

Key Points on Latino Culture

- Family is everything
 - They take care of each other, live near/with each other, socialize together. Clan-like.
 - They stay in close contact with relatives in Mexico, sending money to them and make time to visit when possible.
 - Gender roles are taught early and relatively strict, men provide and women take care of family etc
- Work hard, play hard
 - They respect hard work and do not balk at manual labor.
 - Entertainment is a priority; music, dance, food, festivals, ceremonies.
- Religion and traditions are important
 - Typically Roman Catholic
 - Faith is not as essential, but following tradition is
- Education is valued
 - Immigrated for better education and opportunity.
 - Teachers are highly respected, but intimidating system
 - Language barriers, system differences, and financial pressure make focusing on education difficult for parents and children, especially in poverty.

Key Points on Latino Culture

Hispanic is a term created by the U.S. federal government in the early 1970s in an attempt to provide a common denominator to a large, but diverse, population with connection to the Spanish language or culture from a Spanish-speaking country. The term *Latino* is increasingly gaining acceptance among Hispanics, and the term reflects the origin of the population in Latin America.

FAMILIES

- A basic feature of the Hispanic/Latino American family is the extended family, which plays a major role in each family member's life.
- strong bonds and frequent interaction among a wide range of kin.
- Grandparents, parents, and children may live in the same household or nearby.
- visit one another frequently.
- cooperativeness
- placing the needs of the family ahead of individual concerns. This aspect of Hispanic/Latino family life has led to the erroneous conclusion that the family

impedes individual achievement and advancement. Observers of the Hispanic/Latino American culture must distinguish between being cooperative and respectful and being docile and dependent. Generally speaking, Hispanic/Latino American children and adolescents learn to show respect for authority, the patriarchal family structure, and extended family members.

More than one-third (36 percent) of Hispanic/Latino households were married couples with children in 1997; only a quarter of non-Hispanic/Latino households were married couples with children. Children lived in more than half (52%) of the 8.2 million Hispanic/Latino households. Only about one-third (33%) of the 9.3 million non-Hispanic/Latino households included children ("*Married with children*": More likely to describe Hispanic/Latino households, 1998).

Hispanic/Latino American children learn early the importance of (1) a deep sense of family responsibility, (2) rigid definitions of sex roles, (3) respectful and reverent treatment of the elderly, and (4) the male's position of respect and authority in the family. Although some of the male's authority appears to be relaxing as the woman's role is redefined, women in the Hispanic/Latino American culture continue to occupy a subordinate position. Fathers have prestige and authority, and sons have more and earlier independence than do daughters.

Hispanic/Latinos value the extended family structure and interaction in their daily lives. Parents often arrange for godparents or "companion parents" for the child, demonstrating the value Hispanic/Latinos place on adults other than the immediate parents. These *compadres* also have a right to give advice and correction and should be responsive to the child's needs.

Etiquette

Spanish speakers tend toward formality in their treatment of one another. A firm handshake is a common practice between people as greeting and for leave-taking. A hug and a light kiss on a cheek are also common greeting practices between women, and men and women who are close friends or family. The Spanish language provides forms of formal and nonformal address (different use of *usted* vs. *tu* for the pronoun *you*, polite and familiar commands, the use of titles of respect before people's first names such as *Don* or *Dona*). In nonformal settings, conversations between Spanish speakers are usually loud, fast, and adorned with animated gestures and body language to better convey points.

Hispanics usually give great importance to and place great value on looks and appearance as a sense of honor, dignity, and pride. Formal attire is commonly worn by Hispanics to

church, parties, social gatherings, and work. Tennis shoes and jeans, however, are becoming more popular among Hispanic women, particularly in non-formal settings. **Hispanics tend to be more relaxed and flexible about time and punctuality than U.S. people. For instance, people who are invited for an 8 a.m. event may not begin to arrive until 8:30 a.m. or later. Within the Hispanic community, not being on time is a socially acceptable behavior.** Hispanics tend to be reserved about public speaking because of their heavy foreign accent.

