

distributed throughout different regions of the country, nor even within the same state or county. Most of this differential opportunity arises from discriminatory hiring practices directed against Mexican Americans. Nevertheless, those individuals who have achieved occupational success have done so primarily because they possessed the ambition to exploit even the most meager opportunities in their environment. Hence, it is hypothesized that the motive to achieve is inherent in traditional Mexican-American culture, and that it expresses itself in proportion to both its strength and the extent to which opportunities are available in the person's environment.

RELATIONSHIP OF TRADITIONAL MEXICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE TO EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Educational studies comparing Mexican-American and Anglo-American students frequently reveal a higher overall level of achievement by Anglo Americans. On the basis of such findings it is often concluded that Mexican American culture causes lower achievement. However, by relying on two-group studies, which assume cultural homogeneity, researchers have generally overlooked important within-group differences in the cultural integration of Mexican Americans, and the relationship of these differences to education success. In those few studies where within-group differences have been examined, the results are generally inconsistent with predictions from the damaging-culture model.

The previously cited study by Grebler *et al.* (1970), provides an analysis of Mexican-American educational achievement as measured by years of schooling completed. Using again the 1960 census as their primary source of information, these researchers compared the educational attainment of first-, second-, and third-generation Mexican-Americans between the ages of 14 and 24 years.

Their findings are presented in Table 4, which shows that in 1960 a slightly greater percentage of the second generation had completed high school and some college than had members of the third generation. Interestingly, the

**TABLE 4**  
*Years of School Completed by Persons Age 14-24, by Generation (1960)<sup>a</sup>*

Group	12 Years schooling	Some college (%)
First generation	8.1	4.3
Second generation	16.1	4.5
Third generation	14.0	4.0

<sup>a</sup>Adapted from Grebler *et al.*, 1970, with permission.

college attendance of the first generation also outpaced that of the third generation.

The 1970 census presents data on the educational attainment of Mexican Americans a decade later. Table 5 presents this information for males and females of each generation between the ages of 20 and 24 years.

Table 5 reveals that the first generation had approximately 4 years less schooling than both the second and third generation, who were essentially equal to one another in terms of median school years completed. The first generation also had significantly fewer high school graduates and college-educated members than either the second or third generation. In terms of both high-school graduation and college attendance, the third generation did slightly better in 1970 than the second generation.

One reason why the third generation does as well as or better than the second generation may be that the third generation has a significant number of persons who are still integrated with their ancestral culture. This explanation is consistent with the fact that in 1970, half of all Mexican American high-school graduates, and 48% of all college graduates reported speaking Spanish at home (United States Bureau of the Census, 1973b). More recently, the National Center for Education Statistics (cited in Brown, Rosen, Hill, & Olivas, 1980), reported that in 1976, 84% of all Mexican Americans enrolled in college came from homes where Spanish was spoken when they were children. In addition to national census data, a handful of studies conducted in specific regions of the country demonstrate a positive relationship between cultural integration and educational achievement.

A study by Kimball (1968) examined the influence of social and cultural

**TABLE 5**  
*Educational Attainment of Persons Ages 20-24, by Generation and Gender<sup>a</sup>*

Group	Median number of school years completed	High school graduates (%)	1-3 Years college (%)	4 Years or more college (%)
First generation				
Male	8.8	31.3	10.33	1.20
Female	8.4	28.5	6.29	.89
Second generation				
Male	12.2	55.6	16.99	1.99
Female	12.1	54.0	13.30	1.07
Third generation				
Male	12.2	58.9	17.90	2.50
Female	12.2	58.7	13.98	1.93

<sup>a</sup>Adapted from 1970 U.S. Population Census (1973a). Subject Reports, PC (2)-1D, Persons of Spanish Surname, Table 8, 1973.

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variables on the academic achievement of Mexican-American ninth-grade students in San Diego, California. Measures of academic achievement included school grades, standardized tests of reading comprehension, and IQ. In all, data were gathered from 899 students from eight junior high schools in order to ensure a socioeconomically representative sample. Results showed parents' educational aspirations for their children to be positively related to all achievement measures. On the other hand, little relationship was found between achievement and gender, age, birth order, or family size. However, the most interesting and significant finding of this study was the higher achievement of students born in Mexico and with parents born in Mexico, as compared to students with both parents born in the United States. A recent study (Vigil & Long, 1981) of Mexican-American high school students in southern California also found that earlier-generation students obtained higher grades than their later-generation counterparts.

