Acculturative stress can be associated with increased conflicts between Latino parents and adolescent youth, and have negative effects on Latino immigrant parents’ psychosocial functioning and parenting practices. Yet, the potentially deleterious effects of acculturative stress on Latino immigrant parents’ psychosocial functioning and parenting practices may be mitigated through positive acculturative strategies, such as participating in forms of cultural expression that reinforce Latino parents’ and children’s cultural identity. The study employed a qualitative research approach to examine the meaning that *mexicana* and Mexican American mothers give to their children’s participation in the culturally affirming activity of folkloric Mexican dance. This study was informed by hybridity theory. Hybridity theory has been applied in cultural studies when tending to issues of the reconfigurations of cultural practices and identities to adapt to new and changing cultural, historical, and political contexts. This study used individual and focus group interviews with an intensive sample and a comparison sample of women whose children participated in folkloric Mexican dance groups from three communities in Oregon. Inductive analysis of the interview data revealed that the meaning Mexican and Mexican
American women ascribed to their and their children’s participation in folkloric Mexican dance groups can be organized around three key themes that were supportive of their mothering practices: *desenvolverse* (the process of the children’s unfolding), *convivencia* (living in the company of others; connection), and, most importantly, continuity in aspects of the mothers’ Mexican cultural identity that gets carried forward in their children’s cultural identity development. Policies designed to support Mexican and Mexican American mothers and families by way of implementing and supporting groups where culturally affirming activities are discussed. Recommendations for future studies on participation in culturally affirming activities as a buffer to acculturative stress are included.
An Oregonian Jarabe: Danza Folklórica and Mexicana Mothers

by

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Monica L. Olvera, Author
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Javier and Miguel follow a group of girls onto the stage, looking at a crowd of expectant adults. The adults seem large, menacing, and strange to the two small boys. Both are dressed in a generous sombrero, a traje de charro (similar to costumes worn by mariachi musicians) adorned with golden thread and buttons, boots, and a moño (bow-tie). Three year-old Miguel stays close to his brother’s side. Six year-old Javier has danced before, so Miguel looks to his brother for guidance. Both brothers hold a pair of machetes—one perched on the right shoulder, the other tucked in at the left hip. Miguel finds himself separated from his brother by a girl in a brightly colored dress, adorned with ribbons and lace, just slightly taller than himself. A familiar song begins to play from somewhere, and Miguel finds himself getting pushed to his right. He obligingly moves along. He feels the swish of the girl’s dress as she moves her skirt side to side as she shuffles along, slightly pushing him. In his bewilderment, Miguel looks to his brother for some guidance, but his brother’s gaze is trained elsewhere. Miguel follows his brother’s gaze to the audience, a sea of strange faces. Suddenly, however, he recognizes one beloved and familiar face, that of his mother. There she is, a huge smile lighting up her face. She holds up her index finger and twirls it, a gesture Miguel has learned means to turn. As he turns, Miguel is careful not to lose sight of his mother’s face. As he completes his turn, his mother moves her hands to tap her fists together in front of her, then behind her. Miguel knows this motion means he is supposed to tap the machetes together in front and behind himself. Miguel wields his machetes with all the might he can muster from his little body, all the while keeping his mother’s face in his sights. At the end of the song, Miguel’s mother burst into applause and yells, “Bien hecho,
Miguel!” Good job, Miguel. As Miguel exits the stage with his brother and the other children, he misses the smile on his mother’s face, a look of pride and contentment.

Javier and Miguel have just performed a *Los Machetes de Jalisco*, a folkloric Mexican dance from the state of Jalisco, at a museum’s opening ceremony of an exhibit centered upon *El Día de los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead. Their mother, Juana, is among a small group of *mexicana* mothers who have enrolled their children in México Lindo, a folkloric Mexican dance group with a ten year history in one of Oregon’s larger metro areas.

The mothers, mostly first-generation *mexicana* immigrants, raise their children in a context perhaps very different from the communities in which they were raised. These mothers, like many immigrant parents before them, face the task of acculturation or (re)constructing their identities within a new cultural context, both as individuals and as a part of the family unit. Historically, acculturation in the US has been grounded in assimilationist policies and practices wherein an individual is expected to conform to the norms, beliefs, practices, and language of the dominant culture in the receiving society. While an assimilation approach might have been appropriate for Anglo-European immigrants to the US, it is an option documented to result in self-deprivation and psychological maladjustment among non-Anglo populations (Berry, 2006; Birman, 1994; Gonzales, Fabrett, & Knight, 2009). In contrast, forms of acculturation that allow individuals’ to retain traits of one’s sending community, while adapting to the culture of the receiving community, may promote positive psychological effects such as feelings of pride, distinctiveness, and a rich sense of one’s community and history (Benet-Martinez & Haritastos, 2005). As these mothers enroll their children in *danza tradicional y ballet folklórico*, a traditional form of cultural expression that reinforces national identity, cultural values, and connection to one’s community (Arellano Chávez, 2009), it may be that they are seeking out or working to
create a space within their community that will support a more positive form of acculturation. This study examined why Mexicana mothers enroll their children in such a culturally affirming activity, seeking to understand the meaning such participation holds for them as mothers.

Los mexicanos residing in Oregon have faced a history of racism and discrimination. The deleterious effects of stress associated with learning a new language, obtaining employment, coping with discrimination, and navigating a negative political environment are well documented, and can include declines in physical, emotional, and behavioral health (Arbona et. al., 2010; Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Cervantes et.al., 1991, McClure et.al., 2010). Acculturative stress can be associated with increased conflicts between Latino parents and adolescent youth (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994), and have negative effects on Latino immigrant parents’ psychosocial functioning and parenting (Gonzales, Fabrett, & Knight, 2009). Stressful experiences associated with acculturation can also contribute to a greater likelihood of youth substance abuse (Martinez, 2006); academic problems and lower academic achievement for Latino adolescents (DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006); more authoritarian parenting practices (Martinez, 2006); and the erosion of family cohesion as the family acculturates to US society (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007).

There are many mothers who, like Javier and Miguel’s mother, are raising their children in the cultural context of Oregon. Oregon has experienced a growth in the number of Latino families with resident children. In 2010, the majority of Latino youth in Oregon were native born, with 10% of Latino youth born outside the US (Latino Kids Data Explorer, 2013), whereas in 2000, 18% of Latino youth in Oregon were born outside the US. Between 2000-2010, the Hispanic population in Oregon grew by 63.5% (Oregon’s Demographic Trends, 2011). The overwhelming majority of Hispanics in Oregon are of Mexican heritage. It is purported that the
growth in Oregon’s Latino population is due to higher fertility rates among Latina families and Latino families moving to Oregon from other states, rather than continued immigration from Latin American countries. Due to the growth in the population of Latino youth in Oregon, it is important that we gain a greater understanding of experiences of acculturation. Thus, the study, using danza tradicional (traditional dance) as a lens, possesses the potential to identify strategies that foment positive development during the acculturative process.

Mothers are the primary focus of this research because they are traditionally considered the conveyers of cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices from one generation to the next (Anzaldúa, 1987). Quotidian routines associated primarily with mothering, such as household work, childcare, and schooling, provide opportunities in which children are exposed to culturally valued activities and practices valued (Miller, 2006). Children learn of their cultural heritage through conversations with their parents, interactions with other adults and their peers, and participating in cultural settings. Additionally, mothers were the target participants in the study because, in my ten years of involvement with México Lindo, mothers have comprised the majority of participating parents.

Even though mexicanos have had an enduring presence in Oregon, as early as the 1820s, with sharp population increases from 1942-1964 during the Bracero Program, the histories and experiences of mexicanos have only received attention primarily in the last few decades. The experiences and histories of mexicanas, however, remain understudied. It is expected that findings from this research will contribute to understandings about first-generation mexicana mothers’ acculturative experience in the US. Such understandings may inform policy, practice, and future research leading to providing resources and support to mexicana women and their families in their acculturative process to US society.
This study is informed by hybridity theory. Hybridity theory has been applied in cultural studies when tending to issues of the reconfigurations of race and ethnicity in multicultural contexts. Bhabha (1994) suggests that cultural hybridities emerge during times of historical transformation that may cause a sense of disturbance or disorientation. During such times, individuals and communities may find themselves “in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). That is, individuals and communities may find themselves at disjunctures in which they must negotiate cultural practices and identities to adapt to new and changing cultural, historical, and political contexts. Such moments or “in-between” spaces of negotiation “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). In this fashion, hybridity can be viewed as a positive transformative feature in which individuals and communities negotiate and redefine “pre-given ethnic or cultural traits” for the purpose of adapting to changing environs (Bhabha, 1994, p. 3).

The study employed a qualitative approach to examine the meanings Mexican and Mexican American mothers give to their own and their children’s participation in Mexican folkloric dance groups. Two primary data collection strategies were utilized: individual interviews with an intensive sample of ten mothers belonging to one children’s folkloric dance group, and focus group interviews with a comparison sample of nine additional mothers involved in two other folkloric dance groups, all in the Pacific Northwest. The use of such methods supported our aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the mothers’ beliefs, experiences, and attitudes (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).
After the performance, Juana packs up Javier and Miguel’s charro outfits from the state of Jalisco, along with their costumes for Danza de los Viejitos (Dance of the Old Men) and El Caballito (The Little Horse), representing Michoacán and Nuevo León, respectively. The word jarabe in the title of this study refers to the mixing and combination of different pasos y zapateados (steps) that are particular to specific regions or communities. For example, the Jarabe Michoacano, from the state of Michoacán, is a conglomeration of movements and steps that are typical to different parts of Michoacán. Similarly, the children from México Lindo perform dances from different regions of México, but their performance contains hybridized versions of the dances. The mothers may have sewn the children’s costumes in a creative effort to approximate the “traditional” vestuario, using materials and techniques in their local environments. So, too, as the children present dances from different regions of México, each with its own costume, they perform shifting cultural identities that possess multiple layers of contextual embeddedness, such as the historical time and place where the performance is given. Just as the mothers admire their children’s public performance of a culturally affirming activity, it is my hope that the mothers’ who participated in this study have had the opportunity to marvel at themselves in their remarkable resiliency and creativity.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

“Each Folklórico costume comes with specific guidelines that must be followed. They’ve been shaped by history, custom, climate—everything that is unique to their particular region. The costume maker doesn’t change these things but works with them and around them…you must never forget that each costume you make, the colors and shapes you use, are filled with symbolism. They are links to your past. They are the continuation of your people’s traditions. Your costumes must preserve the essence of your culture” (Grande, 2009, 230-231.

In her novel Dancing with Butterflies, Reyna Grande depicts the lives of four mexicanas living in California who share a passion for Folklórico. In the above excerpt, one of the women, Soledad, reflects upon her grandmother’s admonishment to preserve the symbolism in the costumes she sews for the Folklórico dancers. La abuelita de Soledad reminds her to be creative in the textures and colors of fabric she chooses, but to also sew dresses that can withstand the dancers’ movements. Soledad must fashion dresses that retain a dance’s history and symbolism, yet which are also appropriate for a staged performance. For Soledad and the other women, Folklórico provides a connection to the experiences and histories shared by many mexicanas who seek to maintain or preserve their cultural heritage while residing in the US. This chapter provides a discussion of the functions danza tradicional has in México and the US, such as a means to preserve and maintain one’s cultural heritage. But first, an overview of the history of the presence of mexicanos in Oregon is required, followed by a synopsis of theoretical typologies of acculturation.
Context

Brief history of mexicanos in Oregon

Public dialogues and policy regarding Latinos may be informed by punitive anti-immigrant and assimilationist proclivities. For example, anti-immigrant ballot measures designed to deny or limit unauthorized immigrants’ access to social services, health care, and public education, appeared in Oregon in 1996 and 1997. In 2008, Bill Sizemore introduced a state statute ballot measure that, if passed, would have limited or eliminated bilingual education programs and promoted “English immersion” education. Mendoza (2012) interviewed Oregon residents of Latino descent who were angered by other ballot measures in 2006 and 2008 that denied rights to immigrants and burdened low-income households with unequal taxation. In 2014 Oregon voters defeated Measure 88, the Oregon Alternative Driver Licenses Referendum, which would have made four-year driver licenses available to those who cannot prove legal presence in the US. But, that same year, Oregon voters approved the recreational use of marijuana. At the time this document is being written, a ballot measure is being considered which would make English the official language in Oregon, and would have implications in the delivery of human services, public safety, and public education. As a result of such ballot measures, media coverage and public awareness campaigns have promoted harsh assimilationist policies aimed at Latino communities, without taking into consideration the long-standing presence and contributions of Latinos in Oregon, specifically those of los mexicanos.

Los mexicanos have a long history in Oregon. As early as the 1840s, mexicanos were present in Oregon as mule drivers, shepherders, vaqueros (cowhands), and migrant laborers (Peterson del Mar, 2005). Los mexicanos who resided in Oregon tended to settle in rural areas. During the years 1910-1930 Oregon also experienced an increase in the population of mexicanos
who fled México during the Mexican Revolution. Historian Erasmo Gamboa (1990) noted that migrant laborers were also recruited to work in western sugar beet enterprises and Portland became a significant recruitment site for Mexican workers. During the Depression, however, the US government extensively passed and enforced strict deportation policies. In his analysis of Mexican migration to Oregon from 1900-1930, Gamboa (1990) states

All told, the decade of the Depression did little to alter the migration patterns of Mexican people to the Pacific Northwest. On the surface, it would appear that the general unemployment, the end of Mexican immigration to the United States, and the influx of many uprooted Midwesterners to the Northwest were reasons enough why Mexicans would not continue to be recruited to the northwestern states. Yet, paradoxically and in contrast to the 1920s, Mexican migratory workers came in greater numbers…As before, the region’s agricultural industry needed workers, Mexicans were sought out because they were available, they could be paid cheap wages, and would accept the laborious jobs that others turned down…

Federal and state relief was not extended to them, and the opportunity to escape the migratory cycle through the resettlement program was beyond their reach…Paid low wages and excluded from rehabilitation, those Mexicans who became permanent residents in the Northwest and elsewhere had no significant choice but to retreat into the backwaters to the depressed rural communities of the 1930s (p. 20-21).

After the 1930s, Oregon was a destination or receiving state for Mexican migrants during the Mexican Farm Labor Program, also known as the Bracero program (1942-1964), a bilateral guest worker program wherein the US contracted and imported thousands of Mexican to work in the agricultural sector (Peterson del Mar, 2005). This major policy shift formalized US
recruitment of farm workers from México and arguably provided supports for those workers as well. México allowed migrant laborers to work in the US contingent on the stipulated terms that the workers would be provided with adequate housing conditions, assured 30 hours work per week, and guaranteed salaries, conditions which were repeatedly violated by US employers (Peterson del Mar, 2005).

The Bracero Program was initially created to bring a temporary labor force during World War II, when US men were deployed abroad. While women were among those who migrated, little is known about their presence. From 1950-1986, some guest workers stayed in Oregon as sojourners, settling in areas such as Woodburn, Ontario, Vale, and Nyssa. Malheur, Umatilla, and Madras counties were popular areas for bracero workers to settle (Gonzales-Berry & Mendoza, 2010; Griffith, 2003; Peterson del Mar, 2005). During the same years Oregon also experienced an increase in its tejano population (Mexicans and Mexican Americans who trace their origins to Texas) (Gonzales-Berry & Mendoza, 2010). Among the many crops the bracero workers cultivated, some of the most common crops were sugar beet, potatoes, asparagus, onions, cucumbers, peas, as well as working in harvests in apple and pear orchards (Peterson del Mar, 2005; Tucker, 2002).

Despite the Bracero Program officially terminating in 1964, Mexican migrants continued to be recruited by contactors, some of whom were hired by landowners in the agricultural sector of Oregon (Gonzales-Berry & Mendoza, 2010; Stephen, 2007). These workers consisted of both authorized and unauthorized individuals, mostly men. Over time, migrant workers obtained employment in blue-collar jobs, in addition to agricultural employment (Gonzales-Berry & Mendoza, 2010; Griffith, 2003; Peterson del Mar, 2005). During this period and beyond, migrant laborers and their families experienced heightened discrimination based in racism and prejudice,
fueled by anti-immigrant sentiments promulgated, in part, by local newspapers and the press (Gonzales-Berry & Mendoza, 2010).

