

*Ethnic Conservatism, Psychological Well-Being, and the  
Downside of Mainstreaming: Generational Differences*

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How healthy are we? A national study of well-being in midlife. (2004) Brim, OG, Ryff, CD, & Kessler, RC (eds). Chicago, IL The University of Chicago Press, 373-397

“The longer your family stays in this country the worse it gets” is a rather shocking message for those of us who would like to believe that the United States is still a land of opportunity for poor or persecuted peoples from around the world. Nevertheless, in so many words, that is the major conclusion of a recent review of the literature on the well-being of Hispanic and Asian immigrant families, conducted by the National Research Council’s Institute of Medicine (Hernandez and Charney 1998). The NRC report drew attention to the “paradoxical finding” that “despite their overall lower socioeconomic levels, higher poverty rates, and racial or ethnic minority status,” (1) “children in [first-generation] immigrant families have better health than U.S. born children in U.S. born families on most available measures” (1998, 108), and (2) there is a link between declining physical and mental health in immigrant families and the length of time their families have resided in the United States (1998, 24). In other words, the aggregate amount of suffering in a Hispanic or Asian immigrant family’s descent line seems to rise from generation to generation, and typically, it is the first generation that does the best (also see Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 1995 on the problem of generational decline and some of the hazards of “assimilation”).

The “paradoxical finding” that first-generation Hispanic and Asian immigrants to the United States are both more physically fit and relatively sane or happy compared with their own descendants (and sometimes even when compared with members of long-settled majority groups) begs for explanation. The authors of the NRC report suggest that there must be “protective factors” that favor first-generation immigrants, and they point to strong family bonds that “act to sustain cultural orientations leading to healthful behavior.” They also allude to “other unknown social or cultural factors” that “may serve to protect them” (108). In this chapter we examine the extent to which behaviors that sustain the distinctive cultural orientations of Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrants (e.g., continued Spanish language use, ethnic pride communicated to

one's children, and a preference for in-group affiliation) are associated with higher levels of self-reported psychological well-being. The results of our study lead us to point a finger, however tentatively, in the direction of "ethnic conservatism" as either an index or component of the "protective factors" imagined in the NRC report.

By *ethnic conservatism* we mean an inclination to resist the ideal of rapid and full assimilation to the meanings, values, and practices (including linguistic practices) of mainstream Anglo-American culture. In this study, ethnic conservatism is indexed by a variable we call weak acculturation ideals, by a disposition to communicate feelings of distinctive ethnic pride to one's children, and by continued use of the Spanish language in thinking. The study examines the impact of resistance to assimilation on the psychological well-being of first- and second-generation midlife adults from Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrant populations in the cities of Chicago and New York. We discover that for first-generation immigrants from both ethnic groups, ethnic conservatism predicts higher levels of self-reported psychological well-being (Ryff 1989) in the domains of autonomy, quality of relationships, and sense of purpose in life. These associations between aspects of ethnic conservatism and aspects of psychological well-being remain positive and significant even after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic status (SES) variables. Nevertheless, as anticipated by the NRC report, the longer an immigrant family stays in the United States the worse it gets, at least with regard to the effectiveness of ethnic conservatism as a protective strategy. We discover that ethnic conservatism diminishes in its effectiveness in promoting psychological well-being as one moves from generation to generation in these Hispanic communities. Stated more cautiously, ethnic conservatism can be a useful index of psychological well-being, but it seems to predict happiness and mental health best for the generation that has most recently arrived.

## METHODS

### Participants

The participants in this study consisted of individuals from three sample groups. All respondents were adults aged 25 or older at the time of the survey. The first group, the first-generation Mexican American sample, consisted of 176 adult residents (80 female, 96 male) from the urban Chicago area (mean age = 40.1 years). All were born in Mexico of Mexican parents and had immigrated to the United States after their fifteenth birthday. The second group, the first-generation Puerto Rican

TABLE 1 Selected Demographic Characteristics for Respondents from All Sample Groups

Variables	First-Generation Mexican Americans (N = 176)		First-Generation Puerto Rican Americans (N = 144)		Second-Generation Puerto Rican Americans (N = 242)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Generation variables						
Gender						
Male	96	55.1	73	50.7	123	50.8
Female	80	44.9	71	49.3	119	49.2
Education						
Up to high school	124	74.4	82	62.1	80	33.2
Finished high school	24	14.9	35	26.5	81	33.6
Some college/2 years college	16	9.5	14	10.6	64	26.6
Bachelor's or more	2	1.2	1	0.8	16	6.6
Marital status						
Currently married	135	76.7	64	44.4	113	46.7
Been married	15	8.5	53	36.8	54	22.3
Never married	26	14.8	27	18.8	75	31.0
Additional variables	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Respondent age	40.1	(11.3)	51.9	(14.4)	39.6	(12.5)
Years in United States	16.5	(9.6)	27.9	(14.4)	na	na
Median family income	\$22,000		\$18,300		\$28,500	

Note: na, not applicable.

sample, was comprised of 144 adult residents (71 female, 73 male) from the urban Chicago and New York City areas (mean age = 51.9 years). All were born in Puerto Rico of Puerto Rican parents and had immigrated to the United States after their fifteenth birthday.<sup>1</sup> The final group, the second-generation Puerto Rican sample, consisted of 242 adult residents (119 female, 123 male) from the urban Chicago and New York City areas (mean age = 39.6 years). All were born in the United States of Puerto Rican parents or had immigrated to the United States with their families before their fifth birthday. Additional demographic and background information on all three sample groups is presented in table 1.

### Sampling Procedures

Participants were selected and contacted through a two-stage randomized sampling design. The sample was stratified to reach equal numbers of individuals living in both low- and high-density ethnic communities, defined as census block groups with 10 percent to 20 percent and 50 percent to 70 percent Latino concentration. A smaller number of additional participants ( $n = 40$ ) were recruited in the Chicago area from two very

high density ethnic neighborhoods in which more than 70 percent of the population were Latino. The sample was further stratified to reach equal numbers of individuals living in low and high SES communities, as defined by a 1990 Census-based cutoff value of \$24,000 per year median family income. Surveyors canvassed randomly assigned census tracts and census block groups, going door to door and following procedures to ensure a balanced representation of working and nonworking adult men and women. Respondents completed a two-hour face-to-face survey in their choice of either Spanish or English and received a small sum of money in compensation. English- and Spanish-language versions of the survey and all measures for this study were developed through a translation and focus-group feedback procedure and piloted ( $n = 80$ ) to assess comparability of versions.

