
Culturally Competent Qualitative Research With Latino Immigrants

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Abstract

This article provides recommendations for conducting culturally competent qualitative research with Latino immigrants, a historically exploited group that represents more than half of all U.S. immigrants and is continuously growing. Limited research exists on Latino immigrants despite their large presence in the United States. The authors draw upon their qualitative research experiences to help researchers develop culturally competent awareness, knowledge, and skills in studying Latino immigrants. Recommendations are grounded by integrating Latino cultural values in the research process. Issues related to developing a research team, recruiting participants, using incentives, informed consent procedures, and language issues are addressed. Suggestions for developing interview protocols and conducting culturally competent in-person interviews are provided.

Keywords

Latinos, immigrants, qualitative research, cultural competence

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The United States is composed of immigrants from around the world. During the year 2007, more than 38 million foreign-born people lived in the United States, representing 12.6% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). More than half of all immigrants come from Latin America, and these immigration patterns have contributed to the increasing Latino population in the United States. Among Latinos living in the United States, 48% are immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau). One primary factor that fuels the immigration process is the economic hardships experienced by individuals living in other countries. After the decision to immigrate has been made, Latino immigrants¹ face an array of hardships from the migratory journey to the integration of U.S. culture. Latino newcomers often experience challenges with language barriers, minimal family and social support, work-related stress, and sociocultural stress (Hovey, 2001). Furthermore, the sociopolitical climate for Latino immigrants is often negative, hostile, and unwelcoming (Zuniga, 2002). This hostility is sometimes fueled by misconceptions, such as immigrants taking away jobs or not paying taxes and having access to free health care.

Indeed, Latino immigrants have historically been exploited and mistreated in the United States and, today, are denied basic rights and protections (Halgunseth, 2003; Organista, 1998; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2007; Yancey, Ortega, & Kumanyika, 2005). Despite the propensity for Latino immigrants to experience psychological distress, they are underrepresented in mental health services (Vega & Alegria, 2001) and understudied in psychological research (Cuéllar, 2002). The paucity of research in this area provides a valuable opportunity for the field of psychology to intervene. Specifically, psychology may provide crucial information related to understanding the mental health, psychological stressors, and effective coping mechanisms for this at-risk group. Therefore, the purpose of the article is to provide recommendations to researchers for conducting culturally competent qualitative research with Latino immigrants.

Research can either support or harm communities, thus researchers should develop the cultural competencies to conduct research with the Latino immigrant population. Researchers can also share control of research and attend to the unheard voices of Latino immigrants to increase research participation among this community. Qualitative methodology, when conducted culturally competently, may be useful in conducting research in multicultural psychology as it considers environmental and social contextual factors (Helms, 1989; Merchant & Dupuy, 1996). Qualitative researchers express the potential of this methodology to emphatically represent, involve, and benefit understudied populations (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The authors have qualitative research experience with Latino immigrant samples and have chosen this methodology because it allows an understanding of their experiences in their own words (Ponterotto, 2002). In addition, qualitative research methods honor the Latino

cultural value of *personalismo*, or interpersonal connections. Furthermore, given Latino immigrants are understudied, qualitative methods allow us to generate theory rather than testing theory as is typically done with quantitative research models from a Eurocentric lens (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996).

When conducting studies with Latino immigrants in a culturally competent manner, researchers must not only be well versed in qualitative research methods but also know how to work with communities that have been historically exploited by mainstream society. Some of the skills involved in working with vulnerable communities, such as Latino immigrants, involve relying on gatekeepers, having knowledge of the Spanish language, and understanding cultural nuances. Another issue involves attending to how Latino immigrants may perceive research. Latino immigrants may not only be unfamiliar with research procedures but also experience healthy paranoia with governmental institutions (Paniagua, 2005). Depending on Latino immigrants' experiences with government in their home countries and in the United States, they may be skeptical about how information they provide will be used and/or misused. Thus, the research *process* with Latino immigrants is as critical as the *outcomes* of the study.

