

COPIED BY [illegible] IN [illegible]
JANUARY 1982
U. N. A. M.

14.06
5164
1284

Cultural and Ethnic Maintenance of Interethnically Married Mexican Americans

by NELLY SALGADO DE SNYDER AND AMADO M. PADILLA

Nelly Salgado de Snyder is an associate researcher at the Spanish Speaking Mental Health Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. Amado Padilla is a professor of psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, and director of the Spanish Speaking Mental Health Research Center. This project was supported by Grant MH 24854 from the National Institute of Mental Health.

With the growing number of Hispanics in the United States, research on interethnic marriage seems particularly relevant. To date, there are few studies of intermarriage involving Hispanics (Bean and Bradshaw 1970; Burma 1963; Fitzpatrick 1966; Fitzpatrick and Gurak 1979; Gonzales 1969; Mittelbach and Moore 1968; Murguia and Frisbie 1979; Panunzio 1942). These studies are based on analyses of demographic data obtained from marriage and divorce certificates. The results of these studies have revealed that (1) the rate of interethnic marriages is increasing; (2) Hispanic females are more likely to intermarry than are Hispanic males; (3) Hispanic women who marry outside of their ethnic group are also more likely to marry someone from a higher socioeconomic class; (4) the rate

of exogamy increases with each succeeding generation, with the lowest rate of out-group marriage found among the immigrant generation; and (5) marriage outside of the ethnic group is more likely to occur when either spouse has had a previous marriage that resulted in divorce.

Although these studies of Hispanic intermarriage are very revealing, they do not provide us with information concerning either the role of acculturation or the ethnic identification of individuals engaged in interethnic marriages, since these studies rely only on marriage and divorce certificates. The need for more information about the functioning and social consequences of such marriages has been discussed by several authors (Gonzales 1969; Fitzpatrick and Gurak 1979).

The purpose of the present study was to examine certain questions concerning cultural and ethnic maintenance of individuals who had been involved in an interethnic marriage for nearly two decades. The subjects for this study were all of Mexican origin who were married to a non-Mexican individual in 1963 in Los Angeles County. It was felt that individuals who had been interethnically married for a long period of time could provide information about their sociocultural orientation as influenced by their spouses.

METHOD. Sampling Procedure. The names of potential subjects for this study were obtained from the files of 1963 marriage licenses for Los Angeles County that were examined by Mittelbach and Moore (1968). These files were obtained from the archives of the Mexican American Study Project carried out at the University of California, Los Angeles, between 1960 and 1970. Our search of the 47,163 marriage licenses recorded during 1963 resulted in a total pool of 1,803 Mexican interethnic marriages.

The marriage certificates of interethnically married Mexican Americans were examined for the following information: (1) ages at marriage of both the groom and bride, (2) generation of the Mexican spouse (based on the birthplace of the individual and of his/her parents), and (3) name and address of each marriage partner.

A letter was prepared that described the study and requested that the receiver cooperate by calling a designated number. Since the address to which the letter was sent was 17 years old at the time of this study, the letter was mailed to the current resident at the address indicated by each marriage partner on the certificate of marriage. The letter specified both names of the couple and requested information on the whereabouts of the individuals.

A total of 176 responses were obtained in a three-month period. Of these, 63 couples had moved and left no forwarding address. Another 5 chose not to participate, 11 reports were received that the Mexican-origin or both partners were deceased, and 13 indicated that they were not interethnically married. Thus, a total of 84 couples were located and interviewed.

Respondents. Respondents were 33 males and 51 females. Of the 84 individuals, 69 were still married and another 15 were divorced. The number of offspring for these couples ranged from 0 to 6 children for the Mexican origin male respondents ($\bar{X} = 2.69$) and between 0 and 5 children ($\bar{X} = 2.15$) for the females.

At the time of the marriage in 1963, the mean age for the males was 24.7 years and 22.2 years for females. Eight

respondents (9.5%) were first-generation immigrants. Another 49 (58.3%) were second-generation Mexican Americans, indicating that one or both of their parents were born in Mexico. The final group of 27 (32.1%) respondents were third- or later-generation Mexican Americans whose parents were both born in the United States.

