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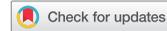


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ARTICLE



## “We Hold Culture in Our Hearts”: A Phenomenological Study of Hispanic/Latina Homeschool Experiences

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### ABSTRACT

Although one of the fastest-growing homeschool subgroups, there are no empirical studies specifically considering Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e homeschool families. This study asks Hispanic and Latina parents to describe what homeschooling means to them. Using phenomenology, intersectionality, and community cultural wealth, we interviewed 18 mothers across the nation. We find that preservation or reclamation of cultural heritage is the most meaningful result of the decision to homeschool. Specific aspects of culture found are family cohesion, familial language, and living the values of a strong work ethic and the need to be resourceful. Implications for policy, practice, and research are discussed.

### KEYWORDS

Hispanic; homeschool; intersectionality; Latino; phenomenology

## Introduction

Homeschooling has become a popular school choice for Hispanic and Latino/a/x/e parents. A recent analysis of a Census Bureau survey found that 19% of families who were homeschooling during the 2022–2023 school year identified as Hispanic or Latinx (Smith & Watson, 2024). Similarly, the past two Parent and Family Involvement surveys estimate between 15% and 25% of homeschooling families identify as Hispanic (Cheng & Hamlin, 2021; Cui & Hanson, 2019). Yet little is known about Hispanic and Latino/a/x/e home educators (Dennison et al., 2020; Fields-Smith, 2021). This study endeavors to narrow this knowledge gap by examining the perspectives and experiences of Hispanic and Latino/a/x/e parents in the United States, who have chosen to homeschool their children.

For this study, we define the term “homeschooling parent” as one who self-identifies as the primary PK-12 educator for their children. We use the pan-ethnic terms Latino/a/x/e and Hispanic, but recognize that they are non-inclusive and so allow for self-identified racial or ethnic preferences (Martínez & Gonzalez, 2021). As part of a larger study investigating homeschooling motivation, methods, and meaning, we present a portion of our

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study focused on meaning-making. As such, this article is bound by these research questions:

1. How do homeschooling Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e parents describe their many identities?

- (a) How do their multiple identities impact their approach to homeschooling?
- (b) How do they describe their homeschooling experiences?

Findings from in-depth interviews of 18 mothers from across the nation who self-identified as homeschool parents and racially or ethnically Hispanic or Latina reveal that meaningful cultural connections arise when families realize and enact educational agency. Using a phenomenological method (Moustakas, 1994) with an intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Núñez, 2014) and community cultural wealth lens (Yosso, 2005), we find that parents sought or found preservation or reclamation of their cultural heritage as the most meaningful result of their decision to homeschool. The most cited aspects of culture that parents wanted to preserve, or rediscover, were the family as the central social unit, familial language, and the typical immigrant need to possess a strong work ethic and demonstrate resourcefulness. Our study makes a valuable empirical contribution to the homeschooling literature by amplifying voices that previous research has underrepresented. Additionally, our research contributes to the field of education by adopting an asset- and strengths-based approach when examining Hispanic and Latino/a/x/e parents, families, and students, highlighting their unique perspectives and experiences. Implications for state policy regarding the language of instruction and homeschool regulation are discussed as well as considerations for practice and future research.

## Background

In this study, we used the pan-ethnic term Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e to collectively describe study participants of South, Central, or Latin American, Iberian, Caribbean, or Spanish-speaking descent and who live in the United States. However, we recognize that this term is not inclusive, and self-identified racial or ethnic labels are correlated with attitudes, beliefs, and actions (Fraga et al., 2012; Martínez & Gonzalez, 2021). Recent polls have shown differences by generation and country of origin concerning Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e identity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment, making generalizations difficult to apply across such a linguistically and culturally diverse population (Zong, 2022). Therefore, throughout the study, we use specific ethno-racial identifiers wherever possible and prioritize the self-identified labels of individual participants. We use the terms referenced in the specific study cited when describing prior literature. In this study, we are

interested in those who share both a Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e identity along with a homeschooling parent identity. As such, we define the term “homeschooling parent” as one who self-identifies as the primary PK-12 educator for their children.

The population of K-12 students in the United States that identifies as Hispanic made up 28.4% of public school enrollment in 2021 and is projected to increase to over 30% by 2030 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). While there are higher concentrations of Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e students in the southern and western regions of the United States, the population increase has been and is projected to be ubiquitous across all US states (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). As the Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e student population grows, so too has the practice of school choice and homeschooling. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) School Choice in the United States: 2019 Report, Hispanic students were likelier than any other racial and ethnic minority to be enrolled in a school of choice. Pre-pandemic, students who identified themselves as Hispanic constituted 33% of charter school enrollment and 10% of private school enrollment (Wang et al., 2019).