Two pieces of legislation passed in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) and the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAW), intended to solve the “immigration crisis” by securing the US/México border and erasing the illegal status for unauthorized immigrants (Gonzales-Berry & Mendoza, 2010). Through these acts migrant workers were able to obtain amnesty or temporary residency, provided they met terms of their continued presence and employment in the US for a specified period of time. Once workers received amnesty and were regularized, many were reunited with their children, wives, parents, and siblings. Yet, some SAW workers who were joined by their families did not apply for visas or did not complete the application process for their families (Gonzales-Berry & Mendoza, 2010).

Until the late 1980s, migration patterns among Mexican migrant workers were circular, in that individuals from traditional sending communities, primarily men, would circle back and forth from the US to their communities of origin (Gonzales-Berry & Mendoza, 2010). With the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, however, the US/México border became highly militarized. Where there was once an imaginary line in the dirt, walls, fences, and barbed wire were erected, stemming migration flows and increasing the degree of difficulty and danger in gaining entry to the US. As a result, migrant workers, both authorized and unauthorized, began to remain in Oregon for longer spans, either being separated from family and friends, eventually forming families in Oregon, or sending for family members to come to Oregon to reside.
The militarization of the México/US border, along with heightened social paranoia of terrorism, anti-immigrant sentiments, and domestic security taking prominence among political issues after the attacks of September 11, 2001 have also altered the patterns of migration among Mexican nationals immigrating to Oregon. Where at one time men and women might participate in cyclical migration, or a pattern of repeated migrating to and fro between the sending and receiving communities, migrants now tend to not return to their sending communities. This is due, in part, to increased danger, risk, and costs associated with crossing the US/México border. Thus, since the year 2000, migrants now tend to remain in receiving communities and have limited physical contact with their sending communities. In sum, the migratory flows between Oregon and México were comprised mostly of Mexican men who were recruited to work in agricultural sectors of the Oregon economy who later were reunited with family members from México, or formed families after arriving to the US. As a result, the acculturation experiences for newer immigrants from México and their children may differ significantly from those who migrated prior to the year 2000. The following section reviews theorized models of acculturation.

**Acculturation and acculturative stress**

A rich body of literature has examined the acculturation experience of Latinos in the US. The following section provides a brief discussion of acculturation and the stress associated with the acculturative process. Acculturation is broadly defined as the process of adapting to a new culture or host society. This process of adapting may include conflict that arises when an acculturating group’s societal norms and practices clash with those of the host or dominant society. (Ward, 2006). Berry (2003, 2008) defined acculturation as the process in which individuals negotiate behaviors, values, and beliefs from a host culture into the matrix of
behaviors, values, and beliefs of the native culture. Acculturative stress refers to the level of psychological strain immigrants and their descendants may experience as a result of learning to adapt to a receiving community. As discussed above, acculturative stress can have many negative effects, such as damaging family cohesion for Latino families.

Immigrant parents may experience psychological stress when they strive to maintain or renegotiate clearly defined family roles during acculturation (Mann, 2004; Samarasinghe, Fridlund, & Arvidsson, 2006). While immigrant Latino men and women experience acculturative stress, women may also have to cope with a subordinate status in society, in their ethnic group, and have to satisfy the demands from their multiple roles (Lueck & Wilson, 2011). Additionally, migrant women may struggle to meet role demands that conflict with norms of the host or dominant society. Migrant women from Mexico and El Salvador may experience significantly more emotional acculturative stress than men, and may receive less help with personal problems and job-related issues than men (Allen et al., 1998).

Some factors may protect against the effects of acculturative stress. One characteristic attributed to many Latino families that may serve as a protective factor for acculturative stress at the family level is the value of familismo, which is a collectivist orientation that requires family members to contribute to the family over the life course (Baca-Zinn, 1994; Triandis, 1990). As Valdés (1996) points out, “for most ordinary Mexican families, individual success and accomplishment are generally held in lesser esteem than are people’s abilities to maintain ties across generations and to make an honest living” (p. 170). Bacallao and Smokowski (2007) reported that family cohesion serves as a way for Mexican immigrants to cope with stressors in the receiving community. Studies have shown that strong ethnic identity may also serve as a protective factor against stress that results from the acculturation process (Kuo & Tsai, 1986;
Mossakowski, 2003; Phinney et al., 2001). Retaining family cohesion, one's language and cultural practices in the face of change, may serve as protective factors to the sense of loss and stress immigrant families may confront (Falicov, 2009). Family rituals that reaffirm family bonds, cultural identity, and community pride can enhance family resiliency during processes of change and transition (Falicov, 2009). A sense of pride, belonging, and affiliation with one’s ethnic group, and participating in activities that affirm one’s ethnic identity, may protect against psychopathology, whereas limited opportunities to use one’s native language and socialize with people of one’s ethnic group may be a risk factor for developing psychopathologies (Burnett-Zeigler et al., 2013). Ethnic or cultural pride learned in a culturally affirming activity, such as folkloric Mexican dance, may serve as a protective factor against acculturative stress (Guillermo-Ramos, 2009; Rogers-Sirin, Gupta, & Tracey, 2012).

**Acculturation and hybridization**

The importance of culturally affirming activities is most supported by a view of acculturation that allows for multiple manifestations or adaptations of cultural practices. Much of the early work examining the acculturation experience of *mexicanos* has considered acculturation as a linear, unidirectional process, where an immigrant community is influenced by the receiving community, rather than a bidirectional relationship. Moreover, cross-cultural research on migration has treated the process of acculturation as a series of fixed phases, stages, and trajectories, with final end points, not taking into account the distinct migration experiences among groups of non-European transnational migrants (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). The enduring presence and cultural traditions of *mexicanos* in Oregon contest traditional assimilationist perspectives, which mandate that immigrant groups shed prior practices, language, beliefs,
traditions, etc., to adopt those of the receiving community. In contrast, to be better understood in its complexities and nuances, the acculturative experience of *mexicanos* in the US must be considered from an alternative model of acculturation.

Previous linear models of acculturation are being replaced with newer models of acculturation that have emerged in the last two decades of research on acculturation. These alternative models include constructs like segmented or selective acculturation, hybridization, and alternation. Such models reflect more dynamic processes of continuity and change as immigrant families continue known behaviors or acquire new behaviors to function in changing cultural contexts (Falicov, 2012). For non-European, non-white immigrant communities, traditional models of acculturation have not adequately accounted for these communities’ constant negotiating between home and host country, past and present, self and other (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). “The acculturation journey is not a teleological trajectory that has a fixed-end point but instead has to be continuously negotiated” (Bhatia & Ram, 2009, p. 148). Acculturation has been associated with a movement away from tradition and toward modernity (Hunt, Schneider, & Comer, 2004). Contemporary research on migrant identities must take into consideration factors that influence immigrants’ need for constant and continuous identity negotiation within historical and political contexts, which require fluidity, flexibility, and the ability to adapt. Falicov (2012), for example, talks of adaptive strategies that allow many immigrant families to function within multiple cultural contexts by drawing from existing everyday practices, behaviors, and cultural codes that are contextually appropriate, and developing new hybrid practices and behaviors. In addition, immigrant families that are able to maintain ties to their cultural practices and language, while acquiring new cultural elements, may have better acculturative outcomes (Falicov, 1998). Hybridization may be an alternative acculturative
strategy in which immigrants simultaneously maintain and transform cultural practices through ongoing contact with other people and places.

Homi Bhabha (1994) expands on the process in his hybridity theory. Developed in a postcolonial context, Hybridity theory is useful in conceptualizing how individuals and communities undergo processes of reconciling or negotiating cultural spaces and ways of knowing by drawing from various but potentially conflicting funds of knowledge. Nations emerging in a post-colonial era were faced with constructing and creating a national identity that had been decimated or disappeared by the colonizers. The (re)construction of national identities, in some cases, required communities to literally unearth cultural relics that had been buried or destroyed in the colonizers’ attempt of erasure. For example, when Mexico City was developing its infrastructure for its metro system, excavators unearthed portions of the Templo Mayor, a pre-Columbian temple, which had been partially destroyed by the Spanish colonizers. Much like a palimpsest, however, the impressions of pre-conquest societies remained imprinted in the parchment upon which colonizers attempted to stamp their presence and identities.

Hybridity, according to Bhabha’s (1994) theorizing, does not refer to a seeming duality or binarism where one cultural tradition or hegemony is given preference. The process of hybridization opens up a “third” space of negotiation where binary representation is refused, where the actor may occupy an “in-between” space, or the interstitial space between seemingly irreconcilable social and cultural practices. Hybridity and related concepts, such as mestizaje (miscegenation), syncretism, creolization, and mixture, have been utilized in cultural studies, especially when tending to issues such as race and ethnicity (Amoamo, 2011). Though its use in the nineteenth century hybridity was associated with biological and botanical studies (Young, 1995), and had negative connotations of scientific and colonial racism, in the twentieth century
the term has been associated with cultural plurality (Amoamo, 2011). The concept of hybridity has expanded to include cultural creativity and new manifestations of diversity. According to Bhabha (1994), “the ‘signs’ of culture can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read anew” (p. 37). That is, funds of knowledge, beliefs, traditions, and practices can be (re)appropriated and refashioned to produce new cultural forms.

Through innovative cultural practices and counter-narratives, new, expressive cultural identities can develop to contest and de-essentialize elements of the dominant culture. Hybridity can be viewed as a positive transformative feature in which homogenous national cultures and practices of “distilled ethnicities” are redefined (Kibria, 2002, p. 160). Thus, hybridity theory informed the study by encouraging a view of acculturation that anticipates negotiation and acknowledges agency. That is, it is expected that hybridity, as an acculturative strategy, would allow for immigrants and their descendants to actively engage in a process of drawing from a repertoire of diverse cultural practices and identities, and (re)configure and transform such practices and identities in such a way as to take on new meanings, within the context of either their personal histories or the history of a group with whom they identify (Chaudhry, 1998). Of course, this process is embedded within the intersections of socially constructed notions of gender, ethnicity, race, migration status, and socioeconomic status. For immigrant mothers, the practices of motherhood may take on new meanings as women draw from learned and expected cultural repertoires of mothering.

**Motherhood and the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge**

Motherhood in its practice is guided by cultural narratives, which are broad understandings of culture and society that shape, constrain, and give meaning to experience (Bamburg, 2004). Although cultural narratives “normalize and naturalize an as much constrain
and delineate agency they also give guidance and direction to the everyday actions of subjects” (Bamburg, 2004, p. 361). In other words, cultural narratives of motherhood guide women’s mothering practices and actions. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990) concept of *habitus* has been employed in research on motherhood to extend understanding of how cultural narratives of motherhood might inform mothering practices. Habitus is the “dispositions and understandings that inform an individual’s knowledge of how to behave, think, and even feel in the various social contexts of everyday life” (McKeever & Miller, 2004, p. 1177). Habitus is (re)produced through beliefs, values, and attitudes. The habitus of motherhood refers to the beliefs, values, and attitudes of how a mother should be, and therefore influences the actions and practices of mothers. Thus, immigrant *mexicana* mothers are guided by the habitus of motherhood, which influences their mothering practices but also must adapt those practices to their local realities.

Women’s work in “making home” includes inculcating in the next generation the important traits of their cultural heritage (Mendoza, 2012). Even as mothers acculturate to a receiving community, women are often held as the intergenerational reproducers of culture and transmitting collective cultural identity (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Hybridity theory acknowledges women’s agency in how they create ways of mothering, drawing from personal histories and cultural narratives of mothering from the sending and receiving communities, and mothering practices in their local contexts.

In México, women’s ideal of caregiving is inextricably linked to the characteristics of La Virgen de Guadalupe, the patron saint of México. According to the ideal of *marianismo*, women should be abnegated and self-sacrificing for their children, similar to the ideal of intensive mothering. Mother’s Day celebrations occurring across México on May 10 exemplify a “state supported cult of motherhood” (Hryciuk, 2010, p. 489), wherein nationalistic ideology and
maternal symbolism is exhibited, celebrated, and paraded. For many Mexican women, the most socially desirable feminine role is madresposa (mother-wife) (Hryciuk, 2010) and mothers constitute the “emotional heart of the family” (Dreby, 2006, p.36). For many Mexican families, fathers are the providers and women are responsible for la educación of the children (emotional and moral upbringing). Men are to be honored and respected as the head of the family, whereas women are in charge of reproductive activities (Coltrane & Collins, 2001).

For transnational Mexican mothers who reside in the US, and whose children reside in México, the quality of a mother’s relationship with her children depends upon her ability to demonstrate emotional intimacy, even from a great distance (Dreby, 2006). In contrast, the quality of fathers’ relationships with their children is tied to their economic success as migrant workers and capacity to act as financial providers for the family. The differences in expectations for mothers and fathers “are tied to Mexican gender ideology in which women’s maternal role is sacralized whereas the father’s role is tied to financial provision” (Dreby, 2006, p. 34). Thus, practices of mothering, even in a transnational context, are guided by social and cultural expectations of mothering. Transnational mothering practices tend to be founded in gender-based roles of caregiving. As such, transnational mothers are generally responsible for the construction, maintenance, and transmission of ethnic identity (Tastsoglou, 1997).

Mothering practices among Latinas in the US are influenced by a myriad of scripts, narratives, gender, and social expectations. In addition, Latina women’s mothering practices are guided by cultural differences tied to immigrant Latina mothers’ country of origin, immigrant generation (e.g., first generation), area of residence within the US, and socioeconomic status (Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006). Latina mothers’ adaption of mothering practices are agentic.
That is, many Latina mothers are in situations in which they have to (re)create mothering practices to fit their local situation (Baker, 2004).

Llerena-Quinn and Mirkin (2005) asserted that Latina immigrant mothers believe that mothers should invest in their children’s education, and provide them with love and discipline. Moreover, Latina immigrant mothers value encouraging pride in their children’s ethnic identity and educate their children about the ecological factors that influence their experiences. In her research with immigrant mexicana mothers, Villenas (2001) showed that Mexican women both challenged and embraced traditional gendered roles, in that the women creatively invested in and performed the work of “making home,” work associated with culture and customs that were tied to former generations. Parsai, Nieri, and Villar (2010) found that the women they interviewed struggled to reconcile their conception of motherhood, as being present for their children, with the need to work outside the home. Latina immigrant mothers may worry that their need to work outside the home inhibits their ability to transmit cultural roots and identity to their children, and that their absence may hinder their children’s success (Parsai, Nieri, & Villar, 2010). In their study, Smith and Mannon (2010) found that immigrant mexicana mothers, similar to other immigrant women, experience social isolation, live in what they perceive as a “cold” community, and have difficulty with the English language, all which contribute to a sense of isolation and loneliness. Baker (2004) showed that immigrant mexicana mothers transgressed traditional gender behaviors by leaving their home communities to work in the paid labor force, driven by the desires to be reunited with their husbands and improve the lives of their children. In doing so, “the women fight to hold to their old lives while the material conditions push them into new ones” (Baker, 2004, p. 405).
In an effort to fulfill familiar and new cultural and social expectations of mothering, women may appropriate cultural forms and adapt them to conform to their local realities as hybridized cultural practices that result from local adaptations of cultural exchanges (Hryciuk, 2010). For example, Galindo and Medina (2009) found that Mexican mothers created a hybridized performance, combining a mixture of folk dance, *huipiles* (woven garments), *dichos* (proverbs), and educational messages. The mothers’ intention of the performance was to convey messages of parental agency, involvement, and engagement in their children’s education. The mothers addressed their local reality of continuing to be engaged in their children’s education, despite possible cultural and institutional barriers, by adapting educational pedagogy to match their own life experiences and current, local cultural exchanges. Thus, might the mothers’ participation in México Lindo be connected to reaffirming or negotiating their role/identity as mothers, while employing local adaptations of cultural exchanges?

**Danza folklórica**

Folkloric Mexican dance serves many functions within Mexican and US societies. While in each country there may be distinct functions associated with folkloric dance, some of the common purposes include creating community cohesion and forming or maintaining cultural identity. This section will examine the role of *folklórico* within Mexican society, and for Mexicans and Mexican Americans residing in the US.

Connection is at the core of the functions *danza tradicional* and *danza folklórica* play in Mexican society. *Danza tradicional* y *danza folklórica* function as symbols of Mexican nationality, similar to the *charro* (Najera-Ramírez, 1994). Dance is an integral part of religious and secular community celebrations, purveying cultural identity and belonging (Garcia Rojas, 2003). The act of dances, processions, and celebrations during religious festivals create symbolic
elements of unity (García Rojas, 2003). Additionally, these events create spaces for formalized
courtship, expression of religious meanings, and performances of identity with one’s community.

