

# “They Learn to *Convivir*”: Immigrant Latinx Parents’ Perspectives on Cultural Socialization in Organized Youth Activities

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**Maria I. Iturbide<sup>1</sup>, Vanessa Gutiérrez<sup>2</sup>,  
Lorraine Munoz<sup>2</sup>, and Marcela Raffaelli<sup>2</sup>**

## Abstract

This qualitative study explored immigrant Latinx parents’ views of the role organized youth activities play in their children’s cultural socialization. Respondents were 29 Latinx caregivers of adolescents participating in 13 project-based youth programs. Most caregivers were female ( $n = 25$ ) and biological parents ( $n = 27$ ); all were born outside the United States (83% in Mexico). Caregivers participated in structured open-ended interviews, which were analyzed using a consensual inductive approach. Although the programs did not focus primarily on cultural issues, two thirds of the caregivers discussed cultural elements relating to their child’s program participation. Three dimensions were identified that reflected how youth programs supported adolescents’ socialization: (a) Latinx socialization, (b) multicultural socialization, and (c) civic socialization. Collectively, these different types of socialization provide youth with skills for living in a diverse society. Parents’ views of cultural socialization as a multifaceted process are consistent with the growing consensus that successful adaptation for

<sup>1</sup>Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA, USA

<sup>2</sup>University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Maria I. Iturbide, Department of Psychology, Humboldt State University, 1 Harpst St., Arcata, CA 95521, USA.

Email: [iturbide@humboldt.edu](mailto:iturbide@humboldt.edu)

children of immigrants involves maintaining connections with the family's heritage culture (enculturation) while developing skills to function in larger society (acculturation). By acknowledging culture as a salient dimension for Latinx youth from immigrant families, program effectiveness can be increased for all youth.

**Keywords**

cultural socialization, immigrants, Latina/o parents, organized youth activities

Immigrant parents face a unique set of circumstances as they raise their children. In addition to accomplishing socialization tasks common to all parents, immigrant parents must also engage in cultural socialization. This involves supporting both their children's heritage cultural acquisition and retention (enculturation) and their adaptation to the larger society (acculturation; Berry, 2007; Gonzales, Fabrett, & Knight, 2009). Consistent with the bioecological perspective that development occurs through interactions in daily contexts (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), cultural socialization occurs through interactions inside and outside the family (Gonzales et al., 2009; Updegraff & Umaña-Taylor, 2010). We focus here on one developmental context—organized youth programs—and examine how immigrant Latinx parents think about culture vis-a-vis their child's program. In the United States of America, organized youth activities represent important socializing contexts for youth (Vandell, Larson, Mahoney, & Watts, 2015). Our focus on Latinx families addresses a notable gap in the literature on organized youth programs regarding a growing segment of the U.S. population (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012). Around one quarter of U.S. children below the age of 18 years are now Latinx (Colby & Ortman, 2015), and nearly two thirds of Latinx youth are growing up in immigrant families (11% are themselves immigrants and 52% are U.S.-born children of one or two foreign-born parents; Fry & Passel, 2009). Little is known about immigrant Latinx parents' expectations about cultural socialization in the context of youth programs. Therefore, the goal of this study was to explore Latinx parents' views of cultural socialization within youth programs.

**Cultural Socialization and the Potential Role of Organized Youth Activities**

The dual processes of enculturation and acculturation have been described by cultural and developmental scholars (see Gonzales et al., 2009; Updegraff &

Umaña-Taylor, 2010). Enculturation is the process by which individuals learn about and acquire their heritage culture's values, beliefs, traditions, and languages. Families are the first and primary agents of enculturation for children, in combination with ethnic communities (Knight, Berkel, Carlo, & Basilio, 2011; Umaña-Taylor & Bámaca, 2004). Acculturation to a novel context is the result of interactions that allow an exchange of behaviors, attitudes, and values (Berry, 2007). Children from immigrant families acculturate through contact with people and institutions outside the home, as well as the media (Gonzales et al., 2009; Updegraff & Umaña-Taylor, 2010). As a result of these two processes, individuals develop an understanding of—and sense of belonging to—both their heritage (home) culture and the mainstream (U.S.) culture (Gonzales et al., 2009). Although enculturation and acculturation are sometimes portrayed as conflicting, theorists view them as complementary (e.g., Berry, 2007; Gonzales et al., 2009; Updegraff & Umaña-Taylor, 2010), and there is evidence that immigrant parents do not see them as incompatible. For example, immigrant Latinx parents recognized acculturation as being necessary for children's future success while emphasizing the need to maintain their cultural identity by becoming bicultural (Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006). Therefore, immigrant parents might welcome opportunities for their children to be exposed to both their heritage and the mainstream culture.

Scholars have speculated that organized youth activities could potentially afford opportunities for both enculturation and acculturation (Simpkins, O'Donnell, Delgado, & Becnel, 2011; Vandell et al., 2015). Organized youth activities include out-of-school and after-school programs where youth engage in structured activities supervised by adult leaders (Vandell et al., 2015). In the United States, participation in organized activities is associated with adolescents' positive academic, psychological, and social adjustment (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012; Vandell et al., 2015) and may allow young people from immigrant families to build human and social capital (Camacho & Fuligni, 2015; Simpkins, O'Donnell, et al., 2011). Research has previously demonstrated the role of nonfamilial influences (such as neighbors, mentors, and peers) on ethnic and racial identity during adolescence (for review, see Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). However, the potential contribution of organized youth activities to sociocultural learning has been understudied (Simpkins, O'Donnell, et al., 2011; E. P. Smith, Witherspoon, & Osgood, 2017).