One of the few nationally representative data available to assess homeschool participation comes from the NCES, which conducts a National Household Education Parent and Family Involvement Survey (NHES-PFI), administered every 4 years. The percentage of homeschool households responding that identified themselves as Hispanic was 10% in 2012, 25% in 2016, and 15% in 2019 (Cheng & Hamlin, 2021; Cui & Hanson, 2019). Though the NHES-PFI is the best estimate of homeschooler demographics nationwide, there were changes in survey distribution methodology across each iteration and as the sample size decreases with each additional subgroup analyzed, these data cannot be longitudinally compared (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). Nevertheless, these results plus those of more recent Census Bureau surveys distributed during the pandemic suggest the Hispanic homeschool population is at least steady and possibly growing (Eggleston & Fields, 2021). The Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey was administered weekly throughout the pandemic in phases. The survey finds an estimated 19% of homeschooling families in the 2022–2023 school year identified as Hispanic or Latinx (Smith & Watson, 2024). Inquiring more about those who may have checked this racial or ethnic identifier box on surveys such as these can illuminate the factors that led these parents to homeschool.

Given these statistics, Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e families are underrepresented in the literature. We completed a search of EBSCO, ProQuest, and Google Scholar databases using keywords *homeschool(ing)* and/or *home education*, and *Hispanic* and/or *Latino/a/x/e*, filtering out home to public school collaboration or partnership. Also, as the experience of Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e individuals in the United States is unique, we were interested in studies thus

geographically bound. No empirical studies specifically considering those who identify as Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e and practice or participate in homeschooling were found. Our database search results are confirmed by recent articles that have called out the absence of Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e families in homeschooling research (Dennison et al., 2020; Fields-Smith, 2021). In a article providing recommendations to support the provision of services to homeschooled families by school psychologists, the authors state, “although we sought to include Latinx families and other ethnic groups, they are all but absent in the homeschooling literature” (Dennison et al., 2020, p. 21). Fields-Smith (2021) inferred what may be known about Latino families in a recent publication by saying, “Currently, empirical literature on non-White ethnic groups focuses primarily on African Americans. Research on homeschool families representing other racial and ethnic groups remains scarce” (p. 221). The lack of scholarship explicitly focusing on the voice of homeschooling Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e families makes this research both relevant to a comprehensive literature base and important for understanding the cultural contexts motivating educational decisions of families.

The perspectives of all racial and ethnic minorities who choose to homeschool are also under-researched, but there is a growing body of work describing the Black homeschool experience. For example, in a comparative study of 96 Black and white mothers, Stewart (2023) found that race was a frequent predominant factor in Black mothers’ educational choices for their children and that those who chose to homeschool strategically did so as a protection strategy from racialized institutional school settings. This strategy has been previously found to be especially employed by parents of Black boys (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Lundy & Mazama, 2014; Mazama, 2016). Still, more studies have examined how Black families have reinforced or realized their cultural values with the decision to homeschool (Ali-Coleman & Fields-Smith, 2022; Fields-Smith, 2020; Puga, 2019; Ray, 2015). We theorized that race is a similarly important factor for Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e homeschooling families and that some of the same motivations and experiences may be found. We also expected to find some similarities with the homeschool populations in existing literature, who represent predominantly racially white, and Christian or counterculture families. Even among these populations, Stevens (2003) canonical work found that homeschool families prioritize family and traditional values at the expense of societal assimilation and bureaucratic cooperation.

### **Research questions**

Although homeschooling is a school choice increasingly being practiced by Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e parents, the only literature to date about this subgroup of homeschool families is survey results and, being quantitative in nature, is unable to discern the significance of the participant’s experience. While every

parent has individual experiences leading to and with homeschooling, there may be similarities across subgroups. Thus, we conducted a study inquiring about motivations, methods, mode, and meaning-making with this population and phenomenon in mind. We present here a portion focused on meaning-making. In the next sections, we will explain our theoretical framework and describe the sample and analytic strategy we drew upon to answer these research questions:

1. How do Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e homeschooling parents describe their many identities?

- (a) How do their multiple identities impact their approach to homeschooling?
- (b) How do they describe their homeschooling experiences?

We will conclude by sharing thematic findings and implications for the practice of homeschooling in the Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e community and considerations for policy and research in this field.

## Theory

The intersectional lens through which this study was considered used tenets from Crenshaw's (1991) original concept and Núñez's (2014) specific model for Latino students. In addition, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory allowed us to frame our conversation with an asset and strengths-based attitude toward our participants' educational choices for their children. We drew upon community cultural wealth theory to conceptualize the resources our participants may have had that made homeschooling possible for them. The meaning of decision and resulting experiences are layered within Núñez's model of intersectionality to understand the greater educational environment in which our participants were operating.

