

CHICANO/MEXICAN “CULTURE” AS A RATIONAL INSTRUMENT IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES

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The instability of the discourse of culture demonstrates the problematic nature of its deployment as an instrument of scientific inquiry. Furthermore, its instability is what has permitted advocates to use culture as a positive and even protective factor for the first time. Before the 1970s, Chicano/Mexican culture was framed as pathological or deficient by many policymakers, scholars, and social service professionals (see Gonzalez, 1990; Gonzalez, 2004; Monroy, 1999; Sanchez, 1993). The advocates of Chicano/Mexican culture use “culture” as a positive discourse despite the history of its negative use. This feat merits exploration, especially their turning the dominant discourse against itself. Yudice (2003) argues that “culture is expedient as a resource for attaining an end,” especially when the cultural resource serves a communal need (pp. 22, 29). Fundamentally, he sees the discourse of Chicano/Mexican culture as being transformed from one of pathology or deficiency to one of “community resource” by the proponents of Chicano/Mexican communities (p. 29).

My argument requires an epistemological sketch in order to contextualize my case study. The problem of using “culture” as an analytical category across the qualitative-quantitative divide ignores the history of the Mexican origin population in the United States. Their racialization has been based on “cultural” inferiority, not solely on “biological” inferiority (see Almaguer, 1994; Menchaca, 2001). This hybrid form of racism is what Razack (1998) has called “culturalized racism.” Razack includes cultural deficiency, social inadequacy, and technological underdevelopment models in her definition. Culturalized racism diverts attention away from structural factors and provides for a versatile explanatory discourse for poor social outcomes of minority groups. It ignores the possibility that employment, the environment, patriarchy, or racism cause poor socioeconomic outcomes. Culturalized racism also occurs when groups are blamed for their poor social conditions because they refuse to exchange their culture for a “superior” one. The consequences of this epistemological history inevitably shaped, as Mignolo (2000) has elucidated, not the “scholarship of culture” but the “cultures of scholarship” that inform our understanding of Chicano/Mexican culture. I conclude with an analysis

of the epidemiologic paradox as a discourse based on an unstable variable: culture. Both critics and advocates of Mexican (or Chicano) culture deploy it as a critical discursive formation. Incredibly, the advocates of Mexican/Chicano culture attempt to reclaim it as a resource and not use it, to modify the famous prescription of Audre Lorde (1984), as “the master’s tool.”

I do not intend to demonize the quantitative traditions of the human sciences by presenting the heroic value of qualitative studies. In his discussion of the production of (anthropological) knowledge and discourse, Rabinow (1992) reminded us that the ultimate product or artifact is “reality.” He proposed to build on Foucault’s stance on modern knowledge that “an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it” (Foucault, 2000). In the human sciences, “culture” has been not the *object* of study for anthropology but rather its *product*. Since culture can never be totalized or fully captured (or, to use the terminology of critical ethnographers, “represented”), I argue that what anthropology has *scientifically* produced is a discourse about culture.

As the anthropological discourse of culture travels from its epistemological “home” into other disciplines, it inevitably will assimilate its new environment.¹ Further compounding the problem is the assumption by social scientists and by qualitative and quantitative scholars that culture, when converted into a variable, maintains the same meaning. But how do we reconcile culture as a fluid category in one disciplinary discourse and a concrete scientific reality in another? The discourse of epidemiologic paradox demonstrates a need for a new discussion on the uses of culture. As Rabinow (1991) states, these types of interrogations and new paradigms are not capricious “nor is it a question of positivists versus humanists; ethical questions are traverse to epistemological ones.” Using Rabinow’s “anthropology of reason” framework, I examine the epistemological problem of uncritically using culture as an analytical category.²

In the discussion below, I examine two methodological issues that expose the epistemological problem of using culture as an analytical tool. In scientific models of research, the control of stable variables allows researchers to configure and re-configure variables as needed. Quantitative or policy scholars may desire to include culture or cultural variables

¹ Said’s idea of traveling theory (Said, 2002) is useful here because he shows how theories change through time and space. He stated, “[t]he first time a human experience is recorded and then given a theoretical formulation, its force comes from being directly connected to and organically provoked by real historical circumstances. Later versions of the theory cannot replicate its original power.”