A handful of existing studies suggest that organized activities are spaces in which youth can learn about culture. For example, culturally based programs provide Hmong youth with safe spaces to engage in identity work (Ngo, 2017), including expressing and negotiating cultural and American identities (Lee & Hawkins, 2008). Latinx adolescents' reports of opportunities for

ethnic socialization in their after-school program were associated with increased ethnic identity 9 weeks later (Riggs, Bohnert, Guzman, & Davidson, 2010). Mexican-origin youth participating in programs reported that their cultural backgrounds should be valued and that programs should be a space where all youth could celebrate their culture (Ettetal, Gaskin, Lin, & Simpkins, 2016). Finally, a study of Latinx youth from four radio-training programs indicated they learned about the world and themselves through the diversity they encountered in the program (Huesca, 2014). Taken together, these studies support the notion that organized youth programs can promote both enculturation and acculturation.

Parents are important gatekeepers to their children's program participation (Vandell et al., 2015). For example, in a multiethnic sample of adolescent program participants and their parents, nearly all respondents described parents as having a role in their child's decision to join the program (Kang, Raffaelli, Bowers, Munoz, & Simpkins, 2017). Immigrant Latinx parents are often unfamiliar with the types of youth programs available in the United States (Griffith & Larson, 2014; Simpkins, Delgado, Price, Quach, & Starbuck, 2013; Simpkins, Vest, & Price, 2011). Perhaps because of this, Latinx youth have historically been less likely to participate in organized activities than youth from other ethnic groups (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012), with immigrant Latinx youth less likely than their U.S.-born counterparts to participate (Yu, Newport-Berra, & Liu, 2015). Participation by Latinx youth has increased in recent years (Afterschool Alliance, 2014), and one study reported higher levels of participation in school-based extracurricular activities among foreign-born Latinx adolescents than their U.S.-born peers (Simpkins, O'Donnell, et al., 2011). Parents' perspectives may be key to understanding these shifts. Given the emphasis on cultural socialization as a critical dynamic in Latinx families, we examined parents' views of culture in their children's programs.

## **Latinx Parents' Views of Culture in Organized Activities**

The existing literature provides hints about Latinx parents' perspectives on nonfamilial socializing agents and the potential salience of culture with respect to organized activities. First, Latina mothers reported that adolescents' ethnic socialization occurred not only within the family but also in various community settings (e.g., churches, schools, museums, school-based organizations; Umaña-Taylor & Bámaca, 2004). Second, although the program literature has not examined parental perspectives on cultural socialization, a growing body of literature discusses how after-school programs can

incorporate families in culturally responsive ways (e.g., Finn-Stevenson, 2014; Simpkins, Riggs, Ngo, Vest Ettekal, & Okamoto, 2017). Third, findings from several lines of research highlight the importance of cultural issues for Latinx parents whose children participate in youth programs. Research examining “dilemmas of practice” encountered by program staff (e.g., Griffith & Larson, 2014; Larson & Walker, 2010) has found that some immigrant parents may not support (or actively oppose) their child’s participation in programs whose goals are seen as conflicting with family values or priorities (e.g., emphasis on enjoyment vs. achievement; concerns about daughters interacting with boys; Griffith & Larson, 2014). Some of these issues were echoed by immigrant parents, although many also recognized that program participation provided important developmental opportunities for their children (Larson, Pearce, Sullivan, & Jarrett, 2007). In another study, Mexican American parents’ cultural values were associated with preferences for specific activities, such as those that were church-affiliated or promoted family interaction (Simpkins et al., 2013).

More directly, several studies indicate that Latinx parents recognize the opportunities for cultural socialization afforded by youth programs. In a national survey, 73% of Hispanic/Latinx parents with children participating in after-school programs agreed that programs provide “opportunities to learn about various cultures, countries, languages and global issues” (Afterschool Alliance, 2014, p. 4). Latinx parents who enrolled their children in community-based Spanish language programs in Los Angeles valued language maintenance but placed differential emphasis on the value of biculturalism (Carreira & Rodriguez, 2011). Finally, a recent study found that, when asked about perceived benefits of organized activities for their adolescent children, Mexican-origin parents mentioned the acquisition of skills relating to both mainstream (American) and traditional (Mexican) cultural values (Lin, Simpkins, Gaskin, & Menjivar, 2018). This body of work indicates that cultural issues may be salient to parents’ views of organized youth programs.

## **The Current Study**

In summary, immigrant Latinx parents may view organized activities as a potential setting for cultural socialization but in-depth research is lacking. Accordingly, we conducted a qualitative study to examine how immigrant Latinx parents describe cultural aspects of their adolescents’ program participation. Our overarching goal was to identify the various ways that Latinx parents view cultural issues (broadly defined) within the context of youth programs. We felt a qualitative approach was appropriate given the exploratory nature of the study and our desire to understand parental perspectives (Miles, Huberman,

& Saldana, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Our guiding question was, what role do immigrant Latinx parents see youth programs playing in their child's cultural socialization?

## **Method**

### *Overview of Study Design and Procedures*

The current analysis draws on interviews conducted with Latinx caregivers as part of a larger study conducted in out-of-school and after-school programs serving primarily low- and middle-income youth. Thirteen programs in urban, suburban, and rural communities in two Midwestern states were recruited with the goal of obtaining a diverse representation of programs and participants. Programs were selected based on criteria associated with program quality (e.g., at least 100 contact hours, low youth turnover, experienced staff) and other characteristics (e.g., mixed gender). All were project-based programs focused on arts, leadership, or science and technology. Seven programs served primarily Latinx adolescents; the others served primarily European American and African American youth.