Intersectionality advances the idea that holding multiple layers of identities can multiply either marginalization or privilege for the identity holder (Crenshaw, 1991). Some examples of layers of identities can be, but are not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, religion, language, and ability. Núñez (2014) applies intersectionality toward power structures surrounding Latino students by developing a three-tiered model examining the intersection of individual identities at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. At the micro-level, additional individual identities of cultural heritage, immigrant generation, and citizenship status are added to the canon of intersectional identities. The meso-level considers how Latino students are portrayed or perceived in society and policies or practices within organizations that empower or disempower their success. Also, at the meso-level are the narratives constructed or conceived by or about Latino students. Finally,

aspects of intersectionality for the Latino student sit within the historical contexts of legal, economic, social, and societal power structures. This study applies Núñez's theory to Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e parents. When conducting interviews, we allowed participants to speak to all of their identities within the context of these levels.

Yosso (2005) theorizes that people of color utilize assets and resources to benefit their communities through aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance capital in response to systematic and persistent oppression. Therefore, we theorize that homeschooled parents in our study may have any combination of higher levels of capital through these measures. For example, our participants may be more likely to be bilingual or speak English; have strong, positive familial and community relations; possess higher educational attainment; be second-generation immigrants or have U.S. origins; or identify with a culture of resistance.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative methods of accessing rich, in-depth data are the best for analytical inquiry about experiential knowledge (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Therefore, we used a phenomenological approach to ask how participants understood their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). A key component of phenomenology is reductionism, ensuring that researchers' own assumptions are addressed and not inappropriately applied to the study (Vagle, 2018; van Manen & van Manen, 2021). In other words, reductionism allows the phenomenon to be wholly defined by the phenomenon experiencer. We applied this practice by allowing participants to define identities themselves. Our main research question asks how participants define their identities as a home educator, parent, and as an individual who identifies as Hispanic and Latino/a/x/e. Using the reductionist tenet of phenomenology allows us to answer this question by discovering not only what these intersecting identities are to our participants but also how they impact the meaning of the schooling decisions they have made for their students.

## ***Positionality and limitations***

As we have a hermeneutic understanding (Giorgi, 2012), and as we share some identities with participants, the four research team members scrutinized our assumptions and biases by examining our positionalities as the study progressed. Hermeneutic shared identities were especially found with the first, second, and third authors. The first author identifies as white and not Latina, though she has a paternal connection to Chile. Her native language is English, and she is a homeschooling mother. She has also made public and private school choices for her students. The second author is Puerto Rican,



**Figure 1.** Participants by location.

identifies as Afro-Latina and Hispana, and her native language is Spanish. The third researcher is Latino, born in Mexico but raised in the U.S., and his native language is Spanish. Finally, the last author identifies as African American and a non-homeschooling parent. None of the authors have been homeschooled students. All authors are members of the same academic institution located in the Southeastern region of the United States.

While the study was recruited nationwide, our sample is not nationally representative. Though we expected many of our participants to be in southern and western states, as [Figure 1](#) indicates, most were in the Midwest, and five were located in the same state as our academic institution. Furthermore, as a phenomenological study, findings are not generalizable across those who share identities with our participants, even if they have any or all characteristics in common.

### ***Data collection and analysis***

Because Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e home educators' experiences have not previously been specifically studied, non-probability recruitment approaches like convenience and snow-ball sampling are appropriate (Creswell, 2013). Recruitment began through the research team's professional points of contact and snowballed as word about the study spread. Cold call e-mails to individuals and requesting posts on listservs of affinity groups proved most useful. For example, our call for participants was posted on multiple national online community forums for homeschoolers of color and Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e homeschoolers. A majority of our participants reported seeing our posts in

these forums. Our eligibility criteria called for a purposive sample by requiring participants to reside in the United States, be actively homeschooling at least one child, and identify as Hispanic or Latina/o/x/e. Twenty video or phone interviews 60–120 min long were conducted, though 18 ultimately qualified for analysis. Phenomenology requires participants to have lived experiences with the study subject and be able to share detailed reflections about the meaning of said experience. The method calls for collecting in-depth data from three to 25 participants with lived experience so that an accurate description and comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon can be accomplished (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 2016). We opted on the higher side of the recommended number of participants because of the broader nature of our research questions and the need to capture a diversity of experiences. Participants were asked about their decision to homeschool and how their identity or culture affected this decision or vice versa. Interviews took place during the months of April and May 2024. Seventeen were conducted in English and three in Spanish.

