The Role of Acculturation, Parenting, and Family in Hispanic/ Latino Adolescent Substance Use: Findings From a Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

Focus groups were conducted with adolescents and parents as part of a larger study to understand the connection between acculturation and Hispanic/Latino adolescent substance use. Parents ($n = 18$) were all mothers and had an average age of 42 years. Students ($n = 16$) were 62% female and had an average age of 14 years. Results are summarized in five categories: culture/ethnic identity, acculturation, parent-child conflict/relationships, gender, and adolescent substance use. Parents and adolescents held similar views in some areas (e.g., pride in ethnic identity and changes in language use), but diverged in others (e.g., indicators of acculturation, gender differences in parenting, and ideas of freedom and independence). Participants in the focus groups did not endorse the association between acculturation and substance use that has been detected in quantitative studies. Implications for substance use prevention and treatment programs are discussed.

Keywords

Acculturation; adolescents; Latino/Hispanic; qualitative methods; substance use

INTRODUCTION

The ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of the U.S. has seen a dramatic increase over the past 20 years. In the U.S., foreign-born individuals comprise 11% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Of those, 53% were born in Latin America (Larsen, 2004). In many communities, there is no longer a majority of any one group, but rather a plurality of individuals of different ethnic backgrounds that contribute to the ethnic and racial make-up of these communities (Baezconde-Garbanati et al., 2007). In part because of the growth of the Hispanic/Latino population, which is fast becoming the "emergent" majority group in many areas of the U.S. (Hayes-Bautista et al., 2004), substance use among Hispanic/Latino adolescents has become a matter of great concern.

Many studies have examined underlying influences on adolescent substance use. Among these, the role of acculturation and family may be particularly important among Hipsanic/ Latino adolescents in the U.S. The diversity of the U.S. facilitates an exchange of cultural values at a rapid pace and this cultural exchange, also known as acculturation, can impose an extra burden on immigrant families trying to adapt to the diverse cultural beliefs that they encounter (LaFromboise et al., 1993). Several studies have described the influence of acculturation on adolescent substance use, particularly among Hispanic/Latino adolescents (Epstein et al., 2001; Fosados et al., 2007; Unger et al., 2000). In addition, the family is an important part of an adolescent's social context and numerous studies have identified parenting and family characteristics as risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use (Bauman et al., 2001; Foshee & Bauman, 1992; Miller & Volk, 2002; Wagner et al., 2008). To develop appropriate prevention programs for adolescents in acculturating families, it is important to investigate the role of the family's acculturation process when examining the association between adolescents' acculturation patterns and their risk behaviors (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). It is also important to understand the social and psychological consequences of various acculturation patterns, including acculturation discrepancies between parents and adolescents. In the current study, we conducted focus groups with Hispanic/Latino parents and primarily Hispanic/Latino adolescents to examine the familial context of acculturation and adolescent substance use.

Adolescent Substance Use

Adolescent substance use remains a serious public health concern in the U.S., especially among vulnerable groups, and racial and ethnic adolescents are at a particularly high risk. In 2005, 26.5% of youth aged 14 to 15 years and 41.9% of youth aged 16 to 17 years had tried an illicit drug during their lifetime (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2006). The prevalence of adolescent substance use is particularly high among Hispanic/Latino youth. In 2005, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey reported that Hispanic/Latino adolescents had the highest prevalence of lifetime alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and methamphetamine use compared to all other ethnicities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2005).

Acculturation

U.S.-born Hispanic/Latino adolescents are more likely to experiment with substance use than their foreign-born peers (Litrownik et al., 2000). However, the lower risk of substance use initiation for immigrant youth diminishes the longer they are in the U.S. (Litrownik et al., 2000). The process of acculturation is one factor that may explain the association between length of residence in the U.S. and risk of substance use among immigrant youth. Several studies have highlighted acculturation to the U.S. culture as a correlate of several unhealthy behaviors, including use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (Epstein et al., 1998, 2001; Gil et al., 2000; McQueen et al., 2003; Unger et al., 2000).

