

Episode 274—Dr. Cristina Mogro-Wilson: Exploring the Impact of Culture on the Parenting Styles of Latino Fathers

[00:00:08] Welcome to inSocialWork, the podcast series of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work at www.inSocialWork.org. We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of inSocialWork is to engage practitioners and researchers in lifelong learning and to promote research to practice and practice to research. We educate. We connect. We care. We're inSocialWork.

[00:00:37] Hi from Buffalo. Canal Side has become a popular venue downtown in its newest edition is Explore & More, The Ralph C. Wilson Junior's Children's Museum. Designed for children up to 12 years of age, the playzone's and educational studios use playful in hands on areas to tell and teach the unique history of the Western New York region while kids have a blast. I'm Peter Simonian. In this episode, our guest Dr. Cristina Wilson, provides us with insight into the Latino Paradox and what makes Latinos so resilient despite comparatively lower socioeconomic status. Specifically, Dr. Wilson describes her research focus on Latino fathers, their role and how their culture affects their parenting and the interaction with their children. She discusses various values present in Latino culture that inform and impact father's approaches to parenting, highlighting duty to family, respect, reliance and warmth and harmony, understanding the strengths of Latino families, Dr. Wilson offers guidance on how to integrate Latino fathers in the treatment experience and the implications for policy work. Dr. Wilson was interviewed in May of 2019 by Jose Diebold, MSW and a PhD student here at the UB School of Social Work.

[00:01:50] I'm Jose Diebold, I'm a PhD student in social welfare at the University at Buffalo, and I am talking today with Dr. Wilson. So welcome Dr. Wilson, and to kick us off, I was wondering if you can tell us a little bit about the work that you do?

[00:02:08] Sure. First, I'd really like to thank you for inviting me to speak with you on this podcast and to have the opportunity to share some of the work that I've been working on. As a social worker, I'm really committed to focusing on individual strengths and empowering at risk groups. And so my work has focused on understanding the factors that promote resilience. I've centered my work on strengthening Latino families and creating environments where kids and youth can thrive. Specifically, I'm interested in looking at modifiable factors associated with parenting and Latino families, and helping inform culture, responsive practice and education regarding under studied ethnic and racial minority populations such as Latino fathers.

[00:02:54] Awesome. That's really interesting. So I'm curious to know what drew you to study this area?

[00:03:01] Read question. As a Latina, I was raised by immigrant parents, both who are born in Bolivia, which is in South America. And I learned Spanish and English in my home. I was able to experience this acculturation process myself and of my mother and father as I was raised. And now that I've become a parent myself, I have three young children who are 11, 9 and 5. In practice, I worked with families and young children in Connecticut, Michigan and New York that were interfacing with a lot of different systems, including travel welfare, schools, medical systems. And I was able to witness the hardship that just being Latino created for these families. But at the same time, I saw some great strengths. And one of the interesting things that we know about Latinos when we talk about them, a look of Latinos in the literature, we see something called the Latino Paradox, which means

that Latinos become more acculturated to the U.S., they get worse on every domain, health, well-being, social, emotional outcomes, all of it. And so is really interested in understanding what makes Latinos so resilient. What are the strengths of our culture and what do we do and how do we preserve them in order for Latinos to overcome their barriers and have better outcomes for their families?

[00:04:12] Yeah, that's fascinating. It's really powerful to hear you make that connection between your own experiences in growing up and starting a family and then how you entered into this area of research. That's really powerful and beautiful to hear. So you just touched on this a bit. I'm not sure if you have more to add, but you spoke to a little bit about why it's so important to study Latinos in the U.S.. Do you have any more thoughts about why this area of research is so vital and why you're digging in?

