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Research Article

Aspirational Mexican American Parenting in the Rural South: Multilingualism, Hard Work, and the Middle Class

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This study examined the parenting choices of Mexican-heritage former child migrant farmworkers who are now financially stable and raising their own children in the rural South. The study yielded multiple significant findings using data collected during semi-structured, bilingual focus groups and analyzed through grounded theory coding. The participants spoke of painful childhood memories of how their poverty and biculturalism left them isolated. Now, as adults, they have sought middle-class belonging for themselves and their children. They described their "pedagogies of the home" as seeking to preserve their linguistic heritage, teach the value of hard work, and facilitate their children's upward mobility into the middle class. However, Southern rural contexts do not allow for a Latino-identified "minority culture of mobility." Therefore, as parents, our participants have often, consciously or unconsciously, chosen fast-track assimilation into the local, predominantly White middle class. For example, most participants have not raised fluently bilingual children. Our participants have emphasized and intentionally encouraged Southern White middle-class-compatible values and behaviors among their children, such as industriousness, respeto, and playing soccer. Many deploy the racially loaded rhetoric of prosperity theology to validate their personal narratives of hard childhood labor. Our participants expressed enthusiasm regarding how their children have been better able, compared to their childhood selves, to fit into the local community and schools. However, they were also aware that this success had come at a cost. They had doubts about what had been lost via sometimes disquieting compromises with the culture of the rural South.

In many rural New Latino Diaspora/Destination (NLD) locations across the US (Singer & Suro, 2002; Wortham et al., 2002), the arrival of large numbers of Mexican Americans and other Latinos has served as a "demographic lifeline" (Lichter & Johnson, 2020, p. 785), revitalizing areas that otherwise faced economic and population stagnation or decline. Rural southeast Georgia is one such site of dramatic demographic change. This traditionally White and Black region is now home to public schools where up to one-third of the student population is Latino (Governor's Office of Student Achievement [GOSA], 2023). This transformation began when the first generation (G1) of adult Mexican-heritage migrant farmworkers arrived in the 1980s and 1990s, usually as impoverished new immigrants. Anchored by year-round job opportunities, many of them and their second generation (G2) children settled in the area (Beck, 2003). Those formerly migrant children are now G2 parents who aspire for middle-class prosperity for their third generation (G3) children. However, unlike their migrant G1 parents, these more Americanized and financially stable G2 parents have a broader range of parenting options. They continually face implicit and explicit choices between the traditions of their *Mexicanidad* and the values of the overwhelmingly White middle class (Ajilore, 2019) of the rural South (Beck & Stevenson, 2016).

This study examined how rural Southern G2 Mexican American parents negotiate these choices. Our findings, grounded in multiple interviews and focus groups, describe how these former migrants have deployed discursive practices, aspirational identities (Alvarez, 2020), cultural wealth, and linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) to assimilate toward and sometimes challenge the rural South's racialized class traditions. As we demonstrate, some elements of *Mexicanidad* do not fit within the expectations of the rural Southern middle-class, while other elements facilitate G2's aspirations for their G3 children. In this way, this study fulfills Jiménez et al.'s (2018) call to examine G2–G3 relationships as "the next chapter in the long story of assimilation" (p. 1040).

Research and Theoretical Context

Isolation in a New Latino Diaspora/Destination

Our study participants all were drawn from rural southeast Georgia. As Lichter and Johnson (2021) found regarding NLD locales in general, this is an area of high poverty and low educational attainment.

Since the 1970s, thousands of multilingual (Spanish, Otomi, Purépecha, etc.) Latino, mostly Mexican-heritage, workers have transformed this region. Four decades ago, approximately 1% of the local population was Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 1980). Today though, many local school districts serve student populations that are 15% to 30% Latino (GOSA, 2023).

As in other rural Southern locales (Carrillo, 2016; Lilly, 2022; López Hernández, 2022; Marrow, 2011), Latinos in rural southern Georgia's traditionally Black and White communities have faced persistent social isolation and identity challenges. Frequently, these situations have taken the form of Mexican Americans seeking to avoid incorporation into the less prosperous Black community while not being allowed easy entry into Whiteness (Beck & Stevenson, 2016). This pattern is compounded by the power of prosperity theology (Bowler, 2018) and Protestant work ethic rhetoric in this region. Within this ideology and in local everyday speech, to be financially successful means to be "blessed," implicitly condemning the poor as outside God's favor.

