“It has cost me a lot to adapt to here”: The Divergence of Real Acculturation From Ideal Acculturation Impacts Latinx Immigrants’ Psychosocial Wellbeing

Sara L. Buckingham and M. Cecilia Suarez-Pedraza


CITATION
“It has cost me a lot to adapt to here”: The Divergence of Real Acculturation From Ideal Acculturation Impacts Latinx Immigrants’ Psychosocial Wellbeing

Sara L. Buckingham
University of Alaska Anchorage

M. Cecilia Suarez-Pedraza
University of Maryland College Park

The wellbeing of Latinx immigrants in the United States varies widely. Immigrants’ changes and maintenance of their cultures, a process known as acculturation, has been postulated to explain differences in wellbeing. However, the mechanisms by which acculturation impacts wellbeing are not fully understood. This study sought to understand the relation between acculturation and wellbeing through a person-environment fit lens, with the hypothesis that the better immigrants can acculturate in ways they prefer (e.g., taking on the practices, values, and identifications they desire), the better their self-reported wellbeing. An explanatory mixed-method approach was used to examine this hypothesis. Four hundred thirty-eight Latinx immigrants (ages 18–77, \( M = 37.88 \)) who had lived in the United States for less than a year to 55 years (\( M = 16.75 \) years) completed survey measures in Arizona, New Mexico, Maryland, and Virginia. A subset (\( n = 73 \)) participated in 12 focus groups. The sample included naturalized citizens (31.0%) along with authorized (33.2%) and unauthorized (35.8%) immigrants, and matched community immigration patterns. Data were analyzed through path analyses and constructivist grounded theory methods. Results indicated that the better Latinx immigrants could acculturate in the ways they preferred, the better their wellbeing. This relation was explained, in part, through lower levels of acculturative stress. This research suggests that practitioners and policymakers should consider ways to support immigrants to acculturate in the ways they desire as opposed to solely focusing their efforts on particular acculturation strategies.

Public Policy Relevance Statement
Latinx immigrants’ acculturation in the United States impacts their wellbeing. These findings suggest that immigrants who can change and maintain their cultures in their desired ways experience higher levels of wellbeing than those who struggle to do so. Thus, policymakers should consider how they can modify policies to facilitate immigrants’ ideal acculturation as opposed to requiring particular cultural shifts.

Whereas immigrants leave their countries of origin with the intention of improving their lives, their realities do not always coincide with expectations. A woman who immigrates for career advancement and financial security may face barriers to obtaining desired employment. A man who immigrates to reunite with and raise his children may have challenges instilling his cultural values in them. A young person who immigrates for safety may face discrimination and...
change and maintain cultures because of individual practices, values, and identifications. Changes of their new communities while maintaining their original cultures. This paper examines one potential explanation of why some Latinx immigrants in the United States report high levels of wellbeing while others do not. Specifically, this study investigates how acculturating in desired ways (e.g., taking on the values, practices, and identifications one prefers) influences wellbeing and acculturative stress.

Wellbeing

To assess the extent to which immigrants are doing “well” in their new places of residence, psychology has often looked to markers of wellbeing (Sue{ez-Orozco et al., 2012). Wellbeing is a broad term that encompasses satisfaction with life as a whole, along with specific life domains (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006). Recent work by Prilleltensky and colleagues (2015) has synthesized many models of wellbeing into six domains: satisfaction with one’s community, economic situation, occupation/vocation, physical state, psychological state, and interpersonal relationships. Wellbeing has been associated with better mental health, physical health, and meaningful relationships; fewer physical and mental health problems; better work productivity and fewer work days missed; longer lives; and, a lower risk of suicide (e.g., Keyes, 2007; Keyes, Dtingra, & Simoes, 2010; Keyes & Grzywacz, 2005; Keyes & Simoes, 2012). To explain varying degrees of wellbeing among immigrants, an array of models has been proposed, many of which relate to immigrants’ navigation of their original cultures and cultures of their communities of residence. This process is known as acculturation.

Acculturation

Definitions of acculturation have changed over time. Today, psychology largely uses Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik’s (2010) definition: a process that takes place when two cultural groups encounter one another, and entails an assessment and potential adaptation of practices, values, and identifications. Practices include language use, social contacts, and media preferences, whereas values are those core beliefs that encompass family roles and obligations, interdependence, and autonomy. Identifications reflect an individual’s sense of belonging to various groups. Contemporary models of acculturation purport that immigrants can adopt values, practices, and identifications from multiple cultures (i.e., bidimensional models of acculturation; Berry, 1980). In this way, individuals may simultaneously make changes that reflect the cultures of their new communities while maintaining their original practices, values, and identifications.

Acculturation has largely been studied as an individual and universal process; most research assumes that all individuals change and maintain cultures because of individual desires to do so (Chikov, 2009). However, as the literature expands, it has become clear that both individuals and their contexts impact the acculturation process and associated outcomes (e.g., Bornstein, 2017). A contemporary model of acculturation, the Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM, Navas et al., 2005), differentiates between two types of acculturation: real and ideal. Ideal acculturation reflects an attitude, referring to ways in which people desire to change and maintain their cultures, whereas real acculturation reflects strategies put into practice, referring to ways in which people do change and maintain their cultures. For example, while an immigrant may wish to learn the language of their new community (i.e., ideal cultural change), they may have troubles doing so (i.e., lack of real cultural change). The model also considers culture across various life domains. In the RAEM, peripheral domains consist of employment, economics/consumption, political/government systems, and social welfare systems. Intermediate domains consist of social relationships and friendships. Central domains consist of family relationships, religious customs, ways of thinking and principles/values (Navas et al., 2005). The RAEM proposes that individuals may enact cultures differently according to life domain. For example, while an immigrant may maintain their family roles and religious practices (i.e., real cultural maintenance in the central domain), they may change how they work and spend time with friends (i.e., real cultural change in the peripheral and intermediate domains).