[00:04:44] Sure. I mean, beyond the personal reasons for myself, we know that as the population in the United States changes, there's a huge and urgent need to understand both the cultural and contextual factors that apply to Latinos in the U.S.. So since about around 2010, Latinos have been the largest racial and ethnic minority group in the U.S. We currently make up about 18 percent of the total population. And we know as immigration hightens, Latinos are going to continue to expand the proportion of our population. I think the growth rate now for Latinos is about four times the growth rate of the general population. So by 2050, they're estimating that Latinos will make up about 30 percent of the U.S. population. And we know Latinos is kind of a broad term and it's used to describe individuals from Latin America, Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South or Central America and other Spanish culture origin regardless of race. We know that. Half of Latino adults were born abroad and more than one half of immigrants are from Mexico. So understanding the nuanced relationship between each of these cultural groups and subgroups of Latinos and helping understand and define these characteristics that make each individual very different, such as length of time somebody spent in the U.S., their citizen status, socioeconomic status, all those contextual factors that we need to speak about in social work, makes Latino fathers an especially diverse group. And so today I'm hoping to talk a little bit more about fathers, and fathers we now have been long established in the literature to have a huge impact on children in many domains. We know fathers are good for social, emotional, behavioral, all types of health. And we know if dads are more involved, the better off the child will be. However, the focus on fathers has consistently been on white non Latino fathers. In the past 20 years or so. We've begun to explore the kind of this role of the Latino father and how parental involvement and other attributes of fatherhood could affect Latinos differently. Latino families are different. So we know that. We know that Latino families tend to be poor with a lower household income and have a larger family size with more kids per family. And Latinos typically live in most of the southwestern states like California and New Mexico and Texas. These differences in socioeconomic status and family size directly affects the role that a Latino father might play in a family. So, for example, a father's education level has been found to effect how much time they spend with their child. Those fathers who attend at least some college spend more time with their child compared to a non-educated college father. So kind of understanding this intersection of these identities are of interest in helping us understand more about Latino dads.

[00:07:25] Awesome. So really building right off of that, I'm curious what are you currently working on that you're feeling really excited about and you're digging into?

[00:07:35] Sure. I have a few things going on right now, but I'm really trying to understand Latino fathers and how culture influences how they parent and interact with their child. It's

so important that we understand this because a lot of the work we do involves family as social workers. However, when we talk about families, we often mean mothers, the kid and the mom. We forget about the dads, and what we know is that fathers are super important for outcomes for their child and for the father. We know that kids, mothers, families, they all do better when fathers are involved. I want social workers understand how parenting and the parent-child relationship works for Latino fathers. This way it can be better integrated into the practice that we're doing. We also know that culture affects parenting. And so what does this mean for Latinos? How does culture affect how they parent? Until we understand these ideas, it's hard to create programs and interventions that can really help families. So right now, I'm working on identifying what aspects of Latino culture affect parenting for fathers and how this might be different under stressful circumstances such as fathers or substance users or fathers who are parents to a child with a developmental disability.

[00:08:43] Awesome. So I want to ask you a little bit more about that research on the father-child relationship, but first, I'm curious what kind of methods do you typically use in the research that you're conducting?

[00:08:55] So I use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. I was trained more as a quantitative methodologist. And so my first projects, starting with my dissertation work and two of my first projects as an assistant professor, really focused on using secondary data analysis and some complex structural equation modeling of large datasets like Adhealth to look at Latino populations and parenting. And then I moved to do some more qualitative work with fathers, doing some focus groups and some interviews, asking them questions about parenting, about being a Latino dad. And then this led me to my current project that's a national survey of Latino fathers. I've also been fortunate enough to be involved in some really cool RCT, or Randomized Controlled Trials that involve looking at parenting interventions for Latino and African-American fathers at Harvard.

[00:09:47] Awesome. So I'm curious to know, you've talked about this importance of looking at the father child relationship as well as the way that Latino culture affects the ways that fathers parent. And I'm wondering if you can expand on both of those points in terms of what you found and what you're discovering in the work that you do.