The political context also has compounded this isolation. For much of the 1990s–2000s, Georgia's Department of Education pursued and enforced an English-only policy in public schools (Beck & Allexsaht-Snider, 2002), a policy that is still in place for statewide assessments (Owens, 2020) and de facto for instruction in southeast Georgia's classrooms. Outside the schools, Spanish is often the target of derision from local nativists; thus, for many rural-Southern-raised G2 Latinos, their childhoods left questions about belonging and their own identities. Moreover, López Hernández (2022) documented how the recent "toxic rhetoric" of anti-immigrant politicians has magnified the social exclusion of Latino adolescents.

Rural Education and Mexican Migrant Parenting

In their review of the literature, Arnold et al. (2005) stated that "rural schools face a unique set of challenges, largely due to their geographic isolation" (p.1). Some of these challenges include unstable local economies, fiscal and tax base constraints, loss of young local talent, and a lack of highly qualified teachers (Biddle & Azano, 2016). These issues have persisted even after the election of 2016 shifted many educators to focus on rural America (Coady, 2020).

Located in liminal rural areas and further marginalized by language, mobility, ethnicity, and class, the challenges faced by the children of migrant farmworkers in our schools have been long established in the research literature (Delgado & Becker Herbst, 2018). However, life prospects for Mexican-heritage migrant children are not inevitably negative. Taylor et al. (2022) found that family support, especially maternal support, can buffer the stressors of migrancy. Bridges et al. (2022) asserted that like White middle-class parents, Mexican-heritage mothers also engage in "purposeful parenting" to prepare their children for school (p. 483). Delgado Bernal (2010) identified such efforts as "pedagogies of the home." Reese (2001) argued that Mexican immigrants find ways to adapt to U.S. customs without losing their "traditional values" (p. 466). By combining "both the familiar and the new in such a way that core moral values continue to give coherence and meaning to everyday life" (Reese, 2001, p. 470).

An important example of such adaptation was documented among Mexican-heritage migrant farmworkers by G. López (2001), who described how, as a means to impress upon their children the crucial importance of educational achievement, farmworkers sometimes bring their children to work alongside them in the fields for a day—a very different but effective form of "parental involvement." Lessons taught through hard work connect with the traditional Latino concept of *respeto*, "obedience to authority, deference, decorum, and public behavior" (Calzada et al., 2010, p. 77). Similarly, traditional *familismo*, placing the family ahead of the individual, has been demonstrated as a positive buffer against Latino student struggles (Means, 2019). Thus, *respeto* and *familismo* sit at the center of Latino parenting (Knight et al., 2010).

Latino Education, Assimilation, and G1 to G3 Language Transitions

The growth of the Latino population in the US has brought greater urgency to reversing the systemic failures in the education of Latino students caused by home-school "discontinuities and incongruence" (Hill & Torres, 2010, p. 99) and the challenges of "language proficiency, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and race/ethnicity" (Olivos & Mendoza, 2010, p. 339). Some scholars have asserted that these systemic failures contribute to the "immigrant paradox," whereby earlier generation

G1.5 and G2 Latino immigrant children frequently outachieve later generation G3 children on multiple measures (Hill & Torres, 2010). This pattern, which contravenes the traditional assumption of linear, upward immigrant assimilation into the U.S. middle-class, is often explained via Portes and Zhou's (1993) concept of segmented assimilation, which asserts that systemic barriers can cause some immigrant populations to take a downward trajectory into the U.S. underclass. Recent scholarship, using more sophisticated statistical modeling, has undercut this segmented assimilation thesis as too simplistic (Luthra et al., 2018). Examining middle-class Mexican Americans in Los Angeles, Vallejo (2012) described a "minority culture of mobility" (p. 3) as an alternative to the dichotomy of linear upward and segmented downward assimilation. This third path allows access to the middle class with a Mexican American identity rather than via the appropriation of Whiteness.

Yet even this path requires that upwardly mobile Mexican Americans "manage interethnic relationships with middle-class whites who rely on class, immigrant, and ethnic stereotypes to define what it means to be Mexican American" (Vallejo, 2012, p. 177). They have to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and build an assimilative counternarrative about themselves. For example, Whites' perceptions of "ethnic boundaries [can] become firm when socially mobile Mexican Americans overtly display their ethnicity through ethnic cues such as speaking Spanish" (Vallejo, 2012, p. 177). Thus, even in highly Latino Los Angeles, joining the "minority culture of mobility" often requires public acceptance and participation in English monolingualism.