The first three authors conducted semi-structured interviews by phone or video conferencing, which were human-translated if conducted in Spanish, and then human-transcribed. Demographic information was put into a matrix which enabled later analysis of themes by participant characteristic. We began by linking provisional codes developed through our research questions and a theoretical framework to interview questions, as seen in Table 1, and then iteratively adjusted codes through the phenomenological process. We applied in vivo coding via qualitative data analysis software, an exploratory

**Table 1.** Interview questions and provisional codes for emergent analysis.

Research Question	Theoretical Framework	Interview Questions	Provisional Codes
RQ1	Crenshaw (1991) Yosso (2005) Núñez (2014)	How do you racially/ethnically identify yourself?  Describe to me your journey to becoming a homeschooling parent. Probe: key factors, experiences, priors	Racial/Ethnic Identifiers  Cultural Heritage Language Educational History
RQ1a	Yosso (2005) Núñez (2014)	What are your educational values and where do they come from? Probe: their education, their parents' education, aspirations for children's education Are there values you hold about education that are unique to your identity as a {racial/ethnic identifier} parent? What role does your culture play in how or why you homeschool? Probe: preservation, reclamation, native language, language of instruction	Aspiration Educational History Educational Values Language Cultural Values
RQ1b	Yosso (2005) Núñez (2014)	What joys or challenges have you experienced because of your decision to homeschool? Probe: criticism, finances, resources Describe your day-to-day homeschooling experience. Probe, best day, worst day, schedule, work	Cultural Values Resources Other Identities

phenomenological analysis technique to condense rich findings within themes to identify convergence and divergence (Saldaña, 2021). An example of this process is found in Table 2. To achieve inter-rater reliability, at least two researchers analyzed each transcript. Furthermore, to ensure validity, interview questions were developed and agreed upon across all researchers, regular research team meetings were held, and measures such as pilot interviews and memoing were conducted.

### **Participants**

While twenty interviews were completed, eighteen were qualified and analyzed. One participant was removed because she had already graduated her son from her homeschool, and another was excluded because she resided in Mexico and had never homeschooled in the United States. The final study participants were eighteen mothers with a collective experience representing almost 140 years of homeschooling 40 students. The average duration of homeschooling was seven and a half years, with a range from one to eighteen years. Eight of the eighteen participants began homeschooling in 2020. Three participants had one child, and nine had three or more children.

Table 3 lists summary statistics for participant characteristics. We describe participant demographics and characteristics by frequency rather than individually in order to protect participant confidentiality and anonymity. Due to the small sample, demographic information cannot be combined in a way that could allow for re-identification of an individual participant (Pascale et al., 2020). Participants were asked to specify their ethnic and racial identities, which were not mutually exclusive: thirteen identified as Latina; six Hispanic; three Indigenous-Latina; three Mexican-American; two Black; two Colombian; two Mexican-American; and one each Chicana, white, Salvadoran, Irish-Mexican, or Texan-Mexican. While most participants' familial cultural heritage originated in Mexico ( $n = 11$ ), participants shared familial affiliations across Central and South America, historical Texas, the Caribbean, and Europe.

All participants had support at home with a partner or multi-generational household and identified as mothers. Five participants did not work outside the home, while three worked inconsistently or alternating with other adults in the home. Most participants worked part- or full-time outside the home, balancing homeschool responsibilities with work schedules. All but one participant had one or more college degrees. Although we cannot directly compare our sample, national surveys imply that our sample is highly educated. An average of 20% of U.S. adults who identify as Latino and are over the age of 25 have a college degree (Zong, 2022), whereby an average of 45% of homeschooling parents, and 42% of parents with school-aged children have a college degree (McQuiggan et al., 2017).

**Table 2.** Example grouping of codes to form themes.

Theme	In Vivo Sub-Codes	Excerpt Examples	<i>n</i> of excerpts contributing	<i>n</i> of participants ( <i>N</i> = 18)
Significance of Family	Parenting values	I think school, whether you're a homeschool parent or not, education should start at should start always at home.	64	18
	Value of time	We did spend a lot of time with them. Obviously quality time. Obviously great time. I think it really allowed for, like a very strong family bond. And I think we're seeing it now as they're growing up. They are very generous in the time they want to spend with us, or what they want to talk to us about. And maybe that's the part that I think might have been a little bit different in the American [school] system. It's a challenging system, especially the high school years, where there's not enough time.	53	18
	Religion	The majority of Latinos that migrate are very religious. I include myself in that. I'm Catholic. Pretty much, we are all Catholic, or Christian. But that isn't one of the reasons we homeschool.	10	4
	Community groups	I was the only Latina family.	11	6
	Family support	I don't know if it's being Latina, that we're very family focused. And you know, we have support from my mom. You know, obviously being Latina, that we are very close knit, and we have that support, but just that is just like our journey as to how we started off homeschooling.	49	17
Resourcefulness	Multi-generation households	The main reason we're able to do it [homeschooling] at this moment is because we live with my parents.	17	9
	Relying on family/friends	We actually, so like our family travels to Mexico, not our specific family, but like my sister and her family, and they bring us materials from Mexico ... We have folks who are from Columbia, and they bring us things too. And so we're constantly getting materials from Spanish speaking like countries.	24	11
	Using community	The type of homeschooling that we're engaging in, like, we think that like museums are awesome, but also what about the people around you? What can they teach you, right?	22	16
	Entrepreneurial spirit	I'm gonna use what I can find, and then like, alter and change it.	18	10
	Public school	I get to discover all these different things that I could teach my child that they may not get in the public school system.	47	16
	Hard work	We don't want to be perceived as being lazy. And a lot of times it is because we are who we are. We need to take advantage of every opportunity that that is given to us in this country.	12	5

