know the culture and know the traditions, "to know and value them. To visit Mexico every once in a while and know how it is... and like meet my family over there. So learn Spanish well, speak it well, write it well".

Despite the majority of participants speaking of a future in which they want to leave a legacy of Spanish and Mexican culture for their kids, two interviewees expressed no desire to have kids but mentioned that they personally still want to continue to embrace and learn about their culture. P8 simply stated that she doesn't want kids so she's not "worried about passing it down or anything. That's not my problem, but I do want to like, know it. I just want to have it". In like manner, P3 remarked that she doesn't have interest in having children since she's not a family person. In light of this, she reflected and voiced the reason why she felt that way, as well as an unspoken concern that led her to think like that:

> I guess a big reason why I don't want to have kids is because I'm scared that they would like lose that Mexican because I lost it… Just also like to see my family fall apart through a lot of that blend of Mexican American culture so it's just like, I don't want kids… I've seen that happen a lot [the loss of culture] as generations pass. (P3)

In spite of this, P3 asserted that, at least in her personal life, she has the desire to keep learning more about her culture and become more in tune with it. And, even though she has expressed feeling insecure about her Spanish, she has now been able to see it in a different light:

> The director of LLCEC always encourages me to really embrace my Mexican side and you know, she even tells me like… 'When you're like speaking in the house then don't worry about how you say things like, you know, don't tame your tongue. You know, it's your language and even if it comes out like Hood -because I basically lived in the hoods-, really even if it comes out like that like, embrace it because that is your language'. (P3)

Describing both cultures: A distinctive but complementary equation.

Navigating two cultures and being a part of both gives individuals a unique perspective into each of them. Likewise, their lived experiences and perspectives help draw a descriptive picture of what each culture means to them. With the hopes of getting a glimpse into how the participants view each culture, the researcher asked them to choose three words to describe both the Mexican and the American culture.

In regard to the Mexican culture, the most frequently used words were: family, food, strength, bravery, united, and dancing (see Figure 2). On the other hand, for the

American culture, the words were: opportunity, success, future, dreams and freedom (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Mexico Word Cloud.

Figure 3. United States Word Cloud.

Uniquely, the core values chosen to describe the Mexican culture exemplify the traits that are most important to them, and that allow them to continue thriving, caring

and embracing their roots while living in a different country. At the same time, the words used to describe the U.S. reflect the land of opportunities and freedom that has led so many “brave and strong” immigrants to take on the risks to achieve this “American dream”. Taken together, the choice of words exemplified the distinct qualities that make each culture unique and that, if complemented, can bring wholeness to the bicultural individual as each culture highlights different aspects that make for a full, joyful and successful life.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the daily life of the younger generation of Mexican Americans through a phenomenology design. Specifically, in regard to how the culture-sharing pattern of biculturalism is reflected in their lives, how they navigate both cultures, and the way they construct their bicultural identity.

Since biculturalism is considered a multi factor construct, Basilio et al. (2014) had stated that effectively capturing the complexities of biculturalism remained a challenge. Because of this, the study utilized rich qualitative data that could help paint a clear and descriptive picture of the internal process of biculturalism within eight Mexican American individuals. Ultimately, the data analysis aimed to collect and reflect the voices of this young generation and the stories surrounding their experience with their bicultural identity. This was done through three distinct data methods that complemented each other: interviews (oral), photo elicitation (visual), and document analysis (written).

The results of the present study effectively capture the complexities of biculturalism. In the first place, it extends previous research done by Basilio et al. (2014) by complementing their findings with a qualitative, in-depth component. Specifically, in relation to their constructs of bicultural comfort (e.g., how they feel), bicultural facility (e.g., how they respond), and bicultural advantage. The findings from this study corroborate the idea that biculturalism presents itself differently in every person and emphasize how it is a multi-factor construct, in which one can still be considered bicultural, but possess differing degrees of "perceived comfort, facility, and advantages associated with living in a dual cultural context" (Basilio et al., 2014, p. 549). Uniquely,

in relation to bicultural comfort, overall most participants feel that they are constantly fed opposing cultural messages. Nonetheless, their bicultural facility can be easily activated in the form of an "on and off switch", leading to a smooth transition. Despite feeling conflicted in bicultural comfort but at ease with their bicultural facility, the advantages they perceive from being bicultural heavily outweigh any discomfort they might feel as they utilize their biculturalism to be a part of community: building bridges, empathizing, and connecting with more people.