Multiple studies have documented the decline of Spanish use from G1 immigrants to their G3 grandchildren. M. H. Lopez et al. (2018) reported that while 97% of G1 Latino parents speak Spanish with their children (G2), the use of Spanish by G2 with their G3 children declines to 49%. As a result, small numbers of G3 speak Spanish fluently (Rumbaut et al., 2006). Research has shown that "parents are mainly responsible for [whether] their children's heritage language" is maintained or lost (Park & Sarkar, 2007, p. 232). Liang (2018) noted that even when parents "proactively promote heritage language at home" (p. 73), if they do not enforce a strict heritage language-only rule, a disappointing gap between parents' bilingual aspirations and their children's English-dominant reality often emerges.

Soccer

Sports, especially soccer, are understood as potential sites for Latino immigrant assimilation into U.S. civil society and upward mobility within the mainstream (Robledo et al., 2022; Stodolska & Tainsky, 2015). For example, Cuadros (2006) documented the instrumentality of soccer in ameliorating anti-Latino hostilities in a small, rural Southern town. Poblete (2015) posited that soccer is an "internalized border zone in the United States" (p. 269) where people often kept separate (e.g., the upper middle class, women, and immigrants) meet. As such, it provides a space where immigrants feel a sense of belonging due to their opportunity to interact with the middle-class Whites who dominate much of U.S. soccer (Bushnell, 2020).

Soccer is by far the most popular sport for U.S. high school Latino boys and girls (Pharr & Lough, 2014). Lin et al. (2018) demonstrated that recent G1 Mexican parents often projected their hopes for the cultivation of traditional Mexican values of *respeto* and *familismo* onto their children's soccer participation. These parental hopes may or may not be borne out. Some studies (Guzmán-Rocha et al., 2017; Robledo et al., 2022) have documented positive outcomes from organized youth activities, including soccer. However, Chen and Harklau (2017) and Mackin and Walther (2012) provided counternarratives to the assumed positive instrumentality of soccer.

Methods and Participants

This study emerged unexpectedly during the authors' process of collecting data for three other research projects regarding mixed-immigration-status families, racial identity formation, and migrancy-themed literature (Beck & Stevenson, 2015, 2016; Stevenson & Beck, 2021). We started recruiting for the original research projects via convenience sampling (Ferber, 1977) of associates from our decades of service to the local migrant community. From there, we "snowballed" (Atkinson & Flint, 2001) the sample to a larger number of participants.

Our participants were 30 adult former migrant farmworkers, renamed with pseudonyms here. The majority were G2 rural Southern Mexican Americans who arrived in southeast Georgia in the 1980s or 1990s as migrant children. They worked alongside their parents in the fields, and their families eventually settled in the region. Most used education

to leave the fields and begin modest careers, and they are now aspiring middle-class parents.

Data were collected using semi-structured protocols during bilingual individual interviews and focus groups (Spradley, 1979). In the context of interviews and focus group discussions for other projects, our G2 participants would frequently, and often emotionally, shift the conversation away from our protocol and toward the challenges they now faced as parents. The repeated experience of these topical shifts prompted us to return to our data using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in search of emergent themes regarding parenting. Data were organized and analyzed following grounded theory coding, minimizing our preconceptions to be open to various interpretations (Charmaz, 2017) while seeking meaningful recurrent statements and emergent themes. This process led us to the following questions.

1. How does the local context of the rural South enable and constrain the parenting options of post-migrant G2 Mexican American parents aspiring for access to the middle-class "American DREAM" for their G3 children?
2. What elements of their *Mexicanidad* (e.g., *respeto, familisimo,* Spanish fluency, hard work, soccer) do these parents implicitly or explicitly emphasize or deemphasize?

Findings

Avoiding Social Isolation: Between *Mexicanidad* and the Rural White Middle Class

During our conversations, the participants repeatedly talked about their social isolation when they were children attending schools in the rural South. They were among the very small number of Latinos to first enroll in recently integrated, racially tense, White-Black schools. Their childhoods provided heartfelt memories of familial relationships, mutual support, and hard work. At the same time, their constant feeling of not belonging left them with questions of identity in their new social space.

