LITERATURE REVIEW OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE WITH MEXICAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

by

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A Literature Review
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Social Work
Grand Forks, North Dakota

December
2016
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INTRODUCTION

The National Association of Social Workers expects social workers to engage in learning about the implications of culture and social diversity to provide ethical services (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). Cultural competence enables social workers to develop their ability to adapt and fulfill the cultural expectations of clients. It is pivotal for social workers in the U.S. to practice competence because within the next couple of decades, people of color will surpass Whites in population. As a result, there are great implications for the future and health of the population of this country.

Generally, social services in the U.S. are not equipped to work with ethnic minorities and need to undo a legacy of oppression and discrimination to inspire trust in their communities. “Current evidence strongly suggests that prevalent models of health and social service provision, which largely reflect White, middle class values, do not effectively meet the needs of ethnically and racially diverse groups” (Calzada & Suarez Balcazar, 2014). Norris and Alegria found that nonwhite groups underutilize mental health professionals, for reasons that include the lack of culturally competent service providers (Furman, Negi, Iwamoto, Rowan, Shukraft, & Gragg, J. 2009; Warda, 2000).

Yet little work has focused on defining and measuring the dimensions of culturally competent care (Warda, 2000). The demographics of the country are rapidly changing and need to improve and adjust service provision to meet its needs. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 309 million people living in the U.S. in 2010, when 33 million people identified as Mexican (Passel, Cohn, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2012) accounting for about 11% of the total population. It is the largest ethnic subgroup among
Latino cultures in the country. As a result, it is imperative for social workers to understand how to serve Mexican immigrants and their families.

The purpose of this review is to inform the production of a technical report that provides resources and synthesizes the theoretical and practical themes found in the cultural competency literature. This review will also identify relevant topic gaps in the literature and make recommendations for future scholars to direct inquiry. Human service providers in many disciplines and settings across the country could benefit from resourcing research grounded literature that guides the administration of engagement, assessment, intervention, program development, and evaluation.

“Nowhere is the diversity practice more important than when the social worker works with families. They are the purveyors of culture and the incubators of diversity” (Yanca & Johnson, 2008). If a social worker is unequipped to establish relationships with Mexicans, not only could it result at the expense of an opportunity for transformation, but it can have negative impact. However, “to the extent that social services support the status quo, social workers participate in oppression and discrimination because they are products of society” (Siepel, 2006). The service provider is incumbent to becoming equipped to collaborate with Mexican immigrant families in resisting oppression, overcoming barriers, becoming empowered and thriving. “Delivering culturally competent services remains a goal and a highly promising approach to promoting positive outcomes among racially and ethnically diverse groups and to ultimately reducing health disparities” (Calzada & Suarez Balcazar, 2014).
METHODOLOGY OF THE REVIEW

The research studies chosen for this literature review focused on cultural competence practice with Mexicans, Latinos and Hispanics predominantly from the social work and nursing fields. Academic articles were sought on Google Scholar and relevant titles were chosen from the bibliographies of these. In selecting literature review, the author attempted to focus on and chose articles written within the last 20 years. The keywords used in searches included: social work, cultural, competence, competency, sensitive, Mexican, families. Most of the grounding for this review was based on primary sources that were designed specifically for Mexicans and Mexican families (Warda, 2000; Jones, 2014; Hancock, 2005).

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH STUDIES

The research regarding culturally competent care for Mexican immigrant families informs health care providers about client perspectives and the cultural, social and family dynamics that have implications for providing service. There is a significant body of research out of the nursing and social work fields that informs service providers about working with people with Latin American origins. Warda (2000), Hancock (2005) and Jones (2014) ground their cultural competence work with Mexican Americans in the existing literature about Hispanics/Latinos. They discuss the important themes and values that characterize Latin American cultures. The authors focused on sharing the qualities, values and beliefs familial and socio-cultural barriers that are typically experienced in their home and host countries before, during and after immigration. Hancock (2005) used the ecological perspective to ground her examination of Mexican families, Warda (2000) used some components of grounded theory and interviewed focus groups, and Jones
(2014) used the grounded theory method. The authors explore the distinctive experiences that influence Mexican immigrants’ approach to healthcare, providers, and illness. Within the articles, the authors make suggestions for social workers to practice when working with and advocating for Mexican immigrants.

**FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW**

**Defining Cultural Competence**

At least 18 models of cultural competence have been proposed across disciplines (Calzada & Suarez Balcazar, 2014). In their research, Calzada and Suarez Balcazar highlighted a model that integrated three key dimensions commonly discussed including the cognitive, behavioral and organizational components found within cultural competence. The cognitive component emphasizes the critical awareness (i.e., awareness of one’s biases) and knowledge (i.e., understanding of a specific cultural group’s history, religion, historical context and beliefs) relevant to the well-being of families. The behavioral component that emphasizes the ability to put skills into practice to build trust and effectively communicate with and serve diverse families. Finally, an organizational component that emphasizes contextual issues and support for culturally competent practices to meet the needs of diverse families. Due to themes found and special limitations, this literature review will focus on the cognitive and behavioral components.

According to Yanca and Johnson, cultural competence requires,

“developing a view of the world and an attitude toward professional social work practice… that seeks to include everyone rather than excluding anyone, that genuinely values differences and variation… This means developing a system of thinking, feeling, and acting that opens the door to actively seeking new knowledge, to developing values that are consistent with this approach... It means becoming a true professional by giving up the safety of what we know and risking to reach out and learn about what we do not know. It involves learning about values that are different from our own and respecting those values. It involves
learning new skills while coping with discomfort that may be associated with doing something different... It means becoming adept to altering one’s own approach or even abandoning it in favor of one with which the client is comfortable” (2008).

Cultural competence is an ongoing and fluid process and requires continuous development (Calzada & Suarez Balcazar, 2014; Furman, 2009; Yanca & Johnson, 2008). It denotes openness to learning from every situation and willingness to engage in ongoing learning over time. Social workers need to work constantly toward developing their knowledge base about the shifting social dynamics of Latinos here and abroad (Furman, 2009). It is contextual because every family might bring different values, norms, and patterns of behavior to the encounter. Engaging in this process implies a willingness to provide services in different ways and to intentionally make culture central to the interaction between service providers and the families they serve (Calzada & Suarez Balcazar, 2014).

**Defining the Population**

The terms “Latino”, “Hispanic”, and “Mexican” encompass several ethnic groups, not a racial category (Siepel, 2006). The existing research on Mexican immigrants varies in how researchers define the Mexican population used in their studies. The Mexicans in Jones’ (2014) research only included those who spoke English. Hancock (2005) attempted “as much as possible” to draw on sources about first-generation, working class Mexican immigrants and even included sources from other immigrant ethnic populations. Across the broader literature, Mexicans are generally defined as families with members born in Mexico or the United States who are currently residing in the United States (Warda, 2000).
Most researchers grounded the majority of their theory in the existing literature on “Hispanics” and “Latinos” while sporadically citing research that existed specifically about Mexicans. For instance, Warda (2000) discussed their work within the context of the literature on cultural care of “Hispanics”. When discussing their research, some sources explained the rationale behind their use of the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino”. Some used one term and others used both interchangeably. Peterson-Iyer explains that Latinos prefer this term because not all groups of people in Latin America speak Spanish or has Spanish origins (like the term “Hispanic” suggests) and unlike this term, “Latino” avoids focusing on the legacy of European colonization (2008).

The literature about developing cultural competence while serving people from Hispanic or Latino groups calls for professionals to differentiate between ethnic groups throughout Latin America. Researchers have cautioned against lumping Latin American groups together, to consider its enormous heterogeneity, and to avoid making assumptions. Making generalizations about a cultural group are starting points, not ending points. Peterson-Iyer asks care providers to be cautious in oversimplifying the values, customs, and beliefs that characterize any ethnic group (2008). One author suggested that no assumptions at all should be made and that there were differences on two levels that needed to be considered: the ethnic and the individual. Calzada and Suarez Balcazar highlight that diversity among the Hispanic population is seen in race (eg., Black, White, Mestizo), ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language (e.g., various indigenous languages such as Mixtec) and patterns of immigration and regional settlement (2014). Levels of assimilation should also be considered. They call to seep the
understanding and appreciation of culture in recognition of potential differences at the individual and subgroup levels.

“Culture” is defined as a set of structures and institutions, values, traditions and ways of engaging with the social and nonsocial world that are transmitted across generations in a certain time and place (Calzada & Suarez Balcazar, 2014). The following section will describe some inherited ways that Mexicans engage with the social world and are relevant in working with Mexican immigrant families.

