Dominican Identity and the Experience of Interpersonal Conflict

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Dominican Identity and the Experience of Interpersonal Conflict

Yubelky Rodriguez

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of the Requirements for the Degree
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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Yubelky Rodriguez, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ph.D. during this Spring Semester 2021.

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Abstract

This study explored how ethnic identity and the cultural experiences of second-generation Dominicans living in New York City influenced their understanding of conflict and coping. As a general theoretical framework, collectivism and individualism guided the examination of ethnic and bicultural identity and interpersonal conflict. A thematic analysis was conducted to generate themes of participants’ narratives, cultural affiliations, and preferred conflict styles. A total of 15 participants, ages 19–46, were recruited through social media. All participants self-identified as second-generation Dominican; they were born and raised in New York City to Dominican-born parents. Participants completed a semi-structured interview and a demographic questionnaire. The results generated three main themes. Theme 1: The experience of culture and how it informs relationships and conflict generated three cultural themes (confianza, familismo, personalismo, and respeto) and seven subthemes were uncovered. Theme 2: Cultural influences on conflict and resolution style revealed seven subthemes of conflict styles (avoidance and withdrawing, obliging and accommodating, third-party, emotionally expressive, integrating, and dominating), that fall under the two main themes of collectivistic and individualistic conflict and resolution styles. Additionally, the data revealed Theme 3, six common coping strategies: (a) support, validation, and a desire for closeness; (b) attending therapy; (c) processing events alone and going for a walk; (d) using the arts to cope; (e) eating comfort food; and (f) mindful tasks. The participants reported a pattern of several conflict styles within one experience rather than a primary style. This study’s findings have important implications for mental health services and further research investigations.

Keywords: Second-generation Dominicans, ethnic and cultural identity, bicultural, interpersonal conflict, conflict and resolution style
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Dedication

Para Amelia hoy y siempre
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Dominican Identity and Interpersonal Conflict

Dominicans residing in New York City interact with Dominican and American cultures, engaging both environments, often switching between Spanish, English, and the popular hybrid Spanglish (Spanish + English). Duany (2008) noted that due to continuous migration and resettlement, cultural, physical, and geographic displacement still characterize New York’s Dominican community. Thus, Dominicans are directly and indirectly connected to multiple social areas across nations, and as a consequence, maintain circulation of people, ideas, practices, money, goods, and information (Duany, 2008; Sagas & Molina, 2004). They use a dual frame of reference, drawing from two cultures, to evaluate their experiences (Louie, 2006). Their life events impact ethnic identity and their experience of culture.

Research has highlighted that individualism and collectivism are constructs that may guide the understanding of cultural affiliation (Schwartz et al., 2007), and the cultural traits can describe the behavioral patterns in relationships. Individualistic cultures prioritize the individual over the group and emphasize independence, whereas collectivistic cultures place the group needs over individual needs, valuing interdependence (Hofstede, 1980). Evidence suggests that individualistic and collectivistic factors are not mutually exclusive; rather, these factors coexist, and different elements may surface depending on the context (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Triandis, 2018). Immigration impacts the internalization of individualistic and collectivistic values, norms, and customs, as well as how individuals address conflict and manage relationships within societies (Triandis, 2018). Their families’ migration narrative impacts second-generation Dominicans, and the degree of internalized values, beliefs, and norms
demonstrated give insight into their unique experiences with interpersonal relationships and with interpersonal conflict.

Interpersonal conflict is a dynamic process that develops between individuals as they experience adverse emotional reactions to perceived disagreements (Barki & Hartwick, 2004). Individualistic and collectivistic traits describe the areas of interpersonal interactions, such as moral judgment, social norms, conformity, and conflict styles and resolutions (Triandis, 2018). Theoretically, individuals who subscribe to more individualistic values tend to use direct conflict styles, such as integrating, compromising, and dominating/controlling modes (Greenfield et al., 2000). Conversely, individuals who identify more closely with collectivistic group membership tend to use indirect interpersonal conflict styles, such as the obliging and accommodating style, and the avoidance mode (Greenfield et al., 2000; Ting-Toomey, 2000). Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2018) suggested that traditional Latinx American conflict practices, tactfulness, and consideration of others’ feelings (involved in obliging and avoiding conflict styles) are part of Latinx American cultural norms in interpersonal confrontations.

Most of the investigations examining Latinx interpersonal conflict focus on Latinx familial conflict, specifically attending to parent-adolescent dyads, and acculturation gaps concerning family cohesion, adaptability, and familismo (Telzer, 2010). Familismo is a natural support system providing physical, emotional, and social support for Latinx from family members (Dunn & O’Brien, 2009). It is possible to learn conflict style in response to an intense event by the socialization of one’s cultural and ethnic groups (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). The ethnic and cultural environments guide individuals through living standards, relationship management, and impacts of conflict. How an individual handles interpersonal conflict and
develops conflict styles sheds light on internal and behavioral processes in response to conflict and cultural values (Ting-Toomey, 2000).

Familial caregiver stress frequently impacts the psychological health status of Latinxs (Perez & Cruess, 2014)—including second-generation Dominicans. Gender norms prescribe the caregiving role to Dominican women, who are often the primary caretakers of elders, partners, and children, which may negatively affect women’s mental health (Perez & Perez, 2014). Additionally, family conflict may occur when low acculturated parents expect their children to continue following their heritage culture’s values and traditions, and their children are reluctant to follow their parents’ social norms (Castillo et al., 2008). Thus, within the context of a cultural system that emphasizes relationships as a core value, stress from interpersonal conflict can result in distress, in addition to manifesting as somatic or physiological symptoms (Perez & Cruess, 2014). Limited empirical studies investigate coping strategies to manage interpersonal stress and address these conversations for Dominicans living in the United States (Cuevas et al., 2012).

There exists a multidimensional relationship between ethnic and cultural identity with respect to interpreting different interpersonal conflict styles. Dominican ethnic identity may serve as a potential risk and protective factor for high emotional distress, specifically when it comes to interpersonal conflict. Investigating Dominicans’ experience as bicultural individuals, as they describe their interpersonal relationships and disagreements, may allow for a better comparative picture of how cultural experience informs conflict styles and resolution.

Assimilation is likewise a multipath engagement process of Dominican immigrants and their children into social institutions and various cultural segments of the United States (Araujo Dawson, 2009). Morawska (2003) argued that transnationalism and assimilation into the host society are typically concurrent. Different macro-and micro-level life events result in diverse
combinations of transnationalism-with-assimilation, giving way to acculturation. In general, acculturation is a shift in cultural values that occurs when individuals contact a new culture (Araujo Dawson, 2009). Research investigations have indicated that most acculturating individuals identify as bicultural (Berry, 2003), and they have been exposed to and have internalized two cultures (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007; 2010). Bicultural influences and cultural identification impact how individuals perceive, manage, and maintain relationships.

The experience of culture and ethnic identity provides a foundation for internalizing values, beliefs, and norms, informing attitudes and behavior. Sociocultural constructs may impact the ethnic and cultural identity of second-generation Dominicans. Historically, Christian traditions influence Dominicans’ gender norms (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002), providing a robust connection between Dominican identity and religiosity. Over time, second-generation Dominicans are transitioning away from conservative perspectives on gender (Araujo Dawson, 2009) and religious affiliation, allowing for a possible internalization of U.S. American culture. Race and Dominican identity have deep roots in Dominican cultural norms, and these elements are present in Dominicans’ sense of self (Rodriguez, 2019). Dominicans represent a racially and ethnically diverse group, and as such, are a likely target of discrimination in the United States (Araujo Dawson, 2009; Rodriguez, 2001; Torres-Saillant & Hernandez, 1999). Experiences with discrimination may deter second-generation Dominicans from fully engaging with the U.S. American culture. Additionally, for second-generation Dominicans, ethnic identification may have a degree of both collectivism and individualism embedded in the cultural subgroups that make up their Latinx identity (Oyserman et al., 2002). The data in this study provides insight into
how second-generation Dominicans handle disagreements, uncovering possible adaptive styles and potential influences of cultural identity and experience.

**Statement of the Problem**

Extant literature addresses the Latinx community as a whole; however, significant cultural variations exist across Latin American countries and subcultural groups. Therefore, researchers need to explore the nuanced experiences of specific Latinx ethnic groups, such as second-generation Dominicans, which comprise a significant majority of the population of Latinx individuals within the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019; Ennis et al., 2011). Limited research investigations have described the experience of second-generation Dominicans. Studies exploring how cultural backgrounds impact the perception of interpersonal conflict do not exist.

For Dominicans, the collectivistic framework supports the idea that family members and the relationships that exist among family members are an extension of the self (Chang, 2015); however, no studies exist to explore how this informs behavior. It is vital to examine interpersonal relationships for second-generation Dominicans since once relationships form, whether familial or not, Dominicans tend to build strong interpersonal bonds, which may foster distress when a threat or strain to this bond appears. Corona et al. (2017) found that several cultural values moderated the influence of cultural stressors on mental health symptoms, such as connection and harmony.