Although it is important that more research be conducted with underserved populations, it is even more crucial that it be done in a culturally competent manner (Chang & Sue, 2005). Poorly executed and insensitive approaches can be harmful to our efforts and can lead to mistrusting researchers. Our article aims to help researchers develop culturally competent awareness, knowledge, and skills by illustrating what we have learned through our qualitative research about culturally sensitive effective strategies in conducting qualitative research with Latino immigrants. Specifically, issues related to developing a research team, recruiting participants, using incentives, informed consent procedures, and language issues are addressed. We provide recommendations for developing interview protocols and conducting culturally competent in-person interviews.

Research Team Composition

Prior to embarking on a qualitative research project with Latino immigrants, a culturally competent research team that works within its bounds of competence is advocated. Multicultural psychology research is faced with challenges because of limited researchers in this area, minimal interest in multicultural research, and inadequate group-specific knowledge (Chang & Sue, 2005).

Although it may be difficult to develop a team of trained researchers with (a) interests in Latino psychology and knowledge of Latino culture and (b) training and expertise in qualitative methodology, professional guidelines

(American Psychological Association [APA], 2003; Council of National Psychological Associations for the Advancement of Ethnic Minority Interests [CNPAEMI], 2000) mandate a culture-centered approach to research with persons from underserved cultural backgrounds (e.g., Latino immigrants).

In our experience, convening an interdisciplinary group of researchers to collaborate on research projects with Latinos has broadened our pool of potential collaborators and added richness and perspective to the conceptualization process. Participating on research teams with professionals from different educational backgrounds provides a broad approach to understanding a specific phenomenon. In addition, having members with expertise about immigrant issues and who are bilingual (speaking, reading, and writing in Spanish and English) *and* bicultural (skilled at navigating two different cultures) have been vital to our research with Latino immigrants. Furthermore, given the Latino population is diverse and composed of individuals with various immigration statuses, we have included research team members from diverse cultural backgrounds (Mexican, Peruvian, and Cuban) and immigration histories (1st-generation through 3rd-generation, international students). Such diversity ensures that the initial research conceptualization stages are conducted thoroughly and that salient issues about the research target group are kept at the forefront of discussions. Bilingual and bicultural skills have also been essential to our qualitative research projects, particularly in designing the interview protocol, conducting interviews, transcribing and translating interviews, and interpreting the data. Having these skills has ensured that the research derived from our studies truly represents the Latino immigrant samples we have studied; avoiding the research pitfall of objectification and pathologization of understudied communities (Lyons & Bike, 2010).

Apart from trained researchers, members of the community can play a valuable role in the development of a study. In our experience, Latino community members have had input in the research process and have advised the researchers on methodological issues. The purpose of such an advisory board that includes community leaders, gatekeepers, and/or community members was to gain a better understanding of the community we were interested in studying. In taking this vital step, we provided methodology that was culturally sensitive which led to increased research participation.

The Importance of Cultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills

Researchers' limited competence in Latino culture and immigrants' skepticism about the intentions of research may contribute to minimal research conducted with Latino immigrants. To most Latino immigrants, participation

in research may be a foreign experience. Thus, researchers should develop essential awareness, knowledge, and skills to conduct culturally competent qualitative research with Latino immigrants. Culturally competent researchers are aware of personal beliefs about the culture at hand, are knowledgeable about the culture, and have the skills to conduct research with individuals from the culture (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).

We recommend research team members openly discuss their own values, assumptions, and biases (Sue & Torino, 2005) about Latino immigrants so they can become aware of how personal beliefs may guide and shape the research. This is especially crucial for qualitative studies because researchers will have more intimate interactions with their participants. APA Multicultural Guidelines (APA, 2003) and qualitative research recommendations (Choudhuri, 2005; Lyons & Bike, 2010) emphasize the importance for researchers to recognize themselves as cultural beings within their research roles and to be aware of the attitudes and biases they have about their own cultural group as well as other groups. These attitudes and beliefs, if left unchecked, can influence researchers' interactions with participants as well as their interpretation of data.