The Relation of Acculturation and Wellbeing

Researchers have attempted to link certain ways of navigating culture with wellbeing outcomes. The literature has traditionally focused on negative outcomes, including anxiety, depression, somatic complaints, identity confusion, and feelings of marginality (e.g., Williams & Berry, 1991). Still, recent research demonstrates that acculturation is predictive of immigrants’ subjective wellbeing (e.g., Amit, 2011; Massey & Akresh, 2006). However, recent meta-analyses and reviews (e.g., Bornstein, 2017; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013; Yoon et al., 2013) have demonstrated that links between certain “types” of acculturation and wellbeing vary by context, providing empirical evidence for researchers’ critiques of the assumptions about acculturation (Chikov, 2009). Birman, Trickett, and Buchanan (2005) have concluded that there is no one “best” acculturative style to facilitate wellbeing and that the benefits of acculturative types depend upon the sorts of cultural skills needed for successful adaptation within each ecological system. As an alternative explanation, Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, and Vedder (2001) proposed that it is the interaction between immigrants’ desires and societies’ responses that influence wellbeing. While building, evidence for each explanation remains limited.

Consequently, we have asked what impact the degree of achievement of one’s “ideal” acculturation has on wellbeing. We hypothesize that when immigrants can enact culture in desired ways (i.e., “real” acculturation aligns with “ideal” acculturation), they will experience higher levels of wellbeing. While the RAEM lacks the empirical evidence necessary to support such claim, a related body of literature examines similar constructs with different names: “postmigratory realities” and “premigratory expectancies” (Rogers & Ward, 1993; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). According to Ward et al. (2001), when immigrants’ realities (“real” in RAEM terms) do not meet their expectations (“ideal” in

---

1 We use the term “Latinx” to move beyond binary gender (male/female) when referencing people with Latin American origin.
RAEM terms), it is detrimental for wellbeing. Notably, these constructs are broader than “real” and “ideal” acculturation due to inclusion of (a) all expectations and realities not necessarily related to culture and (b) undesired expectations.

The Intermediary Role of Acculturative Stress

The relation between acculturation and wellbeing may be theoretically explained through acculturative stress, a type of stress that arises from cultural changes and related psychological challenges from cultural adaptation (Wei et al., 2007). Although the relation between acculturation discrepancies (i.e., the divergence of “real” acculturation from “ideal” acculturation) and acculturative stress has yet to be empirically established, the inconsistent findings in the relation of acculturation and stress throughout the literature may be reconciled if discrepancies, rather than particular ways of acculturating, predict stress. Theory suggests that the congruence between one’s “ideal” and “real” acculturation would negatively predict acculturative stress, such that the better “real” acculturation aligns with “ideal” acculturation, the less acculturative stress one experiences. The relation between acculturative stress and wellbeing has been established, though often examined from a deficit perspective; that is, increased acculturative stress is predictive of psychopathology and other poor psychosocial outcomes. For example, research has demonstrated a relation between acculturative stress and both depression and anxiety in Latinx immigrants in the United States (e.g., Hovey, 2000; Hovey & King, 1996; Hovey & Magaña, 2002; Salgado de Snyder, 1987; Torres, 2010; Torres, Driscoll, & Voell, 2012).

Specific aims. Given a burgeoning acculturation literature that better accounts for context, and yet mixed empirical evidence for “types” of acculturation leading to wellbeing, we asked, “What is the impact of the divergence of real acculturation from ideal acculturation on wellbeing?” We hypothesized that the further one is from enacting culture in desired ways, the lower one’s level of wellbeing, partially explained through acculturative stress (see Figure 1). We explored whether acculturation discrepancies in particular life domains (central, intermediate, peripheral) were most impactful on acculturative stress and wellbeing.

Method

Context

We adopted an explanatory mixed-methods approach, which was approved by the University of Maryland Baltimore County Institutional Review Board. The study took place in two U.S. regions: Mid-Atlantic (Maryland and Virginia) and Southwest (New Mexico and Arizona). We recruited participants from urban centers, namely, Baltimore, Richmond, Albuquerque, and Phoenix. Each urban center within the pair is similar to the other in terms of geographic region and population demographics (e.g., foreign born population, immigration trends); however, their immigration-related policies greatly differ.

Participants and Participant Recruitment

To participate, individuals had to be at least 18 years old, speak English or Spanish, and reside in Maryland, Virginia, New Mexico, or Arizona. Participants had to have emigrated from a Spanish-speaking Latin American country and identify as Latinx, Hispanic, or Chicana. We utilized a snowball sampling strategy because random selection poses obstacles among immigrant populations (Martinez, McClure, Eddy, Ruth, & Hyers, 2012). Participants were recruited by research team members and community partners at establishments that serve Latinx immigrants and at settings that attract a diverse array of people, such as markets, places of worship, sports leagues, and festivals. We shared information in print and auditory formats, engaging participants with respect and normalizing the research by explaining it in their preferred languages, answering questions, and providing contact...
information. Of the 482 people who viewed the consent form, two
did not consent, eight did not meet selection criteria and 16 did not
progress beyond the screening questionnaire; thus 456 people
participated. Of those, 438 participants had complete and valid
data. A subset ($n = 73$) participated in 12 focus groups (three
groups per state; see procedures).

About half of the participants were born in Mexico and a little
less than one-quarter each originated from Central America and
South America; only a handful were from the Caribbean. Participants
ranged in age from 18 to 77, had immigrated to the United
States between infancy and later adulthood, and had lived in
the country from less than 1 year to 55 years. Most frequent reasons
for immigration were a better quality of life, economics, employ-
ment, education, safety, and to join family. Women were some-
what overrepresented in the sample. Approximately one-third each
had attained U.S. citizenship, had a legal immigration status, or
had no authorization or declined to disclose their immigration
status at the time of the study (see Table 1).

**Procedure**

Participants were asked to complete an online or paper survey in
English or Spanish. Following the survey, participants could
choose to enter a raffle for one of 13 $30–$100 Visa gift cards and
indicate if they had interest in participating in a focus group about
the survey topics in the future. Of those who provided contact
information ($n = 338$), 56.5% ($n = 191$) indicated interest in the
focus groups. Participants were also given flyers to share. In all,
65.0% of participants encountered the project through the re-
search team, 13.5% from a community organization, 13.7%
from a friend or family member, and 7.7% from other sources
(e.g., online, flyers, radio, article). Because more participants
indicated interest in the groups than there was space at each
site, we randomized the order in which interested participants
were invited to participate in the groups. We initially invited 24
people to participate at each site, and invited additional partic-
ipants when anyone could not be reached, no longer desired to
participate, or could not attend any of the groups. While efforts
were made to have at least 5 and no more than 8 participants in
each group, groups ultimately had between 2 and 11 partici-
pants (total $n = 73$). Participants were compensated $25 in cash
for participation and refreshments were provided.

