

Conducting Culturally Competent Research with Latinx Families

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In Brief

- **Latinx family research must be grounded in processes related to the Latinx experience.**
- **Cultural competence is important to ensure that Latinx families are accurately understood, represented, and served.**
- **Culturally competent research is needed to promote equity.**

The Latinx population in the United States has grown by 23% in the past decade, reaching more than 62 million in 2020 (Passel et al., 2022), making this population the largest U.S. minority group (Jensen et al., 2021). Latinx parents have identified familismo (familism) and respeto (respect) as important cultural values that should be promoted in Latinx parenting research (Parra-Cardona et al., 2009), as they shape parenting practices and beliefs (Parra-Cardona et al., 2012), contribute to lower marital conflict (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2012), and are linked to positive behavioral and emotional outcomes in adolescents (Stein et al., 2014). Thus, with the continued growth of the Latinx population in the United States and knowing the impact that cultural values have on families, parenting researchers who work with Latinx families are encouraged to conduct culturally competent research that is effective in respecting diversity and cultural differences of minority populations. The purpose of this article is to address current gaps in culturally competent Latinx parenting research and provide suggestions for improving research with Latinx families.

Cultural Values Influencing Family Functioning

Familismo is characterized by strong commitment, loyalty, and closeness among immediate and extended family members (Calzada et al., 2010). Familismo may contribute to healthy family functioning, as it is linked to positive emotional and behavioral outcomes, such as social competence among Latinx adolescents (Stein et al., 2014). Because familismo values putting family needs before an individual's own needs, it may enhance empathy for the needs of others. Familismo is also related to increased school belongingness in adolescence (Stein et al., 2014), perhaps due to adolescents' motivation to succeed in school on behalf of the family (Esparza & Sanchez, 2008). Familismo also serves as a protective factor between contextual risks like poverty and adaptive behaviors of young Latinx children (Calzada et al., 2014).

Respeto places importance on enforcing obedience to parents and older adults (González-Ramos et al., 1998). Incorporating respeto as an essential component of Latinx parenting (Calzada et al., 2010) is important because Latinx parenting practices could be misperceived as harsh or authoritarian—characteristics that lead to negative outcomes in children due to high parental control and lack of warmth (Baumrind, 1975). However, contrary to authoritarian parenting, Latina mothers are directive with their children while showing warmth and sensitivity (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2020). Despite not being captured by parenting frameworks as historically researched, respeto is an important component of Latinx parenting that contributes to positive child outcomes, such as engagement and fewer negative interactions with their mothers (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2020). Thus, parenting researchers studying Latinx families



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are encouraged to cultivate and assess familismo and respeto to accurately examine their influence on Latinx parenting.

Representational Ethics in Minority Research

Although the parenting field has advanced in understanding how culture influences families, there continues to be a need for culturally competent research that assesses the impact of culture and grounds research methods on these findings. With this, there is also a need for researchers to follow representational ethics, which refers to how they "represent the identities of the people they portray in their communications" (Haarlammet et al., 2017). Through their research and writing, researchers have the power to create and present an image of their participants to society. Thus, non-Latinx researchers who conduct research with Latinx families can provide important insights; however, they are encouraged to consult with Latinx researchers who study the Latinx community when planning and carrying out research. Latinx researchers might have experienced similar processes (e.g., immigration, discrimination, acculturation) that could make them more aware of the community's needs. By understanding barriers in research and practice, researchers can better identify more effective solutions.

Latinx researchers can determine ways that research is not sensitively applied to appropriately represent their communities. Specifically, if parenting is not assessed through a cultural focus, then family structures and parenting practices may be misunderstood. For instance, expecting that only mothers and fathers participate in home visits may not be representative of some Latinx families, given that one in seven Latinx children live with their grandparents, who may also participate in caregiving (Chen & Guzman, 2022). Moreover, following the example of *respeto*, Latinx families may place importance on obedience to authority as a way of maintaining harmony with the extended family (Marin & Marin, 1991). Thus, although Latina mothers may show less scaffolding during play and reciprocal or child-directed play, Latinx children do not exhibit low cognitive scores and behavioral difficulties, which are typically related to these parenting behaviors in other racial and ethnic groups (Cabrera & Hennigar, 2019). A culturally competent way of embracing *respeto* while acknowledging the importance of child-directed practices could be to help parents recognize their children's needs and how to fulfill them so they can enforce *respeto* while validating their children's developmental needs.