Rituals and Religions

In the Hispanic world, religion has traditionally played a significant role in daily activity. More than 90% of the Spanish-speaking world is Roman Catholic. In recent years, other faith denominations have experienced growth within the U.S. Hispanic community. The church influences family life and community affairs, giving spiritual meaning to the Hispanic culture. Each local community celebrates its patron saint's day with greater importance and ceremony than individuals do for personal birthdays. As in other parts of the world, traces of the religions of the Indians and African-Americans of Latin America are found in the Catholicism that Hispanics practice.

Celebrations and Holidays

Hispanic countries celebrate the more popular international holidays, notably Easter, Christmas Eve, Christmas, New Year's Day, and the Three Kings' Day. In addition, each country celebrates its *El Dia de Independencia*. The term *fiesta nacional* refers to an official national holiday; *las fiestas* refer to festivals - local, regional, or national - that may be held only one day or may last several days. Most holidays are centered on or have their origins in religion. Many celebrations of the Catholic Church are officially designated by the government as holidays. National government offices may be closed or have limited hours for local or regional holidays.

Eating Habits

In Hispanic countries, a light meal is served for breakfast. Lunch, referred as *el almuerzo*, usually is the main meal of the day for Spanish-speakers. In some countries, it is customary for adult family members and children to come home from work or school for about two hours to be together for this meal. *La siesta*, which is a rest period taken after lunch, is known to be a common practice among adult Hispanics. In the early evening, *la merienda*, a light snack of coffee and rolls or sandwiches, is served. This meal is often very informal and may be just for children. In the evening, often as late as 9:00 p.m., *la cena*, a small

supper, concludes the day's meals. Once settled in the United States, most Hispanics adopt the three-meal system. Midday and evening meals are important family or social events. Especially when guests are present, the meal may be followed by the *sobremesa*, a time to linger and talk over coffee or perhaps an after-dinner drink. Usually when food or additional servings are offered to Hispanics, they tend to accept only after it is offered a second or third time.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

In 1990, over 1 million Hispanic/Latino American families lived in poverty—just over two of every ten Hispanic/Latino families, compared with less than one of every ten non-Hispanic/Latino families. About 30 percent of Puerto Rican families, 33 percent of families from the Dominican Republic, about 10 percent of families from Spain, 11 percent of Cuban families, 23 percent of Mexican families, and 21 percent of Central American families were below the poverty level in the United States in 1990. Although educators should recognize (and respond appropriately to) the effects poverty often has on academic achievement, it would also be a serious mistake to categorize all lower socioeconomic Hispanic/Latinos into unmotivated or underachieving academic groups.

GENDER

In Hispanic/Latino American culture, just as in other cultures, females differ from their male counterparts. Although males and females both experience similar frustrations, such as discrimination and prejudice and sometimes poverty and lower standards of living, Hispanic/Latino American females are different from males in other ways. For example, Hispanic/Latino American females usually prefer cooperative learning environments over competitive classrooms in which many boys learn best. Likewise, Hispanic/Latino American females, because of their families' adherence to strict gender roles, are often less vocal and take less assertive stands than males do.

It is important to note, however, that because of acculturation and females taking steps to improve themselves economically and socially, some Hispanic/Latino American females are adhering less and less to traditional gender expectations.

Selected Characteristics of Hispanic/Latino American Children and Adolescents

Category	Characteristics
Behavioral/emotional expressiveness	Restraint of feelings, particularly anger and frustration
Verbal	Limited verbal expressions toward authority figures
Nonverbal	Preference for closer personal space; avoidance of eye contact when listening or speaking to authority figures
Concept of time	Present time perspective; relaxed about time and punctuality; and immediate short-term goals
Social orientation	Collective, group identity; interdependence; cooperative rather than competitive; emphasis on interpersonal relations

From: Rivera, B. D., & Rogers-Adkinson. D. (1997) Culturally sensitive interventions: Social skills training with children and parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. *Intervention in School and Clinic*. 33(2), 75-80.

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