How individuals cope with interpersonal stress may have behavioral, psychological, and physiological implications related to social conflict and intrapersonal distress. Few studies have documented the preferred behaviors Dominicans use to cope. There are no previous investigations examining second-generation coping strategies. Further investigations need to
emphasize the complex ways in which coping strategies connect with one’s collective and individual ethnic and racial socialization, which may be related to mental health outcomes.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the personal, familial, and community context of second-generation Dominicans living in New York City. Their ethnic identities and their experience of the U.S. American and Dominican cultures served as a context for their interpersonal relationships. Ethnic identity is an individual’s sense of connection to a nation’s heritage, including values, beliefs, traditions, self-image, in-group- and out-group attitudes, and often language (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Tong-Toomey, 2000). Cultural identity at the macro-level is a societal descriptor of collective patterns of beliefs and behaviors (Marger, 2012). It is experienced by factors derived from social identities (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and religion) and other cultural elements (music, food, sense of style, art, etc.). Thus, the person’s cultural affiliations can describe ethnic identity. However, cultural identity is not necessarily linked to ethnic identity or a specific national heritage. For example, a person can ethnically identify as Dominican but belong to many cultural groups that are not directly connected to Dominican culture.

I aimed to examine possible influence Dominicans’ cultural identification may have on how individuals perceive, live, and experience interpersonal relationships. Additionally, the second aim focused on the myriad of strategies second-generation Dominicans use to cope with interpersonal stress.
Research Questions

This study investigated the following research questions:

1) How does ethnic and cultural identity for second-generation Dominicans living in the United States inform the experience of interpersonal conflict and stress?

2) What are the various ways second-generation Dominicans cope with interpersonal stress?

Significance of the Study

Dominicans residing in the United States make up the fifth largest Latinx group (Pew Hispanic Center Report, 2010) and the 12th largest international Latinx group (Thomas et al., 2017). An estimated 41% of Dominican Americans living in the United States, the majority, reside in New York (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Additionally, 9% of New York City’s population is of Dominican descent, and they are nearly 35% of New York’s Latinx population (Ennis et al., 2011). Dominicans are among the largest ethnic groups in New York City, with Washington Heights (located in Manhattan), specifically, generally considered the center of the Dominican community (Renner, n.d.).

No extant literature exists exploring Dominican ethnic identity, cultural experiences, and conflict, and to a lesser degree the impact of interpersonal discord on their physical health, mental well-being, and coping strategies. Existing literature supports an association between familismo beliefs and overall health (Douglas & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Hernández & Bámaca-Colbert, 2016). However, the findings are inconsistent as to whether the effects inform attitudes and behavior, and none of the studies is specific to second-generation Dominicans. Second-generation Dominicans are members of both traditional Dominican culture and mainstream U.S. American culture. Culture-specific factors influence how stressors are experienced (Kim et al., 2018). Familial socialization may function as a risk factor and/or protective factor in its influence
on Dominicans’ mental health. Maintaining and sustaining familial and other close relationships are core values that may serve as emotional support and to strengthen group identity; moreover, conflict may be a potential risk for distress and internalizing behaviors when relationships are not stable. The findings of this investigation can be applied to both practice (i.e., psychotherapy) and further investigative literature. Psychologists may expand their knowledge base of the intersection between relational dynamics, identity, and cultural emotional expression.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, a literature review of Dominican identity within the context of culture, ethnicity, interpersonal conflict, and coping is presented. As a general theoretical framework, collectivism and individualism are used to examine ethnic and bicultural identity for second-generation Dominicans living in the United States, who tend to have strong affinity and socialization around community ties (Stein, Rivas-Drake, & Camacho, 2017). Describing the cultural elements of identity offers insight into the personal experiences of interpersonal conflict and coping strategies for second-generation Dominicans.

First, I critically review select literature on Dominican migration patterns, Dominican Americans, and second-generation Dominicans. Second, I provide a review of acculturation’s effects on Latinx and Dominican identity, Dominican racial identity, Latinx and Dominican gender norms, and bicultural identity. Third, I present a discussion on culture, cultural identity, ethnic identity, individualism, and collectivism. I propose that the empirical investigation of Dominican culture and second-generation Dominicans at the individual level is missing, and warrants attention. Lastly, I examine previous research on interpersonal conflict, conflict styles, resolution, and coping with stress.

Latinx Groups

The terms Latino/Latina/Latinx/Hispanic represent a conglomerate of people from various countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as Spain; they encompass a multitude of ethnicities, races, and cultures within each country that maintain their unique history (Almeida et al., 2009). The label Hispanic refers to all people who speak Spanish, including Spain, and broadening to nationalities that are not a part of the Latinx subgroup. Latino/a/x
relates to all Latin American people excluding people from Spain, including Dominicans. This study excluded the use of the term Hispanic and utilized Latinx to represent the population of Spanish-speaking Latin America. More specifically, Dominican refers to individuals living in the Dominican Republic and the United States. It is important to note that significant inter-group variability between Latinx identities exists, and homogeneity of experiences is not assumed.

**Dominican Migration Patterns**

After 1965, primarily urban, lower-middle-class Dominicans began to migrate in large numbers to the United States (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000). Following the fall of the Trujillo Dictatorship in 1960, the economy in the Dominican Republic began to deteriorate, and this trend continued for decades to follow. Dominican immigrants entered the American workforce primarily as low-wage manual laborers in clerical, operative, and personal service jobs (Lee et al., 2017). Many Dominicans opened small businesses despite hardships (Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000), searching for upward mobility through self-employment.

First-generation Dominican immigrants were born in the Dominican Republic and migrated to the United States in late adolescence or adulthood; their ethnic group memberships are likely to be filtered through positive views of their birth country (Wiley et al., 2012). Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral (2000) posited that Dominicans in New York have a transnational identity that links the Dominican Republic to the U.S. American life. Many first-generation Dominicans attempt to reproduce their lives on the island within their new, New York City context (Duany, 2008). The literature on immigration defines children of immigrants who have arrived in the United States before they reach adulthood (before the age of 20) as 1.5 generation (Rumbaut, 1991; Zgou, 1997). Their birth country influences their worldview, environment, upbringing, socialization, and education, impacting their developmental stages (Portes et al.,
Second-Generation Dominicans

Second-generation Dominican immigrants arrive to the United States at a young age (between the ages of birth to 4 years) or were born in the United States to immigrant parents (Wiley et al., 2012). They spend their early years in the United States and possibly experiencing low public regard in how others perceive their national identity (Wiley et al., 2008). Second-generation Dominicans create a differentiated version of transnational identity by fusing the U.S. and Dominican cultural identity (Lee et al., 2017). They maintain close ties with the Dominican Republic, by engaging in cultural traditions and interacting with other Dominicans (Duany, 2008). Many limited Spanish-speaking second-generation Dominicans might feel disconnected from Dominican culture, partially due to language, which enables people to maintain aspects of the original culture. Bermudez and Stinson (2011) postulated that U.S. native-born Dominicans’ lack of Spanish proficiency can be stressful and cause shame and family conflict. Dominicans living in the Dominican Republic often use the pejorative term “Dominican York” to refer to Dominicans born and living in New York. Nevertheless, second-generation Dominicans are an essential factor in the Dominican Republic economy and are a national revenue source, with their contribution falling only second to tourism (Tells, 2018).

The Effects of Acculturation on Latinx and Dominican Identity

Acculturation is a process whereby change occurs in an individual’s attitudes, behaviors, and values due to contact with the new culture (Marin, 1992). The modification might depend on the individual’s degree of identification with their original culture (Rivera, 2008). Acculturation
has been conceptualized through a bi-dimensional model (Berry, 1980; 2003), in which individuals can retain their culture of origin while also adapting to the new or host culture. Individuals may adopt one of the four acculturative strategies: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration. Assimilation refers to when the individual embraces the host culture and rejects the culture of origin; separation is when the individual avoids interaction with the majority culture and holds on to the culture of origin; marginalization is when the individual has little or no interest in maintaining the culture of origin and mostly interacts with or adopts the host culture; and integration is when the individual embraces the host culture while simultaneously holding on to the culture of origin (Phinney & Flores, 2002; Rivera, 2008; Ryder et al., 2000; Zea et al., 2003). Second-generation Dominicans, who were born or raised in the United States, straddle two or more cultures. These experiences may lead second-generation Dominicans to identify as a unified ethnic group in the United States (Arajo-Dawson, 2015); gender, class, and race may mediate the relationship with their cultural group affiliation.