This desire and push for building community and utilizing their biculturalism as a way to empathize and connect with others, alludes to two of Chickering's seven vectors in his Theory of Identity Development: *Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence*, and *Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships*. Among other things, these two vectors relate to student's increased awareness of interconnectedness with others, the development of intercultural and interpersonal tolerance, and appreciation of differences (Evans, 2010). These qualities are exemplified by most of the participants who, when asked about their motivation to be bicultural and the advantages they perceive, their focus immediately goes to community, rather than individual benefits. For instance, they demonstrate an understanding and desire to connect with other social and bicultural minority groups, build perspective and bridges with people, as well as find a way to give back to their community and help in translating to those who struggle with English.

Equally important, the findings from this study differed with Chen and colleagues' (2008) argument, which suggests that, in order for a bicultural individual to successfully adjust to their environment, they must perceive their intersecting cultural

meaning systems as compatible and complementary. Contrary to that, this study illustrates that, even though their cultures and ideologies can clash at times and feel contradictory to each other, this young generation can still respond and function in both cultures, but in varying degrees. This finding alludes to Basilio and colleagues' (2014) view of biculturalism as being a process and not a demographic characteristic.

In essence, Basilio et al. (2014) emphasize biculturalism as a fluid and not static process. Similar to this fluidity, Chickering and Reisser (1993) state that students move through these identity development vectors at different rates. Moreover, the authors explain that these vectors can sometimes interact with each other, which leads to students often having to reexamine issues they had previously worked through.

In like manner, findings from the study support Huynh and colleagues' (2018) BII theoretical framework, which argues that the notion of cultural harmony vs. conflict (e.g., feelings associated with being bicultural) is completely independent from cultural blendedness vs. compartmentalization (e.g., how one perceives and organizes their culture). In their responses, participants express how, even though it was easy for them to switch back and forth between cultures and languages, they sometimes dealt with feelings of inauthenticity and internal emotional battles. Some of them allude to the fact that they feel like they're not the same way with their American friends than they are with their Mexican friends and feel a need to be more sophisticated and follow societal norms. These examples relate to Chickering's vector of *Managing Emotions*, in which students develop the ability to recognize and accept their emotions, while trying to express and control them. When engaging in cultural frame switching, the participants in the study are

conscious of the anxiety they feel, can manage to express it in words, but are still figuring out how to control their emotions in these particular situations.

No matter how well the participants are able to organize their dual cultures and compartmentalize them in their life, they still struggle with conflicting and opposing feelings. This corroborates what Huynh et al. (2018) advocate, "a bicultural individual may perceive conflict between her cultures and at the same time blend those cultures in her everyday life… but this blend also might bring awareness of important differences and clashes between the two cultures" (p. 1593).

Moreover, the strong affective component and the push for cultural harmony - despite the internal conflicting struggles- could also be related to the particular personality traits associated with Mexicans. Wang et al. (2010) point out that the Hispanic population seeks harmonious relationships and thus, could tend to utilize strategies in which they adapt rapidly to the dominant culture in order to seek approval from them. This relates to the inauthenticity component, in which participants express a desire to fit in and mask themselves on the outside to look as white as they can and thus, more comfortably fit in, even if it means constraining themselves. An example was given by P3, who dresses as a stereotypical "white girl" whenever she goes to the airport, as an attempt at not getting extra checked in security.

With this constant masking of oneself also comes the fear of not knowing who might be against you. In relation to this, Salas and colleagues (2013) express that the anti-immigrant policies have brought about "powerlessness, frustration, fear and stress" for many immigrants since racialization has significantly increased in recent years. In this study, it is evident that racism, labeling, and discrimination are still a part of their lives.

One participant mentions how, because of the current political climate, she has to constantly check herself before she goes into a place so she knows what is safe for her to say. Likewise, the fear of deportation of loved ones and lack of trust in the government (Derby, 2015) is also evidenced in the participants' stories, as P2, P3 and P5 have had direct family members that were either deported or detained by ICE.

Aside from their internal experience with biculturalism and identifying themselves, the present study also touches upon the participants' relationship with their Mexican culture. The majority of them express how, as they've gotten older, they've sought to connect and learn more about their roots, as well as perfect their Spanish. Examples of this are P3's "craving for her culture", and P8 wanting to inform herself more about how the current political climate affects immigrants before she starts protesting. This relates to Chickering's vector of *Developing Competence*, specifically intellectual competence which involves acquisition of cultural knowledge and critical thinking. Through LLCEC and the *Introduction to Humanities and Spanish* course that these students have been a part of, they are attempting to more critically comprehend their world and the place that their Mexican identity and culture has within it.