In another study involving adolescents, Cordova (1970) investigated the relationship of acculturation to educational achievement and alienation among 477 sixth-grade students from New Mexico. Students were divided into three groups: urban middle-class, urban lower-class, and rural. Measures of acculturation and alienation were obtained from a student questionnaire, whereas achievement was measured by the use of standardized tests. Analysis of the data failed to show any relationship between acculturation and achievement for either the urban lower-class group or the rural group. However, there was a significant inverse relationship between these two variables for the urban middle class group. Thus, as acculturation increased, the achievement of urban middle-class students decreased. Furthermore, for the total sample of students, acculturation in the area of the family was positively correlated with a feeling of powerlessness. This suggests that as students moved away from the influence of the traditional family and more toward the Anglo-American norm, there was an increased feeling that they could not control the rewards they sought in the educational setting. On the basis of these findings, Cordova concluded that "previous assumptions that acculturation is a cure-all for educational problems of Spanish-American students need a new orientation" (Cordova, 1970, p. 180).

A widely cited study by Anderson and Johnson (1971) purports to show that first- and second-generation children are educationally handicapped by their greater use of Spanish. Yet, a close examination of their findings suggests otherwise.

Anderson and Johnson (1971) examined the English and math grades of five groups of Mexican-American junior- and senior-high-school students: (1) first generation; (2) second generation; (3) third generation with one or both grandparents born in Mexico; (4) third generation with both grandparents born in the United States, and Spanish spoken in the home; (5) third generation with both grandparents born in the United States, and English and Spanish spoken at home. Although only third-generation subjects were differentiated on the basis of home

language; the Spanish language usage of all subjects was measured. Due to their specific research aims, Anderson and Johnson (1971) did not perform individual-group comparisons, nor did they supply the appropriate error term necessary to conduct such analyses. Nevertheless, from the table of means in their article (Table 3, p. 298), it is possible to rank order the five groups in terms of their performance in English and math, and their use of Spanish.

This information is presented in Table 6, which shows that of the five Mexican-American groups, the second generation (2) had the highest grades in English, followed by Group 3 of the third generation. The rank ordering of these two groups was reversed for math achievement. In addition, the first generation (1) did better in English than third-generation Groups 4 and 5. In the area of math, the performance of the first generation (1) was greater than Group 4 but lower than Group 5. Group 4 (third generation, Spanish spoken at home) had the lowest grades in both English and math.

The immediate temptation is to ascribe the lower achievement of Group 4 to their use of Spanish at home. However, inspection of Table 7 reveals that Group 4 actually spoke less Spanish than either Group 1 or Group 2, who demonstrated high to moderate levels of achievement. It cannot be concluded therefore that the use of Spanish is responsible for the lower grades of Group 4.

Although the results of Anderson and Johnson's study are mixed, they do seem to make one point clear: Spanish-speaking students of the first and second generation do as well, and in some cases even better, than members of the third generation who speak greater amounts of English.

TABLE 6  
Rank Ordering of Generation Groups on Achievement Measures and Spanish Language Usage<sup>a</sup>

Group	Grades <sup>b</sup>		Usage of Spanish at home
	English	Math	
First generation	3	4	2
Second generation	1	2	1
Third generation (one or both grandparents born in the U.S.)	2	1	5
Third generation (both grandparents born in the U.S. and Spanish spoken at home)	5	5	3
Third generation (both grandparents born in the U.S. and English and Spanish spoken at home)	4	3	4

<sup>a</sup>Compiled from information in Table 3 of Anderson and Johnson, 1971.

<sup>b</sup>Lower numbers refer to higher grades and to greater Spanish usage.

