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CITATION
BRIEF REPORT

Measurement of a Latino Cultural Value: The Simpatía Scale

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Objective: Simpatía, a term that captures the tendency to prefer and create social interactions characterized by warmth and emotional positivity while also avoiding conflict and/or overt negativity, is a cultural factor relevant to Latinos. The goal of this article was to develop a scale that measures this cultural value. Method: A self-report scale measure of simpatía was developed and administered to a combined sample of Latinos (N = 296) drawn from 3 larger studies. The scale’s factor structure was explored, and its internal consistency and validity were tested. Results: Exploratory factor analysis supported an 18-item scale and indicated 2 factors: simpatía-related positivity/warmth and simpatía-related negativity/conflict avoidance. Cronbach’s alphas for the overall scale and subscales showed internal consistency. Validity analyses revealed that across subscales, simpatía was positively associated with positive emotion expressivity and dispositional positive emotion. The simpatía-related positivity/warmth subscale was also positively associated with an orientation toward Latino culture. Conclusions: The Simpatía Scale, which captures dual aspects of simpatía that emphasize the positive and avoid the negative, provides a new tool for advancing the study of Latino culture.

Public Significance Statement
Ethnicity is still too often used as a proxy for culture and, as such, measures are needed to help researchers avoid this limitation. To address this need, we developed and validated the “Simpatía Scale” to measure simpatía, a Latino cultural value that emphasizes warmth/positive emotion expression and avoiding conflict and negativity.

Keywords: culture, Latinos, simpatía, emotion, scale development

Cultural psychologists consider Latino contexts to be broadly characterized as collectivistic and specifically characterized by a form of collectivism termed convivial collectivism (Campos & Kim, 2017; Triandis, 1993). In convivial collectivism, social relationships are formed and fostered through the open and frequent expression of positive emotions, frequent social gatherings, and a general respect for the honor and dignity of others. This differs from forms of collectivism emphasizing low-arousal positive emotion (e.g., calm, peacefulness; termed harmony collectivism) that are observed in East Asian contexts (Tsai, 2007) and from the form of individualism emphasizing emotional authenticity (i.e., free expression of internal feelings) that is the dominant norm among European Americans (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Simpatía is a central feature of convivial collectivism and captures the tendency to prefer and create social interactions characterized by warmth and emotional positivity, while also avoiding conflict and/or overt negativity (Triandis, Marin, Hui, Lisansky, & Ottati, 1984). Simpatía is not well studied, and much of the work that has been done relies on ethnicity as a proxy for cultural values. For example, in a series of cross-sectional surveys of male U.S. Navy recruits, Latinos self-reported that they would enact more positive behaviors (e.g., show respect, treat others as equal) and less negative behaviors (e.g., reject others’ opinions, argue) during situations of potential conflict compared with non-Latino Navy recruits (Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, & Betancourt, 1984). Moreover, research using observational methods has found that Latinos do in fact enact simpatía-related behaviors. For example, one study found that undergraduate students in Mexico spent significantly more of their time talking with others and engaging in dyadic and group conversations than their U.S. counterparts (Ramírez-Esparza, Mehl, Álvarez-Bermúdez, & Pennebaker, 2009). Similarly, when spontaneous social behavior was covertly recorded and later coded, Latinos expressed more frequent and longer positive emotion (i.e., smiling and laughing) toward partners than non-
Latino participants (Holloway, Waldrip, & Ickes, 2009). Additionally, Levine, Norenzayan, and Philbrick (2001) found that people in Latin American countries (e.g., Costa Rica, Mexico, El Salvador) engaged in more public helping behaviors (e.g., picking up an accidentally dropped pen) than people in non-Latin American countries (e.g., Netherlands, Romania, United States). Altogether, these studies indicate that Latinos are more likely to prefer and engage in behavior that is consistent with the simpatía construct; however, the cultural value itself was not measured.

Researchers seeking to advance beyond ethnicity as a proxy have used the agreeableness subscale of the Big Five Inventory measure of personality (John & Srivastava, 1999) to proxy simpatía (e.g., Ramírez-Esparza, Gosling, & Pennebaker, 2008). For example, Ramírez-Esparza and colleagues (2008) asked a sample of bilingual Mexican Americans to complete the agreeableness subscale and take part in a videotaped mock interview in English and in Spanish on separate occasions. Nonverbal behaviors during the interview were rated using the same agreeableness subscale items. Despite Mexican Americans self-reporting less agreeableness when they took the Spanish version of the questionnaire, they displayed more agreeableness when speaking in Spanish compared to English (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2008). Agreeableness overlaps with the emphasis on politeness and positive behaviors, but simpatía specifically emphasizes positive emotional expressions and an avoidance of conflict in the service of social relations. Moreover, the broader construct of agreeableness is understood to stem from a person’s individual tendencies rather than their culture (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003).