**Instruments**

A 212-item survey, which included the following measures, was
administered. Participants with low literacy responded to items
aloud and researchers recorded their responses.

**Wellbeing**

The construct “wellbeing” was approximated through the pres-
ent subscale of the 7-item Interpersonal, Community, Occupa-
tional, Physical, Psychological, and Economic (I COPPE) Well-
being Scale (Prilleltensky et al., 2015). Participants rated each
domain on a scale ranging from 0 (worst) to 10 (best), following
the direction, “When it comes to [domain], on which number do
you stand on?” Responses were summed, with higher numbers
indicating greater wellbeing. The Spanish version was created for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Participants Demographic Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region of Origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender or Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No formal education—eighth grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some High School—Diploma/GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College—Bachelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed (Self, Full-time, or Part-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student, Homemaker, Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary or Permanent Permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Authorization or No Answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
this study through translation by a bilingual professional, back-
translation by the first author, and pilot testing. Scale internal
consistency was excellent ($\alpha = .91$). Scores ranged from 11 to 70
($M = 48.66, SD = 13.02$).

**Acculturative Stress**

Participants’ acculturative stress was measured with the 25-item
Multidimensional Acculturative Stress Inventory (MASI; Rodri-
guez, Myers, Mira, Flores, & García-Hernández, 2002). The
MASI’s subscales were grouped into two scales for this study:
Receiving Community Acculturative Stress (RCAS; English Com-
petency Pressures, Pressure to Acculturate) and Immigrant Com-
munity Acculturative Stress (ICAS; Spanish Competency Press-
sures, Pressure Against Acculturation). Participants rated items
according to how much stress they had experienced during the
previous three months on a 6-point scale that ranged from 0 (does
not apply) to 5 (extremely stressful). Consistent with previous
researchers’ decisions, MASI items rated as a 0 by participants
were rescored as 1 (not at all stressful), because an item that does
not apply to participants is not a source of acculturative stress
(Torres et al., 2012). Responses were summed for each subscale,
with higher numbers indicating higher stress respective to each
community. Scale internal consistencies in this study were good to
excellent ($\alpha = .92$ for RCAS, $\alpha = .85$ for ICAS). Scores on the
RCAS subscale ($M = 32.32, SD = 13.55$) were higher and more
varied than scores on the ICAS subscale ($M = 16.21, SD = 6.37$).

**Acculturation**

Participants’ real and ideal cultural change and real and ideal
cultural maintenance were obtained from the RAEM Scale (Navas
et al., 2005), a 32-item measure that was responded to on a 5-point
Likert scale (not at all, a little, somewhat, quite, a lot). To measure
real cultural change, participants were asked, “To what extent have
you adopted American culture?” across the specified domains:
peripheral (work, economics, politics, social welfare; 4 items),
intermediate (social relations; 1 item), and central (family rela-
tions, religious customs, beliefs/values; 3 items). To measure real
cultural maintenance, participants were asked, “To what extent
have you maintained your original culture?” across the domains.
To measure ideal cultural change and maintenance, participants
were asked, “When you first arrived in the United States, to what
does not apply) to 5 (extremely stressful). Consistent with previous
researchers’ decisions, MASI items rated as a 0 by participants
were rescored as 1 (not at all stressful), because an item that does
not apply to participants is not a source of acculturative stress
(Torres et al., 2012). Responses were summed for each subscale,
with higher numbers indicating higher stress respective to each
community. Scale internal consistencies in this study were good to
excellent ($\alpha = .92$ for RCAS, $\alpha = .85$ for ICAS). Scores on the
RCAS subscale ($M = 32.32, SD = 13.55$) were higher and more
varied than scores on the ICAS subscale ($M = 16.21, SD = 6.37$).

**Demographic Measures**

Participant characteristics were also measured: current state of
residence, country of origin, country where participant spent the
most time, gender, current age, age at immigration, race, primary
motivation(s) for immigration, household members, other family
members in the U.S., family members in the country of origin,
annual household income, years of education, employment status,
zip code, and original and current immigration status.

**Qualitative Measure**

Focus groups were primarily facilitated in Spanish (participants’
language of choice), but with some English and “Spanglish” spo-
ken by participants. Questions were created to expand on subjects
from the survey. Primary questions were:

1. When you first came to the United States, in what ways did
   you want to adopt U.S./“American” culture? In what ways
   did you want to maintain your original culture?
2. Has there been a time or event when you were (or were not)
   able to adopt U.S./“American” culture in the way you
   wanted? How come?
3. Has there been a time or event when you were (or were not)
   able to maintain your original culture in the way you
   wanted? How come?

Whereas the guide suggested questions, the focus groups func-
tioned as a conversation. The semistructured nature of groups
allowed participants to discuss broad questions and permitted
probes for clarification or following up on emergent themes. In this
way, themes emerged spontaneously from participants, and were
not limited to initial constructs (Charmaz, 2006; Weiss, 1994).

Multiple observations were made during focus groups by the
research team. These observations were recorded as field notes and
later added to interview transcripts to provide a richer sense of the
participants’ verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Weiss, 1994). They
were used to expound upon participants’ spoken words, bringing to
light more nuanced meanings so that the results could be inter-
preted within the context of the participants’ lives. Finally, partic-
ipants were asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire
to contextualize their responses.

**Analyses**

All quantitative analyses were performed in IBM SPSS Statis-
tics Version 21; main analyses used regression-based path analysis
(Hayes, 2013). Analyses of qualitative data were guided by rec-
ommendations put forth in constructivist grounded theory, so
theory was generated from, rather than ascribed to, the data, while
informed by the constructs under study (Charmaz, 2006). To arrive
at conclusions, the following analytic process was utilized by the
research team: (a) description, creating comprehensive accounts
for analysis by compiling transcripts and field notes; (b) organi-
ization, initially examining each piece of data and labeling what
took place; (c) **connection**, developing preliminary constructs by comparing initial codes, grouping them into focused codes, comparing focused codes across groups and sites, sorting them into categories, and connecting categories to discover themes; (d) **corroboration and legitimation**, developing theory by presenting interpretations and seeking feedback from key stakeholders and colleagues to corroborate and legitimize perspectives; and (e) **representation of the account**, sharing the resulting understandings through embedding theory in its context (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative and quantitative results were then integrated so that qualitative results helped to explain and expound upon quantitative findings. In addition to quantitative rigor, trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was bolstered in multiple ways. Credibility (i.e., accurate depiction of multiple realities) and dependability (i.e., consistency) were supported by diverse participants, observations, negative case analyses, and member checks. For example, during data collection we directly probed for concrete examples when participants made vague or general statements, and we specifically asked for divergent experiences and points of view. During data analysis, we activity sought out cases that did not fit our working theory and modified theory accordingly. Confirmability (i.e., objectivity) was improved through broad, neutral, flexible questioning, reflexivity, and a team approach. Multiple research team members were present for each focus group to ensure comprehensive data collection, multiple team members were involved in data analyses (coding separately and coming together to discuss any divergences and come to consensus), and all kept reflexive research journals throughout the project. Transferability (i.e., applicability to other settings) was enhanced through open questions and observations for detail (Glesne, 2011; see Buckingham & Vargas-Garcia, 2018 for a more detailed description of study methods).