Henderson and Merrit (1968) investigated the environmental backgrounds of 80 Mexican-American first-graders with different potentials for school success. Six-year-old students from Tucson, Arizona were identified as having either a high or a low potential for success based on their scores on the Goodenough-Harris Drawing Test and the Van Alstyne Picture Vocabulary Test. The mothers of these two groups of children were also interviewed in order to gather information on nine environmental-process variables previously identified as being related to school success. These included achievement press, language models, academic guidance, activeness of family, intellectuality in the home, work habits in the family, identification with models, range of social interaction, and perception of practical value of education. The high potential group, in addition to scoring higher on all nine environmental variables also scored higher on a test of Spanish vocabulary than the low potential group. The results prompted the authors to conclude that the "data seem to refute the common assumption that children from families that are 'most Mexican' in their behavior and outlook will have the most difficulty in school" (p. 105). A follow-up study of these same children at the end of the third grade confirmed the author's original conclusion (Henderson, 1972).

Evidence suggests that the decision to attend college is also influenced by one's level of cultural integration. Thus, in a study (Buriel & Saenz, 1980) of female, Mexican-American high-school seniors, college-bound students were found to be more bicultural than non-college-bound students. Because one dimension of biculturalism involves a traditional Mexican outlook and set of behaviors, the greater biculturalism of college-bound Mexican-American females challenges the assertion that identification with traditional Mexican-American culture depresses higher educational aspirations and achievement-motivation.

The relationship of traditional Mexican-American culture to educational achievement is maintained, even in areas outside the Southwest. For example, Schumaker and Getter (1977) studied the educational attainment of Mexican Americans living in 34 counties of the state of Kansas. Four measures of educational attainment were examined: (1) male median education; (2) female median education; (3) percentage of males over 25 years old having completed high school; (4) percentage of females over 25 having completed high school. Results showed a significant positive increase in all four measures of educational attainment, as a function of having been born in Mexico. Hence, the educational attainment of the indigenous Mexican-American population of Kansas was out-paced by that of recent immigrants.

Even among college-educated Mexican Americans, those who retain an integration with traditional Mexican-American culture tend to stay in school longer and to get better grades than those who have acculturated at the expense of their ancestral culture. At least two studies illustrate this point. In the first of these studies, Long and Padilla (cited in Ramirez, 1971) investigated the bi-

lingual antecedents of academic success among Spanish-surnamed graduate students at the University of New Mexico. The researchers compared the home language preference of two groups of students: (1) those who had successfully completed their graduate studies; and (2) those who had dropped out of the university. Results of their tabulations showed that 94% of the successful students were raised in bilingual homes compared to 8% of the unsuccessful students. Thus, most of the unsuccessful students reported coming from homes where only English was spoken. On the basis of this finding, Long and Padilla concluded that bilingual students may have been better able to interact effectively with members of their own group and Anglo Americans, thus making them better-adjusted members of both groups.

More recently, Garcia (1981) studied the effects of family and children's cultural maintenance upon children's achievement in college. Mexican American students from 13 colleges and universities in Texas were sampled. In all, 1573 students responded to a questionnaire dealing with a wide variety of family-background, social-psychological, and achievement variables. Analysis of the data showed that being fluent in Spanish and coming from a Spanish-dominant home was positively associated with better grades in school. Even after important personality variables were partialled out, students who were more fluent in Spanish earned better grades (Garcia, 1981).

The High School and Beyond study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (Nielsen & Fernandez, 1981) provides comprehensive data concerning the relationship of cultural integration to school achievement. High school sophomores and seniors from public and private schools throughout the nation were sampled. In all, 58,728 students were studied, including 1,068 sophomores and 1,204 seniors who were of Mexican descent. All students completed a questionnaire covering a wide variety of family background variables and also took an extensive battery of psychological and achievement tests. Of particular relevance to the present discussion is the relationship between a set of cultural integration variables and a series of academic achievement measures. The cultural integration variables included Spanish usage, Spanish proficiency, and length of residence, which was a composite of generation and years of residence in the United States. Achievement measures included educational aspirations, math achievement, reading achievement, and English vocabulary. Multiple regression analyses were conducted separately for sophomores and seniors. Results of these analyses showed that for both classes, Spanish *usage* was associated with lower scores on all four achievement measures. However, Spanish *proficiency* was positively related to higher aspirations for both classes and also to greater math and vocabulary achievement for seniors.