The larger study followed youth, parents, and program leaders across a single program cycle (typically a school year) and involved multiple forms of data collection. Following institutional review board (IRB)-approved procedures, a research team member presented information about the study to youth in the program and gave them a parent information letter (in English and Spanish) describing the study and giving instructions for opting youth out of the study. Youth assent was obtained at the first data collection session when youth completed structured questionnaires. At each program, a subset of youth was invited to take part in individual interviews and (with their permission) one of their parents was also recruited. Youth and parents were interviewed by different interviewers. Interviewers were graduate students, staff, and faculty members from a range of disciplinary (mostly social science) and ethnic backgrounds; those who interviewed Latinx parents were bilingual. Participants received modest monetary incentives.

### *Sample*

Across all programs, most eligible youth (355 of 376; 94.4%) participated in the larger study. At each program, a subgroup of youth was selected for prospective interviews using purposive quota selection (Miles et al., 2014) with the goal of obtaining a sample that was balanced by gender and reflected program membership. This subgroup of youth ( $n = 73$ ) did not differ

significantly from the rest of the youth sample ( $n = 282$ ) in terms of gender, age, or years of program experience but (reflecting the larger study's goals) included more Latinx youth (46.6% vs. 34.5%). Fifty-seven parents of interviewed youth also agreed to take part in prospective interviews. These parents did not differ from the rest of the parent sample ( $n = 196$ ) in terms of age, gender, marital status, or family income, but were more likely to be Latinxs (47.1%, vs. 31.2% of the remaining parents) and immigrants (51.9% vs. 25.8%).

The analytic sample consists of 29 Latinx caregivers who participated in parent interviews. They were 28 to 53 years old ( $M_{\text{age}} = 41.36$ ,  $SD = 5.96$ ); 25 (86%) were women and 27 (93.1%) were biological parents of the participating adolescent. All had been born outside the United States and most (86.2%) were interviewed in Spanish. Most were Mexican ( $n = 24$ ; 82.8%); two were Guatemalan, one Honduran, one Colombian, and one of unknown national origin. Based on 22 caregivers who reported their family's annual income, 50% of families earned below US\$25,000 a year; 31.8% earned between US\$25,000 and US\$39,999; and 18.2% earned above US\$40,000. The parents' children were 14 to 18 years old ( $M_{\text{age}} = 15.69$ ,  $SD = 1.34$  years); 76% were girls and more than half (59%) had been born in the United States (based on youth reports).

### *Interview Protocols*

Interview protocols were developed based on the research team's prior studies and the published literature, and were pilot-tested and refined before data collection began. Interviews consisted of structured open-ended questions and probes; interviewers were trained to follow up and obtain full responses. In the first year of the study, parents were interviewed at three time points; in the second year, the second and third interview were combined to reduce respondent burden and because preliminary analyses indicated that redundant information was being obtained. The same topics were covered regardless of the number of interviews.

Parent interviews were about their perspectives on their child's program participation. At the start of each interview, they were instructed to focus on the specific child involved in the study, and interviewers used the child's name when posing questions. The first interview focused on the process of adolescents joining the program, caregivers' knowledge and attitudes about the program, and early interactions with staff. Subsequent interviews asked about ongoing interactions with their child and program staff relating to the program, current attitudes toward the program and staff, and whether they had seen changes in their child as a result of program participation. Several

multipart questions were designed to elicit information regarding cultural dimensions of youth's program participation. These asked whether and how the program helps their child "learn and explore their family history, cultural traditions, or ethnic background," helps their child "learn about different groups, ideas, and people," and "supports or conflicts with your family's values." Most of these questions were administered after Time 1, when parents were familiar with the program.

### *Coding and Analysis*

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim, then checked by the original interviewer. Analysis occurred in multiple iterative stages. First, two of the authors read the segments of the transcripts that corresponded to the structured questions about culture. This first pass suggested that cultural responses would be found in other sections of the transcripts, as respondents often referred to things they had said earlier in the interview. This was confirmed by reading entire transcripts for several caregivers. For example, issues of culture arose spontaneously in response to general questions asking caregivers what they liked most about the program, or about their goals for their child's participation. On the basis of this initial assessment, we decided to use all interviews available for each respondent, resulting in a data corpus of 57 interviews across the 29 caregivers.

Open coding was conducted to identify and classify statements related to cultural issues within the program. Coding was conducted in the original language (English or Spanish) and followed an inductive approach to identify emergent themes within the data, based on repeated phrases, words, and concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In keeping with the constant comparative approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), coding was an iterative process, with coders reviewing interviews individually, generating codes and meeting to discuss emerging analytic categories, and returning to the data. This process yielded (a) an operational definition of cultural statements and (b) a set of codes that captured the range of caregiver perspectives with respect to cultural aspects of their child's program participation. Cultural statements were those that referenced cultural ceremonies or celebrations, ethnicity, race, country of origin, language, or immigration. Two additional criteria were that cultural statements needed to mention the program explicitly and be made in reference to the youth. For example, we excluded statements relating to cultural activities that occurred solely in the home or school, as well as unelaborated or minimal responses (e.g., two parents said "yes" when asked if the program helped their child learn about different groups or people, but did not describe in what way).



