

Familismo: How Eight Categories of Needs Are Met in Hispanic American Families Within the Context of Familism

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to assess how eight categories of needs are met in Hispanic American families within the context of familism. Derived from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the categories examined include the need to: (1) feel safe; (2) belong; (3) develop a positive self-concept; (4) experience close real-love relationships; (5) receive respect; (6) feel worthwhile; (7) feel competent; and, (8) experience growth. Study participants completed an online open-ended questionnaire that focused on how needs were met in families within the Hispanic culture. A conceptual model of how these needs can be met in Hispanic American families within a context of familism is proposed. Implications for how educators and practitioners can help Hispanic Americans meet these eight categories of needs and thus strengthen families are discussed.

Keywords: Hispanic American families, familism, eight needs, Hispanic culture, Latino.

INTRODUCTION

The Hispanic American population is currently the largest minority group residing in the United States (U.S.), making up 18% of the total U.S. population. This group made up more than half of the of the U.S. population growth between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) and it continues to be the fastest growing minority group in the nation with expectations of Hispanics by the year 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2019). With this growth, the necessity to better understand the dynamics of Hispanic Americans and their families arises, such as how children are socialized and how physiological and social-emotional needs are met within various cultural contexts. Current research is limited regarding how Hispanic Americans seek to meet these proximal individual needs. Familism is the traditional cultural context in which needs are addressed, a context that places more emphasis on the importance of the family as a whole rather than on the individual (Worthington, Soth-McNett, & Moreno, 2007).

Culture can provide a strong foundation for studying diverse populations (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Turner, 1993; Murray, Smith, & Hill, 2001). In the current study, *culture* is defined as the common beliefs, characteristics, and behaviors of a particular social, ethnic, or age group including, but not limited to, language, values, heritage, rituals, and traditions. Because typical cultural frameworks are based upon European American families, assessing how needs are successfully met specifically within Hispanic American families is important in order to construct a strong culturally competent foundation that focuses on the values and needs specific to Hispanic culture (Allen, 1978; Negy & Snyder, 1997; Oropresa, 1996; Taylor, 2002). *Values* are defined by Bubolz and Sontag (1993) as, "human conceptions of what is good, right, and worthwhile," while *needs* are defined as the requirements individuals and families have "that must be met at some level if they are to survive and engage in adaptive behavior" (p. 435).

Hispanic American families are generally familistic; they place strong emphasis on the family and the importance of meeting the needs of the family as a group over meeting individual needs of family members. Valuing family tends to lead to high levels of commitment to the family, and it is this commitment that strongly influences how Hispanic American families are formed and maintained (National Research Council, 2006). Specifically, healthy Hispanic American families are maintained through frequent interaction with extended family members and sustaining open lines of communication. Communication hierarchies are clearly established among family members with elders being treated with the utmost respect. Respect, or *respeto*, is commonplace within Hispanic American families and constitutes a fundamental component of how healthy relationship patterns are established and enacted (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006; Updegraff, McHale, Whiteman, Thayer, & Delgado, 2005).

IDENTIFYING NEEDS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURE AND FAMILISM

Being aware of the relationship between familism and what healthy relationships may look like in Hispanic American families is important in assessing how both group and individual needs can be met. Individuals who know how to meet specific needs successfully are more likely to engage in functional relationship patterns that lead to increased happiness and well-being both intrapersonally and interpersonally (Harris, Johnson, & Olsen, 2010; Harris, Skogrand, & Hatch, 2008) which, in turn, impacts family and group dynamics. Coplen and MacArthur (1982) have identified eight categories of needs that must be met regularly to achieve functional and happy relationships: (1) the need to feel safe (e.g., food and shelter secure and free from danger); (2) the

need to develop a positive self-concept (e.g., how an individual views himself or herself); (3) the need to feel worthwhile by developing a healthy self-esteem (e.g., feeling valuable); (4) the need to receive respect from others and ourselves (e.g., behaving in accordance with personal and family value and belief systems); (5) the need to experience close real-love relationships (e.g., feeling lovable as a result of relationships that are kind, unselfish, and giving); (6) the need to belong (e.g., being a part of something important); (7) the need to feel competent (e.g., capable); and (8) and the need to experience growth (e.g., opportunities to learn new knowledge and skills).

The eight categories of needs examined in the current study were derived from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Coplen & MacArthur, 1982; Maslow, 1968). In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, basic needs (physiological and safety needs) must first be fulfilled in order for higher order needs (e.g., esteem and self-actualization) to be fulfilled. Correspondingly, we assume with the eight categories of needs evaluated in this study, that lower order needs, such as the need to feel safe and secure, must first be met before individuals can meet higher order needs, such as feeling competent or experiencing growth. While all humans experience needs in these eight categories, the specific ways in which these needs are addressed and met may be qualitatively different from cultural group to group, especially among familistic cultural groups who often value the meeting of group needs over individual needs. Within group variability in cultural values and family rituals and traditions may also influence need fulfillment among individuals and families across cultural groups (Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1982; Taylor, 2002).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Although strengths among cross-cultural families have been previously studied (Baskin, et al., 2010; DeFrain & Asay, 2007; Gilbert, 1976), there is a dearth of information associated with how specific needs are met, or even measured, in families, especially among Hispanic American families. The purpose of the current study was to explore how eight categories of needs are met in Hispanic American families within the context of familism, articulated qualitatively by Hispanic Americans themselves, and how the meeting of these needs or the lack of meeting these needs strengthens or weakens individuals and families.

Familism is considered a subset of collectivism and includes placing importance on the family as opposed to the individual, strong connections with wide ranges of kinship networks, and participating in specific cultural traditions. Hispanic Americans, as compared to European Americans, tend to place more value on family and emphasize the key role that family plays in their life (Almeida, Molnar, Kawachi, Subramanian, 2009; Fuligini, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). Because familism plays a major role within Hispanic American family dynamics, it wields a significant impact on how individuals meet or do not meet their individual and group needs. For example, the need to feel safe and secure in Hispanic American families can be met through experiencing a safe physical environment as well as a supportive emotional environment. Hispanic American parents often create a safe and secure environment for their children through the use of positive interactions (e.g., supporting them, being emotionally available, etc.) (Harris, et al., 2010; Harris, 2012a; Taylor, 2002). The need to belong is associated with feeling a sense of connectedness to one's culture which stems from the concept of familism. A close connection to family members helps to create an ethnic identity among individuals (Umana-Taylor et al., 2006). Thus, familism can serve as a protective buffer against factors that may increase the likelihood of feeling disconnected from others (Sabogal, et al., 1987; Taylor, 2002).

