# The Role of Family in Latinx College Students' Developing Identities

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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological research examined the interaction between sibling relationships and culture in Latinx college students. Thematic analysis revealed participants identifying strongly with Latinx culture describe the importance of inter-familial dialogue and roles in their identity development, while parental expectations and values drove identity development in participants with less cultural exposure.

## INTRODUCTION

The project will qualitatively examine Latinx college students' concepts of sibling relationships. Specifically, this research project has four main purposes:

1. To better understand the nature of Latinx college students' concepts of sibling relationships during the period of emerging adulthood
2. To paint a qualitative picture of sibling relationships from their early memories through emerging adulthood
3. To analyze and better understand early relationship quality in emerging adulthood
4. To examine and contextualize the nature and relevance of sibling relationships of Latinx college students in emerging adulthood.

The current study examined the distinct sibling relationships of Latinx college students and explored the unique characteristics of Latinx culture through qualitative inquiry. The present research design analyzed thematic themes centering on the concept that Latinx culture is influential in the participants' sibling relationships during the emerging adulthood, as well as in their personal lives.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Participants

Participants were seven college students ranging from ages 18-21 with multiple gender identities (four women, two men, and one non-binary person) who all self-identified as Latinx with at least one sibling. Participants were recruited through the State University of New York at Geneseo-specific outlets, such as the class year email listservs (e.g., Class of 2020), the Latinx Student Association, and the Access Opportunity Programs (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). An electronic questionnaire asking for students' demographic information was required prior to eligible participant selection. The survey asked a series of questions pertaining to the individual's perception of how in touch they, their parents, and their siblings are with their Latinx culture. Rigorous criteria organized two focus groups to explore potential differences in sibling relationships across individuals who expressed differing levels of connectedness to the Latinx culture. Before video recording, participants were classified into two groups: one low group (three participants) and one high group (four participants). Participants in the low group self-disclosed feeling that they, and their immediate family members, were less in touch with Latinx culture. In contrast, participants in the high group felt that they, and the family members around them, were more in touch with their Latinx culture. All seven participants participated in the focus group interviews, and four of the same participants returned for individual interviews (two women, one man, and one non-binary person).

### Focus Group Questions

- Can you tell me about the relationship you have with your siblings? And how is this different from the relationship your parents have with their siblings?
- Do you feel that there is competition between you and your siblings?
- Can you tell me about favoritism in terms of birth order or gender between you and your siblings?
- Can you tell me about the roles that people within your family play?
- How have your caregiver(s)'s perceptions or ideas of relationships affected your ideas of relationships?
- How do your parents perceive friendships or romantic relationships?
- Can you speak on your experiences with parental views on education and how that may have influenced/affected you? How may that have influenced/affected your relationship with your siblings?
- Can you tell us about the types of conversations you have with your siblings?
- How were you parented and were you parented differently than your siblings?

### Individual Interview Questions

- What does Latinx culture mean to you?
- Did your parents or siblings act as role models to help maintain or strengthen your understanding of your culture?
- What do you think your parents' thoughts are on individuals in your culture? (think about changing the wording of the question)
- How have your parents affected your relationship with your siblings?
- Could you tell me about how your cultural values changed since you moved to America?
- Can you elaborate on your childhood and whether or not you had a different experience compared to your siblings?
- Who do you feel parented you the most? And why do feel this way?
- What roles have your siblings specifically played in your life?

### Data Collection and Preparation

At the time of recruitment, participants were given a demographics survey on information about their siblings and their family's cultural background. At arrival, participants were assigned an ID number to maintain confidentiality, based off the year of their recruitment and their participant number. Prior to all interview sessions, participants were informed about what the session would entail, including audio and video recording. Participants signed consent forms regarding any personal and audiovisual data. It was made clear that signing was voluntary and consent and/or involvement may be rescinded at any time with no consequences, whether it be before, during, or after the interviews.

The individual and group interviews were held by at least five research assistants. The researchers set up the camera to clearly see each participant's face. One researcher acted as a mediator who would read the questions, provide typed versions of each respective question for easy viewing, follow conversation, and ask follow-up questions while the other researcher took notes and analytical memos. At the end of the session, each participant was monetarily compensated with a gift card. All individual interviews lasted for a maximum of an hour and a half.