Ethnic identity is an individual’s sense of connection to a nation’s heritage, including values, traditions, and often language (Phinney & Ong, 2007). It derives from cultural affiliation and provides a backdrop for beliefs that become norms, and later influence the relational patterns adopted by groups and individuals of a specific nation (Carter, 1995). Ethnic identity has been found to peak in middle adolescence and decline as adolescents determine their ethnic group memberships (French et al., 2006). Theories of ethnic identity development have foundations in ego identity theories (Erikson, 1968), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and acculturation theory (Berry et al., 1989). Erikson (1968) emphasized personal identity and social identity theory are concerned with individuals’ identification with group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Phinney’s (1989, 1993) model of ethnic identity development comprises three
stages: *unexamined, search*, and *committed*, illustrating the transient spaces in which a person may find themselves. A multidimensional approach to ethnic identity primarily focuses on two dimensions: exploration and affirmation/belonging (Duany, 2008; Stein et al., 2014). The authors posited that identity development for adolescents of color may include exploring multiple social identities, including ethnic and racial identity (Stein et al., 2014).

High ethnic affirmation and belonging exist among Dominicans, demonstrated by elevated levels of national pride, close ties to their native country, and circular migration patterns (Duany, 2008; Stein et al., 2017). Ethnic identity may be a protective factor in resisting stereotypes (Stein et al., 2017). Researchers examined the longitudinal association between ethnic identity (centrality and personal regard) and familism respect and obligation values for Latinx students attending a predominately White university (Stein et al., 2017). Additionally, they investigated the role of self-labels in ethnic identity. Results indicate that students who self-labeled as White Americans reported lower centrality, private regard, familism respect, and familism obligation than their peers who identified with any national origin. They suggest that ethnic self-labeling influences the identity processes and the endorsement of cultural values (Stein et al., 2017). Ethnic centrality supports the growth in values of familism and respect across time (Stein et al., 2014). These findings support previous research, highlighting that higher ethnic identity exploration is associated with increased cultural connection among ethnic minorities (Syed & Azmitia, 2010). However, a limitation to this study was the lack of identification for students in the Latin American subgroup. There is significant intergroup variability between Latin American people, as their experiences are not homogeneous; therefore, the limitations compromise the generalizability of the results.
Bicultural Identity

Dominicans living in the United States navigate numerous cultural influences; thus, many second-generation Dominicans identify as bicultural (Padilla, 2006). Cultural psychologists have emphasized the differences between bicultural individuals (integrated acculturation strategy) and other acculturating groups (those using the assimilation, separation, or marginalization strategies) (Huynh et al., 2011). Research investigations have revealed that the majority of acculturating individuals are bicultural (Berry, 2003), and bicultural individuals have been exposed to and internalize two cultures (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007, 2010). Researchers have explored this experience in bicultural identity integration (BII; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002), defining cultural blendedness versus compartmentalization and cultural harmony versus conflict. Cultural blendedness refers to perceiving the two cultures as overlapping, whereas cultural harmony refers to perceiving the two cultures as compatible and lacking conflict (Huynh et al., 2011). Cultural blendedness and cultural harmony are based on individuals’ personal experience of their two cultures interacting, rather than any objective distance or similarities between the two cultures (Huynh et al., 2011).

Biculturalism includes the ability to switch between two cultural schemas and norms (Huynh et al., 2011), referred to as cultural frame switching (Hong et al., 2000). Congruent behavioral patterns in interpersonal relationships, such as personalismo, familismo, confianza, and simpatía affirm second-generation ethnic and cultural identity (Calzada et al., 2013; Schwartz, 2007). Familismo is a natural support system providing physical, emotional, and social support for Latinx from family members (Dunn & O’Brien, 2009). Familismo is considered a collectivist value and it implies prioritizing the needs of one’s family over one’s own needs (Schwartz et al., 2007). Personalismo is an emphasis on politeness and courtesy and establishing
a good rapport with someone, such as a personal connection (Schwartz et al., 2007). In Latinx culture, having *confianza* is obtaining trust based largely on personal relationships and rapport; it is based on the idea that a person is familiar and a part of cultural group. Practicing *simpatía* is being likeable, easygoing, polite, and fun to be with; is being affectionate; and enjoying sharing feelings with others (Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2008). *Simpatía* is associated with striving to promote harmony in relationships by showing respect toward others, avoiding conflict, emphasizing positive behaviors, and deemphasizing negative behaviors (Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2008; Triandis et al., 2018).

As such, it is reasonable to assume that second-generation Dominicans’ navigation of two cultures may influence their experience of interpersonal relationships. Padilla (2006) posited that maintaining ethnic identity and bicultural orientation may be imposed on Dominicans depending on their physical appearance, including race, which may identify them as *outsiders* to the dominant social group. Thus, ethnic loyalty and biculturalism may serve as positive coping responses in a racialized society (Padilla, 2006).

**Dominican Racial Identity**

The Dominican Republic is a part of the global African diaspora, which has a shared common history with other Latin American countries due to slavery, migration, and other experiences (Simmons, 2008). The experience of slavery impacted ideologies around nationality and shaped individuals’ racial identity (Anderson, 2006; Brodkin, 2000; Medina, 1997; Simmons, 2008). By the end of the 18th century, most Dominicans self-identified as *mulattos* and Blacks (*pardos* and *morenos*) (Duany, 1998). Since the mid-19th century, scholars have alluded to a racist and xenophobic ideology in the Dominican Republic, placing its origins and development in an idealized view of indigenous elements in Dominican culture and outright
neglect of the African diaspora (Duany, 1998). Increasing preference for Hispanic (connections to Spain) customs and traditions and hostile attitudes toward Haitians and other Black immigrants has existed throughout the decades (Almanzar, 1987; Hoetink, 1994; Sagas, 1993; 1997). Under Rafael Trujillo’s dictatorship (1930–1961), pro-Hispanic and anti-Haitian rhetoric was prominent among Dominican politics and people associated with the regime (Chagui-Sánchez, 2018; Duany, 1998). Additionally, individuals stressing the Dominican nation’s indigenous roots helped distinguish it from Spanish colonialism and neighboring Haiti (Simmons, 2008).

Second-generation Dominicans living in the United States have altered the meaning of the African diaspora. Aparicio (2007) suggests that this group shifts the definitions of Blackness concerning Haitians, and they work toward changing the misconceptions of the African diaspora and racial discourses. Specifically, in recent years, there has been an outcry by second-generation Dominicans against the Dominican state-sanctioned racism, in the guise of national identification and citizenship, against Haitians (Hazel, 2014). However, external racial identification by western powers has impacted how Dominican Americans identify racially, juxtaposed within the U.S. racial categories (Itzigsohn et al., 2005; Wade, 1997). For example, second-generation Dominican high school students in Providence, RI, do not identify their race in terms of Black or White, but in terms of an ethnolinguistic identity, as Dominican/Spanish/Hispanic (Bailey, 2001). Their resistance to Black/White racialization suggests transformative effects that post-1960s immigrants and their descendants have on U.S. ethnic/racial categories (Bailey, 2001). However, researchers have argued that second-generation Dominicans’ racial identity varies locally, influenced by experiences of racism and discrimination they encounter in society (Hughes, 2003; Wheeler, 2015).
Gender Norms

Dominicans generally identify gender roles dichotomously and using language associated with biological sex: female and male (Zosuls et al., 2014). Historically, Dominicans’ expectations of gender roles have been heavily impacted by Christian traditions, providing a robust connection between Dominican identity and religiosity. For example, Gil and Vasquez (1996) coined the term Maria paradox, juxtaposing the language of Catholicism’s Ten Commandments with expected female appropriate and inappropriate behavior, which, if followed, may also paradoxically lead to maladaptive behavior (Miville, 2013). Mere exposure to religious affiliations and dominant culture may influence a person’s worldview, even if they reject these ideals, impacting their expected roles. Often, these roles are unrealistic and difficult to uphold. Nunez et al. (2016) noted that individuals with non-traditional views on virtuous values and abstinence may experience increased negative cognitive-emotional factors because their beliefs are not congruent with traditional society in terms of sexual morality.

Gender norms prescribe the caregiving role to Dominican women, who are generally the primary caretakers of elders, partners, and children. This link extends to Dominicans who are non-practicing Christians, who romanticize or expect the enactment of la Virgen Maria (the Virgin Mary) in female gender roles such as purity, self-sacrifice, endurance, and maternity/nurturing (Melville, 2013). This phenomenon is called Marianismo (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Dominican women are responsible for taking care of the home and maintaining outside work, leading to burnout and emotional distress.