### Measures

We conceptualize ethnic conservatism as an inclination to resist the ideal of full assimilation into the meanings, values, and practices (including linguistic practices) of the “mainstream” of some dominant culture. Assimilation or “acculturation” measures typically assess individuals across several related domains. Questions designed to assess socialization and leisure preferences, language use and competence, degree of identification with one’s ethnic group, and participation in culture-specific activities and organizations have all been used to operationalize and test assimilation or acculturation status. (See Dana 1996 for a review of measures for use with Hispanic adults.) Acknowledging the growing interest in bicultural models of acculturation (LaFramboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993; Rogler, Cortes, and Malgady 1991), we ideally would have liked to be able to assess assimilation or acculturation along a two-dimensional continuum. This would have involved separately estimating orientation toward both the individual’s host culture and her culture of origin. Such measures, however, were not available for the data with which we were working. Hence, within this study we have employed a somewhat unidimensional set of measures of ethnic conservatism, which we have operationalized using three variables.

*Weak assimilation ideals.* The first variable, weak assimilation ideals, was derived from responses to two questions: (1) “How closely do you identify with being Mexican American [or Puerto Rican American]?” and (2) “How much do you prefer to be with other people who are Mexican American [or Puerto Rican American]?” Responses to these questions could assume four values: “not at all,” “a little,” “some,” or

“a lot.” Item responses correlated at roughly  $r = .40$  and were averaged. Within the terms of our conceptualization, higher scorers were endorsing more ethnically conservative attitudes and weaker assimilation ideals than their peers.

*Ethnic pride.* Ethnic pride as communicated to one’s children (sometimes shortened to ethnic pride) was our second variable for indexing ethnic conservatism. Data for this measure derive from a set of questions asking how often in the past year interviewees with children under the age of 18 had engaged in the following activities: (a) encouraged their children to be proud of their ethnic heritage, (b) did things with their children to commemorate events in their ethnic group’s history, or (c) read to their children from books by authors from their ethnic group or about the history of their ethnic group. Responses could assume six values ranging from “never” to “very often.” A scale variable (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .85$ ) was generated as the arithmetic mean of the three responses.

*Language of thought.* The language in which respondents thought was the third index of ethnic conservatism used in this study. For reasons to be discussed, we coded this measure as a pair of binary contrast variables (language contrast 1 and language contrast 2). These variables represented subjects’ responses to the question “When you are thinking to yourself, what language do you usually think in?” Questions assessing relative language use and competence have proven to be the most reliable anchor points for the assessment of assimilation or acculturation (Dawson, Crano, and Burgoon 1996). Data derived from such variables correlate most centrally and strongly with a wide range of behavioral, social, and attitudinal indices (Dana 1996). Although it is far from ideal to work from a one-item assessment of linguistic use and competence, questions such as “What language do you think in?” have been shown to be fairly strong predictors of other acculturation variables and of the results of broader scales of acculturation (Epstein et al. 1996).

Within the present survey, answers to this question could assume five values: “Spanish only,” “more Spanish than English,” “both equally,” “more English than Spanish,” or “English only.” Within both first-generation samples, “Spanish only” was the modal response, with 70 percent of Mexican American and 47 percent of Puerto Rican adult immigrants choosing this response. Few first-generation individuals reported thinking in both languages equally, and almost none said that they favored English.<sup>2</sup> For analytic purposes, these responses were treated as

categorical data and entered into regression models as a dummy coded pair of contrast variables. In the analyses of first-generation data, language contrast 1 (first generation) was the contrast of “Spanish only” with “more Spanish than English.” Language contrast 2 (first generation) was the contrast between “more Spanish than English” and the combined categories “both Spanish and English equally,” “more English,” and “English only.”

In sharp distinction to data from our first-generation samples, responses from members of our second-generation sample were distributed quite normally across the five possible categories. For this group, mental bilingualism was the norm.<sup>3</sup> For test purposes with this data, the first two Spanish-dominant response categories, “Spanish only” and “more Spanish than English,” were grouped together and contrasted with the modal bilingual response group, “both Spanish and English equally.” This was language contrast 1 (second generation). For language contrast 2 (second generation), the modal bilingual group was contrasted with the two English-dominant response categories, “more English” and “English only.” Constructing contrasts in this way made it possible to look for nonlinearity and disjunction in the relationship of this language variable to measures of psychological well-being.<sup>4</sup>

These three ethnic conservatism indices were significantly and positively correlated in the range of  $.20 < r < .50$  in the first-generation samples. These correlations were lower in the second-generation sample. In addition, among members of the first-generation samples, these measures correlated mildly and positively with total years an individual had lived in the United States.

Within our first-generation Mexican American sample, two ethnic conservatism measures, weak assimilation ideals and ethnic pride, also correlated significantly ( $r = .36$  and  $.22$ , respectively) with the ethnic density of communities in which our participants lived. Adults from higher-density ethnic communities tended to score higher on ethnic conservatism measures. The density of communities in which interviewees from all three samples lived varied from 10 percent to 95 percent Latino population, with an average ethnic density of 43 percent. Our ethnic conservatism measures were not significantly correlated with ethnic density in our two Puerto Rican American samples.<sup>5</sup> Across all three samples, the ethnic conservatism measures with which we worked show disjunction from variables on the community level such as ethnic density. Individual and community-level processes were linked but not reducible to one another.

### Methodological Note

In deciding not to use the language in which the survey was administered as one of our ethnic conservatism variables, we weighed several considerations. First and foremost, although field surveyors in both cities were technically bilingual Spanish-English speakers, the data from several interviewers showed a strong bias toward administration in one language or the other. In other words, the language of administration sometimes seemed to reflect the surveyor's language preference as much as the subject's. This was particularly the case with the bilingual second-generation sample. This was less of an issue with first-generation respondents, the vast majority of whom (84 percent) chose to be interviewed in Spanish.