² See Rabinow (1992). Another framework I will draw from is Latour’s anthropology of science, in particular his call to anthropologize rationality (see Latour, 1991).

(language, attitudes, etc.) in their research model. But what these scholars do not demonstrate is their understanding of culture or the relationship of the group being studied to its culture (or, heaven forbid, cultures). A key difficulty in converting culture, which is a disciplinary-based discourse, into a scientific instrument is the tendency to "black box" it in the design of research models.³ Scientific researchers of human phenomena, unlike ethnographers, are not required to demonstrate their "ethnographic authority."⁴ Latour (2004) reminded us that scientific research, in order to maximize its returns, is risk producing and that some social scientific research is "not risky enough." The endeavor almost depends on predictability instead of discovery or disruption.

Latour (2004) discussed the problems of conducting scientific social research with human subjects. He stated:

Contrary to non-humans, humans have a great tendency, when faced with scientific authority, to abandon any recalcitrance and to behave like obedient objects, offering investigators only redundant statements, thus comforting those same investigators in the belief that they have produced robust "scientific" facts and imitated the great solidarity of the natural sciences! . . . in contrast to bona fide natural objects which, utterly uninterested by the inquiries, obstinately "object" to being studied and explode with great equanimity the questions raised by the investigators—not to mention their laboratories! . . . the social sciences have not been thwarted in their development by the resistance of humans to being treated as objects, but by their complacency about scientific research programmes which make it more difficult for the social scientists to quickly detect the artifacts of the design in the case of humans than in the case of non-humans. . . . Human science laboratories rarely explode! (217)

Indeed social scientific authority depends on the belief in the stable reliability of its models, techniques, and instruments. Categories, identities, truths, knowledge, or subjectivities are not allowed to explode; they cannot. Empirical faith is placed in the study design and, more importantly, in the variables used to produce the edifice of social facts that reveal the underlying laws of society. Again, if culture is a discursive product of a

³ Rabinow (1992) stated, "[i]t is suggested that scientific instruments operate as 'black boxes' when most users of the instruments no longer need to understand the theories embodied in the apparatus and rely upon the standard interpretation of the data generated by the instrument" (p. 8).

⁴ See Rosaldo's discussion of the critiques of objectivity and the "lone ethnographer" as "detached" researcher (Rosaldo, 1988).

particular discipline and not a scientifically reliable category, then how can culture be used as a variable to construct empirical realities or truths? Furthermore even the philosophical foundation of social scientific authority, the strict separation of objectivity and subjectivity, is not a guaranteed given.

A key tenet of social scientific research is the objectivity or “detached” nature of the investigator. Latour (1994) reminded us that “objectivity and subjectivity are not opposed, they grow together, and they grow irreversibly together.” Social scientists are never detached or distant from their research. This does not mean that “good” ethical research by social scientists is not possible, but it is difficult for social scientists to claim the same level of detachment from their research as laboratory scientists. In the human sciences, the researcher and the researched share the same social milieu. Interrogating the methodology of the “hard” social sciences proves to be more risky or explosive than interviewing human subjects. The difficulty of challenging established truth or knowledge is that the process also necessitates confronting power. Foucault (2000) alerted us to the problem that

. . . it's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power. . .but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness, or ideology; it is truth itself. (133)

The discomfiting aspect of this proposition is that truth and knowledge are not free from power or politics.

To provide context for this discussion on the scholarship of Mexican and Chicano culture as connected to the apparatus of power and knowledge, it is critical to first discuss the need to expose the “cultures of scholarship.” Mignolo (2000) defined the cultures of scholarship as being “cast in terms of textual national legacies, for it is in and by texts that the educational system. . .is structured and that science is articulated, packaged, transmitted, and exported” (262). The legacies, according to Mignolo, are long lasting in terms of determining which groups produce “culture” and which produce “scholarship and science” (263). Any discussion of the Chicano/Mexican culture, whether positive or negative, will be trapped by epistemological structures. Immense aporias confront the advocates of Chicano/Mexican culture because in challenging the dominant paradigm or episteme, they must contend with what Mignolo observed as “the goal of science and scholarship is to conquer the facts, whether perceived as human nature or natural nature” (265). In my analysis, a core question at the heart of using culture in the epidemiologic paradox research by the advocates of Chicano/Mexican culture is this: Is

it possible to use a discursive formation (the master's tool) that was not originally intended to help a population and transform it into a liberatory tool?⁵ In order for readers to comprehend the task of confronting the dominant "cultures of scholarship," I will detail the scientific craft of ethnographic writing that establishes the authority of the qualitative social scientist.