Use of theory to help explain specific phenomenon can help fill gaps in the literature and facilitate better understanding of family dynamics (Klein & White, 1996; Harris, 2012b). Within the context of the current study, the symbolic interaction framework suggests that humans make meaning and define meaning through symbols such as language, context and culture. Ecological theory focuses on the multiple layers of the environment (e.g., family, community, cultural) that interact with one another and the influence these environments have on individuals' adaptive and maladaptive abilities to fulfill their own and their family's needs. Because of the immediate and repeated influence of the family as a microsystem, it represents the primary socializer of current and intergenerational thought, emotion, and behavior, and thus how strategies for meeting individual and collective needs are perceived, felt, and enacted (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

In the current research study we sought to expand on the dearth of knowledge in these areas through exploring the following research question: "How do Hispanic American individuals seek to meet eight categories of needs within the context of familism?" No hypotheses were generated due to the exploratory nature of this study. No study to date has specifically targeted how meeting needs are addressed in Hispanic American families. Thus, the information explored provides a unique contribution to the body of knowledge in this area.

METHOD

A research model was implemented that encouraged individual participants to reflect on the influence of culture in meeting their needs while they were growing up. Specifically, the current qualitative study was conducted to allow for exploration of how individual needs were met developmentally within the context of familism in Hispanic American culture. Twenty-five individuals from a major southeastern university participated in the current IRB-approved study. All participants involved in the study were of Hispanic American ethnicity (see Table 1). The participants ranged from 19 to 22 years old. All participants were single except one, who reported being married. The income level of the participants ranged from less than \$20,000 to \$99,999, with the majority (n=23) earning less than \$20,000 a year. Educational levels ranged from high school graduate to higher than a bachelor's degree. No participants reported having any children.

Table 1. Demographics

Demographic Variables	Hispanic American Participants (n=25)	
	N	%
Gender		
Male	5	20
Female	20	80
Missing Data	0	0
Age* (Average age 20.47)		
14-19	3	12
20-29	20	80
30-49	0	0
50-59	0	0
60-69	0	0
70 and above	0	0
Missing Data	2	7.6
Marital Status		
Single	24	96
Married	1	4
Separated	0	0
Divorced	0	0
Remarried	0	0
Widowed	0	0
Missing Data	0	0
Income level*		
< \$20,000	22	88
\$20,000-39,999	2	8
\$40,000-\$59,999	0	0
\$60,000-\$79,999	0	0
\$80,000-\$99,999	1	4
\$100,000-\$149,999	0	0
>\$150,000	0	0
Missing Data	0	0
Education Level		
Some high school	0	0
High school graduate	1	4
Some College	0	0
Associate's Degree	11	44
Bachelor's degree	11	44
Higher than a bachelor's degree	2	8
Missing Data	0	0

Purposive and homogeneous sampling techniques were implemented to identify potential Hispanic American participants for the study. Individuals of Hispanic ethnicity were voluntarily recruited. All twenty-five participants completed the IRB-approved survey instrument. Following a pilot test, an open-ended 24-item questionnaire was developed by the authors to explore and assess eight categories of needs individuals can address in their attempts to achieve health and well-being in their relationships (Coplen & MacArthur, 1982; Harris et al., 2010, Maslow, 1968). Examples of the open-ended questions used in the current study include: "How would you describe what creating a sense of 'belonging' in your culture (i.e., being an important member) looks like?"; "Thinking about your cultural group, what are some things that made you feel like you were an important part of your family growing up?"

The questionnaire was developed and administered online via *Qualtrics*, an online survey software. An IRB-approved letter of information was read by the participants prior to completing of the survey outlining the purpose and scope of the study. The two primary authors of the current study analyzed the data using a similar method purposed by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) to systematically sort, arrange, code, and then look for patterns and themes. The two primary authors independently read through all of the participants' responses, consisting of 81 pages of single-spaced typed responses. Responses were then sorted and arranged into separate coding frameworks using content analysis for how each of the eight needs were discussed by participants. Multiple themes for how the eight categories of needs were met or went unmet were identified from the initial coding frameworks. Statements referring to feeling safe, for example, were coded as "1A". Statements discussing how feeling safe was achieved in their household were coded as "1B". Statements referring to feeling unsafe were coded as "1C". This coding pattern was used for all eight categories of needs (2A, 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B, 3C, etc.).

The two primary authors then met and discussed the identified themes. Each theme was divided and coded into subthemes where appropriate (e.g., 1A1, 1A2, 1A3, etc.). Divergent thematic opinions between the authors were few during this process because of the exact, specific, and directed nature of the survey questions asked. The additional authors were used to provide reliability and to validate that the identified themes were consistent and clearly articulated across observations. Agreed-upon themes and subthemes are discussed below.

RESULTS

Participants in this study identified multiple facets for the important role familism plays in influencing how eight categories of needs were either met or how they went unmet during their developmental childhood years.

Meeting the Need to Feel Safe and Secure

When participants were asked regarding how the need to feel safe and secure was met in their family growing up, coded response categories included seven broad themes: financial stability, physical safety, parental availability, family interactions, family cohesiveness, open communication, and a supportive environment. Financial stability was mentioned fifty-four times by nineteen participants in this study. Financial stability or the importance of finances in feeling safe and secure was directly mentioned by six participants. The other thirteen participants mentioned financial stability indirectly in association with feeling safe and secure through having "a stable career", "food on the table", or income available to pay "all the bills."

Eight participants mentioned the importance of physical safety in regard to feeling safe and secure growing up. When they talked about physical safety they made references to having a “roof over head,” having a “clean house,” or living in a “safe neighborhood.” In addition to living in a safe neighborhood, being safe in the household (no abuse), and having a strict curfew also contributed to feeling safe and secure.

Parents being available to talk was mentioned sixteen times by eight participants as important to feeling safe and secure. One participant captured the importance of this notion when she said, “parents are [must be] in place to help children in terms of life, school and anything else in between.”

Interaction with family members was mentioned thirty times by nineteen participants as important to feeling safe and secure. Five of the participants specifically mentioned spending time with family during family gatherings as important for creating a safe and secure environment. Another four participants emphasized the importance of sharing “every detail of their lives” with their family members.

