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Mexican American Fathers' Occupational Conditions: Links to Family Members' Psychological Adjustment

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Abstract

To examine the implications of fathers' occupational conditions (i.e., income, work hours, shift work, pressure, workplace racism, and underemployment) for family members' psychological adjustment, home interviews were conducted with fathers, mothers, and two adolescent offspring in each of 218 Mexican American families. Results underscored the importance of acculturation as a moderator. Fathers' income was negatively associated with depressive symptoms in highly acculturated families but not in less acculturated families. In contrast, fathers' reports of workplace racism were positively associated with depressive symptoms in less acculturated families but not in more acculturated family contexts. These findings were consistent across all 4 family members, suggesting that the "long arm" of the jobs held by Mexican American fathers extends to mothers and adolescent offspring.

Keywords

adolescents; fathers; Mexican American families; occupational stressors; work and family

The literature on the implications of parents' employment for families and children has focused almost exclusively on European American, middle-class, and professional families (Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000); much less is known about the implications of parents' work for minority families and children. This lacuna is problematic because members of minority groups are more likely to experience negative occupational conditions, such as low wages, discrimination, and underemployment, which may pose challenges for them and their families. A second limitation of this literature is that it has typically focused on employment status despite calls for investigators to go beyond status to consider the occupational conditions that parents experience at work (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1982; Parcel & Menaghan, 1994). Conceptualizing employed parents' occupational conditions as an important feature of the extrafamilial context is consistent with an ecological perspective on human development (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter). Some have referred to these work-family linkages as "the long arm of the job" (Crouter & McHale, 2005; Lynd & Lynd, 1929).

To address these lacunae, we examined the links between fathers' occupational conditions and family members' adjustment in a sample of Mexican American, two-parent families with adolescent offspring. A hallmark of the ecological perspective is the notion that extrafamilial contextual conditions may have different consequences for individuals in different kinds of family environments. In Mexican American families, one source of variation in how larger social, political, and economic forces are translated into family dynamics has to do with parents' *acculturation*, that is, the extent to which they have adopted the values, attitudes, language, and practices of the dominant culture (Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Gonzales, Knight, Morgan-Lopez, Saenz, & Sirolli, 2002; Rogler, Cortes, & Malady, 1991). Conceptualizing acculturation as a source of ecological variation across Mexican American families that might shape how family members interpret and react to fathers' work circumstances, we explored parents' acculturation as a moderator of the effects of fathers' work conditions on family members' well-being.

Links Between Fathers' Occupational Conditions and Adjustment

The literature has identified several occupational conditions as potentially problematic for working fathers and, by extension, their families. These include low wages (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; McLoyd, 1998; Parcel & Menaghan, 1994), long work hours (Crouter, Bumpus, Head, & McHale, 2001; Parcel & Menaghan), nonstandard shifts (Presser, 2003), work pressure (Crouter, Bumpus, Maguire, & McHale, 1999), racism in the workplace (Hughes & Dodge, 1997), and underemployment (Friedland & Price, 2003). In reviewing the literature on the implications of these occupational conditions for psychological adjustment, we focus on studies of Mexican Americans where possible, but because the literature is so scant, we also include studies of other groups. A second caveat is that most research has focused on employed adults as individuals; only a few studies have examined *crossover*, that is, the links between employees' occupational conditions and spousal (e.g., Crouter et al., 1999) or offspring (e.g., Galambos, Sears, Almeida, & Kolaric, 1995) psychological well-being.

Low wages

Many Mexican American families, especially immigrant and less educated families, have low incomes (Hernandez, 2004) that jeopardize living standards and heighten feelings of economic strain (Parke et al., 2004). Because fathers are often the primary earners in Mexican American families (Baca Zinn & Wells, 2000; Coltrane, 1996; Golding, 1990), their wages are particularly important. A body of research indicates that low parental income, especially income near or below the poverty line, is problematic for parents and offspring (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Parke et al.). For example, in a large probability sample of Mexican-origin adults living in Fresno, California, adults earning lower incomes reported significantly more depressive symptoms (Finch, Kolody, & Vega, 2000).

Long work hours

Fathers who spend long hours on the job may be less available at home and, when physically present, may be fatigued and less engaged in family life. In a study of Canadian dual-earner families, Galambos and Walters (1992) found that fathers' long hours were linked to fathers' own stress, including depressive symptoms, but not to wives' stress. Crouter et al. (2001), in a sample of European American dual-earner families, found that long paternal work hours (i.e., over 60 hours per week) were associated with lower quality father-adolescent relationships, but only when fathers felt overloaded. The same study found no connections between fathers' long work hours and the quality of their marital relationships perhaps because, in established families with adolescents, long paternal work hours reflect a subsistence strategy about which there is partner agreement.

Nonstandard shifts

As American workplaces transition to a 24 hours/7 days a week economy, increasing numbers of employees, particularly members of minority groups, have work schedules that involve hours other than standard daytime, weekday hours (Presser, 2003). Smith, Folkard, and Fuller (2003) noted that working a nonstandard shift is associated with elevated psychological distress, a function in part of the disruptions in sleep and physiological functioning that accompany working afternoon, night, or rotating shifts. Working nonstandard shifts also poses challenges for families because shift working parents are often not at home during times of the day that are typically devoted to family life (Presser).