**Interpersonal Skills**

Adaptations that programs and services most commonly make to become more culturally competent include incorporating cultural values important to Hispanics into the program (Calzada & Suarez Balcazar, 2014). The consensus in the literature about Mexicans, Hispanics and Latinos is that Latin American cultures prioritize the value of relationships and on being personal or “personalismo”, in other words, warmth and closeness in personal interactions (Furman et al., 2009; Peterson-Iyer, 2008; Seipel & Way, 2006). Interpersonal characteristics are emphasized over individual achievements.

This might be due to the high value placed on kinship and collectivism. Until recently, the great majority of Mexico’s inhabitants relied on farming and agriculture for sustenance. “Today, one in three farm workers are newcomers to the U.S. with most of these coming from Mexico” (Peterson-Iyer, 2008). The survival and success of families relied on interdependence and required large families to fulfill the tasks associated with farming and husbandry. As a result, in relation to dominant U.S. culture, Mexicans have high expectations and rigid social norms regarding relationships (Warda, 2000). Since
relationships are the vehicle through which social work is delivered, it is crucial for professionals working with Mexicans to understand these.

A social worker could demonstrate this drive by focusing on social work delivery as a collection of tasks: crossing off tasks from a checklist, sticking to scripts and collecting answers for an assessment, adhering to schedules, focus on outcomes, and strictly abiding to rules, perceiving deviation from these beliefs as “disrespectful” or “inappropriate” and expecting their clients to adopt these values and mannerisms. A response to this typical disposition of Americans has led to division in Latino (and other marginalized) groups as members of these groups have adopted “respectability politics”. In comparison, Mexicans prioritize interpersonality above tasks (Warda, 2000, p. 221). For social workers, that might mean putting away the questionnaire and clipboard to help the interaction feel more personal and less contrived, sterile, and distant.

To develop trust with the service professionals working with them, Mexicans need to see them as engaging, pleasant, sensitive, emotionally invested and look to see this expressed through verbal and non-verbal communication and conscious efforts to being open to connect with them (Jones, 2014; Warda, 2000). According to Furman et al., mistrust of the health care system is another reason Latinos may not seek services (2009). “Latino patients are more likely than White patients to feel that a provider has judged them unfairly” (as cited in Furman et al., 2009). Warda explains that “many Hispanics see… bureaucracies as unresponsive, which makes them less likely to get help unless in an emergency or to seek the resources from which they might receive information” (2000). Reservations should not be interpreted as resistance, but instead sensitivity needs to be had around the mistrust (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2009). Mexicans are more trusting and
believe they are treated with respect when they see the professional engaging with them by focusing on affect and action driven responses, talking and responding, and treating people as individuals.

They value intimacy in relationships and kindness. They expect to be treated with caring, understanding, and patience. In short, Mexicans value politeness, the avoidance of hostile confrontation, likeability, attractiveness, fun, and easygoing, also known as “simpatía” (Peterson-Iyer, 2008, Warda, 2000). They expect their interactions with others to be pleasant and less associated with negative experiences. Some examples of delivery may include using physical contact (e.g., handshakes or pats on the back) as the relationship develops, spatial closeness, providing home-visits and walk-in appointments, accepting gifts (such as food) and in-person rather than written and email communication (Calzada & Suarez Balcazar, 2014; Detlaff & Rycraft, 2009; Seipel & Way, 2006).

Due to the value of relationships and intimacy, many Latino clients want to know about the familial life of the social worker, contrary to the norms of professional boundaries in dominant culture. Gutierrez et al. even recommends the development of personal relationships before proceeding to a professional relationship (as cited in Seipel & Way, 2006). Furman et al. suggests the use of appropriate personal disclosure to fulfill the client’s need of better understanding the worker in the context of a family to cultivate the working alliance (2009). Detllaff and Rycraft believe its effective to spend a longer period of time in initial meetings to allow for the establishment of trust through a curious and conversation approach (2009).

Jones’ work aims to “conceptualize the process of the development of interpersonal trust by hospitalized [Mexican American] patients in their nurses” (2014).
They found that for Mexican patients to feel comfortable demonstrating vulnerability, they expected their nurses to demonstrate the aforementioned values. If they felt they could trust the professional caring for them, they disclose personally, feel at ease and allow to be helped without feeling guilty. Their ability to feel cared for and comfortable asking for help could be jeopardized by a single interaction that proved to them as otherwise.

In the event of a negative encounter, trust could be compromised and the client may even not want further interactions with that professional, let alone ask for help if they needed it. Mexicans feel like a bother when asking for help (Jones, 2014). Not only could clients withhold trust, but they could even mistrust the professional and this could lead to them becoming angry and vigilant as they receive care. Jones also found that clients built trust when they did not feel judged and when their practitioner have a positive attitude. Making a first impression through which they demonstrated the appropriate demeanor made an impact in the development of the relationship.

The success of a social worker-client relationship depends on the social worker’s ability to develop trust. “Failure to properly address cultural differences creates and maintains mistrust and other potential conflicts between service providers and potential clients, further contributing to low quality of care and poor health outcomes” (Calzada & Suarez Balcazar, 2014). Furman et al. found that Latino clients might be leery of White professionals as a result of perceived and experienced discrimination (2009). The development of a successful relationship with Mexicans depends more than the behavioral component that emphasizes the ability to put skills into practice and build trust and effectively communicate with Mexican families, but also to develop the cognitive
component that further emphasizes the knowledge of the specific cultural group’s historical context and beliefs.

There are social worker practice implications for this. If the client does not establish trust with Mexican clients, an opportunity is lost to serve a person from a population that is normally underserved. This is at the expense of a marginalized group of people that have a hard time navigating other social services. The establishment of trust could make the difference in the pursuits of social workers to carry out their practice ethically and effectively. It seems these fundamental and practical concepts that could vastly inform the strengthening of relationships for social workers should be essential and widespread knowledge among practitioners.

**DISCUSSION**

Through this literature review, it was discovered that there is a great scarcity of literature specifically for Mexicans, Mexican families and Mexican Americans. The literature that existed that was relevant discussed Hispanic and Latino populations, including their need for culturally appropriate and responsive services and the importance of these. Considering the proportion of the growing population and the high and specialized needs Mexicans have, the implications in the impact of the nation’s mental health and social services are significant. Given that there are many Mexicans with which to practice, overcoming language barriers might be challenging to social workers. Research related to why there is not more literature specific to Mexicans could guide future inquiry.

Extracting Mexican-specific information from the literature of Hispanics and Latinos was burdensome and the interchangeability and synonymous use of terms led to a
focus on exploring how the ethnicity was defined. Throughout the literature, Mexicanness is treated as a sub ethnicity of the larger ethnic categorization of Hispanicity and Latinoness. Although researchers call for the need for social workers to be specific and develop nuanced differentiation between Latino groups, it contributed to the pattern of treating the topic as it cautioned to avoid. This discrepancy led to an emphasis of the review on the definition of the concept.

Few times has the United States experienced such height of racial tension as when this report was being written. During the momentum’s crescendo, pundits reiterated the relentless denial and ignorance about racism among Americans (Bedrick, 2015; Bouie, 2011; Grimsley, 2016; Tankersley, Craighill, and Clement, 2015; Wise, 2015). As the presidential campaigns progressed and the Republican candidate Donald Trump incessantly made controversial, race-laden comments, a fiercely divided country argued whether he or his comments were racist. At the same time, national conversation regarding police use of excessive force towards Blacks divided the country. Political and ideological discourse through social media permitted an unprecedented window into the American mind. Exposed was a glaring inability to define, much less grasp the concept of racism. A predictable trend in polarized conversations included at least two parties with different ideas about what racism meant. These conversations seldom (if ever) began with the two parties agreeing about what the concept meant in the first place. How could it be possible to find common ground and advance a conversation if there is no agreement about what the topic we are talking about means? As a country, how could competence related to ethnic groups even in a profession as specific as social work advance if there is not an established understanding or consistent conceptualization of what it is?
Future scientific inquiry regarding social work practice with people from Central and Latin America must be as specific as possible, depart from the deductive approach of using global categories for the aim of encompassing as many peoples possible, and abandon the use of terms that the labeled populations reject (Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, & Velasco, 2012). The conversation regarding the controversy regarding whether people call themselves Chicano/a, Latina/o or Hispanic are dated and well documented. A challenge in honoring the self-determination of the groups of people from Latin America is that there is no agreed philosophy regarding how to conceptualize themselves even at the level of academia (Renteria, 1998). Future level of inquiry could build on an update in the exploration of Latino and Chicano and Mexican/Mexican American identity politics.

