The Impact of Age in the Acculturation of Latin American Immigrants to the U.S.

A Phenomenological Study

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Context: Why study immigration and acculturation?
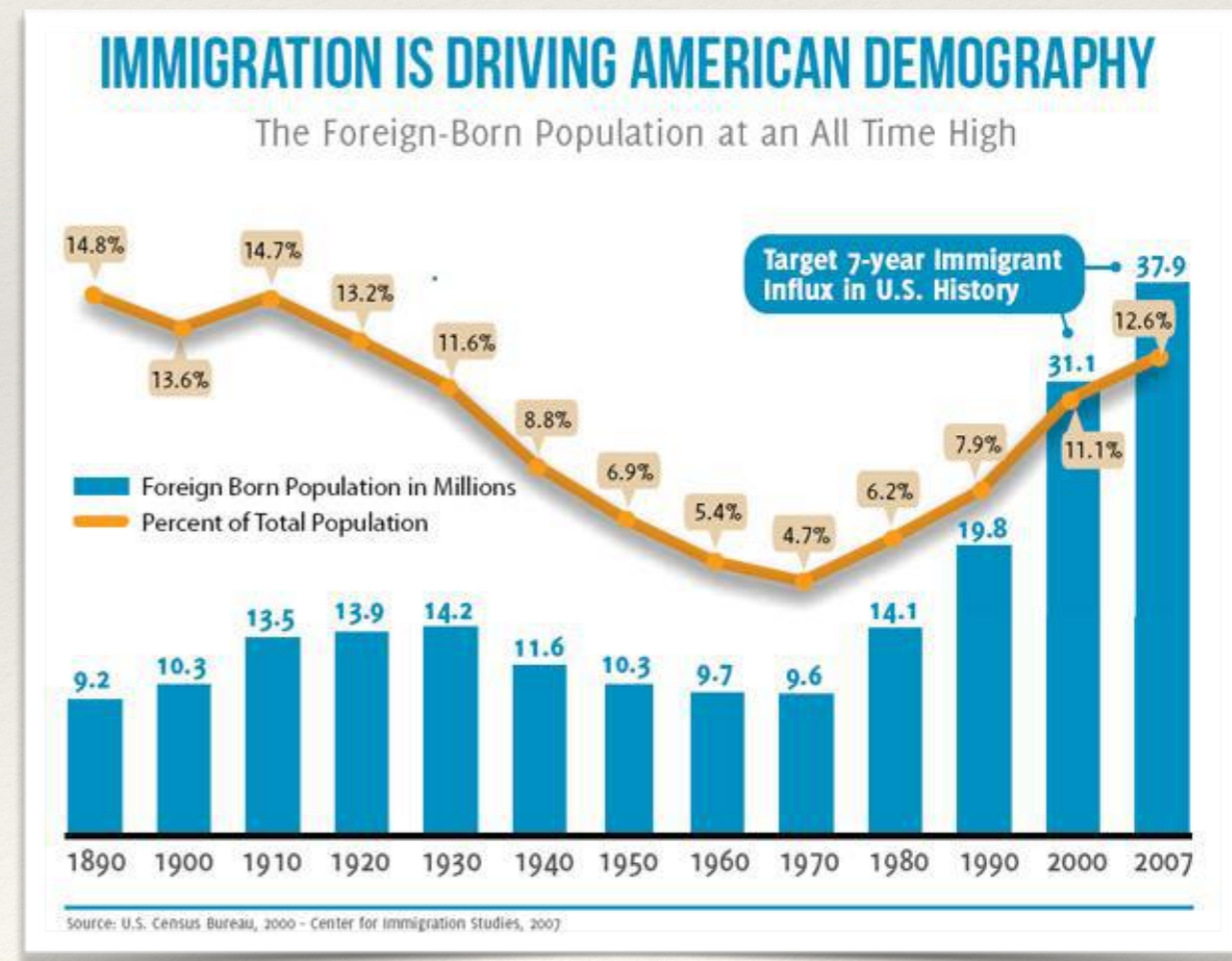
