

Tensions and Accommodations in Mexican Immigrant Households

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- 2003-2006 study of Mexican transnational families. Conducted in Central New Jersey and the Mixteca region of Mexico.
- 2009-2012 study of children in Mexican immigrant households. Conducted in Northeast Ohio (Akron area) and Central New Jersey.



NEW AND OLD
WORLD VALUES. .

..ACCULTURATION
GAPS

**How do family
tensions and
accommodations
manifest themselves in
educational settings?**

FAMILY SEPARATION

MIXED STATUS FAMILIES

MOBILITY / DEPORTATIONS

IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

- Most children of immigrants are U.S. born, but 20 % are estimated to be immigrants themselves (Urban Institute 2006).
- More than 1.7 million children are undocumented immigrants (Passel 2005).
- One study of immigrant children in Boston and San Francisco found that 85 % had been separated from parents prior to migration (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova and Louie 2002).

FAMILY SEPARATION

- Pre-migration and Post-migration separations
- Disproportionately Affects Immigrant Families from Certain Countries



SEPARATION IS A GENDERED PROCESS

- PRE-MIGRATION
 - Fathers more likely to leave children than mothers.
 - Children may be separated from both parents today as wives increasingly join husbands in the United States.
 - Children separated from just mothers tend to live in single-parent households. Their mothers were divorced or separated prior to migration.
- POST-MIGRATION
 - National-level data are not available.
 - Fathers more often detained than mothers.
 - When both parents detained, mothers are often released whereas fathers are deported directly.
 - Separations can be temporary or permanent after a deportation.

PRE-MIGRATION SEPARATIONS

Children feel resentful at being “left behind”

One grandmother I interviewed in Mexico explained:

“You know, he doesn’t really love his parents. I noticed this when they first came back to visit. He was like 8 years old. When they came, he didn’t want to have anything to do with them. Since then, he doesn’t want to talk to them on the phone...”

Resentment about UNMET Expectations

A Mexican boy I interviewed whose mother lived in the United States said:

“Because if she loved us, she would call. ...not even that she doesn’t send money, because that doesn’t matter. But at least she has to call....she has to call and say that she is okay.”

(see Dreby 2010)

CHANGES IN FAMILIES POST MIGRATION

Tensions with Step-Parents

- A mother I interviewed defended the relationship between her new husband and her two daughters in Mexico who had never met him, claiming that unlike others, her husband accepted the two girls as his own:
- “They even call him Papi”

Tensions with Step-Siblings

- A young boy complained of his father having another child in the U.S.:
- “ I don’t understand, it is so ignorant. If he cannot make it with us, how can he with another one?”

(See Dreby 2010)

SEPARATION DUE TO DEPORTATION

Short-term emotional distress

- A 12-year-old in Ohio described the day that she found out that her parents had been arrested,

“[my uncle] came in my room and he woke me up and he said that ‘your mom is...the police got her.’ I don’t know, like my he---, my head almost exploded—it look like it exploded ‘cause that’s like my mom.”

Long-term impacts

- A 14-year-old’s father was deported when she was 11. She explained,

“My mom started working when I was in fifth grade. So I’ve been pretty much taking care of my brother since like fifth grade.....it was a lot harder for me because I never really experienced my mom going to work.”

SEPARATION AND CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

- Children “left behind” by migrant parents perform more poorly in school than their peers on many indicators (see Giorguli 2004; Heymann et. Al. 2009; Kandel & Kao 2000)
- Post-reunification, negative outcomes in school continue to be evident (Grindling and Poggio 2010; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova and Louie 2002)
- Reunification creates its own tensions in families when expectations continue to go unmet (Artico 2003; Nazario 2006; Smith 2006)

THE CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS

- Nearly twice as likely to have poor health as the children of non-immigrants; they more often lack health insurance (Dinan 2006).
- More likely to live in overcrowded housing: 26 percent as compared to only 6 percent of children of non-immigrants (Dinan 2006).
- More likely to live in poverty; 54 percent live in low income families compared to 36 percent of children of non-immigrants (Urban Institute 2006).

FOUR-FIFTHS OF CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS ARE U.S. CITIZENS

(From Urban Institute 2006).

