

# The Impact of Acculturation and Cultural Values on Hispanic Immigrants' Parenting

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**Abstract** This study explored the process Hispanic immigrant families undergo when immigrating to the United States through the implementation of a constructivist grounded theory methodology. The theory illustrates the process in three phases: Arriving to a new country, Integrating new values, and Maintaining values. Through these phases the constant interaction between cultures and its influence in family dynamics is illustrated. More specifically, this theory suggests immigrant families are open to include elements of the new culture encountered while keeping elements of their native culture present once their basic necessities are met. The sample of the study consisted of 16 parents. These parents incorporated the English language, granted greater freedom to their children, became more involved with the school system, included American traditions in their celebrations, and altered their discipline methods based on their interaction with the new culture. Additionally, parents maintained the value of respect, the Spanish language, fostered family cohesion, and instilled their spiritual beliefs to their children.

**Keywords** Hispanic immigrant families · Cultural and parenting values · Acculturation · Enculturation · Grounded theory

## Introduction

The United States' population is comprised of individuals from diverse ethnicities, in particular, Hispanics. According to the U.S. Census Bureau of 2014, there are approximately 56 million Hispanics living in the United States. Individuals of Hispanic descent represent 17% of the total population and are projected to increase to approximately 77 million by the year 2030 (Census Bureau 2014), making them the largest and most rapidly growing minority group. This estimated increase in population leads to interactions among people from diverse cultural backgrounds and values.

As individuals immigrate to a new country, two or more cultures interact and several stressors take place ultimately influencing their family interactions and parenting practices. Examining the experiences of Hispanics when they immigrate to the United States and understanding the consequences of the immigration for the family system not only enriches literature, but also enhances our communities' understanding of shifts in parenting practices and values. Thus, additional research concerning the effect of acculturation on their parenting values augments the cultural competency of clinical practitioners, school personnel, and extends to Hispanic parents themselves. The effects of increased cultural competency and sensitivity can motivate underserved populations to start and/or continue therapeutic services (Ahn et al. 2014) as it can foster a greater sense of acceptance and understanding.

Additionally, being mindful of how an individual's culture may influence family dynamics can aid clinicians and school officials in engaging parents in the wellbeing of their children and family. Therefore, more involvement from several parties can potentially alleviate family issues and improve student performance, increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes for the child, family, and community at

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large. This study contributes to understanding the process Hispanic immigrant families undergo when settling in the United States and how it influences their parenting.

## Literature Review

When examining immigration in Hispanic families, it is important to explore how cultures interact and how they influence family dynamics, specifically in regards to parenting values and practices. Through a review of previous literature, certain themes relevant to Hispanic parenting values and the process of establishing in a new country emerged (i.e. familismo). Therefore, exploring the values held and the change families experience when settling in a new country through acculturation and enculturation can enhance our understanding of Hispanic immigrant families.

## Merging Two Cultures

### *Culture*

To develop a greater understanding of immigrant families it is necessary to consider the role of culture. Culture is defined as the beliefs, attitudes, values, and standards of behavior passed generationally (Raman and Hodes 2012). Culture is not a static process; instead, it is continuously changing (Korbin 2002). Each individual and family has their own culture constructed through diverse life experiences. Culture also influences an extended range of family practices including family member tasks, decision-making processes, ideas, and approaches concerning parenting and child development (Bornstein and Bohr 2011). Therefore, culture serves as a mold and guides family dynamics.

### *Acculturation and Enculturation*

When individuals immigrate to a different country, the process of acculturation and enculturation ensues as the person encounters additional cultures. Acculturation occurs when individuals from a specific cultural background interact with a secondary culture by adapting or borrowing their traits and disengage from their own cultural identity (Calzada et al. 2012; Halgunseth et al. 2006; Harrison et al. 1990; Raman and Hodes 2012; Sabina et al. 2012; Varela et al. 2004). Acculturation to a new culture is a complex process and varies in the degree to which it occurs for people; some people may fully immerse in the host culture and others may not (Halgunseth et al. 2006). For instance, it is possible for young children and parents to have different levels of acculturation (Bean et al. 2001), which can ultimately alter their family dynamics. Therefore, when acculturation takes place, enculturation is also present. Enculturation consists of

maintaining the values of one's culture regardless of adapting to another (Calzada et al. 2012).

As individuals encounter two or more cultures the process of cultural maintenance and/or new cultural participation emerges (Berry 1997). Through this interaction individuals face the decision of deciding what is important for them to keep and to what extent they want to participate in the new culture. This process can be different for individuals and families. Individuals may decide to fully immerse in the new culture leading to assimilation, may avoid interactions with the new culture leading to separation, may decide to incorporate aspects of both leading to integration, or at other times neither option may be desired and individuals and families may become marginalized as they disengage from their cultural identity and do not desire to participate in the dominant culture (Berry 1997).

