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A Culturally Sensitive Approach to Large-Scale Prevention Studies: A Case Study of a Randomized Controlled Trial with Low-Income Latino Communities

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Abstract

In response to U.S. federal mandates to increase the presence of underrepresented populations in prevention research, investigators have increasingly focused on using culturally sensitive research practices. However, scholars have rarely discussed these practices in terms of a larger culturally sensitive framework. Further, while the literature has explored how culturally sensitive approaches can be employed in a variety of methods, there has been little examination of how to incorporate such approaches into experimental designs. In this paper, we explain how we incorporated a culturally sensitive framework in a cluster randomized field trial with over 3,000 predominantly low-income Latino families, utilizing an intervention designed to improve social relations and enhance family functioning. We offer conceptual and practical examples to guide other researchers who want to adopt a similar approach in their research designs. In addition, we discuss the benefits of forging local partnerships throughout the research process to ensure respect for racial and ethnic minorities participating in social and behavioral experimental studies. We conclude with practical considerations for utilizing a culturally sensitive framework to advance prevention programs, policies, and practices among underrepresented groups in order to achieve the ultimate goal of addressing the traditional underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in research.

Keywords

Latinos; Prevention research; Culturally-sensitive research; Randomized controlled trials; FAST

Increasing the participation of historically underrepresented groups in randomized controlled trials (RCTs), and ensuring that research practices attend to the needs of these groups, continue to be pressing challenges for prevention research (Spath, Kavanagh, & Dishion, 2002). While RCTs permit strong causal claims, many recognize that this methodology may further disenfranchise already underrepresented groups in research (Aisenberg, 2008; Whitbeck, 2006). One way prevention researchers have addressed this challenge is by

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Conflict of Interest

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adopting culturally sensitive strategies that combine “the process of inquiry with the cultural characteristics of the group being studied” (Rogler, 1989, p. 296). Common culturally sensitive research strategies include developing measures appropriate for the community (Kumpfer, Alvarado, Smith, & Bellamy, 2002), engaging community partners in recruitment (Bond & Carmola Hauf, 2007), and making culturally specific changes to prevention interventions (Barrera, Castro, & Holleran Steiker, 2011). Although implementing these types of individual strategies is an important first step to increasing underrepresented participation and attending to the study’s local context, these practices present their own challenges. When researchers adopt individual strategies, often in isolation, the resulting practices are disconnected from a larger orienting framework and are less effective than when implemented throughout the research design.

Prior qualitative and quantitative research has appreciably advanced the importance of using a culturally sensitive approach (APA, 2003; Burnette, Sanders, Butcher, & Rand, 2014; Rogler, 1989; Padilla, 2004). However, this research has not included a substantial focus on the methods utilized by most prevention researchers: RCTs and evaluation research. Thus, the literature does not offer practical guidance on how to implement a culturally sensitive approach in experimental prevention studies. These studies entail their own set of demands, such as large-scale recruitment and the implementation of an appropriate intervention. While these demands are best met by forging strong partnerships (Yancey, Ortega, & Kumanyika, 2006), research on how to develop such partnerships in a collaborative and respectful way within RCTs is lacking.

In this paper, we advance a culturally sensitive framework and detail the various considerations we made at each stage of the research process in a mixed methods field experiment with over 3,000 families in under-resourced Latino communities in the Southwest. We focus on conceptual and practical examples rather than empirical outcomes, which are reported elsewhere (see Fiel, Haskins, & Turley, 2013; Gamoran, Turley, Turner, & Fish, 2012; Shoji, Haskins, Rangel, & Sorensen, 2014; Valdez, Mills, Bohlig, & Kaplan, 2013; Valdez, Lewis Valentine, & Padilla, 2013). We make several contributions to the extant literature. First, we propose a flexible and comprehensive culturally sensitive framework for use in RCTs. Second, we expand traditional models of culturally sensitive research to include considerations for the selection of an intervention that are missing from much of the previous literature. Third, we detail the steps used to recruit large samples of participants from traditionally hard-to-reach and underrepresented groups. Finally, we provide researchers with an important set of questions to ask at each stage of the research process to facilitate the implementation of a culturally sensitive framework.

The Children, Families, and Schools Project: A Primer

Our study—the Children, Families, and Schools Project—used a school-based multi-family group intervention called Families and Schools Together (FAST) to examine the effects of parents’ relationships on children’s socioemotional, behavioral, and educational outcomes. FAST is a preventive intervention focused on enhancing the academic, social, and emotional functioning of children by building and strengthening parent-child, parent-parent, and parent-school relationships (Kratochwill, McDonald, Levin, Young Bear-Tibbetts, &

Demaray, 2004). We worked with 52 Title I elementary schools and over 3,000 families in San Antonio, Texas, and Phoenix, Arizona. We selected these cities because of their large proportions of low-income Latino families and the presence of local service agencies experienced in implementing FAST. Our experimental design required that schools, rather than individuals, be randomized to FAST. Half of the schools participated in the FAST program for eight weeks, followed by two years of monthly parent-led follow-up sessions, while the other half of schools did not receive the program and served as a control group.