Most ethnographies written before the 1980s have served to rearticulate a group's ontology and epistemology. The impact of these projects is the further domination of the group being studied. The "ethnographic script" of minority populations has become another pillar in the structure of dominance. The "gate-keeping" concepts of ethnographies written by anthropologists established official and sanctioned discussions about groups (see Appadurai, 1988). The power of these concepts is they produce the effect of the "real." Ethnographic scripts are part of hegemonic forms of knowledge: they inscribe their discourse into the geography, the place of study, and into bodies (Appadurai, 1986). Gate-keeping concepts produced in ethnographies provide readers with the "facts" and "realities" of "different" cultures. These concepts teach that certain cultures are defined by a few essential aspects, that is, metonymic objects stand in for entire cultures. For example, India is represented by castes, hierarchies, and untouchables and China by forms of ancestor worship and strategies for saving face. In Mexico and Central America, this includes *compadrazgo*, *fatalismo*, *machismo* and folk etiologies (*susto*, *empacho*, *caída de mollera*, *ojo*, etc.). The power of such gate-keeping concepts within the ethnographic script is that they shape our understanding of a population through its "culture."

Mimeographed cultural facts take on a life of their own when conflated and converted into objects, thus enabling more facile replication through ethnographic representations by anthropologists. In the hands of anthropologists, the authority of these concepts and scripts arises from the ability of scholars to produce and reproduce (or replicate) the same

⁵ Mignolo (2000) offered this view (which in many ways is germane to my discussion but the entirety of his proposition would require a longer exploration) about developing a new thinking: "[w]hat cultures of scholarship export is mainly a 'method,' since the problems they deal with are problems related to their own place of origin. What border thinking from the colonial difference shall contribute would be to place the 'problem' engrained in the colonial difference (the local problem) before the 'method.' Starting from the problem instead of starting from the method, assuming the colonial difference as conceptual genealogy instead of the genealogy of the social sciences (or cultures of scholarship in general), would release knowledge from the norms of the disciplines. But, above all, it will make visible that knowledge production from the colonial difference will have to deal with the 'silences' of history and the 'differences' of coloniality, that is to say the colonial difference. Border thinking then emerges, historically, at the end of the cold war as a critic of the scientific distribution of the planet. And it emerges, logically and conceptually, from the perception of knowledges and languages placed in a subaltern position in the exercise of the coloniality of power. (p. 306)

facts through time (decade after decade) and space (anthropology department to anthropology department). The “ethnographic authority” used by anthropologists produces the effect of authentic cultural representation (Clifford, 1988). The veracity of the research and the infallibility of the researcher are established by deploying writing techniques that convince readers of the absolute expertise of the anthropologists. Anthropologists construct facts and reality rhetorically using allegory and surrealism. This method assists the ethnographer in creating or exaggerating difference to produce a convincing anthropological account. The problem with this approach is that it essentializes culture and homogenizes people.

The “writing of culture” by anthropologists has become a venue for culturalized racism. Kelley (1997) accurately noted that social scientists have, in effect, racialized culture. Negative terms such as nihilistic, dysfunctional, and pathological are neatly folded into “Black culture.” Kelley argued, “[r]elying on a narrowly conceived definition of culture, most of the underclass literature uses behavior and culture interchangeably” (16). Hence the “behaviors” of a small subgroup of African Americans stands in proxy for the culture of the entire African American population. From a social policy standpoint, this is practical because using a stable definition of groups and culture facilitates actionable policies. But from the perspective of the groups being represented, these ethnographies only serve to create a caricature or simulation.