To check for method-variance effects that may have resulted from the language in which the interview was administered, we conducted a series of *t*-tests for systematic differences in our outcome measures based on language of administration. These tests showed no significant differences across language of administration.

### Psychological Well-Being Measures

Psychological well-being was assessed using the eighteen-item version of Ryff's Well-Being Inventory (Ryff and Keyes 1995). Six core domains of positive human health were measured: (1) enjoying a strong sense of purpose in life, or being engaged in ongoing meaningful activity, such as creating, parenting, loving, and learning; (2) forging and sustaining positive relations with others; (3) possessing a sense of self-acceptance and regard; (4) valuing and striving for personal growth; (5) engaging with and enjoying a sense of mastery in one's environment; and finally, (6) possessing and exercising a sense of self-guidance and self-determination in life, which Ryff labels autonomy. In the longer version of her well-being inventory, each domain is assessed by a set of twenty questions (Ryff 1989). In the consolidated version of the instrument used here, a factor score for each well-being domain is typically established as the sum of responses to a set of three questions. (See Ryff and Keyes 1995 for a validation study.)

We approached the use of this instrument with members of our immigrant samples with particular care. Because we were concerned about the cultural and language differences between our samples and those upon which the Ryff scales had been piloted, we tested the proposed a priori six-factor solution by using a path-modeling procedure. This test did not confirm the full a priori six-factor structure within our sample. We thus

conducted a further set of exploratory factor analyses (principal component analyses with varimax rotation, accepting eigenvalues  $> 1.0$ ). Those analyses were run first for subjects from our separate immigrant samples and then for our combined subject pool. Both sets of tests yielded a similar set of unforced five-factor solutions. The five-factor solution from the pooled subject response data possessed strong face validity. Because we wished to obtain maximum distinctiveness for the factors to be used in this study, we used this solution as the basis for the psychological well-being factors.

The adopted five-factor model accounted for 54 percent of the variance in psychological well-being responses. The first two factors, autonomy and positive relations with others, are identical to Ryff's original factors. Many of the negatively cast items in the inventory clustered together and formed two additional factors. One might be called lack of purpose in life, and the second lack of self-acceptance. Because two of the three items for each of these factors derived from Ryff's original factors of the same name, and in order to avoid the confusion of double-negative references, we retained the labels "purpose in life" and "self-acceptance" for these two factors. A fifth, and final, factor accounted for the greatest amount of variance in the model. This was a combination of five items from Ryff's Personal Growth and Environmental Mastery factors. We labeled this last factor "growth and mastery" in our analyses. All items loaded at greater than  $r = .35$  on their final assigned factors. One item that did not load strongly on any factors was discarded, and two items that had double-factor loadings ( $r$ 's  $> .35$ ) were restored to their a priori Ryff factors. (See the appendix for a list of survey items with their loadings on assigned factors.)

Responses to well-being questions were on a seven-point Likert formatted scale with values ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Final factor scores were derived as the arithmetic mean of summed item scores, with higher values reflecting reports of greater well-being.

#### PROCEDURES

To explore and test for possible relationships of ethnic conservatism to psychological well-being, we conducted a series of two-stage tests. In an initial test we looked at simple zero-order correlations between the ethnic conservatism variables and the factors of psychological well-being. At this first stage, we used a Bonferroni correction procedure for a test of twenty possible relationships in each sample (four ethnic conservatism variables, including two ways of assessing language of thought  $\times$  five well-being



factors). We required a value of  $p \leq .0025$  ( $.05 / 20$ ) to accept a result as significant. Associations that met this first-stage criterion were passed on to a second test.

Each significant ethnic conservatism/psychological well-being relationship from the first-stage analyses was tested again. This was done by entering it at the second stage as a predictor variable into a hierarchical linear regression equation (least unweighted squares procedure) after a control block of six demographic and SES variables had been entered. The psychological well-being factor was the dependent variable in this equation. The control variables consisted of age, education, gender, total family income, marital status, and city of residence (New York or Chicago). SES variables are well-documented confounds and correlates of both ethnic conservatism and psychological well-being. The aim of our analysis was to determine the degree of association between ethnic conservatism and psychological well-being independent of the influence of age, education, family income, and so forth.

We conducted a final set of analyses to contrast the relative strength of the association of ethnic conservatism and psychological well-being across the first- and second-generation Puerto Rican American samples. To test for a formal moderating effect of generational status on the relationship of ethnic conservatism and psychological well-being, we conducted a comparison test of unstandardized  $b$  coefficients (Baron and Kenny 1985; Cohen and Cohen 1975).

## RESULTS

### Overall Observations

Mean psychological well-being factor scores and standard deviations broken down by sample group are provided in table 2. Responses to many of the well-being items stacked toward the higher end of the scales, with most individuals endorsing relatively high levels of agreement for the positively cast questions in the inventory. Unlike the second-generation children in many of the studies reviewed in the NRC report, the second-generation Puerto Rican midlife adults in our sample were not significantly worse off in their psychological well-being than were first-generation Puerto Rican midlife adults. A series of  $t$ -tests showed no overall differences in levels of well-being based on generation. The decline with time (“from generation to generation”) that we shall point to is, instead, a decline with time in the apparent effectiveness of ethnic conservatism as a positive protective factor in support of psychological well-being.