Taking part in acculturation and enculturation is a process many Hispanic families undergo in the United States regularly. Through such process immigrant families are placed in a position to seek positive contextual factors to raise their children and negotiate numerous cultural factors to determine parenting practices and decide what role each culture will play in their lives and family dynamics.

## Cultural and Parenting Values

### *Respect*

From an early age, respect holds an influential role in Hispanic households (Calzada et al. 2010; Halgunseth et al. 2006). In traditional Hispanic culture, respect involves obedience and deference (Bean et al. 2001; Calzada et al. 2012; Falicov 1998; Guilamo-Ramos et al. 2007). Respect indicates a certain level of courtesy towards others varying on the individual's age and situation. Similarly, Garza et al. (2009) found Hispanic parents value "respect" as a behavioral goal for their children. This being said, the value of respect in this particular culture plays an important role in parenting practices.

### *Familismo*

Familismo refers to the act of putting the family's needs before the needs of oneself (Calzada et al. 2010). When referring to family, some Hispanics include the needs of their nuclear family in addition to the needs of extended family and friends. This shows how Hispanic families deeply value loyalty, solidarity, and unity (Bean et al. 2001; Calzada et al. 2010; Guilamo-Ramos et al. 2007). Individuals commonly interact with large social networks, frequent one another regularly (Sabina et al. 2013), and are available for each other if support is needed in variety of areas (Bermúdez et al. 2010; Falicov 1998). More specifically, research has

found that it is more common for Hispanics to live closer to their families if not in the same household (Sarkisian et al. 2007). Familismo shapes and guides the actions and choices of some Hispanics' daily lives. Thus, indicating the family's importance as a vital resource to one another.

### *Religious Beliefs*

Traditionally, Hispanics place great importance on religious matters. Religion is seen as a community involvement where individuals can join spiritual forces, work through their struggles as a family, and form social networks (Santiago-Vendrell 2003). Within this culture it is more common to see a large interconnectedness between one's family and the church community (Martini 2012). Through investigations and interaction with this community, researchers have concluded that a large majority of the Hispanic population practice Catholicism (Merrill et al. 2012). In households where Catholicism is practiced it is believed that children's spirituality is introduced through their parents (Koss-Chioino 2013). For instance, this can be introduced as parents bless their children with the sign of the cross before they leave to school. As children grow older they can become more involved in their religious beliefs through taking part in sacraments, such as through their first communion or confirmation (Koss-Chioino 2013). Additionally, within their practices of Catholicism, Hispanics maintain several traditions dearest to their hearts. For instance, Calzada et al. (2010) found that Dominican and Mexican American parents instilled in their children the value of attending mass regularly and to venerate the Virgin Mary and *Virgen de Guadalupe*. Therefore, it can be surmised how religion intertwines with family values and commences from an early age. Further exploration of the role of religious beliefs on Hispanic parents' lives and how it influences their parenting can increase cultural sensitivity.

### *American Values Perceived by Hispanics*

Exposure to a new culture and environment offers Hispanics opportunities to examine their own parental values and compare them to the dominant cultures' values. Calzada et al. (2010) found Hispanic individuals viewed European Americans as more independent, liberal, and willing to allow children to partake in important matters and expand their wings from an early age. However, the participants from the study did not share these views; instead, participants described themselves as being less able to give their child a say and independence. For participants, independence diminished the importance of family by giving more focus to the individual itself. While the findings offered by Calzada et al. (2010) provide valuable information regarding Hispanic parents' views of European American's parenting,

additional research can assist in supporting what is currently known about Hispanic parenting, as well as, provide additional information on how the interaction between Hispanic parents' culture and the dominant culture influences family dynamics. Thus, the current researchers seek to expand in this area by exploring Hispanic immigrants' parenting values and practices.

## **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to develop a theory of how the immigration experience influences immigrants' parenting approaches by examining the role of acculturation in conjunction with parenting values. More specifically, to explore how immigration and acculturation influences parents' parenting values and practices. As a result, we sought to answer the following questions: (1) what is the acculturation and enculturation process Hispanic parents undergo when they immigrate to the United States? and (2) how does this process influence the parenting practices and values of Hispanic parents? For the current study, immigrants' parenting values as described by participants include: respect, family cohesion, religious beliefs, and American parenting values. While Hispanic culture is complex and there is no single way to pinpoint specific factors that summarize parenting values, the factors identified here were generally found to be relevant components of Hispanic parenting values.