Although the results for Spanish usage and proficiency were mixed, one set of findings were highly consistent: the relationship of length of residence to achievement. For both sophomores and seniors, achievement decreased in all

tionally oriented immigrant youth. The data show that they do not. Moreover, even among nonimmigrant adolescents, those who are more aligned with their ancestral cultural show considerably less gang activity than those who are not.

### THE BASIS OF TRADITIONAL MEXICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE AS AN ASSET TO SOCIOCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

#### PROFILE OF THE MEXICAN IMMIGRANT: EVIDENCE OF BEHAVIORAL CHARACTERISTICS CONDUCTIVE TO SUCCESS

A fundamental assumption of this chapter is that Mexican-American culture arose primarily from the motivations and lifestyles of Mexican immigrants. Thus if we wish to understand why integration with traditional Mexican-American culture is conducive to adjustment, it is necessary to understand the psychocultural characteristics of Mexican immigrants.

It goes without saying that even before the pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock, Spanish-Mexican colonies existed in the Southwest. Yet, when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848, only about "75,000 Spanish-speaking people were living in the Southwest: around 7,500 in California; a thousand or so in Arizona; 60,000 in New Mexico; and perhaps 5,000 in Texas" (Mc-Williams, 1968, p. 52). Moreover, with the exception of the Spanish-American colony of northern New Mexico, only about "200,000 persons born in Mexico were living in the southwest territories of the United States by 1909" (Stoddard, 1973, p. 20). Practically speaking, therefore, Mexican-American culture arose primarily from the waves of Mexican immigrants who began pouring into this country in 1910, the year that the Mexican Revolution began. These waves of Mexican immigrants, by virtue of their numbers (estimated at nearly one million between 1910 and 1930), overshadowed the presence of the indigenous Spanish-Mexican groups, and infused the Southwest with a distinctively Mexican way of life that became the wellspring of contemporary Mexican-American culture. Hence, today the overwhelming majority of Mexican Americans are descendants of twentieth-century immigrants.

#### *Self-Selection of Immigrants*

A prevalent assumption among many social scientists is that Mexican immigrants are "just like" Mexicans living in Mexico. However, Mexican immigrants are not typical Mexicans, because if they were they would have

remained in Mexico as is typical of most Mexicans. The very fact that they left Mexico implies some desire for change, which they share with all other immigrants, and which distinguishes them from those persons who remained in Mexico.

The immigrant's decision to leave Mexico implies a desire for change. This desire for change has probably been felt by many Mexicans at one time or another. However, in responding to it only certain individuals have gone so far as to leave behind family, community, and friends in search of greater opportunities in a foreign land. The potential immigrant is also aware that while life in the United States offers some advantages, it also carries disadvantages. Foremost among the disadvantages is the likelihood that one will be the target of prejudice and discrimination not only from Anglos, but also from anglicized Mexican Americans who consider themselves superior to the recent immigrant.

These and other consequences of leaving Mexico make it very likely that a self-selection process is involved in determining who will immigrate. The opportunity to immigrate must of course be present. But beyond opportunity there are probably some fundamental personality characteristics that are shared by most immigrants and that play a role in motivating their decision to leave Mexico. Some indication of the nature of these personality characteristics is provided by Fromm and Maccoby (1970), who present a typology of a Mexican village based on Fromm's concept of "character orientations." In that study, the entire adult population ( $N = 406$ ) of a single Mexican village, as well as 96 children between the ages of 6 and 16, was interviewed with an extensive open-ended questionnaire, which was scored and interpreted in accordance with Fromm's theory of social character. Fromm's theory states that

In the process of living, man relates himself to the world (1) by acquiring and assimilating things, and (2) by relating himself to people (and himself). The former is considered the process of assimilation; the latter, that of socialization. Both forms of relatedness are "open" and not instinctively determined. . . . These orientations, by which the individual relates himself to the world, constitute the core of his character. Character can be defined as the (relatively permanent) form in which human energy is structuralized in the process of assimilation and socialization. (pp. 68-69)

Factor analysis of the data for the entire village revealed three dominant social characters: the nonproductive-receptive, the productive-hoarding, and the productive-exploitive. Table 7 presents the behavior orientations associated with each social character.

