EXAMINING EMERGING ADULTHOOD EXPERIENCES OF MEXICAN AMERICANS AND THE INFLUENCES OF ACCULTURATION AND FAMILISM VALUES

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by
Alexis D. Becerra
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to Ivan Mercado for loving and supporting me throughout this hectic journey. I would also like to dedicate this work to Dr. Andy Dick, who first introduced me to the fascinating world of research as an undergraduate student. Although he is gone too soon, his work and his dedication to his students will forever be remembered.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

Dedication .................................................................................................................. iii

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................... iv

List of Tables ............................................................................................................. vii

List of Figures ............................................................................................................ viii

Abstract ...................................................................................................................... xi

CHAPTER

I. Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1

   Background ......................................................................................................... 1
   Purpose of the Study ......................................................................................... 4
   Limitations of the Study ..................................................................................... 6
   Definition of Terms ......................................................................................... 7

II. Literature Review ............................................................................................... 8

   Emerging Adulthood ....................................................................................... 8
   Mexican American Culture ............................................................................. 17
   Familial Influences ......................................................................................... 20
   Present Study .................................................................................................... 23

III. Results .................................................................................................................. 25

   Habitat Utilization ......................................................................................... 25
   Procedures ....................................................................................................... 25
   Materials .......................................................................................................... 26
   Measures .......................................................................................................... 27

IV. Results .................................................................................................................. 32

   Description of Sample .................................................................................... 32
   Mexican American Group and Comparison Group ...................................... 34
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mexican American Group and The Emerging Adulthood</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican American Group and Familism</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Adult Experience and Mexican American</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Recommendations</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Mexican American Emerging Adult Demographics</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Non-Mexican American Emerging Adult Demographics</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Total Variance Explained as Indicated on the IDEA Among Mexican Americans</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Total Variance Explained as Indicated on IDEA Among Non-Mexican Americans</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Summary of Multiple Regression for Variables Predicting Familism</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Scree Plot for Component Values as Indicated on the IDEA Mexican Americans</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Scree Plot for Component Values as Indicated on the I for Non-Mexican Americans</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

EXAMINING EMERGING ADULTHOOD EXPERIENCES OF MEXICAN AMERICANS AND THE INFLUENCES OF ACCULTURATION AND FAMILISM VALUES

by

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Master of Science in Psychology

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A lack of research exists examining Mexican American emerging adulthood experiences. This present study attempts to address the influences of acculturation and familism on emerging adulthood. Five hypotheses are presented comparing the Mexican American group and the non-Mexican American group across overall emerging adulthood experiences, cultural generation level and acculturation. Participants completed the Attitudinal Familism Scale for Latinos, Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARSMA-II) and the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA). A series of t-tests, multiple regressions, and factor analysis were completed to examine the relationship and significance between the above variables. Results are indicated in the thesis.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Emerging adulthood, a term coined by Jeffrey Arnett (1998), is a period of time between the ages of 18-29 in which young people transition from their late teens to adulthood. Forty years ago events such as finishing one’s education, getting married and having children were seen as specific milestones that needed to be reached in order to be considered an adult. Today the top criteria for becoming an adult are indicated as: accepting responsibility for yourself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. These three conditions tend to be gradual and do not occur overnight (Arnett, 2006, p. 12). By comparison, forty years ago the typical person in industrialized societies was married by the age 22 or 23, had at least one child, and was well on their way to a mortgage (Arnett, 2006). Where as, in 1990, the median age for marriage and childbirth was 25 for women and 27 for men in industrialized societies (Arnett, 2000).

A great deal has changed as young people in their 20’s are now prolonging pivotal moments in their life such as marriage and having children in favor of exploring who they are through a series of experiences known today as emerging adulthood (EA). Accordingly, there are five distinct features of the emerging adulthood period that allow unparalleled opportunity for emerging adults to transform individuals’ lives.
The five features of the emerging adulthood period consist of: the age of identity exploration, the age of instability, the age of being self-focused, the age of feeling in-between, and lastly the age of possibilities. According to Erikson (1968) prolonged adolescence occurs among industrialized societies because young adults are allowed free role experimentation to find a niche in some section of society (p.156). In exploring ideologies, culture, religion and values, young adults are able to decide who they are and what they want from themselves, their lives, and the people that are part of their lives.

However, Arnett (2000) states that the emerging adulthood period is not a universal period and only exists among cultures that allow for postponement of adult roles and responsibilities. In regards to ethnic cultures that exist in industrialized societies such as the United States, similarities and difference throughout the emerging adulthood period are being acknowledged and explored. Literature indicates that there are similarities that exist amongst white Caucasians and American ethnic groups (Latinos, Asians, and Africans) in regards to beliefs about independence and the self-sufficiency needed to be considered an adult (Arnett, 2003). While similarities exist among white Caucasian and American ethnic groups, there are distinct differences that influence the emerging adulthood period for the American ethnic population. These differences are most evident in the areas of family capacities, norm compliance and role transitions (Arnett, 2003). Arnett (2003) and Nelson, Badger, and Wu (2004) have found that American ethnic minority groups favor values that reflect obligation to others most importantly, putting one’s family before the individual (Arnett, 2003; Nelson et al., 2004). Furthermore, these results could be interpreted as reflecting a bi-cultural identity
that many adolescents among American ethnic groups are seen to possess. A bi-cultural identity is developed when a person coming from American ethnic minority value traits, beliefs and attitudes from the dominant culture but also retains values, beliefs and attitudes from their ancestral culture, which often holds opposing collectivistic values rather than the individualistic values of western society.

As Mexican Americans continue to be the fastest growing ethnic population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001, 2002, 2004; Knight et al., 2010), challenges increase within Mexican American youth to adapt to mainstream culture while maintaining ties to their Mexican American values and roots (Knight et al., 2010). It is believed that Mexican Americans who develop a bicultural identity may have an increased ability to successfully navigate the demands of mainstream American culture and values along with Mexican American culture and values (Schwartz et al., 2006). However, the demands of dual cultural adaptation can lead to internal conflict for the Mexican American emerging adults who are managing conflicting cultural values (Knight et al., 2010).

Familism is one of the most consistent values of Mexican American culture, which is reflected through an extensive and cohesive network of family supports as well as a level of emotional and physical involvement among family members that is quite unique to Mexican American familism (Rotham, Gant, & Hnat, 1985). While familism is seen as an incredible support to the Mexican American population in regards to developmental transition and acculturation, familism can also cause conflict and stress (Rodriguez, Mira, Paez, & Myers, 2007) especially between first and second generation Mexican Americans (Rotham et al., 1985). Mexican American youth find highly valued
familism behaviors such as obedience to parents and family over individual preferences to be at odds with the more “avant-garde” Anglo Society (Rotham et al., 1985, p. 204). Over generations, as Mexican Americans continue to adapt to Anglo American individualistic cultural values, continued stress and conflict occurs with familism values.

Although a significant amount of research has been dedicated to understanding the emerging adulthood period and the distinct transition from late teens to adulthood among white Caucasian samples (Arnett, 2003); the lack of research amongst American ethnic minorities results in the inability to confidently apply the emerging adulthood theory to ethnic minorities. Due to the lack of information regarding ethnic minority emerging adulthood experiences, combined with increasing population of Mexican Americans living in the United States, there is an increasing need to better understand emerging adulthood among Mexican Americans along with the roles that familism and acculturation may play in the experiences of emerging adulthood.