Acculturation describes the patterns of cultural and psychological changes that result from the integration of individuals from two or more cultures, which often result in long-term psychological and socio-cultural adaptations between both groups (Berry et al., 2006). Not all individuals cope with this phenomenon of acculturation in the same manner. In Berry's (1997) fourfold model, some individuals affiliate exclusively with their culture of origin (i.e., Separation) or only with members of the host culture (i.e., Assimilation). Others affiliate with members of both cultures (i.e., Integration), or with neither culture (i.e., Marginalization). In this fourfold model, the Integration profile has been found to be associated with greater psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (Berry et al., 2006). Although these patterns are thought of as being mutually exclusive in the four-fold model, others have argued that they may be intercorrelated and that the process of acculturation

may be significantly more complex (Rudmin, 2003). Attention to this complex process of acculturation is particularly important when considering the pressures faced by adolescents to use drugs, especially given the simultaneous development of adolescent self-identity that would occur even in the absence of acculturation (Phinney, 1998).

Acculturation Discrepancy and Acculturative Stress

When families immigrate to the U.S., the levels of acculturation are not uniform across all family members (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Szapocznik et al., 1978). In most cases, children learn the new culture more rapidly than their parents (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), and this involves learning a new language and a new set of values and behaviors associated with the host culture. The discrepancy between the acculturation levels of parents and children might affect parent-child relations in several ways. When children learn the U.S. culture more rapidly than their parents do, parents might become dependent on their children to help navigate and interpret the new culture (Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). This process not only contributes to stress felt by the adolescent, but it might also undermine parental authority and lead to family conflict and inconsistent parental discipline and monitoring, increasing the risk of involvement in problem behaviors (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Samaniego & Gonzales, 1999; Szapocznik et al., 1986; Wills & Filer, 1996; Ying et al., 1999).

In addition, parents' unsuccessful attempts to transmit traditional cultural values to their children might result in strained communication and minimize social support across generations. For example, parents may try to transmit protective Hispanic/Latino cultural beliefs and traditions to their children, such as *Familism*, a cultural value that emphasizes a sense of obligation to and connectedness with immediate and extended family, or *Respeto*, a value that emphasizes a child's duty to show respect for, take care of, and obey the advice of parents and other authority figures (Cuellar et al., 1995; Garcia & Magnuson, 1999; Ho, 1994). Sometimes acculturating youth refuse to accept these cultural values, which could lead to embarrassment about their parents' traditional behaviors and contribute to the breakdown of communication between parents and their children (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Stressors encountered during the acculturation process might also contribute to acculturative stress, regardless of discrepancies in the rates of acculturation in a family. These may include conflicts in gender roles (Salgado de Snyder, 1987), concerns about deportation or immigration status, perceived discrimination (Gil et al., 2000), difficulties learning a new language, changes in family relationships (Torres Stone & Meyler, 2007), or feelings of marginalization or inauthenticity (Rudmin, 2003). These stressors have the potential to affect the psychological well-being of both adolescents and their parents in several ways, including increasing the likelihood of psychological disorders (Alegria et al., 2007; Hovey, 2000; Salgado de Snyder, 1987), delinquency (Samaniego & Gonzales, 1999), suicidal ideation (Hovey, 2000), and substance use (Gil et al., 2000).

Although previous studies have made important contributions to the literature by identifying the acculturation process as a potential contributor to substance use among adolescents, additional research is needed to understand the process and patterns of acculturation among adolescents and their families. As mentioned above, existing studies have identified the importance of both acculturation and the family in adolescent substance use. However, it is not known exactly why and how acculturation affects family cohesion, parental monitoring, and ethnic identity. Furthermore, personal accounts from both adolescents and their parents that provide insight into individual experiences with acculturation and highlight differences in perceptions of the effects of acculturation on family relations are needed to provide an insider's perspective on the experience of acculturation. This article seeks to add to the body of knowledge regarding parent-child acculturation and the implications for substance use prevention among Hispanic/Latino youth by reporting the results from four focus groups,

conducted with parents and students from predominantly Hispanic/Latino high schools in Southern California. The focus groups were designed to investigate perceptions of the acculturation process and its effects on family and adolescent substance use.