It is also important to understand the worldview of Latino immigrants. Thus, researchers interested in learning about the Latino immigrant experience should acquire basic content knowledge regarding the immigration process of Latinos and their motives for migrating to the United States. This includes an understanding of participants' premigration, migration, and postmigration contexts, reasons for migrating to the United States, prior and current U.S. immigration policies, and the different types of immigrant statuses (see Davies, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2007, 2010). These factors may affect the transition and adjustment process immigrants experience once they arrive in the United States. Furthermore, researchers should acquire knowledge about Latino values, norms, traditions, and customs prior to conducting research with members of this group. Ultimately, the more knowledge researchers have about the sociopolitical climate of Latino immigrants, the more successful they will be in executing a study that produces valuable data about this group. In addition, cultural awareness and knowledge must be developed into skills (Sue & Torino, 2005) and implemented into the research process. In particular, researchers should develop culturally competent skills to engage with Latino immigrants that will demonstrate behavior that honors and respects Latino culture.

Culturally Competent Recruitment

Culturally competent recruitment with diverse groups involves relationship building and requires extended efforts at maintaining connections to the community

(Skaff, Chesla, de los Mycue, & Fisher, 2002). Cultural competence, specifically linguistic competence, contributes to the recruitment of research participants and completion rates of interviews (Domenech-Rodríguez, Rodríguez, & Davis, 2006). Cultural insensitivity when approaching and studying a particular population can result in refusal to participate or lead to data that inaccurately represents participants' stories (Domenech-Rodríguez et al., 2006). In addition, researchers need to attend to the sociopolitical climate that shapes potential participants' perceptions about research and people from the university community. In our experiences, some immigrants perceived researchers from a university to have ties with the government because of a government-issued vehicle, and this perception may prevent them from speaking with the researcher. Unfamiliarity with research, prior experiences of being exploited or deceived for research purposes, concerns about language fluency, or fears that information they provide for a study will be reported to "immigration" may contribute to Latino immigrants' consideration of participating in research.

The recruitment of Latino immigrants into research may be challenging as they may present with language barriers and unique cultural experiences (Domenech-Rodríguez et al., 2006). Such challenges require that researchers use innovative recruitment strategies to ensure a successful project. In particular, culturally competent research recruitment may involve advertising the study in areas potential participants will learn about it, such as Spanish language media (radio, newspapers, television), and restaurants and grocery stores in the community (Miranda, Azocar, Organista, Muñoz, & Lieberman, 1996). More importantly, effective recruitment involves building relationships with key community leaders who have already established trust with the Latino immigrant community (Villarruel, Jemmott, Jemmott, & Eakin, 2006). These relationships are developed over time and are essential in gaining the trust of Latino immigrants who are highly skeptical of government employees or other "outsiders." Recruitment efforts also can be coordinated through Latino-oriented community centers and churches, word-of-mouth through participants, and personal contacts in the Latino community (Domenech-Rodríguez et al., 2006). Researchers should establish relationships with gatekeepers early on to build trust. Other strategies include self-disclosure to gatekeepers and participants. Historically, researchers have restrained from having close contact with participants as it could bias their results. Qualitative research expects the investigator to be an instrument during all aspects of the research (Creswell, 2007). Thus, we recommend researchers explore how self-disclosure and building a trusting relationship early on may facilitate recruitment and trustworthiness in communities historically exploited by mainstream psychological research. Self-disclosure is of particular importance for

Latino immigrants because of the cultural value of *personalismo*. In our experiences, we have found Latino immigrants are often eager to learn about the researcher. For instance, it was not uncommon for participants to ask us where we were from and what our job duties entailed. Engagement in such conversations is of particular value among Latino populations.

For one study in which we were involved, the majority of participants were recruited through personal connections and a Spanish-speaking priest who announced the study at the end of a mass and invited the researchers to conduct the interviews at the church following the mass. Gatekeepers (i.e., community leaders often trusted by community members) are important sources of support and endorsement for research studies. Gatekeepers can validate to potential participants that the researchers are safe and that their well being and security will be protected. Similar strategies have been effective in research with other Latino samples (Domenech-Rodríguez et al., 2006).