**Results**

**Main Path Model**

The hypothesized model (see Figure 2) explained the data as well as the full model with all paths tested \( \chi^2(2, N = 438) = 4.83, ns \); thus, the hypothesized model is discussed below. The degree to which Latinx immigrants’ real cultural change strategies diverged from their ideal cultural change attitudes (i.e., cultural change discrepancies) predicted their wellbeing directly and indirectly through acculturative stress with the receiving community. The degree to which Latinx immigrants’ real cultural maintenance strategies diverged from their ideal cultural maintenance attitudes (i.e., cultural maintenance discrepancies) predicted their wellbeing directly, and predicted their acculturative stress with the Latinx immigrant community, though this stress did not predict wellbeing (see Tables 2 and 3).\(^3\) Acculturative discrepancies and stress accounted for 20.8% of the variance in wellbeing \(F(4, 433) = 28.43, p < .001, r^2 = 0.26\).

**Cultural change discrepancies.** The better Latinx immigrants adopted new cultural customs in preferred ways—that is, the better their “real” cultural change strategies aligned with their “ideal” cultural change attitudes—the greater their wellbeing, partially explained by less acculturative stress. Likewise, the further they were from adopting new preferred customs, the poorer their wellbeing, in part explained by increased stress. Most focus group participants shared instances in which their desires were not attained. Alfy\(^4\), a 30-year-old who had emigrated from Mexico to Virginia at age 18, spoke for many as he recounted his experiences:

> I am from a small town and most people come [to the United States] by crossing the border. So, that’s how I had it planned: Cross the border. . . . Until I arrived here, I realized that I automatically truncated my goals, my dreams, in such a way. [It was] a very intense experience, really filled with fear. . . . Arriving here, I saw that it wasn’t how society had said. I thought that you got here and automatically saw money. . . . It wasn’t like that.\(^5\)

Alfy, like many participants, described challenges in securing the employment and schedule he desired, and making changes to his family economy in ways he considered to be part of U.S. culture (e.g., having spending money, being able to buy a house). As he expressed, the inability to make desired cultural changes in the peripheral domain frequently led to poorer wellbeing, partially from acculturative stress. Leidy, a 23-year-old in Virginia, shared how she felt tricked:

> The nanny agencies started to go to my university to tell us like, “Go to the U.S., this is your opportunity.” . . . Being in Colombia, you believe the idea that it’s marvelous to come as a nanny . . . Later you realize [the reality]. . . . My difficulties started there. For me it was difficult to adapt. . . . It’s a job that doesn’t satisfy the expectations that I had in Colombia. At first it was very hard. I cried many times. I regretted immigrating.

Diesi, who emigrated from Mexico to Arizona in his 20s, similarly described his experience:

> It was a really drastic change. . . . I thought it would be easy to learn [English], I thought it would be easy to find a good job. . . . I arrived here and began to get up at 4 in the morning, without knowing the language and working straight for 13 hours. To this day, of course I haven’t achieved my dreams. These are things I struggle with. I came without thinking of how difficult it would be to adapt. It was really hard for me.

Choclo, who emigrated from Peru to Arizona in his teens, described challenges making desired intermediate domain cultural changes, as he struggled to form friendships with receiving community members, driving his loneliness and poor wellbeing:

---

\(^2\)We also examined the same models controlling for education and income. While education and income accounted for a significant amount of variance in acculturative stress and wellbeing, they did not change the strength or nature of relations in the full path model.

\(^3\)We use this language to reflect hypotheses tested and share participants’ words and meanings in the ways they conveyed them. All data collected are cross-sectional; theorized causal connections are empirically correlational. Future research may reveal additional pathways and bidirectional relations between factors.

\(^4\)Focus group participants are described with their chosen pseudonyms, age, state, country of origin, and gender.

\(^5\)All quotes have been translated from Spanish or “Spanglish” to English for this paper. Please contact the first author for quotes in their original language.
I became very depressed because people did not understand me. I could not make friends. I lived in an area that was a rich area and there were many people in the park, but nobody wanted to play with me [he waved his arms around, signaling his feeling of separation]....I didn’t speak English. I did not even know how to say “hi” so I just sat there saying, “Play?” like trying to teach them, but they just ignored me. So I started to stay home and watch soap operas. And I would hug the dog, crying.

He later described watching his mother’s difficulties making desired peripheral domain changes:

Why am I in this country? Why haven’t I returned [to Peru]? But we already made the effort. We spent so much money to come to this country legally. My mother left her career—she had a good job. And then she came here to mop the floor, to clean the floors every day crying. My mom went to the university and she was told that she could not study. My aunts and uncles had told her, “You can study for your Master’s.” That wasn’t true.

His mother persevered despite obstacles, ultimately succeeding in making desired changes:

She went to community college to learn English. From there she went to a University and there she got her Master’s and now she’s doing her doctorate. No one wanted to hire her—one, because she has an accent and two, because she has no experience in this country. And still she is studying. . . . She is very strong.

Many participants made the changes they desired, which was related to better wellbeing, partially explained by less acculturative stress. Tiki, a 41-year-old Mexico-born woman in Arizona recounted, “It was very important that I could go to school, that I could have a job that maybe makes me tired, but that I enjoy. . . . It changes you a lot when you feel successful, when you have a dream that your children will study and that you reach a certain economic level, and thank God we have done that.” Alfy, quoted earlier, shared that while he could not make changes he desired at first, eventually he was able to do so, which impacted his wellbe-

I noted a new word every day in a notebook and worked this way on my English. . . . I made mistakes when I talked, but I was learning, word by word. . . . [Learning English] gave me courage, it encouraged me, it gave me self-esteem. . . . That’s why I’m here, giving this testimony, hoping that this will help someone, and that’s why I come here to [this community center] because they are so involved in these kinds of programs that help the Hispanic community. Sometimes I get down on myself. I say, “Oh, I haven’t done much in life because I should be able to tell someone that I triumphed. If not, I am no one.”