Folkloric dance constitutes part of the curriculum taught in many public primary and
secondary schools. During the 1920s, the Mexican government sought to collect folk dances
from throughout México and teach them in the public schools (Najera-Ramírez et. al., 2009).

The Secretaría de Educación Pública (Secretary of Public Education; SEP) created cultural
missions with the intention of teaching folk dances in public schools as a way to instill national
pride in students and foment communal solidarity and cooperation (Najera-Ramírez et. al.,
2009). For students, such knowledge is purported to support their identity formation as children
learn about local, regional, and national history through folk dance instruction (Arrellano
Chávez, 2009). Many public primary and secondary schools throughout Mexico offer baile
regional as a part of the required curriculum, or as an extracurricular activity. As such, most
children who attend public primary and secondary school in Mexico will either have participated
in been exposed to baile regional.

Folkloric Mexican dance may serve similar functions in the US as it does in México.
Through events such as the US annexation of Mexican territory in 1848 and continuous cyclical
migration between the US and México, there is a constant replenishment and (re)production of
emblematic components of Mexican national and cultural heritage. The folklorist Américo
Paredes (1993) theorized that there is “evidencia de una serie de intercambios entre el folclore
endémico mexicano y el de México de afuera; un continuo de influencia mutua que se mueve en
ambas direcciones” (evidence of a series of exchanges between endemic Mexican folklore and
the external México [i.e., communities of Mexican heritage existing in the US]; a continuum of
327). *Danza folklórica* is one such emblematic component practiced both among those of Mexican descent residing in the US, and as previously discussed, in Mexican society.

*Danza folklórica* may provide a vehicle by which Mexican nationals create and maintain community identity and cultural citizenship (Flores & Benmayor, 1997), as members of a transnational community. For example, for Purépecha (Tarascan) migrant workers from the state of Michoacán the Dance of the *Cúrpites* serves as an opportunity to rekindle or reaffirm their membership in the community when they return from working in California (Bishop, 2009). This dance was traditionally performed by unmarried men from the town of San Juan Nuevo in the Tarascan highlands in the state of Michoacán. The Dance of the *Cúrpite* and its associated community celebration served as an opportunity for unmarried men to demonstrate (perform) their masculinity and court their sweethearts. Migrant workers were unsuccessful, however, in their attempt to enact this tradition in California because it is context-dependent, intimately connected to a place and a community.

*Danza folklórica* also serves to maintain, reclaim, and preserve an individual’s and a community’s cultural heritage (Najera–Ramírez et. al., 2009). Showcasing *danza folklórica* is a public performance of pride (Mendoza, 2012; Nusz & Ricciardi, 2003). Mexican folkloric dances provide a cultural anchor that people use to define themselves (Garcia Rojas, 2003) in an effort to identify with family cultural traditions. Similarly, Smith (2005) found that dance provided a way for youth to learn about and preserve their cultural heritage. In his ethnography, Smith describes Mexican nationals from the town of Ticuani (a small town in the state of Puebla) teaching second-generation Ticuanenses the Dance of the Tecuanis in an effort to recuperate lost traditions and “import” them to New York.
The performance of *danza tradicional* and *ballet folklórico* provide sites of political resistance or to contest dominant discourses. The very act of performing can be a collective action that highlights the shared values of a community (Goffman 1973, cited in Vasquez, 2011). During the Civil Rights Movement and the Farmworkers Movement of the 1960s, public performances of *danza azteca* (Aztec dance) served as political platforms for Chicanos, Mexican Americans, and Mexican nationals residing or working in the US (Najera Ramírez et. al., 2009). In the context of the Civil Rights Movement, public performances of *danza azteca* and folkloric Mexican dance were an open rejection to assimilating to Anglo norms, practices, and values. These acts, of maintaining one’s language and affirming one’s cultural heritage, may be considered acts of resistance (Ochoa, 1999).

Children learning and performing folkloric Mexican dance may provide mothers an opportunity to create counter narratives of dominant discourses surrounding parenting, the socialization of children, and cultural or ethnic identity. Galinda and Medina (2009) found that by the parents’ collective engagement in integrating *dichos* (sayings) and folkloric Mexican dance into a public performance, was demonstrative of a collective identity, wherein counter narratives were formed. These narratives contested the concept of Mexican parents’ under- or non-involvement in their children’s education and the lack of agency and autonomy in their creation of a collective identity.
CHAPTER 3
Method

The study employed a qualitative approach to examine the meanings Mexican and Mexican American mothers give to their own and their children’s participation in Mexican folkloric dance groups. Two primary data collection strategies were utilized: individual interviews with an intensive sample of ten mothers belonging to one children’s folkloric dance group, and focus group interviews with a comparison sample of nine additional mothers involved in two other folkloric dance groups, all in the Pacific Northwest. The use of such methods supported our aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the mothers’ beliefs, experiences, and attitudes (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Intensive sample

This study focused on Mexican or Mexican-American mothers who have a child that participates in a Mexican folkloric dance group. Mothers were the main informants because women are expected to carry and transmit cultural traditions to their children (Anzaldúa, 1987; Mendoza, 2012; Tummala-Narra, 2004). Participants for the intensive sample were recruited from México Lindo, a pseudonym given to a children’s folkloric Mexican dance group in the central Willamette Valley. In order to ensure confidentiality of participants and their children, pseudonyms have been used in this paper. I chose to work with México Lindo because of having enduring ties to the group, and I believed my connection to the group would allow me to recruit a
sample. Additionally, I anticipated my rapport with the group members might help in collecting in-depth data.

México Lindo originated ten years ago in the study area. While the Latino population of the immediate area has grown during the last decade, Latinos remain a smaller proportion (less than ten percent) of the population here than in other communities in Oregon such as Woodburn (55.1%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). México Lindo is one of a number of culturally affirming activities in the study site. Other culturally affirming activities for youth in the immediate area include a high school mariachi ensemble, the Girl Scouts curriculum designed for Latina girls, and a community group that promotes music and dance from the state of Veracruz, México.

I came to know the women in México Lindo through my experience teaching their children folkloric Mexican dances during the last ten years. México Lindo was established in 2003 by my children’s father, Erubey, who wanted our daughter to learn folkloric Mexican dance, as he had learned as a student in elementary school in México. As Erubey became overburdened with obligations outside the group, I became the main teacher, whereas I had previously been his assistant. With the passage of time, new members cycled in and out of the group; some families have belonged to the group since its inception. Mothers have been the primary parents who have participated in the group. Although I am not Mexican or Latina;, my familial, personal, and professional associations have brought me into contact with hundreds of individuals and families of Mexican descent. Moreover, similar to sociologist Joanna Dreby (2006), my children’s father is Mexican, and raising children in a bicultural and bilingual context, at times, has provided a point of entry into a community I might not be able to access without these connections.

Participant Recruitment.
Although I had an existing relationship with each of these mothers, recruitment for participation in the study followed a formal informed consent process. I extended an invitation to participate in the study through an informational meeting with the group, wherein she explained the purpose of the study, introduced the Primary Investigator, and distributed a recruitment letter that outlined the purpose of the study. Other mothers who were not present at the meeting also received recruitment materials that I sent them in the mail or distributed at the children’s dance practice. Later, I contacted each mother individually to inquire if the mother would be interested in participating in the study, including mothers who were not present at the informational meeting.

To attend to the potential issues that could have arisen due to power dynamics associated with my leadership roles within the group, I strove to assure the mothers that their decision to participate in the study would have no bearing on their participation in the dance group, and that I would maintain separation between my roles within the group and those of a researcher. During the informational meeting and all other recruitment activities, I reminded the mothers that their participation in the dance group would not be impacted by their acceptance or decline to participate in the study. Additionally, during the informational meeting and other recruitment activities, I refrained from divulging information that might reveal the identities of those mothers who had shown interest in participating in the study.

**Participants**

All of the ten mothers who were active in the group at the time of recruitment agreed to participate in the study and be interviewed. Table 1 contains pseudonyms of the individual interview participants. All but one mother self-identified as *mexicana*. Two women also self-identified as *hispana* or *latina*. Nine mothers were born in México and one was born in the US.
Of the women born in México, five were born in the state of Jalisco, two were born in Oaxaca, one was born in Guerrero, and one was born in México D.F. All of the mothers born in Mexico reported coming to the US to work or to accompany their husbands, and formed families after emigrating from Mexico. Information regarding the mothers’ time in residence in the US was not collected, nor the year of their initial arrival to the US (for mothers born in México). One mother completed high school in México and one mother completed a General Education Degree (GED) in the US. Eight mothers had completed some college in the US. Thus, the sample was fairly well educated. The mothers’ occupations included homemakers, educational assistant, radio disc jockey, food service employee, early childhood educational assistant, and certified public accountant (CPA). Nine mothers were married and one was divorced. At the time of the interviews, five mothers were working towards an associate degree. The women were ranged in age from 35 to 45 years of age ($M = 41.6$), and their children participating in the dance group were, on average, 10.8 years of age, in range of age five to seventeen years of age. The mothers were not asked about their household income.

Most of the mothers (8 of the 10) had been involved in the group for more than five years, whereas two had been involved in the group for five years or less. At the time of the interviews, seven mothers had one or more of their daughters participating in the dance group. Two mothers had one or more of their sons participating in the dance group. One mother had a son and a daughter involved in the dance group. Four mothers had children whose siblings had previously participated in the group, but had ceased participating due to moving out of the area to attend college, or were active in other activities that conflicted with participating in the dance group. Three of the four mothers had children who had graduated from high school and where attending
college, thus were no longer able to participate in the dance group, and one mother had a son who was no longer interested in participating.

**Table 1. Intensive sample study participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Time in dance group (years)</th>
<th>Number of children in dance group</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leonor</td>
<td>Human Services</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Homemaker, Educational assistant</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Homemaker, student</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Housekeeper, Food services</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olga</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uma</td>
<td>Homemaker, housekeeper</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Financial services</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramona</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imelda</td>
<td>Food services, student</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews**

I conducted two in-depth interviews with each mother. Although I used an interview guide, the interviews were loosely structured (Patton, 2002). Mothers were asked to choose the location and the language in which the interview took place so as to reduce potential power imbalances that can emerge in the interviewer/interviewee relationship, and create a more complementary or collaborative encounter (DeVault & Gross, 2007). All but one of the mothers in the study preferred to be interviewed at their homes; the final mother selected a local
restaurant as the interview venue. Nine of the mothers elected to be interviewed in Spanish, with English words interspersed throughout. One mother preferred to be interviewed in English, similarly sprinkled with Spanish. Nine mothers agreed to the interviews being audio-recorded. The recordings were transcribed in the language of the interview and then as needed translated into English. For the mother who preferred the interview not be recorded, her responses were written as notes in Spanish, and later translated into English.

During the initial interview, the women were asked to reflect on their own and their children’s engagement in México Lindo as a way of understanding what this engagement means within their lives. Mothers were also asked to recount how they came to be involved in the group and discuss how their engagement has changed over time. The mothers were asked to reflect upon what it means that their children learn and perform folkloric Mexican dance, and whether the meaning changes depending on contextual factors (e.g., the performance venue, the dances the children perform, the region represented, etc). Hybridity theory informed the interview questions by way encouraging the use of a series of probes intended to encourage that would allow for the study participants to reflect on processes of change and negotiation as responses to changing cultural environs. Initial interviews lasted ninety minutes on average. During a second interview, generally within three weeks of the initial interview, mothers were asked to provide more detail about their own exposure to Mexican folkloric dance while growing up, their experiences adjusting to life in the US, their efforts to anchor into their communities or create community linkages, their goals as mothers, and how their participation in Alma de México may be linked to these areas. The second interviews often lasted ninety minutes and also offered an opportunity to clarify information that came up during initial interviews. In general, the women seemed to be at ease and enjoy the interviews, punctuating the interviews with laughter and
humorous comments. At times the women expressed uncertainty in answering the questions correctly, to which I replied that there were no correct answers. The women appeared to appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, and at times remarked that they had not pondered some of the topics I asked them about.

During the interviews, I was also mindful that what the women chose to share would be shaped, in part, by my social location and standpoint (Naples, 2007). For example, I am a white, middle-class well educated woman who is a non-native Spanish speaker. Zussman (2004) asserts that “all researchers who collect data directly have to be self-reflective, aware of how their own positions shape both the kind of information available to them and the ways in which they interpret that information” (pp. 360). Similar to Hesse-Biber (2006), I was aware of the nature of my relationship with the women whom I interviewed. For some of the women, I was a friend or acquaintance that they had known for several years. For all of the mothers, I was also the folkloric Mexican dance teacher who had come to ask about their experiences participating in a group that I lead. It is likely that my relationship with the women as a friend and having a leadership role in the dance group influenced what the mothers chose to share with me. For example, one of the mothers expressed uncertainty in whether my feelings would be hurt by comments that I might take as criticisms of my leadership roles. In this instance, I assured the mother that she could fully divulge her experiences and that I would not take her comments personally. It is possible that having a long-standing relationship with some of the women provided a rapport during the interview in which the mothers felt comfortable disclosing personal information.

Comparison Sample
In order to extend the scope of the study across additional samples, and gain a broader perspective than the information gained from interview data collected from the intensive sample, focus group interviews were conducted with a comparison sample of mothers whose children participate in folkloric Mexican dance groups. Convenience sampling was employed for the comparison group (Patton, 2002), to yield the most information possible about the meaning Mexican and Mexican American mothers give to their own and their children’s participation in Mexican folkloric dance groups. I had intended to conduct focus group interviews with 4-H folkloric Mexican dance clubs from two Oregon communities because the clubs were similar in membership and structure to the dance group from the study site for the intensive sample. The intended samples, however, were no longer in existence, however, because the groups had dissolved or had been integrated into a school district. Thus, I approached other children’s folkloric Mexican dance groups about the feasibility of conducting focus group interviews with the participating mothers. Two groups became available, those from Clarendon Hills and Hanaford. I contacted the directors of children’s folkloric Mexican dance groups in Clarendon Hills and Hanaford, to describe the study and inquire about the possibility of conducting a focus group with the mothers whose children participated in the dance groups. Quetzalli, the children’s folkloric Mexican dance group in Hanaford, Oregon, was established in 1999, as a part of the 4-H Youth Development Program. I have known the director of the group since 2000 and have collaborated with the director in performances, and in sharing choreography, music, and vestments. The children who participate in the Hanaford group attend various elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the Hanaford area. Quetzalli performs at community festivals, schools, juvenile correctional facilities, retirement facilities, and Oregon State University functions. In Hanaford, individuals of Mexican heritage make up 5.7% of the
population, where 7.4% of the overall population is classified as Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Quetzalli is one of few cultural affirming activities in the community.

Ballet Folklórico Fuego Nuevo, the children’s folkloric Mexican dance group in Clarendon Hills, Oregon, is comprised of children from elementary, middle, and high school students in the Clarendon Hills and Fairhaven school districts. The group has smaller, subgroups for children in third to fifth grade, middle school, or high school. There is also a subgroup of adult dancers. Ballet Folklórico Fuego Nuevo perform at area festivals, schools, and puts on an annual show at the end of each school year that community members can attend. Individuals of Mexican heritage make up 19.3% of the population in Clarendon Hills, where 23.1% of the overall population is classified as Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). As Clarendon Hills and surrounding communities have a larger Latino community, there are a variety of cultural affirming activities available in the area. Having variation in the communities in terms of the population demographics and available activities speaks to the popularity and appeal of folkloric Mexican dance groups as a culturally affirming activity among communities of Mexican heritage. Additionally, the differences in community settings and group structure could allow variance in mothers’ meanings to emerge, as shaped by context.

Focus Group Participants

Of the six women whose children currently participate in the Hanaford group, three were able to attend the focus group. One of the participants was also the group leader. The three women reported being homemakers, students, and were gainfully employed part-time. The three women had completed high school or high school equivalent, and two of the mothers had also taken some classes at the community college level. The women were born in México and self-
identified as Mexican. The mothers each had two or more children who had participated in the group at one time or another.