Foundations for a Culturally Sensitive Approach

Our framework, as well as our definition of culturally sensitive research, borrows heavily from Lloyd Rogler's (1989) early work, which focused explicitly on methodological adaptations to make research culturally sensitive. Rogler argued that researchers could produce culturally sensitive research not by focusing on individual strategies, but rather by continually incorporating the values, needs, preferences, and practices of the local community at all stages of the research process.

While our framework borrows heavily from Rogler (1989), there is a sizable literature on culturally sensitive research from the fields of education (Tillman, 2002), psychology (APA, 2003; Cabassa & Baumann, 2013), and from studies focusing on indigenous communities (Burnette et al., 2014). The extant literature is important to consider because it details the struggles facing the larger scientific and academic community to recognize that dominant paradigms, and the scientific endeavor itself, have been associated with a white middle-class European or European-American perspective (Constantine & Sue, 2005; Gordon, 1997; Padilla, 2004). Culturally sensitive research emerged from these larger foundational critiques of dominant research paradigms (APA, 2003; Constantine & Sue, 2005; Gordon, 1997).

One target of these critiques has been RCTs. While some have critiqued RCTs for focusing on narrowly defined questions (Lareau, 2009), others contend that findings are overgeneralized, particularly when racial and ethnic groups are underrepresented in the research study (Lau, Chang, & Okazaki, 2010). Scholars have also noted the incongruity between racial and ethnic communities and the logic of RCTs, in which the scientific method is privileged over relevance to target populations (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Rencher & Wolf, 2013). Failing to attend to the needs of the targeted community can perpetuate distrust between researchers and minority communities and, thus, lower overall levels of participation (Braunstein, Sherber, Schulman, Ding, & Powe, 2008; Shavers, Lynch, & Burmeister, 2002). Whitbeck (2006, p.184) argued that researchers must both recognize and account for the unique social contexts of communities and participants, an aspect not typically considered in RCTs. For example, Whitbeck suggested that to encompass "different ways of knowing," his research team had to "relinquish their role as experts" and become learners. The need for this flexibility repositions the researcher as a "learner" and encourages researchers to recognize and build on the strengths (as opposed to problems) of focal communities. Recognizing differences as strengths rejects the implication that certain groups or individuals are culturally deficient. In advancing a culturally sensitive approach to conducting RCTs, our work builds on these critiques by showing that considerations can be made within an RCT paradigm to reduce the hierarchy between

researchers and participants, attend to the local context, and reject universalistic/deficit approaches.

Instead of being a top-down method, a culturally sensitive approach is grounded in the local context, to better engage and address the needs of the target population. Engaging and addressing the needs of the target population is similarly emphasized in community-based participatory research (CBPR). However, while a culturally sensitive approach is similar to CBPR, in that both privilege the local context, there are differences between CBPR and the culturally sensitive approach we describe here. In CBPR, the study is conceptualized not only with the local context in mind, but also in collaboration with local participants, such that the distinction is blurred between those conducting and participating in the research (Stoecker, 1999). Although a culturally sensitive approach could be developed in collaboration with local participants, the approach neither mandates nor requires this level of collaboration in the ways prescribed by CBPR. Thus, a point of distinction between a culturally sensitive approach and CBPR is the extent to which the local participants determine the nature of the research and, indeed, the research question itself. A culturally sensitive RCT approach maintains the rigor of the paradigm while also attending to the local context for the overall study in which the RCT is embedded.

In a culturally sensitive approach, the research question may not emanate from participants themselves, but the researchers nevertheless recognize the influence of community contexts in understanding the needs and preferences of understudied groups. Research suggests that local adaptations can enhance intervention outcomes and engagement (see Barrera, Berkel, & Castro, 2016). Therefore, awareness of the community's capacity to meet the needs of families, and partnering with key stakeholders to build that capacity, strengthen a study's reach and design. To reflect this context, important considerations must be addressed throughout the research process, but particularly in five major phases: (1) pretest and planning, (2) development of instruments, (3) recruitment and data collection, (4) selection of the intervention, and (5) data analysis and dissemination.

Because previous culturally sensitive frameworks did not consider the role of interventions, particularly relevant for RCTs, we expand Rogler's framework to add "selection of the intervention" as a necessary consideration for prevention researchers committed to engaging in culturally sensitive research. Moreover, we argue that the intervention is foundational to prevention research because it often prompts a study to answer an empirical research question. Thus, our paper begins with a list of considerations for selecting an intervention within a culturally sensitive approach and a description of the processes used in the larger study.