Instrument. A questionnaire consisting of 50 items was used. The instrument was divided into four parts. The first part explored the respondents' perceptions of their children's ethnic identification and offsprings' ethnic social network. Part 2 sought information on the non-Mexican spouse's familiarity with Mexican culture. Part 3 inquired about the cultural awareness, ethnic identity, and sociocultural functioning of the Mexican-origin spouse. Other areas were also explored, such as personal feelings about success or failure of mixed marriages and the individual perceptions of parents' and in-law's approval or disapproval of the marriage, both currently and in 1963. The final section of the questionnaire was used to obtain demographic information on all members of the family.

The questionnaire was designed to be administered over the telephone and to require between 20 to 30 minutes to complete. With only one exception, all subjects were administered the questionnaire in English. It is important to note that although the sample is not strictly random, it does provide suggestive information from which more informed future research may proceed.

RESULTS. Table 1 presents the percentage of subjects by sex and generation who were involved in a variety of ethnic and culturally relevant activities. From the table we see the percent of subjects who identified as Mexican or of Mexican origin. All first-generation male and female respondents self-identified as Mexican-origin, and most second-generation men and women also had a clear preference for Mexican-origin ethnic identity. Third-generation respondents showed a shift in ethnic identity; only 66% of the men and 72% of the women considered themselves to be of Mexican origin. Further, all but five respondents indicated some speaking knowledge of Spanish. Of those speaking Spanish, 51% indicated that they were fluent speakers of Spanish, another 33% said that they spoke Spanish moderately well, and 17% said that they could communicate in Spanish, but with difficulty.

The data reported next in Table 1 corresponds to subjects whose best friend is either Mexican or Mexican origin and to the language spoken to them. As shown in the table, all of the first-generation females and only 50% of the first-generation males had a Mexican-origin best friend. There was no difference between first-generation males and females on language preference, with 50% of each group preferring Spanish. The percentage of subjects having a Mexican-origin best friend and using Spanish as the language of communication decreases with each successive generation. However, the Mexican American female respondents across generations were somewhat more likely than the males to have a Mexican-origin best friend and to speak Spanish with them.

The percentage of subjects who claimed that their everyday behavior reflects their Mexican background through such activities as cooking and eating Mexican food, speaking Spanish with family and friends, having a close relationship with their extended family, or taking special pride in being of Mexican origin is shown next in Table 1. Interestingly, second-generation men tended to reflect their Mexican background more than their first- or third-generation counterparts. Among the female respondents, more third-generation women than second- and even first-generation women claimed to reflect their Mexican background in their everyday behavior. First-generation respondents, regardless of sex, were less likely to reflect their Mexican background in their everyday behavior than later-generation respondents. However, this result may be due to the very small sample size of first-generation subjects.

As can be seen, the next set of data shown in Table 1 indicates that 50% of the first-generation, 55% of the second-generation, and 44% of the third-generation male respondents reported that their Mexican culture was reflected in some way in their marital life. Among men, the most mentioned cultural characteristic was to maintain control and authority over their wives. The percentage of female respondents who reported cultural characteristics in their marriage is similar among the first- and second-generation women (50% and 48%, respectively), but is lower among the third-generation (39%) women. For females, the most frequently mentioned characteristic was to show public affection and respect toward their husbands.

Four different areas of culturally relevant activities were explored. The respondents were asked if they had participated during the past year in a series of Mexican-related activities,

TABLE 1. PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS INVOLVED IN CULTURALLY RELEVANT BEHAVIORS, BY SEX AND GENERATION