Six of the twenty women whose children participate in Clarendon Hills middle school folkloric Mexican dance group were able to attend the focus group interview. Three women reported being homemakers, one holds a managerial position, and two others work as teachers. The women also reported being involved in part-time paid employment and as students. The women’s level of education ranged from completing sixth grade to taking some classes beyond high school. Four of the women self-identified as *mexicana*, whereas the other two self-identified as *hispana* (Hispanic). All six women were born in México. One woman had one child currently participating in the dance group, whereas the other mothers had three children who had participated in the dance group at one time or another. Table 2 contains the pseudonyms of the focus group interview participants from the two communities.
Table 2. Focus group interview participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Community of residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ermelinda</td>
<td>Hanaford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perla</td>
<td>Hanaford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almaluvia</td>
<td>Hanaford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oralia</td>
<td>Clarendon Hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Guadalupe</td>
<td>Clarendon Hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eusevia</td>
<td>Clarendon Hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karina</td>
<td>Clarendon Hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keila</td>
<td>Clarendon Hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingrid</td>
<td>Clarendon Hills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus Group Interviews

The focus group with the Hanaford group took place at the community room in the group director’s housing development. The participants consented to the conversation being recorded. The group interview was conducted in Spanish, with some English interspersed throughout. The group interview lasted ninety minutes, with additional time spent afterwards in small talk. The recording was later transcribed and translated into English.

The focus group with the Clarendon Hills group took place at school where the children were practicing. The participants consented to the conversation being recorded. An undergraduate research assistant helped with the focus group by taking notes while I facilitated the group interview. The group interview was conducted in Spanish, with some English
interspersed throughout. The group interview lasted two hours. The recording was later transcribed and translated into English.

Prior to either focus group getting underway, the participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and confidential, and were asked to respect the confidentiality of those who were present. The participants were also asked to allow others to speak and to not dominate the conversation. The participants were reminded that the conversation was being audio-recorded.

A focus group guide was created after initial analysis of the interview data was completed, wherein main topic areas were identified. This initial analysis consisted of listening to interview recordings and reading the interview transcripts to gain a sense of the general content of each interview. I reread the interview transcripts to identify the main topics that were common across the interviews. The participants were first asked to reflect on what motivated them to enroll their child in the folkloric Mexican dance club. I then distributed a list of the motivations the mothers from study site had identified and asked the focus group participants if their motivations were similar or different from those on the list. The same procedure was used for the other two primary themes of the focus group guide, which were what meanings the mothers ascribed to their children learning folkloric Mexican dance, and how the mothers’ and children’s’ participation in the group might fit with the mothers’ hopes and goals for their children. Although the focus group guide provided an overall structure for the group conversation, the conversation with the Clarendon Hills group was less structured and deviated slightly from the guide, whereas the conversation with the Hanaford group more closely followed the focus group guide. The focus group participants seemed to enjoy the conversation.
and the chance to talk with other mothers. The mothers laughed, carried on friendly banter, and appeared to appreciate reflecting on the topics discussed during the focus group interview.

**Data analysis**

The data analysis utilized an inductive approach (Patton, 2008). Inductive analysis includes uncovering patterns or prominent themes or categories that emerge from the data. Inductive analysis consists of an iterative process of beginning analysis “in” the data, or at the level of the source of data, and then generating codes that emerge during data analysis. This is a to and fro process of moving back and forth between the data and an emerging set of codes. Because the present study was exploratory and did not test theory or hypotheses, the initial phase of analysis consisted of inductive analysis of the data, framed within the interview questions. That is, the overarching research question of what meaning Mexican and Mexican American mothers give to their own and their children’s participation in Mexican folkloric dance groups provided the domain and topics to be investigated.

The analysis consisted of an initial reading of the hard copies of the interview transcripts to gain familiarity with the content of each interview, beyond the familiarity I had already gained with the data when listening to and transcribing the interview recordings. During the initial readings, I conducted open coding, or systematically jotted notes in the margins of the transcripts regarding topics and themes that appeared prominent in the text of the transcripts. I repeated this process two times for each transcript, with the intention of gaining an intimate familiarity with the data, recording notes and memos in the margins of the transcript. I conducted this process first with the transcripts from the individual interviews, then repeated the process with the transcripts from the focus group interviews. I went back and forth between the two sets of transcripts to gain a sense of similarities and differences regarding topics and themes.
particular to the individual or the focus group interviews. The only substantial difference I was able to detect in the themes and topics between the groups was comments made by the focus group participants about the participation of their adolescent sons in the folkloric Mexican dance groups. An initial list of codes and subcodes (n = 26) was created, iteratively informed by the themes I identified in the data, which was framed by the overarching research question. The codes I created were one or two-word phrases that I used as links to or signifiers of a larger theme, thus the codes were reflective of the themes. I created concept maps, diagrams, and data matrices to visually organize and explore relationships between and among the themes that were related to the overarching research question. Through this process, I was able to see where some themes overlapped and could be combined to begin to create categories of themes, and an initial coding scheme was developed. Using this coding schema, I went back to the transcripts to apply the codes to the data. The coding scheme was revised through the process, as I identified new codes or variations on codes, or that parts of the coding scheme were not applicable to the data.

The codes and their connections to the data were considered within the context of the overarching research question of the meaning Mexican and Mexican American mothers give to their own and their children’s participation in Mexican folkloric dance groups. Some coded portions of text from the interview transcripts were not relevant to the overarching research question, Table 3 provides an overview of the themes and subthemes that emerged during analysis of the interview transcripts from the intensive sample, and which were supported by the transcripts of the interviews with the focus group sample.
### Table 3. Summary of themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Key processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Desenvolverse&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>The children’s practice or acquisition of skills that the mothers considered would enhance their children’s development and unfolding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Convivencia&quot; -- Source of connection</td>
<td>Connectedness to other mothers</td>
<td>The sense of connectedness the mothers described having with other women in the folkloric Mexican dance groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connectedness amongst children</td>
<td>The sense of connectedness the mothers described their children having with other children in the folkloric Mexican dance groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connectedness between mother and child</td>
<td>The sense of connectedness the mothers described having with their child as a result of their participation in the folkloric Mexican dance groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connectedness to community</td>
<td>The sense of connectedness the mothers described having with local community as a result of their participation in the folkloric Mexican dance groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity -- &quot;Que aprendan de lo mío&quot;</td>
<td>Continuity of a tradition</td>
<td>Mothers’ experience with <em>folklórico</em> carried forward into the lives of their children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Roots&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aspects of the mothers’ sense of cultural heritage that they aspire to pass on to their children by way of the children learning folkloric Mexican dance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transmitting &quot;mexicanidad&quot; as cultural identity and heritage</td>
<td>The performance or expression of the children’s Mexican cultural identity or heritage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the interconnectedness of the three themes. The meaning the women ascribed to their and their children’s participation in folkloric
Mexican dance groups can be organized around three key themes that were supportive of their mothering practices: *desenvolverse* (the process of the children’s unfolding), *convivencia* (living in the company of others; connection), and, most importantly, continuity in aspects of the mothers’ Mexican cultural identity that gets carried forward in their children’s cultural identity development. “Continuity” is presented as the most prominent theme, in that continuity and the related key processes, seemed central to the meaning the mothers attributed to their and their children’s participation in *folklórico*. The themes and subthemes are explained in detail in the following sections.
Figure 1. “Desenvolverse,” “Continuity,” and “Convivencia” as a part of Mothering Practices.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

The data from the individual and focus group interviews revealed that the meaning Mexican and Mexican American women ascribe to their and their children’s participation in folkloric Mexican dance groups can be organized around three key themes: desenvolverse (the process of unfolding), convivencia (living in the company of others; connection), and continuity. In this chapter, each theme and corresponding key processes will be discussed, utilizing excerpts from the interview transcripts as examples. The key findings revealed that, for the study participants, taking part in the folklórico groups provided a context wherein they were able to carry out aspects of what they perceived as a part of their mothering practices. The context of the dance group provided a space that allowed their children to unfold and develop in a positive and supportive context. By taking part in the group, the mothers were also able to maintain and enhance a level of emotional connection with their children. In addition, through their participation in the folklórico groups, the mothers found support in transferring a strong sense of cultural heritage to their children, inculcating aspects of the children’s Mexican cultural heritage, as aspects of the mothers’ identities, despite literal and figurative borders of separation from Mexico.

*Desenvolverse*

So, the kids, aside from doing exercise for their body, doing healthy things, learning the culture of their parents, they are also learning how to be better, not just in the habit of the group, in dance, but also in everything else (Ingrid).
Both individual and focus group interview participants repeatedly referred to the children having the opportunity to “desenvolverse” through the children’s participation in the dance groups and performing folkloric Mexican dance. Desenvolverse can be loosely interpreted as one’s developing or unfolding that happens over time. Within the individual and focus group interviews, desenvolverse included the children gaining skills or competencies that the mothers considered important in the children's development, and as being useful in multiple settings, such as family, school, and peer settings. Through their participation in the folklórico groups, the mothers asserted their agency in connecting their children with options to unfold in a positive and supportive environment and where the mothers could maintain some level of involvement, which might not have been possible in the context of schools or other institutions. These efforts to protect and foster their children’s unfolding in a supportive environment were a part of the mothers’ desire for their children to not internalize messages of belonging to a racialized ethnic minority group that possessed deficits, when compared to other youth.

The mothers expressed the children’s desenvolvimiento (unfolding) being supported within the space of the dance groups, in that the group provided a positive space where the children might develop in positive ways

My kids learn more about their parents’ culture, they practice some Spanish, they do exercise, they socialize with kids in the same circumstances as them… My children have fun learning something positive. It could be learning to dance, following the rhythm... they practice Spanish, that they see something interesting in being bilingual, they make friends, they learn to socialize.
For Imelda, the skills her children learned or practice through their participation in the dance group were especially helpful in the skill of *convivencia*, or socializing and getting along with others.

The mothers also referred to the positive aspects of their children’s participation that could enhance the children’s academic success. For example, in the individual and the focus group interviews, the mothers spoke about their children learning public speaking skills and stage presence that also helped the students giving presentations in front of peers and teachers in their classes. Also, Olivia reported that in the folkloric dance group, her daughters were gaining “[e]xperience, self-esteem, [and] self control. Self control because they have to control their nerves and self-esteem for them to give presentations.” Laura liked that her children gained self-confidence and the ability to speak in public, “But it is a really big deal what they can do. Simply getting up there on stage to speak or to do anything is very difficult. And they are not afraid to do that because they have been doing it now for so long. And they feel comfortable and even happy doing it.” Through performing in front of audiences, Laura observed her children having increased self-confidence and public speaking skills.

The focus group participants also spoke about how the children have gained skills and competencies through their participation in a folkloric Mexican dance group. Perla stated:

When [the kids] perform a dance, they try to do everything perfectly, and this makes us feel more accountable, such as having to prepare the [dance] outfits and be on time to the practices, and bring everything that they need for the practices and the performances. Like shoes--whatever accessory they might need. It is a big responsibility that they learn; they learn discipline to do everything according to the rules. They learn to work on a team also, because sometimes many kids dance
together and they learn to help each other, to get dressed and do each other’s hair…

They learn to work together as a team.

By way of learning and performing folkloric Mexican dance, and through their participation in the dance group, the children gain self-discipline, punctuality, accountability, responsibility, and the ability to work as a part of a team. Additionally, the focus group participants talked about how some of the older children had gone on to get scholarships related to their participating in the dance groups. This was especially true for the mothers from the 4-H dance group, which put an emphasis on community service and volunteerism.

All of the mothers referred to their children keeping busy in a positive activity that provided opportunities of “learning how to be better.” One focus group participant expressed this sentiment, “So, the kids, aside from doing exercise for their body, doing healthy things, learning the culture of their parents, they are also learning how to be better, not just in the habit of the group, in dance, but also in everything else.” Olivia stated that her daughters, “stay busy and they really enjoy dancing. They liked to dance and when the other kids applauded for them or when people applauded for them and this made them feel very proud. It was very important for me to keep them busy in something that they liked, because they don’t always like the activities I chose for them and they get bored...The girls feel important. They are giving a part of themselves. They are developing and unfolding in a supportive environment.” Olivia likes that her children stay busy and have positive experiences related to dancing and performing. The supportive environment Olivia referred to included the children receiving applause and praise for performing songs during dance practices.
The mothers appreciated their children having a supportive space wherein the children could feel successful and strive toward gaining mastery of the dancing. Laura described appreciating her children having the ability to express themselves in a supportive environment:

One thing that I have liked about the group is that they go and perform and everyone is expected equally, those that know and those that don’t know. And if they don’t do it so good, well there’s no problem. There is no one there telling them that it has to be this way or that way and there aren’t strict rules and it is nice that the kids have the liberty to express themselves and feel successful when they dance however they can, because no one is going to give them a signal that they did not do it well.

Laura went on to describe how she observed her children progressing and gaining competency in their dancing, and gaining self-confidence as a result:

So it’s like they are passing from one level to the next. Like from the white belts to the red belt [in karate], or I don’t know what order they go. It’s like [the kids] are saying that they are more important. They feel more important than to do just that one dance. They feel like they are more capable to do something more complicated and more difficult. Even though no one told them this, they start to get ideas because they associate with the other kids in the group, and that their voice and their feelings are important. And this is important right? They feel like they have passed to that level without anyone telling them the opposite. [My daughter] feels capable and for that reason should be able to go into the older group. And because there is not a strict rule that they have to pass a certain standard, it gives them the freedom to do a lot.
Laura observed that her children gained a sense of mastery in one level and proceeded to the next level. Laura liked that her children felt important and that their voices and perspectives were taken into consideration, and that the children felt capable and comfortable to pursue more complicated and advanced dances, as a result in feeling supported in the dance group to continue progressing. The children gaining a sense of mastery and competency in learning folkloric dance may have helped them to have high self-esteem and pride. For example, Imelda reported, “When [my girls] prepare for a performance and perform [the dances], it raises their self-esteem and gives them self-confidence. [My younger daughter] is proud to tell other people that she participates in the folkloric dance; I’ve heard her say it. When they are applauded, it gives them security.”

Similar to Laura and Olivia wanting to keep their children occupied in a positive activity and in a supportive environment, the focus group participants identified a major benefit of their children's participation in the dance group as a space in which the children can unfold. The mothers expressed gratitude to their group leaders for providing a space wherein the children interacted with peers and adults, rather than perhaps being exposed to “malas influencias” (“bad influences”), or being idle. For example, one focus group participant recalled her son taking a break from the dance group, and beginning to hang out with peers who distracted him from homework. As a result, her son began to struggle academically. The boy later rejoined the dance group and the mother attributed her son’s improvement in school and renewed focus on homework to the influence of the dance teachers. The focus group participants also reported that the peers that could potentially be “malas influencias” was especially concerning for boys, who, in the mothers’ experience, were harder to retain in the dance group than the girls.
It is important to note how, for the mothers, rigidity and laxity at dance practices could contribute to the children’s skill development and learning. For example, the mothers who completed the individual interviews reported liking having flexibility in a loosely structured dance practices, being able to bring non-participating children to dance practices, such as cousins or neighbors, and as Laura stated, the children having the freedom to express themselves and socialize. Also, the women who completed the individual interviews had dance practices wherein children of various ages practiced or were in the same room, alongside each other. In contrast, the focus group participants commented on the strict rules and rigidity of the dance practices of their respective groups. For example, if a child did not arrive on time to one of the group’s practices, the child would not be allowed to enter the room, as the doors would be locked after a specific time. In addition, the children had to learn to be responsible to prepare their practice gear, including dance shoes and appropriate attire. Also, the children might be divided into smaller groups by age or grade ranges. Yet, regardless of whether the dance practices were rigidly or loosely structured, the mothers found the activity in their children’s desenvolvimiento, or development and unfolding.

Convivencia--A Source of Connection

“Convivíamos. We were there together, sharing. And I truly felt like we were like a family. We would see each other and it was a joy to see each other and get together. It is wonderful to convivir with different people. And not just us, but the kids, too” (Urbana).

One of the prominent themes that emerged during analysis is that the participants reported seeing the folkloric Mexican dance groups as a space of convivencia, wherein strong
connections developed. *Convivencia*, from the verb *convivir*, refers to learning to get along with and harmoniously be amongst others. During the interviews, *convivir* was also used to refer to a sense of connectedness to others in one’s surroundings. This connection can include care, friendship, amicability, and empathy. The mothers described a source of connection, or *convivencia*, with other mothers and their children in the dance groups. The women also described *convivencia* among the children who participated in the dance groups. Additionally, the mothers reported a sense of connectedness with their communities as a result of participating in performances at community events.

