

Putting Research to Work for Families



Focus:
Civilian

Ethnic Cultural Features in Organized Activities: Relations to Latino Adolescents' Activity Experiences and Parental Involvement

Liu, Y., Simpkins, S. D., & Lin, A. R. (2018). Ethnic cultural features in organized activities: Relations to Latino adolescents' activity experiences and parental involvement. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence Activities*. doi:10.1007/s10964-018-0839-0

SUMMARY: High-quality youth development programs are commonly seen as beneficial to youth, and youth can participate in programs that either attempt to be ethnically neutral or encompass and embrace certain aspects of their ethnicity. This study examined whether ethnic components of youth development programs influenced the way Latino youth felt about those activities and the extent to which their parents became involved. Results indicate that cultural factors are a significant consideration even for activities that do not revolve around culture.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Latino youth and their parents perceived lower than average ethnic cultural content in their activities ($M = 1.79$ and 1.96 respectively, range 0-4) but higher than average cultural respect ($M = 2.89$ and 2.78 respectively, range 0-4).
- Youths' perception of cultural respect was positively associated with psychological engagement and negatively associated with perceived discrimination by leaders and peers; parents' perceptions of cultural respect and content were positively associated with instrumental support and connection with the activity.
- Latino parents perceived more cultural content in activities compared to Latino youth. Both parents and youth perceived more cultural content when Latino youth were the majority of the youth participants in an activity.
- Youths' perception of more cultural content in their activities was associated with more negative feelings toward the activity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS:

- When working with Latino youth in youth programs, develop cultural competence to be able to consistently show cultural respect
- Emphasize cultural respect in order to facilitate parental involvement

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Educate youth program staff about Latino culture if they are part of the population served
- Provide information to families ahead of time about cultural content and respect involved in the program

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS:

- Continue to support programs that attempt to engage immigrant parents
- Recommend training professionals who work with Latino youth to understand when cultural content is positively received and when it may not be

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METHODS

- Interviews were conducted with youth and parents separately in the language of their choice; ninety-eight percent of youth and 45% of parents chose to be interviewed in English.
- Each participant, youth and parent, were asked to rate their experiences regarding one youth activity, such as soccer or theater, on a scale 0 (never/strongly disagree) to 4 (always/strongly agree).
- Topics addressed included perceptions of ethnic cultural features, cultural content, and cultural respect; youths' feelings about the activity, psychological engagement, and perceived discrimination; parental involvement in activities; and ethnic composition of other participants and staff in the activity.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 154 Latino youth (mean age 12.36 years, 59% female) recruited from four middle schools in an urban area for a larger study about youth development activities. Their parents also participated, though the number of parent participants was not provided.
- Most students (84%) were born in the U.S. while most of their parents (64%) were born outside the U.S., mainly in Mexico (76% of foreign-born parents).
- Average parent education was some high school, and family income averaged \$25,000-\$30,000.
- The participants in this study were only those Latino youth who participated in activities, and differed from non-participants by having higher-income families and were more likely to be female.

LIMITATIONS

- The study used a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to determine causality.
- The study only included Latino participants, therefore results may not generalize to other racial/ethnic groups.
- The participants may have tried to answer in the way they thought the researchers wanted due to social desirability, which limits validity.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Repeat the study with a longitudinal design in order to understand whether positive experiences lead to perceptions of respect and cultural content
- Consider how cultural content and respect lead to other outcomes for youth in programming, such as engagement in additional programming, social emotional learning outcomes, or academic outcomes
- Examine whether negative feelings with increased cultural content is related to youths' naivete

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