The intention of this literature review began as a project to build on the research related to Mexican immigrants and social work practice. Due to the limitations of time and access for this project, the few existing updated sources were difficult to acquire and reference. The theme of the project evolved into a less specific area of study. To be more specific, raw data on Mexican clients and families seems what there needs to be more of. The few studies that were available were often very specific in their area of study that it was difficult to draw from them. The most information was gathered from larger studies related to cultural competence that used some specific examples regarding Mexican culture and families and the studies that largely focused on Latinos/Hispanics.

The literature regarding cultural competence and Mexicans, Hispanics, and Latinos consistently stresses the importance of values including the emphasis on relationships, family, the role of religion, and celebrations. If these depart most
consistently from those held by practitioners in the United States, social workers whose ethnic majority is White could invest their research and practice efforts in learning about their understanding of their own culture and of Mexican culture. They could demonstrate their commitments by developing their awareness around cultural competence by identifying areas of practice that need improvement, engaging with Mexicans, developing understanding regarding how professionals and clients view each other, developing awareness of implications in practice, and by overcoming their personal barriers that impede this process.

Along the sentiment of honoring self-determination and focusing inquiry and exploration by the population being served, an emphasis was placed on the pervasive literature on interpersonal skills given the Mexican value of relationships over tasks. Traditional didactic methods emphasize on accomplishing the objectives of service such as engagement, assessment, intervention, closing, etc. Engagement is the very first phase, since without it, not much else can be accomplished. Research regarding cultural competence with Mexicans could benefit the profession by emphasizing engagement. This includes the building of a relationship, establishing a connection, and trust. Social workers could benefit from learning the intricacies of accomplishing these by working with Mexicans.

**CONCLUSION**

By conducting this literature review, it was discovered that social services in the U.S. are not equipped to work with ethnic minorities and not enough work has done to fully define culturally competent services. Much of the literature attempted to generally define it. Literature for Mexicans is scarce, and most of it is referred to as information for
Latinos and Hispanics. The most common themes include the importance of the values they embody, particularly related to interpersonal relationships. Mexicans are culturally collective, value intimacy, kindness, family, and trust.

Based on the findings of this review, the author proposes the following for future inquiry:

- Research should be made for specific ethnic groups such as for “Purhepecha Mexican Immigrants”, or “Honduran Immigrants” and not for “Latinos and Hispanics”.
- Future areas of inquiry could be made to explore Latino, Chicano, Mexican/Mexican American identity politics, since there is no consensus on what term is preferred by the people who use them.
- Everyone, and especially White social workers need to be more inclusive and could invest time in building their awareness and improve areas of practice to connect better with this population.
- Research could begin by understanding how to engage Mexicans.

Social workers are at the forefront of social change and considering that Mexicans are the largest ethnic group, such a large part of the population and are a vulnerable population that are often in the need of social services, it is necessary that social worker professionals prioritize this topic.
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doi:10.1177/01939450022044368


Establishing Relationships with Mexican Immigrants

A Technical Report for Social Work Practice

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Master of Social Work
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December 2016
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Acknowledgments

Deseo reconocer a todos mis paisanos que sin cesar, a través de nuestra historia colectiva, humildemente han dado y aguantado todo para sacarnos adelante; especialmente a mi familia de inmigrantes: Cristina, Javier, Mayola y Javier Pineda quienes sin duda han mejorado este país con su sudor, risas, y lagrimas. Al siempre ser mis héroes y al ofrecerme ejemplos firmes a seguir, ustedes son la razón por la cual soy. Esto, lo logramos juntos.

I wish to recognize all my compatriots who relentlessly, throughout our collective history have humbly given and endured everything for our success; especially my family of immigrants: Cristina, Javier, Mayola and Javier Pineda, who have undoubtedly improved this country with their sweat, laughter, and tears. By always being my heroes and providing me with solid examples to follow, you are the reason that I am. We accomplished this together.

Thank you, Amelia Gross, Dr. Melanie Sage, Dr. Marcela Ochoa-Shivapour, and to the Masters Margaret Nadziejko, Robin Eisenbach, Marisol Naranjo-Herrera, Debra Oliver, Jeannette Baca, all my mentors, and my entire community in the Pacific Northwest for seeing me. You are my other me.

Gracias a Amelia Gross, las Dras. Melanie Sage y Marcela Ochoa-Shivapour, y a las Maestras Margaret Nadziejko, Robin Eisenbach, Marisol Naranjo-Herrera, Debra Oliver, Jeannette Baca, todos mis mentores, y mi comunidad entera del Pacífico Noroeste por reconocerme. Ustedes son mi otro yo.

Gracias a mis padrinos Abel y Rosa E. Tovar que a través de mi vida, han sido de mis abogados y apoyantes más ferozes.

Thanks to my godparents, Abel and Rosa E. Tovar, who throughout my life have been some of my fiercest advocates and supporters.
Introduction

This resource aims to focus on introducing practical concepts that aid practitioners in the development of social service programs or events for Mexican immigrants. It briefly touches in social and historical contextualization, albeit not in depth since there is an abundance of existing resources of this nature. It is also not to be a standalone guide on developing cultural competence, rather it is meant to be used in complement to the available literature. There are resources throughout the body of this report and a resource list at the end of this document with information that is recommended for the reader to absorb to acquire further perspective.

This tool was developed in response to the need for more accessible, concrete examples in the cultural competence literature. It is also meant to aid the navigation of high levels of complex analysis of abstract ideas so they are more easily incorporated into practice. Cultural competence is a lifelong commitment to deepening awareness and nuance, not an end that can be fulfilled. Because there is enough literature to fill many lifetimes, social workers must make choices regarding the feasibility of their professional development within their limitations and constraints. Presented is an effort to ameliorate a known and identified problem for Social workers challenged with increasing the inclusivity of people and ideas in their services.

The cultural analysis and suggestions in this resource are based on the experience of the author and a thorough review of the literature pertaining to cultural norms and values of Mexican immigrant families. She has been personally immersed, academically oriented, and professionally committed to Mexican immigrants during her entire life. After being raised in a Mexican neighborhood by Chicago and in central Mexico, she has worked with Mexican immigrants and their families in several regions and communities throughout the United States. She identified the need for this report after working in multiple settings with new and seasoned professionals alike who are aware about the need to serve Mexican immigrants, yet have been at a loss when it came to creating programs and events that successfully engage the population. She noticed that professionals are stumped by the language barriers and underestimate the power of intentional and non-linguistic presence.
The author has heard many professionals who have avoided engaging in home visits or in relationship to Mexicans because they fear offending them. The information offered including the “dos and don’ts” are not “rules” of engagement. If they are not followed or adopted, Mexicans will not disengage, become angry, or even be offended. Rather, they are courtesies that are extended to people who are accustomed to the expectation that they should adapt to the comfort of the dominant culture and to absorb the consequences of misunderstandings. They are guiding principles that could help enhance the establishment of relationships with Mexicans. “Speak English, this is America” is a phrase every immigrant understands. When United Statesians make attempts to connect with them on the terms to which they are accustomed, it is usually unexpected but the most imperfect attempts are welcome.

As a Mexican woman, Claudia finds social work practice and the publication of this report to be empowering since it emphasizes her understanding of racism and powerlessness within her own community while attempting to adapt the skills of conventional practice to the perspective of the people who experience it.

Conceptualization

In this report, the terms “Mexican” and “Mexican immigrant” are used interchangeably. This is defined by an ethnic group of first and second-generation immigrants. For this report, a first-generation immigrant is a person who was born in Mexico and then migrated to the United States. A second-generation immigrant is defined by a U.S. born offspring of a parent who was born in Mexico. In the literature, first generation immigrants are usually considered to only apply to those who were raised in Mexico as well, while children who were raised in the United States are considered as second-generation.