**Connectedness to other mothers**

For many of the mothers who completed the individual interviews, their sense of connectedness with other mothers in the dance group existed as early as their first time attending a practice. Eight out of the ten mothers reported having been invited to participate in the group by an existing member of the group who was either a friend or a family member. For the mothers who reported having been invited to the group by a current friend or acquaintance who was participating in the group, the friendship was strengthened or enhanced as a result of the *convivencia* with other mothers and families. The *convivencia* that many mothers reported included celebrating holidays and having potlucks with other mothers and families in the dance group. The *convivencia* for some mothers included the relationships between some mothers growing into strong friendships, or even *comadres* (“co-mothers” or godmothers to each others’ children for religious rites of passage). Uma described her experience forming kinship-like relationships with other mothers:

One thing that motivated us even more [to be in the group] was that we became like family with the other moms. We would *convivir*, we were together, sharing and
taking our kids here and there. And I truly felt like we were a family. We all saw each other and it was a joy to see each other and get together. It is really nice to be around [convivir] different people. And not just for us [the moms] but also for the kids. We didn’t just have fun, we also got together to do embroidery or to talk, and we did a lot of nice things together. We got together and we learned about the culture.

Uma’s statement showed that the connection she felt with the other mothers in the dance group was similar to that of being a family, in her experience.

Uma’s statement also relates to the women sharing knowledge related to mothering and culture. She reported the women doing embroidery together. Additionally, the mothers shared information on sewing dance outfits for their children, where to obtain atuendos (dance costume or attire), providing parenting advice, and information related to job and educational opportunities. In this way, the mothers actively reinforced cultural narratives that promoted the habitus of motherhood that stipulates characteristics of “good” mothers. Ramona stated that the mothers “trust each other and can share anything. It creates a connection between the mothers because it’s not just the kids that make friends. The mothers also talk to one another and support one another.” Norma found that she liked “to go and share the experience with other mothers…[the mothers] shared experiences and are all experiencing the same way.” Norma, Ramona, Uma, and many other mothers found support in and connection with the other mothers who were striving to transmit beliefs, traditions, practices, and language to their children in a potentially unfamiliar cultural context.

Forming friendships with other mothers in the dance group served as both a social support for the mothers and assisted them in supporting their children’s development. For
example, according to Imelda, “I am a little antisocial, so [participating in the dance group] gets me the opportunity to talk with other moms that are in the same situation as me [having children in the dance group]...about our kids’ education, hearing the experiences of those kids that now are adolescents, exchange ideas, tips about school, siblings, friends, the kids’ behavior, and how to get the outfits for the dances.” Imelda found that her relationship with the other mothers provided her to gain parenting advice and to connect with other mothers; connections which became lasting friendships and sources of support.

Despite the majority of the mothers having reported a strong connection with other mothers in the dance group, not all the mothers felt the same sense of connectedness. For example, Leonor reported, “I have a relationship [with the other mothers] when I am there [at practice], but they are not my friends outside of the group. I don’t have a friendship with any of them outside of the group.” The mothers who did not report feeling a strong sense of connectedness with the other mothers in dance group were those who had not been in the group as long as some of the other mothers, or who did not have as much in common with the other mothers, such as having sons who participated, rather than adolescent daughters.

**Connectedness amongst children**

The mothers identified the connection between the children and the friendships the children formed as a positive feature of participation in the dance group. Uma stated, “[the kids] really like to go to the practices and get-togethers because they have been doing it for so many years and have friends.” Uma and many of the other mothers appreciated the friendships their children had forged with other children in the dance group after many years of participating in the group. Many mothers described the anticipation the children expressed in wanting to go to the practices and rehearsals to see their friends. This was especially true for the mothers whose
sons participated in the dance group, in that their sons expressed greater interest in seeing the other boys who participated, rather than going to practice to dance. The women also reported satisfaction in their children having friendships with other Latin@ youth in the dance group, and that the children did not have Latin@ friends at their schools.

A feature of the relationships amongst the children in the dance group included the younger children having “positive role models” in the older children. Diana expressed pleasure that her daughters in elementary school had positive role models in the older girls in the dance group and that her daughters were participating in an activity that might enhance positive body-image.

One thing I really like about Folkloric [Mexican dance] is body image. I’m not a big fan of classical ballet because I feel that the body image is one that most girls can’t achieve especially Latina women because we have curves. What I love about folkloric [Mexican dance] is that you can really be any size. You can be really skinny, you can be heavy, you can be tall, you can be short, and you can put on a skirt or a blouse and you can all look beautiful and I really enjoy that. I think that [dance] class has a variety of girls and we are all one no matter the size and they all dance beautifully and gracefully. I hope that the girls are able to one day see or maybe get more comfortable with or so I like that. You can be young or you can be old and you can always have an affiliation with your culture. Some [older girls] even take the time to teach the younger ones and I like that very much.

Aside from her daughters participating in an activity that was appropriate for “any size,” Diana expressed gratitude that her daughters were participating in an activity that enhanced their cultural identity and provided positive role models.
Connectedness between mother and child

The women reported their and their children’s participation in the dance group enhanced their emotional connection, or emotional intimacy, with their children in a variety of ways. A close emotional connection between mothers and their children is a common expectation that comprises part of the habitus of motherhood that entails an intimate emotional connection between mothers and their children and being present for their children. Imelda reported that “as parents and kids [they] get closer together” as an aspect of her and her children’s participation in the dance group. Olivia saw her children’s performances as a gift, “It’s like a gift to the mothers [obsequio a la mamá], like it is a child’s gift to the mother to perform.”

An example of the connection some of the mothers experienced with their children as a result from participating in the dance group is that of the mothers purchasing or making the dance outfits for their children. Mothers who purchased dance atuendo for their children spoke of looking at outfits online with their children and choosing outfits together. Some of the mothers sewed dance outfits for their children and described the process of going to the fabric store with their children to choose the color and pattern of the fabric, ribbons, lace, and other embellishments. For example, Laura used her sewing skills to create dresses and skirts for her daughters and a charro outfit for her son, who was especially anxious for his mother to sew him an outfit, as she had for his sisters. When asked if her son would be satisfied with a charro outfit that was purchased or loaned, as opposed to being tailor made for him by his mother, Laura replied, “[I]f I buy it he will happy, but it is a part of the relationship with me. It is something that we do together as a team. Because I think that I also enjoy doing it [making the charro suit] and we work together to do it. And he wants to have his own outfit; it doesn’t have to be elegant, it could be simple.” In addition to the sense of teamwork that might occur during the process of a
mother making a dance outfit for her child, some mothers were pleased that the children enjoyed wearing the outfits at a performance. When asked how she felt when seeing her children performing in a dance *atuendo* she had made, Imelda answered, “Well, pride because [the outfit] was made by my hands. And they [her children] got to display it.”

**Connectedness to community**

Another way in which mothers reported a sense of connectedness through their and their children’s participation in the dance groups was a connection to their communities. As previously discussed, the study participants belonged to dance groups that had a range of involvement in community events, celebrations, and festivals. The groups performed at a variety of locations, including schools, libraries, churches, assisted-living facilities, and correctional facilities. The dance groups also performed at cultural festivals, community celebrations, parades, art fairs, county fairs, Cinco de Mayo festivals, and other similar community events.

The mothers appreciated the dance groups performing at events and celebrations that valued the children’s performance, and where the audience seemed to appreciate and enjoy the performances, regardless of the venue or type of event where the groups performed. Some mothers, however, preferred that the dance groups performed at events that were community-based, rather than private, profit-driven events. For example, Diana “definitely enjoy[ed] the performances more when they are community-based events because [she] wants the girls to not just perform but to be a part of something bigger.” Diana and other mothers were more partial to events that raised awareness or funds for a nonprofit community-based organization. The mothers believed this helped their children feel connected to a larger community. Ramona liked that performing at community-based events “gives the girls better perspective, to be less self-centered.” Uma found that her daughter’s interest performing served “as a way to integrate her
into the community, the Latino community.” For Uma and other women, the performances at Latino events or for Latino audiences reinforced aspects of Mexican culture that the mothers strove to transmit to their children, as a continuance of the mother’s cultural identity. Continuity of cultural identity will be discussed further in the following section.

**Continuity: “Que aprendan de lo mío”**

“In time they will identify with it, like I identify with it” (Ramona).

The third and most prominent meaning that mothers gave to their children participating in folkloric Mexican dance is that the mothers wanted their children to learn about elements of the mothers’ cultural identity, such as folkloric Mexican dance, and that the children would potentially integrate these elements into their own cultural identity. The phrase, “*Que aprendan de lo mío*” (“that they might learn from/about what is mine”), expresses the mothers’ desire that the children *aprendan de lo suyo* (learn from/about what is theirs) through seeking out cultural identity affirming activities, such as folkloric Mexican dance, as a way to (re)affirm their and their children’s Mexican roots and cultural identity, or *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness). The mothers carried forward their experiences with *folklórico* from their own childhoods in their mothering practices to inculcate roots and a cultural identity in their children. Passing on a strong sense of rootedness, cultural heritage, or cultural identity to their children is a part of the habitus of motherhood for *mexicana* mothers. By passing on aspects of the mothers’ cultural heritage to their children, those practices and traditions are reproduced and continued. Taking part in the folkloric Mexican dance groups provided a means for the mothers to pass on their cultural heritage to their children.
“In time they will identify with it, like I identify with it.” Continuity of a tradition—

Mothers’ experience with folklórico.

The mothers who completed the individual interviews were asked about their experiences with folkloric Mexican dance during their childhood and adolescence. Because many primary and secondary schools in México include regional folkloric dance in the repertoire of educational activities, it was not surprising that all of the mothers had learned regional dances in primary or secondary school, or knew classmates who had learned and performed dances. For some of the mothers, the regional dances were associated with school and community celebrations, which brought together students, teachers, school personnel, families, and community members. The focus group participants also referred to seeing and performing folkloric Mexican dances for school and community celebrations.

The majority of the women remembered their exposure to regional folkloric dance during primary school in México. The students might dance for holidays such as Mother’s Day, Teacher’s Day, Day of the Child, and as a part of the festivities for students graduating from primary school. The students also performed regional dances on patriotic holidays, such as Mexican Independence Day, Dia de la Raza, The Birthday of Benito Juarez, and Day of the Flag, or religious holidays, such as Day of the Virgen de Guadalupe. Depending on the holiday, dance performances might have accompanied parades, fireworks, carnivals, equestrian events (e.g., charreadas, escaramuzas, horse races), peregrinations, poetry recitals, and theatrical performances.

According to the women, the teachers at the schools determined which dances would be performed, who would dance, and subsequently taught the dances. The teachers might also have provided dance attire, or the children’s families might have had to provide the dance attire. The
mothers were not able to recall having received instruction regarding the meaning or history of the dances, or explanations with respect to particular dance steps, *atuendos*, musical instruments, or choreography. That is, the process of learning the dances, according to the mothers’ experiences, was not associated with learning Mexican national history. The women did recall learning to associate types of dances, *atuendos*, and music with particular states, such as Chiapas, Veracruz, Jalisco, Michoacán, Sinaloa, and Monterrey. Nearly all the mothers reported learning dances from Jalisco. This could be because more than half of those interviewed lived in Jalisco during their childhood, or because music and folkloric dances from Jalisco are considered emblematic of México, such as mariachi music. A few mothers reported learning *danza azteca* (Aztec dance), although they reported that this form of dance is distinct from regional folkloric dance.

The mothers recalled their experience with regional dances during childhood with a myriad of emotions and memories. For some of the women, a lack of financial resources created limitations in being able to obtain *atuendos* to perform, unless alternative arrangements could be found. Ana remembered not being able to dance at all because only children from more affluent families in the town could afford the required outfits and shoes. Olivia spoke about one of the teachers using cardboard to make boots for a performance if students were not able to acquire boots, or using crepe paper to make a tunic. Imelda recollected her mother and grandmother expressing frustration over having to make the dance outfits, due to financial and time constraints to purchase the materials and make the outfits. Laura told a story of how her mother creatively found a solution to making a dance outfit, using the resources available to her at the time:
[At my school] they used to ask who wanted to dance. And I always wanted to
dance. I really, really liked it. And I remember that one time...I knew there wasn’t
money to buy the outfit or what could be done so that I could dance. But I said,
‘But, the teacher chose me to dance,’ even though no one had actually chosen me,
just me wanting to dance. And I remember that my dad and mom always were
like, ‘Well, let’s see what we can do and can make and what you need.’ There
was a lot of poverty. My dad asked my mom who was going to choose me to
dance and that I was like Ticleta’s donkey [la burra de ticleta]. Paying someone
to rent me. That I must have been asking them to choose me. And my mom said,
‘No, see, they chose her to dance.’ But it wasn’t true. It was like what my dad
said, that I was paying someone to rent me, because I really wanted to dance. And
I remember one time my little brother was about to be born. My mom had bought
fabric to make diapers. She had cut the fabric into little pieces and I was supposed
to dance a dance from Veracruz. So, my mom sewed together the little fabric
squares for the diapers and made my dress and I don’t know how it turned out, but
my mom made my dress with the diapers for my little brother that hadn’t been
born yet. So that I could dance because, supposedly, the teacher had chosen me to
dance...But for me there was always a restriction to do it because there wasn’t
money and because it was a burden for my parents. But, I always had a big desire
to do it.

Laura possessed a strong desire to dance, which may have informed her efforts to seek out a
similar opportunity for her children.
Some of the mothers reported feeling excited and proud as children when the teachers chose them for the performances. Also, they recalled appreciating the applause and accolades they received from other students and teachers when they performed for school events, or of getting to put on makeup and dressing up in a beautiful dress for the parades. Uma recollected, “Well, you felt a really pleasant emotion when you were dancing. Because now I see the kids and I think, ‘Wow, what courage.’ Because I couldn’t build up the motivation to do it. I did when I was a kid but now when I see them and I think, ‘No, I wouldn’t dare do that. I wouldn’t get up there to dance.’” Uma admired the fact that, as a child, she had the confidence to dance in front of a crowd, and now appreciates that her children have the confidence to perform. Olga did not recall enjoying dancing because she did not feel comfortable wearing the dresses, “In primary school I participated in a few dances. I participated but I didn’t really like the dresses because I used to be a little chubbier and I felt fat with the dresses. I only participated because it was part of school. After primary school, I didn’t participate anymore.” As shown in Olga’s description, not all the women recollected dancing as a positive experience that they looked forward to.

Sometimes I put the skirt on in the skirt and I say, ‘Son, do you think they will let me dance with the group?’ and he says, ‘Ay, mama.’ But yes, I do it to make him laugh. I say, when I was little I always saw when the folkloric dancers came out, but because of not having money for the outfits, in home we were really poor, and we didn’t have money for the outfits, I always had the desire to go out in the dances too. So, now that I see them, I say, ‘How nice.’ And as they say, it makes my heart beat faster. And that is the reason that, as she said, one feels great pride. I feel very proud because, if I had been able to dance when I was little, to have done it, I would have done it. With much pleasure, but I couldn’t because we
didn’t have the means to do so. So, the teachers in the school where they invited me, said, ‘If you have for the skirt and if you have to buy what you need, you can participate. But if you don’t, then no.’ And one didn’t have the means to do so, and was only there watching and sad because, it was one of the reasons why we couldn’t [dance at school].

Urbana, like some of the other women interviewed, recalled not having the means necessary to be able to dance at school. In seeing her children dance, however, and dancing alongside them at home, Urbana is able to carry forward her desire to dance and the pride that her children have the means and the opportunity to dance folklórico.

Regardless, of whether the women reported dancing as a positive experience that they enjoyed and looked forward to as children, the mothers spoke about experiencing feelings of nostalgia when they watched their children perform folklórico. As described by one Karina, “when one watches their kids dance, one remembers when one was in México. The patriotic holidays. One remembers the places where one was in México. Yes, there are many nice memories. One also has a lot of pride in that one’s children wants to participate in Mexican culture, because there are many that don’t want to learn about it.” Watching their children perform afforded the mothers the opportunity to recall experiences and celebrations from living in México, and the mothers felt hopeful that their children would want to learn about and feel pride in Mexican culture.

The women spoke about feeling nostalgia or recalling specific memories when hearing particular songs. When asked about what she liked when she watched her children perform, Norma answered, “I like the music. It makes you remember your own experiences, classes
during childhood, classes at school and the community.” When Laura hears certain songs, she is reminded of her childhood:

For me the music...I feel the songs in my heart because they are something I grew up with and something from my country that I adore. Also because I am somewhere else [in the US] and when I hear certain music that I used to listen to, well, I like some songs more than others. I am very content when it is a song I used to dance to. But for them [the kids] it is different because they didn’t grow up [with this music] and they don’t have those memories that I have of that music. But maybe now they can it will be for them like it is for me. They are growing up listening to that type of music [folklórico songs] and with time will identify with it, like how I now identify with it.