Literature examining gender roles highlights that the enactment of traditional male gender role beliefs has been associated with maladaptive behavioral health outcomes, such as higher depression, anxiety, and anger (Piña-Watson et al., 2013). Nunez et al. (2016) examined
associations of *machismo* and *marianismo* with negative cognitive-emotional factors (i.e., depressive symptoms, cynical hostility, and trait anxiety and anger) in the Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos Sociocultural Ancillary Study, a cross-sectional cohort study of sociocultural and psychosocial correlates of cardiometabolic health. Participants were adults and self-identified as Latinx of Central American, Cuban, Dominican, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South American, and other Latinx backgrounds. They found that specific components of traditional gender roles were significantly associated with various negative cognitive-emotional factors. This result was stable after adjusting for sociodemographic covariates. These findings contribute to the understanding of the importance of gender role socialization in the context of Latinx psychological health indicators.

**Culture**

Culture offers a framework from which individuals make meaning of relationships, situations, and actions encountered in daily life, and it guides development (Newman & Newman, 2017). Lowe and Weisner (2004) clarified this process using the term *cultural pathways*, suggesting that individuals in each culture have values and goals for themselves and their children that shape and organize the socialization process of daily life. Psychological experiences shape the expectations, resources, and challenges posed by one’s specific cultural group (Newman & Newman, 2017). Culture carriers, such as parents, teachers, religious leaders, and elders, use strategies to foster critical practices and values (Newman & Newman, 2017). Cultural identification influences social networks and patterns of beliefs and behaviors, such as reinforcements, punishments, encouragements, and the many other means that societies use to communicate values (Marger, 2012). These beliefs become norms that influence the relational patterns adopted by groups and individuals.
Latinxs, who identify solely with their ethnic culture of Latin American origin and reside in another country, find themselves holding steadfast to their cultural traditions (Padilla, 2016). Individuals possess the ability to be self-directing. Therefore, they select, accept, or reject cultural influences. Moreover, they can contribute to the process of maintaining, synthesizing, and changing an existing culture (Kim, 2001). Collectivism and individualism help shape attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors of individuals born into a culture (Kim, 2001). For second-generation individuals, ethnic identification may have a degree of collectivism and individualism embedded in the cultural subgroups that make up their identity (Oyserman et al., 2002).

**Individualism and Collectivism**

Individualism and collectivism are cultural constructs that represent several factors, including but not limited to values, norms, goals, and behaviors (Hofstede, 1980, 1983). Latin American, Asian, Caribbean, African, and Middle Eastern cultures have collectivistic characteristics (Triandis, 1995), which tend to have group-oriented values and a focus on social outcomes (Schwartz et al., 2012a). Collectivism is fostered throughout an individual’s lifetime since societies and individuals integrate into strong, cohesive in-groups from birth (Hofstede, 1991). The United States, the United Kingdom and other Western European countries, and Australia are traditionally considered individualistic, meaning that they have self-oriented values and norms focused on personal outcomes (Prioste et al., 2015; Schwartz et al., 2012a). Individualism pertains to the connection between individuals that is characterized by people expecting to look after themselves and their immediate family (Hofstede, 1991).

Individualistic cultures prioritize the individual over the group and emphasize independence, whereas collectivistic cultures place the group needs over individual needs,
valuing interdependence (Hofstede, 1980). Schweder and Bourne (1984) described U.S. Americans as ego contractual. From this perspective, social relationships serve as reflected appraisal or sources that can verify and affirm the inner core of self, the ego (Kim, 2001). Additionally, American individuals are socialized to accept the core value system of being supremely natural and universal. Kim (2001) posited that these values, norms, and standards can be attributed as a derivative of the economic capitalist system in the United States. The survival of capitalism is partially predicated upon the correspondence between political democracy, competition, and individualism (Kim, 2001). Individualists emphasize harmony less often, and they conceptualize that verbal arguments can clarify misunderstanding (Triandis, 2018).

Conversely, in collectivistic cultures, people follow social norms that are frequently designed to maintain social harmony among the in-group members (Kim, 2001). Individuals who identify with collectivistic values want their in-groups to be monolithic and homogenous; everyone thinks, feels, and behaves in the same way because this will facilitate harmony. Individuals who endorse collectivistic ideals seek to meet the in-group members’ expectations, help one another, share scarce resources, tolerate one another’s views, and minimize conflict (Kim, 2001); emotional ties play a significant role in these relationships (Triandis, 2018).

**Dimensional Approach**

Individualism at the person versus group level can be conceptualized differently (Matsumoto, 2003). Variants exist between people residing in primarily individualistic or collectivistic cultural contexts (Schwartz et al., 2007). Evidence suggests that individualistic and collectivistic factors are not mutually exclusive; rather, these factors coexist, and different states may surface depending on the context (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Triandis, 2018). Triandis (2018) posited that individualist and collectivist tendencies exist within every individual and
society. The author contended that an individual’s attachment to their family growing up can be viewed as collectivistic, and as the individual becomes detached from them in different contexts, they learn to be distant from collectivistic views in different situations.

Conceptualized as orthogonal dimensions, higher degrees of individualism are not necessarily related to lower collectivism levels (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001). Researchers used meta-analysis to examine differences between ethnic groups across five samples, looking at the means of individualistic and collectivistic constructs for each ethnic group in all samples (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001). African Americans and Asian Americans scored higher than European Americans in collectivism; however, African Americans scored higher in individualism than did European Americans. Additionally, two comprehensive studies examining four ethnic groups found no differences between European Americans and minority members on individualism (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Oyserman et al., 2002). Schartz et al. (2010) found that dominant White American culture does not differ from other ethnic groups in endorsement of familismo and other collectivistic values. The implications highlight the complexity of parsing out dichotomous categories to symbolize attitudes and behaviors. As a dimensional approach, individualism and collectivism may provide a framework for identifying with a Latinx ethnic identity. For second-generation Dominicans living in the United States, personal identification with Latinx ethnic identity might reflect the cultural components influenced by Latin American culture and dominant U.S. culture.

The level of exposure to various cultures in the United States may also be an essential factor in the endorsement of individualistic and collectivistic values (Schwartz et al., 2007). Historically, oppression and exclusion have impacted higher rates of in-group membership among marginalized ethnic identities (Hofstede, 2001), which may explain the prominent levels
of collectivism in the U.S. immigrant population, influencing the internalization of
individualistic and collectivistic values, norms, and customs.

**Enculturation and Socialization**

Cultural transmission is how beliefs, values, norms, and skills are passed on to future
generations (Kim, 2001). According to Segull et al. (1992), there are two types of cultural
transmission: *enculturation* and *socialization*. Enculturation occurs through learning without
formal teaching, and children obtain values and norms by engaging in the environment (Kim,
2001). Socialization is a direct and explicit transmission of values through intentional attempts to
facilitate, foster, and shape a child’s behavior (Kim, 2001). Therefore, socialization creates an
internalized viewpoint, and for adults, these aspects are commonplace and natural (Kim, 2001).

**Interpersonal Interactions**

Social behavior is an outcome of norms, duties, and obligations (Kim, 2001).
Individualistic and collectivistic cultures affect many interpersonal interactions, such as moral
judgment, social norms, conformity, and conflict resolution (Triandis, 2018). Collectivistic
cultures are described as fostering and maintaining relatedness (Kagitcibasi, 1990), illustrating
the cohesiveness of interpersonal relationships (Kim, 2001). These cultures discourage
arguments and fights since these behaviors threaten the good relations between in-group
members such as relatives, friends, and acquaintances (Kim, 2001). Collectivistic individuals
tend not to end relationships unless it is costly, and members tend not to leave their collectives.

In contrast, individualistic cultures dispose of their relationships if the cost is higher than
their enjoyment (Triandis, 2018). They tend to change relationships often and base marriage on
emotion (which changes); this may explain high divorce rates. Additionally, they raise their
children to be independent of their collectives, and freedom of influence is highly valued (Triandis, 2018).

**Interpersonal Conflict**

Conflict is a universal and pervasive relating process present in social relationships in all ethnic and cultural groups. Constructive or destructive outcomes derive from how individuals manage conflict (Ting-Toomey, 2000). While definitions for interpersonal conflict vary, a few general themes can be identified, such as disagreement, problem, clash, dispute, difference, and interference (Barki & Hartwick, 2004; Wall & Callister, 1995). Interpersonal conflict is a dynamic process between interdependent people as they experience adverse emotional reactions to a perceived conflict with attaining their goals (Barki & Hartwick, 2004). Gunkel et al. (2016) noted that the conflict itself is not necessarily a negative or positive phenomenon; instead, how individuals manage it leads to constructive or destructive outcomes.