(Continued)

**Table 2.** (Continued).

Theme	In Vivo Sub-Codes	Excerpt Examples	<i>n</i> of excerpts contributing	<i>n</i> of participants ( <i>N</i> = 18)
Culture of Language	Policies	We teach in English, we have to by law.	5	3
	Bilingualism	Uno escucha el acento de los papás o los papás están hablando en español, pero los niños ya no, y nosotros no queríamos que pasara eso con nuestros hijos. <i>Translation: You hear the accent of the parents, or the parents are speaking Spanish, but the children aren't, and we didn't want this to happen with our children.</i>	44	18
	Curriculum	But then there's no like holistic resource . . . even just finding ones that aren't like, that speak to people of color, and specifically Latinos. That is very hard to find of itself.	21	12
	Preserve	That's such a, really, key cornerstone of culture, is our language and teaching.	17	5
	Reclaim	The interest that I have in teaching him his own cultural background, I think that's very important. We're in the process of reacquiring my grandmother's language.	35	13

**Table 3.** Participant characteristics (*n* = 18).

Racial/Ethnic Identity		
Latina	13	(72%)
Hispanic	6	(33%)
Indigenous-Latina	3	(16%)
Colombian	2	(11%)
Mexican-American	2	(11%)
Black	2	(11%)
Chicana	1	(5%)
White	1	(5%)
Irish-Mexican	1	(5%)
Texan-Mexican	1	(5%)
Salvadoran	1	(5%)
Employment Status		
Full time	6	(33%)
Part Time	4	(22%)
Inconsistent	3	(16%)
Not working	5	(28%)
Educational Attainment		
Some College	1	(5%)
Bachelor's	12	(66%)
MA or Ph.D.	5	(28%)
Immigrant Status		
1st - generation	5	(28%)
2nd - generation	10	(55%)
3rd - generation	3	(16%)
Native Language		
Spanish	11	(61%)
English	5	(28%)
Both Spanish & English	2	(11%)

Note: Racial/Ethnic Identity allowed for > 1 answer.

Five participants were first-generation immigrants, meaning they were born in another country before coming to the United States. Most of our participants ( $n = 10$ ) were second-generation immigrants, meaning they were the first on at least one side of their family to be born in the United States. Finally, three participants were third generation, meaning at least one of their parents was the first in their family to be born in the United States. The Pew Research Center estimates that 53% of Hispanics are first-generation, 25% second-generation, and 23% third-generation or higher (Lopez et al., 2017). For a majority ( $n = 13$ ), Spanish was their native language. And while all but one participant conducts at least some or all their homeschooling in English, twelve specifically instruct their children in Spanish as well.

## Findings

Participants' experiences converged around a similar theme from the intersection of their identities as homeschool parents and Hispanic or Latina community members. In fact, all but two of our participants were members of online or in-person homeschool networks, and eight were members of homeschool groups specifically geared toward their racial, ethnic, or cultural identity. This similarity centered on maintaining a meaningful connection to their cultural heritage. We analyzed how participants described how the decision to homeschool helped them keep or find a cultural connection by three sub-themes: *the significance of family*, *resourcefulness*, and *the culture of language*. Staying true to the words of our participants and in vivo coding technique, these same themes are presented below as *significado de la familia*, *gente ingeniosa*, and *la cultura de la lengua*.

### **Significado de la familia**

*The Significance of Family.* Often the first answer participants gave to the question of how homeschooling affected their identity as a Hispanic/Latina parent or vice versa was the significance of family values to both identities. Participants expressed great pride when describing how family is the center of the Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e community. Significance was expressed by participants' prioritizing spending time, living close, and traveling to be with family. Family is expected to be the center of the social experience. Camila, who identifies as Latina and a second-generation immigrant, lives in an area with a strong homeschool community and a strong Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e community. She said homeschooling was a natural extension of culturally held familial values,

I don't know if it's the Latino side of me but I feel like . . . because I'm Latina that I care about my family, like that is such a big part of Latino culture . . . . It's a lot of balancing

between family and homeschooling, like there's a lot of that. But at the same time, I like [my children] to see that it's important to take care of your family . . . . This is one of our core family values.

Family duties included attending to children; participating in family business matters; caring for parents, siblings, and extended family members; and now homeschooling. Some participants live in multi-generational households and attributed the possibility of homeschooling to this living arrangement as it provides the additional finance and human resources needed to support this lifestyle. Homeschooling allows parents to be with children, children to be with grandparents and other family members, and children to see family values often and in action. Mothers often described how their children's fathers and grandparents support homeschooling by sharing responsibilities.