Incentives and Informed Consent Procedures

Two important issues in conducting qualitative research with Latino immigrants include the use of incentives and informed consent procedures. Researchers should compensate participants for their time as this is consistent with our belief in “giving back” to participants for their research involvement. Unlike college students or economically privileged members of society, many individuals from underresearched, marginalized groups do not have the luxury of “free” time. Many Latinos are hard-working individuals who often spend long hours at work, including evenings and weekends. We believe participants deserve compensation for giving their valuable leisure time to participate in interviews, and we have done this in our work. Some participants, however, may attempt to refuse payment for instance, if they believe they did not “work” to receive payment, they feel the interview was personally helpful, or if it provided an outlet for them to share their story. The latter scenario is likely among immigrants with limited social circles who appreciate the opportunity to talk about their experiences. Other Latino immigrants might refuse an incentive if they feel grateful that the researcher is trying to help the Latino community through their study. In these instances, researchers should stress the importance of participants’ contribution to the study to help them feel more comfortable with accepting compensation or can suggest that the participant contribute their gift card to another family or to their church. Ideally, incentives should also be provided to community partners who assist in recruitment by paying them for their time or purchasing supplies for their organization. In addition, researchers should consider presenting the research

findings to the communities where the study was conducted and provide access to the project's products (e.g., nontechnical manuals, book publications). All community members can benefit from having access to the knowledge they were involved in generating (CNPAAEMI, 2000).

Researchers are responsible for following appropriate informed consent procedures. This is especially critical in working with Latino immigrants, as their participation can place them in a vulnerable position. They also may be unlikely to have participated in research before and may be unfamiliar with the process. Culturally competent researchers should educate potential participants about the research process, how the data will be used, and their rights as research participants (APA, 2002; CNPAAEMI, 2000; Haverkamp, 2005). A concern among Latinos in our studies pertains to the security of the data and who will have access to the data. It is important to address confidentiality and anonymity with potential participants and to assure participants that their information will not be shared with authorities who can deport them, with employers who can fire them, or with landlords who can evict them.

Information pertaining to Latinos' immigration status could jeopardize their current living conditions, employment, or financial standing. Researchers must determine whether documentation status is essential to the study and needs to be obtained. If so, researchers may obtain a Certificate of Confidentiality (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009) from federal agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health, to protect the privacy of participants by preventing the release of information gathered in research from forced disclosure. Also, it is important for researchers to be aware that they are not legally bound to reveal information about the immigration status of their participants to any governmental agency (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). By protecting researchers and institutions from being compelled to disclose information that would identify research participants, Certificates of Confidentiality can help achieve the research objectives and promote participation in studies by assuring research participants' privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Even if immigration information is not directly gathered, this information might be disclosed in the process of an interview. Thus, researchers conducting studies with Latinos are encouraged to take precautions to protect their participants by obtaining a Certificate of Confidentiality.

We recommend that researchers follow informed consent procedures—both in writing and verbally—to assure participants understand their rights and what their involvement will entail. Even if participants have received a written informed consent form, researchers are cautioned from assuming all participants can read even if the form is written in their first language. Good

research practice includes going over the informed consent form orally with participants prior to collecting data and giving participants the opportunity to ask questions (Domenech-Rodríguez et al., 2006).

Culturally Relevant Interview Protocols: Issues With Language and Translation of Concepts

Developing a culturally relevant interview protocol requires significant preparation as it affects both the participant's experience and the quality of data gathered from interviews. It is important to assess cross-cultural validity of concepts in the interview for relevance to the participants' culture, worldview, values, and experiences (Skaff et al., 2002; Rogler, 1999). If interviews are conducted in a language other than English, it is critical to ensure that concepts and questions have the same meaning as initially intended when translated (Brislin, 2000). Researchers need to ensure that concepts are back-translated accurately to avoid loss of original meaning in participants' words (Brislin, 2000; Skaff, Mullan, Fisher, & Chesla, 2003; Vega, Hough, & Miranda, 1985). Furthermore, it is important to stress that the translation of interview protocols enhances the cross-cultural validity of research (Ægisdóttir, Gerstein, & Çinarbas, 2008; Kwan & Gerstein, 2008).

Challenges at the translation stage include difficulty translating concepts or words, as language is embedded within cultural contexts (Yick & Berthold, 2005). Some concepts or words are difficult to translate or are nonexistent in the other language (Weitzman & Levkoff, 2000; Yick & Berthold, 2005). In translating and back-translating, recommendations include conveying the implied meanings of original words rather than literal translation of words (Marín & Marín, 1991). This process involves the recognition that there could be multiple ways to translate phrases, which stresses the importance of consulting with cultural experts (Uba, 1994). For instance, we ran into difficulty with the term *barrier*, which literally translates into "barrera." The word "barrera" was often misunderstood in our pilot interviews and thus the team prepared additional questions that captured the challenges participants encountered. Instead of simply asking one of our study's participants if they experienced barriers at work, we rephrased the question into "Do you experience challenges at work?" Accordingly, maintaining flexibility in restructuring questions and formulating additional questions is important. If restructuring is needed, we recommend being more descriptive and developing additional ways to explain concepts that will increase participants' understanding.