Fifteen participants mentioned cohesiveness, whether directly or indirectly, as important to feeling safe and secure. Creating this cohesiveness stemmed from the family’s ability to include extended family members, validate other’s opinions, and experiencing physical closeness (i.e. relatives living close by to help). Several participants also specifically highlighted how contributing to the family unit played a crucial role in maintaining family cohesiveness, as was articulated in this statement: “. . . everyone works together to maintain the home.” Having this sense of purpose and knowing they were an important part of the family not only helped to create security but also fostered open communication among family members.

Ten participants mentioned having open communication with other family members as another important factor in meeting the need to feel safe and secure. The idea that “everyone should be comfortable and safe when sharing ideas, concerns, etc.” created emotional security among family members. Not being judged, directly articulated by five participants, and always having someone to talk to, identified by three participants, also contributed to this feeling of emotional security within the family.

Having a supportive environment was mentioned thirty times by sixteen participants as a means to feeling safe and secure. The most frequent way that participants discussed feeling support was through a warm and welcoming environment that allowed them to feel love and affection among all family members. Affection was specifically described in terms of sharing positive words of affirmation and encouragement. Support was also experienced through the interdependence of helping each other during hard times.

When the factors identified above were not present, the need to feel safe and secure was not successfully met. More specifically, in instances where parents were perceived as unavailable, apparent abuse was present, parental fighting occurred, emotional and financial insecurities were expressed or felt, or when expectations set by parents were perceived as unfair and too high, participants reported feeling both unsafe and insecure.

Meeting the Need to Belong

Meeting the need to belong, according to study participants, was accomplished through six broad themes: achieving academic success, receiving praise for accomplishments, contributing to the family, participating in cultural traditions, knowing or understanding one's place in the family, and experiencing open communication among family members. Seven participants mentioned the value that was placed on education within their family and how achieving academic success contributed to their perceptions of belonging. One participant articulated this notion in this way: "... another thing that Hispanics value a lot is education and work ethic (if you don't do either you will be considered a parasite for feeding off of your parent's income)." The value placed on education by Hispanic American families was discussed by participants as a foundational motivation to overcome the institutional and cultural challenges they faced as minorities.

Five participants mentioned the importance of parents and family members praising them about their accomplishments. Two participants specifically mentioned that being appreciated for their accomplishments helped them to feel like they belonged. Another two participants expressed that parents bragging to other family members about their children's skills and abilities also fostered feelings of belongingness.

Fifteen participants responded regarding how contributing to the family unit helped them meet the need to feel like they belong. The primary way that they talked about contributing to the family unit was through caring for other family members, especially elders. Being able to "bring something to the table," help around the house, and have high productivity in accomplishing household chores were also perceived as important ways to contribute to the family. Another important aspect of contributing to the family was identified through participating at family events, such as through promoting cultural traditions, being included in decision making, and having opinions validated.

Three participants specifically mentioned that sharing in cultural traditions helped to create a sense of belonging. One individual articulated this theme as follows: "Taking part in the festivities and traditions of that event [Carnaval], although I was not in Colombia, made me feel like I was still part of my culture as I celebrated alongside my family and friends." Feeling like they belonged through cultural traditions included dancing to Hispanic cultural music, drinking Aguardiente, attending weddings, and participating in *quinceañera*, the celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday.

Six participants in this study stated that being aware of their place in the family helped them to meet the need of belonging. They expressed that they knew their place in their family unit by knowing the socialized rules and regulations, especially those enforced by older adults, which included following strict gender roles. Interestingly, several participants articulated that the need to belong was met as they acted as cultural bridges or communicators for their parents (e.g., English translators). One individual explained, for example, "After I learned English, I was able to become a cultural bridge, so to speak, for my parents. I helped them with paying bills, doctor appointments, and anything else that was difficult for them because they did not speak English."

The impact that communication has on experiencing a sense of belonging was mentioned by fourteen of the twenty-five participants. Open communication fostered meeting the need to belong by having regular contact with family members (mentioned twelve times). Seven participants stated that showing respect also played a role in maintaining open communication, indicating that

the eight needs are interconnected with each other, as one participant explained, “My father has always treated me with respect and shown me through his actions that any man who truly cares about me should treat me the same, if not better.”

When parents placed too high of expectations on participants in this study, increased feelings of insecurity about meeting these high expectations, especially academically, often made them feel like they were not an important part of their family. Three participants also stated that a lack of communication, such as being too involved with technology at social family gatherings or being physically far away from relatives with limited contact, prevented the need to belong to be met. Additionally, three participants mentioned that not having a personal “say” or opinion in the family hindered meeting the need to belong. Feelings of being treated like a child also made them feel disconnected from their families. Two participants also stated that fear of failure and actually failing at something were problems that made them feel they were not an important part of their family. For example, one participant stated how quitting a team sport made him feel unimportant “because I felt I was *directly* hurting my dad.” While this example could be applied to multiple family types, it is the intensity of this emotion, and by extension the feeling that he was letting down not only his dad but his entire family, that helps us better understand the powerful need to belong within the context of familism.

Meeting the Need to Develop a Positive Picture of Ourselves

According to participants in this study, the need to develop a positive picture of ourselves is met in Hispanic American families through at least five broad themes: family interactions, peer interactions, positive verbal affirmations, being successful, and group membership. Fourteen participants stated that having positive interactions with their parents contributed to developing a positive picture of themselves. Half of these participants said that having parents as a source of support and encouragement allowed them to positively develop their self-concept, as this participant articulated, “When I [could] see myself conforming to roles of a mother or adult, I felt that I was not only developing within myself but also being a contributor to my family.” This statement highlights the important role that interactions and socialization play in helping Hispanic Americans to shape perceptions of themselves within a familistic context.

Four participants mentioned that conversing and interacting with peers who were outside of their culture helped to form their self-concept. This was done through making social comparisons as well as learning about new cultural concepts such as individualism. Participants strongly indicated, however, that family ultimately had a greater influence than peers on the development of self-concept among Hispanic Americans.

Seven participants stated that receiving positive verbal affirmations from family helped them to create a positive image of themselves. The messages communicated by their parents elicited perceptions of being capable and feelings of being loved. Socialized messages sent by their parents included that participants were intelligent and beautiful which fostered positive self-thoughts.

