

## Sampling and Recruitment in Studies of Cultural Influences on Adjustment: A Case Study With Mexican Americans

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Research examining how cultural factors affect adjustment of ethnic minority individuals would be strengthened if study samples better represented the diversity within these populations. To recruit a representative sample of Mexican American families, the authors implemented a multiple-step process that included sampling communities to represent diversity in cultural and economic conditions, recruiting participants through schools, using culturally attractive recruitment processes, conducting interviews in participants' homes, and providing a financial incentive. The result was a sample of 750 families that were diverse in cultural orientation, social class, and type of residential communities and were similar to the census description of this population. Thus, using culturally appropriate adaptations to common recruitment strategies makes it possible to recruit representative samples of Mexican Americans.

*Keywords:* community, culture, Mexican Americans, recruitment, sampling

The Surgeon General's Report (Thompson, 2001) made it clear that culturally influenced lifestyles, beliefs, and practices affect people's risk for health problems and how they respond when such occur. The Surgeon General's report argued that programs and policies affecting ethnic minorities' health can be improved only through greatly expanded knowledge of when and how culture matters. Social scientists also have called for expanded research on culture to determine the generalizability of theories and interventions, as well as to understand the specific needs of, and develop interventions for, minority groups (e.g., Chang & Sue, 2005; Hall & Maramba, 2001; Utsey, Walker, & Kwate, 2005). However, studies rarely have included sufficient numbers of ethnic minorities or immigrants to address questions about the role of culture in health, adjustment, or development. Furthermore, when samples have included sufficient numbers of immigrants or minorities, research

designs rarely provided the opportunity for adequate analyses to identify and understand the role of culture (Cauce, Coronado, & Watson, 1998; Chang & Sue, 2005). In fact, the modal research design used in studies on cultural issues compares an ethnic minority sample—usually English-speaking, low-income, inner city residents—to a middle-class European American sample and attributes any differences to cultural factors (Cauce, Coronado, & Watson, 1998; Gonzales, Knight, Morgan-Lopez, Saenz, & Sirolli, 2002).

The primary weakness of studies with such limited samples is that they represent only a select subgroup of the minority population and fail to represent the diversity within that group. For instance, although middle-class families constitute a majority of almost every ethnic group, studies of ethnic minorities usually focus on low-income families. Similarly, although immigrants who speak little or no English make up a significant portion of the population in many minority groups, most research on these groups is conducted exclusively in English. Results from such select samples may grossly misrepresent characteristics of the population of interest, which is particularly important in the study of cultural issues. Furthermore, results from studies with unrepresentative samples often imply that the minority group's culture is somehow inferior (Cauce, Coronado, & Watson, 1998; Cauce, Ryan, & Grove, 1998), in part because such designs often confound ethnicity, culture, and social class (Mertens, 1998). To make progress in finding answers to critical questions related to culture, researchers must implement methodological strategies specifically designed to identify if, when, and how much culture matters to families and individuals (Cauce, Coronado, & Watson, 1998; Chang & Sue, 2005; Mertens, 1998; Thompson,

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ASU will use the information we get from this study to develop programs to help families and children throughout the community.

Your family will be asked questions about your feelings, experiences and attitudes about your community, your family, and your child's school. Because this is a study of how children develop, we will contact you *again in two years* for follow up interviews to see how things have changed since this first interview. In fact, we hope to be able to follow the development of all children in this study for several years. However, you will have the right to agree to take part in the study, or refuse to take part in it, each time we contact you. The interview will last about 2 ½ hours for each of you. Your family will be paid \$45 per person for taking part in this first interview.

All research materials were available in English and Spanish, and the computer-assisted personal interviews were programmed to make it possible to switch between languages as needed to help those, usually somewhat bilingual children, whose working vocabulary was split across languages. Most interviewers were fluently bilingual; English-only interviewers were assigned to cases only when the screening process indicated that there was no possibility that Spanish would be needed. If a family canceled a scheduled interview, they were given two additional opportunities to participate before being dropped from consideration. These "soft refusals" are not uncommon among this population and fit with traditional Mexican cultural values of respect; families did not want to say "no" to authority figures such as research personnel. Each family member was given their cash incentive immediately after signing a consent or assent form so that it was clear that they could keep the incentive even if they quit the study. Cash is preferred by low-income adults because they often do not have bank accounts and have to pay a fee to cash a check. Undocumented immigrants sometimes do not have identification that banks or check-cashing services require. All procedures were reviewed and approved by the university's institutional review board and conformed to American Psychological Association ethical standards.