METHODS

Setting

Project RED (Reteniendo y Entendiendo Diversidad para la Salud) is a 3-year study of acculturation and substance use that seeks to understand the process by which Hispanic/ Latino youth engage in or abstain from substance use. In the larger study, quantitative surveys were conducted in the Fall semester of 2005, 2006, and 2007 with a cohort of 2,222 high school students from seven predominantly Hispanic/Latino high schools in Southern California. The qualitative component of the study consisted of four focus groups, conducted with students and parents of students from one high school in the first year of the study, when students were in ninth grade. The Institutional Review Board of the University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine approved all study activities.

Parent Focus Groups

Parents were recruited from a parents' group at a single high school that was participating in the larger study. Study staff visited the parents' group and explained the study to interested parents, who were then invited to participate in the focus groups. Focus groups were held on a weekday morning at the high school. Groups were facilitated in Spanish by a bilingual research assistant using a semi-structured focus group interview guide (described below). All participants provided written informed consent. Parents were compensated with $50 gift certificates and food was provided.

Student Focus Groups

Students were recruited from ninth grade science classes in a single high school that was participating in the larger study. Students in this high school were 91% Hispanic/Latino and 51% female. Students were recruited by study staff who visited classrooms during the consenting process for the larger study and distributed flyers to the students inviting them to participate in the focus groups. Focus groups were held during the lunch period and were facilitated in English by two research assistants using a semi-structured focus group interview guide (described below). A Spanish-speaking facilitator conducted one of the groups, and students were given the option of being in her group if they felt more comfortable answering some questions in Spanish. One student requested to be in the Spanish-speaking facilitator's group, and the remaining students were assigned randomly to groups. All students provided written parental consent and student assent to participate. Students were compensated with $10 gift certificates and lunch was provided.

Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide was used to conduct all focus group sessions. Five main themes were addressed in the interview guide: culture/ethnic identity, acculturation, parent-child conflict/relationships, gender, and adolescent substance use. Separate guides were used for the parent and student groups—some questions were the same, but others were unique to the target population (i.e., students or parents). For example, both the parent and student guides included the question, "Sometimes teens and their parents disagree about whether they should follow the 'American' way of life or the Latino or Hispanic way of life. Has this happened to you? How did it affect your family?" The parent interview guide included the unique question, "How interested are your children in learning about their cultural heritage? How do you teach your children about your culture?" The student interview guide included

the unique question, "What makes you proud when you think about your parents and where your family came from? Is there anything that frustrates you?" Trained focus group facilitators moderated all groups. Discussions lasted approximately 60 minutes; all groups were tape-recorded and hand-written notes were taken in each session.

In addition to the qualitative interview guide, focus group participants completed a short quantitative survey that collected demographic information including age, gender, ethnicity, country of origin, family structure, and acculturation. Language preference at home, with friends, and at work/school was used to provide an approximation of the acculturation status of the participants because it has been shown to correlate well with other measures of acculturation (Epstein et al., 1998).

Analysis

Tape recordings were fully transcribed for analysis. The parent focus groups, which were conducted entirely in Spanish, were transcribed in Spanish and then translated into English by two bilingual research assistants. A set of *a priori* codes was used to guide the qualitative data analysis. These codes were developed in consultation with senior study personnel and contained themes derived from the hypotheses of the larger study and the specific research questions posed in the focus groups. Two independent coders used the *a priori* set of codes to conduct a thematic analysis of the transcripts using the NUD*IST software program. During the coding process, some new themes emerged that were subsequently added to the original list. Discrepancies between the two coders were compared and resolved via discussions between the coders and the principal investigator.