**Conflict Styles**

Blake and Mouton (1964) conceptualized modes of handling interpersonal conflict, and these styles were extended by Thomas (1976). Rahim (1983) and Rahim and Bonoma (1979) distinguished interpersonal conflict styles into two distinct parts: self and others. The first part denoted the level (high or low) to which individuals try to meet their concerns. The second part indicates the level (high or low) to which a person is concerned about others (Rahim, 1986). Collectively, these parts demonstrate an individual’s motivation during the conflict. Combining the two dimensions results in five specific styles of handling interpersonal conflict: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising (Hofstede, 2001). Figure 1 presents a combined version of the figures shown by Rahim (1983), Thomas Kilman (1974), and Blake and Mouton (1964), summarizing the conflict styles and similar terminology. Historically, third-
party and emotional expressive conflict styles are not included in the interpersonal conflict literature. Gunkel et al. (2016) argued that both styles are culturally inclusive, and they are present in marginalized communities.

The integrating style emphasizes a need for a solution and closure in conflict, involving high concern for self and for others in conflict negotiation (Ting-Toomey, 2002). Integrating is collaborating, and the conflict mode is a “willingness to exchange information openly, to address differences constructively and to make every effort to pursue a solution that will be mutually acceptable” (Cai & Fink, 2002, p. 68). Research has suggested that the integrative style is the most effective since it tends to yield win-win situations (Kim & Coleman, 2015, Pruitt & Kim, 2004). Integrative styles have been correlated with relational satisfaction and satisfaction with conflict resolution (Kim & Coleman, 2015).

The compromising style is the intermediate approach of high concern of self and others to achieve a midpoint agreement. This style is characterized as a decent effort to search for an acceptable outcome mutually but without making a concerted effort (Cai & Fink, 2002). Both Kim and Coleman (2015) and Pruitt and Kim (2004) considered compromising a type of integrative style and not a distinct mode of conflict due to its collaborative nature.

Gunkel et al. (2016) define the third-party conflict style as a compromising style. The third-party style discourages argumentativeness by engaging another person to help mediate the conflict. Participants described using another person to help mediate the conflict, maintain harmony, and discourage argumentativeness.

The dominating style is an individual’s need to control and dominate the conflict, which focuses on one’s goal over the other person’s conflict interest; an individual who practices the dominating style might engage in threats, aggressive behavior, put-downs, and unwillingness to
move from one’s initial position (Cai & Fink, 2002). Kim and Coleman (2015) found that a dominating style was positively related to satisfaction with conflict outcomes but not with processes and relationships. They reported that people who use the dominating style would be satisfied with conflict outcomes in the U.S. culture because they use their authority and power to reach an outcome that they desire.

The obliging and accommodating style represent a high concern for the other person’s interest above and beyond one’s own interest. This non-confrontational style tends to give in to the other person’s concerns while giving up one’s own needs and interests. This style’s value demonstrates the preservation of relationships, desiring acceptance and yielding to preserve harmony (Corey et al., 2014). Another descriptor is engaging in acquiescence, obtaining the I lose, you win perspective; they are more likely to relent and do not want to cause difficulty (Bowlby et al., 2011).

The avoiding style is evading the topic, party, or situation altogether (Rahim, 1986; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Ting-Toomey, 2000). Cai and Fink (2002) theorized, “avoiding occurs because either the benefit in pursuing the conflict is small or because the other party to the conflict is unlikely to make concessions” (p. 69). Therefore, an avoiding style describes behavior that minimizes addressing the conflict directly, either by ignoring it or shifting attention to a different issue. Withdrawal typically follows (Kim & Coleman, 2015).

The emotionally expressive style is characterized as open communication of emotions, emoting, and using feelings to guide attitudes and behavior. Emotional intelligence is related, as it involves recognizing and controlling the individual’s and others’ feelings and using that ability and information to reduce conflict (Gunkel et al., 2016; Mulki et al., 2015).
As patterned responses to an intense event, conflict interaction style can be learned with one’s cultural and ethnic groups’ socialization process. Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2018) contended there are two central issues in understanding the role of ethnic identity in conflict styles: identity salience, and identity content; identity salience refers to the level of importance of ethnic identity to the individual, and identity content refers to the ethnic values that individuals subscribe to and practice. No studies have examined the interpersonal styles of handling conflict for second-generation Dominicans or their interpersonal conflict coping strategies. However, one may contend that second-generation Dominicans’ experience is represented within the individualism and collectivism value system, and it may provide insight into ethnic and cultural influence on interpersonal conflict modes.

**Individualistic and Collectivistic Conflict Style**

As described, individualism and collectivism tend to be described as stable characteristics associated with particular nations (Hofstede, 2001). Conflict style is predicated upon the desired outcome, and traditionally individualistic and collectivistic cultures have distinct ways to approach discord. Individualistic traits give a person the opportunity to be self-assertive, litigious, and access and control the process of articulation (Kim, 2001). In contrast, collectivistic societies view yielding and compromising as desirable virtues that promote substantive goals (Kim, 2001). As outlined in Kim (2001), East Asians emphasized the moral value and interpersonal obligation over justice in a conflict. U.S. Americans, in contrast, gave priority to the justice obligation (Kim, 2001). U.S. Americans tend to identify breaches of friendship and kinship as expectations and the minor needs of others as matters of personal choice (Kim, 2001).

Theoretically, people who subscribe to more individualistic values tend to use direct conflict styles, such as dominating/controlling modes (Greenfield et al., 2000). Conversely,
individuals who identify more closely with collectivistic group membership tend to use indirect interpersonal conflict styles, such as the obliging/accommodating style and avoidance/withdrawing modes (Greenfield et al., 2000; Ting-Toomey, 2000). Gunkel et al. (2016) considered integrating, compromising, and emotionally expressive conflict styles moderately individualistic and collectivistic, where an individual maintains traits from the constructs.

Kim and Coleman (2015) posited that “individuals . . . can align their individualism-collectivism depending on situational cues” (p. 140). Individuals can display both individualistic and collectivistic attitudes during conflict while interacting with a specific reference group or person. There are individualists and collectivists in every society, simply due to influences from societies and environments (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Triandis, 1995, 2018). For example, an individual might have an individualistic attitude when engaging with his co-workers but exhibit a collectivistic attitude when interacting with close family members.

Criticism of interpersonal conflict styles points out Western interpretations of the obliging and avoiding styles. Western cultures tend to associate the two styles with a negative connotation, such as being disengaged; however, many Latinx ethnic groups do not perceive these styles as unfavorable but rather as tools to maintain relationships (Casas & Pytluk, 1995; Garcia, 1996; Padilla, 1981). Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2018) suggested that traditional Latinx American conflict practices, tactfulness, and consideration of others’ feelings (involved in obliging and avoiding conflict styles) are a part of their cultural norms in interpersonal confrontations.

While empirical support of interpersonal styles for Dominican Americans has not been investigated, Locke and Bailey (2013) contended that traditional Mexican Americans’ approach
to communication requires the use of diplomacy and tact, whereas members of the U.S. dominant culture are taught to value openness, frankness, and directness. Additionally, in Mexican American culture there is a degree of concern, care, and respect for others’ emotional well-being preserved in interactions (Sue et al., 2019). In their peer review, Holt and DeVore (2005) found that Mexican Americans’ use avoidant conflict style, suggesting that preserving relational harmony in conflict among Mexican Americans is essential for familial cohesion.

A study examined the influence of ethnic background, ethnic identity, ethnic identity salience, and cultural identity salience on interpersonal conflict styles among African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, and Latinx Americans. Ethnic and cultural identity salience was defined as the extent to which people feel a sense of belongingness, involvement in ethnic activities, and favorable in-group attitudes. The ethnic group is an important reflection of the self, and there is a sense of ethnic identity clarity (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). The investigators studied a sample size containing 662 participants, with the majority recruited from several medium-sized universities in California’s southern region. Factor analysis yielded four dimensions of ethnic identity: ethnic belonging, fringe, intergroup interaction, and assimilation. Second-order factor analyses yielded two clear identity dimensions: ethnic identity salience and cultural identity salience. Factor analysis yielded seven conflict management styles: integrating, compromising, dominating, avoiding, neglecting, emotional expression, and third party.

Findings indicated that Latinx Americans and Asian Americans use avoiding and third-party conflict styles more than African Americans do (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). Additionally, individuals with a strong host cultural identity (i.e., identifying with dominant U.S. culture) use integrating, compromising, and emotionally expressive conflict styles more than individuals with a less salient cultural identity. Individuals with a strong ethnic identity use the integrating
conflict style more than individuals with a less salient ethnic identity. Individuals with a strong ethnic identity (i.e., identifying with their ethnic memberships) use integrating conflict style more often, and they use less neglecting and third-party conflict styles than individuals with a weak ethnic identity. Latinx Americans with a weak cultural identity use neglecting conflict style more than other ethnic groups regardless of cultural identity. African Americans with a strong cultural identity use neglecting conflict style less than other ethnic groups regardless of cultural identity. Bicultural and assimilated groups use integrating and compromising conflict styles more than the dominant American group (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000).