50 million immigrants.
1/7 Americans today is foreign born.
Projected immigration 2012-2060: 725,000 yoy.
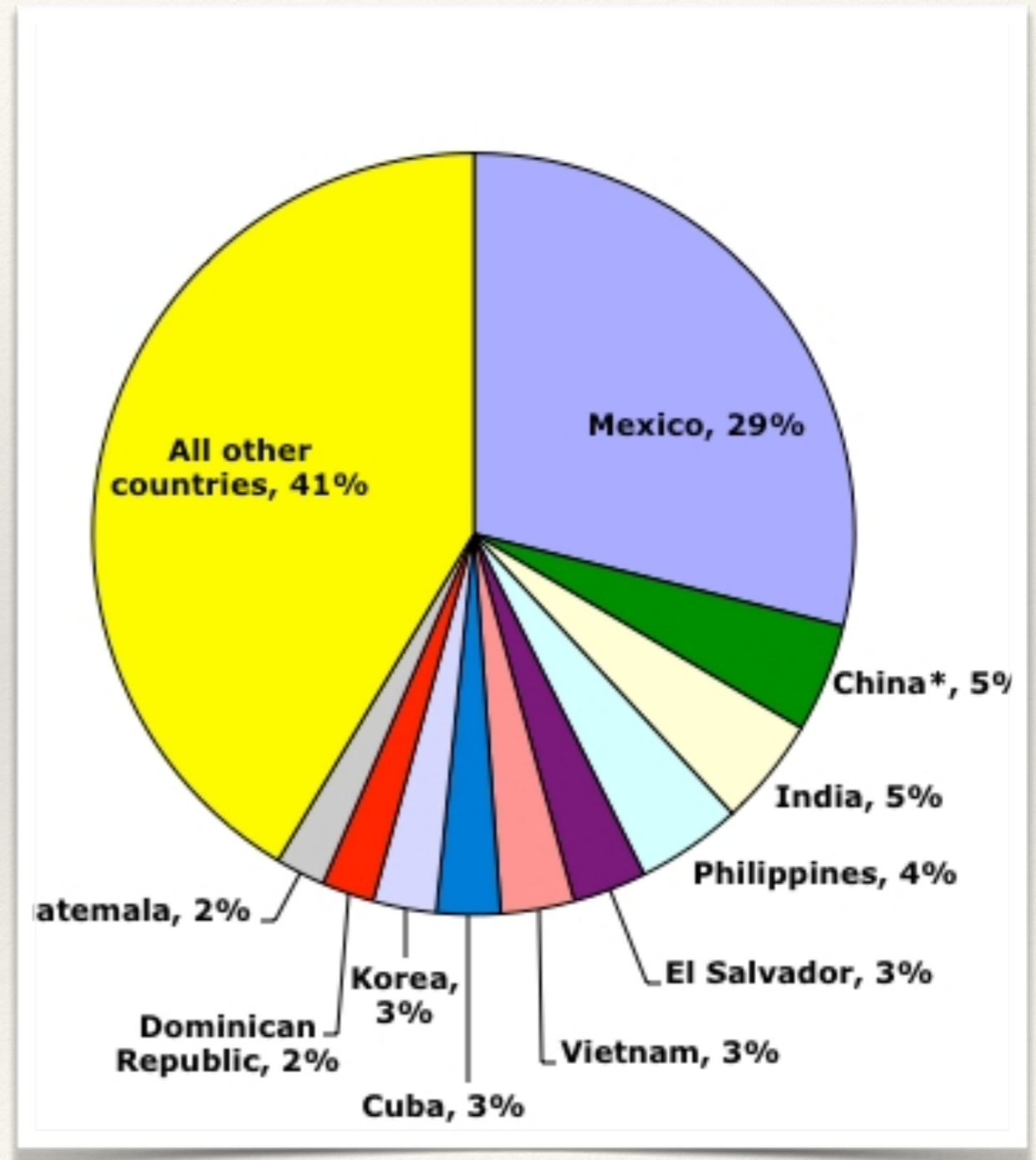Each group brings their own values and traditions.
HOW DO THEY "AMERICANIZE"?