Data from the quantitative survey were analyzed using SAS 9.1.3 to generate frequencies and univariate statistics where applicable. Because of the small number of participants and the descriptive nature of the current analysis, no statistical comparisons were made using the quantitative data.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics and Acculturation

A total of 18 parents participated (Table 1). They were all female and Hispanic/Latino, with mean age of 41.5 years. Fourteen (82%) identified themselves as Mexican, with the remainder identifying themselves as Central American, South American, or Mexican American. Twelve (92.3%) reported that they were born outside the U.S., one reported that she was born in the U.S., and the remaining five declined to respond. Of those who were born outside the U.S., four (40%) immigrated before they were 6 years old. No parents reported using mostly English or only English at home or with friends; most reported at least using both English and another language (Spanish) at home and with friends. At work, parents were also more likely to report using both English and another language. Only one parent reported using exclusively English at work.

A total of 16 students participated (Table 1). They were an average of 14 years old, and 62% female. Because students were recruited from a predominantly, but not exclusively, Hispanic/Latino high school, reported ethnicity was somewhat diverse; 81% of students were Hispanic/Latino. Twelve (75%) students were born outside the U.S. Of those who were born outside the U.S., two (18%) immigrated before they were 6 years old. Students were more likely than parents to report using English at home, with friends, and at school, though most also reported frequently using another language. Students were not exclusively Hispanic/Latino, therefore use of another language does not necessarily imply the use of Spanish.

Thematic Analysis

The interview guide used in the focus group centered around five themes: culture/ethnic identity, acculturation, parent-child conflict/relationships, gender, and adolescent substance use. A summary of results of the thematic analysis are presented graphically in Table 2. Below, we discuss the predominant themes that emerged.

Culture and Ethnic Identity—Culture and ethnic identity are central constructs in studies of acculturation. Participants were first asked about their opinions on the meaning of ethnicity. Both parents and students listed indicators of ethnicity that included their countries of origin, their ways of thinking and behaving, the language they speak, and the religion they practice. Both students and parents expressed a great deal of pride in their ethnicity, specifically citing pride in the place they were born, their culture, or in their families.

Participants were next asked to describe what it means for someone to be American. Parents responded "*Todos nosotros somos Americanos* (We're all Americans)," and said that America represents the whole continent. Another parent commented that although all of Latin America can be considered American, there are distinct differences between countries. Later, however, parents used the term American to describe White, non-Latino individuals, and the process of "Americanization" was used to refer to the process of acculturation. Students, on the other hand, immediately described being American as being White, having freedom and opportunities, and being able to go to school and get a good education. Students said that being American signifies being from the U.S. and speaking English.

Acculturation—In discussing the types of changes that happen to people when they move to the U.S., parents and students discussed changes in ways of thinking, personalities, customs, family cohesiveness, language use, child rearing practices, gender roles, values, and ways of behaving. Students relied heavily on changes in language use to describe the process of acculturation. For example, this student described the change in language use:

> You speak your language over there and when you come over here, you have to speak a different language and it's kinda hard to interact with other people.

Students discussed losing accents and learning to speak English as indications that individuals are acculturating. Some students said that it is important for them to continue speaking their native language in addition to learning English and said that losing the ability to speak their native language would make them "look bad" in the eyes of their relatives.

There was some evidence, particularly among parents, of efforts to maintain a bicultural orientation. Parents discussed acculturation as a process of taking on some, but not all, of the characteristics of the new culture. For example, one mother said:

> One takes, although one doesn't want to, it sticks to you a little and one learns. So then one takes, 'this is convenient for me, this is not convenient for me' and we are like sponges absorbing a little bit of everything.

Another mother emphasized the importance of maintaining a strong identity with one's culture of origin:

> One has to, if one brings principles, behave like how they have … taught you without trying to copy what Americans do. Or, in other words, one has to come with one's personality and be consistent [with] where one was raised.

In contrast, students' descriptions of acculturation focused on the disorienting or unknown aspects of coming to a new country. One student said, "[Immigrants] don't know what to

expect, sometimes. It's like a big change." Another student described a sense of not knowing what to do when one moves to this country:

> Because over there it's kinda like you're going somewhere totally different. Say, if you come from Mexico and you're moving in over here it's a lot different, like the society and like the government and stuff like that.