## **Methodology**

The present qualitative study implemented a constructivist grounded theory methodology due to its subjective epistemology allowing researchers and participants to co-create throughout the research process. Grounded theory is an inductive constant comparative method in which continuous intertwining between data collection and data analysis is present (Charmaz 2014). The goal of this method is to develop a theory that represents the experiences of the participants of the study. Therefore, this methodology provided a venue to look more in depth at the effects immigrating to a new country has on the parenting values of Hispanic parents and interpret their behaviors and identify patterns (Charmaz 2014). Implementing this methodology increased understanding of the process Hispanic immigrants undergo when they immigrate to the United States and how this affects their parenting values and practices.

## **Sample**

The inclusion criteria for the sample required participants to be first generation Hispanic immigrant parents with at least

an elementary-aged child. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval to conduct the study. The researcher recruited participants through several methods. The first method consisted of passing flyers with the inclusion criteria at Hispanic and/or Latino events in the community. The second method consisted of word of mouth between professionals and the community. Finally, the lead researcher made announcements to audiences attending masses held in Spanish and English and passed out additional flyers at the end of mass. The researchers offered a 25 dollar gift card raffle as an incentive.

The final sample of this study consisted of Mexican families with parents ranging from ages 25–35, with at least an elementary-aged child and living in a southern part of the United States. The communities are primarily regions that consist of farming, factory work, and a military base. A total of sixteen parents, eight females and eight males participated in the interviews. Thirteen of the participants held permanent resident status and the remaining three identified as U.S. citizens. Thirteen of the participants identified as Catholic, while the remaining identified as Jehovah Witnesses. Three of the participants completed a high school education, nine participants completed some high school, and the remaining four participants completed some elementary. Participants immigrated to the United States between the years of 1988 and 1995. Participants engaged in the interviews in either English or Spanish, depending on their language preference. When participants responded in Spanish, their responses were transcribed in Spanish and then translated to English.

## Data Analysis

### Self of the Researcher

As Charmaz (2014) states, researchers' experiences, perspectives, and interactions play a central role in the construction of a theory. Therefore, it is important to note researchers' experiences, as they influence the research process. Both authors are females of Hispanic descent. The first author lived in Mexico from early childhood to late adolescence and has experience working clinically with immigrant families in the United States. As a result of immigrating to the United States, the author has firsthand experience in the acculturation and enculturation process. The second author is a clinician and researcher who has experience conducting qualitative research with immigrant individuals from several parts of Latin America. The issue of immigration holds a personal connection, as she is the child of parents who immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Therefore, researchers' acculturation and enculturation experiences informed the conceptualization of the study, and thus, trustworthiness measures were taken to establish study credibility.

### Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was sought in all phases of the research process. Creswell (2013) recommended using at least two of several procedures to help establish credibility. Therefore, for the purpose of this study researchers used an established grounded theory methodology, included an external consultant who conducted several external audits to examine whether or not the interpretations made were supported by the data, included multiple coders, and took part in memoing (Creswell 2013), fostering reflexivity about the researcher's role in the data interpretation process.

### Data Collection

When collecting and analyzing the data, theoretical sampling was implemented as interviews were modified to pursue theoretically important categories that emerged in consecutive interviews. This was done with the goal of reaching theoretical saturation and uncovering and developing categories. The data was collected through demographic questionnaires and semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted by the principal researcher. Researchers fluent in Spanish and English transcribed the interviews verbatim and compared each other's translations. Researchers received graduate training in qualitative research methodology at a doctoral level in a marriage and family therapy program.

Interviews were conducted at a location participants preferred. Some participants preferred a private place for the interview, such as their homes. Other participants selected a public location, such as a park. At times, a public location served as a central place to meet due to geographic distances between the participants and the researchers. The researchers used a digital audio recorder to record the interviews after participants granted consent. Sample interview questions consisted of: *How has your cultural background influenced your transition and adaptation to a new country?* and *What are some of the values your culture considers important in parenting practices?*

Throughout data collection, researchers analyzed the data through initial coding, focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding, as well as memo writing throughout the entire coding process. Participant recruitment lasted until theoretical saturation was reached. The purpose of initial coding was to maintain an open mind and explore all the possibilities the data contained (Charmaz 2014). Initial coding was conducted through line-by-line coding, and constant comparison. Each code was created using gerunds with the goal of defining implicit meanings, processes, and actions (Charmaz 2014).

## Initial Coding

### *Line-by-Line Coding*

Through this method of coding, interview transcripts were printed and each line of data was examined and given a code utilizing gerunds. This gave way for detailed observations of what the data communicated and allowed researchers to immerse into the data. Taking part in this way of coding prevented dismissing potentially important data relevant to the overall analysis as each line was considered providing a panoramic view of the data.