Two participants lacked an established or strong extended family culture or Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e community but were creating their own. They saw homeschooling as integral to inculcating cultural family values in their children. Carmen, who identified as a third-generation Chicana, expressed,

To homeschool is having your children . . . be able to witness how things happen. From little experiences, [like] at certain grocery stores that when they were little, we were the only people of color shopping there, and comments that were made to us and how I responded to them. And you know, people who are kind interacting with us and people who are aggressive interacting with us and just seeing how, hopefully, I responded appropriately, setting a good example.

Carmen credited homeschooling with affording her time to teach her children how to respond to acts of racial aggression appropriately. This aspect of education was especially important to her as she and her children felt isolated living without close family and in a county without a significant Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e community. This feeling of isolation was shared by others living in similar situations or communities where they felt minoritized.

Notably, there was no difference between participants with first-, second-, or third-generation immigrant status regarding the importance of family cohesion, making this the most consistent finding. Valentina, who identifies as Mexican and a third-generation immigrant, describes,

There's a lot of Latino homeschoolers that are [homeschooling] to preserve . . . keeping your family close. You know, spending more time with family is absolutely cultural. So, I think that's why we were attracted to, you know, mainstream calls it attachment parenting. But we've been doing it forever. All what would you call old world cultures have been doing it. So, I think it's an extension of the family being the center and having that connection, and then being able to have a community from that.

Valentina ascribed her and the Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e homeschool community's connection to family values by claiming attachment parenting and homeschooling as a rediscovery of her family's indigenous roots. Whether

first-, second-, or third-generation immigrants, participants found that homeschooling naturally fit in with and upheld familial and cultural values of spending time with, caring for, and prioritizing each other.

### ***Gente Ingeniosa***

*Resourceful People.* Participants identified with being a resourceful person ready to do the hard work of finding and taking advantage of opportunities and resources around them. Participants consistently mentioned the values of resourcefulness and a strong work ethic when speaking about an educational value unique to their identity as a Hispanic/Latina parent. Additionally, participants connected their ability to navigate educational spaces with the values and skills they had learnt as immigrants themselves. They introspectively realized they utilized their community, family, and friends to find, advocate for, and access resources for their children. Confidence was expressed in taking action to find what their children may need for their education.

Paloma, a first-generation immigrant, summed this up when expressing how intuitively being resourceful comes to her, “There’s a word in Spanish that in Colombia they use a lot which is *aprovechar*, to take advantage of. So that word has, and if you ask my daughters, that’s like something that I talk about all the time. It’s just in me. I grew up with it.”

Elena, who identifies as Latina and is a first-generation immigrant, runs a homeschool co-op in a Midwest city with her own three children and a dozen more students ranging in ages from 1 to 12. Living in an immigrant community, she calls on people from her neighborhood to come to teach classes, such as a recent stop-animation workshop.

One day, the children wanted to go to the library just one block away. They began walking but soon found no road crossing and a lot of traffic, making the journey too dangerous to complete. Elena took the children instead to the next city council meeting to let their desire and situation be known. She took pride in how her students sat and listened through the meeting, recounting, “You can learn so much just from the community that you’re in.” Several families shared stories similar to Elena’s, and we found that this value of resourcefulness took the form of utilizing local, national, and even international connections to follow avenues for learning.

Participants attached this idea of the resourceful, hard-working person – often with an entrepreneurial spirit – to the immigrant mind-set. As a second-generation immigrant, Renata said, “As a Latina, you know, we always come to the country to be better, and we always wanna make things better for our children. But I noticed that we don’t always have to follow the way the rules are. I mean, there’s always getting around those rules or systems of learning. There’s gotta be a different way.” The different way was homeschooling, which

participants saw as a commitment or recommitment to the immigrant cultural regard for education.

All participants expressed the importance of education, and some felt a gap in the quality of education in their community and then feeling a need to take matters into their own hands. When describing how she did not want her children to become “just another statistic” in the education system, Gabriela, who identifies as second-generation Mexican-American, said, “Schooling is a really big wound for people, and I think especially for immigrant communities, because they see that as again, like as the ticket to the American dream.” Several others expressed similar sentiments and confidently described how aspects of their immigrant mentality aided their reimagination of education.

This reimagination requires creative thinking, including departing from predominant institutional measures of success, such as school achievement and educational attainment. Most participants aspire for more expansive measures of success, sharing that they want their children to be lifelong learners and content with what they choose to do, whether that means college degree attainment or not. When speaking about how she departed from the expectations she was raised with and came to her own aspirational beliefs, Asiri, a second-generation immigrant who identifies as Indigenous-Latina, said, “it was grounded in like you have to make our sacrifice here worth it, and that means you have to move forward with college. So, it took a long time for me to, you know, unravel myself from the idea that education can be done different ways.”