Purpose of the Study

Thus far, the majority of the studies conducted amongst the emerging adult population in the United States have involved predominantly white samples (Arnett, 2003; Nelson et al., 2004). This research indicates participants’ behaviors and value systems during emerging adulthood tend to be rooted in the individualist ideologies that are favored in the United States (Arnett, 2003). The few studies that have been conducted with American ethnic minorities have found similarities and differences when compared to white Caucasian populations (Arnett, 2003). While we do not know much about what these differences entail, given the Mexican American values of collectivism and
familism, we can infer that they may experience emerging adulthood in distinct ways from their white counterparts. The goal of previous studies has been to identify differences in the “conceptions of the transition to adulthood.” Therefore, while this research has increased our knowledge on similarities and differences that exist among American ethnic minorities and non-ethnic minorities in the emerging adulthood experience, it lack any specifics in regards to the impact the emerging adulthood period has upon-family relationships as well as the role that acculturation may play in the emerging adulthood experience of Mexican Americans.

Given the limitations of the current research, it has been recommended that future research should seek to investigate different patterns of experience amongst ethnic subgroups of emerging adults (Arnett, 2006). While the emerging adult experience is most likely to be found in industrialized societies, due to diverse cultural experiences some minority cultures that exist in these societies may have shortened or non-existent emerging adulthood experiences (Arnett, 2000). Therefore, examining the emerging adulthood period amongst Mexican American’s allows for a greater understanding of the Mexican American experience of transitioning into adulthood (Nelson et al., 2004).

The present study attempts to address the following recommendations by examining the Mexican American experiences of emerging adulthood as compared to non-Mexican American individuals. In addition, the present study will explore the relationship between emerging adulthood and family values amongst Mexican Americans. Also, this study will examine the relationship between emerging adulthood and level of acculturation as it relates to Anglo and Mexican orientations. In doing so, this study will examine several questions. First (R1), do Mexican Americans and non-
Mexican Americans differ in their experiences of the emerging adulthood as indicated through the use of the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA)? Second (R2), what are the features of the emerging adulthood experience that are most prominent among Mexican Americans? Third (R3), what relationship exists between Mexican American emerging adulthood and familism values? Fourth (R4), how are Mexican American emerging adults’ experiencing acculturation as indicated by the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans II (ARSMA-II) Mexican and Anglo orientation scale? Fifth (R5), what relationship exists between emerging adulthood experience and level of acculturation for Mexican Americans?

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study is that the sample was limited to college students, many of whom live away from their parents and siblings. This experience may also increase the individualistic values of the participants. Although college students may not represent all emerging adults accurately, they do in many ways provide an important look into the experiences of Mexican American emerging adults.

Secondly, this study was conducted using an online English survey in which only participants who had access to the internet were able to participate as well as may be more acculturated due to speaking and reading English. Furthermore, through the use of an online survey, the research staff is left to assume that participants were honest in reporting their experiences of emerging adulthood, acculturation, and family values.

Lastly, this study follows the five feature emerging adulthood model developed by Jeffrey Arnett which has predominantly been studied in white Caucasian
emerging adults (Arnett, 2003). As a result, the lack of studies amongst ethnic minorities, especially Mexican American emerging adults, leaves room for further exploration.

Definition of Terms

Emerging Adulthood (EA)
- A phase of the lifespan between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood.
- Focuses primarily on the age period between 18-29 years.
- A life phase in which young people encounter identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between (Arnett, 2000).

Mexican American (MA)
- A citizen or resident of the United States of Mexican birth or descent.

Familism
- A social pattern in which family assumes a position of ascendance over the individual interests.

This term has been used to describe Latino’s strong identification and attachment to the nuclear and extended family, along with strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity and solidarity among family members (Rodriguez, as cited in Marin & Marin, 1991).
Emerging adulthood is a period of time when a person is neither an adolescent nor an adult but is instead in an in-between period in which young people are finding their independence from social roles and normative expectations that will influence their roles as adults later on. This is a developmental period in-between both the adolescent and adult developmental stages. Jeffrey Arnett indicates that the emerging adulthood period ranges in age from 18-29 (Arnett, 2000). This particular developmental period of time has been a recent topic of research due to the many changes and challenges that occur in a person’s life during this age period (Arnett, 2000). During the emerging adulthood period of life often several developmental transitions occur including: moving in and out of their parents’ home, attending college, getting married, having children and becoming steadily employed. Emerging Adulthood can be a turbulent period of time when a person is developing an identity and making decisions about what they want from life. Often in this period, past values and belief systems are challenged and new ones are formed. This can be the most important period of time in someone’s life when one is developing a sense of self and individuality unique from their family of origin. But as generations pass, many of the developmental transitions that commonly occur during this
period, such as marriage or having children are being prolonged. As U.S. data between the 1950’s-2000’s reveals, while marriage was once expected in a person’s early twenties, it is now occurring in their late twenties (Arnett, 2004). This is the same trend for having children (Arnett, 2004). Young people are choosing to attend higher education institutions because of their desire to obtain more desirable occupations to obtain the money needed that will support their active leisure life (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2006). As a trend, individuals are now extending the period of time in which they are transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. Emerging adulthood has changed from being characterized as a time of settling down to a time of self-exploration. Therefore, this period is now known as emerging adulthood.

Emerging Adulthood was distinctly termed and noted by Jeffrey Arnett in the late 1990’s early 2000’s (Arnett, 1998; Arnett, 2000). But there is evidence in literature that this developmental age period has been acknowledged since at least the 1950’s. Erickson (1968) identifies that many industrialized societies are beginning to allow an extended psychosocial moratorium beyond adolescence during which a person’s identity continues to develop and even intensifies with respect to love, work and ideology. Erickson is one of the first theorists to observe and acknowledge this particular developmental period. Erickson (1950, 1968) who wrote about “identity crisis” over half a century ago identifies the primary challenge and difficulty faced by adolescent is identity crisis. It is during the identity crisis period in young adult’s lives that young people are evaluating their abilities, interests and childhood influences to explore the possibilities that lie ahead of them for their prospering futures. The identity crisis that
Erickson characterized is more commonly occurring in emerging adulthood today rather than in adolescence (Arnett, 2007).

Arnett indicates emerging adulthood is a time of instability, exploration, and possibilities. There are five main features that differentiate this period of time from adolescence and adulthood. These features are based on Arnett’s research over the past two decades. Arnett (2006) reports that emerging adulthood is the age of: identity exploration (especially in areas of love and work), instability, being self-focused, age of feeling in-between (not a child, though not yet an adult), and the age of possibilities (when optimism is high and people have the opportunity to transform their lives). This period of time that leads to adulthood has become a time of individualization for emerging adults in industrialized societies. As industrialized societies continuously change and adapt, so have the social norms and social controls of young people. The result has been allowing young people to continue on the emerging adulthood path longer. Emerging adulthood is often the most volitional period of one’s life, people are most likely to follow their desires and these desires can lead them in a wide range of directions (Arnett, 2006). The notion that anyone can be and do what they want is exhibited during this period of time in a person’s life.

Five Features of Emerging Adulthood

The age of identity exploration as Erickson (1968) indicates is a time in which the “young adult through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society” (p.150). During the emerging adulthood period of life most people are exploring all the possibilities of education, jobs, and romantic partners that lay in front of them. This is a time when their exploration of choices is setting the foundation for what
they would like in their future adult life. Emerging adults are clarifying their identities by re-examining the family values and beliefs they have been raised with and deciding what they want in life. Emerging adults become more independent from their parents than they were as adolescents and many have left home, yet most have not yet entered stable, enduring commitments typical of adult life, such as a long term job, marriage or parenthood commitments (Arnett, 2006). This is the life period in which individuals have the opportunity to try out different ways of life by making exploratory choices, such as changing majors, trying different jobs in different fields and dating different people with different values than they have been raised with. Emerging adults form worldviews that address questions that they may have about religion, values, and beliefs. Emerging adults decide whether these values and beliefs are similar or different from the values and beliefs that they were raised with and that are held by their parents (Arnett, 2006).