Source: Am. Census Bureau and Center for Immigration Studies.

Immigrant Diversity

❖ Among the 10 most important countries of origin, Mexican immigration to the U.S. Represents the largest group.

❖ The three largest non Hispanic groups combined (China, India and the Philippines) amount to less than 50% of Mexican immigrants.

❖ Spanish speaking immigrants combine for a 39% of the total immigrant population.

Source: Am. Census Bureau.

Research Question

* Is there a difference between the acculturation of adults, versus the acculturation of younger Latin American born immigrants?

* Role of language and educational level.

* Role of social interaction.

* Role of community of origin.

Why focus on the Hispanic population?

Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing minority in the US (17% in 2012 / 29.9% in 2060 - expected).
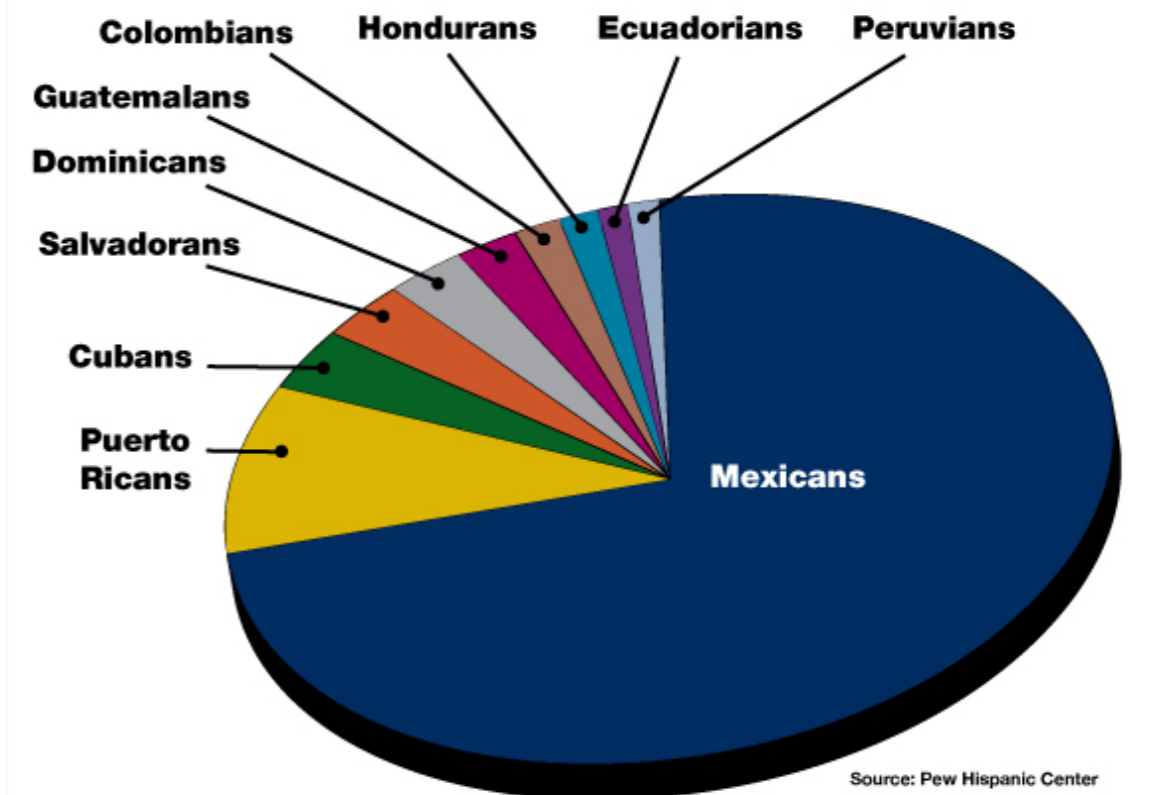
Hispanics come from 20+ countries and share one language.

Hispanics are racially and culturally diverse.

Hispanics show a tendency to maintain the ancestral culture.

Source: Am. Census Bureau.

The 10 Largest Latino Ethnic Groups in the U.S.