For a variety of reasons, nearly 10 years elapsed between the time the data was first collected and the time it was analyzed. Within this period a number of individuals left for the United States, which made it possible to investigate the relationship between social character and immigration. Results of a special anal-

**TABLE 7**  
*Social Characters and Associated Behavior Orientations*

Social character	Behavior orientations
Nonproductive—receptive:	Fatalism, submissiveness, and a tendency to idealize authority
Productive—hoarding:	Independence, responsibility, and traditional relations of respect
Productive—exploitive:	Desire for progress through schools, new technology, and social mobility

ysis indicated that immigrants tended to have either a productive—hoarding or a productive—exploitive social character. The correlation between having a productive social character and immigration to the United States was  $r = .35$ , which was significant at the .01 level. One might suspect that the relationship between a productive social character and immigration to the United States is simply a manifestation of a more general tendency for productive individuals to seek change by moving. However, Fromm and Maccoby's findings revealed no characterological difference between individuals who moved to cities within Mexico in search of opportunity and those who remained in the village. Thus, there was an equal probability that both productive and unproductive individuals would seek change by moving *within* Mexico, but a significantly greater probability that only productive individuals (either productive—hoarding or —exploitive) would immigrate to the United States. And, according to Fromm, coming to the United States, in comparison to moving within Mexico, "is, in psychological terms the much bolder and more ambitious of the two decisions" (p. 136). Thus, speaking within the context of Fromm's theoretical model, we can say that Mexican immigrants are likely to come from the ranks of the most productive sectors of the Mexican population. Gamio's (1931) ethnographic study of Mexican immigrants 40 years earlier suggests a similar conclusion.

Fromm and Maccoby found that productive individuals were more involved in traditional cultural events, and expressed a tendency to identify with the strivings and attitudes of peoples in other parts of the world. Hence, the pride and self-confidence these individuals have in themselves as Mexicans, and their feelings of parity with other peoples, probably allows them to explore other cultural systems without feeling that such actions constitute a rejection of their own culture. This implies that the behaviors, dress, and skills that immigrants pick and choose from Anglo-American culture are viewed simply as added dimensions to their own Mexican culture rather than as a substitute for it. Such an open-minded attitude may account for the relatively rapid acculturation of some immigrants.

Productive adults also have children with productive social characters. (Fromm & Maccoby, 1970). This suggests that immigrant parents are likely to pass on their achievement-oriented traits to their second generation offspring who are born in the United States. This supposition is supported by the results of two recent studies that compared the socialization practices of low-income immigrant and native-born Mexican-American mothers. The first study (McClintock & Moore, 1982) found that immigrant mothers tended to have more harmonious interactions with their children than native-born Mexican-American mothers. In the second study (Chavez & Buriel, 1982), immigrant mothers were found to rely more heavily on a contingent-reinforcement styles to reward children's successes and failures. Theoretical and empirical studies suggest that a child's cognitive and emotional development is fostered by a warm parent-child relationship and the use of contingent reinforcement (Bing, 1963; Smith, 1968).

A final point concerning Fromm and Maccoby's study is that it took place in the Central Plateau Region of Mexico, the area which has traditionally had the highest rate of immigration (Gamio, 1931; Grebler *et al.*, 1970; Cornelius, Chavez, & Castro, 1982). This increases the likelihood that conclusions concerning Mexican immigrants are drawn from a representative sample.

Perhaps as a consequence of their achievement-oriented personalities, Mexican immigrants complete more years of schooling prior to immigrating than the national average for the Mexican population. The figures in Table 8 compare the educational attainment of the Mexican population and a sample of immigrant males studied by Portes (1979).

Table 8 shows that the proportion of illiterates among immigrants is approximately seven times less than for the Mexican population. In addition, the percentage of immigrants who completed primary education or had some secondary education is about double the percentage for the Mexican population (Portes, 1979). While these immigrants are by no means highly educated by United States standards, their educational attainment relative to the rest of the Mexican population clearly reflects their desire for upward mobility.