Five participants said they developed a positive image of themselves through experiencing success. Success was defined by four individuals in academic terms, by two individuals in their ability to provide for their family, by three individuals in knowing how to cook, and by one individual in how

aesthetically pleasing her appearance was. These types of accomplishments fostered positive perceptions not only within the individual, but also within the entire family group.

Three participants mentioned the importance of how being part of the family group helped them develop a positive self-concept. One individual said, "We thrive on the accomplishments of our family and work towards goals that will benefit us all." This collectivist, familistic perspective allowed participants in this study to build a positive picture of themselves through the broader concept of their family group identity.

Eight participants said that experiencing negative confrontation or interaction with a family member greatly impacted their ability to build a positive picture of themselves. This negative interaction was described in terms of parents not being available, feeling unloved, being spoken to in a sarcastic tone, and learning negative self-talk from their parents. Negative peer interactions were also reported as having the potential to negatively influence self-concept. Three participants stated, for example, that bullying by their peers (e.g., being called fat) diminished their positive picture of themselves.

Meeting the Need to Develop Close Real-Love Relationships

The need to develop close real-love relationships was articulated by participants as being met through the following broad themes: physical interactions with others, learning from parents and siblings, showing unconditional love, and perceiving a sense of permanence (stability) in the nature of the family. Seven participants identified physical interactions as important in helping to create and maintain close real-love relationships and specifically mentioned that physical affection, such as hugs, helped to build this love. Quality time was also reported as important, as this participant articulated, "My parents not only constantly said they loved me via words, hugs, kisses, touches, but also exemplified it through their actions [support]."

Twelve individuals said that they learned how to develop and maintain close real-love relationships through observing and learning from their parents and grandparents, as this participant expressed: "I learned to develop close real-love relationships by example. Through watching my parent's [show] unconditional love for my family, I have learned to show this as well." Further examples of what parents taught their children included: to value closeness, to embrace vulnerability at appropriate times, how to be "warm" to others, and the importance of being "authentic." Additionally, having a sibling who taught them how to have close real-love relationships was mentioned by six participants. Three participants said that their close real-love relationship with their siblings was based on dependability, an aspect of trust, as they emphasized that their siblings "will always have [their] back."

When discussing close real-love relationships, unconditional love was mentioned thirty-four times by twelve participants. Showing unconditional love was described in terms of respecting others and being able to talk to others without judgment. Knowing someone was there to listen fostered dependability and support among family members. This consistent support created a sense of trust between family members and a sense of commitment over time. Overall, showing unconditional love in Hispanic American families was viewed as critical to meeting the need to develop and maintain close real-love relationships.

Five participants mentioned that having a sense that family relationships would endure (last forever) increased their commitment to their family relationships. Having unbreakable bonds between family members and knowing that “family comes first” provided reassurance that their current close real-love relationships would last.

Six participants mentioned how a lack of trust played a role in not being able to develop close real-love relationships in their family. This lack of trust was discussed in terms of infidelity, gossip, parental divorce, and lack of emotional support in times of need.

Meeting the Need to Receive the Respect of Others and Ourselves

In order to deserve and receive respect, study participants articulated that they must respect elders, abide by the rules, be aware of themselves and their actions, be able to provide for the family, and obtain validation from family members. In sum, respect is engendered when they represent themselves well and, by association, their families in culturally appropriate ways.

Twelve participants emphasized the importance of showing respect to their elders as a significant aspect of Hispanic American culture. Respecting an elder in their culture was described in terms of listening when elders spoke, not talking back, not raising your voice, and formally greeting an elder. One participant summarized what it means to respect your elders when she stated, “Showing respect is to be very polite and formal to your elder. It is important to acknowledge when someone is older than you that they are wiser and that you have to treat them with respect.”

Eight participants identified the importance of abiding by the rules to show respect in their culture. Three participants specifically stated that phrases such as “yes ma’am” and “yes sir” to show respect were frequently used in their households. Another three participants said that employing good manners (e.g., “please” and “thank you”) also contributed to how one could meet the need to both show and receive respect.

Three participants expressed that it was crucial to know yourself before self-respect could be gained. Being confident in your abilities translated into knowing who you are and where you “fit” within your role in the family.

Several participants specifically mentioned that their ability to provide for their family members and their level of rank in society (e.g., academic or career) were directly linked to gaining self-respect. For example, one participant articulated, “Working hard was vital to receive[ing] respect from others, and this meant [in] school work as well as in certain fields like law and medicine. Everything else was considered a waste of time.” A number of participants felt that in order to successfully gain self-respect, they must pursue a career that aligned with their families’ perceptions of what noble and hard work looked like.

Five participants specifically mentioned that having their family announce they were proud of their accomplishments helped them gain and feel respect within the family. One participant articulated this notion as follows: “One time I felt really respected was when I won a state championship in high school. They [my family members] were so proud of me and shared all the excitement.” Translating individual success into family success is an important aspect of familism.

Five participants explicitly stated that they felt respected within their families when older family members listened to what they had to say. This type of validation made them feel respected and that their opinion was important.

Numerous obstacles were also discussed in relationship to meeting the need for respect. Seven participants directly discussed how a lack of validation from parents contributed to feeling disrespected within their cultural group. Five participants specifically emphasized that they often felt most disrespected when others would ignore their opinions or talk over them. It was this lack of validation by parents and family members that led to participant perceptions that their agency and ability to make good decisions was not being honored, which in turn hindered perceptions of being respected. When parents did not trust their children's judgment in making decisions or tried to control their lives in any way, perceptions of being able to meet the need to both feel and show respect were limited. Disrespect was also discussed by some participants as originating outside of their cultural group. Three participants mentioned that when others pre-judged them by general Hispanic American stereotypes, they felt disrespected because *all* cultural practices were not universal among *all* Hispanic American families. Five participants said they were made fun of by peers due to their ethnicity and cultural heritage, making them feel disrespected.

Meeting the Need to Feel Worthwhile (Self-Esteem)

The need to feel worthwhile was met, according to participants in this study, by successfully contributing to the family, obtaining high educational success, gaining recognition from parents, having strong social skills, and having supportive family members. Eight participants specifically mentioned that being able to contribute to the family made them feel worthwhile growing up. Important contributions were most often discussed in financial or domestic ways as this individual explained, "In some parts of my culture, a woman that is viewed as worthwhile is one that can be a provider; one that is domestic and can fill many roles at once." Contributing to the greater good of the family was perceived as being very important to feeling worthwhile in every case reviewed in this study, suggesting the strong contextual role familism plays in Hispanic American families.

