Imagining the Future of Immigrant Fathers

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Economic stress, ethnicity, and children’s adaptation

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Effects and meaning of fathers for adolescents: ASU & UCR

Collaborators
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Goal of this session

Distinguish between the (a) future status of immigrant fathers and (b) research directions that are necessary in order to understand future immigrant fathers.
Importance of the historical context of immigration

• Early 20th century
  – Turn of the 20th century  
  – Rapid acculturation in a melting pot  
  – Largely white European

• Early 21st century  
  – Less rapid acculturation  
  – Multicultural society  
  – Wider range of countries of origin
Demographic shifts

US Census Bureau (1930)
  7.5% African American
  1.6% other racial minorities

US Census Bureau (2003)
  31% of total population

2030 – In some parts of US, Latino & Asian will be in the majority

Implications of minority-to-majority shift?
Let’s unpack!

No single portrait of immigrant fathers, only multiple ones.
From snapshots to video

Come seeking asylum
Refugee
Avoid political prosecution
Avoid religious persecution
Documented
Undocumented
Motivation to acculturate
Rates of assimilation
Sojourner experiences
Ethnic composition of community

Dynamic longitudinal approaches required to track acculturation as it unfolds
Imagining the Future Status of Immigrant Fathers

• Work and immigrant fathers
  – Exhaustion and reduced patience
What do you need to change about your parenting?

I get upset quickly, I get frustrated. Maybe it’s because I’m so tired, I don’t know, but I get upset, I get frustrated.

Mi carácter. Sí, me molesto rápido, me desespero. Tal vez sea por el cansancio, no lo sé, pero si me molesto, me desespero.
What do you need to change about your parenting?

*because of work, or financial worries, I’m a bit demanding.*

- 30-year-old first generation Mexican immigrant father

*preocupaciones del dinero entonces soy un poco carácter exijente.*
Imagining the Future Status of Immigrant Fathers

• Work and immigrant fathers
  
  (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001)

• Educational disparity
What do you need to change about your parenting?

What I would change, I wouldn’t change much, actually. I would try to help more in her school work because I really have not been able to help them in that because of the English barrier and because I’m not good at school.

- 33-year-old first generation Mexican immigrant father

Lo que yo, no cambiaría casi, mas bien trataría de poder ayudarlas mas en sus cuestiones de escuela, porque casi no he podido yo ayudarlas en eso, por la barrera del Ingles y porque no soy muy bueno para la escuela
What do you need to change about your parenting?

I would say, try to help on her homework when she says she doesn’t understand. I do all I can although sometimes it's difficult because of the language. She will help me understand what it says in English.

- 48-year-old first generation Mexican immigrant father
Imagining the Future Status of Immigrant Fathers

• Work and immigrant fathers
  — (Parke et al., 2004)
  — (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001)

• Educational disparity
  —
  —
Do you think it is harder for kids whose parents did not go to school here as opposed to the kids whose parents did go to school here?

we can’t. We can’t even help in the language. Unfortunately, we can’t even explain it to her in our language, no we can’t. Well sometimes one does feel bad. That wants to help but can’t.

- First generation Mexican immigrant father

Yo pienso que si. Porque quiere que avaces uno le ayude y sinceramente no podemos. Ni siquiera el idioma podemos. Desgraciadamente ni nuestro idioma podemos explicarle no nosotros no. Pues si avuces se siente uno mal. Que quiere ayudarle y no puede.
Do you think it is harder for kids whose parents did not go to school here as opposed to the kids whose parents did go to school here?

Well I think so. Well for example the guys at least speak the language and they have studied. For example that I am still doing high school here like it is, I am missing to give her explanations to her. There are homework’s that they get now and I see that she is complaining. If I could well I would help her but unfortunately I don’t have an idea to help her. Yes, that is the hardest.

