



## Intimacy, migration, and cultural change: Latinos and American Fertility

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### **Resumen / Abstract**

El presente artículo examina la relación entre los patrones de fertilidad en Estados Unidos y la inmigración hispana a dicho país considerando el impacto de la globalización económica, política y cultural en la transformación de las relaciones de pareja, la intimidad y la reproducción. Se argumenta que los patrones de fecundidad en Estados Unidos deben analizarse desde una perspectiva relacional bajo la cual se toma en cuenta la interacción entre la transformación de la fertilidad a nivel nacional en Estados Unidos y procesos globales. Para ejemplificar dicho argumento, se presenta investigación cualitativa sobre la transformación de la vida íntima de la población mexicana y de los mexicanos que residen en Estados Unidos. Dicha investigación ilustra la relación compleja que existe entre las pautas sociales y los cambios en la intimidad y la fertilidad en ambos países. Concluimos que los patrones reproductivos de

This article re-examines the relationship between fertility trends in the U.S. and massive Hispanic immigration in the context of wider processes of globalization, thus highlighting the ways in which local transformations of couple relationships, sexuality, and reproduction are enmeshed in a complex web of interrelated global social, political, economic, and cultural trends. Here, we argue that fertility trends in the U.S. need to be analyzed from a relational perspective that accounts for the interaction between local transformations of intimacy in the U.S. and wider, global developments. To exemplify the preceding argument, this article draws on qualitative research on transformations of intimate life among Mexicans in the U.S. and Mexico to illustrate the complex interaction between relevant social patterns and changes in intimacy and fertility in both parts of the world. We conclude that the long-term reproduc-



la población hispana en Estados Unidos dependerán de la interacción dinámica entre los patrones de intimidad, los esquemas prevalentes sobre la familia y el tamaño familiar, y los prospectos económicos tanto en Estados Unidos como en los países latinoamericanos de origen de los diferentes grupos hispanos en Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave: fertilidad, Estados Unidos, Latinos, cultura, globalización

ive patterns of Hispanics in the U.S. will be highly dependent upon the dynamic interaction among cultural patterns of reproduction and intimacy, desired family schemas and the socio-economic prospects found in America and in the countries of origin of American-Latino ethnic groups in Latin America.

Key words: fertility, United States, Latinos, culture, globalization

## Introduction

Based on a review of the relevant academic literature, this article re-examines the relationship between fertility trends in the U.S. and massive Hispanic immigration in the context of wider processes of globalization. Researchers in demography and family studies have a marked tendency to approach the examination of reproductive behavior and fertility trends within very strict and fixed theoretical and methodological frameworks. Specifically, a large part of the relevant academic literature is premised upon the conceptualization of the relationship between immigration and fertility trends in terms of a set of fixed binary oppositions. First, the U.S. are posited as a self-enclosed and clearly bounded field of gender relations, reproductive patterns, and fertility trends that can be contrasted in meaningful ways with equivalent but different trends in other, equally distinctive and bounded, parts of the world, such as Latin America. Second, on this base, the relationship between fertility trends and immigration in the U.S. is constructed in terms of the respective influence of clearly bounded ethnic groups, such as 'Latinos' or 'Hispanics', whose members are characterized by distinctive behavioral patterns based on their socio-cultural origins..

While different ethnic groups in America may present varying trends in fertility, we argue that this perspective fails to account for recent conceptual advances and empirical developments that have re-shaped sociological understandings of the relationship between the dynamics of intimate relationships and processes of globalization. Cutting-edge studies on globalization and social change consistently emphasize the need to re-conceptualize social life in terms of complex, transnational networks and flows of people, information, and goods that are increasingly superseding territorially clearly bounded societies (Appadurai, 1996, Urry, 2000, Urry, 2007). Likewise, cur-



rent research on transformations of intimacy highlights the ways in which local transformations of couple relationships, sexuality, and reproduction are enmeshed in a complex web of interrelated global social, political, economic, and cultural trends (Castells, 2004, Plummer, 2003, Therborn, 2004). Building on the insights of these studies, we argue that fertility trends in the U.S. need to be analyzed from a relational perspective that accounts for the interaction between local transformations of intimacy in the U.S. and wider, global developments. Socio-cultural, political, and economic transformations of sexual behavior and reproduction in the U.S. simultaneously shape and are shaped by both translocal developments, such as a global trend away towards post-patriarchal forms of intimate life (Therborn, 2004), and local re-configurations of personal life in other parts of the world. For instance, recent research on sexuality and reproduction among Mexican migrants in the U.S. (González-López, 2005, Hirsch, 2003, Hirsch, 2007) has consistently highlighted the ways in which these migrants' cultural understandings and experiences are transformed by the experience of life in the U.S., but at the same time also have the potential to transform cultural meanings and practices of intimacy in their host country. Likewise, studies on changes in the cultural dynamics of sexuality and reproduction in Mexico (Gutmann, 2007) emphasize the complex interaction between local changes in Mexico and transnational transformations, for instance through cultural and economic influence from the U.S.