The rationale for using these terms interchangeably stems from the inevitable level of impact that defines the experience of the population in this country. If someone is born in Mexico, this person’s identity is inextricably marked by their parent’s worldview when this person/people are a part of the child’s life and/or when the child’s skin color or physical features are considered “exotic” or “different” than Whites. The way society treats and reacts to these differences and the way in which this person spends their lives attempting to navigate mainstream United Statesian culture will mark their sense of self and relationship to others.
Educational institutions and professions including that of social work are founded in oppression and uphold barriers that exclude Mexicans from having a more centralized role in their empowerment. Instead, there is some literature that focuses generally on “Hispanics” and “Latinos”. Although some information is relevant to Mexican culture, it is not appropriate to use a concept imposed on people by Whites. There are thousands of ethnic groups throughout Latin America each with distinct histories, and cultures, even within national borders. In Central and South America, people prefer to identify themselves best through national identity and in Mexico, people even identify best with the state or region from which they derive. For these reasons and for the sheer volume of immigrants in this country, it is problematic for researchers to continue attempting to rationalize the illogical creation of “otherness”. This categorization would possibly be relevant if these groups have taken on the label for themselves or if nuance did not have such important implications to practice.

“When Labels Don’t Fit: Hispanics and Their View of Identity”


For example, compare the investigative value of lumping a English speaking, U.S.-born person with only European roots from the Southwest who identifies as “Hispanic” based on their Spanish ancestry with a newly arrived undocumented immigrant from Nicaragua who speaks not a word of English. The social contexts in which the two exist could not be more different as well as the approaches social workers need to consider, however under the current definitions of Hispanicity, both could claim association to the term. The few resources that exist in the literature that are based on Mexicans specifically usually draw their information from sources that do not differentiate between Mexicans and Latinos. Therefore, there is a lack of literature that equips Mexican social workers to support their communities in their quest for social liberation and expansion of human rights.

The term “United Statesian” is used in this report instead of the term “American” because the more common term does not distinguish between Canadians, Mexicans or Central and South Americans. This pattern of appropriating the name of an entire hemisphere resonates with the United Statesian tendency to center and bestow itself as it sees fit while failing to involve other impacted parties. The intention in challenging the mainstream use of language in this report is in attempt to change social behavior and structure.
Finally, although the author is Mexican and a daughter and sister of immigrants, she recognizes her relative privilege as a naturally born citizen of the United States, middle-class, from a professional social network, with lighter skin, a graduate level education, who speaks fluent English, and benefits from a myriad of unearned privileges that Mexican immigrants typically do not enjoy. It is because of this that in the context of this paper, she refers to herself as “us” and “we” in association to dominant culture and United Statesians and to Mexicans as “them”.

The use of generalizations in this report towards “Mexicans” may be influenced by variables such as where they live in the United States, age at which they immigrated, legal status, intersecting identities, and their degrees of:

- Connection they have to their Mexican family
- Skin tone
- Indigenous affiliation
- Level of assimilation/acculturation

For example, a light skinned cisgender, heterosexual, Mexican male with green eyes and blonde hair that grew up in a suburb where there were few Mexicans and attended college will have a different experience than a male with dark skin in the same circumstances. The lateral is more likely to experience discrimination based on his physical appearance while the first person had the privilege of “passing” and choice in his identification as “other” than White or not. Alternately, if the “Whiter looking” of the two was raised in an environment with more people of color, he may experience a different level of discrimination and ostracization by people of color themselves. Although both would experience a degree of “ousting”, it is the one who has darker features that would be impacted the most by systemic, institutional, and cultural forces (assuming he is able-bodied).

Diversity in Mexico and demographics of immigrants

Like many other groups of any given national origin, Mexicans’ cultures are diverse. To give an idea of the physical space of Mexico, it takes up almost three times as much land mass
as Texas. There are 31 states throughout the country and cultures across socioeconomic classes, ethnicities, and regions vary. People have lived in Mexico for at least 12,000 years. Currently there are about 60 indigenous ethnic groups who speak about 70 different languages. The racial heritage of its inhabitants is rich as cross-generational mixing of Africans, Indigenous groups, and Europeans has been occurring since the late 1500s. Due to this, there is no standard profile for the physical characteristics of Mexicans.

Despite the diversity that exists across Mexico, there are more specific characteristics about the groups of people that have recently immigrated to the United States and where particular groups of immigrants have settled is even more predictable. Therefore, it is recommended that service providers become familiar with the specific demographics that have immigrated to the region in which they practice. For instance, in New Mexico, there is an abundance of immigrants originating in the Northern Mexican state of Chihuahua and people from that region have different demographics and culture than those of the central Mexicans who have immigrated to the Chicago area, or the southern Mexicans living in the Pacific Northwest. The specific demographics of each community should be accounted when incorporating the general recommendations within this resource.

The link below will lead to the online article, “A Demographic Portrait of Mexican-Origin Hispanics in the United States” by Ana Gonzalez-Barrera and Mark Hugo López for the Pew Research Center.

http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/05/01/a-demographic-portrait-of-mexican-origin-hispanics-in-the-united-states/

Considering the diversity that exists among Mexican immigrants, it may still be useful and to some degree necessary to make generalized assumptions about Mexican immigrants in the United States for the purpose of providing general guidance. However, workers should remember that all people are unique and it is important to get information directly from the people you serve about their particular cultural and family values. For example, just how it is safe to generalize that Mexicans love tacos, it does not mean that all Mexicans are meat eaters or have a high tolerance for spice in their food. This report will intentionally and carefully use generalizations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ask Mexicans what languages they speak.</td>
<td>Assume they speak Spanish. It may be their second language, if at all. Their first language may be an indigenous tongue or English. They might speak some Spanish. Also, Mexicans may not always teach their children Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask Mexicans where they were born with a clear intention about why you are asking.</td>
<td>Assume they were born in Mexico or that they are undocumented. Ask this question sensitively once you have established trust. Considering widespread U.S. nativism and xenophobia, this question might have been previously asked prior to a racial attack, and might cause anxiety.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask people who you suspect may be Mexican about their “ethnicity” or “heritage”.</td>
<td>Ask what is their “nationality” or where they are from if you want to know from where their ancestors hail. Avoid commenting on whether they “look” Mexican or not. Mexicans come in all colors, shades, shapes and sizes. Forget that there are other ethnicities that have people with brown skin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask people from what state(s) in Mexico their family are from.</td>
<td>Assume all of Mexico is the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask when they were last in Mexico, if at all.</td>
<td>Assume they do not have a relationship to the land. Some people haven’t been to Mexico since they were very young and have not seen their hometowns or families since.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask specific questions about their culture. What religion(s) do their family practice? What holidays do they celebrate? Are they from a pueblo, ranch or a city?</td>
<td>Avoid or ignore the ties Mexicans have to Mexico or their culture because you do not know about it. Ask whether they are undocumented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position yourself as a learner. Be “other-centered”.</td>
<td>Eagerly share your experiences of being in tourist parts (resorts, Acapulco, Cancun, etc.), having volunteered there, or share about the other Mexican people you know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn at least a few words in the language your client speaks. The attempt and effort goes a long way.</td>
<td>Concern yourself about your accent or perfection in your grammar.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The social news and entertainment firm, Buzzfeed, published a satirical YouTube video that was viewed nearly 7 million times, flipping comments that Whites often make to Latinos to demonstrate the dissonance in cross-cultural interactions. The problems highlighted by the video suggests the needs for Whites to be open and flexible by views about Latinos and listen carefully to their own perspective, rather than taking any issue for granted in relation to their identity. The link below leads to the video.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnFUDx3wC-Y

Creating an experience

Social workers act as artists who use their selves and the environment to create a stage for an interactive performance with clients. In the shadows of a dance performance, they lead the processes in which their partners shine. Like chess players, every move, every word, every question is intentional and informed by an idea. This art requires the artist to understand the power, function, potential, and use of its most important tool: the self as a paintbrush. To have self-awareness is to be cognizant of how one shows up in a space, the perceptions that could possibly be had of one’s presence through body language, tone, facial expression, and energy; whether intended or not. Self-awareness is necessary to create a distance between what is believed to be true to the degree that those “truths” could be questioned. These include biases, narratives, and assumptions. The more one can do this, the more one can be in tune with meeting their clients where they are, in developing empathy, understanding, and connection.

To understand the culture of others, it is helpful to become aware of the culturally inherited beliefs that underlie one’s own worldview. In 1984, Robert J. Kohls published a popular guide that helps describe United Statesian culture. Although this work is somewhat dated, it can be argued that national mainstream values inherited for hundreds of years are unlikely to become irrelevant within 30 years. Click on the link below to access a sample of his work.

http://spot.pcc.edu/~sbentley/The%20values%20americans%20live%20by.pdf
The ability to use the self is discussed because engaging Mexican immigrants requires the consideration of faculties that are often neglected in traditional service discourse. Self-awareness requires accounting for parts of the self that may be taken for granted, that wouldn’t normally be questioned if it weren’t for the attending to what could be contributing to someone else’s experience. More than feelings, beliefs and ideas, these also include sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. It includes the consideration of how others might be influenced by spacial awareness and room set up. Just how a social worker might stop using chemical fragrances for those with chemical sensitivities or how they might be vigilant to accessibility for people with special needs, we need to be thorough in our considerations while working cross-culturally.