This procedure was standardized and was reran for every interview. The video and audio recordings of the individual and group interviews were digitized then transcribed. The transcripts and audiovisual data was coded by the same researchers in-vivo in order to stay true to the participants' lived experiences. These codes were analyzed and then organized into different thematic categories. Analytical memos from the sessions were analyzed with the transcripts for triangulation credibility purposes.
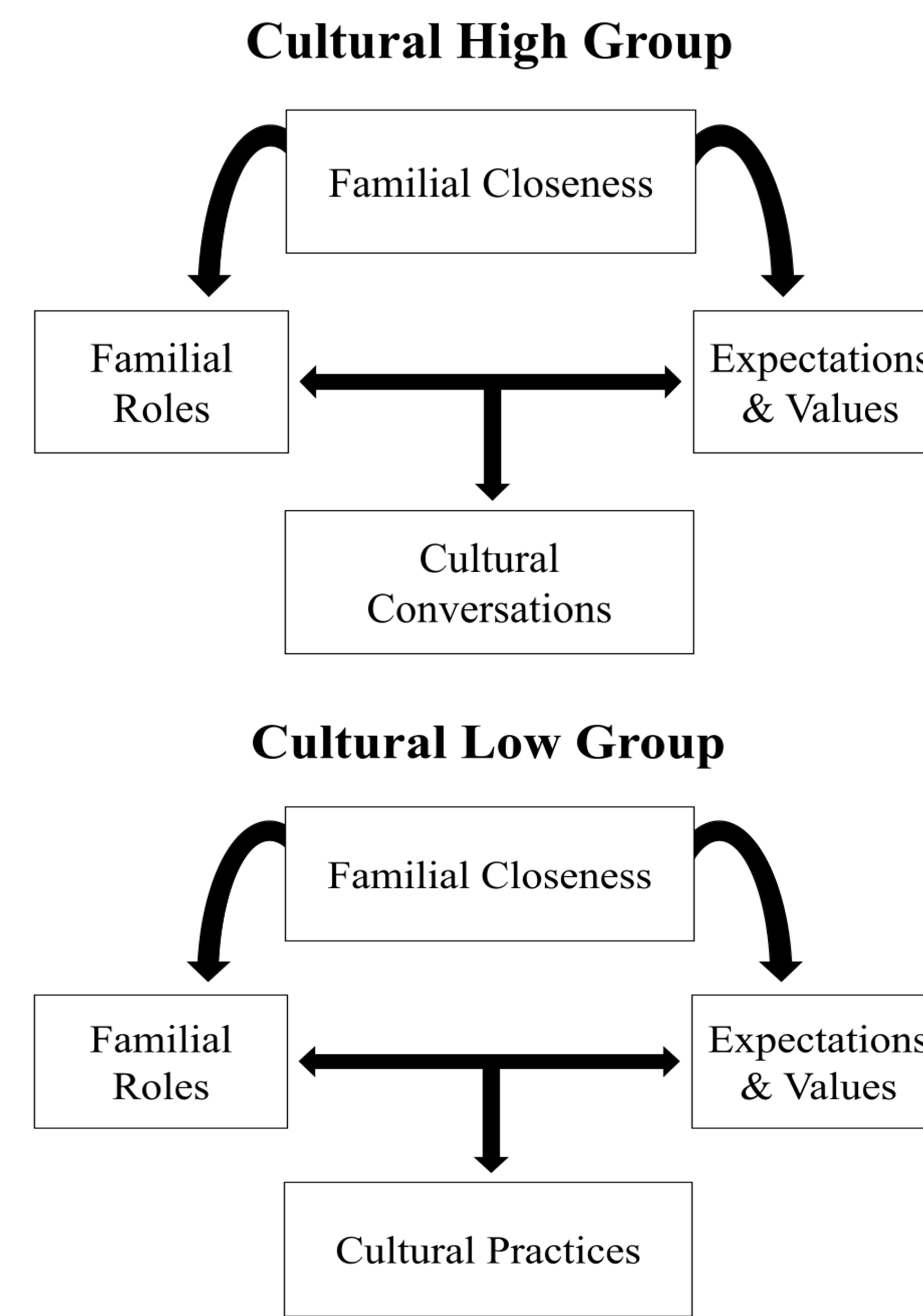