### *Comparative Coding*

Data was constantly compared at each analytic level (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Through this approach incidents from each interview were compared with other incidents in the same interview and with other interviews of participants in the study. For example, during the reading and comparing the researchers noticed that participants consistently discussed the difficulties that came with arriving to a new country. Therefore, these discussions were labeled and organized within the “arriving to a new country phase”. Constant comparison between and within interviews allowed greater awareness of how participants make sense of the data and how the data connects.

## Focused Coding

Focused coding was the second phase of coding and consisted of identifying the more prevalent and/or significant codes among the data (Charmaz 2014). Researchers explored initial codes at a deeper level, with the goal of identifying what they implied or what they were trying to communicate. This shift in coding gave way to more analytical direction as filtering of codes took place. Codes that seemed to be out of place by not relating to the data were removed and codes that seemed to speak to the participants’ process throughout interviews were conserved. For instance, codes such as having quality time as family, valuing family unity, and family comes first, stood out and were kept together.

## Axial Coding

The third step in data analysis consisted of axial coding (Charmaz 2014; Corbin and Strauss 2008). Through axial coding the dimensions within a category and the connections between categories were explored. Axial coding served as a venue to identify properties and dimensions of each category and brought data together. Therefore, through this step researchers continued to define and/or combine categories.

For instance, focused codes that fit together developed into a category.

## Theoretical Coding

The final step involved theorizing the data (Charmaz 2014). During this stage researchers made hypotheses regarding the process Mexican immigrant parents undergo, which then led to the formation of a theory. Through this type of coding, organization and integration of codes took place. A story line as to how participants navigate their experience was made distinct by the emerging codes and categories. Each theoretical code provided information that made the analysis comprehensible. Consequently, at this analytical phase, the “so what?” question was answered by identifying and describing the process immigrant parents undergo in their parenting when interacting with a new culture. Through this type of coding, it was possible to organize the journey families interviewed underwent in trying to settle in a new country and parent their children.

## Memo-Writing

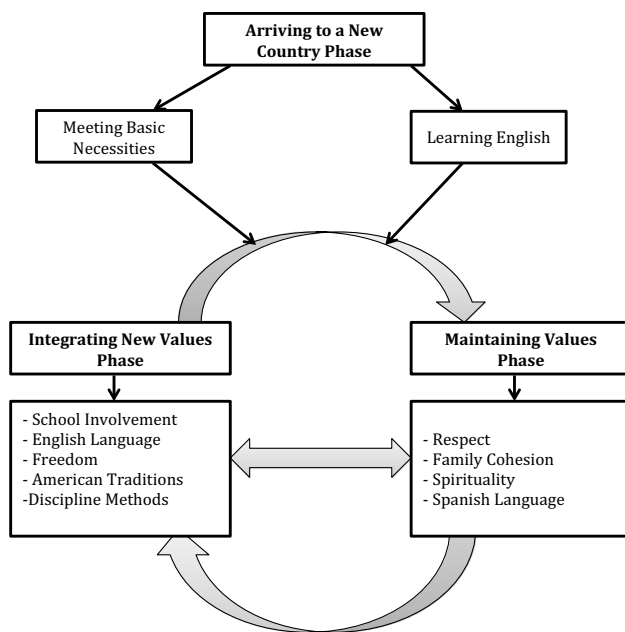
Memo-writing is a process that took place throughout all stages of data analysis (Charmaz 2014). Memo-writing was an essential element as it provided another venue for researchers to interact with the data and make sense of it. It allowed one to reflect, question, and process data by having a conversation with it, as well as with oneself. The memos created for this study enhanced the development of the theory as it allowed the researchers to organize and analyze thoughts, categories, and subcategories.

## Results

After analyzing the data, the model developed consists of three phases: *arriving to a new country*, *integrating new values*, and *maintaining values*. Throughout this process, the families interviewed underwent a change between maintaining and incorporating values to their parenting. The process can be seen in Fig. 1.

### Arriving to a New Country

During the first phase, *arriving to a new country*, families settle in a new country. Families notice differences in their way of living and begin the process of making adjustments to meet their basic needs and prosper. Before making changes to their way of parenting, families first focused on settling and providing for the family. This phase consists of meeting basic necessities and learning the language.



**Fig. 1** Integration and maintenance of values model for Mexican immigrant parents

### *Meeting Basics Necessities*

Families identified priorities when they immigrated to the United States. Settling in a new country consisted of meeting basic needs essential for survival such as where to live and how and where to find a job. Based on the circumstances of the participants this task was difficult due to having a large family. For instance, a mother described:

It was difficult at the beginning because we arrived as a big family of seven without anything and at the beginning it was difficult to get a house. However, little by little and with effort we were able to move forward and have a better life.