Laura recounted how certain songs, such as “El Toro Mambo,” reminded her of her childhood and growing up listening to specific songs, and is hopeful that her children will also have fond memories of dancing to the same song. Similar to Laura, Diana felt nostalgia when hearing particular songs when her children danced, especially the song “El Son de la Negra.” According to Diana, whose father was a musician, “[W]e grew up listening to a lot of music, like ‘La Negra.’ So I have a specific affiliation or thought or something related to it so when I hear it, it makes me tear up so I love to watch them to perform, my husband loves watching them perform.” Imelda also had fond memories of “El Son de la Negra” and similar songs, “I get really excited listening to El Son de la Negra. I also get really excited listening to that song and the banda songs, like from Sinaloa. And the music brings me a lot of memories, it reminds me a lot of my childhood, what I've lived in my culture, I can't say it was music from the family, but it
is music that I grew up with, and it's representative of my country. So yes, hearing the music brings me memories, it brings back memories of growing up in México.”

Diana described having a visceral reaction of hearing “El Son de la Negra” by tearing up. Other women recalled being overcome by emotion to the point of crying, dancing in their chairs, and shouting when they watched their children perform. During her interview, Ana proclaimed, “Even sitting here now I am starting to cry with joy and pride from watching the girls. I love it!” Diana also felt great excitement at watching her girls perform, “Yes, I am very emotional so I will tear up and get goose bumps and I think I enjoy it probably ten times more than they enjoy it.” Oralia, a focus group participant, described such excitement when she hear the zapateado that she would feel like getting up and dancing:

[I]t is almost unexplainable. Not unexplainable but it surges through your whole body. Like this [makes gesture of a pulsation running through her chest]. As soon as the music starts and you hear the dancers’ zapateado, I also feel it. I shout! It just comes out. [Other moms laugh in agreement]. It’s like you go back (regresas arts). You go back to your town in that moment. You go back to your town, and in a matter of seconds you remember all the dances that you saw or that you danced. ... May 10, in the school graduations from the elementary or secondary school graduations, that is how they celebrated. And if you didn’t’ participate, then others participated, but you knew those that participated. And here, in this country, that is not our land, and where you see it, people from here from the United States going to watch it, well it feels really nice. And one remembers it. That’s what happens to me. Oh, how nice it is, and even tears come from my eyes
and shouts escape from my mouth. You almost want to get up out of your chair

[laughter]. It is really, really nice. A lot of emotions at the same time.

For the mothers, watching their children perform and hearing the music and zapateado causes a myriad of emotions to sweep over them, as they feel pride in watching their children dance and nostalgia for their hometowns and communities. In addition, the women feel joy in connecting with their past, while at the same time carrying forward their experiences with folklórico as they transmit aspects of their cultural identity to their children, as a part of their mothering practices.

“It is my culture, my roots, and I am defined by it.”

Many of the individual and focus group interviewees spoke about having a sense of rootedness, and wanting their children to also have roots. The children learning folkloric Mexican dance was a part of the mothers’ larger goal of teaching their children about their Mexican heritage and giving them a rooted sense of cultural identity. In doing so, the mothers agentically sought out contexts that supported the goal of the children learning about their and their mothers’ roots, which included the folkloric Mexican dance groups. The way in which the mothers described their roots reflected aspects of the mothers’ sense of cultural heritage that they aspire to pass on to their children by way of the children learning folkloric Mexican dance. As stated by one focus group participant, “When I came from México to the US, I wanted that my children learned about my roots.” The children learning folkloric Mexican dance served as a support for mothers who wanted to teach their children about their roots. Olivia stated, “It is my culture, my roots, and I am defined by it. It [the dance group] is a support that I have so that [the culture] doesn’t get lost or left behind. So that the girls can have, even if just a little bit, something of me. The folkloric dance is something of mine and something of theirs.”
The mothers believed that teaching their children about their cultural roots would assist them in having a strong sense of Mexican identity. According to Ramona, “if [she] didn’t tell the girls where they are from, it’s almost like they don’t have an identity. It’s like a tree without roots; it doesn’t grow and is fragile.” It was not necessarily clear as to whether the cultural roots belonged to the mother or to the children, or how the roots of each were different. For Olga, her children’s roots were a continuation of her own, “I think it is important for the children to identify [with their Mexican heritage], and that they know where their roots are from.” Laura noted a difference in her roots as growing up in México, as opposed to her children growing up in the US:

I am Mexican because I was born in México, I grew up in México. It is not the same for them because they were not born in México and they did not grow up there like I did. It is a different culture for them because they have their roots both here and there. So, it is not the same, like what I have for myself. They have their roots. Their lives are completely different. I might be teaching them about food, dance, the music; they are not living what I lived. It is something different--their culture.

For Laura, her children shared elements of her cultural heritage through what she transmitted to them, but growing up in the US meant that their cultural roots were a different version of her roots. The aspects of the mothers’ sense of cultural heritage and roots might be conceived as a sense of Mexican cultural identity the mothers hoped to pass on to their children, as their children would develop a version of mexicanidad, or Mexicanness, or an expression of a Mexican cultural identity. The performance or expression of the children’s Mexican cultural identity or heritage, and the ways in which the mothers conceived of their and their children’s
cultural heritage, are discussed in the next section.

**Cultural identity/heritage**

When asked what her goals were as a mother, Ramona responded, “[To] give [my daughters] a solid foundation. That they have an identity. So that it doesn’t cost them so much...Give them an identity or help them to have an identity because ….In the sense of what they are. Let me see. I can’t explain it very well. For example, I am *mexicana* and let’s see...That they have an identity. Like Mexicans or like Latinas in this country.” Ramona admitted that she struggled to articulate what her goals as a mother were when speaking about giving her daughters a sense of identity. Ramona explained that where she grew up, people in her town were similar to the nearby pueblos, and that she didn’t *feel* or identify as *mexicana* until coming to the US. Ramona and other mothers had the desire that their children would take on vestiges of their cultural heritage as they form their own cultural identities. Yet, similar to the variations in how the women described their children’s roots as a continuation of their own, or as different from the mothers’ cultural roots, the ways in which the mothers spoke about their children’s cultural identities varied.

Some mothers spoke about their young children not yet having a sense of their cultural identity, as their children were still forming their cultural identities. Leonor, a mother of a five year-old boy, stated that her son’s learning and performing folkloric Mexican dance “makes him feel important and that he is not ashamed of his culture. Well, he is very young still, so I don’t think he this early on can say or that he has a sense of who he is, proud of being Mexican or that he has Mexican relatives. He is still very young. But he certainly likes people to see him in his *traje de charro* For Leonor, her son had to grow into his own sense of his cultural identity. In her desire for Leonor’s son to develop a sense of pride in his cultural heritage, Leonor hoped to
prevent cultural erasure or her son potentially internalizing a sense of shame in this cultural identity that was also considered “other” or a “minority.” By wanting her son to have pride in wearing his traje de charro, as emblematic of Mexican culture, Leonor also worked to help him develop his cultural identity.

Other women described their children’s cultural identity as carrying parts of the mother’s culture and Mexican cultural identity, but that the children mostly identified as being American. According to Norma, her daughters “consider themselves American, but they also know about their Latino culture because they have good roots. But, yes, they have more American [culture] because they are growing up here. But, they know what is referred to when one talks about Latino.” Interestingly, Norma spoke of her daughters having Latino roots, as opposed to having Mexican roots.

Several women spoke about their children having a cultural identity that was an amalgamation or hybrid version combining Mexican and US culture. The children are being raised in a cultural context perhaps different from that of their parents. Laura said,

Even if they are not Mexicans like we are because they are growing up in a different culture, but they are going to consider themselves Mexican because their roots are there. And they are firm in saying who they are. I think that this is very important and it is never going to and because throughout their life they are going to belong to la raza mexicana. That is who they are. Even though they are born here they are always going to be Mexican or be called Mexican. A lot of people, some people may not feel comfortable saying that they are Mexican. I think that it will be up to each child to decide if they want to be called Mexican or Mexican American. They have to decide for themselves. I only understand in my mind, I
am Mexican because I was born in México, I grew up in México. It is not the same for them because they were not born in México and they did not grow up there like I did. It is that different culture for them because they have their roots both there and here. So it is not the same. Like what I have for myself. They have other roots. Their lives are completely different. I might be teaching them about food, dance, the music, they are not living what I lived. It is something different, their culture. So this is important.

For Laura, that her children were not born in México did not negate their Mexican cultural heritage, but it did mean that the children’s sense of being Mexican would be different than her experience of knowing she is Mexican because of having been born in and growing up in México. Her children’s cultural identity would be a hybridized version of being Mexican or Mexican American. Through her children learning about food, dance, and music, Laura hoped to teach her children about aspects of her own identity that was in danger of being erased or glossed over. Laura countered this erasure through teaching her children aspects of “their culture.” Maria Guadalupe stated, “When I came from México to the US, I wanted that my children learned about my roots. That also they are their roots, even though they were born in the US, but that they identify also as Mexicans, and that they are not embarrassed to wear a traje or a vestment, that it could be of much pride to identify with the culture of their parents. And from their grandparents.” Similar to Laura, Maria de Guadalupe’s children have a Mexican cultural identity even though her children were not born in México.

Some women spoke of their children having two cultures, rather than a hybridized version of Mexican or US culture. For example, for Olga, “it is important that [the children] know that they have two cultures, and that they learn from their parent’s culture, that it’s not just
the culture from here.” It was not clear if this conceptualization of the children’s cultural orientation meant that the children develop two distinct cultural identities, or if the two cultural orientations are a part of the same overall cultural identity.

Another way the women conceptualized their children’s cultural identity is that the mother’s cultural identity would also be their children’s cultural identity. Uma stated, “I think that this is another reason why I liked that they participated in the dance group because it was a way for them to do exercise and learn about their culture” (emphasis added). For Ramona, her children were learning about their culture as an extension of her cultural identity. Ramona noted:

As [my daughter] began to grow up we realized that we needed to look for people who speak Spanish so that she could practice her Spanish with others and learn about her culture even though she was born here; we are Mexican. I think it is beautiful for her to understand where she came from. The dance was a great opportunity...We are in a place with a different language, culture, customs, and food. Beautiful customs, but I will repeat this to you once more, they need to know where they came from and to their race (raza).If [my daughter] learns about her raza, she can learn that we are all different, but still human. This has made her strong, she can move forward because she has an identity. The dance has helped her because she is around people who look like her that she can identify with and that has helped her. She’s proud to be Mexican and it has made her stronger.

Ramona wanted her daughter to know where her parents came from, as a way to understand where she came from. That is, Ramona’s daughter’s cultural identity would be an extension of or continuation of Ramona’s cultural identity. Even though her daughter was born in the US,
Ramona considered her daughter as Mexican nonetheless, and has assuredness that her daughter will grow into a Mexican cultural identity as well.

Some of the focus group participants recalled moments when their adolescent children expressed an awareness of having or realizing they possess a rich cultural heritage. Ingrid spoke with joy as she talked about her daughter realizing she possessed a rich cultural heritage:

Also, my daughter, the little one, has to know what her culture is. And the other one, the 16 year-old, she got goose bumps when she said, ‘Mami, we are rich in culture. Mami, this is beautiful.’ After I saw how welcome our performance [at the school] was I grew motivated to expose my daughter to the dance so she could learn more traditional aspects of her own culture. I was really pleased to see my daughter say with pride, ‘This is our culture.’ It was very nice, very, very nice, to have our culture. To teach our culture and that it never gets lost.

Ingrid’s daughter helped her mother prepare a performance for a showcase of culture from a variety of countries. Ingrid conveyed that the process of her daughter learning and performing folkloric Mexican dance in a cultural showcase provided her daughter the opportunity to learn to appreciate the beauty and allure of her cultural heritage, and the value of preserving this cultural heritage so that it would not “get lost” Oralia spoke of a similar moment with her son coming to own his Mexican cultural identity:

It is one of my motivations [to have my children participate in the folkloric Mexican dance group], that they learn the culture. And that they carry it inside of them. And that they like it. That they do it from the heart...One day I got mad at my son, and I said, ‘Well,’ I tried to tell him Anglo-Saxon or gabacho, and he said, ‘Mama, I am Mexican. And I am truly Mexican you know. It is not in vain
that I dance ballet, if I dance it is because I like it.’ ‘Why do you say this?’ I asked. ‘No, it’s that you tell me whatever thing?’ ‘Well, it’s because you tell me that you don’t want to do it, that they tease you for it, that you feel embarrassed.’ ‘No, I don’t feel embarrassed anymore. I understand now. This is from my land, that I am Mexican and because of that I do it.’ I said, ‘Ah, now things have changed. Now you like it, huh?’ Like, it is normal, they are growing. You can explain things go them and one day they say, ‘Yes I am Mexican.’ ‘And you said it used to make you embarrassed and who knows what else.’ Yes, when he was able to understand it...Or when it is convenient for them.

Oralia and Ingrid spoke about interactions when their adolescent children declared their pride in their Mexican cultural identity. Oralia might have used the word “gabacho,” a term generally referring to white non-Hispanic person, to challenge her son’s cultural identity, or because her son had not yet identified with having a Mexican cultural identity. As Oralia suggested, her son might not claim his Mexican cultural identity if he feels embarrassment or when it is not convenient for him to do so. In this way, she sees that her son’s cultural identity can fluctuate and be fluid, and that he can claim his own cultural identity.

The focus group participants spoke at length about their adolescent sons being teased by other Latino boys who were not in the dance group, and how their sons dealt with being made fun of. Karina recounted how she supported her son when he was teased by his Latino peers:

[My son] already went through that phase [of being made fun of]. I talked to him a lot about this when he was in middle school. I would take [my kids] and drop them off when other kids were getting out of classes. And I saw how the other kids teased them, and tried to do zapateado like teasing. And he only laughed at them.
But I could tell that it affected him. I told him that he had to learn to ignore others. That, ‘if you like it, if you want to do it, and you are going to do with other people want you to do, or you are going to stop doing what you like because other people don’t do it, or for whatever reason, that is something erroneous. You are going trying to do what other people like. Not what you like to do. If you have reasons to do what you like and you want to do it, well then the others are going to have to just get used to it. If you are going to stop doing it, you are going to feel bad. Better yet, invite those kids.’ And he invited them. But they didn’t go. He said, the boys that don’t say anything are the [white] boys. Maybe they value more the other cultures, they have a little more education, I don’t know. Sometimes we the Hispanics are really critical amongst ourselves. [Assent from other mothers.] we are tremendous. And we are from the same place. We are from the same culture. Our parents are from the same places. The same ranches, the same towns, we do the same activities. But yes, it is hard for the kids.

A similar sentiment was expressed by other mothers, in that if the child learns to master the zapateado and does it well, the mother thinks this will help the child not be as affected by peers’ teasing. In other words, the pride the child feels in the mastering the performance of one’s cultural heritage, in the form of zapateado, would render teasing by one’s peers as innocuous. By showing the child’s peers how one has mastered the dance step, he or she can demonstrate mastery or competency in an intricate and difficult activity that the others are not able to do. The example above also illustrates how the mother supports her son in an activity he enjoys, despite potentially disparaging comments or criticisms from his peers. The focus group participants
reported that the adolescent boys in the dance groups tended to get made fun of by other Latino adolescent boys, but not by adolescents of other genders or ethnicities.

Oralia and Ingrid spoke about moments when their adolescent children declared feeling proud of their cultural heritage and cultural identity, which a desire many of the women shared. Ingrid expressed the hope her culture never gets lost. Many mothers expressed the concern that their and the children’s cultural heritage would get lost due to the children growing up in a different cultural context, where cultural traditions, beliefs, language, practices, and customs are primarily transmitted in the family environment. The folkloric Mexican dance groups, however, provide the mothers a support in teaching their children some aspects of what they perceive as Mexican culture. For example, Ermelinda remarked, “[T]hat thing about knowing about our culture, our roots, our country, that is really important because a lot of that has been dying. Our culture, it is not taught. I am very content that they are dancing.” The children do not learn about Mexican holidays and community celebrations in school, as the mothers might have when they attended primary school in México. In México, the educational system served as primary vehicle wherein children learned about Mexican history and traditions. The women would like their children to learn more about Mexican history and traditions, but the opportunities to do so in their communities are somewhat limited. For Imelda, her children participating in the Mexican folkloric dance group meant that “they are connecting to their cultural heritage and as parents and kids we get closer together, they become aware that their parents come from a different culture than theirs and this amplifies their own general culture.” Imelda remarked that there were few opportunities in the area for her children to be taught Mexican culture and for her children to learn about their parents’ culture.
One question that was not directly asked, but that emerges from a synthesis of the research findings, is what would the mothers want their children to learn as a part of their cultural identity, or *mexicanidad*? An extension to this question is whether the mothers find or have adequate community resources in supporting them in teaching their children about their cultural heritage, in accordance with what the mothers perceive as *mexicanidad* for their children growing up in the US. In the individual interviews, the women were asked if there are aspects of participating in the folkloric Mexican dance group that help promote values, practices, and/or traditions that they want their children to learn, in the sense of values, practices, and/or traditions the mothers might want the children to learn as a part of their cultural identity.