Uniquely, family is one of the core Mexican values and a big part of their culture. Because of this, an important component of the study focuses on identifying the role that biculturalism has in Mexican American families. On the one hand, the present study confirms the strength of family values, unity and support, despite the influence of the American culture (Romero et al., 2004). This is reflected in the intimate way each participant spoke about their family and the closeness they feel with them. At the same time, Knight et al. (2010) illustrate that Mexican families support each other emotionally,

physically and financially. This is evidenced in the interviews by two participants, P5 is currently considered the breadwinner of the household and supports his whole family, and P7 expressed her desire to further her studies so that she could help out her parents and give them a better life.

On the other hand, participants' experiences are also able to corroborate the acculturation gaps that can happen between children and their parents when they adapt to their new host culture at different rates (Telzer et al., 2016). This is evidenced with participants explaining how their family dynamic works, in which children speak to parents in English and the parents answer back in Spanish. This language barrier can be minimum if parents understand at least a little bit of English but, when accompanied by a strong discrepancy in cultural values and a worldview aligned with the mainstream culture, these gaps can grow bigger and distance a family. Within the present study, only P3 has experienced that extreme cultural dissonance with her family, that ultimately led her to decide to leave home.

In essence, both Mexican and American cultures are so distinct, but can have the potential to complement each other so well. As part of the study, participants were asked to use three words to describe what the Mexican and American culture mean in their life. It is interesting to see how the most frequently used words chosen are directly tied and validated by the literature. With the Mexican culture, core values are reflected and the chosen words depict the different elements that contribute to a united, strong, and family-oriented life. In regard to this, findings from this study validate the literature's emphasis on Mexican culture's preference for quality of relationships, collectivism, values, and family (Stone et al., 2006). Meanwhile, with the American culture, Arreola (2010)

emphasizes how, for Spanish speakers, the border -or *la frontera-,* is seen with optimism and opportunity; whereas, for English speakers, it's seen as a geographic term of cultural uneasiness. Correspondingly, in the study, the chosen words describe how the Mexican American participants view the U.S. as the opening of doors and opportunities that will lead each of them to a better future and to, hopefully, achieving their dreams.

As can be seen, biculturalism consists of many components and is expressed in varying degrees within each individual. In like manner, Chickering and Reisser (1993) indicate that one of the complex layers of a young adult's identity development is having "a sense of one's social and cultural heritage". Going back to Chickering's seven vectors, *Establishing Identity* is the fifth one and, despite these not being rigidly sequential, it's the only one that builds on each of the vectors that comes before it. Significantly, all of the previous vectors were reflected –in one way or another– in the lived experiences and stories shared by the students in this study.

Through an in-depth personal account, the participants in this study have shown how these two cultures intertwine within their life and, most importantly, their unique perspective on this phenomenon. Despite the multifaceted, conflicting and sometimes harmonious journey of biculturalism, this path is one that the students continue to navigate through. All in all, this young generation of Mexican Americans have demonstrated a desire and craving to know more about their "cultural heritage". In a slow but deliberate process they have begun to, not only embrace their roots and where they come from, but all that their Mexican American culture encompasses and the many opportunities that being bicultural can bring to their life.

Implications and Recommendations

Findings from this study can be used to complement and enrich the existing quantitative data that positions biculturalism as an advantage for individuals, an asset for interpersonal and professional success, as well as the building of healthy relationships and a strong sense of self. Moreover, their particular stories develop a foundation of knowledge so rich and detailed that shows the complex, internal and ongoing process of biculturalism within young individuals.

Qualitative data is not meant for reproducibility, but rather for the meanings generated and the value they provide. Nonetheless, this study could potentially benefit from expanding it to a larger study population to get a more adequate and comprehensive picture, but no more than 25 individuals since the goal of qualitative researchers is not generalizability, but depth. Moreover, it would be interesting to include the parent's voices in order to get a more holistic account of the biculturalism phenomenon and the acculturation gap that can exist within families, as well as their narrated account of crossing the border, the struggles that come with it, and the hopes for a better life. Similarly, aside from the in-depth interviews, the data collection methods could be complemented with focus groups to also provide a safe and inclusive space where individuals are able to connect, relate and build off of each other's experiences.