The need to provide for the family took priority, but also reduced the amount of time dedicated to their children. Participants stated, “During the first few months or year I was unable to be present in my child’s life as I would of wanted to because I focused all my attention on meeting our needs” and “The adjustment period was difficult as my priority as a parent was on working and providing”.

### *Learning English*

Another priority identified by participants included increasing their means of communication to facilitate their settlement in the new country. Participants described how the language barrier complicated their process of settling in their new home. Therefore, a way of increasing communication,

reducing barriers, and ultimately gaining access to additional resources meant learning the dominant language. A father referred to this struggle and stated, “The not knowing the English language, arriving as an undocumented individual, and to start from basically the bottom made it very difficult. We had to put a lot of effort to move forward in life”. Other participants mentioned, “I came to the United States not knowing English and as a result I felt excluded from society” and “Well it has been really hard, especially because not knowing English prevented me from communicating with others”. The language barrier was identified as a complex challenge in itself that isolated participants from the rest of their community and gave place to a lack of emotional support.

### **Integrating New Parenting Values**

Once families settled in their new homes and navigated some of the pressing challenges, the second phase of the immigration experience followed. Parents and children noticed the differences in their families in comparison to other families who either lived their entire lives in the United States or who had more time living in the United States. As a result, this phase includes the categories of school involvement, English language, freedom, American traditions, and discipline methods. In this phase parents described how they started to notice the interconnection of the culture they brought with them and the integration into their new culture.

### *School Involvement*

As all participants had at least one elementary aged child, parents became involved with their children’s school staff. This entailed parents being more active in their children’s academics such as meeting the teachers, attending parenting/teacher meetings, and checking in with their children about school developments. These interactions encouraged parents to attend school functions and increased communication between parents and teachers, thus establishing more collaboration. For parents, this encouraged them to be more active and open with their children in regards to school matters. For example, a mother stated, “here the school system involves you more, like in their grades and in picking them up. Teachers make you participate in parent meetings and keep you in the loop”. Another mother stated, “Teachers value our children’s education. For example, even when they are absent they will call us to see what is going on. Having the teachers involve us has increased our communication with our children and the community”. As these participants stated, the school provided them with an additional venue to communicate with each other and be more involved in their children’s life: “We talk about topics we might have not talked with our parents, we have tried to be more open

and I think that we have incorporated the previous from the American culture”.

### *English Language*

Aside from developing a new way of communicating with their children as a result of greater involvement with school matters, parents also stated noticing their children wanting to speak English at home and them allowing it. This can be seen as a way for parents to demonstrate how they balanced the two cultures at home by honoring their native Spanish and welcoming the dominant language. Even though parents started to learn English as a result of adjusting to a new country, English began to also be part of their life at home. Participants stated, “Our children have been slowly speaking more and more English at home” and “I have noticed myself letting my child speak in English even though I would prefer for him to speak in Spanish more often than not”. Part of their new way of living seems to consist of incorporating the English language as a value while still preserving the Spanish language. A mother addressed the previous in the following way, “The Spanish language is very important in the upbringing of our children. It is important that they do not forget their native language even though they also speak English. I want my children to continue practicing and speaking Spanish”. Being able to speak Spanish and English is perceived as a strength for themselves and for their children as a father stated: “Being bilingual is of great benefit as it gives our children more opportunities job wise and just all around”.

### *Freedom*

Through the constant interaction with the American culture, parents adapted the value of providing their children with greater freedom. Freedom for these families meant children could spend time with others outside of the family, such as spending time at friends’ homes. Participants stated that before coming to the United States their children and even themselves as children spent most of their time with family. However, a shift in this matter seemed to take place. A mother stated, “I have tried to allow my children to have a little more freedom and have allowed them to spend the night with their friends and other family members”. A father stated, “I also think there are many good principles here (United States). For instance, here I see that more liberty is given to their children. We try to give them freedom while maintaining a balance with family time”. This participant’s insight highlights some parents’ willingness to adapt and

incorporate freedom to their way of parenting without dismissing their preserved family values.

### *American Traditions*

Data revealed that aside from taking part in their own traditions, participants also practiced traditions from the United States. This meant incorporating holidays and celebrations typical of U.S. culture, such as Halloween and Independence Day. A father stated,

When did we ever celebrate Halloween and stuff like that (laughs)? Never! And ever since we have been here we have participated in them some way or another because of our children and their wish to share with the friends they have made here.

Another father stated, “We have added a new celebration, the independence of the United States. Our children enjoy learning about U.S. history at school, but also enjoy seeing fireworks (laughs)”. The main reason for parents to celebrate holidays that were not celebrated in their country of origin seems to be through their children and their desire to make them feel a part of the larger society.