Written descriptions of codes were developed and applied to cultural statements. Sections of transcripts fitting the identified categories were marked in NVivo 9 (QSR International, 2010), a qualitative data management program, then extracted. The analysis team examined interview segments sharing the same code to identify overarching patterns and emergent themes that captured important aspects of caregivers' perspectives. A consensus approach was used to ensure that diverse views were taken into account (Hill et al., 2005). Initial coding and analysis was conducted primarily by the first two authors; then the third author was trained on the initial coding scheme and served as a checker. All authors discussed emerging findings and, if necessary, codes were revised or merged. To ensure that interpretations were supported by the data, findings were presented to the larger project team (including faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates) and external audiences (e.g., at conferences).

Through this process, three overarching themes were identified and given descriptive labels. Illustrative quotes were drawn from across the programs and respondents to ensure that a range of perspectives was represented in the description of findings. Pseudonyms were given to each participant. In the results section, Spanish language quotes are provided after the English translation and country of origin indicated after each quote (unless mentioned in the quote).

### *Positionality and Reflexivity*

The analysis team included individuals from various backgrounds. The first author is a second-generation bilingual Latina of Mexican and Spanish Basque descent. She identifies as bicultural—identifying with both Mexican and American culture. She has volunteered for youth programs starting in high school and has continued to do so. The second author identifies as a Latina with Mexican indigenous heritage (Purépecha) whose first language was Spanish. She participated in youth programs throughout high school. The third author is a Spanish-speaking Latina raised by Mexican born parents in a predominantly Polish neighborhood in a large city. She participated in youth programs as an adolescent and was familiar with the importance Latinx parents put on participating in culturally diverse programs. The fourth author holds dual nationality (United States-Brazil), has been conducting research with Latinx populations since 1995 (and, more recently, in Mexico), and has a working knowledge of Spanish. Growing up primarily outside the United States, she did not participate in youth programs while growing up. As a cultural outsider, she helped the team maintain a neutral analytic and interpretive process.

## Results

### *Preliminary Analyses*

*Program characteristics.* Because the number of parents interviewed at each program was small, in-depth consideration of program differences is beyond the scope of the current article. However, for descriptive purposes, key program characteristics are displayed in Table 1. Caregivers had adolescents participating in 10 programs, six majority Latinx (over 60% of participants) and four with fewer Latinx youth (11%-39% of participants). Programs varied in the extent to which they incorporated culture (broadly defined) in their mission or activities. Several alluded to cultural issues in their mission (e.g., expose youth to traditional arts, promote multicultural understanding) and many incorporated some form of cultural programming (e.g., activities linked to Hispanic Heritage Month or international festivals, culture-oriented arts or music, activities promoting intercultural understanding). Based on leader reports and program observations conducted as part of the larger study, seven of the programs were coded as having cultural content and three were coded as not having cultural content.

*Parents who provided cultural statements.* Of the 29 caregivers, 19 (65.5%) were coded for at least one cultural statement. These parents had children in seven of the 10 programs (see Table 2). Ten caregivers (34.5%) did not provide cultural statements; these parents had children in six programs. Four of these 10 parents only participated in the Time 1 interview before in-depth questions about culture were asked; four were asked the culture question but their responses did not fit our operational definition of cultural statements; and two provided unelaborated responses that were excluded from coding. The two groups did not differ on individual characteristics of age, birthplace (Mexico vs. another country), and language of interview, or where they lived (site of data collection). The remaining analyses focused on the 19 caregivers who provided cultural statements.

### *Parents' Views of Socialization in the Program*

Three themes reflecting parents' views of how programs supported their children's cultural socialization were identified. In this section, we discuss each theme and describe the codes within them. Although caregivers could receive multiple individual codes, they were only counted once within each overarching theme (i.e., the unit of analysis is the parent). Of the 19 caregivers who discussed cultural aspects of their child's program participation, five

**Table 1.** Characteristics of Youth Programs.

Program name	Cultural content	Sponsorship/location	Primary activities	Ethnicity of youth <sup>a</sup>
La Prensa	Yes	Urban program under a cultural arts museum.	Youth make news videos about the neighborhood.	L 73%, B 27%
The Station	Yes	Stand-alone program in a suburban youth rec. center.	Youth plan and run music concerts and other activities for youth.	L 39%, W 39%, B 11%, O 11%
Toltecat Muralists	Yes	Urban program under a cultural arts museum.	Youth develop graffiti art techniques and paint murals in city parks.	L 71%, B 25%, O 4%
Unified Youth	Yes	Stand-alone program in a small town community center.	Youth produce public service announcements and organize events to promote intercultural understanding.	All Latinx
Unity House	Yes	Urban settlement house.	Youth work on leadership activities, plan a service project, work on college readiness plans.	L 64%, B 21%, O 14%
Urban Farmers	Yes	Urban youth farming organization.	Youth grow vegetables and sell them in the farmers market.	L 11%, B 89%
Voces Unidas	Yes	after-school program in an urban charter school.	Youth engage in culture-oriented arts (e.g., creating a mosaic mural).	L 88%, O 12%
High Definition	No	Urban neighborhood settlement house.	Youth carry out multimedia projects (e.g., produce online magazines, create videos).	L 80%, B 16%, W 4%
Reel Makers	No	Urban youth center.	Youth learn video production skills through creating films.	L 37%, B 53%, W 5%, O 5%
Rising Leaders	No	Extracurricular program in a small city high school.	Organize school events and community service activities.	L 28%, W 37%, B 35%

Note. Program names are pseudonyms. Programs are listed by presence of cultural content (based on leader report and observational data), then alphabetically. L = Latinx; B = Non-Hispanic Black; W = Non-Hispanic White; O = Other.