### *Other Methods and Procedures*

To place the sampling and recruitment procedures into context, we briefly summarize other aspects of the methods and procedures: This study used a longitudinal design that included parent and child interviews when children were in grades 5 and 7. Interviews covered such constructs as parenting behavior, parent-child relationship quality, marital quality, stressors experienced, and perceptions of the quality of community and school. To assess culture, we asked parents and children to complete measures of cultural values, ethnic identity, ethnic pride, cultural socialization, and the degree to which participants used English and Spanish. Data from school principals and teachers described children's classroom behavior and academic performance and the degree to which schools were supportive of Mexican culture.

## Results

With an average response rate (i.e., forms returned) of 86.1% to classroom recruitment, 2,137 families from several ethnic groups indicated interest in the study, although recruitment materials stated that only Latino families were sought. After screening, 1,085 families met criteria for participation, 830 were ineligible, 12 could not be contacted, 55 refused before eligibility could be determined, and 155 were not screened because quotas for their children's schools had already been reached (see Figure 1). Of the 830 ineligible families, 56 were ineligible because the child no longer attended a participating school, 99 because the biological mother was not in the home, 404 because at least one parent was not Mexican American, 243 because a nonbiological father figure lived in the home, 16 because the child had a serious learning disability, 3 because there was a language barrier (i.e., spoke an indigenous dialect), and 9 because the families were already participating in related studies. Of the 1,085 eligible cases, 750 families (73.2%) completed interviews; this rate was over 70% for both English and Spanish speakers. The targeted sample size was reached before 61 cases could be scheduled, and in 4 cases families terminated interviews before completion. A total of 270 eligible families that initially agreed to participate later refused: 172 refused before scheduling, 74 refused after scheduling, 17 had multiple unexcused cancellations of interview appointments and were considered "soft refusals," and 7 refused during the interview.

The majority of parents who participated in this study were born in Mexico, described themselves as Mexican, and preferred to speak Spanish. In contrast, a majority of children were born in the United States, described themselves as Mexican American, and preferred English (see Table 1). Although Mexican Americans are commonly described as having little education, over 25% of both mothers and fathers in this sample had some education beyond high school. Almost all fathers and nearly two thirds of the mothers were employed. About two out of five families had incomes less than \$25,000, about two-fifths had incomes between \$25,001 and \$50,000, and almost one-fifth had incomes above \$50,000. When compared to census data for the metropolitan area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), this sample was reasonably similar to the local Mexican American population in terms of parental education, father's employment status, income, and children's language. On the other hand, mothers were more likely to be employed and parents were more likely to have been born in Mexico than one would expect from the census data. The largest discrepancy between the sample and census data was in language use, which may be partially due to differences in indicators (i.e., language used in the interview vs. self-report ratings of language ability, respectively).

Children in this study attended fairly segregated schools, with more than half attending schools with at least a 75% Latino enrollment (Table 2). In contrast, almost one third of participating students were distinct minorities in their schools. Similarly, most children attended economically segregated schools; over 60% were in schools where at least