Parent-Child Conflict / Relationships—Acculturation discrepancies and acculturative stress often have the effect of creating conflict between parents who were born outside the U.S. and children who were born in the U.S. and are more adept at negotiating American culture. We asked both parents and students about how they think the process of acculturation and the differences in cultural orientation between parents and children affect how they get along.

Students felt that their parents often stereotyped them based on their appearance or their friends. For example:

> … because of the way I dress or something, it sort of seems like it's a wild style … so she sort of thinks that I'm a wild kid.

Both parents and students described changes in family structure and family communication patterns that they attributed to acculturation. Students associated acculturation with a sense of distance from their parents, and expressed that their parents don't understand what they go through:

> Because being here, there's a lot of different types of people you hang around with. And then your parents, they don't know that. They don't know what you have to do to fit in with certain people and stuff like that. So, when you try to talk to them about it, it [is] kind of weird. Because they don't understand.

> You can get pressure by kids to act different when you're not used to it …. so you can feel distant [from your parents] sometimes.

Parents associated acculturation with a loss of family cohesiveness. Mothers described their families as becoming less connected and less adherent to traditional gender roles:

> The constitution of the family changes a little, in the sense that here both [parents] have to work, and in our countries of origin, the woman stays at home taking care of more. Now you start to see the man and the woman working even in Mexico, but it's more common here that everyone focuses on our jobs and that makes the family divide a little more. It isn't the same union like in our countries of origin.

> The union in a family [is] the main thing, because…its just that now the Latin American youngsters are doing the same [as the Americans], ever since they come of age they become independent, they are not so united as a Latino family that always continues and continues … always together.

Both parents and students discussed the concepts of "freedom" and "independence," although there was little consensus on the direction of change when immigrating to the U.S. Most parents felt that Hispanic/Latino children raised in the U.S. have more independence than children in Mexico or other Latin American countries:

> There is more support here for the youth … over there, there isn't so much. Here the youth feels with more freedom to do whatever he wants simply when they turn eighteen, 'I will do what I want' and over there there's still a limit.

This mother encouraged her daughter to take advantage of the opportunities in the U.S.:

> … if you are in a country of opportunities and if God gave you a license to be born here, you should take advantage of that … Let it be your success that is something. Because I have a sister that has a daughter and another one that doesn't, and both of them work. I tell [my daughter] "I don't want to see you like your aunt the one that has the little girl, with nothing else over there with her daughter doing the chores." I tell her, "I want to see you like the other one that can buy whatever she wants … put effort into school so that in the future you don't depend on anyone, and you have taken advantage of the opportunity to have been born here."

However, there were also parents who felt that children raised outside the U.S. actually have more freedom. This was illustrated in two parent's accounts of visits to Mexico:

> When they went for the first time, because they were born here, they saw the difference. They feel like over there there's more liberty, since they would see their thirteen, twelve year old cousins were already driving. And here it's different-not so young-they don't let them drive.

> They sell them wine, even though supposedly it is against the law. It was my turn to go [to Mexico] and all of my nephews of fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years took their aunt, the older lady, to a night club and I was surprised how these small children [got in].

Students also had conflicting opinions. Some students believed that parents are more overprotective and strict in their countries of origin than in the U.S. and associated acculturation into American culture with more independence and freedom. Others, however, felt that their parents were stricter in the U.S. This student described his interpretation of his parents' strictness:

> They probably think [that] kids from here, they do drugs and stuff. So then they think your friends are … like you're going to end up like that.

Gender Roles—When asked about the role of gender in child rearing and, in particular, adolescent substance use, mothers generally described their treatment of their sons and daughters equally; however, students perceived differences in the way boys and girls are treated. Students generally agreed that parents trust boys more than girls, and that they may not enforce rules as strictly with boys. Others noted that the boys are expected to take care of the girls in the family. Many students suggested that this stems from a belief that girls can get into more trouble than boys, particularly in terms of becoming pregnant. For example:

> I think they trust the guys more, [be]cause maybe the girl, like she might do something like maybe get pregnant or something.

