

Chapter 12

Juntos Resistimos y Sanamos: The Strength of Latinx Families

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ABSTRACT

The authors seek to provide a more holistic, compassionate, and liberatory understanding of Latinx families. This chapter will highlight the importance of understanding families from a historical, culturally centered manner that honors their layered experiences of contextual factors, intergenerational trauma, and strengths-based approach. This chapter seeks to honor ethnic heterogeneity and cultural strengths and expand the notion of what consists of the family constellation. In doing so, the chapter will focus on central aspects of la familia, including child development, parenting, and recommendations focused on engaging Latinx families and improving the assessment and family interventions.

JUNTOS RESISTIMOS Y SANAMOS [TOGETHER WE RESIST AND HEAL]: THE STRENGTH OF LATINX FAMILIES

The experiences of Latinx families living in the United States are vast, ever-changing, and uniquely experienced within all ethnic or national groups. Although our colonial legacies, language, and some of our customs connect us, the impacts of intergenerational trauma, discrimination, and sociopolitical context are all uniquely felt. We thus seek to situate familial dynamics and experiences as not solely occurring

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within interpersonal relationships but rather actively occurring through citizenship, immigration, and racialization, influenced by institutional discrimination (i.e., U.S. policies). We challenge oppressive, apolitical, and ahistorical accounts missing from our therapeutic practices and seek to emphasize the role of the U.S. in creating familial conditions, such as family separation, to not only note the legacies of intergenerational trauma but oppressive ecologies (Carlo et al., 2022) that affect parenting, family processes, adjustment, and development.

Our understanding of the complex Latinx familial experiences remains limited due to the hegemonic analysis of families and our overreliance on the pan-ethnic term Latinx. The lack of ethnic representation in psychological research samples continues to perpetuate a lack of understanding of cross-cultural variations impacting behavior (Arnett, 2016; Nielsen et al., 2017). The existing research holds Whites as the comparative standard of psychological functioning, resulting in cultural (mis)attribution bias (Causadias et al., 2018; Sue, 1999). Consequently, we are unlikely to note Latinx families' survival and resistance strategies by strictly adhering to deficit approaches (Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2004).

We also note that the overreliance on the pan-ethnic term Latinx, in addition to the broader concept of Latinidad, has resulted in limited ethnic group and geographic diversity in research (Delgado-Romero et al., 2017). Due to the overwhelming focus on Mexican families in research, there is an increased risk of negating and erasing the experiences of other ethnic minority groups (Mendez & Cortina, 2021). Within Latinidad, the all-encompassing term fails to name the legacies of "anti-Blackness, femicide, anti-Indigeneity, and inarticulation of violence" (Pelaez Lopez, 2018, Color Bloq's X Collection). Efforts to understand Latinx families within their specific ethnic and cultural histories are necessary to capture essential family factors, including Indigenous ancestry, Black ancestry, proximity to Whiteness, bilingualism, acculturation, and multilingualism. These factors have a significant function and impact on familial well-being and distress and broaden the often-narrow scope by which Latinx culture is examined and understood. Thus, this chapter will address the impact of Latinx adolescent development, parenting, and interventions focused on expanding assessment tools and seek to illuminate essential considerations when working with Latinx families.

LATINX ADOLESCENCE

We begin by bringing attention to the unique and layered development stage of adolescence Latinx youth undergo. Until the past decade, research has focused on deficits, primarily comparative between-ethnic/ racial group differences (Azmitia, 2021) and psychopathology (Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2004) among Latinx youth. The shift to more asset-based research (Azmitia, 2021) acknowledges unique facets within this stage, including ethnic and racial-ethnic socialization, biculturalism, language brokering, and connection to cultural values. The recent inclusion of ethnic and racial identity (ERI) development indicates that stronger ethnic and racial identity protects youth from discrimination, thus fostering positive self-esteem (Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007) and offsetting mental health challenges beginning in early childhood (Meca et al., 2020; Serrano-Villar & Calzada, 2016; Torres et al., 2011). Additionally, ERI development includes caregivers and family members as agents of socialization, highlighting their pivotal role in building youth's view of the world and developing themselves (Meca et al., 2021). Efforts to contextualize Latinx youth's ERI development, specifically within their contexts and within the backdrop of oppression, are growing and offer adaptive strategies enacted by youth to navigate oppressive forces (Sladek et al., 2022; Torres et al., 2020). Nevertheless, gaps in our understanding are

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