The concept of ethnic/cultural identity salience is complex and challenging to try to capture in a few dimensions. Additionally, the investigators recruited from a college population, limiting the generalizability of the results. These findings are of interest when considering second-generation Dominican American individuals, specifically taking into account the saliency of their ethnic identity and how that may impact their interpersonal conflict style.

**Gender and Conflict**

Holt and DeVore (2005) reported gender differences for conflict and resolution styles, impacted by individualistic and collectivistic culture. The authors conducted a meta-analysis using 123 paired comparisons within 36 studies and examined conflict resolution patterns considering three variables: culture (individualistic versus collectivistic), gender, and organizational role. They found individualistic cultures choose forcing (dominating) as a conflict style more than do collectivistic cultures; collectivistic cultures prefer the style of withdrawing, compromising, and problem-solving; in individualistic cultures, women endorse compromising styles; men are more likely to report using force than females in individualistic cultures.
Researchers compared attachment levels, conflict resolution strategies, and marital satisfaction in women from Israel, the United States, Turkey, and Spain (Bretaña et al., 2019). A sample of 343 individuals involved in a romantic relationship at ages 18–68 (M = 35.4, SD = 11.83) completed measures of attachment dimensions, conflict resolution strategies, and marital satisfaction. Differences were observed among women from Israel, the United States, Turkey, and Spain for attachment (avoidant and anxiety). In individualistic countries, women reported using conflict withdrawal to a higher extent. The authors revealed that withdrawal in conflict resolution involves an active strategy. They found that reports of “stop discussion early” in conflict indicated a more active (agency) strategy used by women from individualistic societies. They added that women from collectivistic cultures showed higher avoidant attachment levels and use of a demand strategy. Therefore, even though individuals from collectivistic societies tend to avoid conflict with outgroups in general settings, in close relationships, individualism links to the specific agentic facet of withdrawal strategy (Bretaña et al., 2019).

**Interpersonal Victimization**

An area of research relating to conflict is interpersonal victimization. Investigations on victimization have focused on physical and sexual victimization, and to a lesser extent, stalking, threatening, and witnessing victimization, re-victimization, and poly-victimization (Cuevas et al., 2012). Comparisons of Latinx and non-Latinx adults in national representative samples in the United States have generally yielded similar physical violence levels for Latinxs and non-Latinxs. The 2014, National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data revealed a rate of 16.2 per 1,000 for assault among Latinx females and, on average, 20 per 1,000 among non-Latinx women (U.S. Department of Justice, 2018). Cuevas et al. (2012) found that more than half of the Latinx women in the study (53.6%) reported at least one victimization experience during their
lifetime, with approximately two-thirds of the victimized women (66.2%) experiencing more than one victimization incident, pointing to significant levels of poly-victimization and re-victimization patterns across all victimization types. The results provide lifetime interpersonal violence estimates and present a broader scope of this population’s victimization experiences (Cuevas et al., 2012). Aizpitarte (2014) examined dating violence in young individuals, finding that women in individualistic societies tend to report less emotional and cognitive aggression than do women in collectivistic cultures. Additionally, individualistic women seem more likely to rely on their self-sufficiency. The findings show emotional expression after conflict, giving insight into how conflict styles shed light on internal and behavioral processes in response to conflict.

**Additional Conflict Styles**

Two other studies (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001; Yarnell & Neff, 2013) identified additional interpersonal conflict style constructs (self-compassion and agreeableness) that capture the relational experience. Yarnell and Neff (2013) examined whether self-construal and ethnicity predict individuals’ self-reported conflict styles in small-group settings. Specifically, they investigated the link between self-compassion and the balance of the needs of self and other in conflict situations. The sample consisted of 267 female and 239 male college students attending a public, southwestern U.S. university. The participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 24 years of age, and the sample was 54% European American, 31% Asian/Asian American, 9% Latino/Hispanic, 4% multiethnic, 2% African American, and 0.2% Native American. The investigators found that higher levels of self-compassion were related to a greater likelihood to compromise and greater authenticity, lower levels of emotional turmoil, and higher levels of relational well-being.
Intercultural and relational approaches are documented in the study of interpersonal conflict. Relational researchers’ investigations of interpersonal relationships focus on numerous groups and dyads such as parent-adolescent relations, married couples, and romantic relationships, all of which fall into a family structure.

**Relational Conflict**

**Latinx Family Conflict**

Studies focusing on Latinx familial conflict have directed their investigations toward parent-adolescent dyads, acculturation gaps concerning family cohesion, adaptability, and *familismo* (Kuhlberg et al., 2010; Telzer, 2010). How interpersonal conflict is resolved or managed strongly impacts most relationships’ quality (Gottman, 1994). Few empirical investigations have examined how individuals exposed to more than one culture (e.g., bicultural influences) handle interpersonal conflicts (Kim-Jo et al., 2010). Specifically, interpersonal conflict may arise when immigrant parents expect their children to adhere closely to their traditions (Lee et al., 2017). Individuals may struggle to follow the traditional values and beliefs of their family’s culture or conform to the U.S. American culture (Castillo et al., 2008).

Many Latinx subgroups, including Dominicans, often experience a high level of social instability due to poverty, transmigration patterns, and a history of political unrest (Lee et al., 2017). These life events and conditions may attenuate familial cohesion or strengthen the family unit. Once relationships form, Latinxs often build strong interpersonal bonds with family members or otherwise. Miller et al. (2000) noted that the family and organization structure strongly influence family members’ behavior, impacting how they relate with one another with those beyond the family.
A study by Smokowski et al. (2008) investigated how adolescents’ and parents’ acculturation (culture of origin) and U.S. cultural involvement, biculturalism, conflicts, and parent-adolescent acculturation gaps influenced family dynamics (family cohesion, adaptability, familism, and parent-adolescent). The sample consisted of 402 adolescent-parent pairs representing 804 total participants; 62% percent of the families lived in North Carolina, and 38% percent of the families lived in Arizona. Smokowski et al. (2008) found that U.S. cultural involvement (use of English, media preference, and celebration of holidays) was a cultural asset related to higher family cohesion, adaptability, and familism, and lower parent-adolescent conflict. According to both adolescents and parents, culture-of-origin involvement and biculturalism were positively related to family cohesion, adaptability, and familism. Additionally, bicultural Latinx families displayed significantly lower conflict levels and demonstrated more commitment, help, and support among family members. The geographical area studied limits the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the study examined Latinx from various countries of origin, and the researchers did not compare subgroups due to sample size. The acculturation process is likely to vary by country of origin (Smokowski et al., 2008).

The literature on family research establishes a link between the quality of a couple’s marital relationship and their parenting and co-parenting relationships; this suggests parents construct the interpersonal model for their children (Moore & Florsheim, 2008). Specifically, Moore and Florsheim (2008) identified links between observed conflict interactions and risk for child abuse and harsh parenting among African American and Latinx adolescent mothers and their partners. Female participants were between the ages of 14 and 19, expecting their first child, and willing to meet with researchers in their partners’ company. The investigators recruited inner-city agencies that primarily served African American and Latinx adolescents.
Evidence suggests that stress or conflict in couples’ relationships tends to integrate into the parent-child relationship (Moore & Florshiem, 2008). Adolescent mothers and their partners are at heightened risk for engaging in dysfunctional parenting, including child abuse. However, these results only showed a small part of the participants’ narrative; the study targeted parenting’s negative components. The authors noted that a limitation is the lack of examination of positive qualities, even with those who engaged in highly dysfunctional parenting (Moore & Florshiem, 2008).

**Couple’s Conflict**

Bermudez et al. (2006) conducted a study to identify conflict resolution styles most predominant among 191 married Latinx couples (residing in Houston and Dallas) and examined what demographic characteristics might be related to couples’ conflict resolution styles. Conflict resolution style (avoidant, volatile, and validator) was significantly related to the wives’ and husbands’ religiosity, husbands’ religion, the language in which the husbands answered the survey, and the wives’ education. Sixty percent of the participants self-identified as having a validating style of conflict resolution.

Additionally, Bermúdez and Stinson (2011) examined if the culturally informed subscales of the Marital Conflict Scale were better suited for Latinx couples. The participants were 191 married couples residing in Houston and Dallas. The sampling criteria required both partners to be legally married, heterosexual, and self-identified as Hispanic/Latino/a. The majority of the sample (66.2%) were immigrants born outside of the United States. Overall, no statistically significant differences were found in conflict resolution styles between women and men. The authors utilized Latinx critical race theory as a framework to understand the
intersections of gender and culture for Latinx couples, focusing on specific layers of
subordination based on immigration history and language (Bermúdez & Stinson, 2011).

Wheeler et al. (2015) examined associations between Mexican-origin spouses’ conflict
resolution strategies (i.e., non-confrontation, solution orientations, and control), gender-type
qualities and attitudes, cultural orientations, and marital quality in a sample of 227 couples. They
found that husbands mostly employ a non-confrontational conflict style and withdraw during the
conflict, and wives are more likely to use control and demand (Wheeler et al., 2015).