Intervention

Promoting positive development and healthy well-being is foundational to prevention science and is facilitated by the advancement of evidence-based interventions. Yet, for interventions to reach underrepresented and diverse groups, they must be culturally informed. Research on culturally adapted prevention interventions finds that these interventions are often more effective because they have been adapted for a local community or group. In additions, the adaptations can also improve the retention and recruitment of

diverse populations. While there is a growing body of work on developing culturally sensitive adaptations for evidence-based interventions (Barrera et al., 2011, 2016; Bernal & Sáez-Santiago, 2006; Castro, Barrera & Holleran Steiker, 2010; Guerra & Knox, 2008), there remains little guidance on how to select preventive interventions, particularly for racial and ethnic minorities. Moreover, because the literature on culturally sensitive research includes predominantly non-experimental studies (Rogler, 1998; Magaña, 2000; Tillman, 2002), there has been little discussion of how interventions fit within a culturally sensitive framework.

We selected the FAST intervention because it provided insight into our theoretical question of interest, proved efficacious in five previous RCTs, and had been successfully adapted for and implemented in various under-resourced communities (see Guerra & Knox, 2008; Kratochwill et al., 2004). In addition, FAST mandated cultural competency by ensuring continuity, flexibility, and cultural representation at both the surface and deep structural levels. Okamoto, Kulis, Marsiglia, Holleran Steiker, and Dustman (2014) present a conceptual model for thinking about culturally adapted prevention interventions on a continuum, rather than a dichotomous view of interventions as either culturally adapted or not. This continuum distinguishes between interventions developed from the ground up with the target population in mind, relative to interventions that involve surface level or deep-structural adaptations.

The concepts of surface and deep cultural structures have received wide support in the literature (Castro, Barrera, & Martinez, 2004; Guerra & Knox, 2008). Resnicow, Soler, Braithwaite, Ahluwalia, and Butler (2000) define surface structures as strategies that enhance the cultural fit of interventions by considering visible characteristics of participants, whereas deep structures refer to those intervention adaptations intended to acknowledge and address participants' personal, group, and social motivations and influences on behavior. The consideration of deep and surface cultural structures should inform all phases of research, from conceptualizing the research question, to reaching and engaging participants, to implementation, analysis, and dissemination of the results.

In a recent review of FAST, Guerra and Knox (2008) described how the intervention was adapted for a Latino context in a way that addressed both surface- and deep-level structures. They noted that the Spanish program materials were ideal for adapting to a Latino context at the surface level. However, the authors' local community partner found it necessary to further refine these materials to make them more relevant to participants of Mexican-origin context in California. FAST has undergone a rigorous evaluation process demonstrating its ability to be congruent with local communities (Guerra & Knox, 2008; Kratochwill et al., 2004). In our study, local service partners implemented and adapted FAST in a manner that was consistent with their own training and expertise within each school community. The university-based project team provided assistance when requested, but otherwise supported local agencies' plans to implement FAST in accordance with their normal operating practices.

Selection of the intervention is central to a culturally sensitive approach in prevention research. Researchers should carefully consider what adaptations are required if the

intervention was not developed with the target population in mind.¹ Similarly, it is important to evaluate the evidence of the intervention's efficacy with the intended audience if prior work exists. Our study benefited from other evaluations and adaptations as FAST had been implemented previously in communities and school districts within our targeted cities, although not in our study schools and at a much smaller scale. Prior experience with the intervention meant that our community partners had a strong sense of how it fit within the needs, practices, and values of the local community, all of which are important considerations in the selection of an intervention.

Pretest and Planning

A culturally sensitive approach includes several initial steps: developing the research question and study design, forming the research team, and collaborating with community partners. As shown in Figure 1, some important considerations in the early phases of the study include how the research question addresses an area relevant to the community, who stands to benefit from the research, and what type of local involvement is necessary to successfully implement the study. Below, we discuss the planning phase of our study, with a focus on these considerations.

Development of a research question and study design—Researchers must be aware of the needs and sociopolitical context of the community in which they plan to work, as well as the potential contributions that their work can offer the community. Our study was guided by prior research demonstrating inequalities in children's behavioral and educational outcomes as a result of school-based parental social relationships among families in under-resourced communities (Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999). Although prior work noted strong familial ties among Latino families, it also highlighted the increasing disenfranchisement of Latinos from schools (Valenzuela, 2010). We set out to examine the relationship between school-based parental networks and children's educational achievement and socioemotional functioning.