We examine the significance of these complex transnational developments for fertility trends in the U.S. in three steps. The first part of our article consists of a review of recent findings on the relationship between immigration, ethnicity and fertility patterns in the U.S. The second part of the article then attempts to re-conceptualize and interpret these trends in terms of the outlined formation of transnational networks of intimate life. The third part of the article draws on qualitative research on transformations of intimate life among Mexicans in the U.S. and Mexico to illustrate the complex interaction between relevant social patterns and changes in both parts of the world.

### **Fertility trends in the United States**

The United States currently reports among the highest fertility rates among industrialized nations. An element frequently cited as contributing to higher fertility rates in the U.S. is the high degree of compatibility between child-bearing and women's labor force participation. Morgan (2003) pointed out that American couples tend to have children at relatively younger ages in comparison to European couples, an element which could be traced to the absence of widespread unemployment among the young adults in the United States and to the common availability of childcare services. There is also a deep connection between the relatively flexible and less regulated labor market of the U.S. and high fertility levels. Adsera (2004) has argued that the high



degree of flexible schedules, including the availability of several part-time jobs combined with overall lower unemployment rates, causes American women to re-enter the labor force after the birth of their first child much faster than do German women or women from other low-fertility European countries. This trend is notable as the ability of American women to re-enter the labor force swiftly after giving birth, combined with accessible childcare services, often times even partially or fully provided by employers, means that career goals do not become unattainable as a result from childbearing.

The prominent role which organized religion holds on American life, particularly in comparison to more secular nations in industrialized Europe and Asia, has been recurrently assessed to help explain fertility choices among American women. Hayford and Morgan (2008) explored the relationship between religiosity and fertility in America emphasizing the relationship between life and family schemas which religious individuals hold and their fertility choices. Using data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, Hayford and Morgan (2008) showed that women who report that religion is "very important" in their everyday life have both higher fertility and higher intended fertility than those saying religion is "somewhat important" or "not important."

A substantial portion of the difference [in fertility behavior] is associated with differences in family ideology, including schemas about the importance of marriage and parenthood, the acceptability of nonmarital sexual relations, and gender roles in families. Results suggest that fertility differentials are part of a widespread association between religiosity and family behavior, rather than an expression of a specifically pro-natalist orientation associated with a particular religion (Hayford and Morgan, 2008: 1179-1180).

An important issue regarding higher fertility in the U.S. is that it has not been overtly encouraged through public spending: "As a result, despite a lack of public financial support for families with children, it appears that the flexibility offered to individuals through the market in the U.S. facilitates integration of work and traditional family life" (Kohler et al., 2002: 31). Demeny (2003) favors this approach of non-governmental interference to amend low fertility levels in the EU: "Contemporary welfare states of the affluent world, and especially those of Europe, perform a vastly wider range of functions than the limited government of classical theory. But dirigist intervention typically stops short of any [effective] intent to influence personal fertility choices" (21).

While the U.S. has, on average, higher fertility levels than most of the developed nations, there is considerable geographical variance in American population growth. For example, the majority of the population growth has been concentrated in the American South and West, the northern and the eastern states are growing slowly while several rural counties display population declines as a result of a net migration deficit (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).



Along with geographical variance in reproductive patterns, there are also considerable differences among America's ethnic groups. For example, Hispanics have the highest fertility rate in comparison to any other ethnic group in America. As observed in figure 1 (see appendix), the Hispanic fertility patterns have been the highest among America's ethnic groups at a rate of almost three children per woman since 1989. Given that Hispanic women are reproducing at a faster rate than women from other ethnic groups, the Hispanic population in America is also expected to grow at a faster pace. The following describes the current state of fertility among American women:

Overall, women 15 to 44 years old in June 2006 had an average of 1,169 births per 1,000 women. Hispanic women aged 15 to 44 had the highest number of children ever born (1,435 per 1,000 women), compared with non-Hispanic White women, who had 1,091 children ever born per 1,000 women; Black women, who had 1,288 children ever born per 1,000 women; and Asian women, who had 992 children ever born per 1,000 women (Dye, 2008: 2).

Due to the high fertility levels of Hispanic women, the Hispanic population in America is expected to go from just over thirty million in the year 2000 to over one hundred million in 2050 as seen in figure 2 (see appendix). In short, as Hispanic women continue to be more fertile than White or Black women, the Latino proportion of the American population is expected to increase considerable over the next fifty years.

### **The role of Latin American in-migration in American fertility trends**

One element that has helped, and will likely continue to help, the growth of the U.S. population is immigration. From 1990 to the year 2000, immigration accounted for approximately 40 percent of the population growth (Kent and Mather, 2002), while the remaining 60 percent of the growth was attributable to normal causes, that is, a surplus of births over deaths.