The age of instability is the second experience that emerging adults are exposed to. Instability is a notable characteristic because this is a time in which many changes occur in the young person’s life. Change can be seen in emerging adults’ living arrangements, such as leaving their parents home to go to college or to simply begin an independent living situation. Housing can change on a year to year basis. If a person goes off to college they can live in campus dorms to later move out into apartments or communal living. Most emerging adults living in the U.S. cohabit at some point in their twenties and residential change is likely at the end of a relationship. Finally approximately 40% of emerging adults move back home at some point in their twenties after they graduate college or are in transition between occupations, but often only for a short period of time only to move back out again (Arnett, 2006; Goldscheinder &
Goldscheinder, 1999). It is also common for emerging adults to move out of country to explore other parts of the world in where they pursue work, school or accompany a romantic partner (Arnett, 2006). In addition to the frequent transitions in living arrangements, there are also transition related to school, work, and love. Changes occur in educational paths, jobs are often temporary only to be replaced with the next best job offer and love interests change due to the emerging adult exploring what and who they would like to have as a life companion.

The third feature of emerging adulthood is the self-focused feature. During the emerging adulthood period while people are not necessary selfish or self-centered, they are self-focused in the sense that they have few obligations, duties and commitments to others which leaves them a great deal of autonomy and the ability to run their own lives. The main goal of emerging adulthood is to attain self sufficiency and to develop what it means to be an adult (Arnett, 2006). Having this period of time to be self-focused gives individuals the time and space to ask themselves the necessary questions of “who am I?” and “what do I want from my life.” These questions are at the heart of their identity in which they can further pursue opportunities that promote self-knowledge.

The fourth feature of emerging adulthood is the feeling of being in-between. This is the idea that while emerging adults are not yet adults, they are also no longer adolescents. While in American society at age 18 people are allowed to vote, sign legal documents and join the military, when Arnett asked emerging adults, “Do you feel like you have reached adulthood?” About 60% of the emerging adults responded “in some ways yes, in some ways no” (Arnett, 2000, p. 472). For most people believing you have reached adulthood corresponds with completing one’s education, and getting married.
Many people consider accepting responsibility for yourself, making independent decisions, and being financially independent to be additional crucial factors in achieving adulthood. However, these factors are criteria that are achieved through gradual transition (Arnett, 2006). The emerging adulthood age period allows individuals the time to become confident in whom they are and the choices they make to reassure themselves of a successful adulthood. Therefore, the gradual transition that is required to achieve adulthood criterion can only occur through time and in essence allowing the person to experience “in-between.”

The last and final feature of the emerging adulthood period is that of possibilities. Arnett (2006) indicates that this is the age of possibilities in two ways. One is that this is a time of great optimism and second is that this is time in which individuals can move their lives in a different, more favorable directions (a path that is different from the life they may have grown up in). For instance, before people settle into long term relationships, jobs or other opportunities that may come about, they want to find the best paying, the most personally fulfilling relationship or job to be an expression of who they are and what they value and believe. This is also evident among emerging adults who do not come from well-off backgrounds or high SES. Regardless of personal background, the emerging adult believes that they will have better lives than their parents. Emerging adults believe that they will ultimately prevail despite their current living situation and struggles (Arnett, 2000, 2006). In the end, this is the age of possibilities because the emerging adulthood period is the time in which a person can transform their lives for the better regardless of what family environment they may have come from. If an emerging adult comes from a family that provides all opportunities of success, then they can reap
the benefits and continue down a path of achievement. If an emerging adult comes from a dysfunctional family or low SES and upbringing this is the time they can move and change their lives into a better direction in more profound ways.

**EA and Culture**

As indicated above the emerging adult experience is occurring especially amongst industrialized countries and societies. Arnett (2000) contends that “emerging adulthood is not a universal period but a period that exists only in cultures that postpone the entry into adult roles and responsibilities until way past their late teens” (p.478). Therefore, currently the majority of research on the emerging adulthood experience is based predominantly on white Caucasian samples. Little is known about the emerging adulthood experiences of various ethnic groups. Few studies have been conducted on this matter, especially in regards to the Mexican American experience. In a research study conducted by Arnett (2003) using a 39 item questionnaire using dichotomous response choices “yes and no,” conceptions of the transition to adulthood among three American ethnic groups (African Americans = 122, Latinos = 96, and Asian Americans = 247) were explored. Arnett found that there are similarities among Latino emerging adulthood experiences and white Caucasian experiences in their transitions to adulthood. Examples of similarities found were becoming independent from their parents and learning to stand alone and be self-sufficient. In this research study, examining what I means to become an adult, most American ethnic minorities agreed with the white Caucasian sample in which independence was defined as accepting responsibility for the consequences of your actions, deciding personal beliefs and values, developing financial independence from your parents, and establishing an equal relationship with your parents (Arnett, 2003).
Both Latinos and Caucasians agreed that these are all necessary criteria in order to be considered an adult.

Despite the fact that ethnic minorities tend to agree with Caucasian samples in the area of independence, there are important areas in which ethnic minority experiences differ from that’s of Caucasian emerging adults. The categories most notable to Arnett (2003) were in regards to family capacities, norm compliance, and role transitions. Within the family capacities category over 60-70 percent of Latinos indicated that becoming “capable of supporting your family financially” was a requirement for both men and women to be considered an adult (Arnett, 2003). Support for this category reflected values based on family obligation rather than individual interest. In regards to the category norm compliance, Latinos scored higher on questions that demonstrated concern for the opinions of others rather than causing direct harm to others. For instance, “19 percent of whites indicated that they would “avoid being drunk” as a criterion of adulthood, where as 51 percent of Latinos would avoid being drunk” (Arnett, 2003, p. 72). Lastly, ethnic minorities tend to favor role transition marking pivotal moments in an emerging adult’s life such as marriage, parenthood and completion of education as criteria for adulthood. Therefore, American ethnic minorities place higher emphasis on these transitions based on family obligation as compared to Caucasians. Arnett (2003) indicated that over 50 percent of Latinos supported the role transitions of getting married, finishing education, and becoming fully employed as key markers to being an adult.

Overall, in his study on American ethnic minority emerging adults, Arnett (2003) found American ethnic minorities tended to possess bicultural identities, which support characteristics of both American culture and ancestral values. For example, many
of the minority participants indicated valuing independence as well as favoring family obligations and a consideration for others. The Mexican American emerging adults took on some of the American cultural values and beliefs while still holding on to their ancestral beliefs and values in regards to family obligation. What is most evident from this research is that the transition to adulthood is not simply biological; it is also a social and cultural process (Arnett, 2003, p. 73).

Other research that has investigated the emerging adulthood experience across cultures has also found that more traditional cultures tend to have shortened or no emerging adulthood experience at all. For instance, Asian cultures tend to place greater value on practices that lead to an earlier transition to adulthood such as marriage and finding full time employment (Nelson et al., 2004). Nelson et al. (2004) found that while investigating the emerging adult experience among Chinese in China, 59 percent of the emerging adult participants saw themselves as adults compared to 27 percent of non-Chinese. Though this is a dramatic difference in opinion, both Chinese emerging adults and American emerging adults tend to agree that “accepting responsibility for consequences to their actions,” “having control over their emotions,” and “becoming financially independent from parents” are critical traits that one must possess in order to be and feel like they have reached adulthood (Nelson et al., 2004, p.33).