TABLE 2 Mean Well-Being Factor Scores for All Sample Groups

Ethnic Sample Group	Ryff Well-Being Factors				
	Autonomy	Growth and Mastery	Positive Relations	Purpose in Life	Self-Acceptance
Mexican American first generation ( $n = 176$ )					
Mean	5.34	6.30	5.37	5.17	5.35
SD	1.14	0.72	1.24	1.53	1.36
Puerto Rican American first generation ( $n = 144$ )					
Mean	5.80	6.32	5.44	5.00	5.13
SD	1.22	0.84	1.24	1.65	1.44
Puerto Rican American second generation ( $n = 242$ )					
Mean	5.70	6.44	5.31	5.09	4.93
SD	1.29	0.76	1.38	1.74	1.56

### First-Generation Mexican American Sample

*Zero-order associations.* For the first-generation Mexican sample, an initial test of zero-order association between the four ethnic conservatism measures (weak assimilation ideals, ethnic pride, language contrast 1, language contrast 2) and the five Ryff psychological well-being factors showed eight significant associations. Weak assimilation ideals correlated positively with higher levels of autonomy. For language contrast 1 (the contrast between “Spanish only” and “more Spanish than English”), endorsement of thinking in “Spanish only” was associated with higher levels of autonomy, positive relations, and purpose in life. Ethnic pride correlated significantly and positively with higher levels of autonomy, growth and mastery, positive relations, and purpose in life. Overall, ethnic pride displayed the strongest relationship to psychological well-being factors. These results are presented in table 3, where coefficients of significant correlations are flagged and displayed in boldface.<sup>6</sup>

*Demographic and SES controls.* To assess the robustness of the significant associations between ethnic conservatism variables and factors of psychological well-being, we entered each of the eight first-stage significant associations into a multiple regression model (unweighted least squares procedure) after the six demographic and SES variables had been entered as a block. All ethnic conservatism variables retained a minimum significance level of  $p \leq .01$  ( $F$  of entry) in these tests. Figure 1 presents in a simple visual format the proportion of the variance in each psychological well-being factor that was explained by particular ethnic conservatism variables after all demographic and SES variables had been controlled.

Table 4 presents the  $R^2$  changes and beta and  $F$  values for the entry of the ethnic conservatism variables. For weak assimilation ideals and

TABLE 3 First-Generation Mexican American Immigrant Sample: Correlations between Acculturation Measures and Well-Being Factors

Variables	Ryff Well-Being Factors				
	Autonomy	Growth and Mastery	Positive Relations	Purpose in Life	Self-Acceptance
Weak assimilation ideals ( <i>n</i> = 176)	<b>.29***</b>	-.12	-.10	-.11	-.10
Ethnic pride communicated to one's children ( <i>n</i> = 96)	<b>.55***</b>	<b>.34***</b>	<b>.43***</b>	<b>.36***</b>	<b>.23*</b>
Language of thought					
Language contrast 1 Spanish only vs. more Spanish ( <i>n</i> = 163)	<b>.29***</b>	<b>.22**</b>	<b>.29***</b>	<b>.32***</b>	<b>.18*</b>
Language contrast 2 More Spanish vs. equal bilingual or English dominant ( <i>n</i> = 53)	-.36**	-.28*	-.21	-.21	-.15

Notes: Values are zero-order Pearson correlation coefficients. Using a two-tailed test with Bonferroni correction procedures applied for multiple hypothesis testing, correlations attain significance when  $p \leq .0025$ . Associations significant at this  $p$  value are displayed in the table in boldface and were passed on for a second-stage test in regression analyses.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .0025$ .

language contrast 1, the boost in the model  $R^2$  values associated with entry of the significant ethnic conservatism variables ranged from .06 to .10. In this particular case, this was comparable with the combined explanatory effect of the six demographic and SES control variables. Ethnic pride was even more strongly predictive of its associated psychological well-being factors, with  $R^2$  changes ranging from .07 for growth and mastery to .31 for autonomy. All beta coefficients retained the same valence as in the original set of zero-order correlations. Higher scores on ethnic conservatism measures predicted higher scores on psychological well-being. Among the demographic and SES variables, total family income was the strongest and most consistent predictor of better psychological well-being, with its beta values averaging from .20 to .28 for those equations in which it was significant.

#### First-Generation Puerto Rican American Sample

*Zero-order associations.* Seven associations met the first-round criteria of significance in the first-generation Puerto Rican sample. In this sample as well, all significant associations were in the direction of a

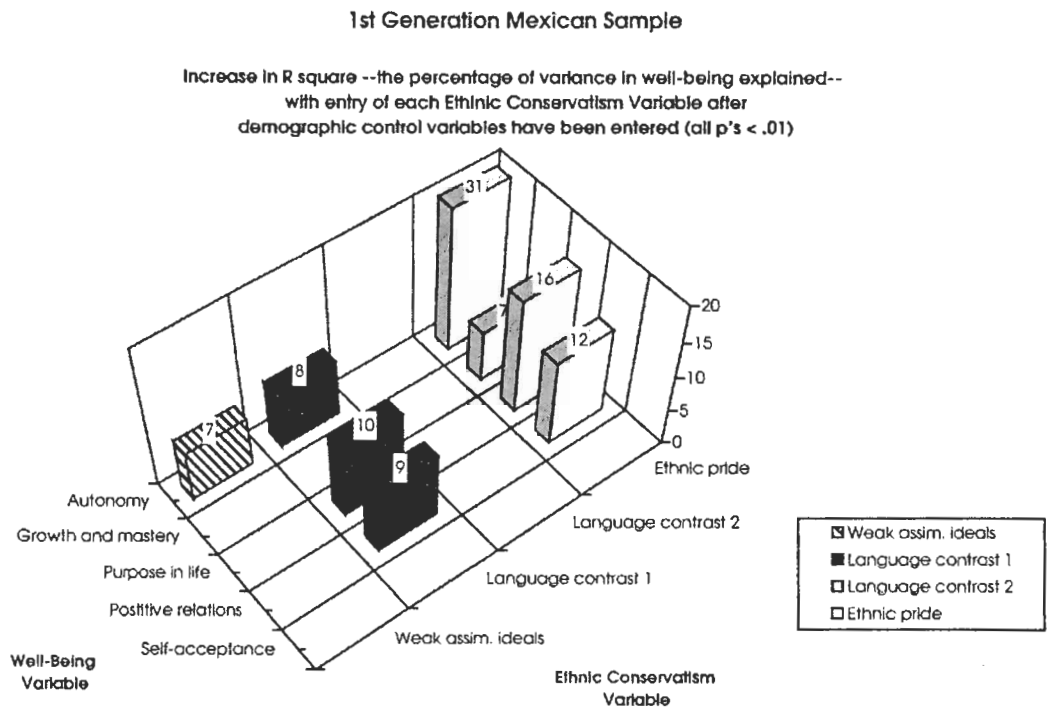


FIGURE 1. The first-generation Mexican sample shows an increase in  $R^2$ —the percentage of variance in well-being explained—with entry of each ethnic conservatism variable after demographic control variables have been entered (all  $p$ 's < .01).