The transformation of cultural caricatures into “truth” is based on the anthropologists’ discourses and practices that are the discursive basis for their authoritative knowledge. For the Mexican origin population, culture is a discursive formation with many layers of ascribed meaning. Ethnographic representations become codified social facts. The Mexican as “ignorant,” “backward,” and “superstitious” was a dominant recurrent theme in many ethnographies of the 1950s and the 1960s (see Carlos, 1997; Montiel, 1970; Romano, 1968, 1969, 1970; Vaca, 1970a, 1970b). These labels are important because they served to characterize the Mexican origin population as pathologically different and deviant from U.S. norms. An emphasis on negative cultural attributes and their exclusive application to specific minority groups can distort the humanity of those groups.

I now turn to a discussion of the epidemiologic paradox, or the discussion of cultural protective factors, examining the epistemological collusion of qualitative and quantitative knowledge through the use of the ambiguous category “culture.” The epidemiologic paradox discussion began in the 1980s with regard to the positive health outcomes of Mexican immigrants (see Markides & Coreil, 1986). The overall health indicators observed included “infant mortality, mortality at other ages, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, other diseases, functional health, and

mental health." One of the most striking findings for health professionals and policymakers relating to the epidemiologic paradox is that poor immigrant mothers can give birth to healthy babies without any prenatal intervention. Social science researchers, who investigate minority populations, attribute causation to culture, especially when they encounter "confounding factors" or their numbers "do not add up." In their 1986 report written for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Markides and Coreil did not intend to create controversy. The authors found, in this health paradox, that culture appeared to play a positive role in most indicators of health. They did not question the use of culture as a variable or rational instrument of measurement. When culture is used as a category within a scientific methodology, it can be interpreted in ways that support the overall research findings. In this first major instance, it was interpreted as positive.

Markides and Coreil (1986) comprehensively culled evidence based on prior quantitative empirical research on the health outcomes of the Mexican origin population. They found that Mexican immigrants had equal, if not better, health outcomes compared to the U.S.-born white population. They also found that, although Mexican immigrants and African Americans share similar social and economic conditions, health indicators such as infant mortality remained higher for African Americans, as well as for U.S.-born Puerto Ricans. Markides and Coreil listed the factors involved in the health paradox: "The relative advantages or disadvantages of Hispanics include cultural practices, family supports, selective migration, diet, and genetic heritage." Markides and Coreil were not the first to discover these better health outcomes nor were they the first to use the label "epidemiologic paradox." However, the publication of their findings had important institutional ramifications (see Guttman, Frisbie, DeTurk, & Blanchard, 1998). Their results ruptured the orthodox understanding of the culture of the Mexican origin population as pathological or deficient. The "common sense" of the cultures of scholarship appeared to be fragmenting because the social science research industry's *scientific* knowledge had been turned on its head (Latour, 1994).

The epidemiologic paradox directly challenged conventional social scientific thought regarding the nature of white and minority health. One of the key factors in the paradox for healthy Mexican immigrants was low acculturation rates (Latour, 1994). Markides and Coreil concluded their review with this list of possible factors that could explain the surprising and mostly positive results.

Possible explanations for these relative advantages and disadvantages in health status may involve several factors.

1. Cultural practices that favor reproductive success may contribute to favorable birth weights and low neonatal mortality.
2. Selective migration may confer some reproductive advantage as well as contribute to general health.
3. Early and high fertility in Hispanic women may contribute to lower breast and higher cervical cancer rates.
4. Dietary factors may be linked to low cancer rates and high prevalence of obesity and diabetes.
5. Genetic heritage, particularly Native American admixture, may partly account for certain cancer patterns and excess diabetes.
6. Extended family support may reduce need for psychiatric treatment and protect from stress-related morbidity.
7. Low socioeconomic status and associated environmental risks probably contribute to high rates of infectious and parasitic diseases.
8. Other, as yet unknown causes, may contribute to a favorable life expectancy and other positive health indicators.

Their assessment considered many factors that could serve as cultural protective factors, but, most interestingly, culture and family were deemed positive. Other fascinating factors mentioned, especially in the area of negative health, were genetic heritage and low socioeconomic status. If anything, the authors at least attempted to frame their positioning of culture among important intersecting variables. Markides and Coreil ended their review by warning that health outcomes could deteriorate as Mexican immigrants and their children became “acculturated”. With this pronouncement, the researchers not only demonstrated their view of Chicano/Mexican culture as beneficial, they also presented the possibility that U.S. culture is detrimental to health outcomes for “healthy” immigrants. However, the results of their research were not decisive in determining the protective aspect of Chicano/Mexican culture. Following their research, other investigators began to look for reasons beyond culture.