Because the current study focuses on the meanings mothers ascribe to their and their children’s participation in folkloric Mexican dance group, and that the study participants are mothers whose children participate in a folkloric Mexican dance group, it is not surprising that the majority of the women wanted their children to learn *baile regional* as a part of their *mexicanidad*. Olga stated, “I wanted them [her children] to learn to dance because it is part of my culture.” At one point Olga’s son stopped dancing. When asked to reflect on how she felt when her son stopped dancing, Olga replied, “Well, I felt bad because I knew it was one of the few things that he has learned about Mexican culture. And now he wasn’t going to do it anymore. Even though it is one of the activities that I can say is Mexican, it is one of the few that he did outside the home, because at home I teach him Spanish and traditional Mexican food, but as far as a sport or activity goes, it was the only one.” Olga lamented that her son was no longer participating in an activity outside the home that provided him an opportunity to learn about Mexican culture. For Uma, “[the folkloric Mexican dance group] is like a window towards our culture because many of the kids aren’t familiar with it and don’t know the culture (*no conocen y...*
no saben la cultura) and this is a little piece they are learning...They learn something that is theirs and that has been maintained for generations in México.” According to Valeria, a focus group participant, “Through dancing, the kids get to learn traditions, culture; they realize that we, as Mexicans, as a nation, as Latinos let’s say, we are happy people.” The mothers’ and their children’s participation in the dance groups may have provided a support to the mothers educating their children about their mexicanidad, perhaps beyond what the mothers were able to teach their children at home, such as Spanish and traditional Mexican food, as in Olga’s case.

As previously discussed regarding the benefits the mothers and children derived from their participation in the folkloric Mexican dance groups, one benefit is that the children were able to convivir y desenvolverse entre sus amigos (harmoniously coexist with and develop alongside their peers). The convivencia the mothers and children experienced, especially during holidays, was also identified as an important part of the children’s sense of their cultural identity.

For example, Imelda stated:

[T]hey get to know not only the dances typical of our culture, but also that they get to know some editions of our culture, those with which we grew and those that our parents transmit to us in the same way. Celebrating las Posadas, Day of the dead, La Rosca de Reyes, Day of the Child… Definitely yes. The group helps contribute to the cultural education for my kids. And the group they get to know a lot of the traditions of México such as Las Posadas, if it weren't for the group, the boys would have not the slightest idea about what is a Posada. And I don't know if they quite grasp what it is. But it is not something that they are going to be able to learn about in any other place. It won't be something at school, or Boy Scouts. Or soccer, it won't be in any other place except for the group. So yes, la Rosca de los
Reyes too. These things are only from going to the group, and from there they get information. I can't tell you if the kids are 100% conscious of these traditions, but they are gaining memories around these things. They have very present in their mind things like piñatas, La Posada, yes all these memories they have. But that they understand them, why they are done, why Las Posadas are celebrated, or why we do a mini Pastorela, because culturally we are accustomed to doing these things, the kids don't have as much information. But yes definitely it contributes to their education, for them to understand that there are other cultures aside from the one here the one they are growing up in.

For Imelda, the group provided an important support in her overall goals of teaching her children about Mexican traditions and celebrations, even if the experiences and ideas her children gained were a different version of what she might have celebrated as a child in México. The experience Imelda’s children gained through the folkloric Mexican dance group was a kind of cultural education, or teachable culture, distilled into folkloric dance and celebrating certain holidays, so that her children might have a glimpse of aspects of Mexican culture. In choosing to participate in the dance group and celebrating certain holidays, the mothers were agentically selecting aspects of Mexican culture that they could preserve and pass on to their children. The dance group served as a support or and a space wherein this could be achieved, in a community that did not offer many other spaces or supports for mothers to actively transmit aspects of Mexican culture to their children.

As discussed in the description of the study sample, the individual and focus group interviewees participated in folkloric Mexican dance groups in three different communities in the Pacific Northwest with varying percentages of the population that were classified as “Hispanic”
or “Latino” according to the 2010 US Census. While two of the three communities represented have a Latino population that does not exceed 8% of the metropolitan area’s total population, the third community has a Latino population that makes up nearly 50% of the city’s overall population. Thus, the number of community resources, organizations, and groups that support mexicana mothers in teaching their children to have a positive cultural identity may vary greatly between the communities. As such, the availability of cultural identity affirming activities may be greatly reduced for families residing in communities with a smaller percentage of the total population being Hispanic or Latino. For example, Imelda mentioned the dance group being the only place where her children might learn aspects of Mexican culture, but not at school or Boy Scouts. When asked if their children participated in other culturally affirming activities, the majority of the women responded that there were not many other options. Other groups mentioned were the Hispanic Initiative by Girl Scouts, soccer, mariachi groups at local high schools, and a few mothers also participated in a group for adults and children that teaches traditional songs and dance from the state of Veracruz, México. Overall, however, the mothers wished that there were more opportunities for their children to learn about Mexican culture, such as through cooking, crafts, theater, and music classes. Yet, the women seek out or create spaces and opportunities for their children to learn and perform aspects of mexicanidad, using the resources at their disposal to make something original and new.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the meaning Mexican and Mexican American mothers give to their own and their children’s participation in the cultural affirming activity of folkloric Mexican dance. This study was informed by third world feminism and hybridity theory. This study used individual and focus group interviews with an intensive sample and a comparison sample of women whose children participated in folkloric Mexican dance groups from three communities in Oregon. Using inductive analytical techniques, data from the interview transcripts were coded, analyzed, and organized by themes and subthemes, as described in the Methods section. The purpose of this chapter is to explore and draw connections between the research findings, theoretical perspectives, and previous research. This study is unique and innovative because few extant studies in the social sciences examine the meanings mexicana mothers place on the cultural affirming activity folkloric Mexican dance for their children.

The most prominent research findings show that their participation in the folkloric Mexican dance groups was meaningful in that it provided the mothers a source of connection with their children, with other women in the group, with the community, and as a source of connection amongst the children in the dance group. The mothers found meaning in their participation in the folkloric Mexican dance groups in that their participation may also allow the mothers to carry forward cultural heritage, traditions, and practices as they strive to transmit their cultural identity to their children. Additionally, through learning folkloric Mexican dance and
participating in the dance groups, the children may be exposed to and learn about aspects of the mothers’ cultural identity, as the mothers strive to transmit aspects of their *mexicanidad* to their children.

In Rena Grande’s book, *Dancing with Butterflies*, one of the protagonists, Soledad, receives an admonishment from her grandmother to preserve the symbolism in the dance costumes Soledad sews for the folklórico dancers. Each outfit has a rich symbolism and guidelines that have been shaped by the history, custom, climate, and other elements that are particular to the region where the outfit is from. Soledad’s grandmother reminds her, “[Y]ou must never forget that each costume you make, the colors and shapes you used, are filled with symbolism. They are links to your past. They are the continuation of your people’s traditions. Your costumes must preserve the essence of your culture” (Grande, 2009, p. 231). The costume maker’s challenge, therefore, is to strive to preserve the symbolism in each outfit, while using the resources available. Laura described the challenges of making a dress for her daughter, despite having limited knowledge, skill, and experience in such an endeavor:

Making the dresses was very exciting. I didn’t really know how to sew, but what harm is there in just trying to make one? I took a really long time to make a dress because I am just trying to figure out if I put things like this, then I sew it, and it all comes apart. I don’t know how to do it well, I didn’t study sewing. But, it feels really nice when I see all the dresses I have made, each dress took many hours, forty or more hours. So, for me it is so wonderful when my daughter performs and I see how nice she dances, and I feel so proud. I made that dress, even though it took me forty or more hours to make. It is something that I feel very proud of because I am not a seamstress, but for me, what I made turned out really well. If
something didn’t turn out well, I would take it apart and redo it again and again, until it turned out well.

While not all the study participants reported sewing outfits for their children, Laura’s experience making a dress for her daughter serves as an excellent metaphor to illustrate the experiences and processes that undergird the meanings the mothers place on their and their children's participation in the culturally affirming activity of folkloric Mexican dance. Producing a completed outfit is a multi-step process that has three primary phases, which can be useful in conceptualizing the processes the mothers may experience in using folkloric Mexican dance as a vehicle by which to transmit their cultural identity or heritage to their children, as a part of their mothering practices. In the first phase, Laura had sought out the folkloric Mexican dance group for her children, and the need for the dress arose for a performance. In the second phase, Laura went through an iterative process of making the dress, to the best of her ability and knowledge, using the resources at her disposal. During the third phase, Laura was able to enjoy seeing her daughter perform in the dress Laura had made, invoking great pride and satisfaction. In the following sections, each phase will be explained in further detail as connections are drawn between the research findings and the literature, taking into account concepts such as hybridity as an acculturative strategy, mothering practices, and the functions of folkloric Mexican dance in a receiving community.

**Hybridity as an acculturative strategy**

In the example of Laura making a dress for her daughter, the need for the dress arose out of Laura having sought out a culturally affirming activity for her daughter. Laura was drawn to the opportunity in a time when she was looking for ways to create linkages with other *mexicana* mothers. Additionally, Laura observed that her learning and performing folkloric Mexican dance
supported her mothering practice of teaching her children about their cultural heritage, albeit in a community where assimilationist policies and attitudes threatened to flatten and erase Laura’s cultural identity.

The enduring presence of folkloric Mexican dance groups in various communities around Oregon contest traditional assimilationist policies which mandate that immigrant groups shed cultural or national vestiges, such as language and traditions, to adopt those of the receiving community. As previously discussed, assimilationist ballot measures proposed in 2008 and 2014 were geared towards suppressing or limiting rights to immigrants, with respect to bilingual education and the ability to obtain driver licenses. This assimilationist tendency in policy carries an underlying message of a national mythology of the permanence of the hegemonic culture, and ignores the continuous presence of minority communities. Hybridization, as an alternative model of acculturation, reflects more dynamic processes of continuity and change and allows for new cultural practices or behaviors to emerge, or the maintenance of known practices, as a response to shifting cultural contexts (Falicov, 2012). Hybridity anticipates a process of negotiating among cultural practices, discourses, narratives, or codes, and adapting cultural practices in one’s environment. Thus, agency is integral to this process of negotiation and compromise. The mothers joined or created folkloric Mexican dance groups for their children as a way to create or maintain the cultural practice of folkloric Mexican dance, and as a way to preserve and maintain their cultural identity. Non-European, non-white immigrant communities may experience a constant negotiation between past and present, home and host country, self and other (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). While the study did not address community-level outcomes, the mothers in the study did describe bittersweet feelings of nostalgia when they watched their children perform.
The mothers also talked about yearning to be in México or to visit family members, yet could only occasionally visit their sending communities.

Hybridity as an acculturative strategy includes processes of fluidity, flexibility, and the ability to adapt, and allows for the adaptation of existing everyday practices, behaviors, and cultural codes to develop new, hybrid practices and behaviors (Falicov, 2012). Folkloric Mexican dance is a type of cultural code that was able to be contextually adapted to community and school events and performances where the children could showcase dances. At times, the dance showcase might have been a novelty or a public expression of performing culture. This idea is developed further in the section on the functions of folkloric dance. Within the space of the group, certain holidays or customs were celebrated in contextually adapted ways.

For example, some of the mothers expressed appreciation in having convivios, (get-togethers with potlucks) and their children celebrating Las Posadas, as a part of Christmas celebrations, with other children in the dance group. As previously discussed, Imelda reported that participating in the contextually adapted celebration of las posadas, as a part of her and her children’s involvement in the dance group, contributed to her children’s knowledge of Mexican cultural traditions. Traditionally, a posada is a popular Christmas festivity that consists of a pilgrimage of two figures, selected to represent Joseph and the Virgin Mary in search of lodging, and followed by a group of people carrying candles and singing. The group travel from house to house, singing a plea for lodging and rest. When the owners of the open their doors to the group, festivities ensue, including refreshments and merriment. The way in which this tradition was adapted numerous times for the members of México Lindo consisted of the children and mothers using the cafeteria and gymnasium at the school where they met for practices to recreate an abbreviated version of the ceremony. The children and mothers would walk through the
darkened school hallways, carrying LED candles and sing to the “innkeepers” on the opposite side of the cafeteria doors. Once the “innkeepers” accepted the pseudo Joseph and Mary into their “inn,” the children and mothers would enjoy each other’s company and refreshments that the mothers had brought for the celebration, such as cider, hot chocolate, cookies, and Mexican pastries.

Other examples of processes of hybrid practices in the research findings include the dances the children performed, the costumes the children wore for the performances, and the ways in which the mothers conceptualized their children’s developing cultural identities. The dances the children performed may have been modified for the venue or context of the performance. For example, a focus group participant noted how a dance and the children’s costumes for a performance at a local church had to be altered from a “traditional” form, for the purpose of respecting churchgoers’ sensitivities to images or parts of a dance that could be interpreted as inappropriate for a performance in a church. Concepts of “authenticity” or “traditional” can be problematic, however, in that there can be an assumption that some form of cultural purity once existed, as if culture was a biological construct (Young, 1995). Instead, the dances the children performed, the costumes they wore, and perhaps their sense of mexicanidad, were undergoing processes of being (re)fashioned and (re)defined.

**Mothering practices and the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge**

In the example of Laura making the dress for her daughter, the second phase consisted of her going through an iterative process of making the dress, to the best of her ability and knowledge, using the resources at her disposal. Laura had a notion of how to sew and what she wanted the end result to look like, but she did not have a pattern to work off of. Instead, she sewed pieces together, doing and undoing the dress until it started to take shape, learning the
techniques as she went through the process. Mothers who made outfits for their children reported using the resources at their disposal, such as fabric, ribbons, and lace from the local thrift shop, or inserting safety pins in a row on the sides of boys’ pants so as to look like the charro pants worn by professional dancers. In a similar way, the mothers whose children participate in the culturally affirming activity of folkloric Mexican dance draw from cultural narratives on mothering that guide the habitus of motherhood, or mothering practices, as they modify, adapt, and employ sometimes competing cultural narratives on mothering (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2002).

The formation of women’s social groups within their ethnic communities opens up a space wherein women can discuss parenting in a new culture and the cultural narratives that inform mothering practices (Tummala-Narra, 2004). In addition, supportive social groups create opportunities for women from marginalized communities to form alliances in society that tends to “flatten” the experiences of minority women or women of color (Zvonkovic & Das, 2009, p. 290). Through their participation in the dance groups, many of the mothers described forming friendships and religious kinships (i.e., comadres or godmothers) with other women. The mothers who completed the individual interviews recounted times of having felt isolation and disconnection from other women with similar cultural backgrounds, especially with regards to matters of mothering. By way of their participation in the dance group, however, the mothers were able to address their feelings of isolation and find convivencia with others women who were striving to the best of their abilities to raise their children in a new receiving community (Tummala-Narra, 2004). The source of connection and support the mothers found with other women in the dance groups also helped to alleviate some of the sense of loss of not having extended female kin nearby, who the women might have consulted regarding mothering practices. As Tastsoglou (2006) found, by participating in organized groups with other
immigrant women from their culture or country of origin, immigrant mothers set up a space where they can claim their collective voice and raise their visibility to the larger community. The mothers who completed the individual interviews spoke of sharing parenting advice with one another. Thus, an aspect of the support the mothers experienced through their participation in the folkloric Mexican dance groups might have focused on the mothering practices and the roles the women carried within their families. Research on Mexican mothers has shown that women strive towards the ideal of being the “emotional heart of the family” (Dreby, 2006, p. 36). Much of the meaning the mothers ascribed to taking part in the dance group seemed tied to fulfilling the role of being the emotional heart of the family, and in nurturing close emotional intimacy between the mothers and their children. The study participants identified their and their children’s participation in the dance groups as a support in enhancing the relationship between the mother and the child, as the dance group provided a source of connection between the mother and child. This connection may have been strengthened through activities such as mothers and children choosing or making dance costumes together, practicing dances at home, and the mothers watching their children perform.