Furthermore, the Confucian religion is seen to have an impact on the experiences of young Chinese adults due to the emphasis Confucianism places on constraining and controlling the self (Nelson et al., 2004, p.34). This belief system may influence the experiences that Chinese emerging adults have regarding the “age of instability,” “identity exploration,” and “self-focused,” three of the five stages Arnett
presents. Therefore, young Chinese will tend to avoid behavior that is against cultural and religious traditions. As a result, it does appear that Chinese young people are experiencing the emerging adulthood period differently due to their unique cultural beliefs and collectivist culture. Given that Mexican Americans also hold unique beliefs and values regarding familism, it can be inferred that their experience of emerging adulthood may differ from Caucasians as well.

**Mexican American Culture**

**Background**

The growth of the Latino population is now being compared to the baby boomer generation growing at a rate of 3 percent every year, with nearly one third of the population under the age of 18 (Grow, 2004). Mexicans first came to what is now known as the United States in the early 1600-1700’s and along with the Spaniards they established missions and communities that are still prominent cities today. In recent times Mexican Americans constitute the largest and oldest group of Latinos in the United States. Due to the large number of illegal Latino immigrants in the United States, it is difficult to get an accurate reading on the number of Mexican or Mexican Americans. In the 2000 U.S. Census it was estimated that 66.9 percent of Latinos in the United States are of Mexican birth or ancestry (Garcia-Preto, 2005). Although Mexican Americans are the oldest Latino subgroup in the United States, the majority of the population continues to remain below the poverty line and few have been able to move up socioeconomically due to lack of resources and language barriers (Garcia-Preto, 2005). Due to the inability to move up in socioeconomic status, most Mexican Americans including those of second
generation continue to live in ethnic neighborhoods that serve as a buffer against culture shock and create a continuity of faces, voices, smells and foods. These communities are often viewed as safe havens for many Mexican Americans (Falicov, 2002). Today the majority of Mexican Americans live in ethnic communities that are spread through California, Texas, Arizona and New Mexico.

People of Mexican origin living in the United States often face the challenge of adapting to mainstream American culture when values at school or in larger community settings while still maintaining ethnic standards and values at home (Knight et al., 2009). Through the process of managing both Mexican ethnic values and American ethnic values, Mexican Americans form what is described as cultural “bifocality,” in which they develop the ability to see their world through two different value lenses (Falicov, as cited in Rouse, 1992). The process of Mexican American acculturation affects an individual’s interests in food and music as well as their identity to their cultural identity, attitudes and beliefs about male and female roles, (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995).

Mexican American values such as religion, family connectedness, parental authority and patriarchal views are tested against the American standard in which individualism and independence are principal. With the majority of Mexican Americans being Roman Catholic, religion provides a constant in the lives of Mexicans that have moved to the United States. The church provides a public support to the people. Although many Mexican Americans keep their religious values private, their values most often reflect that of the Roman Catholic Church in regards to marriage, fertility, abortion,
contraception, and homosexuality (Falicov, 2005). These religious values and views can and often cause conflict among the social norms of American society.

Mexican families are often large and consist of four or more children. Parent-child lifelong connectedness and respect are valued over the husband-wife bond that is emphasized in Western nuclear families (Falicov, 2005). Overall, parental status is placed high and is expected to remain a high value throughout the life of the parent. Mexican parents don’t plan or wish to be friends with their children. Both parents are thought of to forever hold “respeto,” translated in English this word indicates respect, but in Spanish the word has more emphasis on dutifulness and dependence (Falicov, as cited in Diaz-Guerrero, 1975).

As the relationships between the individual family members are viewed with high regard, this is also reflective of the family unit. Family collectivism and inclusiveness are central to the Mexican American culture (Keefe, 1984; Vega, 1990). As a result of collectivistic values, Mexican American families often have highly valued and critical ties with family members such as siblings, cousins and aunts and uncles. The concept “familial self” describes the importance of family among the Mexican American population in relation to their individual identity. The familial self identifies the importance of family unity and family honor as a result of Mexican Americans’ dedication to their family (Falicov, as cited in Roland, 1988). Therefore, family interdependence is strongly encouraged and valued in Mexican American families due to the added support among extended family members in regards to nurturing, disciplining, financial responsibility and companionship (Falicov, 2005).
Another value held by Mexican Americans is patriarchy. Patriarchal views continue to exist among Mexican Americans. Patriarchy is most evident among the double standards that exist between of genders. The father in most Mexican American families takes on the role of the disciplinarian while the woman commands authority only once she has become a mother. After motherhood, the maternal bond and love is viewed as sacred, more sacred than spousal love (Falicov, 2005). As a result, patriarchal gender roles continue to exist among Mexican American families, which often cause conflict between generations as children become acculturated towards American values such as valuing egalitarian relationships. Furthermore, as American acculturation becomes influential in Mexican American lives, dominant Mexican values continue to exist.

Familial Influences

Familism

Familism is a term and attribute that is generally considered to be a trademark of Hispanic culture. Defined in the most general terms as prioritizing one’s family over oneself, familism is regarded as a cultural value that sets Hispanics apart from other cultural groups (Garcia-Preto, as cited in Santisteban et al, 2002; Schwartz, 2007). Lugo Steidel & Contreras (2003) regard four elements that are essential to Latinos in regards to familism: sacrificing, familial interconnectedness, familial reciprocity, and family honor. Furthermore, not allowing one’s own desires to interfere with the well being of the family needs. Family interconnectedness is strategy in which Mexican American families create strong emotional and physical bonds that are maintained into adult life. Family reciprocity is when Latinos provide support of any kind to family members in need
during difficult times and this favor is returned when the other member is in need of support. Lastly, familial honor is the belief that it is a family member’s duty to protect the family name and honor while actively defending it (Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003, p.314-315).

Familism represents one of the many ways that Mexican American’s are able to hold onto their heritage culture while living inside another country that may have opposing values in regards to family life. For instance, familism has also been identified as a key value impacting parenting practices. This value has helped Hispanic’s protect their adolescents from problematic outcomes such as the misuse of drugs and alcohol through providing additional support to family members while living in close communities in the American society (Bush et al., 2004; Santisteban, 2005; Schwartz, 2007). Due to the value of familism, Hispanic’s tend to have larger local familial networks that influence how much family members visit each other and it increases opportunities for exchange among its members (Rodriguez, et al, 2007; Keefe, 1984). In essence, this provides an additional support to parents and family members who are raising children but also continue to define the importance of family.

Mexican Americans form a sense of allegiance towards their family and their roles in their family to a greater extent than do other ethnic groups (Schwartz, 2007; Bulcroft, 1996). However, with this said, familism values contribute to a collectivist value system in which interdependence, prioritizing the goals of the group, shaping behaviors towards group norms, and behaving in a communal ways are attributes also seen among other ethnic groups that value collectivism, such as African American and Asian American groups (Schwartz, 2007; Triandis, 2001). Therefore, researchers are
finding that values such as filial piety and communalism within other ethnic minority groups contain similar traits to the Hispanic value of familism. For example, Schwartz (2007) found that while using the Attitudinal Familism Scale (Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2007) there was no mean difference of scores between non-Hispanics (whites and blacks) as compared to Hispanic scores. As a result, all ethnic groups endorsed some extent of familism on a five point likert scale with Hispanics, $M=3.57$, non-Hispanic Whites $M=3.45$, and non-Hispanic Blacks $M=3.61$ (p. 111-112). Therefore, familism appears to be a Hispanic value that is also exhibited in similar ways amongst other ethnic groups.