Six participants emphasized that education and working towards their goals made them feel worthwhile. Being able to feel worthwhile through obtaining higher education led them to believe they would have a brighter future, a future in which they would be able to provide for both their present and future families.

Receiving recognition from parents for their accomplishments also contributed to how the need to feel worthwhile was met. Five participants said that having their parents "brag" about them to other family members and friends, as well as stating they were "proud" of them, made them feel worthwhile growing up.

In Hispanic American culture, attending family gatherings as well as keeping in contact with extended family members was considered vitally important. Therefore, it was considered crucial that each family member develop good social skills, as one participant stated, "Feeling worthwhile is ALL about how you present yourself. If you are confident in your ability and looks, then socializing comes second [naturally occurs]."

Eight participants said that having a supportive family environment and people who care about you helped to foster a healthy self-esteem. Support, according to four participants, often looked like receiving genuine compliments from other family members. As a result of receiving positive affirmations that they were both lovable and capable, participants in the current study articulated that they began to feel and believe they were worthwhile.

Not doing well academically or comparing themselves to others were articulated as the primary obstacles to feeling worthwhile. Five participants stated that if they were doing badly in a specific course or failed an exam, they felt they were disappointing their family, and important aspect of familism, and they did not feel worthwhile. This sense of failure was often heightened when they compared themselves to their peers. One participant explained that making “comparisons made me feel like I was not worthwhile because there is always going to be someone smarter, prettier, faster, etc. than you.”

Meeting the Need to Feel Competent

Meeting the need to feel competent was discussed by participants in terms of the following broad themes: being able to help provide for the family, having academic success, experiencing stable emotional support, and also having an awareness of the Hispanic American culture. Eight participants associated the importance of being capable to help provide for their family with meeting the need to feel competent. Being able to take “care of things such as rent, car issues, [and other] everyday instances can make you feel competent,” stated one participant. Other factors that made participants feel competent included developing appropriate social skills, learning how to cook traditional cultural foods, and being able to efficiently clean the house.

Thirteen participants mentioned that earning academic accomplishments contributed to feeling competent. One individual explicitly stated “[good grades and awards are] the single most important thing I could do to earn my parent’s approval and feel competent.” Getting into college, earning good grades, scoring above the standard, graduating college and having high test scores were all considered markers of competence.

Achieving competencies were made possible through the emotional support provided from parents and extended family. Six participants specifically stated that experiencing available emotional support helped them feel competent growing up through “believing in yourself and knowing that you have a talent,” as one participant articulated.

Several participants stated that when they were aware of their culture and participated in cultural traditions, they felt more competent. Knowing that they had a strong knowledge of their cultural background increased their feelings of competence by connecting their past, present, and future.

Participants in this study identified not understanding something, scoring below the average on assessments, or failure to maintain a grade in a course as the primary obstacles to feeling competent growing up. This academic focus was particularly poignant given that all of the participants had had to fight through multiple academic obstacles and challenges.

Meeting the Need to Experience Growth

Experiencing growth was identified by participants in a variety of social, emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual ways. Six participants stated that interacting with family members at family gatherings, religious events, and at parties helped them to develop socially. The importance of learning how to socialize with family members was expressly portrayed in the following statement: "We are all a bunch of loud and fun people who just want to make friends, dance, and party!" Specifically, learning how to maintain a conversation, including having confidence to lead the conversation, helped participants in this study grow and develop socially. Over time, they felt like that as parents gave them more freedom, they were able to "stand on their own" socially.

Seven participants stated that the family was the primary socializing agent for emotional growth. Correspondingly, it was important for the family members to openly accept and validate emotional expressions without discounting them, as this participant stated, "You are also taught to express your emotions without guilt and explain why you feel that way [to your family]." Such emotional openness among family members was perceived as perpetuating a loving environment that allowed individuals to grow emotionally.

Five participants stated that conversing with individuals in the community and in their family encouraged intellectual growth. This growth was possible because knowledge from previous generations was passed down through frequent interactions. Fifteen participants specifically identified gaining a formal education as an important way to meet the need of experiencing intellectual growth. Growing educationally or academically was discussed in terms of taking advanced placement courses, studying regularly, interacting with teachers, and learning to think critically.

Six participants mentioned that nutritional foods were necessary to keep their bodies healthy and emphasized the importance of maintaining a healthy diet. Physical activity, mentioned by another six participants, included participating in sports and exercising regularly.

Twelve participants mentioned how going to religious events such as church on Sundays and participating in communion within the church were important contributors to experiencing spiritual growth. They also emphasized the importance of praying daily, always praying "before bed [and] meals, and praying to give thanks." Four additional participants stated that spiritual growth was experienced when they felt independence to explore their own spirituality and religious convictions.

Six participants stated that being treated like a child and having their freedom limited hindered their ability to experience social, physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual growth in their households growing up. They did not like being micromanaged and felt like it was a recipe for rebellion.

DISCUSSION

Hispanic American participants identified familism, both directly and indirectly, as playing a critical role in meeting the eight categories of needs introduced in this study. In this section, the role of familism is explored through a discussion of how eight categories of needs are met in Hispanic American families, as articulated by the Hispanic American participants themselves. Ten

underlying themes that emerged from the data are addressed and a corresponding conceptual model is introduced.

According to participants in this study, familism contributed to feelings of safety and security, especially through perceptions of financial stability and physical safety. Feeling safe and secure also arose from perceptions associated with emotional closeness, such as the availability of parents, interactions with the family (including extended family), cohesiveness and support. Emphasis on open communication and the importance of family were also viewed as integral to helping individuals in this study form their identity (Umana-Taylor et al., 2006). When an individual's identity is grounded in a collectivist, familistic culture, the perceptions of how they see themselves are typically qualitatively different when compared with those of individualistic European American cultures. Collectivists tend to perceive themselves through a more relational rather than through a linear worldview. According to Cross, (1997),

The linear worldview is rooted in European and mainstream American thought. It is very temporal, and it is firmly rooted in the logic that says cause has to come before effect. In contrast, the relational worldview sees life as harmonious relationships where health is achieved by maintaining balance between the many interrelating factors in one's circle of life. (p. 6)

How collectivists think and behave can directly and indirectly influence, and be influenced by, every aspect of the family's identity as a group. Individualistic thoughts and actions are most often viewed as more separate from the family group identity, although they are still often associated, just not to the same degree or in the same way (i.e., linear vs. relational) as collectivist thoughts (Taylor, 2002).