Immigration to the U.S., both legal and illegal, is likely to continue in for the foreseeable future and it is also likely to aid in keeping America's fertility levels at higher levels than other developed nations. In particular, the largest influx of immigrants to the U.S. comes from Latin America and this influx impacts American fertility trends in two important ways. On the one hand, first generation immigrants from Latin America and American citizens of Hispanic origin have considerably higher total fertility rates than the national average. The attractiveness of America as the land of opportunity continues to be a magnet for Latin American legal and illegal immigrants, a pattern that steadily adds people to the existing American population at large. On the other hand, subsequent Hispanic generations present higher fertility rates in comparison to other ethnic groups in America such as non-Hispanic whites and blacks.



While Latin American immigrants and the American Hispanic population at large present higher levels of fertility in comparison to other ethnic groups in America, there are important variations which occur at each generational step. A closer look at the data on fertility patterns across generations of Hispanic women provides more information about the generational variations in reproductive behavior. The data obtained from the June 2006 Current Population Survey shown in figure 3 in the appendix, displays the average number of children born to Hispanic women 15 to 44 years old, broken down by age, for three different generations. As displayed in figure 3 (see appendix), the first generation, that is, those who were foreign born, recorded higher levels of fertility for the majority of the age groups compared to second and third generation women. According to Dye (2008) this trend reflects larger family size norms from the migrants' countries of origin in Latin America and more optimistic views about their socio-economic future in America. In other words, the improved economic prospects found in America may further encourage the cultural tendency toward large families among first generation, immigrant Hispanic women. Conversely, second-generation women 15 to 44 years old had fewer children ever born than both first-generation Hispanic women and third generation Hispanic women who were American born and had two native parents as well. One explanation for the lower fertility levels found specifically in second-generation Hispanic women is the mediating effect of educational attainment and career opportunities. For instance, the 2006 Current Population Survey indicates that 47 percent of Hispanic second-generation mothers had attained education beyond high school, compared with 38 percent of third-generation mothers and 21 percent of first-generation mothers (Dye, 2008: 10). Educational attainment, and particularly educational attainment in higher education, generally leads to an improvement in career prospects and to social advancement which in turn leads some professional women to prefer a smaller family size and to have children later rather than earlier in their fertile period (Kohler et al., 2002). Thus the higher level of educational attainment achieved by second generation Hispanic women in comparison to third generation ones would help to partially explain why second generation Hispanic females tend to be slightly more fertile than third generation ones.

While thus far we have spoken about Hispanics and about Hispanic women as a cohesive group and while most Hispanic immigrant groups share a similar culture and language, it is also important to note that the reproductive behavior and migratory experience of the various Latino groups may differ drastically from one another. Bearing this in mind, the following section provides a more detailed analysis with regard to the particular nuances found in the fertility of Hispanics by considering the reproductive patterns of Mexican immigrants to the United States.





### **Sexuality, reproduction and transnational migration in contemporary Mexico: Beyond the average**

In media representations and academic discussions of this subject matter, there is a tendency to homogenize particular immigrant groups with regard to values, understandings, and practices of family life, sexuality, and reproduction. For instance, it is not uncommon to read that 'Latino' or 'Hispanic' immigrants are characterized by 'traditional', religious sexual mores, which on average lead couples to have more children and be less mindful of family planning practices than white American families. Such statements are often substantiated through references to differences in the average number of children between Latinos and other ethnic groups and general claims about 'Latino culture'.<sup>1</sup> While such generalizing or ideal-typical comparisons may be important and, to some extent, unavoidable in the analysis of reproductive patterns in different ethnic groups, they may also obscure intra-group differences and the complex interaction between immigrants' differential experiences of migration and their reproductive behavior.

Moreover, social research throughout the past two decades has highlighted the need to foreground transnational connections and processes of globalization in the analysis of socio-cultural changes of intimate life (Therborn, 2004, Nehring, 2009). Through transnational migration, mass media, and flows of ideas and cultural products, local patterns of couple relationships, sexuality, and reproduction in the U.S. are deeply intertwined with simultaneous changes and developments both at the global level and in other local settings around the world (Appadurai, 1996, Castells, 2004). Fertility trends in the U.S. thus need to be analyzed from a relational perspective that accounts for the interaction between local transformations of intimacy in the U.S. and wider, global developments. Socio-cultural, political, and economic transformations of sexual behavior and reproduction in the U.S. simultaneously shape and are shaped by both translocal developments, such as a global trend away towards post-patriarchal forms of intimate life (Therborn, 2004), and local reconfigurations of personal life in other parts of the world. For instance, recent research on sexuality and reproduction among Mexican migrants in the U.S. (González-López, 2005, Hirsch, 2003, Hirsch, 2007) has consistently highlighted the ways in which these migrants' cultural understandings and experiences are transformed by the experience of life in the U.S., but at the same time also have the potential to transform cultural meanings and practices of intimacy in their host country. Likewise, studies on changes in the cultural dynamics of sexuality and reproduction in Mexico (Gutmann, 2007) emphasize the complex interaction between local changes