Formation of the research team—It is advantageous to include researchers who are familiar with the target community because they can “carefully consider the extent of their own cultural knowledge, cross-race and same-race perspectives, and insider and outsider issues related to the research process” (Tillman, 2002, p. 6). Accordingly, our investigators were culturally and linguistically representative of the targeted communities and had local knowledge of the area. Working in a variety of disciplines, investigators had formal training in educational and health disparities with research agendas focused on racial and ethnic inequality. These personal and professional characteristics enhanced the team's understanding of the factors affecting both the research question and design (Reich & Reich, 2006), serving as a springboard for a deeper engagement with the local communities.

Two of the four primary investigators were native Spanish-speaking Latina faculty. Ethnic and language representation were surface-level structures that served to build trust with

¹See Barrera et al. 2011 for four strategies for adapting evidence-based interventions to meet the needs of the targeted community. Additionally, see Castro and colleagues' (2010) work detailing the potential issues and challenges in culturally adapting evidence-based interventions.

participants and benefit the deep structures of the research process. Spanish-speaking members of the research team attended and participated in recruitment events, conducted individual home visits, and interviewed participants, quickly establishing rapport, and learning about families' activities and lives. Research shows that shared experiences, caring interactions, and respect among individuals is central to the establishment of relationships (McFadyen & Cannella, 2004; Valenzuela, 2010).

Moreover, supporting the diverse contributions of the research team is as important as assembling a team that demonstrates an interest in participants' lives and communities. In the early stages of recruitment, all team members brainstormed ideas for following up with hard-to-reach participants. Based on the mixed results of recruiting families through the schools as well as feedback from local agencies, we collectively decided that home visits would ensure the fullest participation. Although a major endeavor for a large sample, home visits allowed us to gain entry into and ground ourselves within the community. Importantly, the principal investigator privileged team members throughout the research design by often drawing from their expertise or asking for and implementing their feedback.

Collaboration with local partners—Working with local partners can provide a bridge between the research team and an underrepresented community. A culturally sensitive approach includes working with community partners in a manner that is mutually beneficial and nurtures a true partnership in which information flows both ways (Kingston et al., 2016). Although our team had local knowledge of the communities, we did not assume we were experts; rather, the team's knowledge served as a basis for learning more about the communities from our local partners. Weekly conference calls allowed us to maintain strong lines of communication with local agencies and to build a strong partnership. For example, we reallocated funds from other areas in the budget so the agencies could hire more staff for recruitment, ensuring proper implementation of the study and demonstrating our respect for the agencies (Quinn et al., 2012). Since we were scaling up to 52 schools, we minimized burden on the agencies by involving researchers in home visits to support family recruitment. In addition to monetary and personnel support, we were committed to building the agencies' capacity outside study operations and, upon request, research team members provided on-site training in their areas of expertise. Kingston and colleagues (2016) showed that this type of reciprocity solidified the community partners' commitment to the research and filled gaps in their existing resources that allowed them to expand their services to the community.

Partnering with service agencies with moderate to high capacity was key to implementing our intervention in schools. Capacity refers not only to the sites' resources, but also to the experience they have with the target population, settings, and the intervention itself. We selected our focal cities and agencies because of their longstanding relationships with the local community and their experience with FAST, which made a significant difference in the uptake, speed, and quality of implementation, as has occurred in earlier studies (Kingston et al., 2016; Quinn et al., 2012), and ensured that the research process was respectful and collaborative.

Because recruitment and intervention implementation spanned more than two years, we took time between implementation years to reflect on and improve our efforts. We hosted a retreat for the local agencies during which we reviewed first-year study outcomes and discussed possible enhancements for the second wave of data collection. The retreat confirmed our commitment to the partners and provided a forum for discussing challenges or issues from the previous implementation cycle.

The successful collaboration between the research team and the community partners was due, in part, to the research team's ongoing contact with partners, flexibility, provision of needed resources for the study, and commitment to build capacity beyond the goals of the study. Thus, our working relationship with the local services agencies was an extension of our work with the local communities, which was guided by notions of respect and collaboration.

The pretest and planning phase is the foundation of a culturally sensitive approach. Rogler (1989) suggested that researchers utilize this period to become immersed in the local community and gain knowledge to be used in subsequent phases of the research design. Knowledge of the local context, whether from the principal investigators, the research team, or community partners, is then leveraged in subsequent aspects of the study's design.

Development of Instruments

An essential step in developing culturally appropriate measures is ensuring they are linguistically appropriate (Magaña, 2000). However, linguistic translation (i.e., the direct translation of words from English to another language) is only one of the aspects of culturally sensitive research. Peña (2007) discussed the importance of translated measures also being congruent in meaning, interpretation, and difficulty, given regional language and cultural differences and varying levels of literacy. Importantly, when developing instruments within a culturally sensitive framework, researchers must consider their appropriateness for the intended population and address participant burden; Figure 1 specifies additional considerations.