<sup>a</sup>Based on youth report data from the larger study.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Codes Across Programs.

Program name	Cultural content	Ethnicity of youth <sup>a</sup>	Number of caregivers interviewed/providing cultural statement	Number of caregivers coded for each cultural dimension		
				Latinx cultural socialization	Multicultural socialization	Civic engagement socialization
La Prensa	Yes	L 73%, B 27%	5/2	1	1	1
The Station	Yes	L 39%, W 39%, B 11%, O 11%	1/1	1	0	0
Toltecat Muralists	Yes	L 71%, B 25%, O 4%	1 / 0	0	0	0
Unified Youth	Yes	All Latinx	4/4	4	3	4
Unity House	Yes	L 64%, B 21%, O 14%	4/3	2	2	1
Urban Farmers	Yes	L 11%, B 89%	1/1	0	0	1
Voces Unidas	Yes	L 88%, O 12%	4/3	3	2	0
High Definition	No	L 80%, B 16%, W 4%	5/5	4	4	2
Reel Makers	No	L 37%, B 53%, W 5%, O 5%	2/0	0	0	0
Rising Leaders	No	L 28%, W 37%, B 35%	2/0	0	0	0

Note. Program names are pseudonyms. Programs are listed by presence of cultural content (based on leader report and observational data), then alphabetically. L = Latinx; B = Non-Hispanic Black; W = Non-Hispanic White; O = Other.

<sup>a</sup>Based on youth report data from the larger study.

were coded for one theme; the others were coded for either two ( $n = 11$  parents) or three ( $n = 3$  parents) themes. For descriptive purposes, Table 2 displays the distribution of themes across programs.

**Latinx cultural socialization.** Fifteen caregivers (representing six of the programs) viewed the program as contributing to their adolescents' enculturation, socializing them to their Latinx heritage background. We named this theme "Latinx cultural socialization." Caregivers described that participation in the program allowed adolescents to engage in *cultural activities* or *interactions* that contributed to *cultural maintenance* or *learning* of Latinx culture.

Most of these caregivers described how the program engaged youth in cultural activities. For example, programs observed national holidays and

cultural celebrations such as *Día de La Bandera* (Flag Day), or *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead). Programs also engaged youth in arts and crafts with an explicit cultural focus, such as making *piñatas* (decorated containers that are filled with small gifts or candy and broken as part of a celebration), *ofrendas* (offerings for Day of the Dead altars), or *papel picado* (elaborate designs cut out of tissue paper). Other activities were more general but Latin American cultures were represented; for example, through the use of Mexican music during a talent show or a video project where youth focused on immigration. In addition, two caregivers described how involvement in the program provided opportunities to interact with other Latinx youth, which they felt was important given their child's lack of interaction with Latinx peers in their school and neighborhood.

Ten caregivers described cultural activities and interactions as giving youth opportunities to maintain or learn about their culture. Most explained that the program allowed youth to “conserve,” “value,” or “avoid losing” their heritage culture. When asked whether her daughter's program shared her family's values, Blanca replied affirmatively, explaining,

Because, they keep one's roots. Like culture. What you've been taught . . . like [the Station] . . . they are well aware of that. Of each one's culture. To not lose . . . like I said . . . not lose one's beliefs. What one instills in their children. I do not know . . . many things, I can't explain it to you. [*Porque, mantienen las raíces de uno. Como la cultura. Lo que uno le enseñan. . . como el Station. . . tienen bien presente eso. De la cultura de cada uno. De no perder . . . como le digo. . . no perder las creencias de uno. Lo que los uno le inculca los hijos. No se . . . muchas cosas, no le puedo explicarla.* (Mexico)]

Caregivers also emphasized that programs provided opportunities for youth to acquire new information about their heritage culture. Ana described how her daughter's involvement with High Definition's photography program taught her about her “Mexican culture . . . Where they're from, where they come from.” Although most of these parents focused on values, beliefs, and traditions when discussing cultural aspects of their child's program participation, a few described the program as a place where their children could learn and practice Spanish. For example, in response to a question about whether the program provided her daughter with opportunities that were not available in school, Areli (from Mexico) replied, “She's able to speak with people in her first language, which is Spanish. So she's speaking Spanish here [Unified Youth] with them. That's one of the things that she's getting.”

In describing how program participation supported their child's Latinx cultural socialization, some caregivers discussed how they do not have time

or the opportunity to teach or talk to their youth about their heritage culture. For example, Karina said,

I do not have the time to say “In Mexico we do like this and like this.” We don’t do it because here I don’t do it anymore. But [Voces Unidas is] a good place, because I was very surprised with the *calaverita* [little skull] when he said to me “Mommy we are going to make an *ofrenda* [offering]” and asked me what that was. Well, “It is something we do in Mexico.” It’s our culture. We do not know if it’s true or not but since we were little we were told that this is like this and like this. We believe like this, they are beliefs, it is what matters most that they continue with their culture. [Yo no tengo el tiempo para decir al “en México hacemos así y así” no lo hacemos porque aquí tampoco ya no lo hago. Pero ahí es un buen lugar, porque a mí me sorprendió mucho con la calaverita cuando me dijo “mami vamos hacer una ofrenda “y el me pregunto que eso. Bueno “es algo que nosotros hacemos en México” Que es cultura de nosotros. No sabemos si es verdad o no pero desde chiquito nos dijeron esto es así y así. Así creemos son creencia, es lo que más importante que ellos sigan con su cultura.]