To our knowledge, one scale does exist that specifically measures simpatía (Griffith, Joe, Chatham, & Simpson, 1998). That scale was developed within a substance abuse counseling context, and its items focus on expectations and perceptions of patient–counselor interactions. It has since been modified to be used more broadly (Sotomayor-Peterson, De Baca, Figueredo, & Smith-Castro, 2013; Sotomayor-Peterson, Figueredo, Cristensen, & Taylor, 2012), and one large cross-sectional study of Latinos reported that the modified scale represents one overall factor and is reliable (Merz et al., 2016). In our view, however, there is still a need for a self-report measure of simpatía that is more broadly tailored and captures the dual aspects of emphasizing positivity as well as avoiding conflict and overt negativity, to more comprehensively and precisely measure this cultural value.

The current study developed the Simpatía Scale and assessed its reliability and validity. Scale items were developed based on a review of the associated literature (e.g., Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, & Ybarra, 2000; Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, et al., 1984) and intended to capture the extent to which a person values warmth/friendliness, politeness/avoidance of conflict, and emotional positivity/humor in social interactions. Twenty-two items were developed in both English and Spanish; participants completed only the English version in the current study. Exploratory factor analyses were conducted to determine final scale items, number of factors, and factor loadings. Scale items were then tested for internal consistency and construct validity was examined. We expected the scale to be positively correlated with the tendency to experience and express positive emotions (convergent evidence) and weakly correlated or uncorrelated with the tendency to express negative emotion and value social desirability (discriminant evidence). We additionally examined whether valuing simpatía decreased with greater U.S. acculturation.

Method

Participants

Individuals who self-reported Latino backgrounds1 were selected from the data sets of three larger studies (Sample 1: N = 695; Sample 2: N = 1,350; Sample 3: N = 158) to test the Simpatía Scale’s internal consistency and validity (total n = 296). Table 1 provides each sample’s demographics. Across samples, most participants identified as female (74%) and reported being born in the United States (83.8%) and being of Mexican/Mexican American background (77.1%). A majority reported speaking a non-English language at home (95.3%) and that both parents were born outside of the United States (78.6%; e.g., Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala). Participants reported 10.64 (SD = 5.03) mean years of education for mothers and 10.56 (SD = 4.84) mean years of education for fathers. Participants described their families’ socioeconomic status as lower middle class (42.4%; skilled trade, steady employment), followed by upper working class (27.9%; skilled workers or small farmers, steady employment), lower working class (19.5%; unskilled workers, employed off and on), and upper-middle class (10.1%; professionals, high-earned income). No participants identified their families as upper class (e.g., do not have to work for a living, inherited wealth). All participants provided informed consent, and all study protocols were approved by the Institutional Review Boards at the University of California, Irvine and Los Angeles campuses.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through university research participation pools and from local community colleges. They completed online surveys and tasks related to the respective larger studies, were debriefed, and received partial course credit for their participation (but some from Sample 3 were compensated $50).

Measures

Demographics. Participants self-reported their age, cultural background, gender, years in the United States, parents’ birth country, and whether a non-English language was spoken in their childhood home.

Simpatía Scale. Twenty-two items directed participants to rate their agreement to each item on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) Likert scale. The Appendix reports all scale items and the instructional scale prompt.

Emotional expressivity. Sample 1 completed the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (Gross & John, 1995), a 16-item measure of individual differences in emotional expressivity. Four items assessed positive emotion expressivity (e.g., “Whenever I feel

1 Participants from non-Latino backgrounds were excluded in this article because simpatía is a Latino cultural value, and the extent to which simpatía is present in other sociocultural contexts is unclear and precludes specific predictions.
positive emotions, people can easily see exactly what I am feeling”), and six items assessed negative emotion expressivity (e.g., “I sometimes cry during sad movies”). Participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a greater tendency to express that type of emotion. In Sample 1, the overall questionnaire, α = .82, was internally consistent, and internal consistencies of the subscales were acceptable, ranging from .65 (negative expressivity) to .68 (positive expressivity). This pattern was comparable to that found in a sample of Latinas with breast cancer (α = .74 total scale, subscale internal consistencies were not reported; Moreno et al., 2016).