[00:10:10] Sure. So let me talk about, since I keep talking about parenting, define that a little bit more and also define a little bit about what I'm talking about, the father-child relationship or the parent-child relationship. So parenting is this concept that Diana Baumrind spoke about in a way that parenting is a combination of both warmth and love, and this idea of control or monitoring your child. And through the combination of these two main components there exists four typologies of parenting and said these are common terminology uses in parenting, literature and also kind of more broadly things like authoritative and permissive parenting, authoritarian parenting vs. uninvolved parenting. And what they are just cross sections are combinations of warmth and love and combinations of control or monitoring. So parents with high levels of warmth and love, but also high levels of control and monitoring tend to be authoritative in their parenting. And this is open to some give and take and some discussion of explanations of why rules are certain ways. Those parents that have lower warmth and love and higher amounts of control are talked about as authoritarian. And this type of parenting is also associated with kind of this traditional Latino parenting. This is where expectations are set and there's very little questioning allowed for. And then the permissive type of parenting styles, high amounts of warmth and low amounts of control where parents tend to be a little more

permissive in what they allow for their child. And then there's the uninvolved parenting style, which has low amounts of warmth or love towards their child and low amounts of control. We know that parenting is a super crucial role in child development as both a risk and protective factor, and as a meaning, parenting behaviors varies between different cultural groups. So that's parenting. But parenting is different than the parent-child relationship. So parenting is something that is often seen as drawn from generation to generation and tends to be somewhat stable across the children in the family. In other words, how you parent one child tends to be similar in style to high parent another. However, the parent-child relationship as a contract that's different in that it's developed with each child individually and it can be different from child to child and depends on things like the child's personality and the gender of the child, among some other things.

[00:12:29] Thank you for that clarity. That's really fascinating to understand that very clear distinction between parenting and that parent-child relationship. So building on that, I'm curious then to know how does Latino culture affect the way that fathers parent and what have you found in the work that is done thus far?

[00:12:49] So that's a great question and that's what I'm trying to tease out right now. It's a super complex question because there's so many different things affecting fathers. Socioeconomic status, country of origin, acculturation status, how long they've been in the U.S., education level and so on. However, Latino culture has some trademarks that as practitioners, at least all need to know a little bit about. So parenting, I mentioned, is a cultural construct and thus your own culture affects how you parent and how our parenting is then perceived by the child. While there are many cultural constructs that are embedded into Latino families, I want to talk about a few of the primary ones and what I've been finding on how it's impacting parenting. An important note is to remember that all these cultural values change over time and are impacted by all those things I talked about, immigration status, socioeconomic status and so on. So the first cultural concept that I wanted to talk a little bit about is familismo, which is the cultural value of really emphasizing a duty to the family and this interconnection and cooperation among members of the family. So we found that fathers who value familismo feel a strong obligation to maintain family ties. And that involves the importance of the family as the primary emotional support system. So Latino fathers, due to this cultural value of familismo, may feel an added pressure to preserve the family unit by focusing on cooperation and agreement and parenting and relationships. Latino fathers view the family unit as more expansive and utilize kind of the role of uncles, aunts and other extended members of the family and parenting activities. So Latino fathers view the behavior of their children as a way their family is represented to the outside community. Latino fathers want to maintain the respect for their family and their role as a father and want the community to see that through the behavior of their children. So one father that we talk to in one of my research projects said, I have a quote here from one of my projects that really brings the forward. He said, quote, "What I'm trying to teach them is that when you do something crazy, it doesn't just affect you. It affects the entire family. It affects the entire reputation of that entire family." And so that really just brings forward this cultural value of familismo that fathers are trying to embed in their parenting practices. The next cultural construct that I wanted to talk about is respecto, which is respect in English as a translation. And it's a cultural value where there is an importance placed on maintaining respect towards oneself and others during interpersonal relationships. It's an expected part of being part of the family, And that each member of the family is expected to respect the roles that they play. So Latino fathers have noted the importance of this cultural value in their parenting. They confirmed this as a bidirectional relationship of respect so that they respect their child and they expect their child to respect them. Latino fathers utilize the role of respect as a way to