Work pressure

Work pressure reflects experiences such as frequent deadlines and fast pace that may be emotionally and physically depleting. To date, studies have focused on European American samples. Using a design that focused on daily variation in work experiences, Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, and Wethington (1989) found that, on days when men had experienced high demands at work, their wives experienced high demands at home. This suggests a compensation mechanism: If wives take on more responsibilities at home when their husbands face more responsibilities at work, fathers' work pressure may have negative implications for wives' psychological well-being. In a study of families with adolescents, fathers' work pressure predicted fathers' and mothers' feelings of role overload; parents' role overload in turn predicted higher levels of parent-adolescent conflict, which was associated with lower adolescent psychological well-being (Crouter et al., 1999).

Racism and discrimination

Although discrimination and racism have been implicated as correlates of depressive symptoms in a variety of studies of minority populations (e.g., Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999), little research has focused specifically on Mexican Americans. In their study of Mexican-origin adults living in Fresno, California, Finch et al. (2000, p. 309) found "a clear, direct relationship between perceived discrimination and depressive symptomatology." Furthermore, in line with our interest in the possible moderating role of acculturation, Finch et al. noted that the association between perceived discrimination and depressive symptoms was stronger for more acculturated than for less acculturated adults.

As is the case for most research in this area, Finch et al. (2000) used a general measure of discrimination in everyday life; few investigations have examined workplace discrimination. In an exception to that rule, Hughes and Dodge (1997) found that workplace discrimination was a more important predictor of African American mothers' perceptions of job quality than many more commonly studied work dimensions, such as task variety and supervision. Hughes and Dodge did not link perceptions of workplace discrimination to depressive affect, but, given the literature linking general perceptions of discrimination to depressive symptoms (e.g., Kessler et al., 1999), this link is logical.

Underemployment

Typically, researchers have defined underemployment as working involuntarily less than full-time or working for poverty-level wages (e.g., Dooley & Prause, 2004). Friedland and Price (2003) adopted a more expansive definition, arguing that someone can be underemployed in terms of work hours, income, skill, or status. Using data from a nationally representative sample of adults, they found that, of these four types of underemployment, only income-based underemployment significantly predicted increases in depressive symptoms over time. Noting their somewhat weak and inconsistent results, Friedland and Price (2003, p. 41) underscored

the need to develop measures that ask respondents directly “about the fit between their skills and the requirements of their jobs,” the approach taken here.

Do the Effects of Fathers’ Occupational Conditions Vary as a Function of Acculturation?

Consistent with our grounding in the ecology of human development, we were interested in whether the effects of fathers’ work conditions on family members varied as a function of how acculturated families were to the majority culture’s values, attitudes, language, and behavior. As noted above, in a community sample of Mexican-origin adults, Finch et al. (2000, p. 308) found that “higher levels of acculturation are associated with more detrimental effects of perceived discrimination on depression.” We extended this line of inquiry to examine the links between a variety of occupational stressors, including racism and discrimination in the workplace, and depressive symptoms in employed Mexican American fathers, their spouses, and their adolescent offspring.

The concept of acculturation is fraught with controversy. On the one hand, Hunt, Schneider, and Comer (2004) delivered a stinging critique of research on acculturation, arguing that the construct has been so poorly conceptualized and measured that it reflects ethnic stereotyping. Gonzales et al. (2002), on the other hand, concurred that the construct has often been oversimplified but argued that research on acculturation still has the promise to reveal important dimensions of Mexican American family life. Gonzales et al. (2002, p. 67) elaborated that what is needed are multidimensional measures of acculturation that go beyond superficial indicators, such as language use, to include “the major behavioral and attitudinal domains related to these processes.” Gonzales et al. also noted that acculturation has been treated too often as a simple main effect in models predicting Latino mental health; they urged researchers to develop more complex models that examine acculturation in concert with other important contextual and family process phenomena, an argument that guided our approach.

Because so much of the literature on acculturation has focused on main effects rather than interactions, however, there is little research available to guide our thinking about its possible role as a moderator. Indeed, an argument can be made for either low or high acculturation as a risk factor (see Rogler et al., 1991). On the one hand, being less acculturated may come with certain assets, and acculturation may bring certain risks. As Finch et al. (2000, p. 297) explained, “While the experience of immigration may lead to higher transitional stress and role strain, immigrants may have superior social and psychological resources and lower expectations for income and employment status.” Similarly, Mexican Americans in highly acculturated families may come to identify with the value system prevailing in the United States that emphasizes individualism and materialism (Triandis, 1995). To the extent that fathers are not successful on these terms because they earn low wages, encounter racism on the job, and so on, there may be stronger associations between fathers’ negative work conditions and family members’ depressive symptoms in highly acculturated than in less acculturated families. On the other hand, less acculturated families may be particularly vulnerable to fathers’ negative work conditions because fathers are accorded especially high status in these contexts, making the provider role a high-stakes venture. With little previous research to guide us, our analyses of the role of acculturation are exploratory.