positive association between greater ethnic conservatism and greater psychological well-being. Ethnic pride once again showed the strongest relationship to psychological well-being factors. Weak assimilation ideals correlated positively with autonomy, positive relations, and purpose in life. Language contrast 1, the contrast between “Spanish only” and “more Spanish than English,” revealed that those who indicated “Spanish only” reported higher levels of autonomy. Ethnic pride communicated to one’s children correlated positively with autonomy, growth and mastery, and purpose in life. The full correlation matrix is presented in table 5.

*Demographic and SES controls.* When the associations reported earlier were tested with multiple regression analyses, six of the seven relationships retained significance at the level of  $p \leq .01$ . The association between ethnic pride and purpose in life dropped out in these controlled analyses. Figure 2 presents the proportion of the variance in each psychological well-being factor that was explained by ethnic conservatism variables beyond that which was accounted for by the demographic and SES control block.

The  $R^2$  changes and beta and  $F$  values for entry of the ethnic conservatism variables are presented in table 6. For weak assimilation ideals and language contrast 1, the boost in model  $R^2$  values ranges from .05 to .07. Ethnic pride was even more strongly predictive of its associated psychological well-being factors, accounting for an additional 19 percent of the variance in growth and mastery scores and 23 percent of the variance in autonomy-factor scores.

### Second-Generation Puerto Rican Sample

*Zero-order associations.* The zero-order correlation matrix for the second-generation sample revealed only two significant associations between ethnic conservatism variables and psychological well-being factors. Ethnic pride correlated positively with both autonomy and growth and mastery. Correlations across all the indices of ethnic conservatism and the psychological well-being factors were substantially lower than in either of the first-generation immigrant samples. Table 5 presents these results alongside those for the first-generation Puerto Rican sample.

*Demographic and SES controls.* In the second-stage test of these associations, ethnic pride retained its significance with both autonomy ( $F(1, 89) = 4.35, * \Delta > R^2 = .04, \beta = .21$ ) and growth and mastery ( $F(1, 90) = 6.15, ** \Delta R^2 = .05, \beta = .23$ ), after all demographic and SES variables had been controlled.

### Generational Status as a Moderator of the Relationship of Ethnic Conservatism to Psychological Well-Being

In testing this moderating relationship, we followed procedures outlined by Baron and Kenny (1985) and Cohen and Cohen (1975), generating a test of differences between unstandardized  $b$  coefficients. We conducted tests for the two predictor variables, weak acculturation ideals and ethnic pride communicated to children, across all five of the well-being factors.<sup>7</sup> Moderator variable tests were not conducted for language of thought (contrasts 1 and 2) because these variables were differently comprised in the two generational sample groups. The tests confirmed significant differences in the relationship of ethnic conservatism to psychological well-being factors on the basis of generational status in fully half of the ten possible relations. Results of these tests are reported in table 7.

In a comparison across generations, weaker assimilation ideals showed a significantly stronger and, in all cases, a consistently more positive association with psychological well-being scores in the domains of autonomy, positive relations, and purpose in life for adults from our first-generation

TABLE 4 First-Generation Mexican American Sample: Regression Demographic Variables

Acculturation Variables	Autonomy		Growth and Mastery	
	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
Weak assimilation ideals $F(1, 135) =$	.07	.27 10.66***	—	—
Ethnic pride $F(1, 72) =$	.31	.57 11.97***	.07	.26 6.23**
Language contrast 1 $F(1, 135) =$	.08	.28 11.97***	—	—

Notes: Probability values reflect  $F$  of entry for acculturation variables at the second step in hierarchical multiple regression equation (unweighted least squares) after prior entry of demographic variables. Demographic control variables consisted of age, gender, marital status, total family income, and education level.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

sample. Ethnic pride showed a similar stronger positive association with purpose, and growth and mastery in the first-generation sample than in the second.

## DISCUSSION

### General Findings

Rather than trying, point by point, to explain every association between a predictor and criterion variable, we focus instead on identifying trends in association and discussing some of the patterns that appear most salient across different indices of ethnic conservatism in our sample groups. On the most global level, the findings that emerge from these analyses can be summarized by saying that for our first-generation adult Mexican American and Puerto Rican immigrants, an ethnically conservative set of attitudes and approaches to acculturation was associated with better psychological well-being. This was the case across several domains of psychological well-being. Most notably and strongly, our results suggest, individuals who are ethnically conservative may experience an enhanced sense of autonomy and purpose in their lives, and enjoy more positive experiences in their relationships with others.

### Autonomy

Ryff's autonomy factor showed the most distinct and persistent association with our measures of ethnic conservatism in both first-generation ethnic samples. The statement "I have confidence in my own opinions,

## Coefficients for Entry of Significant Acculturation Variables after Have Been Entered

Ryff Well-Being Factors					
Purpose in Life		Positive Relations		Self-Acceptance	
$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
—	—	—	—	—	—
.16	.29 17.67**	.12	.36 11.56***	—	—
.10	.33 17.68***	.09	.30 15.23***	—	—

even if they are different from the way most other people think” captures the flavor of this factor. In interpreting our findings, we note that a stronger sense of independence of judgment and action is reported by those adult Latino immigrants who do not try to aggressively acculturate by adopting English-language use and seeking social ties with out-group members. This independence of temper could easily be regarded as both arising from and contributing to a desire to actively conserve and maintain a distinct ethnic identity in the face of pressures by the dominant culture to assimilate.