A key point regarding the power/knowledge discursive formations and the cultures of scholarships is the influence of the dominant paradigms or epistemes within the human sciences. Even research scholars who are members of same group being studied are not free of epistemological constraints. Paredes (1993) famously advised that Chicanos and their cultures were not distorted because of overtly racist white scholars. On the contrary, the scholars were very sympathetic and politically “left”

of the American mainstream.⁶ Paredes revealed that the problem was not with the researcher but with the research methodology. Hence, according to him, if the methods, models, or theories are bad, then, regardless of who does the research, the final results or findings will be problematic. In 1999, for example, Chicana sociologists Segura and de la Torre indignantly challenged the idea that immigrant health practices were beneficial: "[w]e argue that the current popular trend of promoting the 'good' health behaviors of recent Mexican immigrants should be challenged as ignoring the cultural contradictions that exist and are often rooted in patriarchal family structures" (156). They instead promoted the idea that patriarchy and sexism are primarily Mexican cultural phenomena and, like many social scientists regardless of race or gender, believe that patriarchy and sexism are present in the United States' culture but play less of a role than in immigrant or minority cultures. They were hesitant to accept the idea that there could be positive aspects in Mexican immigrant culture. Instead they attributed the good health outcomes to living in the United States and acculturation.

Segura and de la Torre reinforced the dominant epistemological view of U.S. culture as progressive and Mexican culture as backward. They repositioned the epistemological terms of epidemiologic paradox by re-inscribing the discourse to reflect this line of thinking: Chicanas are more feminist oriented (modern) and Mexican immigrant women are more traditional (backward).⁷ They also contended that since these Mexican immigrant women are living and working in the U.S., they technically should be considered "highly" acculturated and therefore more similar to Chicanas (Segura & De La Torre, 1999). For them, the cultural protective factors for good health outcomes are based on residing in the United States. Mexican culture, in their view, cannot be responsible for good health outcomes. They also believed that the daily lives of Mexican immigrant women are better here and there is more opportunity for them to re-make themselves as more independent, which may be valid but

⁶ In a similar strain, Said (2002) contended in his study on Orientalism, that the "best" Orientalists are the scholars from the Middle East because they have learned and incorporated the master narrative of what Middle Eastern culture and society are really like. The power of dominant knowledge to shape the thinking of scholars also implicates minority scholars who attempt to advocate for their communities. The scholar as an interlocutor as defined by Said carries two definitions. The first originates from the colonial situation of being the colonizers' messenger and interpreter. The other definition comes from the academic realm; it is meant to refer to a speaker who has been domesticated and represents the dominant perspectives. These epistemological and ontological dilemmas bedevil many minority scholars. (pp. 297-9)

⁷ Recently sociologists and anthropologists of gender have noted the problematic epistemological formations surrounding the discourse of gender, culture and Mexicans. More importantly the perception that Mexico's gender system is dominated by machismo and passive women does not hold up when confronted with ethnographic data. See Gutmann, 2007a, 2007b; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994.

does not preclude the maintenance of culture. Segura and de la Torre recommended redefining “traditional” as “adaptation and innovation” to include Chicanas and Mexicanas (163). The skepticism toward the idea of Mexican immigrant culture providing cultural “protection” not only comes from Chicana feminists but also from quantitative social scientists.

In another study focusing on the long-term advantages of the health paradox for Mexican American children, an epidemiological research team (an ethnically mixed group) found a higher risk of poor developmental skills for children of immigrant backgrounds, regardless of birth weight (a key indicator in the health paradox findings) (Padilla et al., 2002). The researchers tested the paradox hypothesis by giving standardized tests to different groups of children (U.S.-born Mexican Americans, Mexican immigrants, African Americans, and white children). They found many of the immigrants’ children to be developmentally challenged (1119). They cautioned that the overoptimistic tone of some of the research on the paradox does not consider long-term effects on the healthy babies as they mature into childhood (1120).