Fathers’ occupational conditions and acculturation processes do not occur in a vacuum. Mothers’ involvement in paid work is a possible source of family economic support, as well as of strain, that should be taken into account. In our analyses, we controlled for the number of hours mothers were involved in paid work. We also controlled for gender because girls typically report higher levels of depressive symptoms than boys in adolescence (Ge, Conger, & Elder, 2001), mirroring the pattern for women versus men in adulthood (Nolen-Hoeksema,

1987). One of the values that shifts as families become acculturated has to do with notions about the appropriate roles for men and women (Leaper & Valin, 1996). Thus, in our analyses we examined whether our results reflected acculturation per se or a related but less culture-specific phenomenon, gender ideology.

Research Questions

In sum, this study addressed two questions:

1. How are Mexican American fathers' occupational conditions (i.e., income, work hours, nonstandard shifts, work pressure, workplace racism, and perceptions of underemployment) associated with fathers', mothers', and adolescent offspring's depressive symptoms?
2. Are the associations between fathers' occupational conditions and family members' adjustment moderated by acculturation?

We used multilevel models (MLM) to address these questions with data from four family members: mothers, fathers, and two adolescent offspring.

METHOD

Participants

The data came from a study of family socialization and adolescent development in Mexican American families (Updegraff, McHale, Whiteman, Thayer, & Crouter, in press; Updegraff, McHale, Whiteman, Thayer, & Delgado, 2005). The sample included 246 families who were recruited through schools in and around a Southwestern metropolitan area. Criteria for participation were (a) a biological mother and a biological or long-term adoptive father in the home (nonbiological fathers had lived with mothers and adolescents for at least 10 years), (b) a target seventh grader and at least one older adolescent sibling at home, (c) fathers worked at least 20 hours per week, and (d) mothers were of Mexican origin. (Although it was not a criterion for participation, 93% of fathers were also of Mexican origin.) Families' names were obtained from five school districts and five parochial schools representing a wide range of socioeconomic circumstances. Letters and brochures describing the project (in English and Spanish) were sent to 1,851 families with a nonlearning disabled seventh grader. Follow-up telephone calls were made by bilingual staff to determine eligibility and interest in participation. For 438 families (24%), the contact information was incorrect, and it was not possible to locate them. An additional 42 (2.4%) families moved between initial screening and final recruitment contact, and 8% refused to be screened. Eligible families included 21% of the initial rosters (29% of those screened). Of those eligible, 75% agreed to participate and 64% completed interviews. Of the 246 participating families, 28 were dropped from these analyses because of (a) the father not being employed (despite reporting being employed when screened; $n = 8$) and (b) missing data on one or more key variables ($n = 20$; in 17 cases, fathers were missing data on workplace racism, usually because they were self-employed). Thus, these analyses focus on 218 families.

The percent of families in poverty was 18.3%, almost identical to the Census 2000 figure (18.6%) for Mexican American families with the same demographic characteristics from the same county. Median annual income for fathers was \$30,000 ($SD = \$39,828$), and median family income was \$38,300 ($SD = \$44,156$). Fathers averaged 47.99 work hours a week ($SD = 12.54$) including time at work and time spent at home on job-related activities. The average National Opinion Research Center (NORC) prestige rating of fathers' occupations (see Nakao & Treas, 1994) was 35.96 ($SD = 11.98$), representing occupations such as machine operators, sales workers, and semi-skilled laborers. Two thirds of mothers were employed for pay. Parents

had completed an average of 10 years of education ($M = 10.15$; $SD = 3.68$ for mothers, and $M = 9.67$; $SD = 4.25$ for fathers). Mean ages were 38.9 years for mothers ($SD = 4.38$) and 41.4 years for fathers ($SD = 5.43$). Most parents had been born outside the United States (76% of mothers and fathers); this subset of parents had lived in the United States an average of 12.3 ($SD = 8.6$) and 14.6 ($SD = 8.5$) years for mothers and fathers, respectively. Slightly more than 70% of interviews with parents were conducted in Spanish. Older offspring were 15.78 years of age on average ($SD = 1.56$); 51% were girls, 49% were born in the United States, and 81% conducted their interview in English. Younger offspring were 12.77 years of age on average ($SD = .58$); 51% were girls, 60% were born in the United States, and 84% conducted their interview in English.

Procedure

Individual home interviews were conducted in respondents' language of choice by bilingual interviewers using laptop computers. Interviews lasted an average of 3 hours for parents and 2 hours for adolescents. The interview protocols were designed to hold respondents' interest by covering a variety of topics and including breaks. Questions were read aloud because of variability in reading levels. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interview, and families received a \$100 honorarium.

Measures

All measures for this study were forward and back translated into Spanish for local Mexican dialect using the procedures described by Foster and Martinez (1995). Discrepancies were resolved, and an independent Mexican American staff member reviewed all instructions and items as a final step. Pilot and measurement work was conducted to ensure that measures were reliable and valid in both Spanish and English and for Mexican American individuals.