> Ignacia: No one chose to reach out to me. They [local students] were just so unkind at times. You know it was almost like there was a lot of prejudice-ness.… We [my brother and I] tried to be friends with people [but] no one would ever come up to us and just talk to us or try to be friends with us or want to interact with us.

The participants may not have understood their post-desegregation historical context, but they did know that they did not like it. Another participant recalled her experience.

> Dominga: [It was] awful. I remember the kids. They would pick on me because I didn't know English, and I couldn't tell the teacher when they would push me around. I hardly didn't have any friends.… There was just one Hispanic girl that she would translate what the teacher would say, but she wouldn't hang around with me or play.

These traumatic childhood experiences appear to have framed participants' adult parenting choices as they have negotiated between their family's traditions of *Mexicanidad* and the compromises necessary to find a place within the local, predominantly White middle class.

Spanish: From *Familismo* to Resistance

Questions regarding language and multilingualism are some of the first faced by immigrant communities, parents, and their children in the US. For nearly all our participants, their childhood home language was Spanish simply because it was their G1 Mexican immigrant parents' primary language. The lives of migrant farmworkers are highly isolated from the U.S. mainstream and, thus, are very comparable to urban ethnic immigrant enclaves in which adults can function with little exposure to English while their children develop English skills at school. Although the use of Spanish was dominant in all the participants' G1–G2 homes, two G1 parents were particularly proactive and intentional about preserving Spanish, as shown in this conversation between Ester and Antonio.

> Researcher 1: I am curious about the language. So, when you were growing up in your households, did you speak Spanish at home?
> Ester: All the time. That was one of the rules my father said. At school, outside, we can speak any language we want, but when we come home, only Spanish, and no Spanglish.
> Antonio: Yeah, we mostly [spoke] Spanish.… [My dad] didn't like us to speak in Spanglish. [He said] "Do not speak to me in mixed languages, either English or Spanish."

The only examples of strict G2–G3 parental intentionality about Spanish preservation also came from Ester and Antonio.

> Researcher 1: Do you speak to your own children in Spanish?

Antonio: When they were small, it was nothing but Spanish, and they didn't speak English until they went to kindergarten. And that way it is, they learned how to speak either all Spanish or all English.

Ester: I did the same with mine. Because sometimes it gets lost so you have to.… It was really hard for me because my husband is American, and my kids went to daycare. And in daycare, the only thing they speak is English. So the only one speaking to them in Spanish is me. … They would tell me "I don't want to speak Spanish, Mom." Well, "*No hablo Inglés, no entiendo* [I do not speak English, I do not understand.]"

Similar G3 resistance to Spanish was mentioned by multiple other upwardly mobile G2 parents whose life trajectories have incorporated them and their children, at least partially, into their local English-only middle class. These G2 participants often expressed regret that their G3 children were not proficient in Spanish. Many referenced partial, less than strict, and therefore failed attempts to cultivate Spanish in their G3 children. For example,

Nanci: The problem that I see now a lot of our [local Mexican-heritage] kids, not all of them, but a lot of our kids only speak English. Their Spanish is broken Spanish, and so there is not open communication with parents. That communication is pretty much gone.… See that's where we lose our language, I carried [my children] to Mexico and left them there for two weeks.… They knew some [Spanish] when they came back.…

Researcher 2: How about the way you use language with your kids?

Nanci: I speak to them in Spanish.

Researcher 2: And they answer?

Nanci: In English.

Another participant elaborated on this point.

Ignacia: My children don't want to speak Spanish. And I want to teach them Spanish because it's good that they learn the language. I tell them, "It will be great in your future," but they're not interested. I'll try to turn on the Spanish channel and everybody leaves.…When I first had [my oldest child], my mother kept him, and he picked up a lot of Spanish.… Then my mother got sick, and she couldn't keep him anymore, so I had to put him in the daycare, and he lost every bit that he picked up, and after that he just didn't want to learn it. I think they're just accustomed to hearing [English] at school with their friends, and that's all they do, talking English to each other.

Thus, most participants were disappointed that their children were not mastering their heritage language and were growing up less connected to the culture and *familismo* of their people. Part of the cause for this resistance to and withering of G3 Spanish can be directly connected to problematic attitudes in the local schools.