Table 2. Wellbeing Path Analysis Test Statistics of Direct Effects in Hypothesized Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Acculturative Stress: Receiving Community</th>
<th>Acculturative Stress: Latinx Immigrant Community</th>
<th>Wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partial r</td>
<td>2.53 (p = .012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal-to-Real Cultural Change Discrepancies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.46 (p = .014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal-to-Real Cultural Maintenance Discrepancies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturative Stress: Receiving Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturative Stress: Latinx Immigrant Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I am a carpenter still, but at the same time, even though I have continued working in the same way, today I have a small carpentry business from what I learned here.

**Receiving Community Acculturative Stress**

The quantitative data suggested that the more acculturative stress Latinx immigrants experienced, the poorer their wellbeing. Across focus groups, participants described acculturative stress that appeared associated with poor wellbeing. Julieta, a 36-year-old Mexico-born woman in New Mexico, was in tears as she described her sadness, which she believed she developed from acculturative stress:

> It has been very difficult. But I have to learn to know where I am, and yes, because of this, I became sick. I have seen that how my body got sick because of this. I am, I was sad. I could not, nor did I even want to, pick up my daughter. I could not even start the car. I could not do anything. My body blocked everything. But I cannot be sick anymore. I need to move. I need to move forward.

**Cultural Maintenance Discrepancies**

In the quantitative model, the closer Latinx immigrants were to maintaining cultures in preferred ways, the better their wellbeing. While the further Latinx immigrants were from maintaining their cultures in desired ways (i.e., cultural maintenance discrepancies) predicted their acculturative stress related to the Latinx immigrant community, this stress did not predict wellbeing. Overall, participants could better maintain their customs in desired ways than they could make desired cultural changes. Still, across sites, participants described challenges to maintaining customs. For example, Canela, a Colombia-born woman who immigrated to Virginia in her 40s, had difficulties maintaining her leisure activities:

> It was a very big change because . . . of the very different way of life. [In Colombia] we had memberships to a club, we had a country home. . . . We were used to spending the weekends in our country home. When I arrived here I worked the entire month because we had to work. That was horrible, because I was out all day at work and I left at night, and where do you go on the weekends? Our entertainment was to go to Walmart.

Carlos, a 26-year-old El Salvador-born man who immigrated to Virginia at age 12 echoed her sentiments: “It was a bit of a difficult transition—the language, the climate. . . . You feel lonely, because you’re used to playing outside. Here the communities are separated—it seems as if . . .” Pilimili, a 42-year-old Peru-born woman, interjected and participants chuckled in affirmation. “That’s right, and it’s boring. At Christmas it’s super boring. It was like, well, it’s Christmas, but not really, because it’s a normal bedtime,” Carlos chuckled and participants nodded in agreement about holiday differences. He continued, sharing the impact of challenges maintaining culture, “The schools are very different here. For two months, I had headaches and stomachaches, and I think that’s from the stress.”

Holidays were particularly challenging for many participants, as their lack of ability to maintain traditions was especially salient during that time. Vivo, a Mexico-born 65-year-old in New Mexico, described how holidays brought her pain: “I try to maintain my culture, but for example, Independence Day is completely different here. And Easter—it’s incomparable. When I saw what they did here, I cried from sadness.” Similarly, Mariana, a Colombia-born 26-year-old in Maryland, described sadness that arose from the difficulty of maintaining cultural practices over the holidays: “My first Christmas here I was alone and the only friends I had were Jewish. So obviously they didn’t celebrate. On Christmas Eve I went to bed at like 9 at night crying. . . . This is the time to cry.” Music, a Venezuela-born 18-year-old in Virginia similarly lamented her inability to maintain holiday customs: “Christmas, it’s very sad, because you see all the cousins and aunts and uncles all celebrating in Venezuela. Although it is horrible there, they are always happy. And here, even as you try to be a family . . . and to have your family close to you, you can’t. . . . So we left so much there.” Indeed, challenges maintaining family customs were stressful and impacted wellbeing. Elizabeth, a Honduras-born 56-year-old in Maryland, shared her story:

> My mom had Alzheimer’s. . . . The social worker at the hospital said that we were not fit to take care of my mom [due to no full-time caregiver being available in the home, as both Elizabeth and her husband worked full-time]. They put her in a nursing home. My mom cried day and night. . . . So I had to fight the state. I had to go to court. I had to jump through so many hoops, I had to quit my job. Simply because they said I was not fit to take care of my mom. And my mom spent a month and a half in the nursing home, but that month and a half was not life for me because in our customs, we are not used to putting our elderly in a nursing home. . . . It was a very difficult experience for me.

Nevertheless, as was true for cultural change, many participants could maintain their cultures in desired ways, which in turn was related to better wellbeing. Ana, age 32, exemplified this as she recounted moving to a different community where she could maintain her culture:

---

**Table 3. Wellbeing Path Analysis Test Statistics of Indirect Effects in Hypothesized Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Through Acculturative Stress: Receiving Community</th>
<th>Through Acculturative Stress: Latinx Immigrant Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideal-to-Real Cultural Change Discrepancies</td>
<td>$t = -2.37, p = .009$</td>
<td>$t = -1.37, p = .058$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal-to-Real Cultural Maintenance Discrepancies</td>
<td>$t = -1.86, p = .06$</td>
<td>$t = -1.37, p = .058$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We stayed in Arizona for three years. There I was married, my first daughter was born. When she was three months old we moved over [to New Mexico]. And since then we have lived here in Albuquerque. We have felt so comfortable here because it is more similar to Mexico. It was not so much of a change. In Arizona, yes, it was such a strong, violent culture shock. We lived in a small town. . . . There they did not speak any Spanish. So, there were no resources for people who speak Spanish. But when we got [to New Mexico] everything changed. . . . Here my second daughter was born. . . . [My daughters] know perfectly well who they are. They call themselves Mexican-Americans. . . . Yes, I like that they go to Mexico, they know where we are from, how we live, how people live there.