Fathers' occupational conditions—*Income* was assessed by fathers' reports of how much they earned annually before taxes and other deductions. Because income was positively skewed, a log linear transformation was performed. To assess *work hours*, weekly hours fathers spent at work and on job-related activities at home were summed. We asked fathers to report their typical work *shift* using eight choices: (a) day shift, for example, 8 or 9 a.m. to 5 or 6 p.m.; (b) day shift primarily but also requires additional hours in the evening or on weekends; (c) afternoon/evening shift, for example, 3 p.m. to 11 p.m.; (d) night shift, for example, 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.; (e) rotating shift (works different shifts on a regular basis); (f) split shift, for example, hours in the morning and the evening; (g) routine travel, work involves being away at least several days a week; and (h) other. Because nonstandard shifts were fairly rare, we combined Options a and b into *standard shift* ($n = 162$) and the other options into *nonstandard shift* ($n = 56$). *Work pressure* was measured with the Work Pressure Scale from the Work Environment Scale (Moos, 1986; Moos & Moos, 1983). This 9-item scale assesses the degree to which work pressures and time demands characterize the participant's job (e.g., "There is constant pressure to keep working") on a scale from *very true* (1) to *very untrue* (5). Because this scale had not been validated in a Latino sample, psychometric analyses were conducted that revealed that six of the nine items loaded onto a single factor. The three remaining items did not load on one dimension and were omitted. All items were reverse coded and averaged to create a scale score, with higher scores indicating greater pressure (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$ for English-speaking fathers, $.72$ for Spanish-speaking fathers). *Racism in the workplace* was measured by combining Hughes and Dodge's (1997) measures of Institutional Discrimination and Interpersonal Prejudice in the Workplace, which were highly correlated ($r = .46$, $p < .001$), to form a single scale. This 12-item scale assesses the extent that fathers experience discrimination and bias in the workplace (e.g., "Mexicans/Mexican Americans get the least desirable assignments"). Items were rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*), with high scores reflecting high racism ($\alpha = .90$ for English-speaking and $.88$ for Spanish-speaking

fathers). *Underemployment* was measured using seven items created for this study to measure fathers' perceptions about whether their jobs tap their full earning and skill potential (e.g., "Given my skills, education, and experience, I should be in a better job than my current job"). Fathers rated the items on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Items were averaged, with higher scores indicating higher perceived underemployment ($\alpha = .82$ for English-speaking and .93 for Spanish-speaking fathers).

Acculturation—Acculturation was measured using the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans II (ARSMA-II), a 30-item scale adapted by Cuéllar, Arnold, and Maldonado (1995) from the original version (ARSMA-I; Cuéllar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980). The scale assesses cultural orientation toward Mexican and Anglo cultures through two subscales, the Anglo Orientation subscale and the Mexican Orientation subscale. Respondents used a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely often or always*) to indicate how applicable each item was during the past year (e.g., "I like to identify myself as a Mexican American," "I speak Spanish," "I associate with Anglos," "My family cooks Mexican foods"). For the Mexican Orientation and Anglo Orientation subscales, alphas were above .70 for all family members in both English and Spanish. A single measure of acculturation was created by subtracting the Mexican Orientation Scale from the Anglo Orientation Scale as previous studies have done (e.g., Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Gamst et al., 2002). Parents' acculturation scores were highly correlated with choosing to speak English in the home interviews ($r = 0.82, p < .001$; $r = 0.80, p < .001$, for mothers and fathers, respectively). Thus, in our analyses, we cannot disentangle acculturation and language use.

Depressive symptoms—Fathers', mothers', and adolescents' depressive symptoms were assessed using the 20-item Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) (Radloff, 1977). The CES-D has been used in previous research with Mexican American samples (e.g., Moscicki, Rae, Regier, & Locke, 1987). Respondents rated the items using a scale from 1 (*rarely or none of the time*) to 4 (*most of the time*) to describe the frequency of their experiences (e.g., "I had crying spells") (all α s $> .85$ in English and Spanish).

Maternal employment—Mothers reported whether they were employed and, if so, for how many hours per week. Because 73 mothers did not hold paid jobs, the work hours variable was not normally distributed. We therefore coded mothers' work hours into three roughly equal categories (*low*: 0 – 9 hours; *part time*: 10 – 39 hours; *full time*: 40 or more hours per week).

Gender ideology—To explore whether the acculturation findings could be explained by *gender ideology*, we adapted a measure by Hoffman and Kloska (1995) that originally consisted of two subscales, one focused on marriage and the other on childrearing. Psychometric analyses on this sample revealed that all but three items loaded on a single factor reflecting gender traditionality (sample item: "A husband's job is more important than a wife's"). We omitted the 3 items and treated the remaining 10 items as one scale ($\alpha = .90$ and .86, for mothers and fathers, respectively.)

RESULTS

Preliminary Descriptive Findings

Table 1 presents a correlation matrix of the main variables used in these analyses. As can be seen in the upper left quadrant, some of the six occupational conditions are interrelated, generally in ways one would expect. Men who earned more income worked longer hours and felt less underemployed. Higher levels of racism on the job was associated with longer hours, higher pressure, and greater underemployment. Family members' scores on depressive symptoms were positively correlated. The more acculturated fathers were, the more they

earned, the more hours they worked, and the less they reported racism on the job and underemployment. The correlates of maternal acculturation mirrored those of fathers'. Indeed, parents' acculturation scores were highly and positively intercorrelated, probably reflecting patterns of homogamy, the fact that some couples immigrated to the United States together, and the fact that some of the acculturation items pertain to family-wide phenomena (e.g., "My family cooks Mexican foods"). In comparison to mothers who worked 40 hours or more a week, mothers employed very few hours were less acculturated, as were their spouses.