Colombians   Honduras   Ecuadorians   Peruvians
Guatemalans
Dominicans
Salvadorans

Cubans

Puerto
Ricans   Mexicans

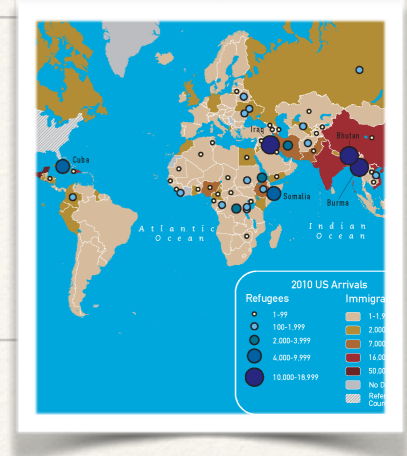Source: Pew Hispanic Center

Mexicans: 31.7 Million • 63.0%   Guatemalans: 1 Million • 2.1%
Puerto Ricans: 4.6 Million • 9.2%   Colombians: 909,000 • 1.8%
Cubans: 1.7 Million • 3.5%   Hondurans:633,000 • 1.3%
Salvadorans: 1.6 Million • 3.3%   Ecuadorians: 565,000, • 1.1%
Dominicans: 1.4 Million • 2.8%   Peruvians: 531,000 • 1.1%

Numbers and percentages are based on the total U.S. Latino population of 50.5 million

Key Terms.
What do I say when I say ...

* Immigrant: person who takes permanent residency in a foreign country.

* Acculturation: a cultural modification of an individual or group, as a result of prolonged contact.

* Culture: the beliefs, customs arts, etc. of a particular society, group, place or time.

* Tradition: the stories, beliefs, etc. that have been part of the culture of a group of people for a long time.

* Hispanic: a person of Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

Research Design and Methodology

- ❖ Aim of researcher: to describe as fully as possible the phenomenon of immigrating from Latin America to the U.S., and how the cultural transition process of the subjects is affected by the age at which the process is started.

- ❖ Focus: the actual experience (data collection is possible only by engaging directly with the source).

- ❖ Best methodological option: qualitative model, phenomenological approach.

Research Activity

- Define population and sample.

- Identify possible subjects. Conduct screening to confirm eligibility.

- Group subjects according to age at immigration.

- Conduct interviews.

- Transcribe, organize field notes, identify clusters of meaning.

- Explicitation. Organize units of meaning around themes.

- Summarize.

Demographics

- Sample size: 6

- Age range: 22 to 55 years old.

- Gender: 5 females, 1 male.

- Average years in the US: 23

- Educational level: from some middle school to masters.

- Origin: Central and South American countries.

Research Findings

❖ Both age groups mentioned the same topics.

❖ Preparedness: being ready to transition is more than handling logistics. Very few reported being emotionally ready at the time of immigration.

❖ Language proficiency: higher language skills correlated with higher levels of acculturation and personal satisfaction.

❖ Discrimination: affected their self perception and their willingness to interact with members of the mainstream culture. Caused by language and physical appearance.

Research Findings

❖ Education: perceived as the single most relevant life-changing element. Only way to overcome social and economic disadvantage.

❖ Community involvement: important to keep the ancestral traditions alive, and to help other Hispanics in need. Source of personal validation for the subjects that were less acculturated.

❖ Social interaction: push/pull. Seen as an opportunity to Americanize, but also as a potential source of discrimination. Church/volunteering are risk-free. School and employment are not immigrant-friendly.

Results

- The results were not in line with the expectations. Data did not support the research hypothesis.

- Subjects ease of acculturation did not directly correlate with their age at the time of immigration.

- Language skills, preparedness, discrimination, education, community involvement and other forms of social interaction were the themes around which the subjects narratives revolved.

- Age was a factor they considered when discussing English language acquisition, but it was given a minor role.

Why do these Results Matter?

Immigration and Acculturation have a dual impact: on the immigrant and on the host society.

❖ Understanding the phenomenon.

❖ Designing and planning actions to facilitate the cultural transition.

❖ Implementing actions.

Summary

❖ Initial question: does age matter in acculturation?

❖ Targeted population: Latin American immigrants.

❖ Sample: 6 eligible individuals from 6 Latin American countries.

❖ Methodological choice: phenomenology.

❖ Research findings: preparedness, language skills, discrimination, education, community and traditions, social interaction affect the acculturation process. Age not seen as relevant.

❖ Hypothesis was not supported.

References

❖ US Census Bureau http:/www.census.gov

❖ Camarota, S. (2010). "Immigration and Economic Stagnation. Trends 2000 to 2010." Center for Immigration Studies. http:/<u>www.cis.org</u>