control and monitor their children, both in public and at home. So, for example, fathers have noted in some of my work that they will not loudly discipline or spank a child in public because they respect their child and do not want to embarrass them. There has been also other evidence for the value of respect to having an influence on the father and mother relationship in coparenting. Suggesting that fathers who value respect, or respecto, have the better coparenting harmonization. So one father put this perfectly when we interviewed him, and he said, quote, "Age does not matter, because for that word, respect, age does not exist because an adult must not disrespect a child nor a child to an adult." So further, he really expressed this idea of the bidirectional relationship of respect, that it's not just top down from the father to the child, but also for the child to the father, which is kind of a beautiful quote. He was able to operationalize for us. Another cultural construct that we see a little bit less in literature is this idea of Personalismo. It's a cultural value that really centers on reliance, warmth and respect in relationships. And you can see it as a cornerstone for this development of the parent-child relationship that I was talking about earlier. The parent-child relationship centers on trust and getting along. And this cultural value of Personalismo further enhances it. The development of the father-child relationship is often portrayed for Latino fathers by being attentive to their child's interests and abilities and engaging in play that is directed by the child. One father said in some of the work that we did, quote "I think that's the key in everything. Talk to me, I listen. I talk to you, you listen." So finally one more cultural concept before I get into that kind of a cornerstone of when we talk about Latino fathers is Sympathia, Which is a cultural value that emphasizes creating harmony in relationships and being apathetic to others. Having an easygoing attitude as well as an openness to conform to authority figures, this includes medical and school personnel. So this avoidance of conflict and tendency to lean towards agreeableness translates for Latino fathers as having a family system that is an agreement, where there is sharing of responsibilities and decision making that is done collaboratively with the mother. Latino fathers who highly value Sympathia are more likely to agree upon the parenting values of the mother. Latino fathers often betray their warmth and love for their child through the cultural value of Sympathia, and this value is often displayed differently depending on the gender of the child. So, for example, for girl children they are more likely to give hugs and kisses and with boy children, they may be using more physical play or roughhousing. So finally, I wanted to cover two concepts that are talked about a lot in the literature around Latino males, this idea of Latino males are macho and that is often talked about in a negative light. Traditional Machismo is a gender role construct where male authority and female passivity are hereto. So within the family, Traditional Machismo may be demonstrated through a father's adherence to affirm division of family roles based on gender where the mother is the primary caregiver and the father is primarily a financial provider. However, our recent evidence that we're seeing in the literature does not support the implementation of the stereotypical meaning of Machismo and fathering. For example, when we look at both Mexican-American and Puerto Rican fathers, they have shown active interaction with their children, playing, showing warmth and love and emotionally supporting their children. In addition, when we look at amount of time spent. Latino fathers spend more time with their children in direct interactions than non Latino white fathers. An explanation for these differences that we're seeing is the cultural value of Caballerismo, which encompasses other still gender based values that may help us explain the differences we're seeing for Latino fathers and their caregiving roles. So finally, Caballerismo is an expansion to the traditional Machismo cultural value that includes positive values such as Latino fathers valuing a sense of obligation and responsibility towards their family and a need to protect the family as a unit. So in addition, the adherence to this cultural value for Latino fathers has been connected to outcomes that include better life satisfaction for the father, things like more involvement for the child's life, better relationships, and a sense of responsibility towards the larger community as a

whole. Latino fathers who adhere to positive values of Caballerismo not only feel financially responsible, but they also feel this emotional responsibility towards their children. Latino fathers have described their role as more involved with their children, including attending parent-teacher conferences and being involved in the day to day activities of their child. They feel responsibility and a pride of being Latino fathers and as a part of their family. And it benefits not only the father, but to the child as well. So in conclusion, all of these cultural values that I just discussed affect the way fathers parent and they develop relationships with their child and interact with other members of their families and communities. Parenting styles, much talked about earlier, are often viewed through traditional Westernized lenses of understanding parenting roles. But these cultural values give us context to these parenting styles and relationships and viewing parenting practices through the cultural lens of Latino cultural values as a layer of complexity to the understanding of how Latino fathers are parenting.