Follow the link below to access a pdf document with the work of Margo J. Heydt and Nancy E. Sherman regarding the “Conscious Use of Self” in Social Work Practice with Cultural Competence


Attention to these kinds of details are noticeable from the receiving end. Clients are sensitive to the disposition of practitioners to serve or help. A facial expression, open body language, and willingness to invest are all gestures that can be appreciated without needing language to communicate intention or meaning. The proverb of “actions speak louder than words” appropriately captures the conveyance of this idea.

The process of becoming aware, making these considerations, and stepping out of habits and reflexes could be initially uncomfortable. It requires accepting parts of ourselves that we may deny due to fear or insecurity. However, as social workers we need to be able to work through, and put our personal baggage to the side (at least temporarily), because our mission is to hold space for someone else who is more uncomfortable than ourselves. Inadvertently, we may be getting in our own way of the work that we seek to accomplish. Unlike us, Mexican clients are not as able to choose as easily whether they step into that space or not. The expectation that we become temporarily uncomfortable to assist someone who is not only uncomfortable but vulnerable or lacking basic needs most of the time seems completely valid.

The need to have this level of self-awareness is universal. The intended audience of the report is for the majority of social workers who are White and English speaking. However, these lessons are also required for Mexican, Latino/Hispanic and Spanish speaking social workers. It is
commonly assumed that because someone belongs to an ethnic group, that they are culturally competent or have self-awareness. This could not be far from truth. Often, it is this assumption that enables people in these positions to create confusion among other professionals or perpetrate harm among the clients receiving services.

Once, a White Spanish speaking professional shared with the author that she had perceived the attention she received at a Mexican restaurant to be rude. She said that “they should be grateful that she works to help their people” instead of being rude to her. On several other occasions, the author witnessed people of color in gatekeeping roles\(^1\) enforcing respectability politics\(^2\) on members of their own ethnic groups since they were unaware of the impact of their behavior and awareness of their role in the greater context of racism and oppression. The author has also witnessed times that the staff of predominantly white institutions celebrated their hiring of a person of color, although these hires were not vetted around their self-awareness in relation to their community or their cultural competence. People of color internalize racism and it is often people of color that have learned to selectively acculturate just enough to navigate traditional institutions that end up enforcing dominant values authoritatively on the people they serve, further contributing to their subjugation. Just how some white people believe they are culturally competent because they have friends or partners that are people of color, many people of color believe they have also reached competence by the virtue of being a person of color.

People of color need to do their own work in self-examination including understanding how they have been personally impacted by racism, what their role has been and is contributing to racism, and what specific role they need to play in undoing their own internalizations and in undoing racism and how they need to be working with allies to increase cultural competence. They need to specifically know how to use their power as a member of an ethnic group to enhance the empowerment and liberation of their own members and how to avoid doing the opposite. Mexican people weren’t born knowing history, politics, economics, or policy and how these have played a role in the collective identity of Mexicans. They are not automatically aware to the ways in which they have or have not bought into dominant values and ideologies. They

\(^1\) Gatekeepers work in institutions and ensure that the institution perpetuates itself.
\(^2\) Respectability Politics refers to attempts by marginalized groups to police their own members and show their social values as being continuous, and compatible, with mainstream values rather than challenging the mainstream for what they see as its failure to accept difference.
may have a lot more insight into these topics because they might have seen them from the inside out. That awareness varies from each individual person’s experience.

Adjusting to a different life

The Spanish translation for “wetback” is Mojado, meaning “one who is wet”. Below are select lyrics from a song titled “Mojado” written by Guatemalan singer song-writer, Ricardo Arjona and released in 2005. Through beautiful poetry, the lyrics powerfully capture raw sentiments, underlying rage, aspects of the Latino immigrant experience, and injustice created by immigration laws of the United States.

The official “Mojado” music video with English subtitles can be found through this link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZOJI0Iryxo

Empacó un par de camisas, un sombrero
Su vocación de aventurero, seis consejos,
siete fotos
Mil recuerdos

Empacó sus ganas de quedarse
Su condición de transformarse
En el hombre que soñó
Y no ha logrado

Dijo adiós con una mueca disfrasada de sonrisa
Y le suplicó a su Dios crucificado en la repisa
El resguardo de los suyos

Y perforó la frontera
Como pudo

Si la luna suave se desliza
Por cualquier cornice
Sin permiso alguno
Porque el mojado precisa
Comprobar con visas
Que no es de neptuno

He packed a pair of shirts, a hat
His vocation of adventurer, six pieces of advice, seven photos
A thousand memories

He packed his desires to remain
His condition to transform himself
into the man he has dreamed of
But has not achieved

Said goodbye with a grimace disguised as a smile
And he pleaded with his God crucified on the shelf
The preservation of his own

And he penetrated the border
However he could

If the soft moon slides
Through any cornice
Without any permission
Why is the wetback expected
to prove with visas
that he is not from Neptune?
El mojado tiene ganas de secarse
El mojado está mojado por las lagrimas que evoca la nostalgia
El mojado, el indocumentado
Carga el bulto que el legal no cargaría
Ni obligado
El suplicio de un papel lo ha convertido en fugitivo
Y no es de aquí porque su nombre no aparece en los archivos
Ni es de allá porque se fue

Mojado
Sabe a mentira tu verdad
Sabe a tristeza la ansiedad
De ver un freeway y soñar con la vereda
Que conduce hasta tu casa

Mojado, mojado de tanto llorar
Sabiendo que en algún lugar
Espera un beso haciendo pausa
Desde el día en que te marchaste

Si la visa universal se extiende
El día en que nacemos
Y caduca en la muerte
Por que te persiguen mojado
Si el cónsul de los cielos
Ya te dio permiso

The wetback is anxious to dry himself
The wetback is wet with tears evoked by nostalgia
The wetback, the undocumented
Carries the bundle that the documented wouldn't carry
Even if obligated
The pursuit for a paper has turned him into a fugitive
And he isn't from here because his name doesn't appear in the archives
Neither is he from there because he left

Wetback
Truth tastes like a lie
Anxiety tastes like sadness
To see a freeway and dream of a driveway
That leads to your home

Wetback, wet from crying so much
Knowing that in some place
Waits a kiss that's been on pause
Since the day you left

If the universal visa extends
from the day in which we are born
and expires upon death
why do they persecute you, wetback
if the consul of the heavens
has already given you permission

Mexican immigrants, especially those that reside in the U.S. without permission from the government, often yearn for their home country. For many, the “American Dream” was not a commitment of coming to stay in this country permanently. In their hometown, they often heard from others that it was a place in which economic success was assured. They may have come with the idea that their stay would be temporary or that they would return to visit often. They would work, live modestly, and return home sooner rather than later. Once here, they come to realize that the cost of living is so high that regardless of how much or hard they work it can be challenging to break even, let alone save money to accomplish their original plans. Many experience setbacks and over time, the dream of returning home quickly to revel in newly acquired wealth becomes an unreachable and naïve dream. Some end up acculturating or adapting to the United Statesian lifestyle. They marry, raise United Statesian children, bring their family from Mexico, and buy houses.
Generally, in Mexico, daily urban and rural life is filled with a diversity of rich smells, beautiful landscapes, fresh produce, sophisticated cuisine, a variety of sounds, never-ending music, an abundance of opportunities to dance, laugh, and socialize. There are common sayings that people “live poor but happy” or “simple, but happy”. There is an overarching sense of focus on the quality of life versus the quantity of material owned or consumed. In exchange, United Statesians highly value materialism, at the expense of productivity and superficial wealth. Although these lifestyles are coveted by Mexicans who are exposed to material abundance in the media, the joy of consuming is often short-lived.

This sudden, sometimes unexpected, and dramatic change in lifestyle leaves them to figure out how to cope with intense personal experiences including culture shock, and result in depression, adjustment disorders, anxiety, substance abuse, social discord, and other challenges. Consider what it may be like from transitioning from an entire life surrounded by family, community, open spaces, warmth, and familiarity to living somewhere that is unfamiliar, isolating, and restrictive. The work-life balance in the United States is dramatically less family and community friendly than in Mexico.