<sup>1</sup> One notable example of this tendency is a recent report by the U.S. Census Bureau on fertility trends among women in the U.S. (Dye, 2008). The report places 'Hispanic women' in one broad group and then goes on to compare fertility rates within this group and with other ethnic groups. The report does not differentiate in a sustained manner between the particular origins of these 'Hispanics' or the circumstances of their immigration into the U.S.



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In this section, we address this issue by examining the ways in which dynamics of intimate life in contemporary Mexico are shaped by the interaction of a set of global and local forces. We first look at general trends in the cultural organization of intimate life in Mexico. We then examine the findings of recent research among Mexican immigrants in the U.S. to illustrate the transnational relationships between local developments in both countries. Given their high share among recent immigrants in the country, as well as their notable public profile, their case seems to be particularly suited for an illustration of the need for a more nuanced appreciation of the relationship between immigration and reproductive behavior. In this regard, two important arguments are made: To begin with, just as patterns of sexuality and reproduction have been rapidly changing in US society in recent decades, so too they have been undergoing notable transformations in immigrant-sending communities in Mexico. These locally specific transformations in sending communities need to be taken into account in any comprehensive analysis of immigrants' reproductive behavior. The dynamics of intimate relationships have been transformed, on the one hand, through internal developments in the Mexican gender order, such as the massive incorporation of women into the labour market, cultural trends towards a pluralisation and democratization of gender relations, women's social movements, and legislation that has expanded women's sexual and reproductive rights, such as the recent partial legalization of abortion in Mexico City (Amuchástegui Herrera, 2001, Nehring, 2008). On the other hand, processes of globalisation and transnational cultural connections, for instance through international mass media, commerce, and migration, have led to a hybridisation of Mexicans' cultural understandings and experiences of couple relationships, sexuality, and reproduction. For instance, Carrillo's (1999, 2002) research in western Mexico has shown how Mexicans' cultural understandings of male same-sex relationships may be simultaneously shaped by cultural models rooted in Mexican history and 'imported' from other Western societies. These transformations of intimacy in Mexico in turn vary significantly between regions of the country and rural and urban areas (González-López, 2005). While on the whole a decline of patriarchal forms of intimate life may be noted across Mexico since the late 1970s, Mexicans' everyday experiences of love, sex, and reproduction are shaped by a variety of locally specific factors, and they need to be explained in terms of this local situatedness. In this sense, the roundabout groupings of immigrants in the USA by perceived ethnicity (Hispanic, Latino, etc.) seems to be eminently problematic. Furthermore, immigrants' understandings, experiences, and practices of sexuality and reproduction are re-shaped in important ways by their experiences of immigrant life in the U.S. These experiences of migration in turn are differentiated by a range of factors, such as migrants' access to visas, levels of education, occupations, and access to income,



goods, and services upon their arrival in the U.S. These processes of differentiation in sexual understandings and practices constitute a central dynamic of the migration process and need to be placed center-stage in respective discussions. The association between immigration and trends in sexual and reproductive practices in host countries – here the USA – can only be understood from a relational perspective, by accounting for both the local situatedness and variability of intimate practices in migrants' societies of origin and the diversity of ways in which the transition into another society might be experienced.

It is generally acknowledged that, until the late 1970s, the Mexican gender order was, by and large, shaped by patriarchal cultural models strongly related to Catholic morality.

A central element of patriarchal culture in 20th-century Mexico has been the exclusive legitimacy of sexual and love relationships between men and women and the stigmatization as immoral of such relationships between men or between women (Carrier, 1995, Cano, 2006, Irwin, 2003, de la Mora, 2006, Carrillo, 2002). Furthermore, sexual and affective relationships between men and women only acquire normative legitimacy in the context of a religiously sanctioned, ideally lifelong marriage.<sup>2</sup> Villafuerte García summarizes respective religious doctrines by and large current in Mexico since colonial times:

“Marriage is defined as a unique and irrevocable bond; that is, a single man with a single woman, where the bond is lifelong and it is impossible to dissolve it without the death of one of the spouses; thus, the norm of fidelity and cohabitation is established. Sexual activity is only legitimate within the marital institution and with the purpose of procreation. Thus, marriage becomes an institution which through its characteristics guarantees social order” (1998: 255; my translation).