What the authors found to be more important than birth weight was the mother’s education level and socioeconomic status. Their main concern was that the focus of health intervention policy in early childhood should promote socioeconomic opportunities, not reinforce culture. They believed that “foreign” culture and language skills actually impeded academic success and caused developmental problems, but that these could be overcome with access to better resources (1120). They minimized the importance of programs that promoted cultural maintenance rather than providing economic support. Instead of advocating for both aspects to be included in intervention programs, they dismissed the cultural (as possibly being beneficial) in favor of purely economic solutions. It is admirable that the researchers desired a structural response to help children with developmental problems, but it need not come at the expense of culture by debasing or deriding it as a minimally beneficial factor.

Another skeptical research team (Palloni & Morenoff, 2001) concluded that the health paradox is the product of poor methodology. They faulted the paradox literature for relying on “variable and risk approach” modeling for the research design: “[w]e showed that the biases can be large even under benign conditions, that the entire enterprise of controlling for confounding influences, so fundamental in a risk or variable-based approach, can be self-defeating” (171). With dramatic language, Palloni and Morenoff proclaimed that the paradox “crumbles” and “fizzles” because of the reckless construction of un-theorized variables such as ethnicity or the lack of inclusion of the social selection process of immigration, which they claimed is the sign of “lazy researchers.” They

warned, “[f]urther studies following the conventional risk or variable approach will produce only vapid stories, suffering from the same fragility as already expounded” (171). They concluded by stating that the Hispanic (epidemiologic) paradox is a “punch line” for poorly constructed research models, so that Mexican culture in the U.S. cannot be the cause of good health outcomes. Instead they insisted it is poor statistical data and faulty models that give the illusion of beneficial outcomes.

Cultural deficiency discourses and other epistemological forms of culturalized racism not only affect individual members of racialized groups daily, they also influence the construction of knowledge and the cultures of scholarship that reproduce negative representations of culture. But as I mentioned earlier, culture is a fluid and flexible discourse. In order to reposition “culture as resource” and not as pathology, a struggle for meaning that will have structural or institutional implications must take place.

Yudice (2003) offered his perspective on the possibility of transforming the meaning of culture. Using a Gramscian lens, he stated, “[i]n our era, claims to difference and culture are expedient insofar as they presumably lead to the empowerment of a community” (344).⁸ If advocates of Chicano/Mexican culture are able to seize the discourse from its dominant perch and then transform “the master’s tools” into tools of liberation for a community, then the discourse of culture can be a “terrain of struggle.” Many advocates for Hispanic and Latino communities have used the paradox to critique inequality, lack of access to healthcare, and lack of opportunity for the production of minority professionals. These advocates have the audacity to claim that the benefits of “cultural protective factors” work in the following way: “these factors serve to shield them [Hispanics] from many high-risk health behaviors” (see Falcon, Aguirre-Molina, & Molina, 2001). Falcon, Aguirre-Molina, and Molina supported the perspective that health professionals and researchers need to reassess strategies and interventions that preserve culturally determined protective factors that optimize health outcomes.

Advocates for the paradox discourse created a rift in the dominant cultural and health ideology by engaging in a “war of position” in order to organize fragmented social interests and create a new language. Burawoy (1990) argued that transformative movements need strong leadership. More importantly, the type of leader is important for Burawoy.

⁸ For more context for this quotation, I offer these earlier statements from Yudice: “[c]ulture, in this view and following Gramscian theory, was understood as a ‘terrain of struggle.’ But the content of culture receded in importance when the instrumental usefulness of the claim to difference as a warrant gained legitimacy. It might be said that previous understanding of culture—canons of artistic excellence, symbolic patterns, that give coherence to and thus endow a group of people or society with human worth, or culture as discipline—give way to the expediency of culture.”

He stated that “[o]rganic intellectuals close to, and with faith in, subordinate groups must assume a critical role in any such war of position.” In another example of “advocates” creating a discourse of culture as resource is Scribner’s editorial in the *American Journal of Public Health* (Scribner, 1996), which used the journal’s institutional authority to advocate for Hispanics. He stated,

The fact that the health status of Mexican Americans as a group deteriorates with exposure to community environments in the United States and the fact that the characteristic deterioration in health status is associated with the loss of a Mexican cultural orientation indicate the existence of a group-level model of risk. It is a model of profound importance for public health, one that has been virtually ignored by the research establishment. The paradox of Hispanic health exposes the limitations of the reductionist paradigm of biomedicine in setting the research agenda for public health. The acculturation hypothesis suggests that a group-level effect for cultural orientation is far more important in determining risk of chronic disease among Mexican Americans than genetic, biologic, or socioeconomic factors operating at the individual level.