In addition to these conditions, racism and discrimination is another adjustment into their identities that is internalized differently for each person. Immigrants, especially those who are undocumented, experience explicit discrimination and other forms of abuse while attempting to access resources including housing, healthcare, education, employment, and other social services. Without prior experience navigating these scenarios, not knowing that they have rights, and in fear that attempts to defend themselves could impact them negatively, they stay silent.

Read The Seattle Globalist’s, “Rejecting the American Dream, Mexicans Reintegrate Back Home” that you may access with the link below.

http://www.seattleglobalist.com/2015/03/26/mexico-american-dream-reintegrate-migrant-immigration/35018
Aside from the hostility and rejection experienced in day to day life, Mexicans, like other marginalized populations, become aware that there are explicit and implicit narratives that permeate national culture and reinforce hatred and discrimination towards them. As a defense and coping mechanism, Mexicans learn to be weary of people from other races and cultures who could potentially subscribe to these ideologies.

At the beginning of Donald Trump’s Presidential campaign in June of 2016, he said that Mexico “sends” its people who are not their best. “They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with them. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” This incensed people around the world and it was damaging to Mexicans whose ever-present, looming fears of how they’re viewed by others in this country were confirmed. Although he did not recant, some apologists claimed that his comments were out of context and that he did not intend to offend Mexicans.

Regardless of his intent, the impact of failing to understand what a generalization is and how it was used greatly overshadowed the historical pattern of zealots strategically exploiting racism to preserve personal, cultural, and racial dominance. After all, that is why racism exists and powerful groups in society control social beliefs about the nature of society that perpetuates the ideology. The narrative that we tell about something chooses between possible alternatives so that our communications convince others that what we say is true. If we can rethink it, a different interpretation may become true. Trump seized an opportunity to benefit himself and the ethnic group he represents at the expense of another with less power.

PDF link below: “But You’re Not a Dirty Mexican”: Internalized Oppression, Latinos & Law by Laura M. Padilla, Law Professor at California Western School of Law.

The experience of Mexicans in this country is greatly shaped by external, environmental factors. Social workers committed to understanding oppression need to have a solid grasp of this experience and their impacts because they have the power to either contribute to or to challenge the momentum of exclusion. With understanding and tools, social workers can also share strategies to ameliorate the impact of xenophobia. To gain the trust of Mexicans who can come to seek services with an impact like the ones described, there are attitudes and values social workers can learn to interpret and embody.

The link below will lead you to a site with an e-version of the textbook titled, “the Psychology of Culture Shock” by Colleen Ward, Stephen Bochner, and Adrian Furnham. Chapter 9 is dedicated to their research regarding the topic in relation to immigrants. On page 44 there is a relevant figure that displays the acculturation process.

http://www.academia.edu/2662056/Psychology_of_culture_shock

Displaying personalismo

A significant amount of literature discusses the Mexican value of personalismo. This means that Mexicans are heavily relationship-oriented. Displaying warmth, openness, and kindness is an important aspect of developing trust and rapport with Mexicans. This premium on relationships is not to be confused with the nonchalant “informality” United Statesians value that for Mexicans can be a sign of disrespect. From the perspective of more formal societies such as Mexico, United Statesians’ casualness may come off as being disrespectful by not appearing to take others or matters seriously.

For Mexicans, the value of personalismo in contrast to the United Statesian definition of “professionalism”, and values regarding privacy, independence, and tasks can lead to distance in relationships. In the United States, professionals are typically expected to separate their work and personal lives, to focus on the client, and to be weary of confusing roles. This is also a manifestation of the United Statesian preference for linearity, individuality, and that which is
concrete. In contrast, for Mexicans to feel like they can trust their service providers, they need to feel that they are interacting with a person who has similarities to them, sees them as an individual, and is personally invested in their wellbeing. For Mexicans, an absence of emotional expression can be viewed as impersonal, inauthentic, and void of empathy and concern. Mexicans are curious about the personal lives of the professionals they meet. It does not make sense for a Mexican client to divulge personal and vulnerable information with someone who is not willing to exchange some level of disclosure.

In institutions of the U.S., to be “professional” and “strong” is often expressed through the restraint of emotion. A culturally appropriate ice breaker after an introduction for a social worker who just met a client would be to ask from where they are. The social worker could then respond by sharing from where their own family is from, offering slightly more of a disclosure to give the client an opportunity to build in their response. For example, a response could be, “I’m from Wisconsin. I grew up there and my mom still lives there.” Sharing about oneself in relationship and in the context of one’s family is comforting for Mexicans whose identity is centered within the family. By initiating this conversation, you are setting the tone to casually chat about who you each are before diving into impending conversations that will be heavily one-sided in disclosure. By being vulnerable first, you also model for them that it can be natural and comfortable to engage in this level of communication with someone new to them.

The link below leads to a blog written about “The Mexican Mind”, a book published by Boyé Lafayette De Mente who interpreted Mexican culture for foreigners. The blog page specifically focuses on Lafayette De Mente’s explanation of the value of personalismo.

https://mexicosculturalcodewords.wordpress.com/2011/12/19/mexicos-cultural-code-words-personalismo-pehr-so-nah-ees-moh/

Mexicans appreciate facial expressions and body language, both of which are more opportunities to connect with the humanity of the service provider. Similar to a person who is deaf relies on what they can see for information when verbal communication is not an option, a non-English speaking person will absorb visual messages.
In Mexican culture, hosting others as a guest in one’s space is an extremely important role. This tradition, aside from being transferred from Biblical text was also highly valued in Pre-Hispanic cultures. Leading to their demise, the first Europeans that visited the great Indigenous empires in America were treated as honored guests and royally pampered. As a direct product of both these customs, Mexicans take a serious responsibility of ensuring visitors’ comfort. The more generous the host is with their resources, the kinder. This is especially true when it comes to food. Mexicans are known to offer food immediately, often even if it is the only food the family has. If you are visiting a home and are offered food, please indulge. Exceptions are when a glance to the kitchen demonstrates they would need to go out of their way to prepare you something or if you notice there are few portions.

Follow the hyperlink below to read the blog of a traveler who visited Mexico and recognized the values of hospitality, warmth, and the centering of relationships in Mexican culture.

https://germanamericanabroad.wordpress.com/2013/10/12/mexico-on-culture-and-latin-warmth/

Cooking for others is a cultural expression and act of love. To consume a meal carefully construed by your host will bring them pleasure. Comment on how delicious the food is to reassure the cook that you are having a good experience and valuing their culture. If you do not feel comfortable eating, you can always ask for a very small portion. If you are not hungry at all, it is acceptable to turn down food. Be honest. You can explain that you just ate prior to the meeting. Accepting offers is also a display of vulnerability, just like entering a home. Seek opportunities for there to be an even exchange of favors. People are sensitive to how much generosity of yours they “take” in the services you provide them. The more you participate in a balanced exchange, the more comfort you inspire in them asking for what they need from you. This helps the relationship feel more natural and authentic versus prescribed and imbalanced.

This link leads to a video of women in the central state of Mexico, Michoacán cooking traditional and ancient feasts.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhZ-EKPPQkU
When a Mexican person comes into an organization for services, this warmth could be replicated by asking them if they need a cup of water or if they need “anything else” such as a trip to the restroom, somewhere to hang their coat, etc. The attention and thoughtfulness in these detalles take on significant meaning and are attributed to how much one feels seen and considered, ultimately increasing their feelings of being respected. Communal oriented, Mexicans feel respected when they are introduced to the rest of the people in the space. For social workers, this might include colleagues or other organization staff that will be involved with the client. It is not until they feel welcomed and acclimated to the space that “business” should be brought up.

The article found in the link below is helpful in learning to establish trust in relationships with Mexicans in the nursing field. There are important cultural considerations for social workers in this article.

http://ccn.aacnjournals.org/content/22/4/47.long

It is common for Mexicans to invite serving professionals to their homes for a meal with their family or to a family celebration. In Mexico, the attendance of these guests to their events is a great honor and families will work extra hard to be good hosts to them. It is a gesture that communicates trust and appreciation for the relationship the parties have established. Ethically, it is important for social service providers to have a clear policy set up with the institution with which they serve regarding how they will handle these invitations and interactions. If an invitation cannot be accepted, it is important to stress feeling honored for the gesture and to be open about why one cannot attend (citing policy if relevant), otherwise the host might feel personally offended. This is an example of an ethical implication that a social worker will need to know how to manage to honor the client’s culture while adhering to the policies that protect the client, employee, and employer.