When explaining her decision to homeschool her children, Elena reminds her fellow immigrants, “There was a point in your life when you were like, ‘I want something different.’ And you made a decision to make that happen.” Because homeschooling may be seen as a departure from cultural expectations holding education as paramount, participants reframe the conversation around values associated with the immigrant mentality and strategically utilize resources around them to adequately facilitate their children’s educational aspirations. By drawing on immigrant cultural heritage and values of hard work and resourcefulness, participants felt they were continuing or reconnecting with the original ambitious ingenuity that brought them or their families to the United States.

### ***La Cultura de la Lengua***

*The Culture of Language.* Participants spoke about several aspects of their identities regarding homeschooling. Still, a universal theme we found was how homeschooling allows for connection to cultural heritage through their familial or native language. While most participants’ first or familial language was Spanish, other languages like Quechua, Portuguese, French, and Italian were referenced alongside Spanish. These participants referenced growing up in

multi-cultural, multilingual households. We found divergence by generational immigrant status with this subtheme. First-generation immigrants felt that homeschooling allowed them the time and privilege to preserve their linguistic heritage. However, third-generation immigrants felt homeschooling gave them agency to rediscover, reclaim, or rewrite cultural heritage, history, and language for themselves and their children. Second-generation immigrants were split between these experiences. While all first-generation participants specifically instructed their children in core subjects via Spanish and another familial language, if it was present, this was only half true for second-generation participants and not at all for third-generation immigrants.

Most participants had strong opinions about learning or teaching their familial language. A few cited state laws that required them to provide core subject instruction in English, and explained how they balanced meeting legal requirements while upholding cultural values of familial language instruction. When speaking to how culture plays a role in her homeschooling, Paola, a first-generation immigrant who identifies as Hispana, shared, “*me interesa mucho que conozcan sus raíces*” (it interests me a lot that they know their roots). She and several participants specifically cited language as one of the most important roots of their culture. Camila, a second-generation immigrant who identifies as Latina, was so committed to her daughter learning Spanish that she bought a label maker and translated books herself. Still, others expressed seeking or making for themselves desired resources or curriculum.

Camila’s commitment to preserving the culture of her language also highlights that despite participants’ drawing on their connections and resources, the most needed or missing are those in the Spanish language. For example, Daniela described not being able to find a curriculum resource in her native language so that she could share her history as a second-generation immigrant visiting her abuela in Mexico,

We went very frequently, and when we were planning this trip for our kids, I wanted to find a curriculum or something to guide through the history of Mexico as Latinos, or as a Mexican-American family, and I could not find anything that incorporates our family’s ethnic, cultural identity, and history that informs also what is current, what is happening there, and how is the dialogue with the U.S.

Parents continually expressed difficulty finding affirmative resources at all, much less in Spanish or their familial language. Frequently mentioned needed resources were those about teacher development, pedagogical theory, books for older children, history books, or aids for special needs, to name a few.

Several second- or third-generation immigrant mothers whose parents had not taught them Spanish were learning Spanish alongside their students to reclaim their culture. When asked if homeschooling provided an avenue for cultural preservation, Estrella answered, “. . . it doesn’t have to be the way that our family did it. But it’s how we hold culture in our

hearts.” She described that homeschooling helped her rediscover and reclaim her cultural heritage as one who identifies as Texan-Mexican. She detailed what family culture was lost when state educational policies allowed for the Spanish language to be beaten out of her parents, literally, by her description. Estrella credited homeschooling with allowing her to spend the time to learn Spanish and learn to celebrate holidays like Día de los Muertos alongside her children.

## Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the complex interplay between cultural identity and homeschooling experiences among Hispanic/Latina parents in the United States. The central role of family in their experiences aligns with the cultural value of *familismo*, which emphasizes strong family ties, loyalty, and interdependence (Campos et al., 2014). Participants across all generational immigrant statuses described how homeschooling allowed them to prioritize and strengthen family bonds while providing a culturally sustaining education (Paris, 2012). These findings suggest that homeschooling may serve as a means of resisting individualistic and competitive values often promoted in mainstream American education (Valenzuela, 2010) and instead affirm the collective and relational values central to Hispanic and Latina cultures.

It was surprising to us that religious identity did not emerge in our findings as this is a predominant motivator for many homeschooling parents (Gaither, 2018). We probed specifically about religiosity when asking about the key factors for participants’ journey to homeschooling and only one participant acknowledged their faith as being a motivator for homeschooling. Those that acknowledged having a faith community did not indicate that their religious values and beliefs played a role in their decision to homeschool, even when directly asked.