This prominent association of attitudes of autonomy with ethnic conservatism is intriguing, not the least because ideals of autonomy, and independence of temper and judgment, are generally held to be hallmark traits in American national character. Ryff, Lee, and Na (forthcoming) have remarked that autonomy is perhaps the most distinctively American psychological construct to be represented as a cardinal domain of well-being in their model of psychological well-being. The emphasis on autonomy in our own culture is often explained as having arisen in response to the hardships and demands of the immigration process, and of life on the national frontiers. In the life cycle and establishment of ethnic communities, the early stages of settlement present the members of a new immigrant group with a social frontier and a similar set of challenges. There may be a historically similar blending of intense familial and ethnic social ties with a strong insistence on cultural autonomy among members of these modern immigrant communities.

## Positive Relations with Others

Ethnic conservatism was also associated with reports of deeper and more intimate social ties with others and more satisfying interpersonal

TABLE 5 First- and Second-Generation Puerto Rican American Immigrant Samples: Correlations between Acculturation Variables and Well-Being Factors

Acculturation Variables	Ryff Well-Being Factors				
	Autonomy	Growth and Mastery	Positive Relations	Purpose in Life	Self-Acceptance
Weak assimilation ideals					
First generation ( $n = 144$ )	<b>.39***</b>	.16	<b>.27***</b>	<b>.25***</b>	-.08
Second generation ( $n = 242$ )	.11	.10	.00	-.03	-.08
Ethnic pride communicated to one's children					
First generation ( $n = 41$ )	<b>.50***</b>	<b>.51***</b>	.33*	<b>.47***</b>	.15
Second generation ( $n = 110$ )	<b>.28***</b>	<b>.36***</b>	.18	.25**	.06
Language of thought					
Language contrast 1 <sup>a</sup>					
First generation ( $n = 108$ )	<b>.29***</b>	.09	.16	.27**	-.04
Second generation ( $n = 132$ )	.06	-.07	.01	-.14	-.02
Language contrast 2 <sup>b</sup>					
First generation ( $n = 75$ )	-.06	-.02	.04	-.09	.08
Second generation ( $n = 198$ )	.00	.02	.04	-.02	-.04

Notes: Values are zero-order Pearson correlation coefficients. Using a two-tailed test with Bonferroni correction procedures applied for multiple hypothesis testing, correlations attain significance when  $p \leq .0025$ . Associations significant at this  $p$  value are displayed in boldface and were passed on for a second-stage test in regression analyses.

<sup>a</sup>In first-generation sample, this variable is the contrast between endorsing Spanish only vs. more Spanish than English. In second-generation sample, it is the contrast between Spanish dominant vs. equal bilingual.

<sup>b</sup>In first-generation sample, this contrast is between endorsing more Spanish than English vs. equal bilingual thinking. In second-generation sample, it is the contrast between equal bilingual vs. English dominant.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .0025$ .

relationships. There are many reasons to infer that in these first-generation groups, the deeper sense of relatedness that ethnically conservative individuals are reporting is arising from ties within their ethnic groups and in their home communities. Making use of additional data from the MIDUS survey, we analyzed the composition of social networks of the immigrants within our sample. We discovered that a very small percentage of our first-generation immigrant groups, only 9 percent of Mexican American and 16 percent of Puerto Rican American adults, named *even one* person of non-Latino ethnic descent as an important helper within their social networks. At least for the first-generation immigrants within this study, the experience of forming deep social ties with individuals outside of one's cultural or linguistic group of origin seemed to be far more the exception than the rule.





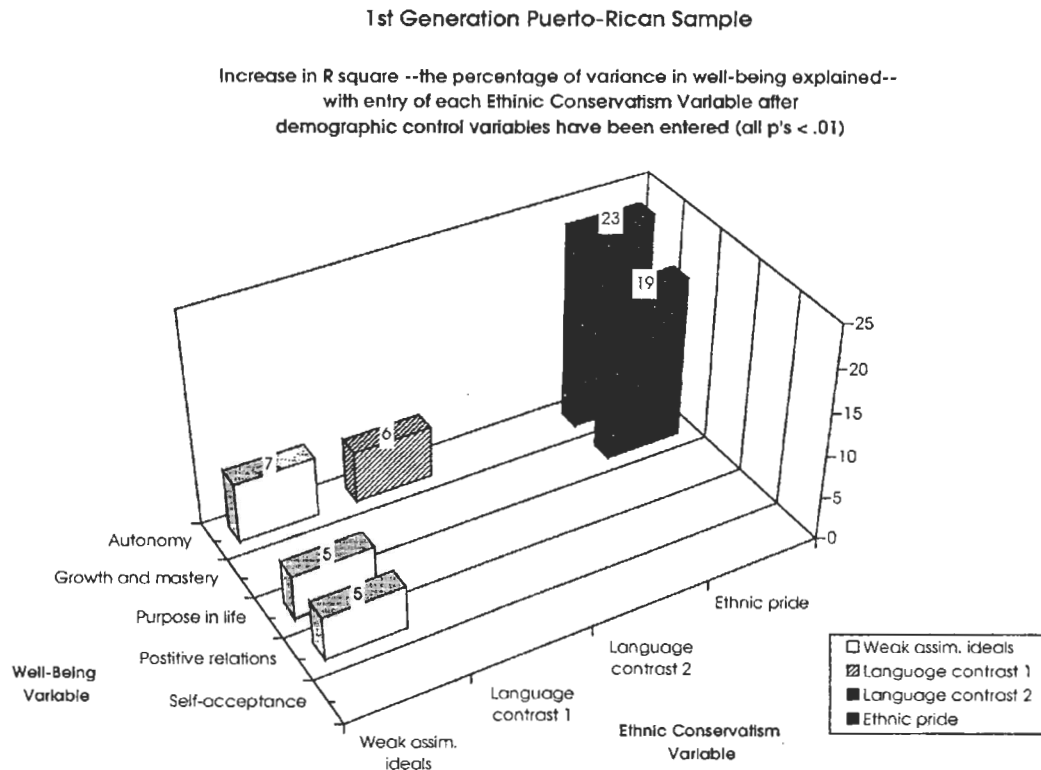


FIGURE 2. The first-generation Puerto Rican sample shows an increase in  $R^2$ —the percentage of variance in well-being explained—with entry of each ethnic conservatism variable after demographic control variables have been entered (all  $p$ 's < .01).