Although several of our instruments had previously been adapted for our intended audience, we vetted them to ensure their appropriateness, a deep-level strategy. While our primary child outcome measure was available in Spanish and had been normed with Spanish speakers, many other instruments relevant to our research questions had not been translated into Spanish. To address this discrepancy, we first translated the instruments with the goal of obtaining linguistic equivalence, as recommended by Sperber (2004) and Wild and colleagues (2005). Instruments were translated by two project team members, both native Spanish speakers. The two researchers translated separately and then discussed discrepancies in order to resolve any differences. Second, we sought feedback from Spanish-speaking graduate students working on the project, as well as a Spanish-speaking consultant, to ensure that the translation was free from bias (Clark, 2012). Third, we consulted with the university's survey center on the functional equivalence of certain constructs. For example, U.S. categories of education are not equivalent with Latin American categories. Thus, we developed alternative categories to elicit the same response from participants, but in a more familiar manner (Peña, 2007). Fourth, the survey center provided feedback on metric

equivalence, that is, whether the translations maintained the level of difficulty intended in the original measure. Because the participants had a lower literacy level than the groups used to norm the measures, we also received feedback from local agency staff members who were native Spanish-speakers with firsthand knowledge of both participants' literacy levels and regional vernacular.

Finally, informal feedback from participants and our direct observations of the relative ease with which participants completed the surveys further informed our understanding of proper instrumentation and any necessary revision. Thus, the instruments underwent an iterative process of adaptation, piloting, and refinement from multiple stakeholders to improve precision and ensure they were culturally appropriate.

While adaptation of the instruments is necessary within a culturally sensitive approach, researchers should also consider participant burden, including the time required to complete surveys or participate in activities such as interviews and focus groups. We kept pre-assessments short (three pages), and restricted interview and focus-group protocols to a reasonable set of six main prompts that would allow us to explore the focal phenomena and facilitate discussion, but would not be burdensome in terms of participants' time and energy.

Recruitment and Data Collection

The most important aspect of data collection for any type of study is participant recruitment. Having an insufficient number of participants, losing participants before study completion, or experiencing differential attrition between treatment and control groups may bias results. When working with hard-to-reach populations, researchers must take extra care that recruitment procedures are culturally sensitive to ensure both the adequate representation of the intended participants and their sustained engagement in the study (Dillman Carpentier et al., 2007). As noted earlier, adapting evidence-based interventions for specific sub-group populations facilitates the recruitment and, just as importantly, the retention of under-researched communities (Barrera et al., 2011). Moreover, Quinn and colleagues (2012) found that researchers trained in culturally sensitive approaches utilized a greater number of, and more diverse, recruitment strategies than researchers without this type of training. This underscores the principle that flexible and comprehensive strategies are key to recruiting and building trust among hard-to-reach populations. As shown in Figure 1, recruitment and data collection processes should focus on ensuring buy-in from key leaders and engaging in extensive outreach efforts. Finally, participant burden should be addressed not only with regard to the development of instruments, but also in the recruitment and data collection phases of a study.

Key leader buy-in and participant recruitment—Given widely established research showing how schools often disenfranchise the families they intend to serve, (e.g., Valenzuela, 2010), we knew the possible challenges involved in gaining the trust of the focal communities and were committed to reducing barriers to collaboration between minority families and schools (Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2005). We sought strong buy-in from both schools and families. Researchers and local agency staff members held individual and group meetings with district officials, principals, and teachers to describe the study and the

process of randomization, provide details about the schools' involvement, and answer any questions. Although school participation was secured at the district level, we compensated schools with funds the principals could use for their respective campuses.

We asked teachers and principals about recruitment strategies and learned that events with meals and child participation (e.g., recitals and school performances) were always well attended. We encouraged school staff to participate in various ways, from attending the formal back-to-school nights, sending reminders home about the back-to-school recruitment night, and using the school's marquee to remind parents about recruitment events. Engaging the school staff was central to our recruitment effort and helped build the trust needed in communities that do not often participate in research (Quinn et al., 2012).

This school engagement strengthened partnerships and revealed changes in the school and community that might impact the study (Israel et al., 2005). For example, the research team learned from a principal that a crime occurred near a school the same night as an intervention. We learned from parents that many participants left immediately when they mistook heavy police presence for an immigration raid. This event explained the low attendance and provided insight into the stressors that many families experience. The intervention facilitators were able to discuss the situation with families at the next meeting, thereby deepening their understanding of families in context (Resnicow et al., 2000). Increasing knowledge about families' lived experiences is not only practically relevant, but is theoretically rooted in a culturally sensitive approach that privileges relationships and understanding of the local context (Castro et al., 2010).