José Guadalupe Posadas is perhaps Mexico’s most influential cartoonist, who used death through hand-drawn skeletal figures in comics. See image below. His humor is emblematic of Mexicans’ use of humor to cope with political and social oppression. Use the link below to learn more about him and his impact in Mexican culture.

An effective tool in displaying warmth and comfort to Mexicans is through the use of humor. Mexicans are generally more permissive in their use of humor than United Statesians. Where United Statesians would consider it to be rude or inappropriate to laugh or make a joke, Mexicans use it as a coping mechanism. Through a United Statesian lens, Mexican sense of humor could be described as “dark” and macabre. Across history in the face of political tyranny, disparity, and violence, Mexicans continually find ways to find humor in their suffering. For Mexicans, light teasing and mockery is a form of expressing comfort and affection. When used appropriately, humor used by the social worker is an invitation for clients to feel relatable comfort.

Since many Mexicans that have come to the U.S. originated in small agricultural towns called *pueblos* or even smaller collectives of dwellings named *ranchos*, they came from neighborhoods where they knew the families and some degree of personal information from the professionals in their towns. They know of them, their families, they may have known them since children, were possibly raised together, their children might attend school together, know where they live, or they might even to some degree be related to one another. They celebrate, worship, and grieve together. There is an abundance of opportunities to witness vulnerability and share intimacy with the professionals that serve them in such small and close knit communities. Professionals are often seen as good potential mentors for their children and are often asked to be a *madrina* or *padrino* (godfather or godmother).

Compare the distance that exists between professionals and Mexican immigrants, for instance, in a United Statesian urban area or in a city, where the only place in which these two
worlds converge is in very specific settings. Aside from feeling unnatural, foreign, contrived, and intimidating to name a few descriptors, social service providers are from different socioeconomic classes, race, and ethnicities than they are. There is hardly ever overlap in the worlds of the two. Add a language barrier and racism, it is a feat and takes a fine art for the parties to develop fruitful relationships.

For Mexicans, personalismo is part of being outgoing because those who are outgoing are transparent and don’t have anything to hide. It is easier to trust someone who does not have reservations. From the time kids are young, they are expected to learn formal social etiquette such as shaking hands and acknowledging others when they are introduced to someone, greeting everyone in a space upon arriving, and strongly encouraged to play with other children. Children are encouraged to be extroverted and comfortable with themselves. In contrast, in the United States, there is significant tolerance for a diversity of personality including people who are “quiet”, shy, socially anxious, or introverts. There has also been a relatively recent, popular trend among United Statesian youth describing themselves as “socially awkward”. They often attribute this to the discomfort they feel when unsure about how to behave in social situations. In Mexico, professionals are expected to be cosmopolitan and socially sophisticated. This clash in expectation versus self-perception could be interpreted by Mexican clients to cause a personal disconnect between themselves and the service provider.

In the United States, experiences with serving institutions are often described as being cold, uncomfortable, invasive, and judgmental. It is common that people walk away questioning whether they could trust service providers and whether they have their best interests in mind. Without having a personal understanding of their service providers, it is difficult for Mexicans to feel like they can read them, thus making it difficult for Mexicans to know that it is safe to trust them with their personal affairs, know where they stand in relation to xenophobia, and to protect their interests.
Respect in Mexican culture

Read an overview of the history of race relations in Mexico from a sociological perspective found in the link below.


As mentioned previously, most Mexicans come from *pueblos* or *ranchos* and immigrated to increase their chances of survival. Within the last 50 years as the larger cities in Mexico developed, agricultural communities have suffered the neglect of access and resource distribution, especially affecting Indigenous communities which are usually geographically isolated. The domination of Indigenous communities has its roots in European colonialism having endured subjugated and treated as inferior. In the eyes of many Mexicans, domination was transferred from Europeans to the United Statesians, from the hands of one set of Whites to the Whites in the near north. Although racism in Mexico is rampant, social and class discrimination is less taboo, more apparent, and widely discussed.

“Oppression is understood to be characterized by personal and social relationships based upon the assumption of inequalities of power, so that people internalize the acceptance of their own lack of power in their own lives” (as cited in Payne, 2005, p. 286).

Throughout the country, middle and upper class city dwellers use pejorative terms to distinguish themselves from the “peasants” or *nacos* or *paisas* as they call them. People who live in rural towns are identified by their slang (which suggests poor education) and vocal intonation, appearance (outdated fashion, darker skin tones, sun tans, cowboy/indigenous attire), faith in Catholicism, and preference in Mexican folk music. Hence, before they have immigrated to a country where they are treated as outsiders, poorer families have likely been marginalized in their home country to varying degrees. Upon arriving to Mexico, people who are Indigenous even continue to be discriminated by more urbanized or acculturated Mexicans.
Many Mexican immigrants had internalized their beliefs of inferiority long ago before immigrating to the U.S. Due to this, they may often experience higher levels of discomfort in formal or official settings. They often will apologize for taking up space or making any requests. Their disposition is not necessarily to feel entitled to services, but to be considered a burden, not worthy of time or attention. If trust is not established, Mexicans will often delay seeking services or assistance until their situations have become more complicated for fear of molestar which means “to bother”. They could be embarrassed to ask for clarifications or questions. They may leave meetings without understanding the institutional processes in which they are involved in. It is not uncommon for them to smile and nod through a meeting just to get through it. It is because of this that establishing trust through a demonstration of respect for their person and concerns is of critical importance to further social justice and build genuine relationships.

Generally, immigrants expect social workers to play a dominant role in the relationship, to enforce social and cultural norms, be proactive and directive, and take actions while they perceive their roles as clients to defer, comply, learn, receive, and obey through the duration of the relationship. When working with Mexican immigrants, to further social justice, the role of the social worker is to create space and encourage, educate, and inspire the client to take it. This may be difficult because taking a passive role might be a learned disposition that had helped them navigate institutions or relationships in their current lives or in their past. The role of the social worker in this case is to show the client the benefits of taking an active role in the matters that affect their lives. For instance, when making the referral to another service in the community, you may ask them to make the call and set up an appointment. You could ask whether they feel comfortable doing this and you could even offer to role play with them or offer to walk them through what they could say to express their need and set up an appointment. It is typical for immigrants to feel that their services have not been effective or efficient if the social worker does not take action on their behalf.

Read an academic paper by Sofía Chaparro for the University of Pennsylvania that describes “fresas” (a Mexican version of “preppys”) and “nacos”. In it, she connects the models of personhood to the legacies of colonialism and racism in Mexico.

http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1275&context=wpel
“Respect” defined in the context of social work services

A firm of cross-cultural consultants, Rowland and Associates, gives tips to foreigners on the role of respect in Mexican culture in their page found through the link below.


In addition to the historical and social implications already discussed, another contributing dynamic to the idea of respect for Mexicans is their tendency to defer to those in position of authority. Mexican culture values hierarchies. To avoid being perceived as impolite or disrespectful to people in power, Mexicans may express agreement in the presence of someone who is in a position of authority, only to have a different response with their family members in private. The closest position to a social worker in a small town in Mexico is a doctor, priest, or a teacher, and Mexicans often refer to social workers as “maestro/a” (as they would refer to a teacher). This is to convey respect for the worker’s position as a helper in the community and as an educated person.

A social worker should help the client feel as an equal so that they will feel comfortable expressing dissatisfaction, being open about their determinations, giving feedback, and to offer differing opinions. At the same time, formalities should always be incorporated in the relationship to continue the perception of a professional relationship and avoid it becoming too personal to avoid the crossing of boundaries. Following are some suggestions that can help the social worker maintain this balance.

Upon entering a space, greet Mexicans when they come in the door, address them formally (Mr. or Mrs. If they/you speak English and “señor” for an older man, “jóven” for a younger man, “señora” for an older woman, and “señorita” for a younger woman). Introduce yourself using your name and title/role to everyone in the family with a handshake, a smile, and ask casual, personal questions. It is important for people in positions of authority including social workers to dress formally or business casual and be well groomed to communicate that they take their career, time, and clients seriously. In Mexico, schools and places of employment
have strict dress codes and they take personal hygiene seriously. For Mexicans, the appearance, manners, and formality displayed by professionals are often correlated to competence. The more capable clients believe their service providers are, the more likely they will be amenable, willing to trust, and reach out for help.