- First generation Mexican immigrant father

A pues yo creo que sí. Pues por ejemplo los señores por lo menos hablan el idioma y tienen estudio. Por ejemplo que yo todavía estoy haciendo aquí mi high school aquí como sea, me falta para darle explicación a ella. Hay tareas que se le dan ahorita y veo que está renegando. Si yo pudiera pues la ayudaría pero desgraciadamente no tengo la idea para ayudarla. Si eso es lo duro.
Imagining the Future Status of Immigrant Fathers
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• Work and immigrant fathers
  (Parke et al., 2004)

• Educational disparity

• Dynamic interplay
Dynamic Interplay

Immigrant
1) Age at time of entry
2) Type of economic opportunities
3) Commitment to host country
4) Identification with country of origin
5) Type of immigration status
6) Cultural context in US

Birth Culture

Father

Child

U.S. Culture

Host country fathers
1) Experiences
   • immigrant fathers and families
2) Attitudes
   • About immigrant families
   • Perception of economic threat
   • Beliefs about the educational impact
   • Ideas about how medical and social services will be affected
Acculturation: Who, How, and When

• Differential rates of acculturation
  –
  –
  –

• Cultural brokering
  – Parent-child role reversal
  – Stressful for children
How have you handled problems that your child has had at school?

Well to plan all the time to try to be, if we go to school that there is someone that talks to me in Spanish. Yes, yes because…I normally understand a little, a little English but not a lot. No his…to speak it I don’t know how to speak it, darn. Like sometimes him sometimes I tell him, I mean that they are talking to me in English I tell him to tell me what he is saying, I mean he doesn’t know how to tell me, like I know…how you say…he gets, he gets embarrassed and at the end he doesn’t know how to say what it is that they are saying in English.

- First generation Mexican immigrant father
Similarities are just as revealing as differences

• Educational aspirations of parents for their children are similar across ethnicities

• PAYS parent narratives
  – No surface differences between immigrant and native-born dads on what they do well
    • Spend time
    • Affection for children
    • Provide for family
A word of caution

“Time holds its mysteries and the future resists our easy grasp, however anxious we be to assert it conclusively.”

Robert Coles
author and child psychiatrist
1999
Research Directions: Multiple Disciplines

Historians
Demographers
Anthropologists
Sociologists
Political scientists
Psychologists
Research Directions:
Multilevel Framework

[Diagram showing levels of culture, society, family, with arrows pointing to 'Father' and 'Child']
Multilevel Framework: Individual Level

Men’s relationship with family of origin

Socialization of boys into fathering role

Attitudes

Motivation

Caregiving skills
Multilevel Framework: Individual Level

Individual level changes experienced by fathers

• Involvement in pregnancy associated with hormones in early life
  (Berg & Wynne-Edwards, 2001; Storey et al., 2000)

Involvement during pregnancy

Less prolactin, cortisol, & testosterone
Increased responsiveness

Implications for sojourner fathers

• Might patterns of involvement lead to lower connectedness?
Multilevel Framework: Dyadic Level

Dyadic level processes

• State-of-the-art methods for evaluating actor, partner, and dyad level contributions (Kenny, Mohr, & Levesque, 2001)

Research questions

• Change over time in dyadic processes?
• Associated with acculturation?
  • Whose acculturation?
• Do individual level components matter more as acculturation proceeds?
Multilevel Framework: Familial Level

Family level processes

• Assessment of family-level processes
  • Familism (Cook, 2004)
  • Routines & rituals (Fiese, 2006)

• Assessments needed
  • Acculturation as individual, dyadic, and family level process

• What’s Cookin
Multilevel Framework: Community Level

Community level processes

- Assessment of neighborhoods
- Census tract measures
- Community surveys
- Systematic social observation
  (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson, 2005)
- Global Information Systems
  (Cadora, Swartz & Gordon, 2003)
Not by numbers alone

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are needed at every stage of the research process.
Beyond Description

- Toward process-models of fathering in immigrant families

Economic stress $\rightarrow$ Depression $\rightarrow$ Harsh Parenting $\rightarrow$ Child Outcomes

(Parke et al., 2004)
Policy implications

Rights of native-born children and their nondocumented parents

Assurance of insurance and health care

Promotion of biculturalism
Final message

By recognizing that fathering, including immigrant fathering, is a dynamic concept open to historical, cultural, and technological influences we will be better positioned to understand the inevitable changes that will take place for future immigrant fathers and be better able to design policies and programs for immigrant fathers in this new millennium.
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