How Are Fathers' Occupational Conditions Linked to Family Members' Depressive Symptoms?

We next examined associations between fathers' occupational conditions and adjustment using MLM, specifically the Proc Mixed program in SAS, a statistical package that extends multiple regression to nested data. Our design included two levels:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Level 1 : depressive symptoms}_{ij} \\ = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}\text{family member}_{ij} + \beta_{2j}\text{gender}_{ij} + r_{ij} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Level 2 : } \beta_{0ij} = & \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}\text{father's acculturation} \\ & + \gamma_{02}\text{mother's work hours} \\ & + \gamma_{03}\text{father's shift} \\ & + \gamma_{04}\text{father's work hours} \\ & + \gamma_{05}\text{father's income} \\ & + \gamma_{06}\text{father's work pressure} \\ & + \gamma_{07}\text{father's underemployment} \\ & + \gamma_{08}\text{father's workplace racism} \end{aligned}$$

$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$$

The Level 1 unit of analysis was the individual family member and included dummy codes for family member (1 = *mother*, 2 = *older sibling*, 3 = *younger sibling*, 4 = *father*, the reference group) and gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*). The Level 2 unit of analysis was the family and included family-level characteristics, shared by the group, including mother's work hours (0 = *9 hours or fewer per week*; 1 = *10 – 39 hours per week*; 2 = *40 or more hours per week*, the reference group), the six occupational stressors, and acculturation. In the analyses focused on moderating effects, Level 2 also included the Acculturation $\times$ Stressor interaction terms. All models were specified with random intercepts only.

The first analysis focused on the six paternal occupational conditions as main effects. This analysis controlled for (a) father's acculturation to examine the implications of work conditions holding constant cultural antecedents (e.g., facility in English and involvement in Anglo culture) of occupational choice, (b) mother's involvement in paid employment to hold constant that source of possible economic support or strain, and (c) gender. Because father's income was one of the occupational measures of substantive interest, including it in effect controlled for socioeconomic status.

As can be seen in Table 2, the dummy variables reflecting family member revealed that older and younger offspring reported higher levels of depressive symptoms than did fathers (the reference group), but mothers and fathers did not differ significantly. In addition, girls and women reported higher levels of depressive symptoms compared to boys and men. When mothers worked part time (i.e., 10 – 39 hours), family members reported more depressive symptoms than when mothers worked full time (≥ 40 hours, the reference group), but there was no difference in family members' depressive symptoms when mothers worked very few hours (i.e., 0 – 9 hours) compared to full time. Two paternal work stressors were associated with

depressive symptoms: The less income fathers earned and the more racism they reported on the job, the more depressive symptoms family members reported.

In a follow-up analysis, we added Income $\times$ Family Member and Racism $\times$ Family Member interaction terms to test whether the significant associations were the same across family members. Both interactions were significant, $F(3, 645) = 2.62, p = .05$, $F(3, 644) = 7.09, p < .001$, for income and racism, respectively. Thus, we next examined the estimates for the four different family members. Income was a significant negative correlate of depressive symptoms for fathers, $\gamma = -.19, SE = 0.05, t = -3.97, p < .001$, mothers, $\gamma = -0.11, SE = 0.05, t = -2.40, p < .05$, and younger offspring, $\gamma = -0.21, SE = 0.05, t = -4.41, p < .001$, but not for older offspring, although that effect was in the same direction, $\gamma = -0.07, SE = 0.05, t = -1.56, p = .12$. We then compared these associations for pairs of family members. The links between fathers' income and depressive symptoms were not significantly different for fathers, mothers, and younger offspring, but were significantly different for older offspring versus fathers, $\gamma = 0.11, SE = 0.06, t = 2.05, p < .05$, and for older versus younger offspring, $\gamma = 0.14, SE = 0.06, t = 2.45, p < .05$. In other words, older offspring were the only family members not to report higher depressive symptoms in the face of lower paternal income, and in this they differed significantly from their fathers and younger siblings.

Fathers' report of racism in the workplace was a significant and positive correlate of depressive symptoms for fathers, $\gamma = 0.13, SE = 0.05, t = 2.43, p < .02$, and mothers, $\gamma = 0.23, SE = 0.05, t = 4.33, p < .001$, but not for older, $\gamma = 0.02, SE = 0.05, t = 0.40, ns$, or younger offspring, $\gamma = -0.06, SE = 0.05, t = -1.14, ns$. Comparing estimates for pairs of family members, we found that this association did not differ for mothers versus fathers or older versus younger offspring, but that the association was significantly different for mothers versus older, $\gamma = 0.21, SE = 0.07, t = 3.10, p < .01$, and younger offspring, $\gamma = 0.29, SE = 0.07, t = 4.32, p < .001$, and for fathers versus younger offspring, $\gamma = -0.19, SE = 0.07, t = -2.82, p < .01$. The associations for fathers and older offspring were not different, $\gamma = -0.11, SE = 0.07, t = -1.60, p = .11$. In sum, when fathers reported more racism in the workplace, parents reported higher depressive symptoms but offspring did not, and this generational difference in association was significant for parents versus younger offspring and partially so for parents versus older offspring.

