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Latinx Youth's Helping Behavior Tied to Cultural Processes as well as Parenting Practices

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Relations Among Parenting, Culture, and Prosocial Behaviors in U.S. Mexican Youth: An Integrative Socialization Approach

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Although interest in studying prosocial behaviors among U.S. Latinx individuals has increased recently, there is still limited existing research with this population. Evidence shows that prosocial behaviors (actions intended to benefit others) are a marker of healthy social functioning and can both support positive development (such as academic achievement) and mitigate problematic outcomes (such as anxiety and depression). An important question is whether prosocial behavior is fostered by parents in ways that are specific to their cultural groups or through more universal aspects of parenting. A new longitudinal study in the United States examined relations among parenting, culture, and prosocial behaviors in U.S. Mexican youth.

The findings were published in a *Child Development* article written by researchers at the University of New Mexico, University of California at Irvine, Arizona State University, and University of Missouri.

The results point to the importance of both cultural practices and aspects of parenting seen across cultural groups, such as acceptance and harshness. They also underscore the importance of both fathers and mothers in supporting prosocial behavior.

- Results showed that fathers' but not mothers' acceptance predicted youth's prosocial behaviors (helping others when asked, helping in emergency situations, and comforting others when upset).
- Similarly, paternal but not maternal harshness predicted less helping in situations where there was no expectation of benefit from others, but also predicted more helping in front of others (perhaps when acknowledgement or rewards might be anticipated).
- In addition, ethnic socialization practices by both mothers and fathers predicted more prosocial behaviors by fostering youth's ethnic identity and familism values (supporting the family emotionally,

physically, and financially; having a sense of obligation; and incorporating the family as part of the self).
- Both parents' ethnic socialization practices were important to youth sense of ethnic identity in 10th grade, but with maternal behavior showing a greater influence earlier in development (at 5th but not 7th grade) and paternal behavior later (in 7th but not 5th grade).

"Researchers have often emphasized the role of parenting in fostering youth's prosocial development," said Cara Streit assistant professor in the Department of Individual, Family, and Community Education at the University of New Mexico. "Our findings suggest the need for integrative, culturally-sensitive theories that focus on the relations between culture-related mechanisms (such as ethnic socialization and familism), and parenting practices that are more universal (such as acceptance and harshness) to successfully promote positive youth development among U.S. Latinx youth."

Participants were recruited from diverse communities in a metropolitan area of the U.S. Southwest and included 462 Mexican adolescents (48 percent female) and their mothers and fathers. The families participated in four waves of data collection at the 5th, 7th, 10th, and 12th grades and were assessed through the following measures:

- **Acceptance and harsh parenting** (5th and 7th grade): parents were asked to review statements such as "You made [child] feel better after talking over his/her worries with him/her" or "You lost your temper with [child] when s/he didn't help around the house" using a scale ranging from "almost never" or to "almost always or always."
- **Parental ethnic cultural socialization** (5th and 7th grade): using a scale ranging from "almost never" to "a lot of the time (frequently)," parents were asked to review statements such as "How often do you: tell your child to be proud of his/her Mexican background."
- **Ethnic identity** (7th grade): adolescents were asked to review statements such as "You have attended events that have helped you learn more about your Mexican/Mexican American background" using a scale ranging from "not at all true" to "very true."
- **Familism values** (10th grade): adolescents were asked to review statements such as "A person should share their home with relatives if they need a place to stay" using a scale ranging from "not at all" to "strongly agree."
- **Prosocial behaviors** (12th grade): using a scale ranging from "does not describe me well at all" to "describes me greatly," adolescents reported their prosocial behaviors by reviewing statements such as "You never wait to help others when they ask for it." The study separated out different types of

prosocial behavior, such as helping in emergency situations, comforting others when upset, and helping others when there is no expectation of benefit to self.

"Family support programs can best promote positive youth development among U.S. Latinx youth if they include both fathers and mothers and incorporate a focus on ethnic heritage, ethnic identity, and traditional cultural values," said Gustavo Carlo, professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Irvine.

The authors recognize that the study relies entirely on participant self-reports. They also recommend that future studies should consider bidirectional and fully reciprocal study designs to allow for more stringent tests of direction of effects as well as a sample that includes more recent emigrants.

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Summarized from *Child Development*, Relations among Parenting, Culture, and Prosocial Behaviors in U.S. Mexican youth: An Integrative Socialization Approach by Streit, C. (University of New Mexico), Carlo, G. (University of California, Irvine), Knight, G.P. (Arizona State University), White, R.M.B. (Arizona State University), Maiya, S. (University of Missouri). Copyright 2021 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.