Latinx Immigrant Community Acculturative Stress

The extent to which Latinx immigrants experienced acculturative stress related to the Latinx immigrant community did not significantly predict their wellbeing. This may be due to a floor effect, as scores were very low (M = 16.21, SD = 6.37 on a scale of 11 to 55, as compared to the receiving community scale: M = 32.32, SD = 13.55 on a scale of 14 to 70). Focus groups participants reported much more stress related to the receiving community (136 instances, reported in all sites and all groups) than they did the Latinx immigrant community (42 instances, reported in all sites, but not all groups).

Relation of the Two Types of Acculturative Stress

The residuals of both types of acculturative stress were related in the quantitative model, and focus groups illustrated their statistical relation. Participants who endorsed more receiving community-related acculturative stress were also more likely to report increased stress related to the Latinx immigrant community. Some participants expressed this as being between two worlds, not feeling fully at home in the U.S., but also not fully at home in immigrant communities or countries of origin. Carlos Kent, a 26-year-old who immigrated to Virginia in childhood, did not feel he belonged in the United States, but “when I went to El Salvador, yes I felt, in part, that I didn’t belong. . . . People there, they knew that I was not from there, that I was not from El Salvador, even though I was born there.” Nata, an 18-year-old who also immigrated during childhood, echoed the sentiment:

I partially identify with the Americans, but at the same time, I do not always feel, like, American enough. And sometimes . . . I do not feel Peruvian enough. Like, they tell me, “. . . You have an accent when you speak Spanish. You talk like an American. You, like, do not talk like a Peruvian.” . . . But my teachers tell me, “Oh, when you speak [in English], I cannot understand you because you have a Spanish accent.”

In sum, the better participants could adopt new cultural customs and maintain previous ones in desired ways, the better their wellbeing, in part explained by less acculturative stress. However, they experienced greater acculturative stress related to the receiving community than the immigrant community, and only receiving community-related stress influenced wellbeing.

Domain Models

We then explored whether acculturation discrepancies in particular life domains (central, intermediate, peripheral) were more impactful on acculturative stress and wellbeing than others. Quantitative results indicated that while acculturating in desired ways predicts wellbeing in all life domains, acculturation in the peripheral domain may best predict wellbeing. Qualitative results further expounded on these findings, as participants highlighted particular aspects of culture within each domain as more important to change and/or maintain in desired ways than others.

Central. The hypothesized central domain model (see Figure 3a)6 explained the data as well as the model testing all possible relations [Q = 0.99; χ²(2, N = 438) = 4.45, ns]. The better Latinx immigrants were able to make desired central domain cultural changes (i.e., the smaller the discrepancy), the better their wellbeing, in part explained by less acculturative stress related to the receiving community. The better Latinx immigrants were able to maintain desired central domain customs, the better their wellbeing and the less stress they reported experiencing with the Latinx immigrant community, though this stress did not predict wellbeing. This model accounted for 14.3% of the variance in wellbeing [F(4, 433) = 18.10, p < .001, ² = 0.16].

Of the central domain cultural elements (family relationships, religious customs, ways of thinking/principles/values), family relationships were described as most stressful and influential on wellbeing, both as they related to challenges maintaining preferred customs and feeling forced to make undesired changes. Tiki in Arizona spoke for many: “One custom that I lost here far too soon is the family unit. I’m not talking about just parents and children, but also aunts and uncles, cousins. Everything here is more separate. [In my culture] everyone tries to have a little more family unity. And here, they don’t; I cannot. Because of the rhythm of life, it changes a lot.” Jeny, a 31-year-old Mexico-born woman in Maryland, explicates family relationship changes:

You cannot tell the children here anything. You cannot yell at them. “I’m going to tell the teacher, I’m going to call 911, and you can go to jail.” Well, these are threats that children make to their parents, and, wow, you see the difference. It is a difference in how we are educated in Mexico. Here the children, well, at a young age they already threaten you. They tell you this, they tell you that, and they are lacking in respect.

Intermediate. The hypothesized intermediate domain model (see Figure 3b) explained the data as well as the model testing all possible relations [Q = 0.98; χ²(2, N = 438) = 8.14, ns]. However, only cultural change hypothesized relations were statistically supported. That is, the better Latinx immigrants were able to make desired intermediate domain cultural changes (i.e., the smaller the discrepancy), the better their self-reported wellbeing, in part explained by experiencing less acculturative stress related to the receiving community. Intermediate domain cultural maintenance discrepancies were not significantly related to well-

---

6Test statistic tables for domain models are not included due to space constraints. They are available upon request.
Figure 3. Figures 3a–c. Wellbeing Path Models by Life Domain with Standardized Path Coefficients. Solid lines denote statistically significant paths at the .05 level; dashed lines denote paths tested, but not significant at the .05 level. \(^* p < .10\) \(^* p < .05\) \(^{***} p < .001\).
being. This model accounted for 18.2% of the variance in wellbeing \(F(4, 433) = 24.04, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.20\).

Qualitative data suggested that participants experienced a great deal of stress and poorer wellbeing both when they felt forced to make changes to relationships they did not desire and when they struggled to make desired changes, such as becoming friends with U.S.-born people. Many participants felt isolated and unable to enter into relationships and participate in leisure activities they preferred, as Chaparra, a 35-year-old Mexico-born woman in Arizona, illustrated:

I am so sad here. Here people only work and stay at home, especially those of us who do not have [immigration] papers. We cannot go anywhere else for fear that ICE will grab us on the way. . . . We go to the same store always and then turn around and come back. We don’t know anything else here. . . . In Mexico it is very different. We would go over to our uncles’ and aunts’ [house], . . . You go out and take a walk. You take the children out on Sunday to learn more about the area. Here we only go to work and to home or to school and then home again.

Orquidea, a 54-year-old Cuba-born woman in Maryland, echoed the negative effects of feeling forced to make undesired changes:

Life here is so fast-paced. . . . You have to plan everything you have to do. You cannot visit someone without calling them first. You have to ask, “Can I come over? Or can I not come?” All of those things we do not have to do in Cuba—we just show up. And there you are welcome and you hang out, and everyone is happy, right? Here everything has to be planned. I do not know if I will get used to it. Or maybe I will, but I will not like it.

Peripheral. The hypothesized peripheral domain model (see Figure 3c) explained the data as well as the model testing all possible relations \(Q = 0.97; \chi^2(2, N = 438) = 8.84, ns\). The better Latinx immigrants were able to make desired peripheral domain cultural changes, the better their wellbeing, in part explained by experiencing less acculturative stress with the receiving community. The better Latinx immigrants were able to maintain their peripheral domain cultural customs in desired ways, the better their wellbeing. The model accounted for 22.1% of the variance in wellbeing \(F(4, 433) = 30.74, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.28\).