With families, considering culturally sensitive strategies for outreach, engagement, and retention meant meeting with local agency partners and giving substantial thought to developing culturally appropriate materials and procedures for successful recruitment. For the initial contact with families, we sought a comfortable yet engaging space. The local agencies conducted "recruitment nights" at intervention and comparison schools at which families were offered a meal and child care, services that are central to the FAST program and maximize attendance.

Although our local partners were in charge of coordinating and hosting recruitment nights, members of the research team were always present to support them. Being present allowed us to observe the process and more directly address the questions and concerns of parents. Building relationships and trust with participants involved frequent face-to-face contact between the local agencies, the research team, and participating school principals and teachers.

To assuage parents' potential misapprehensions about participating in a large-scale research study, we attempted to provide information in a way that was non-threatening, clear, and concise. All printed project materials were brief, used terms understood by a layperson, and conveyed culturally relevant concepts (e.g., "program" rather than "intervention"). These materials were present in the schools and endorsed by teachers to increase credibility and trust among potential participants.

To reach those families who did not attend the recruitment night, graduate students and investigators teamed with agency staff, when available, to conduct home visits. Face-to-face contact with potential participants has been effective in large trials with barriers to participation (Kingston et al., 2016; Quinn et al., 2012). Several families recruited via home visits appreciated the attention. Some indicated that they were unaware of the recruitment night; others said they had prior obligations. Some families may have been apprehensive about participating in school activities. Home visits served as a successful supplemental recruitment strategy for hard-to-reach families, and refusals to participate were rare when we visited parents in person.

While partnering with schools and school staff may enhance recruitment efforts, there are larger theoretical considerations in regards to developing diverse and holistic recruitment efforts that involve research teams, local service agencies, and community institutions (Kingston et al., 2016). At the same time, engaging schools in the recruitment of families could improve families' perceptions of schools as investing in families' lives and school-family ties.

Reducing participant burden—Conducting data collection at times and places that are appropriate for the given population is important when working with hard-to-reach populations (Magaña, 2000). We ended our home visit recruitments by 6:00 p.m. so as not to intrude on meals or family time. We also sought to reduce participant burden through concise instrumentation, as recommended by Clark (2012), which limited the time we spent in families' homes to less than 15 minutes. If parents appeared to have difficulties with the survey, a research team member or agency staff read and explained the survey questions. For follow-up surveys, we used postal mail interviews and telephone interviews with parents in the language of their choice. Research has shown that these flexible and comprehensive strategies are important to the success of research among underrepresented groups (Clark, 2012; Quinn et al., 2012).

Participant compensation for assessment—During planning, researchers must carefully consider appropriate compensation in order to avoid possible coercion with respect to historically marginalized and underrepresented communities. We asked consultants, local agencies, and the university survey center to advise us on common and fair practices for this population. Prior studies on culturally sensitive research have included few explicit recommendations about compensation, and thus we worked from the general principle that compensation should recognize the contributions of participating families yet not be exploitive (Clark, 2012).

Data Analysis and Dissemination

Considerations for data analysis and the dissemination of results focus on appropriate types of analyses and the interplay between researchers and the community. For example, as shown in Figure 1, how will participants be involved in the interpretation of results? How might discrepant findings be resolved? And how can the research be utilized to build capacity in the targeted communities?

Data analysis—Data analysis is highly dependent on the quality data collection and successful recruitment. One of our approaches to data analysis focused heavily on understanding heterogeneity within our Latino sample based on varying characteristics and social statuses. Our analyses explored the effects of parents' place of birth, years of residence in the U.S., ethnic identity, and native and primary language, among other factors, on the study's outcomes of interest. Examining within-group heterogeneity illuminates the complexities of the study population and avoids deficit-focused interpretations of the data that result from homogenizing groups (Rogler, 1989).² Within-group analyses are now considered best practice in culturally sensitive prevention efforts and allow for more targeted recommendations for research, practice, and policy (Lauricella, Valdez, Okamoto, Helm, & Zaremba, 2016). Beyond these practical considerations, within-group analyses reject larger theoretical notions of universalism and instead focus greater attention on context by assuming and explicitly modeling differential impacts.

We relied on our community partners and key leaders to help explain unexpected findings. For example, although FAST reduced grade retention in one city, it appeared to increase it in another. Consultation with a local social agency and school officials produced "insider" information—including that the school district had stricter policies for grade promotion and the possibility that FAST may have built parents and teachers' confidence in their joint decision-making and strategies to support struggling students—that was helpful in ensuring our interpretation would be accurate and lead to concrete recommendations.

In addition to gathering quantitative data, we held interviews and focus groups to explore the cultural and contextual meanings underlying families' development of social ties and the perceived barriers to and facilitators for developing such ties.³ Detailed ethnographic observations of FAST meetings were analyzed to document parents' evolving interactions with FAST staff, other parents, and school staff. These interviews and observations contributed to our deep-structure understanding of the contextual factors associated with the local communities, and allowed us to more fully understand parents' experiences with FAST (see Shoji et al., 2014).