- 61 percent (in 2004) lived in families in which one or both parents lacked a legal status – a mixed status family.
- Mixed status more common for children in younger age groups: 93 percent of children under age 6 in immigrant households are U.S. born citizens.

CHILDREN AS FAMILY TRANSLATORS



In 2000, 58 percent of all young children of immigrants had at least one limited English proficient (LEP) parent (Urban Institute 2006).

DOMAINS OF PARAPHRASING

(Orrellana, Dorner Pulido 2008)

MEDICAL / HEALTH

- Fill out insurance info in ER or doctor's offices
- Translate at medical appointments
- Fill prescriptions at pharmacy
- Make / cancel appointments
- Translate correspondence from insurance, WIC, Medicaid, etc...

COMMERCIAL

- Shop with parents
- Interpret receipts
- Order services like cable, phone etc.
- Answer phone calls
- Fill out rental applications

EDUCATIONAL

- Attend parent-teacher conferences
- Visit and assess preschools for younger siblings
- Help parents with ESL homework
- Report school absences
- Interpret Letters and other school correspondence
- Help siblings with homework
- Translate for other members of the community at schools / other community events.

CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES AS TRANSLATORS

- Most children do not like to translate. I asked a ten year old,
- In New Jersey, a mother to a ten year old explained,

“Did you ever have to do that [translate for mom]?”

“Yes.”

“You have? Do you like doing that or not?”

“Not really.”

“How come?” I asked her.

“Because sometimes I don't know how to say some things in English in Spanish so it's hard.”

“Yes, she [Andrea] translates for me. But there are times that I am talking on the phone and I tell them to wait so I can get someone to help me or I ask them to please put on someone who speaks Spanish. But I can make an appointment on the phone well....I can answer the phone if someone is calling about an appointment . . . I can say no, I can say yes.”

CHILDREN'S WORK AS CULTURAL BROKERS

- TUTORS
 - Basic translation
 - Basic interpretation
 - Teaching parents about aspects of U.S. society
- ADVOCATES
 - Intervene on behalf of parents often due to language skills
 - Defend parents / family
- SURROGATE PARENTS
 - Engage in caretaking activities
 - Consulted by parents on major purchases etc.

- Children's work changes dynamics in families.
- One 14-year old told me,

“I would have to translate. So I would know like more than I was supposed to when I was younger.”

“I don't know, usually kids my age won't like be, won't have like as much responsibility as I do now.”

TENSIONS AT SCHOOLS

Parents Struggle to Monitor Children's Schooling

“It is that I dont know very much – she is the one who teaches them. My oldest daughter says who is there to help me and I say, ‘daughter, it's that I dont know it. How can I do it if I dont understand.’ ”

- Mother of four ages 14, 13, 6 and 6 in describing their homework routines.

Parents' Insecure about Institutional Interventions

- Parents fear that children will call CPS on them if they discipline their children.
- Children may threaten to call CPS on their parents.
- Children may also be complicit with parents in avoiding such interventions.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLING

When parents consider their children's school as a safe place, they are willing and eager to be involved in their children's education regardless of the mixed legal statuses within their families.



MOBILITY

Low-income status and domestic moves

- “There are many situations in which, for example, the parents move around a lot. There are situations in which the parents don't have a contact number, we don't have a phone number for them. It is very difficult to be in touch with parents who have just arrived. They don't have telephones, the rent rooms only, it is very difficult to get a phone number for them. Sometimes you want to communicate with them and you have to call three people before you can get in touch with the parent directly.”

- ESL teacher, New Jersey

Transnational Ties – international moves

- Parents may send older children back to country of origin as a form of discipline (see Kasinitz et. al 2009).
- Younger children may be sent back for child care reasons (see Foner 2009).

MOBILITY AND EDUCATION?

- Prolonged visits to home country may give children of immigrants an advantage, especially when it removes them from a negative pathway in the United States (see Kasinitz et. al. 2008).
- A year in the home country may, however, severely derail children's schooling. This is especially true for younger children moving back and forth to places with varying types of school systems.

TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION

An increase in deportations nationally mean that children may experience multiple adjustments to schools both within the United States, but also between the United States and Mexico.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