Of the peripheral domain cultural elements (employment, economics, government/political systems, social welfare), the inability to change and maintain work and employment practices was particularly stressful and described as detrimental to wellbeing. Participants often felt frustrated that they were unable to take on the profession practices they desired. Alexandra, a 27-year-old woman who had immigrated to Maryland three years prior, lamented, “The woman who raised me told me, ‘Go there. Since you want to be a lawyer, there at least you can get a good job, you’ll be able to work. Because here [in Honduras]—if you are a lawyer, gangs will come looking for you and kill you.’ So I came here, but I could not finish my studies. I could not be a lawyer.” Many participants across sites echoed similar challenges, feeling forced into careers they did not envision for themselves. Nacional, a 55-year-old Colombia-born man in Virginia, shared, “I am a professional, I had two companies and specialized in the agricultural market and animal feed. It was very nice work. And that is what hurt me most coming here, having to change my work here.” Angel, a 43-year-old Mexico-born woman in Arizona, summed up, “I see this every day where I work—that people who come from other countries and who are doctors and engineers [in their countries] are working construction here. It’s hard to see that.”

In conclusion, while acculturation discrepancies across life domains impacted wellbeing, of the models examined, the ability to enact peripheral domain cultural changes in desired ways and related acculturative stress accounted for the most variance in self-reported wellbeing. Some cultural elements (e.g., family roles/relationships, friendships, work/employment practices) were described as more influential on stress and wellbeing than others across the focus groups.

Discussion

This research supports prominent contentions (e.g., Bornstein, 2017; Chirkov, 2009) that we must consider person-environment interactions as we seek to understand acculturation and wellbeing. Both individuals and their contexts influence acculturation processes and associated outcomes. This study shows that the better Latinx immigrants were able to acculturate in the ways they desired, the better they reported their wellbeing to be, which could be explained, at least in part, by experiencing less acculturative stress. The qualitative findings further illustrate these relations, as participants discussed experiencing less acculturative stress when their communities better supported their desires (i.e., person-environment fit), which enhanced their wellbeing. This explanation of the process by which acculturation influences wellbeing adds to current interactional theories (e.g., Prilleltensky et al., 2005; Phinney et al., 2001), suggesting that the match of real acculturation strategies to ideal acculturation attitudes is key. Given that wellbeing is associated with many key outcomes for individuals and communities at-large—including health, interpersonal relationships, and better work outcomes (e.g., Prilleltensky et al., 2015)—identifying ways in which ideal acculturation can be achieved is essential. Notably, this may differ from simply facilitating acculturation broadly (i.e., helping individuals to simultaneously maintain all elements of their original cultures while taking on all elements of the cultures of their new communities), as individuals may not prefer certain ways of changing and maintaining cultures. While some Latinx immigrants may indeed wish to take on the values, practices, and identifications of their new communities, others may not, and thus interventions seeking to facilitate cultural changes may have a positive impact on some and a deleterious impact on others. Likewise, Latinx immigrants may diverge on the degree to which they value maintaining their cultural customs, and thus programs designed to support cultural maintenance may be received differently. Consequently, when working with Latinx immigrants, practitioners should consider the ideal acculturation attitudes of their clients and seek to support their individual desires rather than prescribing a preconceived notion of what would be “best” for the individual.

Notably, we found that acculturative stress related to the Latinx immigrant community was very low among the Latinx immigrants in this sample. This floor effect may explain why this type of acculturative stress was not significantly related to wellbeing. Indeed, this type of acculturative stress might be more apparent in 1.5 generation immigrants (i.e., children who immigrated to the United States with their families before the age of 6) and 2nd generation immigrants (i.e., children born in the United States to
Migration and acculturation

1st generation immigrant parents, who may experience more difficulties “fitting in” to the local Latinx immigrant community and pressures to take on elements of their cultures (Rodriguez et al., 2002; Romero, Carvajal, Valle, & Orduña, 2007). Findings suggest that practitioners working with 1st generation Latinx immigrants may find that they experience more stress related to the receiving community; however, support for Latinx immigrants to both change and maintain their cultures in the ways in which they desire may facilitate their wellbeing directly, or indirectly through reducing their acculturative stress.

The broad and concrete ways in which culture is defined, measured, and explored in this study differ in important manners from many prior studies of acculturation. While culture has been defined in many ways—indeed, there were more than 200 definitions of culture in the extant literature over two decades ago (Lonner, 1994)—in the acculturation literature, culture has generally been studied as a nebulous, monolithic attribute that people (usually immigrants) gain and lose as they interact with a new large, nebulous, monolithic society. Usually comparisons are made between an immigrant’s ethnic, original, or “home” culture, and the national culture in which the immigrant now resides, which nearly always reflects the attributes of the so-called dominant culture or those who possess the most power (see Chirkov, 2009).

In this study, we chose to deconstruct culture by exploring the particular aspects of immigrants’ cultural lives that they found important. Such examination allowed for a better understanding of the challenges and successes Latinx immigrants had enacting culture. In this way, we did not have to ignore natural variation within acculturation attitudes and strategies and we did not have to imperfectly categorize participants into typologies. Consequently, the study points to concrete interventions to support acculturation in specific ways (see below). However, we also relied on participants to describe relevant aspects of culture, and as such, it may have been easier for participants to name concrete practices than to consider more abstract aspects of culture, such as values and beliefs. Further, based in the RAEM, our study of acculturation included culture in multiple life domains. Elements conceptualized as culture in peripheral and intermediate domains, such as economics, politics, and work practices, may expand the way in which readers conceptualize culture.

Given that this study demonstrates that not all individuals wish to change and maintain cultures in similar ways, this research suggests that interventions to facilitate ideal acculturation should be targeted to individuals’ specific needs and desires. These findings have implications for practice by informing services for immigrants at agencies, such as resettlement centers, schools, social services, and mental health services, suggesting that immigrants would benefit from individualized interventions. Moreover, this research provides a framework that allows individual immigrants to understand their collective experiences while recognizing their differences as individuals. When taking a family approach, service providers should consider the acculturation of each family member, given that both ideal and real acculturation may vary among members (Buckingham & Brodsky, 2015).