The occupational backgrounds of Mexican immigrants provides another index of this group's achievement oriented character. It is commonly thought that Mexican immigrants were involved in agricultural labor prior to coming to the United States. However, Grebler (1965) found that among Mexican immigrants, agricultural workers were greatly underrepresented relative to their frequency in the Mexican labor force. On the other hand, skilled and unskilled industrial workers, craftsmen, foremen, operatives, and laborers were greatly overrepresented (Grebler, 1965). More recently, Portes (1979) found that only 12% of the Mexican immigrants in his sample were involved in agricultural work in Mexico. According to Portes, the modal occupation of immigrants was skilled and semiskilled workers. In addition, the overwhelming majority of these immigrants did not intend to pursue farm occupations in the United States. Moreover,

**TABLE 8**  
*Education of Mexican Immigrants and the Mexican Population<sup>a</sup>*

Education	Mexican immigrants—1973: males ages 18–60 (N = 806) (%)	Mexican population—1970: 15 years of age and older (%)
Illiterate (fewer than 2 years of formal schooling)	3.0	21.9 <sup>b</sup>
Completed primary school or higher	65.4	31.0 <sup>b</sup>
Some secondary schooling	32.4	15.2
Completed secondary school or higher	5.5	4.7

<sup>a</sup>Adapted from Portes, 1979.

<sup>b</sup>Male population only.

among those who do begin their employment history in the United States as farmworkers, the majority move into nonagricultural work and also make certain that their children do not work in agriculture (Cornelius *et al.*, 1982).

The available literature clearly indicates that Mexican immigrants have traditionally been a highly self-selected group of individuals who exhibit a variety of psychological, educational, and occupational traits that are conducive to success and adjustment in the United States. The self-selection of Mexican immigrants is not, however, an isolated case, but rather is part of a more universal trend for immigrants to have more ability and work motivation than their fellow countrymen who remain at home (Chiswick, 1979).

Those individuals who immigrate do so out of a common desire for change, and, for the most part, share with one another a unique set of behavioral characteristics that distinguish them as coming from one of the most productive segments of the Mexican population. These shared characteristics of immigrants represent the core aspects of Mexican-American culture. That is, because Mexican-American culture is basically a culture of immigrants, the unique behavioral characteristics of this group are mapped onto the larger behavioral complex that make up their culture in the United States. It is this fundamental aspect of Mexican-American culture that is referred to here as traditional Mexican-American culture.

**THE PROBABILISTIC NATURE OF SUCCESS**

From the previous discussion on the origins of Mexican-American culture it is clear that the values underlying the culture are highly conducive to success.

Among Mexican Americans, therefore, the probability for success should be greatest for those individuals who are more firmly integrated with traditional Mexican-American culture. This does not mean that all individuals identified with traditional Mexican-American culture will experience success, but only that the *probability* of success will be greater for them in comparison to those persons who are less firmly aligned with the culture. The probabilistic nature of this relationship needs to be emphasized because of the often uncontrollable effects of prejudice and discrimination that can limit access to the socially approved means to success.

Aside from restricting access to the usual avenues of success, prejudice and discrimination can also lessen Mexican Americans' chances for success by drawing them away from the enhancing aspects of culture. As already noted, Mexican Americans with a strong cultural integration tend to experience a higher overall level of success than individuals who have rejected or in some way lost contact with their traditional culture. One reason for this of course is that traditional Mexican-American culture is well suited to achievement requirements of American society. Another reason is that integration with traditional Mexican-American culture acts as a buffer against the insidious effects of prejudice and discrimination that can potentially lower an individual's self-concept of his or her ability to succeed. A study by Dworkin (1965) illustrates this very important point. Dworkin compiled a list of positive and negative statements describing

**TABLE 9**  
*Self Images Held by Foreign-Born and Native-Born Mexican-Americans<sup>a</sup>*

Words agreed to significantly often by foreign-born Mexican-Americans	Words agreed to significantly often by native-born Mexican-Americans
Proud	Emotional
Religious	Unscientific
Strong family ties	Authoritarian
Athletic	Materialistic
Gregarious	Old-fashioned
Friendly	Poor and of a low social class
Happy	Uneducated or poorly educated
Field workers	Short, fat, and dark
Racially tolerant	Little care for education
Short, fat and dark	Mistrusted
Practical	Proud
Well adjusted	Lazy, indifferent, and unambitious

<sup>a</sup>Adapted from Dworkin (1965).