Participants described drawing on their immigrant mentality and community networks to find resources and opportunities for their children’s education. They demonstrated resourcefulness and a strong work ethic even in the face of systemic barriers and discrimination. This finding illuminates the resiliency and agency of Hispanic/Latina parents and challenges deficit-based narratives that often portray these parents as lacking educational aspirations or resources (Yosso, 2005). The importance of preserving and reclaiming linguistic and cultural heritage through homeschooling underscores the ongoing struggle of cultural maintenance in the face of assimilationist pressures. Participants described using homeschooling as a space to resist language loss, celebrate cultural identities, and pass on heritage to their children. This finding suggests that homeschooling may serve as cultural and linguistic resistance for Hispanic and Latina parents, particularly in contexts where bilingual education and culturally sustaining curricula are limited or absent.

These findings mirror the motivations already known about homeschoolers, who have been found to value independence from educational authorities and the freedom to pursue individuality no matter their identity, ideology, or pedagogy (Stevens, 2003; Van Galen, 1988).

The divergence in experiences by generational immigrant status points to the dynamic and evolving nature of cultural identity across generations. It is not a novel finding that generational differences among immigrant populations occur concerning assimilation, preservation, and reclamation of traditions (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970). While first-generation immigrants prioritized linguistic and cultural preservation, later generations used homeschooling as a means of rediscovery and reclamation. This finding aligns with research on the shifting patterns of language use and cultural identification among immigrants and their descendants (García & Kleifgen, 2018) and suggests that homeschooling may serve different cultural purposes for Hispanic and Latino/a/x/e parents at different stages of the immigrant experience.

It is important to keep in mind that the experiences portrayed here and subsequent findings of our study are based on a sample of participants that are highly educated. It may be that Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e homeschooling parents who are less educated have a substantively different relationship with their cultural identity and distinct motivations, goals, and needs for their students. Furthermore, our sample is more representative of second- and third-generation immigrants who enjoy higher levels of educational attainment and socioeconomic status (Ryberg & Guzman, 2023).

## Implications

Though homeschooling allows additional time and freedom to find and follow a family's own history, language, values, and heritage, these pursuits are easier when supported through community and curriculum. Our study participants acknowledged a need to find other Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e homeschool families. National groups, such as Latinos Homeschooling, allow for opportunities to connect with those who share similar identities. Still, there is room for more localized groups and culturally affirming spaces within other educational options to emerge. There is also a need for curriculum and resources that affirm and reflect the history, language, and experiences of Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e families in the United States. Especially requested were resources specifically created with second- and third-generation immigrant students in mind. Hispanic and Latina home educators are hungry for literature in Spanish, history curricula that recognize the multicultural nature of Central and South American and the Caribbean, and language curricula for learners whereby Spanish is not a first language, but neither is it unfamiliar.

There are two points of consideration for state policies: homeschool regulation and K-12 language of instruction laws. Our participants told us they followed the

language of instruction laws, even within the privacy of their homeschools. This behavior aligns with the Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e community's cultural regard for education and respect for educators. In contrast to prevailing assumptions about homeschool parents' stance (Bartholet, 2019), it may also signal there are some homeschooling parents that would not find more discerning regulation burdensome and would be willing to sacrifice oversight to maintain the right to homeschool. Specific studies on how existing homeschool and public school policies and regulations are perceived by and affect the Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e homeschool community are needed. For example, the mothers of our study value bilingualism. State policies regarding the language of instruction need to be reassessed to reflect the latest multilingual learner research affirming bilingualism. Because of the lack of literature taking into account Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e perspectives, it is safe to say that this field of research is ripe for consideration with different theoretical frameworks, such as Berner's (2024).

Furthermore, we have disrupted the notion that homeschoolers are white, single-income, religiously motivated families (Dwyer & Peters, 2019; Gaither, 2017); and, we have offered a more nuanced view than Lois (2006, 2010, 2013) has found of homeschooling mothers. In addition, we have generated more questions. For example, we expected more participants from southern and western states rather than the Midwest and eastern states, given geographical population demographics. Are those who are minoritized within their geographical area by race, ethnicity, language, family structure, or other characteristics more likely to respond to a study or more likely to consider homeschooling or make other educational decisions that affirm their cultural values? This exploratory study is the first empirical inquiry of Hispanic and Latina homeschool parents and has shown that those who practice homeschooling do so within the context of their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities. We are interested in future research that answers more questions, specifically regarding how immigrant communities, communities of color, or others who are minoritized in their communities consider educational options and make education decisions for their children. A follow-up study considering our participants students' characteristics such as gender and ability could explore how these contextualize our findings.

## Conclusion

In this study, we sought to understand how Hispanic and Latina parents negotiate their multiple identities to navigate the practice of homeschooling. This study does not claim to make a generalized statement about all homeschooling experiences or all Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e parents but rather highlights the identity factors that led parents to homeschool their children, their subsequent experiences, and finally, the meaning of these experiences. Families who identify as Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e are the fastest growing homeschooling

population in the United States and their experiences are worthy of inquiry. Our research has contributed to this conversation so that future research, practices, and policies can take into consideration what is important and meaningful to Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e homeschool parents and students.

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