At the same time, this study poses the question of where do we go from here? It becomes evident that our young bicultural generation can think critically, be introspective and retrospective, and have a drive to succeed. But, at the same time, their constant identity struggles, feelings of inferiority, fear of discrimination and missed opportunities, because of their legal status, represent so many barriers to their development.

Implications for social policy and research should consider what our young bicultural generation needs in order to succeed and thrive as a minority?

Specifically, within Kentucky, one concrete example that addresses this particular need is LLCEC. This summer camp has been identified as a changing point in the lives of the participants within this study. This experience becomes a type of mentoring program, in which these driven individuals can get in close contact with potential colleges and, through peer mentoring, leadership and social justice education workshops, among other things, they have begun to empower Mexican American young adults to pursue a higher education (LLCEC, 2019). Additionally, they make them realize that these options are also available for them and that they have the potential to achieve them. Moreover, alluding to the familism values that are so important in their culture, LLCEC does not stop in the summer but rather continues to be a part of the now-college-students' lives by follow-up mentoring and full *familia* gatherings throughout the school year. Uniquely, in 2015, the LLCEC was selected by the White House Initiative for Educational Excellence of Hispanics as a Bright Spot for Latino student success (LLCEC, 2019).

All in all, the journey of biculturalism is a long and winding one, full of ups and downs, pride and discomfort, fluency and awkwardness, comfort and distancing, embracing and shutting down. As Huynh and colleagues (2018) establish, the challenge of negotiating between multiple, and sometimes conflicting, cultural identities and value systems is an ongoing process that takes place in the day-to-day life. Effectively, through a phenomenological design, the present study seeks to shed more light into the lived experiences of bicultural individuals by giving a voice to the younger generations. Specifically, to those of Mexican American descent, who are currently at the center of a

turbulent political climate that incites anti-immigrant sentiments against them and generalizes all immigrants as “faceless, nameless” individuals or “bad hombres”, when ultimately, they all have a story to tell, a purpose in life, intentions that are honest, a drive to better themselves, and a family to care for and give their all to, no matter the sacrifice.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Script

1. What is your full name? How do you like to be called? → DEMOGRAPHIC
2. Tell me a little about yourself. → DEMOGRAPHIC
3. Where were you born in Mexico? If so, when did you move to Kentucky? What were the reasons for your move?
    a. If you were born in the United States, tell me about your family history, the reasons they moved to Kentucky and when it happened. → LIFE HISTORY / BACKGROUND
4. What was it like being a new immigrant in this country? (benefits, challenges, etc.)
    a. If you didn't personally experience it or remember because you were young, what stories have your parents told you about this time. → ADJUSTMENT
5. What does it mean for you to be Mexican-American? Do you feel identified with the term? If not, how would you identify? → IDENTIFICATION
6. With what culture(s) do you identify more strongly now, Mexican or American? Why? → BICULTURAL
7. Do you feel comfortable switching between cultures? Why? → BICULTURAL COMFORT
8. How would you describe your relationship with both cultures? Do you perceive them as compatible and complementary, or oppositional and contradictory? → BICULTURAL COMFORT

9. Do you feel comfortable speaking both languages? When/for what purposes do you use each of them? → BICULTURAL COMFORT AND FACILITY
10. What are the advantages you perceive of being bicultural and bilingual? → BICULTURAL ADVANTAGES
11. What is your motivation to be bicultural?
12. What kind of contacts, if any, do you maintain with Mexico? → TIE TO COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
13. How does being Mexican influence what family is to you? → FAMILISM
14. How did you decide what language(s) to speak in your home? → BILINGUAL
15. How important is it to maintain the Mexican culture and language in your family? How do you achieve this? → BICULTURAL/BILINGUAL
16. Are there aspects of your first language/culture that you want to pass on to your children and grandchildren? Explain → FUTURE GENERATIONS
17. Name three words that represent Mexican culture to you and three words that represent American culture to you. → MEANING OF BOTH CULTURES

Appendix B: Coding Guide

Reasons for immigration	Pressure to succeed
Identity	Embracing Mexican roots
Relationship to each culture	Mexico
Motivation to be bicultural	USA
Advantages of being bicultural	Comfort with language
Cultural frame switching	Family
Early struggles	Future / Legacy
Immigration barriers	Description of each culture

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