Does Acculturation Moderate the Links Between Occupational Conditions and Adjustment?

We next explored whether acculturation moderated the effects of occupational conditions on adjustment. Note that we were not focused on acculturation as a main effect in its own right. As can be seen in Table 2, at the bivariate level, parents' acculturation was negatively associated, albeit weakly, with parents' depressive symptoms. More importantly, as can also be seen in Table 2, acculturation was associated with some of the characteristics of fathers' work circumstances. With those variables in the model, we would not necessarily expect acculturation to emerge as a significant main effect. Instead, our interest was in whether families in different acculturation ecologies interpreted or reacted to fathers' work circumstances differently.

As a preliminary step, we explored different ways to operationalize acculturation. Conceptualizing acculturation as a family-level variable, we ran analyses using fathers' and mothers' individual acculturation scores as moderators of their own and other family members' adjustment. We also treated acculturation as an individual-level variable by running analyses in which family members' individual acculturation scores were included at Level 1. The strongest and most consistent results emerged when we treated mothers' acculturation as a family-level moderator. We reran the models summarized in Table 2, substituting mothers' acculturation for fathers' acculturation, and examining each Occupational Condition $\times$ Acculturation interaction term individually. Then, we ran a final model that included controls, main effects, and the interactions that had emerged as significant on their own. We present

findings from this final model because, with one minor exception, all interactions held up, and presenting them together is the most parsimonious approach.

Two significant interactions emerged: Income $\times$ Acculturation, $\gamma = -.06$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = -2.40$, $p < .02$, and Racism $\times$ Acculturation, $\gamma = -0.08$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = -3.15$, $p < .01$. The Underemployment $\times$ Acculturation interaction was significant when examined alone but became a nonsignificant trend in the full model, $\gamma = 0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = 1.76$, $p < .10$. Because it depicted the same pattern as the Income $\times$ Acculturation interaction and was not significant in the full model, we did not explore it further, but we return to it in our discussion.

We next ran models that included the Income $\times$ Acculturation $\times$ Family Member and Racism $\times$ Acculturation $\times$ Family Member interaction terms. These three-way interactions were not significant, meaning that the findings did not differ as a function of family member. We next used MLM to follow up the interactions.

The follow-up of the Income $\times$ Acculturation interaction revealed that the negative association between income and family members' depressive symptoms was significant when mothers were *more* acculturated, $\gamma = -0.22$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = -6.28$, $p < .001$, but not when mothers were less acculturated, $\gamma = -0.03$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -0.84$, *ns*. As can be seen in Figure 1, when mothers were more acculturated, the less income fathers earned, the more depressive symptoms family members reported. In contrast, when mothers were less acculturated, there was no association between paternal income and family members' adjustment.

The follow-up of the Racism $\times$ Acculturation interaction revealed that the association was significant for families in which mothers were *less* acculturated, $\gamma = 0.17$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 3.89$, $p < .001$, but not for families in which mothers were *more* acculturated, $\gamma = 0.02$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 0.61$, *ns*. As can be seen in Figure 2, the more racism fathers in less acculturated families experienced on the job, the more depressive symptoms family members reported. This association was not apparent in families in which mothers reported higher levels of acculturation. In sum, mothers' acculturation moderated the effects of fathers' income and fathers' reports of workplace racism on family members' depressive symptoms, but the findings revealed important differences about how families that vary in terms of acculturation respond to contextual stressors: Highly acculturated families were vulnerable in the face of low income, whereas their less acculturated counter-parts were vulnerable when fathers experienced racism and discrimination on the job.

Does Acculturation Reflect Gender Ideology?

In our final analysis, we sought to shore up our argument that the key moderator was indeed mothers' acculturation and not gender ideology. In this sample, more acculturated parents held less traditional notions about gender ideology, $r = .42$, $p < .001$, $r = 0.39$, $p < .001$, for fathers and mothers, respectively. To examine whether gender ideology played the same moderating role that acculturation played, we reran the moderator analyses, substituting mothers' and, in separate analyses, fathers' gender ideology for acculturation. Results revealed no support for this line of reasoning; there were no significant interactions between fathers' occupational stressors and mothers' or fathers' gender ideology. Thus, we conclude that, although acculturation and parental gender ideology are related, the links between fathers' work conditions and family members' depressive symptoms are moderated by acculturation and not by gender ideology.

DISCUSSION

Our results revealed that fathers' income and reports of racism on the job were related to family members' depressive symptoms. Furthermore, these associations differed in interesting and

important ways as a function of mothers' acculturation. In our concluding remarks, we review what we have learned about the connections between fathers' occupational conditions and the well-being of fathers, mothers, and offspring in Mexican American families.

Which Occupational Conditions Matter?

Neither paternal work hours, nonstandard shifts, nor work pressure emerged as predictors of family members' well-being in this sample of Mexican American families. The conditions that mattered were low wages, racism on the job, and, to a lesser extent, fathers' perceptions of being underemployed, work dimensions that members of minority groups are more likely to encounter than are European Americans.