This mother, like others, suggests that some youth are not explicitly taught about aspects of their heritage culture at home. And because most schools did not afford Latinx youth opportunities to become vested in their culture, parents saw the program as filling a void.

**Multicultural socialization.** Twelve parents (representing five programs) described the program as contributing to the development of multicultural skills in their child through *exposure to other cultural groups, ideas, and places* and *intercultural interactions*. Parents explained that these activities and interactions occurred with various cultural and ethnic groups.

Exposure occurred through a range of activities inside and outside the program. Caregivers described programs as a context where youth could learn about “different cultures” through contact with people from different backgrounds (nationalities, races [*razas*], neighborhoods, families), thereby gaining a “different perspective” on the world. This was verbalized by Luciana, a Mexican mother whose son was in the High Definition program:

I think getting just outside the house . . . the skills that he’s . . . you know learning . . . socializing, meeting new people, different types of people you know from different cultures and we might not share the same view but he’s being exposed to all of that.

Programs also exposed youth to novel locations (e.g., neighborhoods) and settings (e.g., churches). A few caregivers described how field trips afforded

Latinx youth the chance to learn about “different parts of the city” and cultural places. Some emphasized that without the program, youth would not be exposed to different ways of life and locations because their schools did not have the same diversity as the youth program. These caregivers felt that as a result of exposure to different groups, ideas, and places, their adolescents learned to be more open-minded, share their viewpoints, and, most of all, respect people from different backgrounds. Two parents described the value of intercultural interactions in teaching youth to work with diverse groups of peers using the Spanish word “convivir,” which translates literally as “living together” but has the meaning of coexisting in harmony. This concept is illustrated in Juanita’s description of her daughter’s involvement with Voces Unidas:

They also learn to *convivir* with different races. To coexist . . . what are their customs . . . I believe, right? Because . . . she has different friends. Latin Americans, darker skinned individuals [Blacks]. [*Sí porque aprenden también a convivir con diferentes razas. A convivir . . . cuáles son sus costumbres . . . yo creo, no? Porque sí. Ella tiene diferentes amistades. Latino Americanos, morenos . . . (Mexico)*]

Caregivers emphasized the importance of youth engaging with different groups and ideas for several reasons. First, most felt that this type of exposure was a way of gaining skills to function in a multicultural society that would be valuable in the future. Two caregivers mentioned that their children could practice English in the program. Second, several parents noted the value of their child making sense of exposure to difference for their personal development. Juanita also stated,

It is important for her because apart from relating to different cultures, because there are different cultures in the group, I think they are helping her to be a little more, oh I don’t know how you say, more firm in her decisions . . . That she have more confidence in herself to get involved. [*Es importante para ella porque aparte de que se relaciona con diferentes culturas, porque hay diferentes culturas en el grupo, creo que le están ayudando a que ella sea un poco más, ay no sé como se dice, mas firme en sus decisiones mas u-huh. Que tenga más confianza en si misma para poderse envolverse. (Mexico)*]

**Civic socialization.** In discussing cultural aspects of their child’s program participation, nine caregivers (representing five programs) described the program as giving youth the opportunity to *help cultural communities* and *learn about social issues*. We felt this theme reflected “civic socialization,” which appeared to be culturally motivated. Several parents gave examples of program activities

designed to inform, assist, or serve others (e.g., college information workshops, fund-raisers, community service). Most emphasized the pride they felt seeing their child help others within their local community, as captured in Pablo's words:

What I really like is that they [Unified Youth] help the community. Not all the towns have that privilege, but here we do have that help in the community. [*Realmente lo que me gusta es que le ayudan a la comunidad. No en todos los pueblos tienen ese privilegio, pero aquí si tenemos esa ayuda que hay así a la comunidad.* (Mexico)]

Ariana noted that her son "plans to continue working there [Urban Farmers] like, help his community, he likes it, it's a good job" [*Piensa seguir trabajando allí como, ayuda a su comunidad, a él le gusta, es buen trabajo* (Mexico)]. Although in most cases youth were described as helping other Latinxs, this was not always the case. For example, Jorge (from Guatemala) emphasized that his daughter's work in Unified Youth "will help not one group, not one ethnic group, but multiple cultures at the same time."

Caregivers explained that through these activities youth became aware of, recognized, or understood issues confronted by individuals from various backgrounds. As Paula noted, participating at La Prensa helped her son:

Know that outside of the house and outside the family there are other people who have problems . . . Or that they have problems or need a kind of help and do not know to whom or where to go [*Saber pues que fuera de la casa y fuera de la familia pues hay otras personas que tiene problemas . . . O que tienen problemas o que necesitan un tipo de ayuda y no saben con quien o a donde dirigirse.* (Mexico)]

Similarly, Violeta described how being involved with Unity House taught her daughter about "the difficulties that [other youth] had experienced in their lives" (Mexico). Most of the examples provided by caregivers related to challenges experienced by Latinxs. For example, Areli stated that "[daughter] has seen how difficult it's, the language to go to a clinic, and not having anybody to translate for that person" (Mexico). Delia described how her daughter became aware of challenges undocumented youth confront:

She has learned a lot. And like she says, "Now I understand mommy people who cannot go to school because they do not have a social security, they cannot help, they cannot afford to pay for their education and that . . . is what she has learned most from [High Definition] . . . Now that she has seen it, that she knows that it is really happening here, now she is more aware of that. [*Bueno a*



*todo eso ella ha aprendido mucho. Y como dice 'ahora si entiendo mami a las personas que no pueden ir a la escuela porque no tienen un seguro social, que no pueden ayudar; que no pueden económicamente para pagar sus estudios y en eso . . . lo que ella ha aprendió mas de aquí . . . Pero ahora que la lo vio, que sabe que realmente esta pasando aquí, ahorita ya esta más consciente de eso. (Mexico)]*

## Discussion

This exploratory study revealed that many immigrant Latinx (primarily Mexican) parents saw youth programs as contributing to their adolescents' cultural socialization. The prominence of cultural themes is notable because although most of the project-based programs in our study incorporated some form of cultural content, programs were not aimed primarily at inculcating cultural values or empowering youth to address issues of racism and injustice. Findings extend recent examinations of cultural dimensions of organized youth programs (e.g., Larson & Ngo, 2017; Williams & Deutsch, 2016) and have implications for research, practice, and policy.