### *Discipline Methods*

Based on parent’s reports, physical punishment served as one of the main strategies to correct misbehavior. However, a shift in discipline occurred as parents incorporated verbal communication and understanding rather than corporal punishment. Parents reported a change in the discipline process and described how instead of immediately castigating, they paused and offered opportunities for a two-way discussion. More specifically, parents identified two reasons for this change. First, most participants stated increased awareness of the benefits of verbal means through observation and discussion with other parents and professionals. For example, participants stated, “We have left the physical punishment to the side. Being here has made me notice that there are other means of discipline. Through parent talks I now recognize the value of communication” and “We try not to hit our children, instead we try to talk things out and reach an understanding”. Second, other parents stated they refrained from physical punishment due to fear of police enforcement. Participants shared this opinion by saying, “Our children have the mentality that if we hit them they can call the police. Therefore, we have left that method to the side” and “Here everything is different because if we hit our children and authorities find out they can take them away and can even put us in jail. Knowing this can happen has made us not use it anymore”.

Regardless of the motivation to alter methods of discipline, parents seemed open and adaptable to change.

### Maintaining Values

Throughout their constant interaction with the American culture, families incorporated new values to their family. The values included greater open communication, inclusion of the English language, greater freedom, integration of American traditions, and discipline methods. However, participants were also active in their efforts to maintain their family values despite the migration to a new country.

#### Respect

All participants viewed respect as an important value in parenting as reflected in their interviews. Respect meant how one interacts with elders and how they demonstrated respect verbally and through actions. For example, referring to elders using the pronoun of “*usted*” instead of “*tú*,” in which “*tú*” is seen as informal and disrespectful. “*Usted*” is more formal and the use would be similar to the use of “sir” or “ma’am” when interacting with someone deserving of respect. For these families, respect transcended through time and generations. Participants pointed to a lack of respect in speaking between children and adults in their current communities and expressed a desire to not let it interfere with their value of respect. A father expressed,

My wife and I try to inculcate in them the value of being respectful of the elderly, to say good morning, good afternoon, etc. to people even if they are not family. This is something we were instilled as children and is something we don’t see here often. I have also noticed that our children are adapting to the way they talk here and address us by “*tu*” and try to give us orders. They can try to address us in that way, but we will continue to instill respect in our family, especially in the way we talk to each other.

A mother discussed her stance, “One of the most important values is to be respectful to all individuals and to speak to elders as elders and not as friends (“*usted*” instead of “*tu*”). Making a distinction in the way elders and children communicate continues to be important in the upbringing of children as it is seen as maintaining deference.

#### Family Cohesion

As parents experienced many changes throughout the process of adapting to a new culture, family cohesion remained as a core value. Parents defined family cohesion as a source of support and as a family goal. This is demonstrated by offering emotional support and making it a priority to spend

time with loved ones. Participants stated, “One experiences many hardships but with the determination and support of your family everything is possible” and “We greatly value the unity and support we possess as a family and only hope to pass this value to our children by being a role model and talking about the importance of family”. Family is seen as a source of support and as a value that ought to be passed down through generations.

#### Spirituality

For most participants their belief in God remained unaltered and steadfast. In fact, families’ beliefs in God seemed to be strengthened throughout their immigrating journey and parenting. Spirituality in these families emerged in teaching children about who God is, how God can be a part of their lives, and also serve as a source of support. A father discussed, “Coming to the United States was hard, but God gave us the opportunity to be here, and for that I am very grateful”. Other parents referred to their belief in God as a value to be passed to their children. This became evident by the following statements: “Believing in God is something very important to us and is taught from a very young age. As we learned it as children, I am teaching my children the same” and “We try to inculcate in our children the faith in God. We try to teach our children that everything is possible if they have God in them”.

#### Spanish Language

Speaking English was a necessary part of the transition the United States, but the use of the Spanish language remained as an asset and preference for families to continue to honor their Spanish heritage. Participants indicated, “Speaking Spanish has helped us not forget the Spanish culture” and “We will continue to speak our native language so that our children do not forget it”. Additionally, through the demographic questionnaires participants were asked what language was spoken at home and eleven parents answered Spanish and the remaining five parents stated a combination of Spanish and English. Based on participant reports, the daily use of Spanish and active preservation of the language at home was one method families preserved part of their culture.

### Connecting the Phases

Once parents were able to move through phase one *Arriving to a New Country*, the model shows the co-occurring nature of phase two *Integrating New Values* and phase three *Maintaining Values*. As parents are integrating new values from the dominant culture, they continue to cultivate and practice their previously held family values. Therefore, the



formulated model shows how parents continuously negotiate the skills and actions necessary to facilitate the transition to the United States, such as learning English and incorporating new discipline methods, but at the same time preserving important family values. Overall, each phase in the model honored both cultures and gave place to a constant interaction of practicing values that fostered growth within the family system.