Our results support previous research showing income to be an important correlate of well-being (e.g., Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). In the main effect analyses, fathers' income was associated with higher depressive affect for fathers, mothers, and younger offspring. In the analyses in which we explored whether mothers' acculturation moderated the association between fathers' income and depressive affect, we found that this association was apparent in more acculturated families but not in less acculturated family contexts and that it applied across all four family members. Finch et al. (2000) reported that the link between employed adults' incomes and their depressive symptoms was stronger when they reported being more acculturated. Our findings extend this idea beyond the employed individual to other family members, an illustration of the "long arm of the job" (Crouter & McHale, 2005).

Fathers' perceptions of workplace racism and discrimination also emerged as a significant correlate. Interestingly, the effects of racism in the workplace varied as a function of acculturation, and this pattern held across family members. Fathers' perceived racism was positively associated with depressive symptoms in less acculturated families, but this association was not significant in more acculturated families. As family researchers extend their research models to consider the experiences of more diverse populations, racism in the workplace is an important work dimension to include (Hughes & Dodge, 1997).

In response to Friedland and Price's (2003) call for subjective measures of underemployment, we developed and included a measure of fathers' perceptions of being underemployed. Underemployment did not emerge as a significant correlate in the analysis limited to main effects. On its own, the Underemployment $\times$ Acculturation interaction was significant, mirroring the pattern reflected in the Income $\times$ Acculturation analysis, but, in the final model, the Underemployment $\times$ Acculturation interaction became a nonsignificant trend. Fathers' income and perceptions of underemployment were correlated, $r = .42$, $p < .001$, making it difficult for underemployment to emerge as a significant correlate, but the findings suggest what low wages may mean psychologically.

Our sample represented a broad swath of socioeconomic circumstances; it was not a high-risk sample. Thus, another angle on the acculturation findings offers a more positive interpretation: In more acculturated families, the higher fathers' wages, the fewer depressive symptoms mothers, fathers, and offspring reported. Similarly, in less acculturated families, the less racism fathers reported on the job, the better adjusted family members were.

Maternal Acculturation as a Moderator

It is noteworthy that *mothers'* reports of acculturation provided the strongest and most consistent evidence of moderation. Why was mothers' acculturation so important? One possibility is that, because mothers play a particularly influential role in Mexican American families by socializing children, performing and overseeing housework, and linking the family to the broader network of kin, friends, and community (e.g., Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez,

2002), their views are particularly influential. As can be seen in Table 1, however, mothers' and fathers' acculturation levels were highly correlated ($r = .76, p < .001$). Thus, another interpretation is that mothers' acculturation was the most sensitive measure of a shared characteristic of the parental dyad.

There are several possible explanations for why the link between income and depressive symptoms was significant when mothers were more, but not when they were less, acculturated. First, highly acculturated mothers and their families may embrace more materialistic, individualistic, majority-cultural values, making fathers' income particularly important. Second, acculturation may reflect a frame of reference; rather than comparing their situation to those of recent Mexican immigrants, members of more acculturated families may compare their circumstances to those of other highly acculturated Mexican American families or to majority families and feel comparatively disadvantaged when fathers earn low wages. Finally, high acculturation may also mean that families have less access to traditional sources of instrumental and emotional support, such as extended family, making it more difficult to cope with challenging circumstances (Rogler et al., 1991).

In contrast to the findings for income, and contradicting the findings of Finch et al. (2000) for global discrimination, the positive association between racism on the job and family members' depressive symptoms was apparent in *less* but not in more acculturated family environments. One might conjecture that this pattern reflects the fact that less acculturated individuals might be exposed to higher levels of racism on the job, but, in this sample, as can be seen in Table 2, workplace racism and acculturation were correlated positively but at a very modest level; racism was reported across the range of acculturation levels. Another explanation is that less acculturated parents in this sample were more likely to be Spanish speaking and relative newcomers to U.S. culture. Although they may have experienced economic strain before migrating to the United States, racism in the workplace is likely to have been a new and unwelcome experience. In addition, racism targets the very culture with which less acculturated individuals identify, making this experience especially hurtful. The fact that different occupational stressors emerged as significant correlates of adjustment in more versus less acculturated families suggests that acculturation may entail complex trade-offs for families. As Gonzales et al. (2002) suggest, it may be more fruitful for researchers to treat acculturation as a moderator rather than to assume that it has monolithic positive or negative effects.

Strengths and Limitations

This study makes several contributions to the literature on work and family and to the study of Mexican American families. First, it addressed an important but understudied topic: Mexican American fathers' occupational conditions and their implications for family members' adjustment. Second, the investigation extended its focus not only to fathers' adjustment but also to that of mothers and offspring. Crossover findings such as these are not only important substantively (and rare in the work-family literature) but are noteworthy because the data on adjustment come from different reporters, providing a more rigorous test of work-family links. Finally, the study revealed a complex picture, suggesting that the connections between fathers' job conditions and adjustment vary as a function of acculturation.

Future research would benefit from longitudinal designs in which one asks, for example, whether family members in households in which fathers earn low incomes become increasingly depressed as they become more acculturated or whether improved work conditions predict increased well-being over time. The correlational design also constrained our ability to make causal explanations. Although the findings are consistent with a causal scenario in which fathers' occupational conditions lead family members to feel more depressed, in the case of racism and underemployment, it is possible that the causal arrow operates the other way: Fathers who score high on depressive symptoms, or whose wives and children are more

depressed, may make more negative attributions about their jobs than others do. Similarly, our findings do not provide insights about the mechanisms through which fathers' occupational conditions are linked to mothers' and adolescents' depressive symptoms, an important direction for future research.