Elba: They're [local schools] actually trying to make them stop talking Spanish. I have a little nephew that came home, and his mom told him to talk Spanish, and he said, "No, my teacher told me not to speak Spanish." So, it is like he doesn't want to talk Spanish anymore because they don't want him to talk Spanish.

Angela: *Eso le paso a me.* [That happened to me]. They told me that. *Una viejita,* [An old teacher], when we spoke Spanish, she was like, "You're in America, you gotta speak English," she would tell me, and I was already in high school.

Another focus group discussed the same patterns.

Selena: Teachers tell the parents, "Don't let them speak Spanish at home. They need to speak just English, if they speak a lot of Spanish, they are never going to learn English."

Juana: It happens, I have seen it! …

Felicia: It is also because they [the parents] have been discriminated [against]. They want the kids, the faster they become assimilated to the culture, the faster they will be accepted, and they are paying the price of losing that part of the culture.

Teresa: They think that they are going to be less discriminated [against] if they choose [English], if they do not understand Spanish.

Felicia: Some kids, they deny that they speak Spanish.… They don't want anyone to know that they speak Spanish. Because the parents have told them it is not a good idea.

Other participants even spoke of children hiding that they have an understanding of Spanish.

Much culpability is attributable to the local schools, but most of our G2 parents had, at least implicitly, made three interrelated choices: (a) not to enforce a strict Spanish-only rule at home, (b) to accept their children's English-only identities, and (c) to celebrate the social access they gained. Home language decline in G3 is not unusual (Alba et al., 2002), but these examples demonstrate the assimilative power of a monolingual rural community

where the only public representations of Spanish are associated with marginalization, poverty, and otherness. G3 children in such settings bring home negative attitudes about the language of their grandparents and resist sustaining their Spanish.

Hard Child Labor in the Fields as a Valued Motivator

Regarding their experiences of working as field laborers during their childhoods, many of our G2 participants boasted with pride about their own histories of hard work alongside their G1 parents. For example, Cesario said, "I have worked most of my life, so it's not new, just normal. Other people might be surprised, 'You used to work as a kid?' Yeah, just helping out … the family." Elba added, "You work from dawn to dusk, and you still don't sometimes make ends meet! Hard work!" However, few participants' close family members were currently working in the fields, and therefore their G3 children had not experienced such labor. Participants spoke of the need to teach their children the value of hard work. Multiple G2 parents spoke of creating fieldwork experiences for their children to teach them about the sacrifices that they (G2) and their parents (G1) made to provide opportunities and thereby motivate their G3 children in school. This strategy emerged as two participants reminisced about the struggles of their childhood.

> Antonio: So it's true, you know, you got to walk in somebody's shoes to believe it. I see my kids, you know, they don't really.
> Ester: They don't get it.
> Researcher 2: Do you think is it possible for them to get it? …
> Antonio: I think I will get them to grasp a little bit of the concept if I actually take them down there [the fields] and make them work like a half a day or something. You know they kind of get the idea maybe.
> Ester: Yeah, make them work there.

During another focus group discussion about the appropriateness of child labor, the participants presented a similar rationale.

> Fernanda: I feel for me, it's like I have to teach my son how to work. … I don't see that as something offensive. I see something as like one of life's greatest lessons that you can give your kids. Even the Bible says, "The one that doesn't work, should not eat." …
> Laura: It's a great lesson. It's hard work.
> Researcher 2: Great lesson about what? What should they be learning from it?
> Laura: Hard work. And money doesn't grow on trees like we grew up, you know.…
> Fernanda: *Pienso que es mejor que trabajen duro para que digan, "no quiero hacer esto toda mi vida. Un día quiero estudiar, hacer otra cosa." A mi me encantaría un día llevar a mi niño al campo. Yo ya no tengo nada que ver allí, pero llevarlo conmigo y decirle, "es como trabaja alguna gente. Esto hizo tu mami cuando era niña." Porque yo quiero que él vea, que lo sienta. Tal vez no ponerlo a trabajar, pero, será como un field trip para él. Cuando menos que sepa.*[1]
> Laura: *Y que no tiene que hacerlo porque ahora tú ganas bien y lo vas a educar [para] que vaya a la universidad*.[2]

Moreover, a participant in another interview spoke of taking their children to the fields and doing it again.