Figure 1. Group-specific conceptual models representing the emergent themes from the high and low cultural groups.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Data Analysis

The methodological approach for the present study was qualitative interpretive phenomenology (Benner, 1994). The approach of this study used the process for thematic analysis posited by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a structure, in which to situate the inquiry of this present research. The specific analytic approach employed in this study was thematic analysis.

### Coding Procedure

**Phase 1:** Each individual and group (e.g., high, low) interview transcript was coded, and it was decided that we should attempt to capture some of the participant's voices in the study; thus, initial coding was dropped, and the coding was performed using the in-vivo method (Saldaña, 2013). This was a calculated decision made in order to allow the participants to tell the researchers what their sibling relationships meant to them and how they were perceiving the relationship dynamics.

**Phase 2:** Prior to adding a layer of in-vivo coding to the primary data set, the research team developed a coding schema based on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure developed by Phinney (1992). This coding schema focused on identifying data and capturing in-vivo codes based on demonstration of affirmation, belonging and commitment or ethnic identity searching.

**Phase 3:** Following the first cycle coding methods, and in following the guidelines for Thematic Analysis proposed by Braun and Clark (2006, pp. 86-93) all the codes were collated into "potential themes," the researchers refer to this collated group as thematic categories.

**Phase 4:** Five thematic categories (one primary and four secondary) that emerged from the codes included "familial closeness," "familial roles," "expectations and values," "cultural conversations," and "cultural practices." The thematic categories were constructed during group sessions in which a minimum of three researchers evaluated and sorted codes into evolving categories. This was done to pull together and meaningfully group data into units of analysis that would inform hierarchical theme-building.

**Phase 5:** Thematic categories from all interviews were evaluated individually by magnitude and relevance to the proposed research question in order to uncover salient themes. Themes that consistently emerged across all interviews were then compiled into one dataset. The most prominent of those were then able to be visualized in a conceptual model.

## REFERENCES

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## RESULTS

### Cultural High Group

**Primary Theme #1 : Familial Closeness**
*Claim: In Latinx families, older siblings have an influence on how participants understand their Latinx culture/identity.*
- *"it [family discussions] really helps me stay in touch with that kind of culture back there to have kind of a back up and a support system." (high, p. 4)*

**Secondary Theme #1 : Cultural Conversations**
*Claim: Latinx participants' cultural identities are shaped by discussing their cultural and familial heritage with their parents, siblings, and other family members as well as engaging in cultural traditions.*
- *"It's a lot of talk about what is our culture, what it means to us and kind of like in a way, maybe because my sister feels like I'm a bit more American, she always tries to remind me of who I am." (high, p. 9)*

**Secondary Theme #2: Expectations & Values**
*Claim: Latinx individuals highly value education and familial closeness, and these values are shaped by parental expectations.*
- *"You know we want you to, we came here, you gotta do a better life, we don't want you to be like us, do you want to like break your ass like working every day like we do, and like, I mean education was definitely something that was very heavily focused on in my house." (high, p. 15-16)*

**Secondary Theme #3: Familial Roles**
*Claim: Latinx individuals hold specific roles within their families which are often influenced by traditional gender norms and birth order.*
- *"I kinda see a lot that the mother is always more present in the [Latinx] house I feel for in Latinx communities, they kind of...they're the ones who have to take time out of their day to kind of care for the child while the father's out working, and um...I don't know I think it kind of reinforces that to me, I kind of see it with my own parents." (high, p. 17)*

### Cultural Low Group

**Primary Theme #1: Familial Closeness**
*Claim: Latinx individuals value creating strong bonds with their family members–especially their siblings–though these relationships change with growing physical and emotional distance.*
- *"I had to act a certain way so my brother could follow into my footsteps, like I couldn't do certain things." (low, p. 33)*