Latinx researchers may also understand how their own communities are depicted in research and provide perspectives that prevent stereotypical and marginalized portrayals. Latinx researchers could be more attuned to situations that may be uncomfortable for participants. For example, they may recognize and sensitively respond to some immigrant families' fears that personal documentation may be released and compromise their immigration status, thus posing challenges to their voluntary participation in research (Arevalo et al., 2016). Researchers' lack of awareness of these barriers could further power dynamics and privilege differences, thus damaging researcher-participant relationships. Overall, having a Latinx research team can increase participant involvement (Castro et al., 2006) and satisfaction (Parra-Cardona et al., 2016).

Conducting Culturally Competent Research

Although Latinx researchers have imperative insight that benefits research, they are not solely responsible for representing and speaking for their communities. Having a deep, informed understanding of the populations studied is a shared responsibility across all researchers. Additionally, Latinx researchers may have varying experiences and lack some understanding of the experiences of other Latinx individuals (e.g., U.S.-born Latinx researchers may not fully understand the experience of Latinx immigrants). As scientists and leaders in the advancement of society, researchers must ensure that they appropriately assist marginalized families by amplifying their voices rather than speaking for them.

With the purpose of enhancing equitable Latinx research, we encourage researchers to implement culturally competent practices. Guided by criteria for culturally competent scholarship (Meleis, 1996) that Casado et al. (2012) adapted for implementation in studies with language minorities, we offer the following recommendations accompanied by real examples from the authors' research experiences.

Research problem formulation entails conducting group interviews to gather a deeper understanding of the community's challenges and most salient needs. These may reveal that Latinx parents need culturally relevant parenting education services that address the Latinx experience.

Recruitment and retention require additional efforts to engage non-English speaking participants by including community leaders and stakeholders to build trust and having culturally competent research members who are sensitive to power differences. In our experience, participants enjoyed meeting Latinx researchers during community events and conversing, in their native language, about immigration and biculturalism before researchers initiated recruitment efforts. Participants also needed time flexibility, as they are generally available in the evenings and need to reschedule multiple times. We further found that patience and

understanding are important to retention, so as to not pressure participants.

Measurement approaches must be culturally valid, and data should be collected in the participants' preferred language. When measures need to be translated, they should be done by a professional translator and by following valid systematic methods (e.g., series of translations and back-translations [Brislin, 1980] or a committee approach, in which bilingual committee members translate an instrument as a group [van de Vijver & Leung, 1997]). Given the linguistic heterogeneity of Latinx participants, we found it beneficial to include different terminology for words and phrases that may differ depending on participants' country of origin.

Dissemination of findings is imperative to inform research and policy to work against the invisibility and exclusion that Latinx families experience, and to ensure that their needs are understood and addressed appropriately. Disseminating findings within the Latinx community and increasing academic-community partnerships may also increase trust and participation in research (Israel et al., 2012) and improve the development of culturally competent interventions (Bogart & Uyeda, 2009).

Conclusion

The commitment to promoting positive family relationships involves utilizing equitable practices that make research and family programs positively impactful to all families, especially Latinx families who have been historically marginalized. One way of doing this is by acknowledging cultural influences on Latinx parenting. Rather than solely controlling for contextual influences, research methods must be grounded in aspects that underlie the Latinx experience to accurately capture how these affect Latinx parenting. Without cultural competence, non-Latinx researchers risk imposing their perceptions from their own cultural experiences on the research participants, thus potentially compromising data and research outcomes. Last, we recommend that non-Latinx parenting researchers collaborate with Latinx researchers, as they

culturally competent continued on page F7

(e.g., compadrazgo) (2022; Walker et al., 2016).
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composition that results
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become widespread
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knowing who in their
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1).

Professionals Do?

families in the context
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that are family centered
ally centered. This is
in the context of forced
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That is, Family Life
and health providers
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(2015). Relational
use of technological
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n their children's lives
er, recommendations in
ould account for the
n these family systems

wherein family members who live abroad
may maintain decision-making authority over
the family in the United States (Dreby, 2015).

Although it is well documented that cultural
humility and competence are key when
working with mixed-status families (Green,
2019), educators, mental health counselors,
and medical providers need to constantly
undergo cultural competency training and
partake with groups that dedicate efforts
to the well-being of mixed-status families
(Pacheco & Pacheco, 2019). Family providers
may learn to adapt to a new worldview
matching those of Latinx families who have
experienced forced family separations. It
is plausible mainstream epistemology of
family life may mismatch the worldviews of
focal families and communities (Zayas et
al., 2023). Thus, we suggest that providers
be careful to not cause unintended
consequences with their recommendations.
That is, practitioners' recommendations
may be incompatible with the familistic and
collective nature of the families they are

forceful separation continued on page F16

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may help ensure that parenting programs
encapsulate the Latinx experience,
and that research is conducted and
communicated in culturally competent
ways. *

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