**Trait positive emotion.** Sample 1 also completed an early version of the Dispositional Positive Emotion Scale (Shiota, Keltner, & John, 2006). This 28-item measure yielded an overall positive emotion disposition score. Participants rated how much they agreed with each item (e.g., “Many things are funny to me,” “I feel wonder almost every day”) on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated dispositional positive emotion. In Sample 1, the overall scale had an internal consistency of α = .93.

**Social desirability.** Samples 2 and 3 completed the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Loo & Thorpe, 2000). This 33-item scale measures a certain type of response bias, namely, the likelihood of responding in a way that would be approved of by one’s culture. Participants were asked whether each statement (e.g., “I have never intensely disliked anyone,” “I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me (reversed)”) pertains to them personally and responded with either “true” or “false.” Higher scores of the summed “true” responses indicated higher social desirability. As with past research, the scale demonstrated internal consistency (α = .78; Hopwood, Flato, Ambwani, Garland, & Morey, 2009).

**Acculturation.** Samples 2 and 3 completed a version of the 30-item Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans–II (Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995) that was adapted so that it could be used for Latinos broadly by modifying “Mexicans” and “Mexican Americans” to read “Mexican and/or other Latino Americans.” Items focused on language use (e.g., “I enjoy speaking Spanish”), ethnic identity (e.g., “I like to identify myself as an American”), culture (e.g., “My family cooks Mexican and/or other Latin American foods”), and ethnic interaction (e.g., “My friends, while I was growing up, were of European American origin”). Thirteen items measured Anglo orientation and 17 items measured Latino orientation. Higher scores on a subscale indicated higher orientation toward that culture. In Samples 2 and 3, the scale demonstrated internal consistency (Latino orientation: α = .88; Anglo orientation: α = .68).

**Data analysis plan.** As a rule, factor recovery using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is best achieved with larger sample sizes. Monte Carlo simulation has demonstrated factor recovery can be achieved with a minimum sample size of 234 for a scale with about 24 items, three factors, and factor loadings as low as .4 (de Winter, Dodou, & Wieringa, 2009). Our combined sample of participants meets these criteria. Using MPlus Version 8.3, EFA with promax rotation was first conducted on the 22 simpatía items and three-, two-, and single-factor solutions were compared. All other analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

Specifically, internal consistency was assessed for each final factor and for the overall scale using Cronbach’s alpha. Intercorrelations between each factor and the overall scale were then conducted. Construct validity was measured by correlating simpatía scores with mean scores for positive emotion expressivity, negative emotion expressivity, dispositional positive emotion, social desirability, Latino orientation, and Anglo orientation.

**Results**

**Factor Analysis**

To test for evidence of simpatía components, the 22 items were analyzed using EFA. The eigenvalues (greater than 1.0) and the model fit indices indicated that a three-factor solution fit the data well (see Table 2). However, one of those factors comprised only
two items (“People who express lots of positive feelings (e.g., smiling, laughing) annoy me”; “It’s silly to always be worried about people’s feelings—some things just need to be said”), so these items were removed to maximize scale reliability (Raubenheimer, 2004). The 20-item scale was then analyzed, and eigenvalues indicated that a two-factor solution fit the data best (see Table 2). Two items (“When I meet someone for the first time, I really try to make them feel comfortable”; “When in the company of others, it is important to be upbeat and pleasant”) cross-loaded onto both factors (i.e., factor loadings differed by <.2) and were removed from the scale. The 18-item scale was then analyzed, and eigenvalues indicated that a two-factor solution fit the data best (see Table 2). As shown in Table 3, the first factor items reflect warmth and positive expressivity and the second factor items reflect politeness, particularly through a tendency to avoid conflict/expressing negativity. We labeled the first factor Warmth/Positive Expressivity and the second factor Negativity/Conflict Distancing Politeness.