The nature of our sample did not allow us to disentangle parents' acculturation, generational status, and language use because over 75% of the parents had been born in Mexico and almost as many chose to be interviewed in Spanish. It will be important in future research to pay attention to generational status and language use, including the roles they play in shaping parents' interpretations of their work and family experiences. A related criticism is that our findings would be more compelling if we knew how fathers' occupational stressors were linked to family members' adjustment for families living in Mexico and could compare those dynamics with those reported here. Our findings are the first to examine the correlates of fathers' occupational stressors and depressive symptoms in four family members, including adolescent offspring. They await replication in larger samples that include better representation of second- and third-generation Mexican American parents. Despite the fact that many of the parents in this sample were recent immigrants to the United States, however, acculturation emerged as a significant and interesting *moderator* of the association between father's work circumstances (i.e., income, racism) and family members' depressive symptoms.

In sum, this investigation provided compelling evidence that Mexican American fathers' wages and reports of racism in the workplace were related to family members' psychological adjustment, and, further, that these associations varied as a function of mothers' acculturation. Extrapolating from our findings, effective policies targeted at reducing workplace discrimination and maximizing workers' abilities to find jobs commensurate with their training and experience may have positive effects that reverberate beyond the workplace.

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FIGURE 1.
Family members' depressive symptoms as a function of fathers' income and maternal acculturation.

FIGURE 2. Family members' depressive symptoms as a function of fathers' perceived workplace racism and maternal acculturation.

Table 1

Correlations of Fathers' Occupational Conditions, Parents' Acculturation, Fathers' (F), Mothers' (M), and Older (O) and Younger (Y) Offsprings' Depressive Symptoms and Other Study Variables (N = 218 Families^a)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Income	1.00													
2. Weekly hours	0.41***	1.00												
3. Pressure	-0.01	0.18*	1.00											
4. Racism	-0.10	0.14*	0.27***	1.00										
5. Underemployment	-0.42***	-0.10	0.05	0.23**	1.00									
6. Shift ^b	0.01	0.01	-0.11	-0.01	-0.05	1.00								
7. F acculturation	0.41***	0.14*	-0.03	-0.14*	-0.30***	0.12 [†]	1.00							
8. M acculturation	0.36***	0.10	0.04	-0.07	-0.29***	0.07	0.76***	1.00						
9. F depressive symptoms	-0.34***	-0.05	0.08	0.22**	0.30***	-0.03	-0.16*	-0.14*	1.00					
10. M depressive symptoms	-0.19**	-0.08	0.09	0.31***	0.18*	0.01	-0.14*	-0.17*	0.32***	1.00				
11. O depressive symptoms	-0.10	-0.03	0.07	0.06	0.06	-0.02	0.01	-0.02	0.16*	0.21**	1.00			
12. Y depressive symptoms	-0.27***	-0.11 [†]	-0.06	-0.03	0.10	-0.08	-0.09	-0.06	0.16*	0.25***	0.07	1.00		
13. M low hours ^c	-0.13 [†]	0.02	0.03	-0.01	0.01	-0.03	-0.20**	-0.20**	-0.01	-0.11*	-0.03	-0.00	1.00	
14. M part-time hours ^c	0.08	-0.02	-0.03	-0.05	-0.03	-0.07	0.00	-0.09	0.04	0.13*	0.15*	0.07	-0.44***	1.00

^aData on depressive symptoms were missing for one mother.

^bShift coded as 1 for *nonstandard* and 0 for *standard*, that is, day shift.

^cMaternal low work hours: 1 for 9 hours or fewer per week, 0 for *other*. Maternal part-time work hours: 1 for 10 – 39 hours per week and 0 for *other*. Reference group = mother works 40+ hours/week.

[†] $p < .10$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Coefficients and Standard Errors for the Associations Between Fathers' Occupational Conditions and Family Members' Well-Being

	Depressive Symptoms		
	Coefficient	SE	t Ratio
Intercept	1.59**	0.05	33.24
Level 1			
Person = mother ^a	−0.02	0.06	−0.35
Person = older offspring	0.15***	0.04	3.36
Person = younger offspring	0.09*	0.04	2.06
Gender (1 = female)	0.16***	0.04	3.70
Level 2			
Fathers' acculturation	0.01	0.02	0.61
Mother works 0 – 9 hours/week ^b	−0.01	0.04	−0.19
Mother works 10 – 39 hours/week ^b	0.13**	0.05	2.87
Fathers' work shift ^c	0.01	0.04	0.26
Fathers' work hours	0.0002	0.002	0.13
Fathers' (logged) income	−0.15***	0.03	−4.42
Fathers' work pressure	0.01	0.04	0.25
Fathers' underemployment	0.02	0.02	1.14
Fathers' racism at work	0.08*	0.03	2.39

^aReference group = fathers.

^bReference group = mother works 40+ hours/week.

^cReference group = standard (i.e., daytime) shifts.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.