**Family Stress**

Although familism is intended to create a support system, there is also evidence that having a close-knit community of family members may increase problems and stress among Mexican American families in regards to cultural values and family conflict (Rodriguez, 2007; Salgado de Snyder et al., 1990). Mexican Americans report greater stress in the areas of culture and family than whites do (Rodriguez, 2007, Salgado de Snyder et al., 1990). Repeated research indicates that when Mexican Americans favor “Anglo” family values over Mexican family values conflicts develop at home with peers and parents that favor traditional Mexican values. Therefore, when intrafamilial and intercultural conflict occur, it increases the stress level amongst family members (Cervantes, Padilla, & Salgado de Snyder, 1991; Ramirez, 1969; Rodriguez, 2007; Szapocnick & Kurtines, 1993). Lugo Steidel & Contreras (2003) state that when studying Mexican Americans, “Negative correlations are expected between familism and greater exposure to U.S. mainstream system and culture” (p. 317). To a large extent, American young adults today pursue their identity explorations on their own, without the daily
companionship of their family of origin (Arnett, as cited in Jonsson, 1994; Morch, 1995). Therefore, conflict and stress in Mexican American families seems to be fueled by opposing family values, where children are adapting to mainstream U.S. culture in which independence and individuality are highly valued, while abandoning their ethnic cultural values, such as interconnectedness.

Present Study

While there is literature and research describing Emerging Adulthood experiences, and Mexican American cultural values and beliefs, we do not yet know how Mexican Americans experience emerging adulthood between the ages of 18-29. Additionally, we do not yet understand the roles that acculturation and, family values play in the emerging adulthood experience for Mexican Americans. For instance, Arnett (2000) indicates that emerging adulthood might look noticeably different in cultures that emphasize responsibility to others despite the minority population residing in the United States (p. 478). As a result, our aim in this research study was to examine whether Mexican American emerging adults experience the five stages of Emerging Adulthood that Jeffrey Arnett presents in his research and if so, were there any positive or negative relationships between the emerging adulthood experience and family attitudes and values. Acculturation amongst the Mexican American population was also examined to explore the relationship between emerging adulthood experiences and the level of acculturation of an individual.

This study presents five hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 (H1): Mexican Americans possess dual ethnic identities, which will result in the Mexican American group sharing
some similar experiences to the comparison group during the emerging adulthood period.

H2: Mexican Americans will hold stronger attitudes and beliefs towards familism compared to non-Mexican Americans. H3: An increase in cultural generation level will negatively influence Mexican American attitudes and beliefs towards familism. H4: Higher scores on emerging adulthood will negatively influence Mexican American attitudes and beliefs towards familism. H5: Mexican American acculturation will positively influence emerging adulthood experience.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Habitat Utilization

The participants in this study were emerging adult college students between the ages of 18-29 years residing in Northern California. The comparison group included all participants that did not identify themselves as Mexican or Mexican-American, while the experimental group included all participants that identified themselves as Mexican or Mexican-American emerging adults. The comparison group mean age was 22.17 years, $SD = 2.58$, while the Mexican American group mean age was 22.18 years, $SD = 2.94$. Participants were recruited predominantly through an undergraduate university department. In the participant sample ($n = 137$), 36 participants were males and 101 were females. Of the participants, 29.2 percent of the sample was second generation Americans with foreign born parents who immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Regarding educational level, 59.9 percent of the participants reported having a high school degree, while 35.8 percent had completed a Bachelors degree. The average income of the participant was between 5,000-9,999, $SD = 1.79$.

Procedures

Participants were recruited through the use of flyers posted around a university. Several university professors offered extra credit as an incentive for students
who participated in research. Flyers were posted on informational boards throughout university departments but also among cross-cultural organization offices on campus. These cultural programs offer support to first time college students from underserved and minority populations. Hispanic clubs on campus were also used to promote this study among Mexican/ Mexican American college students. The primary researcher presented this research opportunity in various classrooms across departments to expand the participant base. Furthermore, while incentives such as extra credit were given to students by their professors, participants were also entered in a raffle for a 1/20 chance to win a $20 visa gift card.

Participants were able to complete the online survey at their own convenience. Confidentiality was maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Participation in this online survey involved risks similar to a person’s everyday use of the Internet. Participants were made aware of these risks in the informed consent. Checking the box to begin the survey indicated the participant’s acknowledgement and acceptance of the study’s terms.

Materials

Participants were recruited to participate in an online survey questionnaire that consisted of three measurements and 10 additional questions on demographics. The three measurements consisted of: The ARSMA-II also known as the Acculturating Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995), the IDEA Inventory also known as the Inventory of the Dimensions of the Emerging Adulthood
(Reifman, Arnett, & Cowell, 2007), and the Attitudinal Familism Scale for Latinos (Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003).

The survey included 107 items total, of which 10 items were demographic questions, 48 items came from the ARSMA-II, a two scale acculturation rating scale known as the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans. The ARSMA-II (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995) measured cultural orientation towards Mexican and Anglo cultures. An additional 18 items on the survey came from the Attitudinal Familism Scale for use with Latino populations (Lugo, Steidel, & Contreras, 2003) in which familial support, interconnectedness, honor and subjugation for self and family were analyzed. Lastly, 31 questions on the survey came from Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adult (IDEA) in which attitudes towards the emerging adulthood experience were evaluated (Reifman, Arnett, & Cowell, 2007). Participation in this survey took most participants approximately 18-20 minutes to complete.

Measures

Three separate scales were used in this research project, the ARSMA-II, the Attitudinal Familism Scale for Latinos and the IDEA Scale, to measure participants’ level of acculturation, beliefs and attitudes toward family and experiences as an emerging adult.

Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARSMA-II)

The ARSMA-II consists of two sub-scales that examine Anglo Orientation and Mexican Orientation. With 48 questions divided among two sub-scales, the ARSMA-
II uses a 5 point likert scale in which 1 represents not at all, 2: Very little or not that often, 3: Moderately, 4: Much or very often and 5: Extremely often or Almost Always.

The ARSMA-II attempts to measure four modes of acculturation among Mexican Americans. These modes include: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. Built upon its predecessor the ARSMA, the ARSMA-II primarily measures behavioral aspects of acculturation in which it assesses both positive and negative affirmation of ethnicity. A major limitation to the ARSMA was that it measured Mexican culture at one extreme and American culture at the other extreme, so participants could only be defined as one or the other. The ARSMA-II allows for four basic quadrants from which to derive bi-cultural typologies. The ARSMA-II was developed to address the above concerns while still maintaining construct equivalence with the original ARSMA. According to Cuellar, et al., the ARSMA-II marginality scale shows good internal reliability with a coefficient alpha of .87. Test re-test reliability over one week also shows good consistency with a coefficient alpha of .96. Finally, since the ARSMA-II builds upon the previous acculturation scale, the ARSMA (Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980) compared a sample of 171 individuals’ acculturation scores both on the ARSMA and the ARSMA-II which resulted in a Pearson correlation coefficient of .89 and supported concurrent validity of the scales.

Attitudinal Familism Scale

The Attitudinal Familism Scale for use with Latino populations (Lugo Steidel and Contreras, 2003) was created to identify attitudes toward familism such as family loyalty, honor and family interconnectedness, a core value of Mexican American populations. In particular it was created to assess the attitudes and opinions on familism
for both acculturated Latinos as well as predominantly Spanish speaking unacculturated Latinos. The Familism Scale consists of 18 items in which questions regarding familial support, interconnectedness, honor and subjugation were examined. A 10 point likert scale is used to assess participant’s attitudes in which 1=strongly disagree and 10=strongly agree. Steidel & Contreras (2003) found that the Familism Scale had a cronbach alpha for the overall factor scores of .83. The reliability factor scores of the individual scales were varied, including: Familial Support .72, Familial Interconnectedness .69, Honor .69, and Subjugation for Self and Family .56. Although internal consistency of the subjugation of self subscales had lower reliability, reliability analyses conducted by Steidel and Contreras indicated the reliability and the internal consistency of the overall scale was high. Validity analysis conducted by Steidel and Contreras confirmed the scale is a valid indicator of familism among Latino populations. To examine validity support for the scale, correlations were run between participant acculturation level, generational status, and exposure to U.S. culture. As expected, the researchers found a significant negative correlation between \( r = -.26, p < .01 \) familism and acculturation. Taking into consideration generational status and exposure to U.S. culture resulted in highly acculturated participants scoring lower on the familism items (Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003).

**Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA)**

Lastly, the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) is a measure created to assess and identify the transition to adulthood among people between the ages of 18-29 (Reifman, Arnett & Colwell, 2007). In this inventory, five primary
emerging adulthood features are measured, including: identity exploration, experimentation/possibilities, negativity/instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between. The IDEA scale is a 31 item measure in which participants are asked to think of this time in your life, the last five years and the next five years to come and to consider these thoughts/ experiences when answering the 31 phrases listed. An example of one of the phrases is, “Is this period of your life a time of many possibilities?” A 4 point likert scale is used to respond to the phrases in which 1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=somewhat agree, and 4=strongly agree.

Reifman and Arnett developed the IDEA instrument to measure the five distinct experiences associated with emerging adulthood (identity exploration, experimentation/possibilities, negativity/instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between) among several diverse populations in five separate studies. The ages of the participants in the various studies ranged from 12-70 years of age. To check for test-retest reliability the scale was given a second time one month later to participants. What resulted was that amongst the population of participants between the ages of 18-29, the five factors (identity exploration, experimentation/possibilities, negativity/instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between) indicated validity scores ranging from cronbachs alpha .70-.85, with a test-retest reliability that ranged from .64-.76. The lowest scoring category was “feeling in between” which resulted in a test-retest reliability of .37. With the majority of validity and reliability scores being fairly high, Reifman and Arnett concluded that the findings on using the IDEA Scale appear to support the theoretical construct of Emerging Adulthood as proposed by Arnett (2000). Reifman and Arnett (2007) reported that, the exploratory study supported their predictions that persons age 18-29 tend to have
significantly higher or lower means on the various emerging adult experiences described using the IDEA dimensions compared to older or younger age groups, in accordance with the EA theory.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Description of Sample

The Mexican American participants comprised 54.7 percent of the sample and consisted of 75 individuals. The non-Mexican American participants comprised 45.3 percent of the sample and consisted of 62 individuals who represented various ethnic groups: 45 white Caucasians, 5 Middle Easterners, 1 African American, and 11 others (often because the participants identified more than one race). The age range for participants was 18-29 representing the emerging adult age period. The mean age of the Mexican American group was 22.18 with a $SD = 2.94$. For the comparison group the mean age was 22.17 with a $SD = 2.58$. Amongst the 137 participants, 36 were males and 101 were females. As a result, females comprised of 73.7 percent of the overall participant sample. Within the overall sample, the cultural generational level that most commonly applied to the participants in the study was 3rd generation ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.47$), (See table 1. and table 2.), which is described as “You were born in the USA, both your parents were born in the USA and all grandparents were born in Mexico or other country,” (Cuellar, Arnold & Maldonado, 1995).
# TABLE 1

**Mexican American Emerging Adult Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>$n = 75$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<td>22.18</td>
<td>2.94</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Generation:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fist</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# TABLE 2

**Non-Mexican American Emerging Adult Demographics**

<table>
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<th>$n = 62$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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Mexican American Group and Comparison Group

A series of independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare the means of Mexican American group and the control group across the three identified measures used in the survey. These measures consisted of the ARSMA-II; scale 1 (which examines Mexican and Anglo orientation), the IDEA Inventory, and the Attitudinal Familism Scale. There was no significant difference found between the Mexican American group and the comparison group in regards to acculturation within Anglo orientation.

$t (135) = -1.90, N.S.$ Furthermore, no difference was found in overall emerging adulthood experiences between the Mexican American group and the comparison group.

$t (135) = -.92, N.S.$ In contrast, there was a significant mean difference between groups in regards to orientation to Mexican culture for the Mexican American group ($M = 3.45, SD = .72$) and the comparison group $M = 1.63, SD = .55$; $t = (135) = .00, p < .05$ (two-tailed). These results support hypothesis 1 in that the Mexican American participants are holding onto Mexican culture and identity, yet are simultaneously acculturating quite well to the U.S. dominant Anglo culture. Therefore, Mexican American participants appear to possess dual identities, which result in sharing some similar experiences to the comparison group during emerging adulthood. There was a slight significant difference in regards to familism attitudes between the Mexican American group ($M = 6.90, SD = 1.09$) and the comparison group $M = 6.34, SD = 1.44$; $t (135) = 2.57, p < .05$ (two-tailed). This supports the hypothesis that Mexican Americans, regardless of level of acculturation into U.S. society, hold stronger attitudes and beliefs on familism as compared to non-Mexican Americans.
Mexican American Group and
The Emerging Adulthood
Experience

An exploratory factor analysis was completed to examine Mexican American participants’ experiences of the five features of emerging adulthood experience: identity exploration, possibilities, instability, self-focused and feeling in-between (Arnett, 2006). This analysis revealed that one significant factor identity exploration, accounted for 52.29 percent of the variance in the emerging adulthood experience (See table 3; See figure 1.). The second most prominent factor possibilities, accounted for 17.92 percent of the total variance for the entire set of variables. Therefore, using Kaiser’s criterion of retaining factors with eigenvalues above one, only one distinct factor “identity exploration,” appears to explain a significant amount of variance in the experiences of experiences of emerging adulthood among the Mexican Americans whom participated in this study.

The same exploratory factor analysis was conducted for the comparison group using the five features of the emerging adulthood experience: identity exploration, possibilities, instability, self-focused, feeling in-between (Arnett, 2006). The results indicate the factor identity exploration accounted for 61.78 percent of the total variance in the emerging adulthood experience (See table 4; See figure 2.). Like the Mexican American group, using Kaiser’s criterion of retaining factors with eigenvalues above one, only one distinct factor “identity exploration,” appears to explain a significant amount of variance in the experiences of emerging adulthood among the comparison group whom participated in this study. As a result, both the Mexican Americans and the comparison group are experiencing similarities during the emerging adulthood period with identity exploration being the most prominent factor that they are experiencing during this period.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>% of</td>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>52.30</td>
<td>52.30</td>
<td>2.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Possibility</td>
<td>.896</td>
<td>17.93</td>
<td>70.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instability</td>
<td>.669</td>
<td>13.39</td>
<td>83.54</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-focused</td>
<td>.575</td>
<td>11.50</td>
<td>95.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-between</td>
<td>.248</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>100.00</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, the remaining four factors appear to have similar influences on both the Mexican American group and the comparison group within emerging adulthood experiences.

**Mexican American Group and Familism**

A multiple regression analysis was conducted for the Mexican American participant group to examine the relationship between familism and the predictors: cultural generation level, Mexican orientation as indicated on the ARSMA-II, and emerging adulthood experience as indicated on the IDEA. The Multiple regression model with all three predictors produced $R^2 = .206$, $F (3, 71) = 6.14$, $p < .001$. (See table 5.). As can be seen Mexican orientation and emerging adulthood experience had significant positive regression weights (Mex. Orientation, $\beta = .31$, EA total, $\beta = .22$). These results
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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<th>Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Instability</td>
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<td>Self-focused</td>
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<td>4.70</td>
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<td>In-between</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>3.82</td>
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</table>
Figure 2. Scree plot for component values as indicated on the IDEA for non-Mexican Americans

indicate that participants with higher scores on Mexican orientation and emerging adulthood experiences were predicted to also have higher scores regarding attitudes and beliefs towards familism. Specifically, the beta (β) coefficients indicate that as Mexican orientation scores increase by 1 standard deviation, the expected familism score will also increase by .314. Furthermore, as scores on emerging adulthood experience increase by 1 standard deviation, the expected familism score will increase by .22. Surprisingly, cultural generation did not contribute significantly to the multiple regression model, when it was predicted that those participants that have lived in the United States longer would score lower on the value of familism. Lastly, $R^2$ accounted for nearly 21 percent of the variance in familism. Although the variables do not account for a large amount of variance in familism, there is still a significant predictive relationship between Mexican
orientation, IDEA total and familism. This finding did not support the research hypothesis that increased scores on emerging adulthood as indicated by the IDEA would negatively influence individuals’ attitudes and beliefs towards familism as indicated on the Attitudinal Familism Scale.