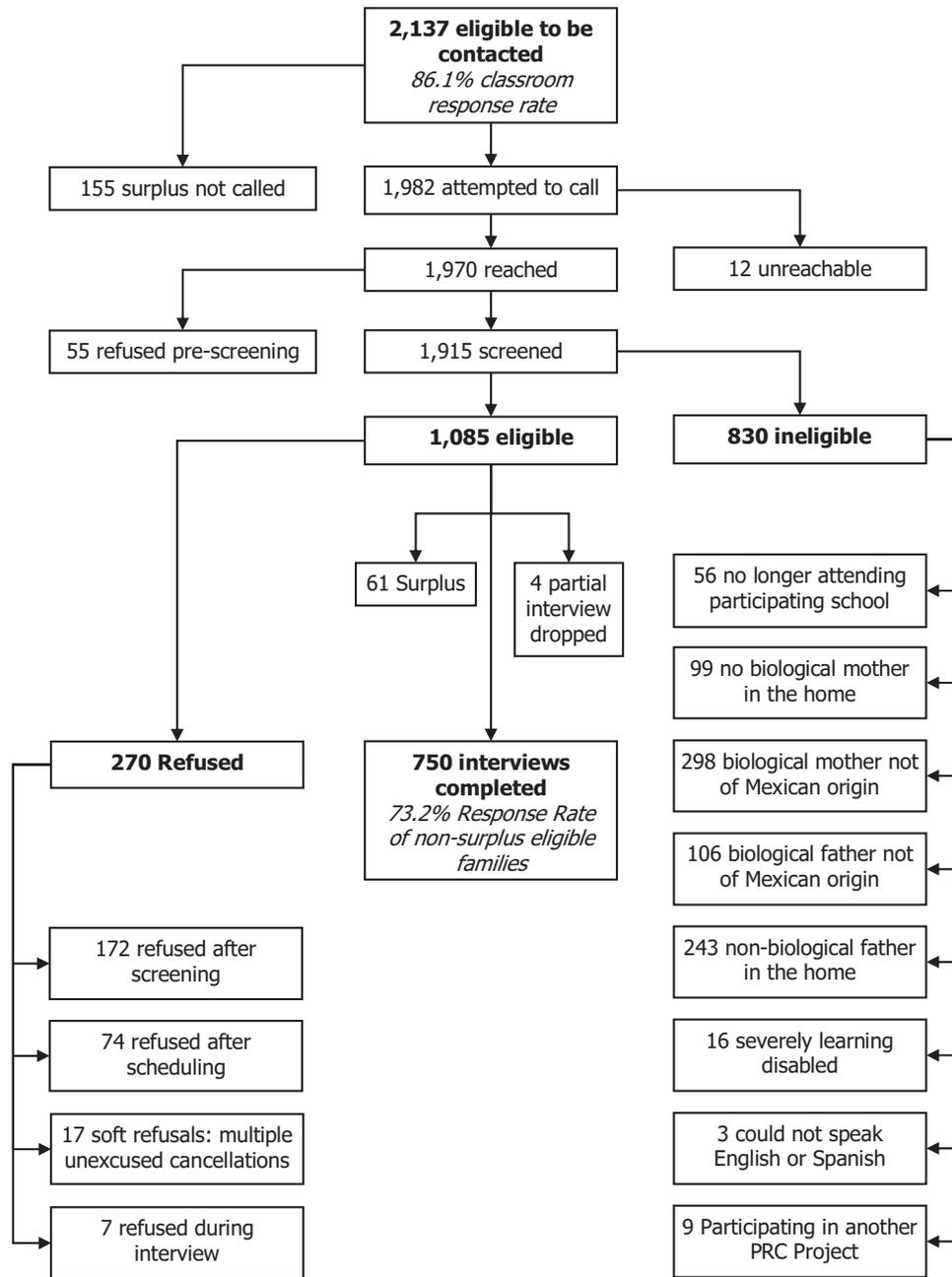


Figure 1. Response rate throughout the recruitment and interviewing processes. PRC = Prevention Research Center.

75% of the students qualified for free school lunch, an indicator of poverty level. However, participating families lived in quite diverse neighborhoods. Fewer than one fifth lived in ethnic enclaves with Latino densities above 50%. Only about one fifth lived in neighborhoods in which more than half of the families were living below the poverty level. Thus, the sample obtained was quite diverse on multiple characteristics. Was it necessary to include the first step in the sampling process, sampling diverse communities, to

achieve this level of sample diversity? One way to answer this question is to examine intraclass correlations (ICCs) for key study variables. ICCs represent the degree to which there is more variability between units (e.g., communities) studied than within these units; nonsignificant ICCs indicate that there is more variation within a unit than between units. For indicators of social class (e.g., parent education and family income), ICCs were significant ( $p < .05$ ) and ranged from .08 to .34. For parent reports of neighborhood quality,