**Latinx Conflict Resolution Styles**

The literature on Latinx conflict resolution styles is limited. However, a few studies
(Bermúdez et al., 2006; Bermúdez & Stinson, 2011; Wheeler et al., 2015) have focused on
identifying normative behavior in conflictive situations. Bermúdez and Stinson (2011)
specifically reported the importance of identifying conflict resolution styles for Latinxs to
minimize over-pathologizing. Traditionally, Latinxs are described as avoidant to maintain
harmony, which behavioral characteristic is perceived to be shared among people from
collectivistic cultures (Bermúdez & Stinson, 2011). Although conflict avoidance can be
problematic for couples, it can also serve a positive cultural function (Bermúdez & Stinson,
2011).

**Coping With Stress**

Stress derived from interpersonal conflicts, such as distress among caregivers, has been
shown to impact Latinxs’ psychological health status (Kuhlberg et al., 2010; Perez & Cruess,
2014). Kuhlberg et al. (2010) interviewed 226 adolescent Latinas; 64 participants identified as
Dominican, 72% of the sample was U.S. born, and 50% had histories of suicide attempts. The
participants reported having attempted suicide in the past six months, and they were recruited
from the New York City area. Using path analysis, familism (as a cultural asset) was associated with lower levels of parent-adolescent conflict but higher levels of internalizing behaviors, while self-esteem and internalizing behaviors mediated the relationship between parent-adolescent conflict and suicide attempts. While familism acted as a protective factor against parent-child conflict, it showed a strong positive relationship to internalizing behaviors and a negative relationship to self-esteem. The authors posited that reducing parent-daughter conflict and fostering closer family ties has the added effect of improving self-esteem and reducing the likelihood of suicide attempts (Kuhlberg et al., 2010). One of this study’s limitations is the purposive sampling strategy; they used female participants from mental health centers that had attempted suicide and a convenience sample for their comparison group. Additionally, results only reflect those surveyed in one specific metropolitan area.

As outlined in the literature review by Perez and Cruess (2014), stress experienced from interpersonal conflict, specifically from family members, can manifest in somatic or physiological symptoms. Signs of distress occur at a cognitive, emotional, physical, or behavioral level (Pouwer et al., 2010).

A few studies have reported family and community support systems by other Latinx groups during stressful events, not specifically from interpersonal conflict (Calzada et al., 2012; Pagan et al., 2013). Pagan et al. (2013) found that Puerto Rican female college students were more likely than Puerto Rican male college students to use social support as a stress-coping strategy, and from the sample, college students less than 25 years old used social support more often than older college students. In a different study, students who described having social supports were less likely to report being stressed (Mahmoud, 2012). Other investigations have focused on stress-related issues associated with chronic health-related problems such as diabetes
(Gonzalez Rodriguez et al., 2019; Payan et al., 2019). Ahola and Groop (2013) noted that psychological factors such as insufficient knowledge contributed to poor coping and problem-solving skills, and hindered self-care for Dominicans. *Familismo* is a natural support system providing physical, emotional, and social support for Latinxs; family support may be an important buffer for Latinxs (Dunn & O'Brien, 2009) and second-generation Dominicans encountering stressful situations.

Researchers identified stress-coping approaches used by 303 college students (27% male and 73% female) attending a private university in the Dominican Republic (Thomas et al., 2017). The inclusion criteria consisted of participants aged 17 years or older, and currently enrolled in the university’s Spanish language academic programs. The study examined sociodemographic characteristics, substance use, mental health, and stress-coping approaches. The researchers found that older students in good academic standing were more likely to engage in exercise as a response to stress. Smoking cigarettes was significantly higher among racially White Dominican students. The authors found that participants responded to stress; listened to music; and used more than one stress-coping approach, such as exercise. However, they noted that since the study took place in a private institution, limitations existed in the generalizability of results; students attending private universities are more often from upper-class families and may have more financial means to help them cope with various kinds of stressors than does the general population (Thomas et al., 2017). Another limitation is that the participants lived in the Dominican Republic, limiting its generalizability to the experience of Dominicans living in the Dominican Republic.

Latinx family values may impact Latinxs’ physical and mental health behaviors (Perez & Cruess, 2014). Dunn and O’Brien (2009) examined the relative influences of gender, perceived
stress, social support from family and significant others, and positive and negative dimensions of religious coping to predict psychological health and sense of meaning in life. The participants consisted of 179 Central American immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes as part of an adult education program and living in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. The results reveal that Latinxs’ greater perceived stress was predictive of psychological health and sense of meaning in life, while social support from a significant other also explained variance in meaning in one’s life. For Latinx immigrants separated from family members, receiving support from a significant other may be likely to correspond to a sense of personal meaning (Dunn & O’Brien, 2009). Contrary to their hypothesis, men and women were equally likely to perceive support from their families and significant others and use religious coping. One limitation noted was that the study design was correlational, and causal relationships were not tested. Thus, participants may not be representative of all immigrants, and directionality cannot be inferred.

Within the context of Latinxs’ cultural system that emphasizes relationships as a core value, distress from interpersonal conflict may contribute to anxiety or depression. Many investigations have focused on work from a deficit model, specifically maladaptive behavior with minimal discussion on the cultural influence on adaptive and protective factors (Mariglia et al., 2011; Schwartz et al., 2012b). Gottman and Notarius’s (2002) review contends that some conflicts are productive by creating a balance between positivity and negativity, increasing relationship satisfaction. A couple’s conflict that develops in the context of a mutually supportive relationship is more likely to have a positive resolution (Driver & Gottman, 2004; Gottman & Notarius, 2002). For example, in a study that used observational methods to study 49 newlywed couples in a 10-minute dinnertime interaction and a 15-minute conflict discussion, they found
support for the importance of daily moments (with playfulness and enthusiasm) in relationships. Since the study was observational and correlational, further research would be needed to determine the direction of causation. It is important to note that Driver and Gottman (2004) did not make racial distinctions in their research, thus limiting the study in terms of generalizability to all Latinxs relationships.

Further research is needed to examine interpersonal conflict, stress, and coping strategies for Latinxs, explicitly investigating the experience of second-generation Dominicans living in the United States. The ethnic and cultural environments guide individuals in relating to others and in navigating behaviors that surface during times of conflict. It is essential to comprehend the complex relationships between ethnic background, ethnic identity, and cultural identity in informing different interpersonal conflict styles. A greater understanding of these factors may provide a better comparative picture of identity and conflict styles to offer insight into how Dominicans handle interpersonal conflicts, uncovering possible adaptive modes.

**Summary**

Immigration patterns have shaped second-generation Dominicans’ identity, creating a transnational identity linking elements from life in the Dominican Republic to the U.S. American life (Itzgsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000; Lee et al., 2017). Rather than viewing collectivism and individualism as two distinct dichotomous opposites, the dimensional approach offers a theoretical framework to illustrate how second-generation Dominicans identify with their cultural identification and group membership (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Gaines et al., 1997).

Culture facilitates the formation of ethnic identity and personality formation. Ethnic identity may serve as a multidimensional component that may be a potential risk and protective factor for high emotional distress, specifically when it comes to interpersonal conflict. Second-
generation Dominicans’ conflict styles may be influenced by their cultural group membership (Ting-Toomey, 2000). Therefore, viewing conflict styles through the lens of individualistic and collectivistic values may provide insight into ethnic and cultural influence on interpersonal conflict modes. Gender differences in conflict styles and resolutions are impacted by cultural affiliation. Interpersonal conflict research highlights numerous familial groups’ dynamics, such as parent-adolescent, married couple, and romantic relationships. Familial obligations and caregiver stress can influence the psychological health status of Latinx individuals. Further research is needed to illustrate the nature of the phenomenon of how culture impacts attitudes and behaviors within relational dynamics, mainly when conflict arises, and the coping mechanisms expressed.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This qualitative study aimed to understand and describe how ethnic and cultural identity influence how Dominicans living in the United States cope with interpersonal conflict. For the purposes of this study, interpersonal conflict is defined as a process between two people as they experience anxiety or stress due to a perceived disagreement, argument, difference, or hindrance to a goal.

Specifically, this study investigated the following research questions:

1) How does ethnic and cultural identity for second-generation Dominicans living in the United States inform the experience of interpersonal conflict and stress?

2) What are the various ways second-generation Dominicans cope with interpersonal stress?

This chapter includes descriptions of the research paradigm and design, theoretical framework, participants, procedure, individual interviews, analysis, validity and credibility, and researcher reflexivity.

