

# Support within Cultural Context, with Dr. Melanie Rodriguez

Abby Stewart

07/20/2020

## Support within cultural context with, Dr. Melanie Domenech Rodríguez

Dr. Melanie Domenech Rodríguez views Ethics as fundamentally connected to everything she does. As a researcher who mostly works with minority communities and a diversity of graduate students, Rodríguez has worked throughout her career to ensure that Spanish speakers are able to give proper consent and accurate answers when they participate in research. This includes simplifying consent forms for non-native English speakers, as well as making cultural and language adaptations to surveys to more accurately get results.

One of the biggest projects in Dr. Rodríguez's time at USU is [Padres Preparados](#) – a program with Latinx families with a child enrolled in the pre-K headstart program. This program provides materials for Latinx parents to teach their children reading skills – even when they might not have those skills themselves. It is a fully bilingual program, with instructions in both English and Spanish. Through this research, Rodríguez learned a lot about community organization and community ties, as well as the importance of working from the grassroots in communities in order to have a real impact. These sorts of methodologies aren't often taught in programs, but can be incredibly powerful and likely make the interventions stronger.

Ethnicity, race, and culture are words that are often combined, interchanged, and thrown together. While are all related, there are important differences that even researchers will confuse.

Race and ethnicity are the closest related. Both are social constructs. Race is dependent on an indicator of your decent that is marked by phenotypic characteristics – examples including African American, white American, etc. Ethnicity is a broader construct that has to do with the

context you grew up in – like being Italian American and following those traditions.

Culture is the lifeways that are transmitted from one generation to the next. They inform our values, beliefs, practices. They affect everything from the language we speak and music we listen to, to what we do when someone dies. Researchers will often include race and/or ethnicity in their research processes but will neglect culture, incorrectly attributing differences to race rather than culture.

Everyone comes from different places and deals with things differently. This is why ensuring inclusion is more important than just ensuring diversity. Inclusion ensures that everyone feels included, respected, seen, and heard rather than just being reduced to a statistic. One way Dr. Rodríguez makes sure that those in her lab and department feel included is by hosting thanksgiving at her home each year.

She roasts an entire pig in the traditional Cuban way, and her students contribute in their own way, whether that be helping her, cooking their own meals, or washing the dishes at the end of the night. Whether the students show up hours before to help, or simply arrive for dinner, they are all showing their respect in their own culture's way.

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Dr. Melanie Domenech Rodríguez has been a professor in the USU Psychology Department since 2000. She is also the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for protecting human subjects in research. She views mentoring as one of the most important aspects of her job and wants her doctoral students to find something that they are passionate about when it comes to social justice, as well as cultivate a diverse group of students so that the future workforce is also diverse. Her research focuses on family processes in Spanish-speaking Latinx families and more broadly on multicultural issues in psychology.