The positive association of ethnic conservatism to psychological well-being is primarily a phenomenon of the first-generation immigrant experience. We speculate that given this generational effect, these findings may reflect crucial developmental experiences of socialization to basic cultural roles, scripts for intimacy, and modes of relating to others. As a consequence of such early socialization, in-group relationships may be experienced as richer and more deeply satisfying than out-group relations. Under such conditions, those individuals with ethnically conservative views may simply be living in deeper consonance with this principle, and enjoying real benefits from doing so.

### Parenting and Ethnic Identity

Among the most surprising findings of this study was the powerful association between ethnic pride (and cultural identity) communicated to one's children and psychological well-being. As a scale variable, ethnic pride is probably an index of both parenting resources and self-esteem

TABLE 6 First-Generation Puerto Rican Sample: Regression Coefficients for  
Have Been

Acculturation Variables	Autonomy		Growth and Mastery	
	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
Weak assimilation ideals $F(1, 117) =$	.07	.24 10.49**	—	—
Ethnic pride $F(1, 28) =$	.23	.57 16.62***	.19	.47 9.56**
Language contrast 1 $F(1, 93) =$	.06	.24 6.81**	—	—

Notes: Probability values reflect  $F$  of entry for acculturation variables at the second step in a hierarchical multiple regression equation (unweighted least squares) after prior entry of demographic variables. Demographic control variables consisted of age, gender, marital status, total family income, city of residence, and education level.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

as well as an index of ethnically conservative attitudes.<sup>8</sup> Although it was not surprising to find this measure correlating positively with aspects of general psychological well-being, the magnitude of the associations of this parenting variable to diverse aspects of well-being was quite unexpected. This effect was by far the most marked among our first-generation immigrant parents. For these individuals, the level of communication of ethnic pride, history, and customs to their children related to four out of five factors of psychological well-being almost as strongly as these factors related to each other. In fact, if we wanted to know how well the first-generation immigrants in this survey who were parents were doing psychologically, of the hundreds of variables available in the MIDUS survey, we could scarcely have done better than by asking them the series of three questions that began, “How often do you do things with your child to remember the history of his or her ethnic group?”

The issue of direction of causality deserves special attention with this finding. Immigrant parents who are flourishing and psychologically strong may be more likely to report higher levels of ethnic pride-related activities with their children. In this respect there is clear reason to acknowledge the possibility of a backward causal influence of psychological well-being on this index of ethnic conservatism. Nonetheless, we believe there remains an important potential finding here about ethnic identity, acculturation, and the centrality of parent-child ties for members of these Hispanic immigrant communities.<sup>9</sup> The suggestion of these analyses is that for first-generation immigrants, a desire to communicate and

## Entry of Significant Acculturation Variables after Demographic Variables Entered

Ryff Well-Being Factors					
Purpose in Life		Positive Relations		Self-Acceptance	
$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
.05	.25	.05	.17	—	—
	8.18**		6.78**		
.10	.34	—	—	—	—
	3.89				
—	—	—	—	—	—

pass along key aspects of one's cultural identity is deeply indicative and reflective of broader psychological health.

A corollary to this observation perhaps deserves attention as well. It may be that for adult immigrants, movement away from or denial of one's ethnic identity and background *during the process of parenting* is indicative of and associated with a diminished experience of psychological well-being.

Low scores on this particular index of ethnic conservatism could be explained in other terms as well. Individuals suffering from a general sense of demoralization, of the kind associated with substance abuse or depression, for instance, might show up as low on ethnic pride in the realm of parenting.

#### Contrasting the Meaning and Correlates of Ethnic Conservatism across First- and Second-Generation Samples

As we have alluded to at many points in this discussion, data from both parts of this study support the notion that the effects of ethnic conservatism are strongly moderated by generational status. The attitudes and practices of ethnic conservatism that were associated with better psychological well-being across all domains for first-generation adult immigrants, both Mexican and Puerto Rican, were not found to be as predictive of enhanced psychological well-being for members of our second-generation sample. The differences appeared systematic and far-reaching. Although ethnic pride and communication of ethnic identity to one's children remained positively associated with psychological well-being for second-generation immigrant parents, even here the strength of this relationship to psychological well-being was attenuated.

TABLE 7 Tests of the Moderating Influence of Generational Status on the Relationship of Acculturation Variables to Well-Being Factors: *T*-Test Comparison of Unstandardized Regression Coefficients

Variables	df	b Value		t <sub>b</sub>
		First Generation	Second Generation	
For Assimilation ideals				
Autonomy	(380)	.38	.13	6.18***
Growth and mastery	(380)	.10	.07	1.42
Purpose in life	(380)	.33	-.05	6.81***
Positive relations	(377)	.27	.00	6.15***
Self-acceptance	(377)	-.09	-.10	0.21
For Ethnic pride				
Autonomy	(147)	.45	.28	1.75
Growth and mastery	(147)	.27	.15	3.13**
Purpose in life	(147)	.42	.29	1.92*
Positive relations	(147)	.25	.14	1.47
Self-acceptance	(147)	.09	.09	-.01

Notes: Tests for mediation in language contrast variables were not performed. Differences in response distributions to the question about language of thought, across the first- and second-generation samples, rendered the test statistically unfeasible.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### Context and Limitations of the Study

The most serious limitations of this study without doubt arise from the somewhat piecemeal nature of the ethnic conservatism measures that were used and the absence of a second-generation Mexican American sample. Also, aspects of the sampling design of the study may have resulted in our samples underrepresenting the most highly assimilated or acculturated portion of the Mexican and Puerto Rican American populations. By the nature of its survey frame, the MIDUS urban ethnic oversample pulled randomly from a subset of census tracts in the Chicago and New York metropolitan areas. These were tracts and block groups whose ethnic Hispanic populations were at least 10 percent. The most acculturated individuals, and among them, perhaps the most affluent, may tend to live or move outside of these neighborhoods, or outside the city limits entirely. These are the individuals for whom real benefits of acculturation, often argued to consist of socioeconomic advancement, might be expected to accrue. Thus the results we have reported here may reflect, in part, a design-specific finding.