Immigrant mothers are typically responsible for teaching their children to function in two cultures (Tummala-Narra, 2004). Moreover, according to Collins (2011), a part of “motherwork” for women of color or women from marginalized communities includes preparing their children to function in a society wherein the children may experience discrimination. “Mothers make varying choices in preparing their children to fit into, yet resist, systems of racial dominations” (Collins, 2011, p. 286). While the mothers did not directly articulate that they were teaching their children to resist systems of racial oppression, a part of their mothering practices included seeking out spaces in which the children’s desenvolvimiento, or development and unfolding,
could be nurtured. Through the children’s participation in the dance groups, and learning and performing folkloric Mexican dance, the children learned or practiced skills that could help them fit into and succeed in systems that have, in the past, marginalized Latino children, such as schools. For example, the children were learning to overcome fear of speaking in public and standing in front of an audience through practicing and performing the folkloric dances. Through acts such as a mother encouraging her son to wear his charro outfit and do the zapateado with pride, despite teasing from Latino or non-Latino peers, the mothers were teaching their children to have pride in their cultural identity, which may serve as a protective factor from ethnic discrimination among adolescents (Phinney, Madden, & Santos, 1998). Also, mothers who encouraged their children to wear their dance outfits with pride to school and community performance, despite perhaps being teased by other youth, were fostering meaningful ethnic identities in their children, and perhaps in doing so were imparting the ability to challenge cultural erasure and oppression (De Reus, et. al., 2005). By instilling orgullo de sus raíces (pride in their roots), the mothers were inculcating cultural pride in their children, as a way to resist a deficit framing as “minority” students in communities with limited racial and ethnic diversity (Villenas, 2001).

The mothers countered cultural erasure through their efforts to instill pride in their children, with respect to their cultural heritage and roots. The mothers may not have come to reflect on their cultural identity until after emigrating, as the act of migrating can cause one to gain a different awareness of one’s cultural orientation and identity (Ainslie, 2009). At this juncture of reflexivity, difference can become highlighted. An anecdotal example is that migrant Mexican parents might remark on how they didn’t feel Mexican until after emigrating from their sending communities, because they might have grown up in isolated communities where
practices, values, and traditions where collectively shared. Immigrant Mexican parents may not have considered themselves as “Mexican” until after arriving to receiving communities and being labeled as a racialized ethnic minority, and possibly experiencing discrimination as a result of being categorized as a racialized “other.” But, as a way to counter hegemonic negative discourses targeted at immigrant Latinos, or their children internalizing negative attitudes, immigrant parents enact parenting practices that help their children develop a positive image of themselves and of their cultural heritage (Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006). Through the mothers’ effort to instill pride in their children with respect to their cultural heritage and roots, the mothers also sought to teach their children to be proud of their mothers’ cultural heritage and identities, de no tener vergüenza de sus padres (to not be embarrassed of their parents.)

Women’s work in “making home” includes passing on important traits of cultural heritage to the next generation (Mendoza, 2012; Neimann, 2004). Women are often responsible to transmit collective cultural identity to the next generation, and be the intergenerational reproducers of culture (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Immigrant women are often expected to carry on cultural traditions in a receiving country, in addition to raising children who are adept in functioning in the dominant culture of the receiving community (Tummala-Narra, 2004). Immigrant Mexican mothers have a desire for their children to remember their roots, learn about their Mexican cultural heritage, and immigrant mothers rely on cultural mothering scripts to guide their mothering practices while in the US (Parsai, Nieri, & Villar, 2010). The process of migration and subsequent hybridity can lead to a process of reflexivity, or an awareness of multiple cultural lenses and various cultural “selves” (Tastsoglou, 2006, p. 215). The study participants spoke at length about wanting their children to have a sense of their cultural “roots,” or a sense of their Mexican cultural identity, as a continuation or extension of the mothers’
identity as *mexicanas*. The mothers in the study sought out folkloric Mexican dance groups for their children in an effort to negotiate their mothering practice of transmitting their cultural heritage to their children by employing local adaptations of folkloric Mexican dance (Galindo & Medina, 2009; Hryciuk, 2010). The sense of connectedness the mothers described feeling with other women in the groups, and amongst the children in the groups, served as a support in passing on cultural values and traditions. Moreover, supporting each other in passing on traditions, alongside change and innovation, was important for the individual and collective preservation of the groups of mexicana mothers forging community (Villenas, 2001).

By creating, seeking out, and participating in folkloric Mexican dance groups, the mothers engaged with other women who had similar cultural backgrounds, which might have provided a space to (re)connect with or (re)kindle the mothers’ cultural traditions (Tummala-Narra, 2004). Moreover, the space the mothers create in the dance groups to provide a safe environment for the children to unfold, counter cultural erasure, nurture the emotional intimacy between the mothers and their children, may serve as a protective factor for the effects of the acculturation gap, or differential acculturation, for the mothers and their children. Although research has shown that Latino youth with weakened orientations towards Latino cultural values, languages, and norms may have increased risk of poor health outcomes and may engage in early sexual experience and drug use (Coatsworth et. al., 2005; Martinez, 2006; Sullivan et. al., 2007), the mothers may be able to counter these effects through creating spaces wherein to enhance their emotional bond with their children, and promote their children’s pride in their Mexican cultural identity and heritage.

**Functions of danza folklórica**
In the example of Laura making a dress for her daughter, in the third phase Laura was able to enjoy seeing her daughter perform in the dress Laura had made, invoking great pride and satisfaction. Laura not only took pride in the finished product that had taken much time and effort, but she also felt pride in watching her daughter perform a version of *mexicanidad*. As such, Laura and her daughter were able to claim, maintain, and preserve aspects of their Mexican cultural identity, in the performance of *danza folklórico*.

Folkloric Mexican dance, as a practice of “distilled ethnicity” (Kibria, 2002, p. 160), is (re)defined as claiming, maintaining, or preserving aspects of Mexican cultural identity. A practice of “distilled ethnicity” consists of what mothers might consider the core essence of their cultural identity that can be transmitted to their children, as a part of the children’s awareness of the various components of the mothers’ Mexican cultural heritage. Immigrant parents may redefine cultural practices and beliefs and adhere more diligently to them when in a transnational context, as a part of their desire to keep some of the cultural practices and beliefs of their own childhoods intact (Tastasoglou, 2006). Within the space of the dance groups, other practices of “distilled ethnicity” may be redefined, such as the celebration *El Día de los Reyes Magos* (Three Wise Men Day, or Epiphany). As a continuation of traditions and celebrations the mothers were familiar with from their own childhoods, the women in México Lindo arranged celebrations of *El Día de los Reyes Magos*, including the typical Rosca bread, as a way in which the children would be exposed to a “distilled” or essentialized version of a celebration with religious and cultural importance. By celebrating *El Día de los Reyes Magos* with other mothers in the dance group, and by their children learning folkloric Mexican dance, the children were being exposed a few core components of what the mothers conceptualized as integral to their Mexican cultural heritage and what the mothers experienced during their childhood.
Community cohesion is created through the practice of folkloric Mexican dance. The mothers identified connection to the community and to other mothers in the dance group as a critical aspect of the importance they place on their and their children’s participation in the dance groups. Contrary to research on the function of folkloric dance instruction in primary schools in México, however, the children in the folkloric dance groups that were included in the study sample do not receive ample historical instruction alongside learning the dances. Rather than a way for the children to learn national pride and foment communal solidarity and cooperation (Najera-Ramirez, 2009), the mothers hoped that, through learning and performing the dances, the children would gain a sense of pride in their cultural heritage. Furthermore, the mothers hoped that by way of learning the dances, the children would identify with their mothers’ Mexican cultural identity, and also take on their own version of *mexicanidad*. In this way, mothers encouraging their children to perform *folklórico* may have been a way for the mothers to preserve aspects of their cultural heritage (Najera-Ramirez, 2009), or as a cultural anchor the mothers utilized to define themselves and their children as *mexicanos* (Garcia Rojas, 2003). For a few of the study participants who were US born, the *folklórico* groups may have provided a means to reclaim aspects of their cultural heritage.

Performing *folklórico* is a public display of pride in one’s cultural heritage (Mendoza, 2012; Nusz & Ricciardi, 2003). Public displays of affirming one’s cultural heritage, however, such as performing folkloric Mexican dance, can be considered an act of resistance (Ochoa, 1999). While the study participants did not directly say that the act of seeking ways for their children to learn and perform *folklórico* constituted an act of resistance, it may be that the mothers found ways to create counter narratives to assimilationist policies of parenting. For example, similar to Galindo and Medina (2009), the mothers sought out opportunities for their
children to learn about and perform a Mexican cultural identity. Moreover, many of the mothers appreciated their children having exposure to Mexican national holidays and the opportunity to hear and speak Spanish with their peers. Such actions may be among what Lugones (2010) refers to as “everyday” acts of resistance (p. 743). Such acts of resistance can include simple actions, such as speaking Spanish in an area where English is the predominant language, so that the language does not get lost. Cultural erasure is a primary feature of traditional assimilationist policies; thus, the children learning and performing folklórico, which is an emblematic Mexican cultural activity, may be a way in which the mothers resist cultural erasure.

Interestingly, the study participants were very insistent in wanting their children’s performances to be valued. The mothers did not want their children's performances to be viewed as a type of spectacle or sideshow. Rather, the mothers expected that the venues at which the children performed would be well attended and that the audiences would appreciate and give value to the children’s performance. In a similar fashion, the mothers expected that the children would value the folkloric Mexican dance and have pride in the activity. Thus, the women countered the narrative of cultural erasure with a completely opposite expectation--that of the children’s folklórico performance stirring of pride and appreciation amongst the dancers and the audience alike.

In summary, a core component of the meanings Mexican and Mexican American mothers ascribe to their and their children’s participation in the culturally affirming activity of folkloric Mexican dance is a thread that weaves Mexican cultural heritage into their and their children’s cultural identity. In the book *Dancing with Butterflies*, the character Soledad receives an admonishment from her grandmother to preserve the symbolism and cultural essence inherent in
the costumes the folklórico dancers wear (Grande, 2009). In the example of Laura sewing the dress for her daughter, similar to the mothers who participated in this study, Laura is fashioning an outfit that not only preserves the symbolism of the past, but also carries forward a cultural identity and inheritance, instilling a sense of mexicanidad in her children. In doing so, Laura (re)learned and (re)valued notions of sewing that she had learned from her mother.

Hybridity, as a process of negotiation, compromise, and change is an adaptive strategy in response to, or in opposition to, traditional assimilationist policies that mandate shedding one’s cultural practices, traditions, and vestiges. Agency is integral to processes of negotiation and compromise. These processes are reflected in the mothers’ actions of joining or creating folkloric Mexican dance groups for their children, as a way to create or maintain the cultural practice as a way to preserve and maintain their cultural identity. In addition, the space or group provides many supports for the women in their mothering practices. The groups created opportunities for sources of connection and cohesion to be enhanced amongst the group members, as well as strengthening ties to local communities. Implications of the research findings, as well as recommendations for policy and future research will be discussed in the next section.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Research on Mexican and Mexican American mothers has identified that some key features of mothering practices include establishing emotional connectedness with children (Dreby, 2006), transmitting cultural identity to children in a receiving community (Tummala Narra, 2004). Yet, assimilationist policies promote cultural erasure and undermine Mexican and Mexican American women’s mothering practices. The research findings have shown that, for the study participants, the folkloric Mexican dance groups provide a place that supports the mothers’ efforts in establishing emotional connectedness with their children and transmitting their cultural identity to their children, albeit a hybrid version of their cultural heritage. The purpose of this chapter is to tie the research findings to implications for policy and directions for future research.

An important theme that emerged from the individual and focus group interviews was that their participation in the folkloric Mexican dance groups was meaningful because it provided the mothers a source of connection with their children, with other women in the group, with the community, and as a source of connection amongst the children in the dance group. This finding has important implications for culturally affirming programs that also enhance the relationship between mothers and their children. Additionally, family closeness and cohesiveness can be enhanced by culturally affirming programs that encourage the participation of parents, siblings, and extended family members. Through their participation in the folkloric Mexican dance groups, bonds were formed and strengthened between mothers and their children, between
siblings, and amongst the children in the dance group. Close parent-child relationships, such as those supported through activities like folkloric Mexican dance, may protect against family conflict that occurs as a result of segmented acculturation for immigrant parents and their children (Schofield, Parke, Kim, & Coltrane, 2008). Moreover, culturally affirming activities that support a family’s cultural heritage, reinforce family bonds, and build community pride may increase family resilience during acculturative processes, and deal with losses incurred as a result of immigration (Falicov, 2009). The mothers were also able to form or reinforce bonds with other mothers in the group, which served as a form of social support. As Tummala-Narra (2004) has found, creating extended social support with other immigrant mothers, the women are able to address feelings of isolation, and create a supportive environment wherein the women can (re)connect with or (re)kindle the mothers’ cultural traditions. Thus, policies that support the formation or maintenance of folkloric Mexican dance groups should support groups that allow children of multiple ages to participate. Such policies should also support groups that strive to minimize barriers to families being able to access and participate in the group, or offset expenses, which might present barriers to participation, such as purchasing or obtaining dance atuendo.

Another key research finding regarding the meaning the mothers ascribed to their participation in the folkloric Mexican dance groups in that their participation may also allow the mothers to carry forward cultural heritage, traditions, and practices as they strive to transmit their cultural identity to their children. Additionally, through learning folkloric Mexican dance and participating in the dance groups, the children may be exposed to and learn about aspects of the mothers’ cultural identity, as the mothers strive to transmit aspects of their mexicanidad to their children. As a result, the mothers hoped that the children would learn to positively identify with
their cultural heritage with a sense of pride, which could, in turn, serve as a protective factor from ethnic discrimination for the children (Phinney, Madden, & Santos, 1998). Additionally, the mothers characterized their children’s participation in the folklórico groups as a positive activity that enhanced their unfolding and development in many domains, such as the home and school environments. Therefore policies designed to support Mexican and Mexican American mothers and families should focus on implementing and supporting groups where culturally affirming activities are supported and maintained. This would be especially important to support immigrant mothers who may be experiencing acculturative stress, which can be deleterious on family functioning.

As discussed earlier, recruiting a sample for the focus group interviews presented challenges. The anticipated sample for the focus group interviews was mothers whose children participated in a 4-H folkloric Mexican dance club. Yet, at the time of this study, all but one of the former 4-H folkloric Mexican dance clubs in Oregon had either dissolved or converted into a group housed within a different institution, such as a school district. Thus, policies and future studies should be related to uncovering factors that can hinder or promote the longevity of current and future groups.

This study was limited in that the experiences of children who participate in folkloric Mexican dance groups were not included, nor other family members. Thus, future research should include children in the study sample. Future research should also include folkloric Mexican dance groups comprised of individuals of all ages, including adults. Future research informed by a feminist perspective and utilizing a feminist analytical strategy would need to include data collection techniques that allow analysis of the intersectionality of multiple social
locations, such as gender, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, authorization status and ability.

This research is based on individual and focus group interviews with a small number of Mexicanas. Because this study was limited to the number of participants from only three communities, future research should survey a larger number of communities. Research with an evaluative component should distinguish between groups which are community-based, or housed with an institution, such as a school district or 4-H. Also, because this study was limited to interviews at just one point in time, future studies should employ multiple data collection strategies so as to provide a broader perspective of the phenomenon under study, and possibly include a longitudinal study design. For example, future studies could include outcome measures related to positive development. Future studies that focus on participating in culturally affirming activities as a buffer to acculturative stress should include data collection techniques to assess acculturative stress levels, such as biometric data.

Let us return, for a moment, to the beginning and look again at Javier and Miguel on stage, waiting to perform before an audience of expectant adults. The two boys, wearing their traje de charro, appear diminutive under their generous sombreros. Miguel is nervous, looking to his older brother for reassurance and guidance. As the music begins and the boys take their cue to being dancing, they find their mother’s familiar and adored face among the myriad of strange faces in the audience. Their mother, Juana, encourages the boys by smiling and applauding, motioning and gesturing to remind the boys of the dance steps in each part of the song. The boys are heartened and emboldened by their mother’s smiles and gestures. What they don’t notice,
however, are how her eyes well up with tears of joy and pride, how goose bumps break out on her arms when she hears a beloved song from her childhood, and that her smile reflects her contentment in her boys having aprendido de lo suyo (learned what is hers) to make it their own.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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