The persistent significance of this logic is exposed by Rivas Zivy (1998) in a study that compares understandings of sexuality among three generations of Mexican women in rural and urban locations. Only women in the youngest generation of 20 to 38 years accepted openly the possibility of pre-marital sexual encounters, and only one of these women admitted to having had sex with a man she had not intended to marry. The older participants all insisted on the exclusive legitimacy of sex in marriage. Amuchástegui (2001) in this context points to the notion of 'decency' (*decencia*) as an important cultural code for judging women's sexual conduct regarding their premarital virginity, reserved attitude in dealing with (male) strangers, and lifelong monogamy.

Patriarchal cultural logics have often involved the construction of masculinity in terms of a persistent, uncontrollable desire for sexual satisfaction

<sup>2</sup> However, since the liberal Reforms of the mid-19th century, civil marriage had emerged of an increasingly accepted secular alternative to religious marriage, and towards the middle of the 20th century, many couples chose to have both religious and civil marriages. The main point in the current context is the central importance of marriage for the social legitimacy of couple relationships. See Bridges (1980), Quilodrán (2001), and García Peña (2006) for further discussions of marriage patterns since the late 19th century.



and the linkage of masculinity to the fathering of children, as well as an active stance towards sexuality and the possession of initiative and control in the sexual act (Hirsch, 2003, Rivas Zivy, 1998, Carrillo, 2002, Amuchástegui Herrera, 2001). Conversely, female sexuality has regularly been constructed in terms of the opposition between 'decent' women characterized by sexual passivity, the desire to sexually 'serve' the husband, the tying of sexual activity to conception, and the absence of a need for pleasure and 'bad women' characterized by an active stance towards sexuality regardless of marriage and promiscuous behavior (Carrillo, 2002, Rivas Zivy, 1998, Hirsch, 2003, Amuchástegui Herrera, 2001). The use of contraception and family planning have often been rejected in relation to respective religious prescriptions and the tying of masculinity to the fathering of children (Chant and Craske, 2003, Elu, 1999). This cultural logic – which Chant and Craske (2003) describe as a covert 'sexual double standard' – has strongly constrained female sexuality, in so far as it de-legitimizes female desire and subjects female sexuality to male control and initiative. Hirsch (2003) in this context points to especially older Mexican women's understanding of sexual activity as – among other factors – a device for ensuring marital stability by satisfying their husbands rather than as a direct source of pleasure. These patriarchal cultural models constitute what is often described as 'traditional Mexican family values' in academic papers and media reports on Mexican immigrants in the U.S..

However, based on the findings of recent research, it also seems uncontroversial to state that this hegemonic patriarchal culture has recently been weakened by economic crises and neoliberal structural adjustment, a strong decline in women's fertility rate, women's massive incorporation into the labor market, feminist movements, experiences of migration, and other factors (Chant and Craske, 2003, García and de Oliveira, 1994, Gutiérrez Castañeda, 2002, Hirsch, 2003, Valdés and Gomariz, 1993). In this context, Amuchástegui (2001) points to trends since the late 19th century towards a secularisation of social life and a recession of religiously rooted hegemonic visions and practices. This cultural trend, Salles and Tuirán (1998) explain, seems to have entailed a partial loss of importance of patriarchal power within the family and a change of the logic of marriage from an inseparable sacramental union to a conditional contract between partners whose acknowledgement depends on their satisfaction in terms of, for instance, mutual fidelity, understanding and tolerance, or sexual gratification.

Recent years have seen a number of important socio-cultural, political, and legal changes and conflicts in this regard. On November 9, 2006, the legislature of Mexico City [Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal] approved a law permitting gay civil unions [Ley de Sociedad de Convivencia]. The sanctioning of this law marked an important event in the increasing explicit public recognition of alternative forms of intimacy alongside historically dominant patriarchal-religious models of sexuality and relationships (Associ-



ated Press, 2006, Cuenca, 2006). Equally, diverse forms of family life and parenting, for instance with regard to postponed parenthood, childlessness, and varying forms of single motherhood, are increasingly acknowledged in public life (Pérez-Stadelmann, 2006, Martínez, 2006). The role of the Catholic Church in Mexican society has also become, at least to some extent, an object of public discussion. This is shown by recent debates about alleged sexual abuse committed by Marcial Maciel, the founder of the Legion of Christ, and about the possible involvement of Norberto Rivera Carrera, the Archbishop of Mexico City, in a cover-up of the sexual abuse of children by the priest Nicolás Aguilar (Sánchez, 2006a, Sánchez, 2006b). However, alongside these pluralizing trends, patriarchal and religious models of intimacy continue to be significant in Mexican society, particularly in relation to the considerable influence of conservative political and social groups (Amuchástegui Herrera, 2001, González Ruiz, 1998, Hirsch, 2003).