In the current study, participants articulated how the need to develop a positive picture of themselves (i.e., positive identity) was met through positive interactions with family and peers, positive affirmations from family members, being part of a group, and feeling successful. Success in Hispanic American families, according to participant responses, can best be understood in terms of self-reliance such as through being able to take care of oneself (e.g., cooking a good meal, or showing academic progress). Supported by previous research, academic success and education are frequently valued in Hispanic American families and form an important foundation for how individuals view themselves within the family context (Reese et al., 1995; Zayas & Solari, 1994). In turn, the need to feel worthwhile (i.e., self-esteem) represents the emotional component of identity; it is how we *feel* about how we *see* ourselves. Meeting the need to feel worthwhile, according to participants, was met by contributing to the family, receiving recognition from parents, developing social skills, showing and receiving support, and educational achievement.

The need to develop close real-love relationships was articulated by study participants as being met by learning from parents and siblings and through physical and social interactions with others, especially with extended family. Social interactions were described in terms of being dependable, supportive, respectful, and committed. Levels of commitment are especially important in the development and maintenance of close real-love relationships (Stanley & Markman, 1992; Way, et al., 2001). When Hispanic Americans are able to assess whether their relationships are dependable, supportive, respectful, and committed, they are more likely to make necessary changes to better meet the need to develop and maintain close real-love relationships through showing and receiving unconditional love. Gaining self-respect through respecting others is a need closely associated with

close real-love relationships within the context of familism. Respect, viewed as a critical component of Hispanic American culture, can contribute to close real-love relationships by minimizing the intensity of arguments, for example (Dixon, et al., 2008; Gottman, 1994). To meet the need of receiving respect from others, participants in this study reported that they must respect elders, abide by the family rules, be aware of themselves, be able to provide for the family, and receive validation from other family members that they are respecting the family name, traditions, rituals, and heritage in proper and acceptable ways.

With a focus on placing the interests of the family first, the need to feel competent was fundamentally met by being capable of providing for family members. Participants generally felt more competent in providing for their families when they were able to get into college and receive a good education. Previous research supports this finding that education is important for individuals to continue on *el buen camino* or “the good path” – a concept highly valued by parents in Hispanic American families (Reese, et al., 1995, p.67). In addition to parents valuing academic education, another aspect of competency includes having a strong awareness of the importance of Hispanic culture. Culture and familism also play a role in meeting the need to experience growth. Experiencing growth was described by participants in this study in social, emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual ways such as through interaction with family, learning to socialize, increasing education, and participating in religious and cultural traditions.

Themes That Emerged within the Context of Familism

Theme 1: Lovability and Capability – Feeling Lovable and Capable

Two of the most important messages that can be communicated in families are that family members are lovable and capable (Coplen & MacArthur, 1982; Harris et al., 2010). This theme helps to explain underlying reasons for why specific needs were perceived as being met by participants in this study and can also help explain the contexts for when they were not being met. A warm and welcoming environment, affection (positive words of affirmation), a lot of physical touch (a characteristic of many Hispanic American families), and validation are key ingredients to feeling lovable. Being praised for skills and accomplishments, experiencing encouragement, being included in decisions, and contributing to the overall welfare of the family are a few ways participants in this study were made to feel capable. It should be noted that self-concept and self-esteem are closely tied to perceptions of feeling loveable and capable. How both are developed may look qualitatively different within the context of familism because of the strong influence of the group in identity formation (Harris et al., 2010; Marcia, 1966).

Theme 2: Communication – Strong, Open Communication with Family

This was a central theme throughout our review of the participant responses as they documented how open communication and a lot of positive interaction was integral to meeting the eight needs in Hispanic American families. Parents and siblings being available to talk, family and community interaction (including at cultural events), spending time together, disclosure, a safe environment to share ideas, not feel judged, and having opinions validated all contributed to perceptions by participants of their needs being met through strong, open communication within a familistic context.

Theme 3: Respect – Being Respectful to Elders and Feeling Respected

Understanding the critical importance of respect in Hispanic American culture provides unique insight into how such phenomenon as caring for elders, being listened to and included in decision making, abiding by family and cultural rules, being aware of oneself and one's actions, being able to provide for the family, obtaining validation from other family members, and engaging in noble and hard work contribute to this need being met. From a familistic perspective, having revered elders listen to you and include you in family decision-making is a monumental sign of respect signaling you are trusted and have sound judgment. Inclusion in key group decisions can provide both external bestowals of respect from family members and become the genesis for developing internal perceptions of self-respect.

Theme 4: Social Interaction – Having Frequent Social Interactions with Others

Hispanic American participants in this study were socialized by parents and siblings to value closeness, warmth, authenticity, and confidence in social situations, among other things. Through these social interactions most, if not all, of the eight needs could be met. The participant-reported power of the family over that of peers to influence how needs are addressed and met (e.g., self-concept) provides strong evidence of the function of familism to socialize thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Correspondingly, because our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are generally most influenced by the people we perceive we belong to the most, putting “family first” identifies the family as being not just a powerful socializing agent, but *the* most powerful socializing agent in Hispanic American families.

Theme 5: Success of Group – Considering the Family's Group Needs

Achieving academic success and noble work, providing dependability, trust, support, and commitment, as well as contributing to the family (group) in multiple other ways suggests the power of familism to influence how individual needs can be met within a context of promoting group success. While putting the needs of the family as a group first was considered a proven strategy for maximizing group success, participants in this study were quick to articulate that group success was contingent upon strong group support of individual group members.

Theme 6: Financial and Emotional Insecurities

Familism is prevalent in some cultures not just for religious reasons but for economic reasons, as well. Many Hispanic American families have been touched by, or have a heritage associated with, poverty. Participants in the current study highlighted how financial and emotional difficulties could influence how needs go unmet. Participants also identified parents being unavailable, being treated like a child (too young), being talked over (invalidated), and feeling misjudged as some of the emotional insecurities they experienced that influenced whether or not their eight needs were met.