	Males by generation				Females by generation			
	First (N = 4)	Second (N = 20)	Third (N = 9)	Mean	First (N = 4)	Second (N = 29)	Third (N = 18)	Mean
Self identity as Mexican-origin	100%	95%	66%	88%	100%	93%	72%	86%
Best friend is Mexican-origin	50	40	33	39	100	52	33	49
Speak Spanish with friends	50	21	11	21	50	31	19	31
Behavior reflects Mexican origin	50	75	67	67	75	83	89	84
Culture in marital relationship	50	55	44	48	50	48	39	45
Participation in:								
Historical activities	100	60	33	58	75	72	44	63
Religious activities	25	10	11	12	75	48	17	39
Social activities	75	95	89	91	100	93	100	99
Entertainment	100	100	56	91	75	66	56	63

such as celebrating Cinco de Mayo (The Battle of Puebla), 16 de Septiembre (Mexican Independence Day), La Virgen de Guadalupe (Patroness Virgin of Mexico), Las Posadas (Pre-Christmas popular religious celebrations), attending a Mexican dance or fiesta, going to Mexican movies, and watching the Spanish television channel. These activities were divided into four areas: historical, religious, social, and entertainment.

With the exception of the first-generation respondents, women participated in more historical celebrations than males. This pattern of greater participation by women was even more apparent in religious festivities. However, participation in culturally relevant social activities was not different among male and female respondents. First- and second-generation men were more likely to participate in culturally relevant entertainment such as watching Spanish television programs or going to Mexican movies. Respondents were also asked about the frequency of trips to Mexico. Overall, the number of visits to Mexico during the previous year was higher for males ($\bar{X} = 1.2$) than for females ($\bar{X} = 0.6$). As one would expect, first-generation Mexican subjects visited Mexico more often during the previous year ($\bar{X} = 2.8$) than second-generation ($\bar{X} = 0.7$) or third-generation ($\bar{X} = 1.0$) respondents. In comparing the level of participation of the three generations, it is clear that more first-generation respondents celebrated and participated in culturally relevant activities than later-generation respondents. Conversely, third-generation respondents were least likely to participate in Mexican-related activities.

Respondents' perception of the advantages and disadvantages of both out-group and in-group marriage was assessed. Overall, a higher percentage of Mexican American women than men (55% vs. 42%) found advantages in marrying someone from a different ethnic group. The advantage most frequently mentioned among the respondents was "to learn about another culture." Another advantage mentioned by three female respondents was "having a non-Spanish surname." As for the disadvantages of out-group marriages, the highest proportion of subjects who found disadvantages were the first-generation male and female respondents. Overall, there was no difference between males (58%) and females (53%) with respect to stated disadvantages in marrying someone from a different ethnic group. The disadvantage most frequently mentioned among the female respondents was "cultural differences." Among the male respondents, the most commonly mentioned disadvantage was "prejudice and discrimination from the other group."

With regard to the advantages and disadvantages in marrying someone of the same ethnic group, more women (65%) than men (58%) across all generations indicated more advantages in marrying within their ethnic group. The advantage that was given most often was "having the same culture," followed by "the use of Spanish." As for the disadvantages of in-group marriage, it is interesting to note that again, more women (41%) than men (27%) mentioned that there were more disadvantages in marrying another Mexican. This was particularly true among first-generation respondents where none of the men but 75% of the women found disadvantages of in-group marriage. The most frequently stated disadvantage in this type of union was "disagreement about the woman's role," which was reported by 35% of the women but only 5% of the men. Another disadvantage was "less communication because of sharing a common culture." The results show that

the respondents find advantages and disadvantages of out-group marriage. Further, 20% of the female and 3% of the male respondents perceived interethnic marriages as more successful than in-group marriages. Another 27% of male and 12% of female respondents perceived exogamy as less successful unions. The remaining subjects viewed out-group marriages as successful as any marriage.

Respondents reported that, prior to the wedding in 1963, 50% of the parents disapproved of the marriage because the spouse was not of Mexican origin, and 53% of the in-laws disapproved because the subject was Mexican American. Other reasons for disapproval included differences in age and religion. In spite of the initial conflicts that the subjects had with parents about the outmarriage, 64% of the respondents also had a brother or a sister who was involved in an interethnic marriage. Currently, the respondents that were still married felt that their marriage was sanctioned by both their parents and in-laws.