**Secondary Theme #1: Cultural Practices**
*Claim: Latinx individuals connect with their cultural identity through a variety of practices, such as speaking Spanish, listening to Latinx music, and preparing traditional meals, which allows them to feel close to their family and heritage despite physical distance.*
- *"The emphasis of meals and family over like the process of cooking meal with different family members, like that's really important." (low, p. 6)*

**Secondary Theme #2: Expectations & Values**
*Claim: Latinx participants suggested that their parents instill strong cultural values into their children, emphasizing the importance of education, familial closeness, and perseverance.*
- *"For me, my parents, like since it was only us four like for all my life. Like just my parents, my brother and me. My parents like, they've always enforced that we like, us four need to have like a really strong relationship 'cause it's always only been us four. Cause like, I didn't grow up with cousins or uncles or aunts, or anything like that." (low, p. 22)*

**Secondary Theme #3: Familial Roles**
*Claim: Latinx individuals have clearly-defined roles in the family that create high familial cohesion, and these roles are often influenced by cultural and gendered norms.*
- *"Like domestic roles, yeah my mom cooked and clean...umm...but she also worked a lot during her time." (low, p. 23)*

Our results suggest that Latinx siblings value familial closeness and cultural belonging. In particular, college students who are more in touch with Latinx culture (cultural high group) emphasized the importance of a long-lasting bond with their siblings and described their relationships with their siblings as one that nurtures their own identity with Latinx culture and values. College students who are less in touch with Latinx culture (cultural low group) described their duty to serve as role models for their younger siblings, and sometimes this role strained or complexified their relationship with their siblings. These differences are reflected in the emergent primary themes between each group, which is supported by in-vivo quotes that differentiated the cultural high and cultural low groups and their experiences. Interestingly, both high and low groups strongly emphasized the importance of familial closeness, which affected other family dynamics.

## CREDIBILITY MEASURES

**Negative Case Selection.** During the final stages of the thematic analysis, the researchers began to label these cases within the data set and attached them to burgeoning themes in order to establish credibility of the data (Patton, 1999).
- *"I only have a tight relationship with three of my siblings compared to all five of 'em." (high, p. 9-10)*
- *"My brother he's 9 years older so it's a huge gap… we relate to things but he's like already like working." (low, p. 3)*
- *"He'd just kind of forget about us and then come back like aye I'm back like I'm your dad." (low, p. 17)*

## DISCUSSION

**In analyzing the cultural high group,** we found that familial closeness chiefly shapes identity in Latinx individuals. Cultural values passed on by close family members help Latinx adolescents develop a sense of individual cultural identity. Additionally, familial roles, shaped by household dynamics, influenced our participants' identities. Roles and values instilled by family members were mediated by inter-family conversations about their heritage.

**In analyzing the cultural low group,** familial closeness plays a key role in shaping our participants' identities. Cultural values and expectations communicated by close family members, as well as household roles, helped our participants construct their unique cultural identities. These roles and values interacted with our participants' engagement with Latinx culture through various traditions and practices.

**Both cultural groups shared** similar themes. Both high and low groups strongly emphasized the importance of close familial relationships, as well as familial roles and cultural values. However, secondary themes differed between groups. The high group's strong association with their cultural identity appeared to make them feel closer to their culture when discussing their identity with members of their family, including their heritage, expectations, and values. Low group participants valued the ability to be involved in their cultural traditions and practices, which made them feel closer to their identity and family.

**Our findings revealed potential critiques for the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) as a tool for analyzing and understanding cultural identity.** The MEIM explored two elements of cultural identity: affirmation, belonging, and commitment and ethnic identity searching. Scale questions focused on how individuals engage in cultural practices and learn more about their heritage, as well as the extent to which these individuals identify with their cultural background. However, the MEIM failed to adequately examine the importance of the family in shaping cultural identity. In our Latinx sample, participants strongly emphasized the importance of close familial relationships, as it developed into a primary theme between both high and low groups, though this facet was not originally measured by the MEIM. This provides new opportunities for improving the validity of the MEIM such that it accurately reflects the lived experiences of cultural groups, such as the Latinx community.

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