> Dominga: Last year when [my field-working relatives] did pecans, I took them [my children] to the pecan field. I wanted them to know that you have to work, there is work that goes through to picking them and putting them at the stores or at the table or whatever. I told my mom, "When you go [work in] blueberries, let me know so I can take them." I mean just for a little bit. I've never taken them anywhere but the pecans, but I do plan on showing them and, and you know this is what it is, this is where it comes from.…
> Researcher 2: So, are you expecting to have them out in the fields to work?
> Dominga: Just to let them know, you know? I mean like, where the crop comes from, how it grows. It is something that I want to have them … to appreciate and know where I came from.

[1] Fernanda: I think that it is better for them to work hard so they will say, "I don't want to do this all my life. I want to go to school someday and do something else." I would love to take my son to the fields someday. I don't work there anymore, but I'd take him with me and tell him, "This is how some people work. This is what your mommy did when she was a child." Because I would like him to see how it feels and know. Maybe I wouldn't put him to work, but it would be like a field trip for him. At least he would know.

[2] Laura: And [he would know] that he doesn't have to do that work because you make good money and you will educate him and help him go to college.

> And pushing them forward and just letting them know [that] they're getting the opportunity to do something else besides you know, working in the fields.

Our participants clearly and repeatedly articulated how they valued the lessons they had learned from their childhood days in the fields, but they recognized that these lessons likely would not be passed along to their relatively privileged G3 children. Thus, some wished for and even created limited fieldwork experiences for their children.

Sports Fields in the Place of Onion Fields?

Our participants also spoke of how sports, especially soccer, and occasionally other extracurricular activities, such as band, had come to occupy the space and time in their G3 children's lives that fieldwork had in their own G2 childhoods. Often these descriptions began with reflections on the fact that such activities were not available to them as children in part because their after-school hours were spent working. Manuel and Antonio, who were picked up after school each afternoon to work in the fields recalled, "My dad was always like, 'Sports are a waste of time.'" Antonio added, "We couldn't even go to high school football games!" Beyond parental disapproval and the need to work to support the family, transportation was an obstacle for most. Ester explained that migrants "live so far away—you cannot really [join] those after-school programs." Thus, none of our participants spoke of playing sports or participating in other extracurriculars as G2 children, which increased their sense of isolation.

Participants were enthusiastic about these opportunities for their own children, speaking with parental pride about their children's participation and accomplishments in soccer and other youth activities. They often framed these achievements as ways to keep their children on the path to graduation, much like the motivation derived from fieldwork. For example, Katia shared, "I told them that I don't care what you do, but you are finishing school. And I don't care what sport you play, but you are playing a sport in school.… It keeps them more focused in school."

G2 parent participants repeatedly shared examples of how participation in soccer and other extracurriculars was leading to social integration and dating with local Whites, something that was very uncommon during their G2 childhoods.

> Katia: I would have never thought about that! [laughing] … It was just our culture. It wasn't that open back then, I guess, with the Whites and the Blacks. They had a different lifestyle than what we did.…
>
> Yadira: I dated one [White guy] for about a week, he was too redneck! [laughing] So that was the end of it.

Similarly, when Ignacia and her White husband dated and married in the 1990s, such mixed-ethnicity relationships were rare. Ignacia stated, "I didn't see a lot of it." Now, though, Latino-White romantic relationships are common. A particularly noteworthy exchange regarding these relationships occurred when Ignacia's husband, a high school band director and soccer coach, unexpectedly joined our conversation for a few minutes. He talked about two male Mexican-heritage students who were on his soccer team and dating White girls. Another of his students, a male Mexican American drum major, had married a White girl from the soccer team.

As these examples suggest, although Latino cross-ethnic dating is more common now, it is still gendered and racialized, with Mexican male-White female relationships predominating.

> Nanci: A lot of the [Mexican] girls, they date the other Mexican boys. You have one every now and then who may date a White boy or a Black boy, but even here still in our society that is not acceptable.
>
> Researcher 2: What about the Latino boys, are they dating across lines?
>
> Nanci: They date White girls, they don't date Black girls.
>
> Researcher 2: Which Latino boys are the ones that are dating White girls?
>
> Nanci: These are probably third generation, U.S. born. If the boys are in the band, they will have a girl in the band, but it won't be a Latino girl, it will be a White girl.

Other participants echoed similar patterns and constraints. These descriptions suggested that Latino boys may more easily use school activities to achieve social integration into the local, White-dominated middle class.