We also advocate adapting to each participant's vocabulary usage and reading comprehension level. Determining vocabulary level may be determined

through consultation with local cultural experts (Domenech-Rodríguez et al., 2006). Researchers should “check-in” with the participant to gauge whether they are able to understand the questions. In clarifying concepts or questions, researchers may avoid providing examples to the question that might influence the responses the participant provides.

An additional challenge with developing the interview protocol includes ensuring that interview questions are relevant to the experiences of a given culture and that they are culturally appropriate. Experiences that may apply to a particular culture may not exist in others or may even be culturally offensive (Skaff et al., 2003; Vega et al., 1985). For example, the question, “What do you enjoy most about work?” may be perceived as offensive as it is situated in a cultural context in which work is assumed to be enjoyable. Instead, our team used a different question that better reflected the information we intended to capture, “Do you enjoy anything about work?” This question may be more culturally sensitive to the population as it accounted for work as something that may be done out of necessity. Thus, knowing your participants thoroughly and consulting with cultural experts is critical in ensuring cultural relevance and competence for research.

Another consideration is the sequencing of questions. Asking less thought-provoking questions or collecting descriptive/demographic information early in the interview may help the participant to feel at ease and confident about their ability to answer questions. This strategy may be effective in assisting participants to open up and share more information with the interviewer.

Researchers should practice administering the interview protocol with other research team members and with representative members of the target population in terms of language and cultural proficiency, otherwise known as *cultural experts* (Miranda et al., 1996). Consulting with cultural experts or “cultural insiders” is important as it may also aid against violating cultural norms (Domenech-Rodríguez et al., 2006; Marín & Marín, 1991; Yick & Berthold, 2005). Practicing with people within the same culture may yield valuable information as to whether interview questions are indeed culturally appropriate and targeting the research focus (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996). In addition, practice may add authenticity to the interview protocol as valuable information may arise. For instance, in a study about work, one participant indicated he was teaching his children to *trabajar con la camisa bien puesta*. A literal translation means “to work with your shirt on right”; however, our knowledge of this term as a folk saying indicating they want to represent themselves and their employers well helped to facilitate the interview and to capture this cultural nuance. In having an understanding of this folk saying, the interviewer validated the participant’s experience. The ability to capture

cultural nuances and folk sayings is one reason why we stress the importance for the interviewer to be not only bilingual but also bicultural. In essence, maintaining cultural sayings is important as they may express cultural values, beliefs, and ideas that would preserve the authenticity of participants' responses.

Culturally Relevant Interview Procedures: The Integration of Latino Cultural Values

Integrating Latino cultural values, beliefs, customs, and traditions in the interview process is critical in conducting culturally competent research with Latino immigrants. For instance, researchers may consider participants' living circumstances when coordinating interviews, and interviews should be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient for participants. Latino immigrants may have time constraints that cause them to schedule interviews at the last minute or at inconvenient times for the interviewer. In addition, researchers should ask participants if there is a private location where they would prefer to meet to conduct the interview. Oftentimes, participants indicate a preference to being interviewed in their home setting or in locations they are familiar within their community (Skaff et al., 2002). Hence, it is critical for qualitative researchers to become familiar with the cultural value system of the communities they are studying. In our case, we spent time discussing the value system (e.g., *plática*, *familia*, *respeto*) of Latino immigrants based on our experiences in working with Latinos as well as the published literature (e.g., Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002; Skaff et al., 2002). This discussion allowed the members of the research team to explore how cultural values may play a role in the data collection for our study.