### Table 3
**Factor Loadings of the Final Simpatía Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simpatía item</th>
<th>Warmth/positive expressivity</th>
<th>Negativity/conflict distancing politeness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like to spend time with others laughing and having fun</td>
<td>.848</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to look for opportunities to smile and share laughter with family and friends</td>
<td>.830</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to treat people with respect</td>
<td>.818</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When spending time with friends, laughter and humor are important so everyone has a good time</td>
<td>.791</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s most important to be yourself, whether people like you or not</td>
<td>.759</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When something good happens to someone you know, it is important to show enthusiasm and be happy for their good news</td>
<td>.740</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I have free time, it’s good to spend it with others laughing and joking</td>
<td>.698</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If someone needs help, it is important to try to be of assistance</td>
<td>.678</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to show consideration for others</td>
<td>.671</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In social situations, I try to be polite</td>
<td>.604</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In social situations, I try to be humorous to set people at ease</td>
<td>.559</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I spend time with my family, we make each other laugh a lot</td>
<td>.542</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In social situations, one should not create conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td>.617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s important to me to get along well with all the people in my life</td>
<td></td>
<td>.582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When someone is being impolite or rude, it is best not to pay attention</td>
<td></td>
<td>.567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to me to be someone people like to be around</td>
<td></td>
<td>.560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my everyday life, I try to be an agreeable person</td>
<td></td>
<td>.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In social situations, I am reluctant to make things unpleasant by disagreeing with others</td>
<td></td>
<td>.539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 296$. Only factor loadings greater than .4 are presented.
negative. As such, our scale provides an important new tool for advancing the study of Latino culture.

The Simpatía Scale showed internal consistency, as well as convergent and discriminant validity. As measured by our scale, high simpatía is linked with expressing positive emotions and having a disposition to experience positive emotions. Importantly, however, our scale avoids conflating this cultural value with its correlates or consequences. The Negativity/Conflict Distancing Politeness factor of our subscale is also an advance that presents an opportunity to study how simpatía unfolds in the context of social conflict or other situations that are dissonant with simpatía values.

This research had a number of strengths. It developed a new, reliable measure of simpatía that will allow for future study of within-group cultural variation. This will facilitate research on Latino culture that avoids the pitfalls of using ethnicity as a proxy (Causadias, Vitriol, & Atkin, 2018). Our work also had limitations. Scale development was done with college student samples. It will be important for future research to validate this scale, as well as its Spanish version, in larger, community samples to maximize generalizability and test for measurement invariance. We were not able to examine differences among Latinos based on country of origin, but Merz and colleagues (2016) reported that Mexican adults in the United States self-reported lower simpatía than Dominican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Central American counterparts (as measured by the modified Griffith scale). Our work, however, sets the stage for future research that can address these limitations and productively build on its strengths.

Simpatía is as an important cultural value for Latinos, including Americans of Latino heritage. It does not follow, however, that all Latinos highly value simpatía. We hope we have provided a tool for studying simpatía without assuming that all Latinos are high in simpatía.

Because other scholars (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2008) have used agreeableness as a proxy for simpatía, we also examined the association of simpatía with agreeableness as measured by the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling et al., 2003). The TIPI measures agreeableness with two items; it has high content validity but reduced internal consistency (Gosling et al., 2003). Observed internal consistencies of TIPI agreeableness ranged from α = .18 to .27 in our studies. Thus, we hesitate to interpret the small to medium correlations observed for simpatía and TIPI agreeableness (simpatía overall: r(166) = .20, p = .009; simpatía positivity: r(166) = .14, p = .065; simpatía negativity: r(166) = .27, p < .001).

Future research should employ longer personality inventories to replicate and confirm this finding and to better understand the link of simpatía with agreeable personality.

References


**Appendix**

**Simpatía Scale**

To what extent are the following statements true about YOU?

Use the scale below to answer the following questions. Choose the answer that best describes YOU and YOUR beliefs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. In social situations, I try to be polite.
2. When spending time with friends, laughter and humor are important so everyone has a good time.
3. It’s important to me to get along well with all the people in my life.
4. In social situations, I am reluctant to make things unpleasant by disagreeing with others.
5. When I spend time with my family, we make each other laugh a lot.
6. In my everyday life, I try to be an agreeable person.
7. If someone needs help, it is important to try to be of assistance.
8. When something good happens to someone you know, it is important to show enthusiasm and be happy for their good news.
9. It is important to me to be someone people like to be around.
10. It is important to treat people with respect.

(Appendix continues)
11. In social situations, I try to be humorous to set people at ease.

12. When someone is being impolite or rude, it is best not to pay attention.

13. When I have free time, it’s good to spend it with others laughing and joking.

14. In social situations, one should not create conflict.

15. It is important to show consideration for others.

16. It is important to look for opportunities to smile and share laughter with family and friends.

17. I like to spend time with others laughing and having fun.

18. It’s most important to be yourself, whether people like you or not.

Simpatía-related warmth/positive expressivity items: 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18
Simpatía-related negativity/conflict distancing politeness items: 3, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14
Scale and subscale scores are calculated by aggregating items for that (sub)scale.