### *Adolescent Socialization*

Immigrant Latinx caregivers described three ways that program participation fostered their children's cultural socialization. First, caregivers described program participation as contributing to Latinx cultural socialization. This complements prior research where Latina mothers described adolescents' ethnic socialization as occurring primarily in the home but also identified nonfamilial contexts as sites of cultural socialization (Umaña-Taylor & Bámaca, 2004). Looking at the specific context of organized youth programs, we found that parents saw programs as promoting enculturation through activities and interactions that foster cultural maintenance and learning. Previous studies have reported that immigrant parents actively strive to prevent children from becoming detached from their heritage culture (e.g., Perreira et al., 2006). Some of our respondents said programs provided opportunities for enculturation that were not available in the home because parents lacked time or knowledge to teach their children specific cultural traditions. In this way, youth programs may contribute to children's enculturation, fostering attachments to the family's heritage culture and traditions.

Second, caregivers described program participation as contributing to multicultural socialization. As a result of exposure to different groups, ideas, and places, adolescents developed personal competencies (e.g., open-mindedness,

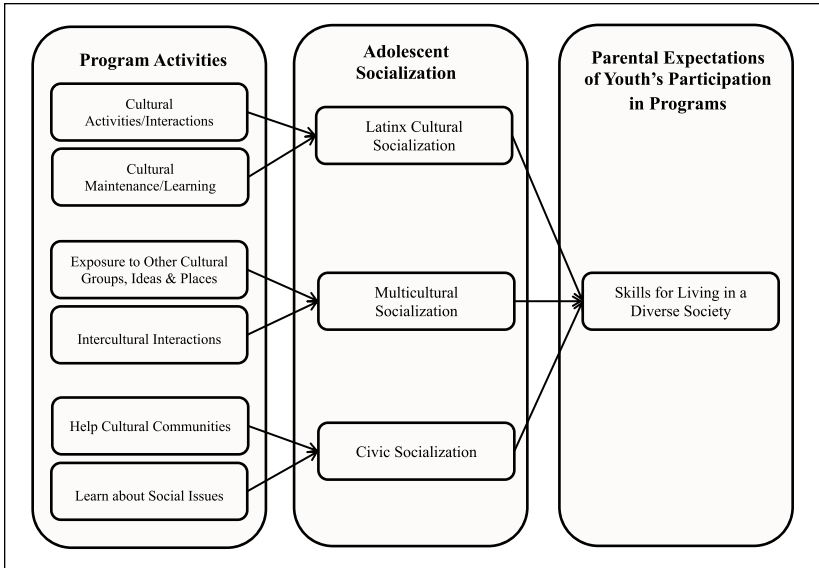
respect for diverse viewpoints) and learned skills to function in U.S. society. Findings are consistent with research indicating that young people see after-school programs as places to learn about themselves and others (e.g., Huesca, 2014; Ngo, 2017). Other studies have reported that immigrant Latinx parents recognize the need for their children to become socialized in U.S. American culture in order to succeed in the United States (e.g., Perreira et al., 2006). Our findings suggest that parents may view youth programs as a potential vehicle of the acculturation process.

Third, program participation was seen as contributing to civic socialization. Unlike the first two types of socialization, which correspond to the dimensions of enculturation and acculturation and reflect psychological dimensions of cultural adaptation (Berry, 2007; Gonzales et al., 2009), civic socialization reflects adolescents' relationship with the broader (external) world that may be rooted in cultural values (Flanagan, Lin, Luisi-Mills, Sambo, & Hu, 2015; Jensen, 2008). Immigrant Latinx parents want their children to be socially aware and contribute to their community (e.g., Parra-Cardona, Bullock, Imig, Villarruel, & Gold, 2006). Caregivers in our study emphasized that programs allowed adolescents to learn about and help people inside and outside their cultural communities. This is consistent with research on program effectiveness, which finds that youth programs can foster socio-emotional skills like empathy and perspective taking (C. Smith, McGovern, Peck, Larson, & Roy, 2016).

### *Theoretical Integration: Skills for Living in a Diverse Society*

These three forms of socialization collectively provide youth with skills for living in a diverse society (see Figure 1). Parents' views on cultural and civic socialization as a multifaceted process are consistent with the growing consensus that successful adaptation for children of immigrants involves maintaining connections with the family's heritage culture while developing skills to navigate the larger society (e.g., Gonzales et al., 2009). Because of this, the different forms of socialization are likely to be intertwined in important ways. Our finding that most caregivers who discussed cultural aspects of their child's program participation mentioned more than one theme is consistent with this notion, although our data did not permit a full examination of the overlap between themes. However, Jensen (2008) reported that some immigrants described civic engagement (e.g., volunteering or community work) as stemming from cultural motives, including having a cultural or immigrant identity.