Discussion, Significance, and Recommendations

Participants' Mexican-heritage migrant childhoods did not fully prepare them for aspirational (Alvarez, 2020) middle-class parenting. As described by Carrillo (2016) and López Hernández (2022),

most of our participants' reflections on their childhoods included painful memories of how their poverty and bicultural lives left them isolated from their classmates. Now, as adults, they seek middle-class security and belonging for themselves and their children. However, Southern rural social contexts do not allow for a Latino-identified "minority culture of mobility" (Vallejo, 2012). As G2 parents, they have consciously or unconsciously chosen a fast-track of assimilation into the rural White middle class. In such a context, assimilation outweighs preservation of *Mexicanidad*, except when the two are consistent with each other.

Regarding language, their childhood *familismo* supported their own bilingualism, but their children's more mainstream lifestyle and local schools are blocking Spanish use. Living bilingually and biculturally is not supported in the mainstream of the rural South, and most participants did not implement what Liang (2018) demonstrated as necessary—a Spanish-only restriction at home. Thus, Mexican *familismo* (Knight et al., 2010) and linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) via preservation of Spanish have been, at least partially, lost. Participants explained that while their G3 children demonstrate limited Spanish comprehension in private settings, their productive speech is almost entirely English, even at home, much less in public contexts.

The rhetoric of the Protestant work ethic and prosperity theology, as described by Bowler (2018), are pervasive elements of public Southern rural White middle-class culture. Our participants have deployed discursive practices (Alvarez, 2020) to leverage their personal narratives of hard childhood labor to make especially strong claims upon the same rhetoric. Like G. López (2001), our participants' experiences of childhood hard work in the fields motivated them in school, but they also instilled values that are not easily replicated within their own children's comfortable lives. Many participants expressed concern that they would have to find other ways to teach the value of hard work, an essential element of *respeto*, in their children. Multiple participants have considered or even created token experiences for their children to work in the fields.

Implicit alternatives for their G3 children were structured extracurricular activities, especially soccer. These activities, in effect, replace the parents' G2 childhood hours in the fields. Additionally, as a sport deeply embedded in the cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) of *Mexicanidad*, soccer affirms their Mexican American identity (Stodolska & Tainsky, 2015). The participants lionized these opportunities as a means of socialization and integration of their own children into middle-class society, "crossing over" Poblete's (2015) "internalized border zone" (p. 269). In addition, as a sport with high participation by privileged White upper middle-class players (Bushnell, 2020), it opened opportunities for friendships and relationships that were unavailable a generation earlier.

As G2 parents, participants described their "pedagogies of the home" (Delgado Bernal, 2010) as seeking to preserve their linguistic heritage, teach the value of hard work, and facilitate their G3 children's upward mobility into the middle class. As their families' economic status has risen, the contradictions and coincidences of these goals have been revealed. These G2 parents have emphasized and intentionally encouraged Southern White middle-class-compatible values and behaviors, such as hard work/*respeto* and soccer, which have facilitated integration. Meanwhile, however, they have implicitly deemphasized incompatible aspects of their *Mexicanidad*, especially multilingualism.

As a result, their G3 children have gained access to White middle-class friendships and norms, but only by sacrificing facility with Spanish and all that it entails for *familismo* (Knight et al., 2010). In the end, our G2 participants expressed enthusiasm for how their G3 children are better able to fit into the local community and schools than they had. They also were aware that this result had come at a cost and questioned whether the trade-off was worth it. The aspirational middle-class American dream of our participants continually draws them into negotiations and sometimes disquieting compromises with the culture of the rural South.

Given these findings, we suggest a five-point agenda of goals for practitioners and policymakers regarding the improvement of education and socialization of current and future generations of marginalized, multilingual students in rural schools.

1. Explicit and well-funded efforts, structures, and policies to encourage the social integration of newly arrived multilingual families into supportive and safe schools and communities.
2. Explicit education, professional development, and policies to build educator and parent understanding of the ease and benefits of multilingualism.
3. Building upon the first two initiatives, cultivate and expect, as a matter of policy, a

culture of asset, rather than deficit, thinking among educators about the differences and enrichment multilingual students bring to rural classrooms.

4. Explicitly and directly incorporate the hard work experiences of multilingual families into the curriculum to connect with multilingual students' funds of knowledge and build local-origin students' empathy.
5. Use policy and funding to expand access to and encourage the participation of multilingual students across the full range of extracurricular activities.

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