Moreover, this research suggests that interventions should be specific to cultural elements. While changing and maintaining cultures in desired ways influenced wellbeing across life domains, intermediate and peripheral domain models and related acculturative stress predicted more variance in wellbeing than the central domain model. Furthermore, additional analyses from this study revealed that participants had more challenges enacting their cultures in desired ways in peripheral and intermediate domains than in central domains (Buckingham, 2017). Thus, interventions to facilitate ideal acculturation would likely be most effective if targeted at peripheral and intermediate domains, with a focus on cultural elements such as work and employment, family relationships, and friendships. For example, programs that enhance relationships among immigrants and receiving community members should be bolstered along with ones that assist Latinx immigrants in finding and having opportunities to socialize with one another. Programs that help Latinx immigrants to utilize their previous degrees and continue their careers in the United States should be explored, in addition to educational and employment opportunities that help Latinx immigrants to make changes they desire. Cultural appreciation events, such as festivals, can provide opportunities for immigrant communities to celebrate their heritage and their receiving communities can learn about these community members’ cultures and show support for diversity to Latinx immigrants.

Beyond individual interventions and programming, this research indicates that multiple societal systems and structures play a significant role in facilitating or constraining Latinx immigrants’ abilities to acculturate in ways they desire. Immigration and residency regulations; employment policies; primary, secondary, and higher education systems; and social welfare divisions were described as influencing acculturation. These structures and systems seemed to particularly affect peripheral domain customs, such as employment and economics, but also were described as influencing intermediate and central domains customs, shaping family roles and social relationships. Without systemic support for the realization of ideal acculturation preferences, Latinx immigrants may be marginalized and excluded from their receiving communities, underemployed, and without the ability to realize the “American dream” (Buckingham, Emery, Godsay, Brodsky, & Scheibler, 2018). In turn, these new community members may experience poorer wellbeing and their receiving communities may lose out on the tangible and intangible benefits they provide as community members. Consequently, local, state, and federal policies, structures, and systems should be examined in order to identify opportunities for change. This study can inform future examination of strategic changes needed to support the Latinx immigrant community.

Limitations

There are several noteworthy limitations of this research. The cross-sectional design lacks temporal precedence and thus directionality is only theorized. While participants were recruited from diverse locations and directed to recruit others who had disparate experiences, due to the stratified snowball sampling method, sample representativeness cannot be guaranteed. Moreover, although participants matched demographics of their sites, there were differences across sites. Participants “opted in” to the focus groups; thus, it is possible those who had particularly strong feelings about the topics participated. Notably, focus groups in Arizona were smaller than other sites, perhaps due to a climate that may have caused fear of participating. While groups were held at an immigrants’ rights organization in anticipation of this, turnout was depressed by cancellations and no-
shows. We still had enough participants to hold each group and every discussion was fruitful. Given the diversity of Latinx immigrants as well as the diversity of U.S. contexts, it is not possible to generalize findings as typical of all Latinx immigrants across the United States. Nevertheless, these participants’ experiences, grounded in their contexts, are representative of their experiences, embodying real variability and validity. Future research is needed to determine if similar findings are discovered among other Latinx immigrants living in the United States.

Although the best methods and measures available were selected for data collection and analyses, as is true of all self-report measures, the scales and their scores were approximations of the constructs under study. We defined culture broadly and measured it with the RAEM, which includes elements of culture that may extend beyond readers’ definitions. The I COPPE was used with a Spanish-speaking sample for the first time in this study and acculturative stress levels related to the immigrant community were low on the MASI, potentially creating a floor effect. Participants were required to recall their past perspectives to report on ideal acculturation, and thus their perceptions might not be completely accurate. Participants’ responses may have also been influenced by the research team. Approaches were taken to minimize this: a research team consisting of both bilingual nonimmigrants and 1st and 2nd generation Latinx immigrants was used to balance insider and outsider perspectives, a waiver of written consent was granted so participants could participate anony-
mously, and we partnered with community organizations to carry out the research. Moreover, while great care was taken to stay as close as possible to the meaning of participants’ words, some level of nuance is necessarily lost in translation.

**Future Research**

There are several findings in need of additional investigation. While this research found support for the hypothesis that the further Latinx immigrants are from enacting culture in desired ways, the poorer their wellbeing, the quantitative models could only examine the quantity and degree of differences rather than their quality. In the focus groups, it became apparent that not being able to enact certain customs in desired ways was far more distressing to participants than not being able to enact others. Family relationships, friendships, and employment customs were described as most important. Future research should consider the quality of these differences rather than their sheer quantity or degree of difference, as certain acculturation discrepancies may be more influential than others. Moreover, additional research is needed to identify the reasons why Latinx immigrants’ real acculturation diverged from their ideal acculturation. While numerous societal structures and policies, along with particular interactions with programs and members of immigrants’ receiving communities, were described as impactful, additional systemic research is needed to establish further empirical evidence. Longitudinal designs should be utilized to investigate changes in ideal and real acculturation over time and their influence on stress and wellbeing.

As temporal precedence is established and relations are more fully understood, interventions to facilitate immigrants’ desired acculturation can be developed and tested. Given that Latinx immigrants make up a substantial portion of the U.S. population, supporting their ideal acculturation may be key in enhancing the wellness of our nation.

**Conclusion**

This study examines real and ideal acculturation across life domains in the U.S. and identifies the impact of their divergence. Results suggest that the further Latinx immigrants are from enacting culture in desired ways, the poorer their wellbeing, in part explained by acculturative stress. Despite difficulties, participants kept moving forward. As Chiquita in Maryland put it, “I thought it would be easy, but it has been really painful. . . . It has cost me a lot to adapt to here. Even though I am still not accustomed [to this culture], I do want to be able to move forward. I want to stay here and value myself for me and have this impetus to keep trying.” Indeed, many participants were able to change and maintain their cultures in ideal ways as they fit their environments well, promoting their wellbeing. Rebeca in Virginia concluded:

I did not know what I was going to face here. I did not speak English, I knew nothing. For us and for me personally it has been a blessing . . . because my daughters have grown peacefully in this country. They have had many opportunities. We are well and I am happy here. . . . The least I can do for this country is to stay and contribute to its growth also as part of the society. . . . I am also a part of here and I feel this sense of belonging—I belong here and I feel useful, I feel active, I feel happy.

**Keywords:** Latinx immigrants; acculturation; wellbeing; acculturative stress

**References**