Theme 7: Lack of Communication

Perceptions that parents were unavailable to talk and provide support, feeling invalidated by parents such as not being included in decision-making, and lack of proximity (physical distance) which made it difficult to communicate, were some of the factors reported by participants that led to a general lack of communication. In a familistic culture where talking is considered critical to successful and satisfying relationships (Harris et al., 2008), a lack of open communication can provide a real barrier to meeting the eight needs because their successful or unsuccessful fulfillment is mediated and moderated through the medium of communication.

Theme 8: Negative Family Interaction

Parental fighting, abuse, parents being unavailable, feeling unloved, making comparisons, being spoken to in a sarcastic tone, and learning negative self-talk from their parents were all identified by participants as contributing to patterns of negative interaction which in turn contributed to a lack of trust. Lack of trust was discussed in terms of infidelity, gossip, parental divorce, and lack of emotional support in times of need. Negative interaction was considered by study participants as a critical threat to the foundations on which strong Hispanic American families are built and was articulated as a toxic deterrent to perceptions of familism (Gottman, 1994; Harris, 2012).

Theme 9: Lack of Honoring Agency from Parents

Experiencing negative preconceived judgments and assumptions and feeling micromanaged by parents were identified by participants as contributing to perceptions that personal freedoms were being limited and that agency was being violated. This theme may represent a good example of a direct clash between the individualism promoted through typical American culture and authoritative parenting styles and the more controlling and authoritarian parenting styles often employed in Hispanic culture by Hispanic American parents (Harris et al., 2010). Because of the familistic emphasis on respect for parents and elders and how their opinions, rules, expectations, and mandates matter most, it is easy to see how these types of cultural conflicts might develop and potentially inhibit meeting certain needs.

Theme 10: Academic Failure

Falling behind academically, experiencing academic problems, and not being able to meet expectations that sometimes were considered to be too high were a few of the reasons identified by participants for their strong fear of academic failure. This fear was likely closely linked to the fact that a majority of the study participants were college students and a number of them were the first persons in their families to attend college. Changing a longstanding family pattern is bound to be fraught with a fear of failure, especially in a familistic system in which the individual directly and indirectly impacts the family's reputation and future.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The Symbolic Interaction framework and Ecological Systems theory are the foundational perspectives used in this study to help explain how eight categories of needs can be successfully met or how they can go unmet among Hispanic Americans. Symbolic interaction suggests that comprehending social behavior results from understanding how humans make meaning out of symbols, such as through contexts and behaviors. Ecological systems theory focuses on the multiple layers of the environment (e.g., family, community, cultural) that influence how individuals and families meet the requirements to fulfill their needs (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Family kinship networks are particularly important in understanding how needs are addressed within a familistic context. Perceptions of safety, security, success, happiness, belongingness, self-concept, self-worth, close relationships, competence, growth, and respect, among others, are all filtered through patterns of interaction within families which directly and indirectly influence how needs are both addressed and met. Community and culture also exert direct and indirect influences on how needs are met or go unmet in Hispanic American families. Having a strong sense of community can be influential in helping to facilitate strong families (Defrain & Asay, 2007). The community context can also be a powerful way to promote competencies and growth through gaining knowledge from older adults, learning vicariously through other's experiences, and participating in cultural events.

Developing a visual, conceptual model is a viable component of qualitative research (Berg, 1998; Bogdan, & Biklen, 1992). Beginning with a broad community context, Figure 1 illustrates the fundamental or core characteristics described by participants in this study that helped them to meet their eight needs successfully while they were growing up. These core characteristics included capability and lovability, communication, respect, social interaction, and working toward achieving group success. When needs were not being met successfully, these core characteristics were lacking in some way (see Themes 6-10). Understanding the broad community context in this conceptual model is important because community can wield a strong influence in helping individuals and families to successfully meet, or inhibit the meeting of, the eight needs. Culture, subsumed within the community context, is particularly relevant to understanding how study participants were socialized to adopt the values and traditions that