[00:21:11] Thank you. That is such fascinating, really rich information about those cultural values and the way that those impact and shape and contextualize father's parenting. And to build on that, well I'm curious to know is why is it important for practitioners and policymakers to understand these issues?

[00:21:33] Yes. So what is the point? The "So what," right? When Latino males become fathers, it's kind of this natural time in their life for change as a transformative life event. And other people have spoken about this as a time, as a teaching moment, a time when the life event can increase your motivation to change your behavior. So becoming a father can change how fathers perceive risk and self-image. So, for example, we know that Latino males have shown a greater desire to even quit smoking when they learn about their partner's pregnancy and after the birth of the child. So interventions that utilize Motivational Interviewing with fathers may be able to use these reasons for breaking from the path and as a traditional period of change to stop risky behaviors. The opportunity of using a commitment to fatherhood coupled with these cultural tenants, the underlying Latino cultural values such as a strong commitment to the family, can offer opportunities for interventions. However, we know that family interventions that are truly father-centric and inclusive of the father that also include cultural sensitivity are limited. And the research shows that about only 18 to 20 percent of parent training involve fathers. There are Head Start and Early Head Start programs that have added portions of their outreach to fathers either in the home or in center based programs. However, involvement and engagement in these interventions for Latino fathers are often challenging, and there are many barriers to involvement such as transportation and job schedules and so on. There is a need to really create some tailored interventions for Latino fathers that can really integrate these cultural values and help them develop a close parent-child relationship. Family based interventions need to really look at and address the issues of culture and parenting, and that is culturally attuned to Latino fathers to build emotional connections. Multi-dimensional family therapy could be one such avenue as it can encourage strong parent child connections. In an article I published quite some time ago in 2008 I made an effort to move some of my preliminary work to the development of culturally competent services. And so I created a conceptual framework for direct practice called Mi Mundo for areas of resiliency to target with vulnerable Latino children and families. And it's really built on the strength of the individual family, community and culture. And I think this resiliency strength-based model supports the resources of the Latino culture and community to help protect against negative health outcomes and adverse circumstances. So the specific features of the Latino individual, such as positive ethnic identity, self mastering efficacy and high levels of perceived control can be utilized as resources when developing interventions for practitioners in direct practice. So that article really stressed the importance of placing an

emphasis on the family to help strengthen the coping, stress and communication mechanisms. It also addresses the necessity of incorporating community and neighborhood resources and the role community plays in family life, which we didn't really touch on today, and also the role of spirituality, which read didn't even speak about, which is a whole other episode, to help and contribute to effective interventions. So I hope that social workers can help Latino families and include fathers in all of their interactions. We often hear from dads in the work that I'm doing. Everything is addressed, the mom that they will often be overlooked even if they're attending a teacher conference or a medical appointment, that all the questions will be directed towards the mom. And so involving the Latino father, using close family relationships and a personal responsiveness, kind of this idea of respect and personal dignity in the work that we do. So the second part of your question that I'll briefly address is this idea about what are the implications for policy. And so I think the next set of critical questions for the following decade is how to move this conversation really into policy change. So most of the policy change around fathers is really focused on economic contributions to the family. However, Latino fathers are changing the landscape of immigration. As more men are crossing the border to find employment, they're away from their families and children for extended periods of time. This impact on child development and on the mental health of Latino fathers is not yet understood. Given the current political climate and the changes to health insurance, medical coverage, health access and family support and leave policies, the role of the father is often left out of these discussions. Work must be done to continue the integration of fathers into the policies being created that is accessible for Latino fathers. And with the political climate affecting anti-immigration and anti-Latino sentiments, the increased policing and criminalization of Latino males that is occurring, We all have an important responsibility to see that we investigate the impact on children and families. As increasing numbers of Latino families become involved in the criminal justice system, the child welfare system and other institutions, the interventions that we really work on to employ to help these families must include the dads and fathers. How we create spaces that are not kind of these elaborations of systematic oppression towards Latinos that can provide services and comprehensive education and care and involve fathers frames kind of our next set of challenges.