## Discussion

Relocation to a foreign country entails changes, consequences, and influences families' ways of living. After consultations and interviews with families of Mexican heritage a model was developed to show the constant interaction between two cultures and their influence on parenting. The model illustrates how Mexican immigrant parents are proactive in maintaining their cultural values while remaining receptive to incorporate new values when necessary. This conclusion is supported by previous literature as families incorporated aspects of the two cultures into their parenting. As discussed by Berry (1997) when individuals are willing to include aspects of the new culture and at the same time maintain their cultural values, integration takes place. More specifically, parents in the study actively decided what values were important to maintain, while remaining open to include other values from the new culture. Additionally, the findings complement and support previous researchers' findings with regards to the values Hispanic families hold from their culture and practice in child rearing (Bean et al. 2001; Calzada et al. 2010, 2012; Falicov 1998; Garza et al. 2009; Guilamo-Ramos et al. 2007; Halgunseth et al. 2006; Martini 2012).

Participants' descriptions illuminate the struggles involved when immigrating to a new country and how such struggles impact parenting. Participants came to the United States with little to no resources and started from the bottom, as many stated. Experiencing this hardship hindered their ability to be fully present in their children's lives. The initial focus of parents consisted of meeting their family's basic necessities. Once the needs were met and parents were able to overcome additional barriers (i.e. learning English) they were able to provide greater attention to their parenting and became conscientious of how their culture and the new culture influenced their family. Immigrating to a new country does not mean individuals will abandon their values and customs in their attempts to acculturate, as acculturation and enculturation can differ for each individual and family (Berry 1997). Instead, individuals can become involved in both acculturation and enculturation. Through acculturation individuals and families can borrow and incorporate traits from the dominant

culture into their family dynamics (Calzada et al. 2012; Halgunseth et al. 2006; Varela et al. 2004). On the other hand, enculturation can also be actively present and allow individuals to keep values and customs from their culture (Calzada et al. 2012). Therefore, through the presence of acculturation and enculturation parents from the study were able to integrate aspects of both cultures as discussed by Berry (1997). For instance, participants in the study found themselves reinforcing their cultural values by instilling respect, the value of being a united family, the importance of keeping their faith present, and their desire to maintain their native language active. Contact with individuals from a new culture inadvertently influences and leads to the process of acculturation. Through this acculturation, participants incorporated greater reasoning and open communication, allowed their children more freedom when compared to their own experiences growing up and their parenting practices before immigrating. Parents also recognized the importance of their children learning the English language, incorporated American traditions, and began the process of moving away from corporal punishment. Overall, the presence of acculturation and enculturation are inevitable as individuals and families who migrate will become involved with the new culture and will bring aspects of their culture with them.

Additionally, the findings from the current model relate to Olson's (2000) Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems where family cohesion, flexibility, and communication are main dimensions. Relevant to this study, Olson (2000) defines family cohesion as the emotional connection family members experience with each other and how they balance separateness and togetherness. The elements of the family cohesion dimension connect well with the experiences described by parents in this study, as they maintained family togetherness as a core value and a source of support throughout the entire process, while also staying open to fostering greater freedom for their children. Families in this study also demonstrated aspects of the flexibility dimension in their process of acculturation and enculturation. Olson (2000) described flexibility as the amount of change in a family's leadership, roles, and rules. Parents from the study were flexible in their discipline strategies and their parenting goals by cultivating a sense of stability and openness to change, especially by exploring new options to support their parenting practices. Their openness highlighted a change in leadership and relationship rules as parents took their children's needs into consideration and were willing to adjust their parenting as needed, such as learning the English language or allowing a greater sense of freedom. Finally, the communication dimension is considered a facilitator for the family cohesion and flexibility dimensions (Olson 2000). Based on the results of the model, it can be shown that parents utilized their communication in a positive manner as

they moved along the continuum within the other dimensions when necessary.

## Implications

Given the findings, the researchers offer additional insights to clinicians, researchers, school officials and staff, and the general public with knowledge of the experiences endured by Mexican immigrant families. This is done with the goal to continue to enhance information regarding suitable and culturally relevant parenting practices for immigrant families.

## Clinical Implications

Clinicians frequently interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, increased knowledge about the consequences, changes, and adaptations parents make when transitioning to a foreign country offers significant knowledge to clinicians who frequently deal with behavioral concerns brought into therapy by parents. Increased knowledge about the process of adapting and selecting parenting practices as families integrate into a foreign country increases cultural sensitivity and competence (Ahn et al. 2014), while also giving insight to the process of deciphering what parental values fit best for some families.