Moreover, this summary of central features of gender relations and intimate life in Mexico can only be translated to a limited extent into generalizations about Mexicans' day-to-day practices of intimate life. These developments have in no way been linear and have not affected all areas of Mexican societies in equal ways. It seems best to understand them in terms of the reorganization and, to different degrees, successful contestation of a number of regional patriarchies. The hybrid structure of the cultural logics of intimacy current in Mexican society seems to have become much more symmetric in terms of the relative power of its elements, and patriarchal cultural forms now seem to act to a lesser degree than before as a 'cultural centre'. Amuchástegui describes the hybridising pattern of late 20th-century modernization as follows:

"Economic modernization does not automatically entail cultural modernity. [...] Even though from the past century up to the developmental ideology [desarrollismo<sup>3</sup>] of the 1970s the modernizing ideologies of Liberalism postulated a very clear difference between tradition and modernity, the substitution of all other forms of production by capitalism has not occurred in Latin America, where furthermore scientific knowledge and the mass media have not eliminated all other forms of cultural expression. This is the reason why I argue [...] in favor of a postmodern approximation to the understanding of Latin American cultures, since in them one encounters a coexistence and an articulation of traditions and modernity and of multiple logics of development, which can only be understood in terms of heterogeneity" (Amuchástegui 2001: 56; my translation)

In this sense contemporary Mexican society is in the context of its historically rooted diversity and inequality in ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic terms, characterized by multiple, overlapping, and possible contradictory

<sup>3</sup> This term refers to the political aim of rapid, forced industrialisation pursued in the 1970s and the economic and social policies it involved. See Dietz (1995), Gwynne and Kay (1999), and Krauze (1997) for general discussions of this issue.



socio-economic and cultural patterns and collective belief systems.<sup>4</sup> Localized patriarchal belief systems and modes of social organization interact with secular, individualist cultural logics in the shaping of heterogeneous and hybrid patterns at level of individuals' day-to-day understandings and practices of intimacy. These complex, simultaneously globalizing and localizing dynamics have led González-López to describe the Mexican gender order as composed of a set of 'regional patriarchies':

Regional patriarchies are those that are constructed in the diverse geographical regions of Mexican society and include the following characteristics: 1. They are fluid and contestable, depending on the socioeconomic and political contexts in which women and men live. The fewer opportunities women and men have to obtain equal education and paid employment, the greater the gender inequalities [...] and the more emphasized the regional patriarchies. 2. Not just men, but also women, actively participate in the social reproduction of different expressions of gender inequality, femininities, and multiple masculinities in contemporary urban and pre-industrialized colonial societies. 3. These dynamics have their historical roots, in part, in the formation of the Mexican state, which has been constructed through and within local hegemonies that have promoted and reproduced regionally specific constructions of social and political power and control since the early 1930s (Rubin, 1996), and through regional expressions of bourgeoisie and proletariat shaped by international capital and free-market economies in contemporary society [...]. (González-López, 2005: 91f.)

González-López (2005: 92) also distinguishes between rural and urban patriarchies, arguing that factors such as greater opportunities for education and paid employment as well as the stronger presence of women's organizations lead to greater possibilities for women to challenge gender inequalities and for men to perceive women as equals in comparison with rural settings.

By and large, it seems possible to think of the cultural organization of intimacies in contemporary Mexico in terms of such a pattern of contradictory pluralization. It involves, in relation to economic, demographic, and political developments such as those we mentioned above, a limited trend towards companionate logics of intimacy. It entails shifts in women's and men's understandings and experiences of power and production divisions as well as matters of sexuality, in close interaction with patriarchal logics of equal cultural importance. The latter seem to have lost their hegemonic status in many sectors of Mexican society, but nevertheless are forcefully reasserted in public life by parts of the media, political groups, and the Catholic Church. The partial legalization of abortion in Mexico City, for instance, received widely negative media coverage and public reactions in other parts of the country, highlighting a notable cultural and political divide between the capital and other states with regard to matters of intimacy. Equally, within Mexico City, the measure received immediate and fierce resistance, including a legal chal-

<sup>4</sup> In this context, also see García Canclini (1990, 1999, 1996, 2001), Rowe and Schelling (1991), Schelling (2000), Yúdice (2003), (2006).



lenge, from conservative social and political groups, headed by the conservative party National Action Party (PAN) (Avilés, 2008), which currently controls the national government. This example illustrates the fragmentation of discourses and public opinions on matters of sexuality and reproduction that prevails in contemporary Mexico.