Table 5

*Summary of Multiple Regression for Variables Predicting Familism*

| Variables                  | Unstandardized Coefficients | Standardized Coefficients |  |  |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|  |  |
| (Constant)                 | 2.84                        | 1.13                      | 2.51 | .01 |
| Cultural Generation Mexican Orientation | -.12 | .11 | -.14 | -1.09 | .28 |
| IDEA Total                 | .36 | .147 | .31 | 2.46 | .01 |
|                           | .57 | .28 | .22 | 2.10 | .04 |

*Note. *p < .001

Emerging Adult Experience and Mexican American Acculturation

A second multiple regression analysis was conducted for the Mexican American participant group to examine the relationship between emerging adulthood experience and the predictors: cultural generation level, Mexican orientation, and Anglo orientation as indicated on the ARSMA-II. It was predicted that the multiple regression model with all three predictors produced $R^2 = .041$, $F(3, 71) = 1.002$, N.S. As a result, none of the predictor values produced a significant relationship with emerging adulthood experience. Overall, emerging adulthood examined through Mexican orientation, Anglo
orientation and cultural generation level did not support the hypothesis that an increase in acculturation will result in an increase in the emerging adulthood experience.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The overall goal of this study was to broaden the scope of research on Mexican American experiences regarding acculturation and familism during the emerging adulthood period. The lack of cultural research on the emerging adulthood period calls for further exploration of this period. Arnett has defined the emerging adulthood period as a transition period between adolescence and adulthood ranging from 18-29 years of age. There are five features of the emerging adult period that are most prominent, they are: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities (Arnett, 2006, p.7). Though this theory has been predominantly studied on white Caucasian emerging adults, it is believed that minority cultures within highly industrialized societies may have cultural practices that lead to shortened or no emerging adult period at all (Arnett, 2000, p. 478). Therefore, this study seeks to examine the emerging adulthood period within the largest ethnic minority group in the United States, Mexican Americans. The present study also seeks to identify the most influential factors of the emerging adulthood period as well as the role that familism and acculturation play amongst Mexican American emerging adulthood experiences.
As Arnett (2003) indicates, the emerging adulthood period is not simply biological; it is a cultural and social process. Erickson (1968) indicates that adolescence is associated with asking the question, “Who am I?” Adolescence is a time when identity crisis is most paramount in the mind of a young person. The emerging adulthood period is most prominent in promoting identity exploration within the areas of: love, work and worldviews. This allows for a young person to explore the type of person they want to be while developing an identity. Emerging adulthood also allows young people to engage in activities that build life experiences such as exploring jobs and educational choices in preparation for their future adult roles. Furthermore, it is assumed that not all cultures will experience this process the same due to core cultural characteristics and values that may hold back or prevent the individual from experiencing the emerging adulthood period.

To a large extent, young emerging adults today explore identity formation on their own, without the daily companionship of their family of origin (Arnett, as cited in Jonsson, 1994; Morch, 1995). Consequently, the emerging adulthood age period may be problematic among young people who find themselves in internal and external conflict with finding their identity in a home and society where values clash (Padilla, 2006). For instance, Mexican immigrant parents may demand that their children hold onto their Mexican culture and values regardless of whether the young person has lived in Mexico, which places the children in conflict with the values and beliefs that are being taught at school in American society (Padilla, 2006, p. 472). Familism is a traditional Mexican American value which promotes family collectivism, allegiance and inclusiveness, and can therefore create conflict with younger generations that may place a higher value on
independence (Bulcroft, 1996; Keefe, 1984; Schwartz, 2007; Vega, 1990). Mexican American family interconnectedness and inclusiveness allows for Mexican parents to pass on their heritage culture to their children with the hopes of maintaining core family values and beliefs while living in another country that has opposing family values and beliefs.

While Mexican American emerging adults attempt to navigate through a society that values individualism and independence to find their own sense of self, Mexican values such as familism may be abandoned or weakened in order to establish successful dual cultural identities. When this occurs, intrafamilial and intercultural conflict increases stress between family members and Mexican American emerging adults (Rodriguez, 2007; Ramirez, 1969; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993; Cervantes et al., 1991).

This study examined five hypotheses as they relate to the emerging adult experiences of Mexican Americans. Hypothesis 1 (H1): Mexican Americans possess dual identities, which will result in the Mexican American group sharing some similar experiences to the comparison group during the emerging adulthood period. H2: Mexican Americans will hold stronger attitudes and beliefs towards familism compared to non-Mexican Americans. H3: An increase in cultural generation (those that have lived in the United States longer) will negatively influence Mexican American attitudes and beliefs towards familism. H4: Higher scores in emerging adulthood will have a negative relationship with Mexican American attitudes and beliefs towards familism. H5: Mexican American acculturation will have a positive influence on emerging adulthood experience.
Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis was partially supported in that there was a significant mean difference between the Mexican American group ($M = 3.45, SD = .72$) and the comparison group ($M = 1.63, SD = .55$) in orientation towards Mexican culture as measured by an independent samples t-test. As expected, the significant difference between the two groups demonstrates that only the Mexican American group is holding onto Mexican cultural values. A lack of significance was found when comparing group means among Mexican Americans and the comparison group in the areas of Anglo orientation and emerging adulthood experiences as measured by independent sample t-tests. This may be explained by Mexican American’s possessing dual bi-cultural identities in which Mexican Americans also embrace the individualistic values of the American majority culture (Arnett, 2003) These results indicate some shared experiences between the Mexican American group and the comparison group during the emerging adulthood period.

Additionally, an exploratory factor analysis was completed on the five features of emerging adulthood: identity exploration, possibilities, instability, self-focussed and feeling in-between to examine the Mexican American and comparison groups’ experiences of emerging adulthood. For both participant samples this analysis revealed that one significant factor, identity exploration, accounted for over 50 percent of the variance for the entire set of variables. This indicates that identity exploration is a prominent factor for both the Mexican American and comparison group. The similarities that exists between the Mexican American participants and the comparison group of
participants during emerging adulthood could be a result of both participant groups growing up in the United States, an industrialized society that promotes prolonged adolescence and free role experimentation (Arnett, 2006). Furthermore, the importance of Identity Exploration for both groups may be due to the identity conflict that arise during emerging adulthood. For instance, Mexican American emerging adults may experience identity conflict with Mexican cultural values, beliefs and expectations that may differ from the values of the dominant culture. Similarly, the non-Mexican American participants are also exploring their identities by addressing questions about future relationships with family members, expectations for the future and the characteristics they desire in themselves (Arnett, 2006).