While the findings of the current study relate to families of Mexican heritage, the information learned about how parents merge their values to determine parenting practices can be used as a point of reference when working with families from varying cultures. Parents' descriptions of their processes in determining how best to approach the merging of values from two cultures demonstrates their skills at managing stressors associated with immigrating and settling in a new country, as well as their willingness to incorporate parenting practices that honor both cultures. Therefore, clinicians can be active in learning about parents' and family members' skills at developing effective coping strategies in the face of relocation. This information is especially pertinent given the vast numbers of families entering the United States from all over the world on a daily basis.

Furthermore, exploring how families navigate the intertwining of cultures and the effects of this process highlights the strengths and resources in these families that can also be extended to help other families learn how to navigate their own unique challenges. This being said, clinicians are encouraged to remain curious and willing to discuss these resources with families. Discussion about resources can not only aid family's own recognition of the strengths and resources abounding in their nuclear system and communities, but can also aid therapists to continue to learn from diverse families.

Equally important to note, is that parents and their children interact with the dominant culture in different ways (Bean et al. 2001). Children, because of their integration into American schools, frequently interact more and receive more exposure to the dominant culture in comparison to their parents. Based on participants' stories, they teach us that immigrant parents were receptive to new ways of parenting. This encourages us, especially as family therapists, to be collaborative and invite parents to therapy sessions to be a part of the treatment plan and process. It seems that parents' willingness to immigrate to a foreign country, endure the challenges associated with immigration, and learn to successfully adapt to the changes demonstrates their willingness to take part in what is necessary for the success and growth of their children and families.

## Research Implications

Participants' reports enhance the existing information about Hispanic populations. This study was unique in that it engaged with families in a southern region of the United States who described their process of merging values from two varying cultures to influence their parenting practices. While numerous studies exist examining the effects of immigration on families, this study is exclusive in that it looked at the specific process of how families bring in their cultural values and decipher how they will complement or conflict with the values of the new culture. Information such as this aids future researchers in further understanding Hispanics and people from all cultures in the world. Thus, with more information these communities can be more adequately served.

However, there still remains much more researchers can learn about Hispanics and their families, especially given the diversity within the Hispanic culture. More in depth studies would provide professionals involved with these families additional resources to serve and understand this population. In the study, the parents were first generation Mexican immigrants with a legal residence status. Their experiences and resources can vary drastically from families who have lived in the United States for a longer period of time or from families who do not have a legal status in the United States. Therefore, additional research on how the model may be affected by the lack of legal status by either one or both parents will further enrich our understanding of how families navigate their adjustment regarding parenting practices.

## School Staff and Counselors

School officials are in constant interaction with children from diverse backgrounds. Knowledge about the factors involved in the transition from one country to another can support the work in the educational growth of children

with families making this type of transition and decisions regarding parenting. For instance, parents in the study stated that their inclusion in educational matters was instrumental in creating a new family dynamic, which in turn, led to greater communication between parents and their children. Increased interaction and collaboration between caregivers and the school system enhances the support system for children, thus increasing children's probabilities of successful educational and social development. The educational success and well being of children and their families extends beyond the family and expands the success to our communities.

### Limitations

The study enriches professionals' knowledge about the changes and decisions Mexican families use to adjust parenting after immigration to the United States. A limitation is that the changes described were from the perspectives of people of Mexican heritage and did not include participants from other Latin American countries. Future research would benefit from the inclusion of the experiences from parents from different Latin American countries and examine how their parenting processes differ or are similar to those of the study participants. Another limitation is that participants resided in West Texas, an area largely populated by Hispanics, which may influence the level of integration of new values and maintenance of previously held values. The experiences described by participants in the sample who were of Mexican heritage might report different experiences from Hispanics residing in different parts of Texas or even the United States. Furthermore, most interviews were translated from Spanish to English. While this was a good opportunity for the researcher to interact with the data and add to the meaning making of the process participants engaged in, the process of translation increased the risk of not entirely capturing participants' voices. Translation can give way to a loss in meaning of what participants were trying to communicate.

### Conclusion

Immigrating to a new country is a process many families undergo. Such process allows two or more cultures to interact and ultimately influence family dynamics. Therefore, the theory illustrated in this study shows how immigrant families navigate adjusting and incorporating values from the new culture while maintaining elements and values of their native culture.

### Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Informed Consent** Research involved human participants who only participated in the study after giving informed consent. The informed consent specified participant participation was voluntary, and thus, participants were free to only answer question they felt comfortable with and could leave the study at any point with no consequences.

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