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<tr>
<th>Dos and Don’ts to Demonstrate Respect to Mexicans</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do</strong></td>
<td><strong>Don’t</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If speaking Spanish, address family members formally using the formal “usted” article rather than “tu”.</td>
<td>Undermine/challenge parents’ authority in front of their children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use Mr. Mrs. And their first name ie “Senor Jose”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refer to clients as “tu” rather than “usted” if they insist. Usually people refer to anyone older than themselves as “usted”.</td>
<td>Refer to older people than you as “tu” (unless they insist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite them multiple times to ask you questions. Check for understanding.</td>
<td>Assume they understand who you are or something you already explained. Don’t share a lot of information without offering space for clarification or questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage them to call you if they need anything. Ensure they have all of your contact information. Call them to see if they need anything/check in. Make it very clear when they need to call you.</td>
<td>Assume they have your phone number or know how to contact you. They may not know the name of your organization, forget your phone number or role. They might be nervous to call you because they might be afraid of encountering a language barrier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When sharing your contact information, make sure they can contact someone who speaks their language directly if possible.</td>
<td>Use their children to translate sensitive information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Check for understanding, ask for their thoughts.</td>
<td>Assume silence or nodding is understanding or agreement.</td>
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### Dos and Don’ts to Demonstrate Respect to Mexicans

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Explain what kind of services your organization offers, how it can assist them, what your role is, what are the limitations and parameters. Multiple times.</td>
<td>Assume they understand who you are or what the role of the organization is in relation to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have resources and documents in Spanish if needed.</td>
<td>Assume that because a resource is in Spanish they understand it. They might need help filling it out. Do not assume they are literate.</td>
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### Ethical implications for social work practice

Incorporating the ideas suggested in this report leads to implications in the delivery of social work practices since it has not yet been successful in incorporating major social change to achieve equality and social justice for Mexicans. The professional responsibilities of social workers may be implemented oppressively or through empowering means. Because of this, effective anti-oppressive practice requires a clear theoretical perspective to inform a value base which will permit this process. A clear understanding of power and oppression must inform the values of practice.

An inability to understand Mexican worldviews and their interpretation for values could contribute to reinforce the pattern of excluding Mexicans from needed services and preventing them from attempting to seek them in the future. This deficiency in awareness on behalf of the social worker perpetrates the uneven distribution of power that creates the conditions that oppress Mexican immigrants.
As previously mentioned, social workers are invited by the profession to develop highly complex philosophical analysis of their practice contexts grounded in theory and evidence-based practice. Yet the literature that sets ideological and experiential precedence for work with the largest ethnic minority group in the country does not yet exist. This was discovered upon performing the literature review to inform this report. This absence of relevant literature is aligned with the discriminatory practice of hegemonic culture to ignore and exclude the voices of Mexicans and the issues relevant to them.

“Power is seen as concerned with personal and social relationships where one person or group consistently prevents others, who are seen as powerless, from achieving their needs or aspirations.”

(As cited in Payne, 2005, p. 286)

Wilson and Beresford (as cited in Payne, 2005) argued that the way in which social work practice has given importance to anti-oppressive practice allows workers to appropriate the ideas of oppressed service users while retaining the power to define what is oppressive. Service users still lose control of how their lives are defined and this is in itself oppressive.

Social work ethics are usually interpreted and practiced based on the understanding of people in positions of power in relation to direct service providers and this power is compounded when practitioners are minorities as well. While the people social workers serve include a disproportionate number of people of color, most social workers are White women (as cited in Social work salaries, 2011, p. 1). There are risks for experiencing labor repercussions for social workers who may be considered to violate practice norms when their superiors have not developed their own nuances about culturally appropriate practice. It is because of this that social workers need to be clear about their practice principles with their superiors and to have the capacity to communicate their theoretical foundations. Professional development needs to be considered structurally and include members at all levels of the organization.

To shift personal disclosure to be more culturally inclusive without overstepping ethical standards in social work practice, workers could follow the general rules of responsible sharing:

- Keep disclosure concise, limited, and purposeful.
The disclosure should be functional to normalize or universalize an experience for a client.

Disclosures could be used to establish comfort and rapport with the worker.

Immediately after the disclosure is made, turn the attention and focus of the conversation back to the client to avoid taking their space away.

Do not make disclosures that are uncomfortable, too personal, intimate, or that you are not ready to share. Be aware of your personal boundaries.

Another ethical implication is that to serve Mexicans, social workers collaborate with other institutions that are built on hegemonic principles in favor of impeding their agency. For instance, social workers are usually required by their employers to respect the rule of law, a value strongly held by United Statesians. On the other hand, those laws may be in conflict with the overall needs, perspectives, and wellbeing of the client. For example, there could be situations in which the social worker is required to report a scenario to authorities that may then result in the deportation of the primary breadwinner of an entire family. This devastation reinforces the fear Mexicans have in reaching out to formal institutions when they need help. One incident could have ripple effects on the entire community as a single example can forewarn third parties and endure over generations.

The job of the social worker supporting Mexicans is to foresee these disastrous scenarios and be informing and providing choices for their clients at every turn. This includes an investment of greater time and care than for clients from the hegemonic population. Sometimes this task is not feasible due to structural limitations. Then the ramifications of the impact of these shortcomings can significantly impact the lives of the clients, as in the previous example. The more one understands the Mexican worldview, the less misunderstandings and unchecked assumptions could avoid similar results. For social workers who work with Spanish speaking social workers, supporting Mexicans can mean that the rest of the team support this worker with their caseload considering that work with Mexicans requires more support than supporting English-speaking clients.

These implications all have a structural component, which then calls on social workers to expand their role in serving Mexican clients from direct practice to advocating for legislation and policies that remove barriers and instead support them. Social workers can also create or support alternatives to traditional services that are inherently founded in hegemonic
institutions. These include organizations that are founded and led by Mexicans such as the Immigrant Youth Justice League, which is led by undocumented organizers working towards full recognition of the rights and contributions of all immigrants through education, leadership development, policy advocacy, resource gathering, and mobilization.
Recommended web links

Since this resource does not provide comprehensive socialization of Mexican immigrants, included is a list of accessible, internet-based resources that could help readers develop a general understanding of the experiences of this community.

VIDEOS

Latino Americans: A three-part, six-hour documentary series by PBS

What does it mean to be Mexican American in Modern Day America?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXrvQWUWJBA

The Fruits of Mexico’s Cheap Labor
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YT6AvAhDx8Q

Hey Americans, Come Take Our Jobs
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7TGWaHaUeU

HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Colonization

The Historical Context of Undocumented Mexican Immigration to The United States
http://www.chicano.ucla.edu/files/Bustamante____.pdf

History of Mexican Migration to the US
https://15minutehistory.org/2013/09/04/mexican-migration-to-the-us/

Myths and Facts About Immigrants and Immigration
http://www.adl.org/civil-rights/immigration/c/immigration-myths-and-facts.html#.WDuDDPorLb0

RELEVANT POLICIES

The North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement
Video: The Real USA – Mexican Immigrant Labor in Florida
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmj5aCkWZQs

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

Al Jazeera Documentary: “Walls of Shame”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TU5uOAG71Tw

Video: Why Walls Won’t Secure the U.S. Border
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yh3fez9CyXg

PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Mexican Sense of Humor
https://chicagousa.wordpress.com/2008/02/18/mexican-sense-of-humor/

My Experience with Culture Shock as an American Raised Abroad

I Am Joaquin
http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/latinos/joaquin.htm

OTHER ARTICLES

Awareness of Self - A Critical Tool

Care in Health Care: Remaking the Moral World of Medicine
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228513720_Care_health_care_remaking_the_moral_world_of_medicine

Commentary: On the Wisdom and Challenges of Culturally Attuned Treatments for Latinos

The Costs of Getting Ahead: Mexican Family System Changes After Immigration
Cultural and Ethical Issues in Working with Diverse Patients and Their Families: The Use of the Culturagram to Promote Cultural Competent Practice in Healthcare Settings

Cultural Competence: A Literature Review and Conceptual Model for Mental Health Services
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26710590_Cultural_Competence_A_Literature_Review_and_Conceptual_Model_for_Mental_Health_Services

Enhancing Cultural Competence in Social Service Agencies: A Promising Approach to Serving Diverse Children and Families

Even Though I Don’t Speak English: A Letter to Every Healthcare Provider
http://ccn.aacnjournals.org/content/22/4/47.long

In Mexico, Racism Hides in Plain View

Mental Health Care for Latinos: Translating Research into Action: Reducing Disparities in Mental Health Care for Mexican Americans

Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice by the National Association for Social Work
References


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