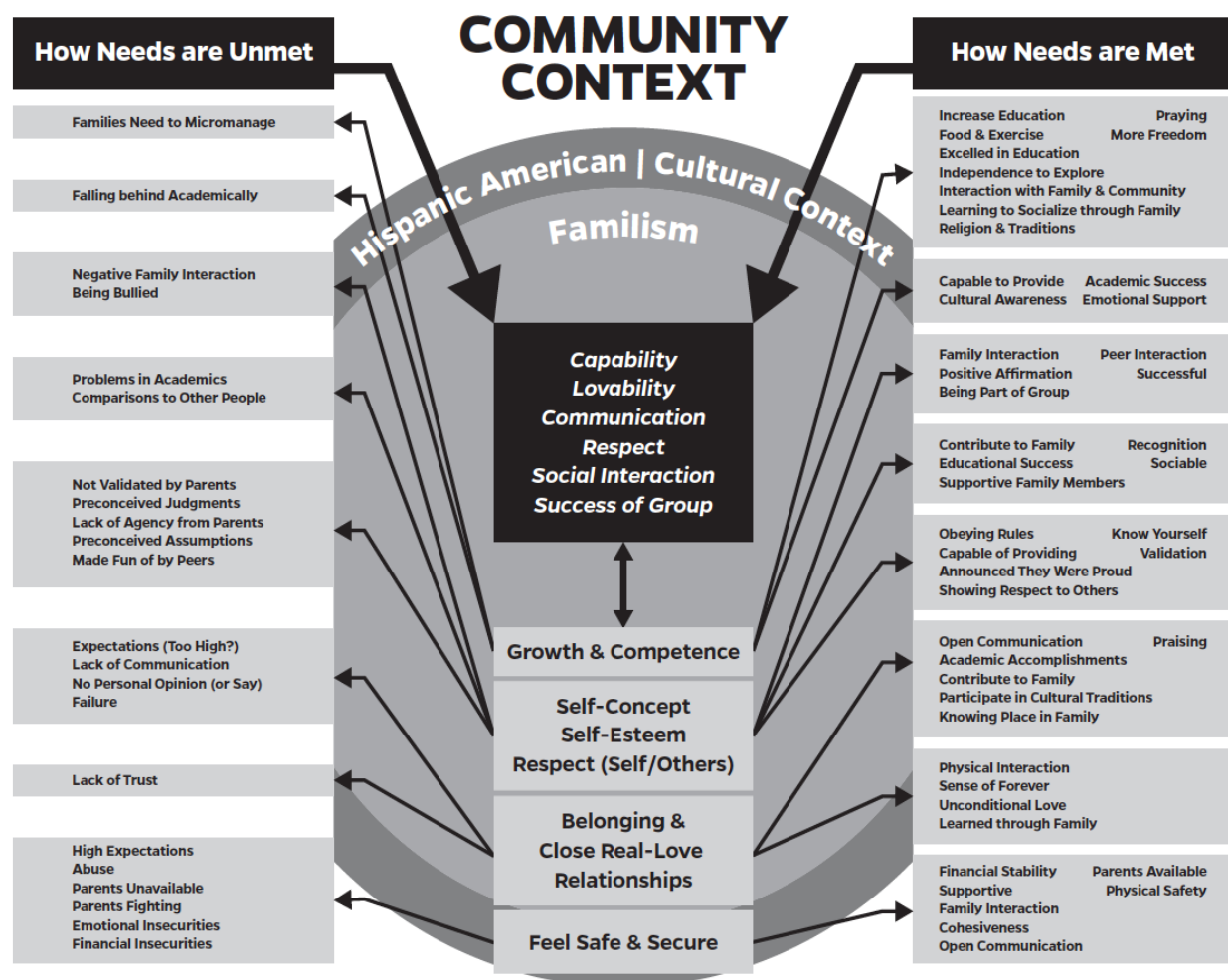


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Met or Unmet Needs in Hispanic American Families

Encompass the Hispanic American culture. It is within this culturally rich Hispanic American family environment that individuals adopted familistic and sometimes individualistic values, beliefs, and practices (i.e., characteristics). In the current study, these characteristics played an important role in explaining how needs were met or went unmet in Hispanic American families. When these core

characteristics were present, the eight categories of needs were generally successfully being met. When these core characteristics were not present, at least some of the eight needs were typically not being successfully met. In sum, in the current study, when families achieved these core characteristics, multiple needs were being met and healthier functioning and stronger families were the likely outcomes. Overlapping and interrelated factors described in the results section that helped to illuminate how these eight categories of needs were met or went unmet were numerous. Open communication, for example, was consistently identified as playing a key role in helping individuals meet the need to feel safe and secure, feel like they belonged, develop a positive picture of themselves, and experience growth. Similarly, family and social interaction were reported as key ingredients to meeting individual needs to feel safe and secure, develop close real-love relationships, feel like they belonged, feel worthwhile, develop a positive picture of themselves, and experience growth.

LIMITATIONS

The information and themes provided in this study are unique to the body of knowledge in that no current study exists on how needs are met in Hispanic families as articulated from their own perspectives. Although this study provides an initial conceptual framework (see Figure 1) for the role familism can play in influencing how meeting eight categories of needs occurs in Hispanic American families, it will need to be validated by future studies. This can be accomplished through triangulated replication using qualitative, quantitative, and observational measures. We readily acknowledge that there are likely additional characteristics of familism that contribute to understanding how the eight categories of needs are addressed that are beyond the scope of this study. Additionally, it is important to note that the Hispanic American participants in this study were not a homogenous group. Within group differences were not accounted for in this study. The authors acknowledge that specific Hispanic American groups (Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican, etc.) may have differing values, beliefs, and practices when it comes to the concept of familism and how it influences the meeting of these eight categories of needs.

The sample population also represented a limitation of this study. The majority of the sample were female college students, aged 19-22, earning less than \$20,000 a year. Because the sample was purposive, it is not representative of Hispanic American families in general, nor does it provide valid gender difference explanations for how these eight needs can be met. However, it is the first study of its kind and represents a beginning to this line of inquiry. Correspondingly, due to the sample size and female majority within the sample, the overall exploratory findings may provide initial insights for understanding Hispanic American women who live in these family contexts. Additionally, further studies with larger sample sizes and more male responses will need to be conducted in order to provide a more detailed picture of the male perspective in Hispanic American families within the context of familism.

We also acknowledge potential methodological limitations such as the design of the survey and research bias because the research was self-report. The use of a 24-question qualitative open-ended survey may also have been a limitation to this study. Although the survey provided rich context, several participants did not fully complete each area of the survey due to its length. However, because of the sample size ($n=25$), we were still able to draw some relevant exploratory findings from this sample based upon the saturation of participant responses.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS, PRACTITIONERS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Many of the Hispanic American participants in this study identified strengths similar to those identified by Defrain and Asay (2007) – strengths that emphasize how individuals and families can successfully meet their needs within various cultural and community contexts. Specific to the current study, feelings of capability were especially important for participants when it came to providing for their family. Participants also cited the importance of expressing messages of lovability within the family. Fostering Hispanic American families' abilities to send and receive messages of lovability and capability through open communication represents a practical strategy educators and practitioners can use to facilitate the meeting of multiple needs with this population. Educators and practitioners may also want to better understand and promote the following concepts to facilitate the meeting of needs: 1) Building strong relationships within Hispanic American families includes not only fostering perceptions and feelings of capability and lovability, but also fostering a foundation of respect and open communication; 2) For family members to develop close real-love relationships, respect must be shown to elders and they must also feel comfortable talking to other family members without feeling judged, including members of extended kinship networks; 3) Hispanic Americans tend to have many opportunities for social interaction. Social interaction was considered by participants in this study integral to fostering the meeting of multiple needs. Thus, providing an ongoing context in which these social interactions can occur can be a critical component of fostering the meeting of needs; 4) Participants in this study reported learning about Hispanic American values and adopting familistic views and practices which focused on the success of the family group as a higher priority than individual success.

Because there is limited research on how needs are specifically met among America's racial/ethnic groups, we welcome future research that will explore comparisons of how needs can be met among a variety of diverse populations. Researchers may also want to examine specific within group similarities and differences among each of these diverse racial/ethnic populations, such as those among Puerto Rican Americans compared to Mexican Americans. Additionally, as previously identified, the development of triangulated qualitative, quantitative, and observational measures would represent a viable next step to further assess the validity and reliability of how these eight categories of needs can be met successfully.

CONCLUSION

As the Hispanic population continues to grow in the United States, it is important to research the relationship between Hispanic American culture and individual and family well-being. Becoming aware of how specific individual and family needs are met is important for expanding the current body of knowledge about how Hispanic American families operate within the context of familism. It can also be a valuable tool for assisting educators and practitioners who work with Hispanic American families to facilitate the knowledge and skills that promote healthy and strong families.

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