Scribner’s editorial demonstrated the small spaces available to counterdominant thinking. This example shows the tensions within the public health, biomedicine, and the research “industry” (see Latour, 1994).

Other Latino advocates have acknowledged the importance of culture but emphasize the power of economic factors for determining health outcomes. Elena Fuentes-Afflick (Science Blog, 2000) pointed to the paradox as a way to further improve child and maternal health outcomes. A concern in this debate is that healthy outcomes with little or no medical attention can pose a potential problem if used as justification for denying access to healthcare. Fuentes-Afflick (Science Blog, 1998) noted that times of stress (postpartum for women, for example) may weaken culturally protective factors and Latinas may put their own health at risk. For example, a mother who might have provided a source of family income prior to getting pregnant may develop poor eating habits if she is unable to work and the family’s income is cut in half. Culture, even as a protective factor, is vulnerable to powerful forces such as the economy. Latino advocates through their research effectively demonstrate the power of culture and the many possibilities for understanding the positive effects of minority culture.

Academic writing, research, discourse, and knowledge constitute more than mere intellectual or scientific inquiry. Research provides the basis for policy recommendations on pressing social issues. The recommendations serve as guidelines for governmental agencies and institutions. The production of academic knowledge on the Mexican origin population has produced essentialized representations. Initially, research that described culture was used to reinforce ideas that Mexican culture was deficient. The empirical tradition of research, though usually reliable as a form of rational knowledge, is negated by the very concept it attempts to monitor: culture. For the Mexican origin population, poorly informed and designed research is their greatest risk factor. The epidemiologic paradox is an unstable discourse that creates a space of transgression for research scholars who attempt to subvert orthodox thinking. Culture becomes a surrogate discourse for racialization; the paradox discourse is a battle between negative and positive discursive formations within the cultures of scholarship.

Culture as an instrument of scientific reason was meant to describe the Mexican origin population as a problem. A rupture in the structures of epistemological domination occurs when culture is framed as a protective factor. Many Latino scholars and advocates were able to turn the discursive formation of culture back on itself. Advocates of minoritized groups now face a critical choice. As Abu-Lughod (1991) implored, "[t]he West still has tremendous discursive, military, and economic power. Our writing can either sustain it or work against its grain." For these advocates, the burden of defying conventional epistemology also means defying dominant power. Culture is not a negative factor or impediment but a benefit. In the combative arena of academic publishing and policymaking, culture occupies an ambiguous terrain of struggle. Empirical scholars attempt to make culture a unit of analysis. This provides the opportunity to shift culture from a confounding factor to a critique of U.S. practices, norms, and dominant culture. The health of immigrants and their long-term outcomes provides an opportunity to highlight positive aspects of minority populations and to demonstrate the negative aspects of U.S. culture. An important institutional fact is that the cultural protective factor analysis will not gain prominence until there is a critical mass of minority scholars, especially Latinos, to promote this view.

Academic and policy writing makes scientific claims about its objects of study. Researchers use the rational tools of their science. Their methods, writings, and findings are not viewed as polemical or agenda driven but as truth driven. The application of their "findings" should invoke concern if issues of asymmetrical power relations are not addressed. Since no power system is totalizing, there is always room for

struggle. Advocates can transform the master's (rational) tools to reframe the discourse of culture into a beneficial community resource. This "war of position" enabling advocates to see the culture of minority as valuable was only possible because of the context of the late twentieth century. Yudice (2003) reminded us that for culture to make the transition from a dominant tool to one controlled by communities "it is not so much that power dispenses with culture, but that it no longer needs it to shape ethical subjects of the nation. Culture is 'freed,' so to speak, to become a generator of value in its own right" (336). Let's hope that with the increasing "value" of Chicano/Mexican culture that the Chicano/Mexican community itself will no longer be *valuably worthless*.

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