Plática (small talk) is a behavior many Latinos engage in when meeting with someone formally or informally, regardless of whether it is initial contact or they have known the other person for an extended period of time. Researchers should demonstrate respect to the cultural value of *personalismo* (personal engagement) through *plática* during the interview and when scheduling the appointment. These initial interactions will influence the participant's perception of the researcher and will contribute to the participant's comfort level, rapport built, and *confianza* (trust). These three factors are essential for a positive research participation experience for Latino immigrants. Taking a moment to acknowledge *la familia* will demonstrate *respeto* (respect) for the participant and her or his family. It will also let the participant know the researcher is amicable and interested in her or him as a person and not just as a research participant. Interviewers should also be aware of

their comfort with self-disclosure, as participants may ask interviewers personal questions, which is congruent with *personalismo*. In addition, participants may offer food or a drink to the interviewer because it is often present during Latino gatherings and it may also be a participant's way to be cordial to the interviewer. Interviewers should consider accepting such gestures to prevent the participant from feeling rejected or unappreciated. After the interview, the participant may likely want to engage in additional *plática*. Ending the meeting abruptly after the interview without engaging in *plática* at least momentarily can be awkward and even rude. This may lead the participant to feel used and distant from the researcher, which would violate the cultural value of *personalismo* (Skaff et al., 2002).

As with most collectivistic cultures, demonstration of *respeto*, that is, unconditional respect and deference to elders and authority figures, is a cultural value among Latinos. *Respeto* may come into play during the interview process from the moment a researcher interacts with a participant. Simply by identifying oneself as a researcher may automatically give one power over the participant because the researcher is viewed as a figure of authority based on education level and career. A researcher's ethnic background may also play a role in the perception of power among participants. For instance, Latinos may feel intimidated or perhaps even inferior to White researchers due to historical hierarchical and oppressive institutions (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007). Therefore, it may be more culturally appropriate to have a Latino researcher meet with the participant because they may be more likely to see this as a camaraderie interaction.

Distribution of power may also be demonstrated in the language the participant uses to refer to the researcher if conducting the interview in Spanish (Rogler, 1989). For instance, the term *usted* translates to "you" in a formal and more respectful way to address someone while the term *tú* is the less formal and more egalitarian version of "you." Informing the participant that they may refer to a researcher as *tú* if they feel comfortable may help diminish the power differential perceived by the participant. On the flip side, when a researcher addresses the participant, she or he should demonstrate *respeto* by addressing the participant as *señor* (sir), *señora* (Mrs.), or *señorita* (Miss), as well as using *usted*, unless the participant indicates otherwise (Skaff et al., 2002). It is important to note Latinas may be sensitive to being referred to as *señora* or *señorita* incorrectly. For instance, historically, the title *señorita* has been reserved for single Latinas who are therefore expected to be sexually "pure" (de Rios, 2001). Therefore, referring to a Latina as *señora*, regardless of age, when they are not married may be perceived as offensive. Similarly,

not acknowledging a Latina's marital status by being referred to as *señora* may lead the participant to feel undermined, as marriage is historically viewed as a sacred status (Falicov, 1998). This issue can be easily addressed by simply asking the Latina participant if she prefers to be called *señora* or *señorita* or by not using either term until the information is revealed in the interview.

Gender dynamics between the researcher and participant may also play a role in what the participant is willing to disclose, particularly if the participant adheres to traditional Latino gender roles. *Machismo* is the traditional gender role for Latino men characterized as bravery, invulnerability, and self-control (Mirandé, 1997). If a Latino man is interviewed by a woman, he may hesitate to disclose information he perceives as being "unmanly." Nonetheless, this issue may also arise even if a Latino man was interviewed by another man if the participant believes he needs to prove his "manliness" to him. Potentially, a Latino man may be more open with a woman rather than a man if he perceives women to be more accepting of emotions than men. However, because Latino men may also adhere to the gender role of *caballerismo* (chivalry), they may edit the information they provide to a woman.

It is also important to be familiar with the traditional Latina gender role of *marianismo*. This consists of being self-sacrificing, passive, and pure; characteristics of the emulated Virgin Mary, a powerful female symbol among Latinos, particularly among Catholics. A Latina who is interviewed by a man may experience pressure to present herself as a "good woman," especially with the additional component of male authority among traditional Latino culture. Therefore, it may be more comfortable for a Latina to be interviewed by a woman since research has demonstrated this would contribute to increased willingness to disclose (Song & Parker, 1995). If resources permit, researchers may want to give participants the option of being interviewed by a woman or man so they may feel more comfortable during the interaction.