The generalizability of these findings should be qualified on other grounds as well. For ethnic conservatism to be a successful adaptive strategy, many social factors may need to be in place. Ethnic conservatism

may become viable and associated with psychological well-being only where relatively strong immigrant communities have been established. Although the adults in our study lived in neighborhoods of varying Latino ethnic density, all enjoy certain social advantages that accrue from living in a large, well-settled urban immigrant environment. In New York City and Chicago, it is possible for Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrants to negotiate many aspects of daily life in Spanish, with the social support of other individuals from similar cultural backgrounds. Both cities boast a profusion of Spanish-based media outlets, specialized immigrant services in law and medicine, Latino churches, and at least limited bilingual educational and social services. Although the strain on these services is often severe, their presence may nonetheless buffer against some of the hardest aspects of resettlement and make it easier for Latino immigrants to remain rooted in a sense of their own culture.

Berry (1997) and other theorists have described a host of additional economic and political factors that might also militate for or against success of this acculturative strategy in different locales. Whether it will prove possible to formulate valid general theories relating acculturation practices to psychological health remains to be seen. Certainly researchers should entertain the alternate possibility that the effects of acculturation choices will be mediated in complex ways by the exigencies of local social and cultural settings. Entrance into the American mainstream, or more recently, the development of “bicultural competence,” has sometimes been held out to immigrants as a necessary condition for the enjoyment of psychological health. With due respect to such general formulations, the suggestion of the present study is that for many first-generation Hispanic immigrants, and perhaps other resettled adults, “it ain’t necessarily so.”

#### APPENDIX

Well-Being Factors Derived from Ryff’s Shorter Well-Being Inventory	Factor Loading Scores <sup>a</sup>
Autonomy	
I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.	-.76
I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.	.67
I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are different from the way most other people think.	.39

*(continued)*

Well-Being Factors Derived from Ryff's Shorter Well-Being Inventory	Factor Loading Scores <sup>a</sup>
Positive relations with others	
I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.	-.75
Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.	-.51
People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.	.37
Purpose in life	
I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.	-.75
I live one day at a time and don't really think about the future.	-.68
I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago. (Personal growth)	-.60
Self-acceptance	
In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.	-.72
When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far.	.68
The demands of everyday life often get me down. (Environmental mastery)	-.66
Personal growth and environmental mastery	
I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world. (Personal growth)	.68
For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth. (Personal growth)	.62
I like most parts of my personality. (Self-acceptance)	.54
In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live. (Environmental mastery)	.52
I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life. (Environmental mastery)	.50
Dropped item	
Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them. (Purpose)	

*Note:* An item's original assignment in Ryff's factor structure is indicated in parentheses if the item has been moved.

<sup>a</sup>Factor loading values for Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization. All eigenvalues  $\geq 1.0$ .

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to all members of the MacArthur research team.

## NOTES

1. In defining our first-generation samples in this way, we have broken slightly with the practice of some acculturation researchers. We have chosen to look at individuals who immigrated to the United States as adults or young adults. In doing so we are working from the assumption that early socialization and immersion in the way of life of a different culture (coupled usually with a voluntary decision to resettle) are the experiences that distinguish first-generation from second-generation immigrants. To include as first-generation immigrants individuals who were brought to this country as young children and socialized through American schooling to English-language use and mainstream American cultural norms may confound the potentially useful distinction between first and later generations of immigrants.

2. For both the Mexican and Puerto Rican subsets of our data, individuals who arrived after age 12 only infrequently endorsed balanced bilingual thinking or, even more rarely, reported English dominance in thinking. This seemed to hold despite the number of years that resettled individuals had lived in the United States.

3. Here is an instance in which the endorsement of identical answers to a question on an acculturation instrument by first- and second-generation immigrants probably reflected vastly different underlying acculturative attitudes and experiences. A report of bilingual thinking or English dominance by an adult first-generation immigrant would reflect a far more active effort to acculturate and gain competence in the host-culture practices than would be true for a second-generation individual. This suggests a need for caution in assuming comparability of acculturation measures across the first- and second-generation divide.

4. In the second-generation sample, it also provided the opportunity to make a small test of the relative effectiveness of a bicultural strategy of acculturation. Using terms proposed by Berry (1997), we checked whether endorsement of balanced bilingual thinking (reflecting an “integrative,” bicultural strategy to acculturation) would be associated with better or worse psychological well-being than either a culturally more “assimilationist” (English-dominant) or “separationist” (Spanish-dominant) response. We found no differences across these groupings. In designing this test, we followed a procedure outlined by Magana et al. (1996). We can only speculate, however, whether many of the individuals in this second-generation sample, even those answering “more Spanish” or “Spanish only” to this language question, may have been bilingually competent.

5. Although the ethnic density of the communities in which our first-generation Mexican American adults live proved a predictor in its own right of two facets of psychological well-being, it was not a predictor of the same magnitude as the individual-level measures of ethnic conservatism upon which we focus in this study.

6. We also noticed, however, a slight contrary trend in the data. Within this sample, the variable language contrast 2 showed a trend toward a negative association with some of our well-being indices. This was the single place in our



data where ethnic conservatism, in this case endorsement of “more Spanish” as opposed to equal bilingual or English-dominant thinking, was at least marginally associated with lower well-being. These correlations approached but did not attain the level of significance.

7. We did not restrict these tests to those variable combinations that correlated significantly. Even if a set of predictor variables is not significantly correlated with their criteria variables, the moderating influence of a third variable on their relationship can be demonstrated statistically (Cohen and Cohen 1975).

8. One might also have expected this variable to correlate positively with advancing socioeconomic markers, most notably with higher levels of education and family income. In fact, in both of our first-generation samples, acculturation measures correlated only mildly and nonsignificantly with education and total family income. Ethnic pride behaved more like a true acculturation measure than a marker or index of social class. Even among second-generation immigrants, greater acculturation (that is, low ethnic conservatism) was not found to be significantly correlated with greater family income.

9. A vast body of sociological literature has discussed “familialism” as a root organizing structure of life within Hispanic-American immigrant communities.

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