One student associated this strictness with his parents' culture of origin:

> That's why I don't blame my parents for being strict, because over there it's like … they're following what they do.

Although most parents were adamant that they treated their boys and girls the same, one mother disagreed, saying, "Sometimes in our culture, we give more liberty to the boy than what we give to a girl."

Drug Use—Participants were asked to describe why they think adolescents use drugs. Students and parents both described aspects of family relationships, peer pressure, and lack of support. For example, several students stated that some adolescents start using drugs because "their parents don't care enough" or "they have problems with their parents." Many parents attributed adolescent drug use to a lack of attention or absence of parental emotional support; however, one mother also noted that children may exhibit "bad behavior" even

when parents do their best. Students also stated that some adolescents "just do it to be cool," whereas girls, especially, may start using cigarettes or methamphetamine to lose weight.

Parents discussed general parenting practices that they consider important for preventing adolescent drug use. Mothers prided themselves on being their children's "number one investigator" and maintaining vigilant supervision over their adolescent children (e.g., by searching their backpacks when they come home from school).

A primary hypothesis of the overall study is that stress and family changes resulting from acculturation may lead to increased drug use among adolescents. When asked specifically about this, few students endorsed the association. For example, one student attributed adolescent substance use to the individual characteristics of the person:

> I don't think culture really affects your drug use. I think it's more just you, independently, and what you go through.

Others mentioned that experimentation with drugs during adolescence is inevitable, particularly in the U.S.:

> I think that everybody is going to do it one time at least in their lives. You can't escape from [drugs] here.

DISCUSSION

In the current study, parents and students provided different perspectives on the role of acculturation on substance use among Hispanic/Latino adolescents. Most of the students were children of immigrants, whereas most of the parents were immigrants themselves. In terms of indicators of acculturation, students discussed language use as a particularly salient feature and provided some evidence for biculturalism in their desire to maintain their native language. Several students also discussed changes in behavior (e.g., "trying to fit in") and in parent's monitoring of their behavior (e.g., "strictness") as indicators of acculturation. In fact, it has been suggested that the use of authoritarian parenting strategies (i.e., emphasizing obedience and enforcing rules through power assertion) among parents of Mexican descent may be more influenced by acculturation status than by traditional cultural values (Varela et al., 2004). That is, parents living in the U.S. who are Mexican Immigrants or Mexican Americans report more use of authoritarian parenting strategies than their Mexican counterparts. The authors suggest that an attention to the influence of ethnic minority status in the U.S. is an important factor in understanding the role of parental styles. In the current study, students associated their own acculturation with a feeling of distance from their parents. This supports the acculturation gap hypothesis, which states that discrepancies in acculturation between parents and their children can impair family cohesiveness and communication. Some previous studies have found support for this hypothesis (e.g., Elder et al., 2005; Felix-Ortiz et al., 1998) but others have not (e.g., Lau et al., 2005; Pasch et al., 2006).

Parents also talked about a bicultural orientation. For some, this biculturalism seemed adaptive, whereas for others it appeared to create conflict with their adult peers or family members. Biculturalism, or integration, has been argued to be adaptive (Berry et al., 2006), however, others disagree and point out that it likely depends on other contextual factors (Rudmin, 2003). Parents were less likely to discuss language use and more likely to discuss a loss of family cohesiveness and changes in gender roles as significant features of the acculturation process. Parents, too, discussed "strictness" in parenting as an important value. The strictness was generally expressed as a strategy for protecting their children from harmful social influences that they encounter in the U.S. culture. This suggests that immigrant parents may benefit from programs to help them understand the social pressures

that their children face and resources to help them keep their children out of high-risk social contexts.

The concepts of "freedom" and "independence" are frequently associated with American culture and elicit fundamental American values. Parents and children provided discrepant accounts of the degree of freedom and independence adolescents have in the U.S. versus their countries of origin. In fact, there was little agreement even within the parent and student groups about these concepts. A central theme in the discussions of freedom and independence appeared to relate to adolescents' access to drugs and alcohol and their ability to "go out." More research is needed to understand the significance of these values to acculturating adolescents and their families and to identify their contribution to adolescent substance use.