Participants may be elusive about divulging personal information for fear of *el qué dirán* (social criticism and judgment). As a collectivistic culture that adheres to *familismo* (familism), being viewed negatively by others is often perceived as a disgrace not only to oneself but also to one's family because it represents their upbringing and the integrity of *la familia*. Therefore, a participant may not want to *avergonzar* (bring shame) to their family by revealing what she or he deems as shameful. Given the potential negative influence of *vergüenza* (shame) on the quality of data and the comfort of participants during the interview, researchers should assure participants that their experiences are unique and that their responses will not be judged as being right or

wrong, good or bad. A researcher should also emphasize that she or he does not want to judge them but to learn about their authentic experiences.

A further Latino cultural value that may play a role in the interview process is *espiritualismo* (spiritualism). This value may be demonstrated by participants making reference to God when responding to questions. For instance, they may say, *Gracias a Dios que tengo mi salud* ("Thank God I have my health") or *Si Dios quiere* ("If it is God's will"). Furthermore, inquiring about a participant's reactions to a potential negative future event may be received unfavorably (Skaff et al., 2002) and cause the participant to feel uneasy. This is because many Latinos believe if a negative event is voiced, it may occur. Therefore, before researchers inquire about a potential future negative event, they should proceed with the phrase *Dios no lo permite, pero . . .* ("God forbid, but . . .") or *No se lo deseo a nadie, pero . . .* ("I do not wish this upon anyone, but..."). Given many Latinos emphasize *espiritualismo*, the former phrase may be viewed as more powerful to participants.

Sharing a language that is not often spoken in mainstream society may increase the connection between the participant and the researcher (Gelman, 2004). Therefore, interviewers should be familiar with the Spanish language particularly if participants are monolingual. It is also important not to assume Spanish is the language of choice if working with a participant from an indigenous background whose first language may be an indigenous language (e.g., Nahuatl, Maya, Zapotec, and Quechua). Thus, Latino immigrants who are from indigenous cultures may range from slight to full proficiency in Spanish as their second language.

In our experiences, it has been essential that our interviewers were both bilingual *and* bicultural as this helped to accurately ask the interview questions, understand the participant's responses, understand the meaning behind their responses, and establish a connection with participants. Asking participants to speak in English if it is not a language they are comfortable with is inconsiderate of their needs and demonstrates that the research is being conducted on the researchers' terms (Song & Parker, 1995). Latinos who have knowledge of both the English and Spanish language, regardless of which language is of preference, should be given the option to switch between languages freely (Santiago-Rivera, 1995). We cannot stress enough the importance of interviewers having a strong grasp with the Spanish language and feeling comfortable to converse with the participants in their preferred language. Using interviewers who are fluent in the preferred language of participants increases the likelihood of obtaining authentic, valid responses from them.

Conclusion

The U.S. Latino population continues to grow and the negative sentiment and hostile environment toward Latino immigrants are negatively affecting their well-being (Cavazos-Rehg, Zayas, & Spitznagel, 2007). Thus, more research is needed to understand the experiences of Latino immigrants. Qualitative methodology is a research tool that can allow Latino immigrants to have their voices heard. However, knowledge of qualitative methodology does not suffice. Research with Latino immigrants should include an awareness of their biases toward Latinos, knowledge about Latino culture, and skills to effectively conduct research with Latino immigrants. An understanding of Latino cultural values and openness and sensitivity to Latino culture will aid in the facilitation of culturally competent interviews with Latino immigrants.

If conducted appropriately, information gained through culturally competent qualitative research can lead to social justice and change. This can come in the form of creating an agenda for the stakeholders of the communities studied that highlights the needs of Latino immigrants. The agendas can include plans of action stakeholders may want to consider as they attempt to deal with the challenges of Latino immigrants living in their communities. More immediate social change efforts can be made by sharing the information with gatekeepers and helping to train service providers on the importance of culturally sensitive qualitative data-collection procedures. We hope the knowledge gained from our experiences can provide much needed information about conducting culturally competent qualitative research with Latino immigrants that can lead to increased research efforts with these populations and give a needed voice to their experiences.

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Note

1. Latino immigrants refer to individuals who were born in Latin America and now live, with or without legal documentation, in the United States.

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Bios

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