Our mixed methodological approach allowed us to account for context in the quantitative analysis and understand families' experiences from their own narratives. Through our interviews, coupled with knowledge gained through recruitment efforts and home visits, the differences between our focal cities became highlighted. The qualitative interviews not only gave us a deeper appreciation of families' experiences, they also illuminated the variation in experiences and resources available to them, further highlighting the need to understand and account for context in similar studies (Castro et al., 2010; Israel et al., 2005).

Dissemination—Acknowledging the contributions of the community and its project participation is critical to a culturally sensitive approach. Giving back can be accomplished by providing results to participants for their interpretation, incorporating feedback into the

²For empirical examples of within-group analyses from the larger study see Gamoran, Turley, Turner, and Fish (2012) and Valdez, Mills, Bohlig, and Kaplan (2013).

³For empirical examples utilizing the qualitative data collected from participants, see Shoji, Haskins, Rangel, and Sorsensen (2014) and Valdez, Lewis Valentine, and Padilla (2013)

final analysis, or distributing translated descriptive reports of findings to be used by policymakers and service delivery professionals (Magaña, 2000). Giving back acknowledges the importance of the community to the overall project, cements the trust established by the researchers (Kingston et al., 2016), and facilitates the implementation of future studies. For example, one of the authors is, in collaboration with agency staff, collecting qualitative data on the Phoenix sample into adolescence to address the impact of state immigration policies on youth development.

We disseminated research findings at the national and local levels. Both authors, along with local service agency representatives, presented at a national conference on the challenges and opportunities of community-academic collaborations, focusing on informing family and school practice and policy, and covered aspects of the research process, from the feasibility of using community-based approaches with large, experimental designs to issues of scaling up and the fidelity of implementation, which often confounds studies as they progress from randomization of individuals to clusters of individuals (e.g., schools).⁴ At various national conferences, we discussed ethical considerations when working in low-income Latino communities.

At the local level we compiled and disseminated information to school partners and local officials. We provided school profiles illustrating first-year results to all participating school principals. In addition, we convened meetings in each city with local officials, agency staff, and foundation representatives; these meetings highlighted the efficacy of the intervention and the capacity of the local agencies to deliver large-scale, high-impact intervention programming. At the meetings, participating parents powerfully illustrated the importance of building parental social networks in under-resourced communities and the impact of FAST on their lives. Presentations to city council members were important because we engaged them about issues of program sustainability at the conclusion of the research study. These efforts were consistent with culturally sensitive research because they aimed to strengthen families and communities and empower others to sustain the changes resulting from the study (Magaña, 2000).

Conclusion

In current prevention research, cultural sensitivity is often incorporated into disparate and individual components of the process, rather than being adopted as a cohesive framework with concrete strategies for every stage. This may be due, in part, to time constraints, lack of cultural familiarity among many researchers, or a concern that the flexibility associated with this type of work may compromise the fidelity of the program implemented and thus the results its evaluation (Castro et al., 2004). We argue that attending to the local community by

⁴Issues around fidelity, adaptation, and implementation continue to be a pressing concern in prevention research. We recognize the long-standing debates and the contention surrounding these issues. A central question among these debates is whether interventions maintain fidelity once adapted. Chambers and Norton (2016) argue, however, that the process of adapting an intervention, testing, and making further adaptations represents an incremental approach to science that is least helpful for quickly turning research into practice. The FAST program is flexible in that 60% of the components are adaptable to the local context and 40% are core and invariant to context. Our research team drilled down even further into the components of FAST to identify how the core components build and enhance parental social relationship that can be implemented in other schools without adoption of the FAST program (see Shoji et al., 2014).

adopting a culturally sensitive approach will improve participation among underrepresented communities in large-scale trials.

One contribution of our work is a set of considerations for other researchers, which we see, along with the overall framework, as particularly useful for those conducting RCTs and evaluation research. The guiding framework we advance comprises a series of considerations incorporated throughout the research process that may fully address the concerns of a variety of underrepresented communities. Because local communities, research questions, and research methods are diverse, and there is thus a need for flexibility, these are considerations, not imperatives. Many have been proposed by others, but in the context of different research designs or with a focus only on individual aspects of the research design. Because including and retaining members of underrepresented communities in RCTs continues to be a challenge, the considerations we provide are part of a comprehensive framework that attempts to mobilize opportunities for more culturally sensitive research with underrepresented communities.