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Although today many gangs are self-perpetuating, their origins are nevertheless rooted in Anglo-American prejudice and discrimination against Mexican Americans. Thus, gangs, rather than being an inherent expression of traditional Mexican-American culture, are more appropriately a reaction by some Mexican-Americans to the ambivalent attempts of society to assimilate Mexican Americans while rejecting them.

In contrast to deculturation, integration with traditional Mexican-American culture represents a highly adaptive strategy for satisfactorily adjusting to Anglo-American society. Individuals who are closely aligned with their traditional culture are aware of the many rewarding and constructive elements of their culture and use these as a frame of reference to guide their thinking and behavior. As a result, these individuals do not as readily succumb to damaging stereotypes, which they know from their own personal experiences to be unsubstantiated, and thus false. Securely embedded in the reinforcing structure of their ancestral culture, these individuals are free to explore new cultural avenues without any threat to their sense of identity, and to adopt the skills, roles, and standards of behavior that are necessary to translate their native ability into conventional forms of success within Anglo American society. In essence, such individuals are bicultural, which means that they are capable of interacting successfully in both the Mexican-American and Anglo-American cultural worlds. Yet, before Mexican Americans can become bicultural they must first be allowed to freely explore and become thoroughly acquainted with their own traditional Mexican-American culture, and to use this experience as a point of reference while learning to cope and adjust with an unfamiliar, and sometimes hostile, Anglo-American society.

#### ASSIMILATION VERSUS BICULTURALISM

Assimilation is neither desirable nor even possible for most Mexican Americans. Complete assimilation means that Mexican Americans have become indistinguishable members of Anglo-American society. However, this is impossible, for the most part, due to Mexican Americans' distinctive *mestizo* features and to the proximity of Mexico, which remind Anglo Americans of Mexican Americans' ethnicity. And, although some successful Mexican Americans may consider themselves assimilated, this does not necessarily mean that Anglo-American society unequivocally accepts them as being assimilated. Under such circumstances, delusions of assimilation are likely to be accompanied by anxiety and confusion over one's identity. For Mexican Americans therefore, the adoption of a bicultural identity represents a more realistic and psychologically healthier solution to the ambiguous acculturative demands of Anglo-American society. This requires the retention of a strong traditional culture as well as

acculturation (but not assimilation) to the social and economic mainstream of United States society. Because assimilation precludes any ties with the ancestral culture, it is neither a desirable nor a realistic option for Mexican Americans.

#### TOWARD A THEORY OF ACHIEVEMENT AND ADJUSTMENT FOR MEXICAN AMERICANS

From the foregoing review and discussion we can link together the following chain of events that explains the greater achievement and adjustment of Mexican Americans who are more closely identified with traditional Mexican-American culture.

Immigration from Mexico is motivated out of a desire for change and opportunity, which ultimately results in the northward migration of some of Mexico's most productive and ambitious individuals. These individuals' whole purpose for coming to the United States is directed toward fulfilling their desire for change and achievement. Mexican-American culture, therefore, arose out of the life style of immigrants and places a heavy value on the need for change and achievement. However, prejudice and discrimination against Mexican Americans shut off many of the usual avenues to achievement. In addition, damaging stereotypes such as Mexicans being lazy, passive, and non-achievement-oriented are reinforced by society and the media and become internalized by those Mexican Americans who have lost close contact with their ancestral culture. The behavior of these individuals thus becomes guided to a large extent by this distorted view of their culture and of themselves, involuntarily imposed on them by an ethnocentric dominant society. On the other hand, Mexican Americans who are integrated with their traditional culture have a more positive image of themselves and of their group. Furthermore, stereotyped remarks about Mexican Americans are not as psychologically damaging to these individuals, because a thorough acquaintance with their culture reveals to them the shallowness of these statements. Consequently, these persons are in a better position to make headway against prejudice and discrimination and thereby increase their chances for success.

Embeddedness within Mexican-American culture allows the individual to maintain a clear sense of identity and a feeling of self-worth, while exploring the standards and expectations of Anglo-American society.

The probability of having a strong, positive identification with traditional Mexican-American culture is greatest among members of the first and second generation because these individuals are socialized essentially as Mexicans. By the third generation there are no longer any direct parental links to Mexico, which increases the probability that members of this group will lose contact with

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# *Chicano Psychology*

## *Second Edition*

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