As noted earlier, youth programs have been described as spaces where youth can explore and negotiate cultural identities (Ngo, 2017) and ethnic



**Figure 1.** Thematic map representing caregivers' views of cultural socialization in organized youth activities.

socialization within programs is linked to youth identities (Riggs et al., 2010). Navigating multiple cultures is not just a set of skills that allow individuals to function in different contexts but can also be considered a way of being. This form of cultural adaptation may go beyond traditional notions of biculturalism and result in a hybrid or integrated identity that incorporates multiple dimensions of the heritage and mainstream culture (Huynh, Nguyen, & Benet-Martínez, 2011). Research on the related topic of youth organizing highlights that activism and engagement contribute to changes in individual identity (e.g., Corrigan-Brown, 2006) and can affect communities and society more broadly (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012). Future research can build on our findings by considering multiple forms of cultural and civic socialization in the context of youth programs and examining how youth respond to cultural socialization in this context.

### *Implications and Limitations*

With demographic changes in the United States, those who work with Latinx youth will increasingly come into contact with immigrant families, and cultural issues will likely be relevant. Therefore, findings have implications for

program developers and staff. The importance of increasing Latinx adolescents' participation in organized activities has been noted (e.g., Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012). One important step in this endeavor is understanding parents' perspectives about youth programs, including whether programs are consistent with parents' goals related to cultural socialization. The current study extends prior work, which has focused primarily on youth perspectives (e.g., Huesca, 2014; Riggs et al., 2010), by elucidating immigrant Latinx parents' views of the role of culture in organized youth programs.

Findings suggest that programs and staff should not ignore cultural aspects, regardless of program focus (Larson & Ngo, 2017). As noted earlier, none of the leadership, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), or arts programs we studied had a primary focus on culture, yet many caregivers identified aspects of cultural socialization within these programs. This complements prior work indicating that issues of culture and race arise spontaneously in the course of program activities or as a result of events outside the program (Gutiérrez, Larson, Raffaelli, Fernandez, & Guzman, 2017). Studies of Mexican-origin families have revealed the salience of cultural aspects, with some adolescents reporting being the targets of ethnic/racial microaggressions (e.g., ethnic name-calling and teasing) in the context of school-based sports activities (Lin et al., 2016) and others emphasizing the importance of respect for both cultural similarities and differences (Ettetal et al., 2016). The current findings indicate that parents also see culture is a salient dimension of their adolescents' program experiences, bolstering the argument that to be effective, programs must be culturally responsive (Simpkins et al., 2017).

At the same time, the findings suggest that programs do not have to be "about" or exclusively focused on culture to support cultural socialization or appeal to Latinx parents. Many of the caregivers saw programs as offering opportunities for youth to learn about their own and others' cultural histories and practices (see also Lin et al., 2018). Moreover, language (e.g., use of Spanish) did not emerge as a major issue for parents; instead, other aspects of cultural socialization (beliefs, values, traditions) were more salient. Perhaps if Latinx youth do not have the opportunity to speak Spanish in the program, they may still have the opportunity to engage with youth from a culture other than their own which is considered beneficial by their parents. It may be that programs do not have to make sweeping changes (such as offering Spanish language programming) to increase their relevance for Latinx families. Instead, programs can provide focused—but meaningful—opportunities for youth to learn about multiple cultures, including their own (see Simpkins et al., 2017, for an in-depth discussion).

Study limitations offer opportunities for future research. First, given our interest in parental perspectives, we chose to focus only on caregivers; future research should consider the perspectives of program staff and adolescents. Second, the sample was relatively small and most parents were from Mexico; therefore, we could not explore variations due to parent characteristics (e.g., country of birth, gender). Moreover, by design, we focused only on immigrants; findings would likely differ for nonimmigrants. Future research can build on this initial examination by developing a set of focused questions tapping into the three dimensions we identified and including both immigrant and U.S.-born Latinx parents from multiple national backgrounds. Finally, the larger study from which we drew our sample was not designed to examine program effects; future research is needed to examine whether parental perspectives differ due to program focus or membership.

## **Conclusion**

The cultural adaptation process may pose challenges for immigrant families because of differences in parents' and children's experiences, including differential levels or rates of acculturation and enculturation (Gonzales et al., 2009; Updegraff & Umaña-Taylor, 2010). It has been proposed that youth programs operate as "transitional" or "alternate" spaces that provide unique developmental opportunities for youth (Larson & Ngo, 2017). Our findings indicate that programs represent potential spaces for cultural socialization of Latinx youth from immigrant families, allowing youth to bridge the heritage and mainstream cultures.

## **Authors' Note**

Vanessa Gutiérrez is now at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

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## Author Biographies

**Maria I. Iturbide** is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Humboldt State University. Her program of research focuses on understanding factors associated with adolescent well-being. Specifically, her research has centered on ethnic minority parenting, ethnic identity, acculturation, and their links to adolescent positive adaption and risk behavior.

**Vanessa Gutiérrez** is a Research Analyst II at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research. She has an MA in social science from the University of Chicago. Her research interests include race, ethnicity, social inequality, and communities of color.

**Lorraine Munoz** is a doctoral student in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. She has an MS in human development and family studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. Her research interests focus on Latino family dynamics, immigration, ethnic identity formation, positive youth development, youth programs, and adolescent-parent interaction.

**Marcela Raffaelli** is a professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. Her research focuses on sociocultural influences on adolescent development; current projects examine immigrant youth and family adaptation, the impact of poverty and homelessness on development, and the role of families and social institutions in promoting positive outcomes for youth.