**Hypothesis 2**

The second hypotheses addressed whether there are significant mean differences between the Mexican American and comparison group in their attitudes towards familism as measured by the Attitudinal Familism Scale. An independent samples t-test was run to analyze for group mean differences. The second hypothesis was supported, there was a significant mean difference between the Mexican American participants ($M = 6.90, SD = 1.09$) and the comparison group ($M = 6.34, SD = 1.44$) in regards to familism. These findings are consistent with past research which has suggested that familism is a core value to the Latino culture (Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003). Familism is defined as a cultural value that involves an individual’s identification with an attachment to his or her nuclear or extended family that results in strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among members of the same family (Lugo Steidel & Contreras, as cited in Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002; Cortes, 1995; Marin &
VanOss, Marin, 1991; Sabogal et al, 1987). Therefore, the retention of familism values amongst Mexican American emerging adults is supported in their higher scores on familism as compared to the comparison group.

An interesting observation that should be noted regarding familism is that there was only a slight difference between the means of the Mexican American participants ($M = 6.90$) and the comparison group ($M = 6.34$). The Attitudinal Familism Scale was rated on a 10 point likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree and 10 = strongly agree. It may be that the moderate familism mean within the Mexican American group is a result of greater acculturation to the dominant U. S society, influencing attitudes and beliefs towards familism. Moreover, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess whether a relationship exists between familism and acculturation. The results were not significant; there was no predictive relationship between acculturation and familism. This does not support the previous findings by Lugo Steidel and Contreras (2003) indicating more highly acculturated individuals adhere less to familism values.

Another inference that can be made regarding the small familism mean differences between groups is that familism may be a value system that is not only attributed to Mexican American cultures, but a broader universal value. This inference is supported by previous findings by Schwartz (2007) examining familism among Hispanics ($M = 3.57$), non-Hispanic whites ($M = 3.45$) and non-Hispanic blacks ($M = 3.61$). Schwartz too found a minimal difference between groups in familism values. Schwartz (2007) indicates that these results provide countervailing evidence that the construct of familism as measured by the Attitudinal Familism Scale is applicable across ethnic groups (Schwartz, 2007, pp. 112-113).
Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis predicted an increase in cultural generation level will negatively influence Mexican American attitudes and beliefs towards familism as measured by the Attitudinal Familism Scale. Using a multiple regression analysis to examine the variables, cultural generation level and familism as measured by the (Attitudinal Familism Scale), this hypothesis was not supported. The present study failed to find a significant relationship $R^2 = .206, F (3, 71) = 6.14, p = .28$, between cultural generation and familism values.

In a previous study, Lugo Steidel & Contreras (2003) found that first generation Latino participants adhered to overall familism stronger than other generation respondents. Although we are examining if a positive linear relationship with cultural generation level and familism exists, the lack of variability in generation level among Mexican American participants may have contributed to the present findings ($M = 2.20, SD = 1.00$). As mentioned previously, Lugo Steidel & Contreras (2003) indicated that in their study, individuals with greater exposure to U.S. culture showed less overall adherence to familism. The present study does not support the previous findings. But instead suggests that cultural generation level does not appear to significantly impact familism values.

Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis predicted the emerging adulthood period will negatively influence Mexican American attitudes and beliefs towards familism as measured by the Attitudinal Familism Scale. Using a multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between emerging adulthood experience and familism, the
hypothesis that emerging adulthood would negatively influence familism was not supported. Instead, there was significant positive linear relationship between the IDEA total and the Familism total $p = .040$.

An inference that can be made regarding these results is that regardless of ethnicity, as individuals increase their experience of the emerging adulthood period, they may require additional familial support in times of transition, especially during experiences of instability, and feeling in-between. Emerging adults often move in and out of their parent’s home as transitions through residential changes, college life, jobs and romantic partners occur. In addition, during the experience of feeling in-between, emerging adults often feel they lack the responsibility to be financially independent and make confident independent decisions. These emerging adult life experiences may require individuals to reach out and seek help and assistance from family.

The results of the multiple regression analysis also indicated that Mexican orientation as measured by the ARSMA-II has a significant positive linear relationship with familism $p = .016$. These findings indicate that as the scores on the IDEA and the ARSMA-II Mexican orientation subscale increase, so do the scores on the Attitudinal Familism scale. These finding are quite unique because the value of familism is attributed to family interconnectedness, strong identification and attachment to one’s family (Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003), where as emerging adulthood experiences are marked by individualistic character and quality (Arnett, 2003). Although the variables familism and emerging adulthood have not been studied mutually in previous studies, similar variables such as family capacity indicating caring and supporting family members has been examined. In a previous study, Arnett (2003) found that while Latino ethnic minorities
embrace individualism in some ways, they are also more likely than Whites to embrace
criteria related to family capacities. This present study supports Arnett’s findings in that
as Mexican orientation scores increase, so do attitudes and beliefs towards familism
among Mexican American emerging adults.

**Hypothesis 5**

The fifth hypothesis predicted Mexican American acculturation will positively
influence emerging adulthood experiences as measured by the IDEA. Emerging
adulthood characteristics represent cultural values such as independence that are highly
valued by American society, therefore those more acculturated would be expected to
score higher in emerging adulthood experience. Using a multiple regression analysis to
examine the variables, Mexican acculturation as measured by the ARSMA-II and
participant cultural generation level, were not predictive of emerging adult experience as
measured by the IDEA, $R^2 = .041$, $F(3, 71) = 1.002, N.S$. This hypothesis was not
supported.

Acculturation refers to the process by which individuals adapt or react to
foreign culture and usually this entails the adoption of new cultural practices or the
blending of cultures (Cheah & Nelson, as cited in Berry, 1998). The lack of significant
findings within acculturation and emerging adulthood experience can be attributed to the
bi-cultural identities that the Mexican Americans in this study presented in the previous
finding as explained by Hypothesis 1. Furthermore, the lack of previous research findings
amongst ethnic minorities examining acculturation and overall emerging adulthood
experience should be noted for further exploration.
Limitations and Recommendations

While the present study had several strengths in exploring the relationship between emerging adulthood, familism, and acculturation in Mexican American and non-Mexican American participants, there were also limitations to this study that should be addressed for future research. First, the number of participants in the study was fairly small for the purpose of comparing groups. The total number of participants was $n = 137$, in which 75 participants identified themselves as Mexican/Mexican Americans and 62 identified themselves as non-Mexican Americans. Therefore, due to the sample size, this study may have failed to find additional significant differences between the Mexican American group and comparison group during the emerging adulthood period. In future research it may be beneficial to increase the number of participants in both sample groups.

Second, there was a significant difference in the number of males and females that participated in the study. The study sample consisted of 36 male participants and 101 female participants. This may have been due to the recruitment context, participants were recruited from a college department with predominantly female students. However, it would be beneficial for future research to compare the male and female Mexican American experiences of emerging adulthood to investigate whether there is a relationship between familism and gender roles.

Lastly, the use of college students excluded some segments of the Mexican American population who have not completed or attended formal higher education as well as those who may not be fluent English speakers. According to Schwartz (as cited in Greene & Forster, 2003), this includes a large proportion of the Hispanic population, as
reports indicate that as of 2003 nearly half of all U.S. Hispanics did not complete high school. Additionally, our participant sample has spent more time in the American educational system, which increases exposure to individualist values. As a result, examining the relationship between emerging adulthood and familism values in a community sample of Mexican Americans may produce very different results compared to the current college student sample.

Despite these limitations, the present study indicates differences do exist between Mexican American emerging adults and non-Mexican Americans in regards to attitudes and beliefs about familism. But the minimal difference between groups also indicates that Mexican Americans living in the United States may be experiencing emerging adulthood similar to non-Mexican Americans.

This study provides a framework for future research during the emerging adulthood period in that it narrows down the scope of differences experienced between Mexican Americans and non-Mexican Americans, when taking into account acculturation, gender, and cultural generation. These results increase our knowledge on emerging adulthood as it is experienced by Mexican Americans, as well as the roles that acculturation and familism values play in the emerging adulthood experience.
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