When asked about why adolescents use drugs, students provided a long list of reasons but explicitly ruled out cultural changes as one of those reasons. However, they did talk about the need to "fit in," which could include pressure to acculturate, resulting in stress and discrepancies between parents and children. Further, more acculturated youths have been found to be more susceptible to antisocial peer pressure (Wall et al., 1993). Of course, because most of these adolescents have grown up in the U.S. cultural context and are not familiar with other cultural contexts, it may be difficult for them to perceive the effects of culture on their cognitions and behavior. Parents discussed the need for good parenting skills to prevent adolescents from using drugs but did not specifically associate adolescent drug use with acculturation or acculturation discrepancies.

LIMITATIONS

It is unclear the extent to which some of the issues discussed by focus group participants reflect issues related to adolescence and parenting of adolescents, in general, rather than issues unique to acculturating families. Students were able to identify differences between themselves and their parents; however, it is somewhat unclear whether these differences pertain to acculturation. This is particularly evident in the discussions of parental strictness and substance use—students in these focus groups were entering into adolescence and parents' strictness may be related to these changes, as well as acculturation. Similarly, parents focused on general parenting skills as a means of preventing drug use in their children. However, in other areas such as other cultural changes, language use, and gender roles, both parents and students were able to discuss the specific effects of acculturation.

As in any other study methodology, there are limitations in the interpretation of focus group findings. It has been noted that the interaction in the group itself may lead to the creation of group bias and polarization of attitudes that could compromise the validity of the findings because participants' views tend to become more extreme in the context of the focus group (Sussman et al., 1991). However, focus group facilitators were trained in appropriate facilitation methods and made an effort to encourage a diversity of opinions in the group.

Findings should be interpreted in the context of their limited generalizability. Those individuals willing to participate in focus groups inherently differ from those who refuse or who do not have time to participate, thereby restricting generalizability of these findings to motivated, involved parents and students who have time and interest in participating in groups to discuss issues such as acculturation and drug use. In addition, only mothers participated in the parent focus groups. Future investigations should make efforts to enroll fathers. However, we acknowledge that fathers are generally more difficult to enroll in studies such as this. We attempted to recruit fathers to participate in the current study but were not successful. In this sample of primarily Mexican American immigrant parents, it appeared that the mother was the primary liaison between the children and the school.

Future studies might be more successful in recruiting fathers through other venues such as churches or workplaces.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Several studies have demonstrated the statistical association between acculturation and substance use among adolescents (Epstein et al., 1998; Fosados et al., 2007; Unger et al., 2000), and some have highlighted acculturation discrepancy and acculturative stress as factors that may increase adolescents' risk for substance use (Gil et al., 2000; Torres Stone & Meyler, 2007). In the current study, we provided qualitative accounts from adolescents and parents that describe their view of how acculturation affects their families, values, and behavior. The adolescents and parents viewed acculturation discrepancies as causes of breakdowns in family cohesion and communication, a view that is supported by studies that suggest that acculturation may affect adolescent substance use via a breakdown in *familism* (Gil et al., 2000). However, the parents and students in our study did not view adolescent drug use as an outcome of these family-level changes. Future research is needed to understand how the family context influences drug use.

Gender differences in parenting were easily perceived by adolescents in this study. These gender differences in how parents monitor or supervise their children have been identified in other qualitative studies of Hispanic/Latino youth, and it has been suggested that traditional cultural values may serve a protective function for Hispanic/Latina girls (Torres Stone & Meyler, 2007). Interestingly, in the current study most of the parents denied treating their boys and girls differently. This discrepancy in the views of children and their parents warrants further study. Additionally, future studies that include fathers of adolescents will be important to more completely understand the role of gender in parenting.

A main hypothesis of the overall study is that acculturation is associated with increased rates of substance use among adolescents. When asked about this phenomenon, students explicitly disagreed with it and attributed students' desire to initiate substance use with individual-level characteristics or with the peer environment. Whether youth are correct in their assessment of the more significant role of individual characteristics and peer influence or whether the phenomenon of acculturation's influence on substance use is one that is unobserved by these students is yet to be determined.