The growing exposure of Mexicans to foreign cultural influences as part of globalization, furthermore, seems to have had a significant impact on collective beliefs concerning couple relationships. Contemporary Mexico and Latin America are closely enmeshed in transnational cultural flows and globalized 'expert systems' through various forms of mass media, which play a significant role in many Mexicans' daily lives (Maass and González, 2005, Ortiz Crespo, 1999, Herman and McChesney, 1997). Carrillo (2002) and Hirsch (2003) point to the importance of cultural influences from Europe and the U.S., for instance through television programs, on discourses concerning sexuality, which entail more open discussions of and a greater tolerance towards same-sex relationships. Such influence has also rendered ambiguous Mexicans' cultural understandings of sexuality, which have partially moved away from patriarchal beliefs and towards an 'object-choice' model, defining roles through categories such as 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual' in terms of the gender of the individually desired partner (Carrillo, 2002). Experiences of migration also facilitate the adoption of alternative models of intimate life, as the work of Hirsch (2003) and González-López (2005) has shown.<sup>5</sup>

Hirsch (2003), for example, is particularly clear in her analysis of the localized dynamics that have led many younger members of the rural migrant communities she studied to espouse companionate relationship ideals. Her study is based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the migrant-sending villages of Degollado and El Fuerte in western Mexico and migrant-receiving Atlanta in the U.S. Hirsch relied on a range of methods, including formal life history and informal interviews, participant observation and group drawing exercises.

Within such companionate marriages, the significance of sexuality tends to lie in the experience of intimacy and mutual satisfaction rather than, as common among older couples, in reproduction and women's duty to satisfy their husbands as part of the 'marital bargain'. Sex may be negotiated according to individual preferences, which for instance may allow women to refuse sex with their husbands instead of being obliged to satisfy them regardless of their own inclinations. The changing significance of sexuality is also manifest in changing reproductive practices among many young couples. These include the delay of first birth after marriage in comparison with older generations, which allows couples to enjoy each other's companion-

<sup>5</sup> For general discussions on the social, economic, and cultural implications of Mexicans' migration to the U.S., see Besserer (2004) and de Genova (2005).



ship and stabilize the relationship; reduced numbers of ideal children among younger women; and a greater openness towards non-traditional, technological contraceptive methods.

While emphasizing these changes, Hirsch carefully qualifies them and acknowledges their tentative character and the persistence of more 'traditional' marital and sexual norms among many young couples. Rather than superseding these traditional models, she concludes, the ideal of companionate marriage based on trust and sexual intimacy coexists with them, leaving younger participants with complex choices as to the construction of successful relationships.

Hirsch explains the generational trend towards companionate relationships and the respective differences among younger participants in relation to socio-economic and demographic developments in Mexico. Such issues as declining fertility levels, increasing access to education, the propagation of modern sexual ideals and information about sexuality by the mass media, and the experiences of migration, involving greater levels of privacy and individualism in the U.S. and an understanding of sexuality which does not tie it to reproduction, are all seen as relevant. Varying attitudes among participants towards marriage and sexuality are, Hirsch suggests, related to issues such as differing levels of education and the extent of migrants' access to resources, such as visas or means of transportation, which might increase their exposure to U.S. culture.

Hirsch's findings clearly reveal the glocalized, hybrid constitution of the ideals of companionate marriage she found among some of her participants. Facilitated by the mentioned structural conditions, these ideals have developed as a *mélange* of cultural elements taken from both Mexican and U.S. contexts. These ideals challenge local traditional ideals of marriage and sexuality found among older generations and many younger women and men, but at the same time respond to and elaborate these ideals by incorporating new elements discovered in the context of migration to the U.S. or medical-scientific notions of sexuality learned in the context of formal education.

## **Conclusion**

The preceding discussion illustrates the complex relationships between different local manifestations of a global trend towards an erosion of patriarchal cultural models and the emergence of alternative forms of intimacy in recent years (Plummer, 2003, Therborn, 2004). Just as in the U.S., patriarchal cultural models of sexuality and reproduction in Latin America have been, to varying degrees, eroded in recent years in relation to locally specific and wider transnational social, economic and cultural developments. A pluralization or fragmentation of patterns of intimate attachment and reproduction has taken place in Mexico, leading to substantial variations of respective ex-





pectations, values, and practices among contemporary Mexicans.<sup>6</sup> This fragmentation is further accentuated by individuals' differential experiences of migration, as recently described by Hirsch (2003) and other scholars. Consequently, it seems necessary to incorporate an in-depth analysis of these variations into future research on the relationship between immigration and patterns of reproduction and fertility in the U.S.. While statements about averages and overall trends among particular ethnic groups constitute a starting point, they reflect in no way the complexity of migrants' experiences at the intersection of a variety of social, cultural, and economic forces.

In the short term, the Hispanic population in America is likely to continue to grow at a faster rate than other ethnic groups. However, as argued in the present text, the long term reproductive patterns of Hispanics in the U.S. will be highly dependent upon the dynamic interaction between cultural patterns of reproduction and intimacy, desired family schemas and the socio-economic prospects found in America and in the countries of origin of American-Latino ethnic groups in Latin America. Additionally, the analysis presented here underscores the need for a closer look at the role of the different cultural reproductive norms present among the various Hispanic immigrant groups and their influence upon subsequent generations, which are simultaneously heavily influenced by the overall fertility trends in America. We hope that the more detailed and nuanced socio-economic and cultural examination of fertility dynamics among the Mexican trans-migrants presented here provides a good starting point for further research on the prospective impact of other migrant ethnic groups on the future population dynamics of the U.S.