[00:26:48] Awesome. So really directly building on what you just said, what are the next critical questions for Latino fathers?

[00:26:57] I would say one of the most critical questions for our next decade is how to integrate Latino fathers into these services that we're providing to the child, to the mother, to the family. Service providers like social workers, psychologists, health professionals, teachers, have to really understand the unique role that Latino fathers play in the family. In order for Latino families to reach their full potential, the father has to be involved in the child's lives to benefit the child, the father and the family itself. As we move forward, having service providers integrate the work that they are doing to involve the father and understand ways of engaging and retaining them in various parts of treatment that is culture responsive is imperative. There's really a lack of discussion in the literature and also here in my interview on things about same-sex marriages and households where two fathers are raising children or where the father is not heterosexual or where the father is transgender. And the lack of research in this area of gay, transgender and non-binary Latino fathers is really startling. As families are ever changing in the United States and around the world, we really need to better understand how gender and sexual identity influences fathers and their children. And then finally, I think we really need to think about keeping the voices of the Latino dads present in the work that we do to move things forward. The ever changing role of the father is moving towards more egalitarian roles with

more technology integrated into parenting and relationship development. The modern Latino male is going to respond to the responsibilities of parenting differently and the way they develop relationships with their partners and children and the ever changing ways. In all of these coming changes we must turn to the dads and the men who know and are experiencing these parenting roles in a complex political and social environment. We need to use this moment of transition into parenthood as an opportunity to change as a positive movement for self-development for the Latino man. And so utilizing a strength based perspective, we have to see the Latino father as an essential component of the Latino family.

[00:29:01] So there are many areas to dig into and critical questions that I hear you telling us about. And so that leads me to ask, what is next for you in your research?

[00:29:12] Yeah, I would really like to move my research towards developing some evidence-based interventions for Latino fathers. I'm really interested in strengthening father involvement and learning about how fatherhood identity is important to co-parenting and the co-parenting relationship. There's a real critical need to address health disparities by culturally adopting evidence-based interventions for Latino fathers. And I hope I'll continue to focus my scholarship on resilience in vulnerable populations and really start to unpack and understand what makes Latinos so resilient. What are the strengths of our culture and how do we preserve them and integrate them into practice and policy to better outcomes for our children and families? I want to create change for Latino families by focusing on cultural strengths of the Latino population. So my next project will probably be working with some vulnerable Latino families and fathers in Connecticut who have children with developmental disabilities to see how culture and spirituality play a role in how these families succeed and overcome challenges. So maybe we could do another interview after I finish that project.

[00:30:21] Absolutely. Awesome. Before we wrap up, is there anything else that you wanted to tell our listeners or to share about the work that you're doing or questions that you have to find?

[00:30:33] Just wanted to thank you for being a great host, following along in my answers. So I appreciate your time.

[00:30:39] Absolutely. Yeah. We want to really thank you so much, Dr. Wilson, for taking the time to talk to us and to shed light on this really vital work that you are doing. So thank you for taking the time to be with us.

[00:30:51] Sure, Thanks.

[00:30:52] You've been listening to Dr. Wilson discuss the impact of culture on the parenting of Latino fathers on inSocialWork.

[00:31:07] Hi, I'm Nancy Smyth, professor and Dean of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school, our history, our online and on the ground degree and continuing education programs, we invite you to visit our website at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu. And while you're there, check out our Technology and Social Work Resource Center. You'll find it under the Community Resources menu.