Findings from the current study can contribute to the development of interventions designed to prevent substance use among acculturating Hispanic/Latino adolescents. Both students and parents expressed a great deal of pride in their ethnicity—future interventions designed to assist acculturating youth in delaying the onset of substance use can incorporate this pride into culturally tailored interventions. Furthermore, the parents in this study expressed a significant interest in their children and, in helping their children avoid the initiation of substance use. Interventions designed to educate parents in general parenting skills and to sensitize immigrant parents to the difficulties faced by their acculturating children may help mitigate some of the effects associated with discrepancies in the levels of parent and child acculturation.

Our findings also have implications for substance use residential treatment programs for adolescents who may require more intensive therapies, especially when there has been a breakdown in communication and cohesiveness at school, with family, and in the community. For example, the stressors involved in severe acculturation discrepancies in the parent-child relationship may help to explain a history of aggression or running away that complicates the substance use profile. Some of the findings from this article can provide a greater understanding of how residential treatment programs can strengthen family therapy,

group processes, and the development of community social skills and communication as youth prepare to reunite with their families, schools, and community environments.

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TABLE 1

Demographic Characteristics and Language Use Preferences of Parent and Student Focus Group Participants

Variable	Parents ($n = 18$)	Students ($n = 16$)
Mean age (SD)	41.5 (4.15)	14.4 (0.6)
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	18 (100%)	13 (81%)
Non-Hispanic/Latino	0	3 (19%)
Country of birth	Missing=5	Missing=0
United States	1 (7.7%)	12 (75%)
Other	12 (92.3%)	4 (25%)
Age moved to United States (if not born in US)		Missing=2
Less than 1 year old	0	1 (9%)
1-5 years old	4 (40%)	1 (9%)
6-10 years old	0	1 (9%)
11-15 years old	2 (20%)	1 (9%)
16 + years old	4 (40%)	N/A
Language use at home	Missing=5	
Only English	0	2 (13%)
Mostly English	0	1 (6%)
Both	5 (38.5%)	10 (63%)
Mostly Another language	3 (23.08%)	2 (13%)
Only another language	5 (38.5%)	1 (6%)
Language use with friends	Missing=4	
Only English	0	5 (31%)
Mostly English	0	6 (38%)
Both	4 (28.6%)	5 (31%)
Mostly another language	3 (21.4%)	0
Only another language	7 (50.0%)	0
Language use at school/work	Missing=10	
Only English	1 (12.5%)	6 (40%)
Mostly English	1 (12.5%)	5 (33%)
Both	2 (25.0%)	4 (27%)
Mostly another language	2 (25.0%)	0
Only another language	2 (25.0%)	0

TABLE 2

Summary of Thematic Analysis from Parent and Student Focus Groups

Theme/Construct	Parental Views	Student Views	Similar/Discrepant
Indicators of Ethnicity	- Country of origin, ways of thinking, ways of behaving, language use, religion, pride in one's ethnicity		S
Meaning of the term "American"	- *"Todos somos Americanos [we are all American]"*	- Someone who is White	D
		- Having freedom and opportunities	
	- Anyone from North, Central, or South America	- Having access to a good education	
		- Being from the U.S. and speaking English	
Acculturation	- Changes in: ways of thinking, personalities, customs, values, ways of behaving		S
	- Importance of maintaining aspects of one's native culture	- English language use	D
		- Disorientation	
		- Importance of speaking native language	
Parent/child relationships	- Changes in gender roles	- In the U.S. parents are more strict	D
	- Loss of family cohesiveness	- Parents don't understand pressure to fit in	
	- Perceptions of freedom and independence differ between the U.S. and countries of origin		S
Gender	- Parents generally treat girls and boys equally	- Parents trust boys more than girls, boys can get away with more	D
Reasons for adolescent drug use	- Deficits in family relationships, peer pressure, lack of support		S
	- Lack of parental attention or support	- To be cool/fit in	D
		- To lose weight	