Also explored was the subject's perception of his or her children's involvement with the Mexican culture. Questions about the names and nicknames of each of the children were asked as well as questions concerning the children's ethnic preference, ability to speak Spanish, and ethnicity of the children's best friends. Results indicate that according to the respondents, 91% of the children of first-generation males and all of the children of first-generation females identified themselves as Mexicans or of Mexican origin. More children of second-generation males (67%) than females (26%) identified as Mexican origin. Somewhat fewer children of third-generation male respondents (48%) than third-generation female respondents (55%) identified as Mexican origin. Most respondents that had more than one child were consistent in perceiving the same ethnic identity for all their children. However, 14 respondents with more than one child reported different ethnic identities for their children.

Also examined was whether children have a Spanish name or nickname. More children of male than female respondents had Spanish names (24% vs. 14%). However, more children of female than male respondents had Spanish nicknames (23% vs. 18%). Findings show that as the generation of parents progresses from first through third or later, the percentage of children with Spanish names decreases (39%, 17%, and 14%, respectively). This pattern is even more pronounced for Spanish nicknames from first-generation (83%) to second-generation (15%) and third-generation (14%) respondents.

As for the ability to speak Spanish, overall, more children of first- and second- than third-generation respondents (50%, 49%, and 17%) spoke Spanish from moderately well to fluently. Furthermore, more children of female than male respondents spoke Spanish (36% vs. 29%). As for the children reported to have a Mexican-origin best friend, more children of first-generation respondents (72%) had a Mexican-origin best friend than children of second-generation (18%) and third-generation respondents (22%).

DISCUSSION. Although the number of respondents for this study is small, the results are important for what they reveal about interethnic marriage and acculturation. This investigation represents the first effort to interview Mexican Americans who are interethnically married. Moreover, the study of such marriages after nearly two decades is a methodological innova-

tion in this type of research. The usual or more common approach to interethnic marriage research is to merely examine marriage and divorce certificates for some locale over some given period of time (e.g., Bean and Bradshaw 1970) without ever engaging participants in such marriages in direct questioning concerning their motives for and perceptions of interethnic unions.

Results of this study lead us to the tentative conclusion that intermarriage itself is not necessarily a good index of acculturation. Rather, the findings show that Mexican Americans, in spite of marrying outside their ethnic group, maintain cultural ties and an ethnic identity. Further, such marriages appear to be flexible enough to allow each spouse to maintain ties with his/her culture of origin, to transmit both cultural orientations to offspring and to be relatively free of inter-cultural conflict.

Although exploratory in nature, this study does suggest that research on interethnic marriage could provide important insights into the complex processes of acculturation, cultural exchange between spouses, and the impact of competing cultural orientations on offspring. The importance of this study is apparent when we consider the increasing number of Hispanics in the United States and the increasing rate of exogamy noted by recent investigators (Fitzpatrick and Gurak 1979).

REFERENCES CITED

- Bean, F. D., and B. S. Bradshaw
1970 Intermarriage Between Persons of Spanish and Non-
- Spanish Surname: Changes from mid 19th Through mid 20th Century. *Social Science Quarterly* 51:389-95.
- Borah, W., and S. Cook
1966 Marriage and Legitimacy in Mexican Culture: Mexico and California. *California Law Review* 54:946-1008.
- Burma, H. J.
1963 Interethnic Marriage in Los Angeles, 1948-1959. *Social Forces* 62:156-65.
- Fitzpatrick, J. P.
1966 The Intermarriage of Puerto Ricans in New York City. *American Journal of Sociology* 71:395-406.
- Fitzpatrick, J. P., and D. T. Gurak
1979 Hispanic Intermarriage in New York City: 1975. Hispanic Research Center: Fordham University, Monograph No. 2.
- Gonzales, N. L.
1969 The Spanish Americans of New Mexico: A Heritage of Pride. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Grebler, L., J. W. Moore, and R. C. Guzman
1970 The Mexican American People. New York: Free Press.
- Mittelbach, F. G., and J. W. Moore
1968 Ethnic Endogamy: The Case of the Mexican Americans. *American Journal of Sociology* 74:50-62.
- Murguia, E., and W. P. Frisbie
1979 Trends in Mexican American Intermarriage: Recent Findings in Perspective. *Social Science Quarterly* 50:374-89.
- Panunzio, C.
1942 Intermarriage in Los Angeles, 1924-33. *American Journal of Sociology* 47:695-96.