As shown in the considerations in Figure 1, a culturally sensitive approach spans multiple aspects of research design. These considerations emphasize flexibility and comprehensiveness in research design, careful selection of the research team and community partners, and a commitment to building capacity and attending to the local community throughout the research process. First, flexibility and comprehensiveness refers to the active role of researchers in tailoring research strategies to participants' preferences and practices, with the aim of reducing barriers to participation and retention. Flexibility is also critical with regard to community partners, and involves an ongoing and careful assessment of existing capacity and experience, as well as needed resources (Kingston et al., 2016). Second, a culturally sensitive framework calls for the careful selection of the team and a genuine inclusion of the team's ideas in the decision-making process (Reich & Reich, 2006). Culturally sensitive research calls for investigators to be trained in multicultural competency (Magaña, 2000; Whitbeck, 2006), which can bring a necessary awareness of underrepresented and under-resourced communities to the forefront of a proposed study. Third, establishing and nurturing partnerships with multiple stakeholders can facilitate an understanding of the social context within which participants live and the institutions with which they interact. We worked with local service agencies and schools in two cities, and all were crucial partners in planning, recruiting participants, collecting data, implementing the intervention, and disseminating and interpreting the study findings. This approach to partnerships is one of the most successful practices in large-scale research (Yancey et al., 2006).

At the center of these considerations is reflexivity, a term that has largely been used in qualitative research and cross-cultural practice to highlight intentionality on the part of the researcher and practitioner. Specifically, reflexivity refers to researchers' active self-awareness and questioning of their own social location relative to the communities they study, an appreciation for diverse methodologies, and openness to the situations that may arise when partnering with key stakeholders to address a local disparity through large-scale research (Reich & Reich, 2006). Prevention researchers should question how assumptions

about specific communities guide research questions and implementation, as well as how such assumptions affect the analysis and interpretation of their findings.

These considerations also have implications for training, which prior research has found to be a critical component of culturally sensitive research (Quinn et al., 2012). Although cultural competence has typically been taught in diversity and equity courses, ideally the value and applicability of a culturally sensitive framework should be emphasized in research methods courses. In these courses, instructors can: (a) teach students theories relevant to research and practice with diverse and underserved populations; (b) use readings to challenge students to think about how traditional theories and methods can be modified to incorporate knowledge about working with underserved populations; (c) use examples from their own research to illustrate such modifications; and (d) blend classroom learning with service-learning opportunities to increase students' reflexivity about their cultural biases, knowledge about communities they wish to study, and skill in conducting culturally sensitive research with understudied communities.

In conclusion, the call for greater participation of historically underrepresented groups in prevention research, and particularly in RCTs, must be met with greater sensitivity toward these populations and an understanding of the reasons underlying their historical lack of participation (Braunstein et al., 2008; Shavers et al., 2002). We suggest that a culturally sensitive approach not only provides a sensible and inclusive framework for prevention research, but also best aligns with recent U.S. federal mandates to increase the presence of minority populations in research.

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Pretest and Planning	Development of Instruments	Recruitment and Data Collection	Intervention	Data Analysis and Dissemination
☐ How does the research question address an area of concern for the community?	☐ What instruments are available in participants' language?	☐ Which stakeholders and institutions will be included as targets for recruitment?	☐ What efficacy does intervention have with similar populations?	☐ Is within-group variability included in analyses?
☐ How can research question be answered in targeted community?	☐ What instruments have been normed with the population under study?	☐ What role will these community members have in recruitment and data collection?	☐ What experience does community have with it?	☐ Who is involved in explaining discrepancies in findings?
☐ What is the communities' familiarity with and acceptance of the intervention?	☐ What formal procedures will be followed to translate other instruments?	☐ What steps have researchers taken to build trust locally?	☐ How well do the activities reflect participants' culture, norms, and practices?	☐ What is the community's role in interpreting findings?
☐ How well does the research team know the community?	☐ How will informant burden be minimized?	☐ How flexible is recruitment to address potential challenges?	☐ How flexible is it at the local level?	☐ How are mixed-methods used to strengthen interpretation of findings?
☐ What training has team received in carrying out research in culturally sensitive manner?	☐ How will the community's experience with research be captured qualitatively as well as quantitatively?	☐ Will location of recruitment ease comfort for potential participants?	☐ What characteristics of facilitators will enhance engagement?	☐ How is research process reflected upon by all stakeholders?
☐ Which community partner can help conduct research locally?		☐ How will social issues impacting recruitment be addressed?	☐ How will facilitators be trained to ensure cultural sensitivity?	☐ What capacity needs to be built to ensure sustainability beyond the study?
☐ What resources does partner have and need to carry out collaboration?		☐ How will recruitment materials be designed and disseminated?		☐ How are findings disseminated and to whom?
☐ How will community partner inform study decisions?		☐ What steps will be taken to ensure fair compensation of participants?		

Figure 1.
Considerations for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Research. Questions to ask when preparing for research with underrepresented populations.