

A Look at Latinos



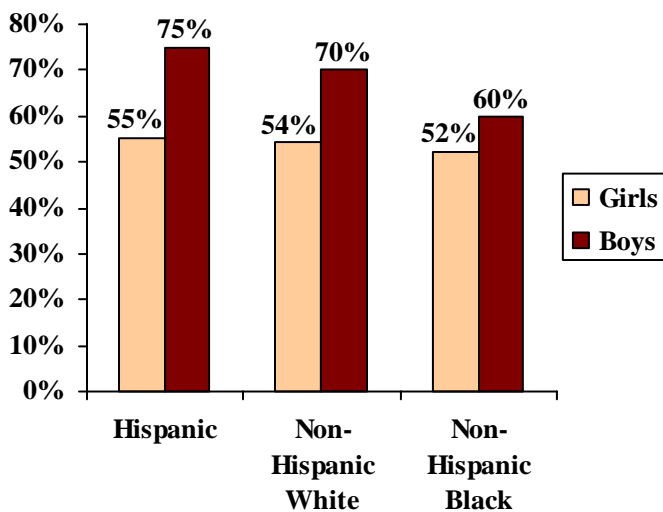
Relationships in the Latino Community

Focusing on relationships is an important part of any effort to reduce teen pregnancy and to strengthen families and communities. By shedding some light on how Latino teens view relationships and by offering some possible characteristics of relationships shared among members of the Latino community, it is our hope that practitioners will gain a deeper understanding of Latino teens and how they can better serve them.

What Latino Teens Think about Marriage, Cohabitation and Relationships

- Three-quarters of Latino teen boys (75%) and more than half of Latina teen girls (55%) believe that getting married is better than remaining single (see Figure 1).¹ Latino teen boys, like their non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black teen boys, are significantly more likely than Latina teen girls to favor marriage. While this is consistent across race/ethnicity, it is important to note that the difference between Latino teen boys and Latina teen girls is more pronounced than the difference between non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black boys and girls.

Figure 1: Percentage of teens (aged 15-19) that agree that getting married is better than remaining single, by race/ethnicity and gender



Source: Flanigan, C., Huffman, R., & Smith, J. (2005). Teens' attitudes toward marriage, cohabitation, and divorce, 2002. *Science Says*, 16. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

- Roughly one-third of Latino teen boys (34%) and 40 percent of Latina teen girls disapprove of cohabitation, which is slightly higher than black teen boys and girls (32% and 39%) and white teen boys and girls (32% and 34%).²
- More than half of Latina teen girls (53%) think that it is acceptable to be in a relationship with someone three or more years older—roughly the same proportion as their non-Latino peers.³ However, their behavior sets them apart. More than one-third of Latina teens reported that their first male partner was four or more years older, compared to about one in five for white and black teen girls.⁴ This puts Latina teens at particularly high risk for early pregnancy and parenthood. As the age difference between teen girls and their partners increases, the likelihood of having sex increases and the likelihood of using contraceptives decreases.⁵ Furthermore, as the age difference between girls and their first partners increases, it is more likely that first sex will be unwanted.⁶
- The National Campaign conducted unscientific focus groups with Latino teens in San Antonio, Miami, and Los Angeles.⁷ Here we present some of the anecdotal findings of the focus groups to help put the scientific data into context.
 - ♦ In San Antonio, the majority of Latino teen boys and girls agreed that if young people knew more about how to build and sustain healthy relationships early on, they would have more successful relationships later in life.
 - ♦ In both San Antonio and Miami, the majority of teens said that they would find lessons on relationship skills worthwhile. Teens also expressed frustration that their parents do not take their teenage relationships seriously. Focus group participants said that parents often told them, “You’re just a kid; you don’t know what you’re talking about.” Teens in the groups said they wish they could discuss with their parents *how* best to develop healthy relationships.
 - ♦ Latina teens in Los Angeles agreed that abusive relationships are a major problem experienced by many Latinas in their communities. Many suggested



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that these abusive relationships often start when a partner becomes jealous of the attention the other is receiving. One girl said, “Jealousy is often welcomed at the beginning of a relationship—it’s proof that he really cares.” However, as many pointed out, jealousy often escalates into abuse, and once it has reached this level it is very difficult to end the relationship.



Characteristics of Latino Families

- A traditional expectation for the Latina’s role in the family is that she is first a mother, then a wife. In other words, the needs of her children will be prioritized over the needs of her relationship with her husband.⁸
- A characteristic that has commonly been associated with Latino culture is machismo. Machismo has often been seen as the male partner in a domineering and controlling role. A more positive aspect, however, is that machismo encourages Latinos to work hard for their family as providers and protectors.⁹
- Familismo is a principle that is commonly attributed to the Latino community. Familismo refers to putting one’s family before individual needs.¹⁰ For example, Latina mothers are more likely (71%) than non-Latino white (52%) or African American (49%) mothers to have a relative take care of their children while they are at work.¹¹
- Familismo often means that every member of the family has a strong emotional, social, and economic support system. Decisions, including those involving raising children and relationships, are often made as a group.¹²
- Acculturation is the change that immigrants — and their environments — go through as they interact with new cultural values and beliefs.¹³ A common way to measure the level of acculturation is by language.¹⁴ Research suggests that the more proficient Latinos are in English, the more they reflect non-Latinos in their values and beliefs (see Figure 2).
- Increased acculturation has also been associated with the increased likelihood of risky behavior among Latino teens, including depression, poor academic performance, substance abuse, and earlier initiation of sexual activity. Also, when a teen acculturates more quickly than his or her parents, the result can be a shift in power and “erosion” of parental authority.¹⁵

- The length of time in the United States also has a direct impact on behavior. Foreign-born and first-generation immigrants typically have higher rates of marriage, lower rates of single-parent households, and less cohabitation than their second- and third-generation counterparts.¹⁶

Figure 2: Topics that highlight differences in attitudes held by Spanish-dominant, bilingual, English-dominant Latinos, and non-Latinos

Acculturation Measure	Language Group			
	Spanish-Dominant	Bilingual	English-Dominant	Non-Latino
Agree that divorce is unacceptable	50%	33%	29%	26%
Agree that it is better for children to live in their parents’ home until they get married	95%	75%	52%	46%
Agree that in general, the husband should have the final say in family matters	43%	34%	27%	29%
Agree that relatives are more important than friends	94%	88%	79%	67%
Agree that it doesn’t do any good to plan for the future because you don’t have any control over it	59%	31%	24%	17%

Source: The Pew Hispanic Center-Kaiser Family Foundation, 2002 National Survey of Latinos.



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