<sup>6</sup> Similarly considerable variations may be expected among 'Latino' migrants from other Latin American countries. For an overview of the recent development of gender relations in Latin America, see Chant and Craske (2003).



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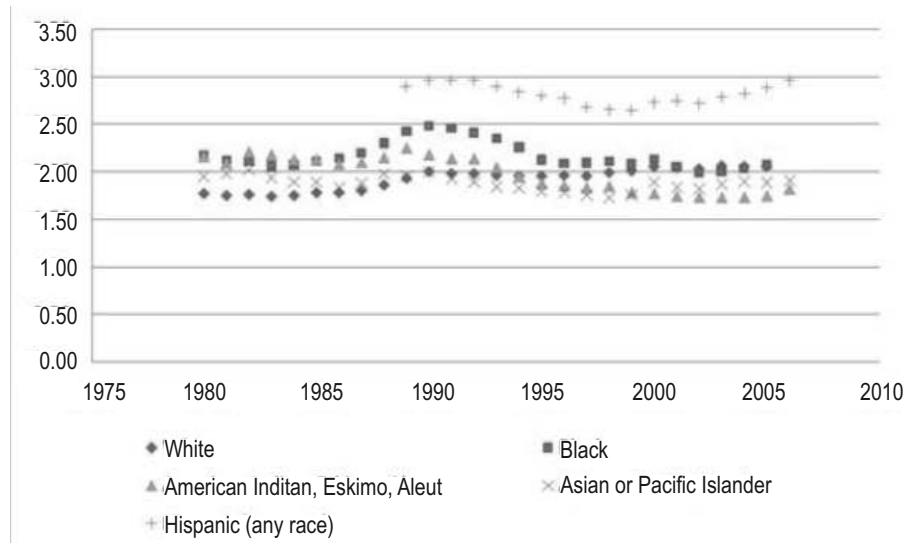
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Appendix

Figure 1. Total fertility rate by race and Hispanic origin



Source: U. S. National Center for Health Statistics

Figure 2. Projected population of the United States, by race and Hispanic origin: 2000 to 2050

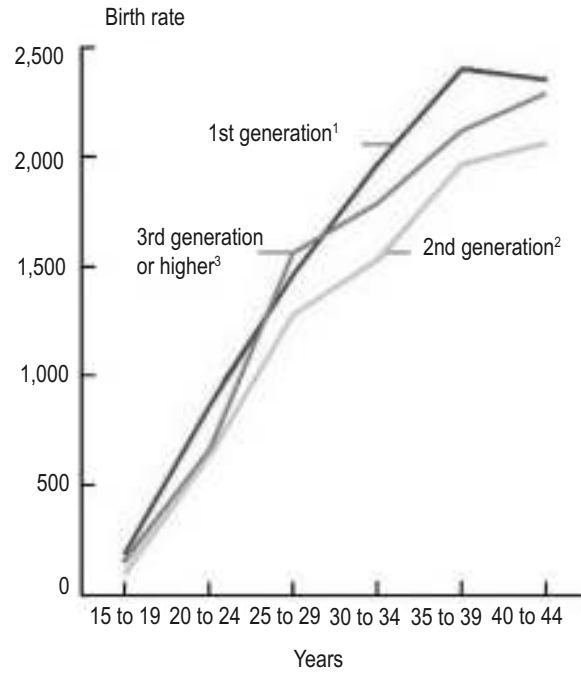
Population and race or Hispanic origin	2000	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
TOTAL	282,125	308,936	335,805	363,584	391,946	419,854
White alone	228,548	244,995	260,629	275,731	289,690	302,626
Black alone	35,818	40,454	45,356	50,442	55,876	61,361
Asian alone	10,684	14,241	17,988	22,580	27,992	33,430
All other races <sup>a</sup>	7,075	9,246	11,822	14,831	18,388	22,437
Hispanic (of any race)	35,622	47,756	59,756	73,055	87,585	102,560
White alone, not Hispanic	195,729	201,112	205,036	209,176	210,331	210,283

Notes: (a) Includes American Indian and Alaskan native alone, native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone, and two or more races.

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, 2004 "U. S. Interim projections by age, sex, race and Hispanic origin. <<http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/>>, Internet releasedate: March 18, 2004



Figure 3. Children ever born per 1,000 Hispanic women by age, nativity and generation of immigrant families: June 2006



<sup>1</sup> Foreign born.

<sup>2</sup> Native with foreign-born father

<sup>3</sup> Native with no foreign-born father

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, June 2006