

## Abstract

Acculturation is a multi-dimensional process characterized by retention of one's cultural identity while integrating values, beliefs, social expectations and attitudes of a host culture.<sup>1</sup> The acculturation process explains partially the healthy migrant paradox, which is characterized by increased psychiatric co-morbidity and decreased family well-being in higher acculturated individuals and better than expected health outcomes in lower acculturated Latinos despite their socio-economic disadvantages.<sup>2</sup> Low-income Latino couples confront poverty and acculturative stressors, both of which have been found to affect relationship quality in couples. While family cohesiveness buffers the stress of acculturation, increased stress in lower acculturated couples challenges this protective factor.

This poster presents results of a preliminary analysis exploring the relationship between levels of acculturation and relationship satisfaction in unwed and unmarried Latino couples at the time of enrollment into relationship education programming.

## A Healthy Marriages Paradox?

- The US Latino health paradox is characterized by better than expected health and mortality rates despite socio-economic disadvantages of most Latino Groups.<sup>3</sup> There are variations in health outcomes by nativity, country of birth, age, gender, and acculturation level, among other factors.<sup>4</sup>

- Oropesa & Landale (2004)<sup>5</sup> exploring the future of marriage in Latinos concluded that if current socio-economic characteristics continue for the second and third generations, these generations will not be able to sustain the pro-marriage orientation and family values that characterizes the first Latino generation.

- In regard to healthy marriages outcomes, low income second and third generation Latinos are more likely to resemble US main stream couples. These groups tend to have higher rates of premarital cohabitation, divorce, and non-marital fertility,<sup>6,7</sup> a trend that supports the healthy marriage paradox.

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## Acculturation and Relationship Satisfaction

- Relationship Satisfaction (RS) indicates not only how couples regulate positivity and negativity but also perceived closeness and attachment.<sup>8</sup>
- In Latino couples, RS involves integration of cultural values, ethnic identities, and acculturative stress.<sup>9</sup>
- The limited research on acculturation and RS is mixed with increasing indication that women's satisfaction is more negatively impacted than men.
- For example, **marital distress is related to levels of higher acculturation as it requires renegotiation of traditional marital roles.** However, higher marital distress and role strain is experienced by women more intensely than men.<sup>10</sup> In Latino couples at risk for inter-partner violence, the medium acculturated report higher rates of female to male violence than other acculturated groups.<sup>11</sup>
- RS also impacts mental health. Family functioning and acculturative stress have been associated with depression in Latina women.<sup>12</sup> Testing the marital discord model of depression in Latino couples, Hollist et al (2007)<sup>13</sup> found that **marital satisfaction was not only a strong predictor of depression 2 years later** but also of the co-occurrence of depression in women.
- When accounting for acculturation levels, **marital satisfaction has been found to be positively related with family cohesiveness,<sup>14</sup>** but negatively related to perceived machismo and marianismo in Latino couples.<sup>15</sup> Thus, strengthening cohesiveness in couples may be an important protective mechanism as couples cope with acculturative stress.

- This study explored the association between couple's cohesiveness and acculturation predicting that RS is negatively related to higher levels of acculturation (hypothesis 1) and positively associated with lower acculturative levels (hypothesis 2) for each partner and the couple after adjusting for income and education.**

## Method

### Participants

Sixty one couples (122 individual participants), a majority of Mexican background (95%) completed self-report questionnaires as part of the outcome evaluation for relationship education programming at Healthy Start Healthy Families Oakland, MI. All couples were unwed, new parents or expectant at the time of enrolment into the program.

### Measures

Several instruments are used by the program for outcome evaluation; however, only the Short Acculturation Scale,<sup>16</sup> the Couples Satisfaction Scale, income and education level information were used for this analysis.

### Data analysis

Separate regression analyses were conducted to model couples cohesiveness. In each analysis, income level was entered in the model as a first step and level of acculturation as a last step.

## Results

- Descriptive analyses indicated that this sample was rather **homogeneous** in terms of family income (median <\$25,000 a year) and level of education (mean dads =1.85 SD=.89; mean moms=1.91; SD=1.03) with 78% and 79% of moms and dads reporting to have less than or HS level education.

- The vast majority (97%) of mean scores for mothers and fathers were in the **low acculturation range** (<2.99) (Mean moms=1.70; SD=.48; mean fathers=1.84; SD=.56). This homogeneity is partly the result of risk criteria used for admission into the program.

A correlational inspection of variables yield statistical significance only between **acculturation and education** (r=.54, p<.01) and **acculturation and emotional connection** (r=.40, P<.05) for mothers. No significant correlations were found between fathers' CV, IV, and DV.

SUMMARY OF LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS EACH PARTNER AND COUPLE						
<b>A. Dads Acculturation Predicting RS</b>						
Variable	B	SEB	β	R	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>
<b>Model 1</b>						
Education level	1.82	3.12	.12	.12	.01	
<b>Model 2</b>						
Acculturation level	-0.05	3.55	-.003	.25	.06	.04
<b>B. Mom's Acculturation Predicting RS</b>						
Education level	3.58	4.18	.16	.16	.03	
<b>Model 2</b>						
Acculturation level	-2.27	4.74	-.10	.41	.17	.14*
<b>C. Couples Acculturation Predicting RS</b>						
Education level	3.58	4.18	-.05	.06	.003	
<b>Model 2</b>						
Acculturation level	-2.27	4.74	-.06	.08	.007	.004

Hypothesis 1: Only 3% of the sample reported higher levels of acculturation (<.299) limiting comparisons with the lower acculturated sample. Fathers slightly higher acculturation mean compared to mothers still fell within a low acculturated range.

Hypothesis 2: As shown in the Regression Analysis summary Table (Section B), *the predicted positive association between lower acculturation and relationship satisfaction was only supported for Latino mothers* (R<sup>2</sup> =.17 p<.05). Lower acculturation accounts for about 14% of the change in mothers experience of emotional connection after accounting for educational level. This association was positive, such that increased acculturation increases emotional connection.

Regression analysis for fathers and the couple's acculturation (Sections A & C) predicting increased RS did not yield statistical significance.

## Discussion

- Results indicated in *mothers' higher levels of acculturation (within a lower acculturated range) are associated with a higher levels of emotional connection with their partner.* These results are consistent with research that has shown decreased role strain and greater role stability in low acculturated couples, but specially women.<sup>17,18,19</sup>

- Results also indicate a positive correlation for mothers' acculturation and education, such that increasing education is related to increasing acculturation within a low acculturated range. Thus, increased education could help mothers adapt and cope with initial cultural changes.

## Conclusion

While results of this analysis are preliminary and exploratory, they point to the **potential role of acculturation as a predictor and determinant of relationship satisfaction in US Latino couples.** Variants in satisfaction may be different in couples even when both partners have similar acculturation levels.

Outcome measurement in relationship education that incorporates an understanding of acculturation can help understand the healthy marriage paradox in Latinos, and the extent to which healthy marriages contribute to the healthy migrant paradox.

The homogeneity of this sample is not typical of US Latinos or US Mexicans per se, even in groups that share lower socio economical characteristics. Thus, generalization of this findings is precluded.

## References (refer to handout)



\*\*This analysis includes contributions made by the Healthy Start Healthy Families Oakland's team and represents just a sliver of their collective curiosity, passion for supporting families, and cultural competency.