Paradigm and Research Design

The study method focused on understanding the individual as a unique, complex entity through a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005). Through deep reflection, interpretations were understood and described, as they were uncovered through the interaction of the investigator and participants. Through the interview and analysis, there was co-construction of their stories. A constructivist paradigm recognizes the existence of multiple, constructed realities rather than a single actual reality (Ponterotto, 2005). A constructivist paradigm also recognizes that the lived experiences of second-generation Dominicans in this study are not
generalizable to other groups. The goal was to better understand the lived experience of second-generation Dominicans residing in New York City.

This study utilized narrative inquiry and individual stories to develop ideographic research. Contemporary narrative inquiry is a “combination of interdisciplinary approaches revolving around the biographical and autobiographical events [life history and story] and experiences as narrated by the one who lives them” (Chase, 2005, p. 656). There is an attempt in retrospective meaning-making in shaping and structuring past experiences. Researchers may view themselves as narrators as they develop and interpret their ideas about the narratives that they have studied (Lieblich et al., 1998). This comprehensive study examined the personal, familial, and community context of Dominicans through narratives shared in semi-structured interviews. Interviews provide insight into conflict and resolution styles and protective factors for coping with distress, which has important implications for understanding challenges.

**Theoretical Framework**

The investigation used the dimensions of collectivism and individualism as a theoretical framework to describe how second-generation Dominicans gravitate toward their cultural group membership. Individualism and collectivism tend to be described as stable culturally derived characteristics. Conflict style is predicated upon the desired outcome, and traditionally individualistic and collectivistic cultures have distinct ways to approach discord. Theoretically, people who subscribe to more individualistic values tend to use direct conflict styles, such as dominating/controlling modes (Greenfield et al., 2000). Conversely, individuals who identify more closely with collectivistic group membership tend to use indirect interpersonal conflict styles, such as the obliging/accommodating style and avoidance/withdrawing modes (Greenfield et al., 2000; Ting-Toomey, 2000). Gunkel et al. (2016) considered integrating, compromising,
and emotionally expressive conflict styles moderately individualistic and collectivistic, where an individual maintains traits from the constructs. Kim and Coleman (2015) posited that “individuals, however, can align their individualism-collectivism depending on situational cues” (p. 140). Individualism and collectivism guided the interview questions, themes, and analysis, and they are viewed on a spectrum rather than in dichotomized categories.

The interview questions were developed to understand each participant’s ethnic identity, salient cultural influences, conflict styles, resolution, and coping strategies. Individualism and collectivism are cultural constructs that describe several factors, including but not limited to values, norms, goals, behaviors, beliefs, and patterns of interaction. Since individuals can display both individualistic and collectivistic attitudes during conflict while interacting with a specific reference group or person (Triandis, 2018), the study questions explored collectivistic and individualistic cultural influences from both the United States and the Dominican Republic. For example, an individual might behave independently, which is an individualistic value, while engaging with their co-workers. They may desire to maintain cohesion with family members after conflict, which is a collectivistic trait.

The analysis of the themes incorporated the two constructs individualism and collectivism as a framework. The sources of conflict and conflict styles were generated both deductively and inductively with the constructs into consideration. Individualism and collectivism were used to described sources of conflict based on cultural elements, such as the participant’s values, norms, and beliefs. Inductive reasoning was used to develop the subthemes of the salient values affiliated with the sources of conflict for the participants. Individualism and collectivism were seen in the attitudes and behaviors as an initial response or the desired outcome goal. Deductive inquiry was used in the analysis and the use of the conflict styles reported in Gunkel et al.
(2016); the authors used Rahim’s (1983) conflict styles and three additional styles, which have been historically used to described conflict styles.

**Procedure**

**Participants**

The inclusion criteria for the study required participants to be at least 18 years old, born and raised in New York City, and identified as second-generation Dominican. New York City has had a large Dominican community since the 1960s (Hoffnung-Gaskof, 2009). The United States is the most popular destination for Dominicans living abroad, accounting for about 75% of all emigrants from the Dominican Republic. Within the United States, 60% of all Dominican immigrants live in one of two states: New York and New Jersey (Babich & Batalova, 2021). At the time of this study, 44% resided in the state of New York, with 28% living in Bronx and New York (Manhattan) counties alone (Babich & Batalova, 2021). Dominicans are among the largest ethnic groups in New York, with Washington Heights (located in Manhattan) considered the center of the Dominican community (Renner, n.d.).

For this study, second-generation Dominicans are defined as individuals born in the United States to two Dominican parents who emigrated to the United States from the Dominican Republic after reaching adulthood (after 18 years of age). Individuals who arrived in the United States before they reached adulthood are considered 1.5 generation, and they did not meet the inclusion criteria. There are differences between children of immigrants born in the Dominican Republic and children of those born in the United States (Rambaut et al., 2001). The parents’ country of birth would impact their developmental stages, familial socialization, education, and environmental upbringing, as well as their emotional connection to their country of birth (Portes et al., 2016; Tovar & Feliciano, 2009; Zgou, 1997). Dominicans that are 1.5 generation tend to
have a higher affinity for their nation of origin than other groups (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2018, 2020).

Participants were recruited through social media outlets, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter; a recruitment flyer was posted on the researcher’s homepage, which was shared with friends, family, several Latinx community organizations, and graduate school groups.

In many forms of qualitative research, investigators seek to achieve thematic redundancy through ongoing sampling, such that new themes and properties are not identified in the data (Maxwell, 2013). Generally, the literature recommends that researchers seek samples of between eight and 12 participants to achieve saturation; this range is considered to be sufficient in gathering rich data and meeting requirements for narrative inquiry (Maxwell, 2013).

**Participant Demographics**

Fifteen participants met the inclusion criteria. They self-identified as second-generation Dominican or Dominican American living in New York City. Participants were between the ages of 19 and 46 years old; the median age was 31 years old. Eleven identified as female, three as male, and one participant as gender fluid. Eleven revealed that they identify as Dominican, three as Dominican American, and one as American Dominican. Fourteen participants stated that they were heterosexual, and one participant identified as gay. Eight reported being married, six as being single, and one as being legally separated. Six participants completed a master’s degree, six are currently in a bachelor’s program, two earned a bachelor’s degree, and one completed high school. Eleven reported holding full-time employment, and four indicated that they were currently full-time students without employment. Fourteen were raised as Catholic, and 10 actively practice Catholicism. Four did not identify as Catholic but reported that they are Christian. One participant did not practice Christianity and shared that he follows Buddhist
philosophy. Annual income ranged from $20,000 to $250,000. The median annual household income was $65,000. A summary of the participants’ demographics is in Appendix E.

Methods

I obtained Institutional Review Board approval to conduct the study. I screened individuals who expressed an interest in participating in the study were screened to ensure that they met the criteria for the study. I emailed an informed consent form (see Appendix B) to those who met the criteria. Once the informed consent form was electronically signed, the individual interviews were scheduled to take place via videoconferencing (doxy.me) or by phone. Seven participants preferred to interview through videoconferences, while eight participants preferred to use the phone. The participants between 19 to 27 years of age preferred to interview via videoconference, while participants older than 30 preferred to use the phone. I inquired about the participants’ expressions and nonverbal cues, which led to more in-depth responses from these seven participants. The eight participants that used the phone provided in-depth descriptions of their experiences, and many did not need additional prompts for further data.

I emailed the participants a demographic questionnaire which I asked them to complete and email to the my university email address. The demographic questionnaire consisted of items that inquired the participants’ gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, relationship status, education, employment, religious or spiritual affiliations, and annual household income (Appendix C). I digitally recorded the interviews and transcribed them from the recordings. Afterwards, I sent each participant their interview transcript for review, to ensure accuracy and integration of participant feedback. After the preliminary analysis, I sent the results to the participants for feedback. Two participants added more details to their descriptions of their examples of conflict. One participant requested clarification of the different conflict styles.


**Individual Interviews**

The research design utilized semi-structured interviews. I had a guide of questions that I created using extant themes and concepts derived from the literature review, and I had the flexibility to add or adjust questions (see Appendix D). The method is not tightly structured, allowing for internal validity and contextual understanding (Maxwell, 2013). The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. Given the current global context and restrictions related to COVID-19 public health precautions, video and phone conferencing facilitated the rapport-building process, which allowed for observation of body posture and non-verbal cues relevant to the inquiry while offering safe distancing measures.

**Analysis**

I used a thematic analysis (Creswell, 2012; Riessman, 2008) to synthesize second-generation Dominican narratives during data collection. The participants’ narratives were organized into sections such as identity, values, beliefs, norms, self-reported conflict styles, experiences of conflict, and cultural affiliations. Afterwards, the initial codes were recorded. The data were categorized into themes, in which the life stories were described, classified. To code the data, I performed part of the analysis using Rahim’s (1983) five conflict style dimensions (integrating, avoidance, dominating, compromising, and accommodating), plus two additional conflict factors from Gunkel et al. (2016) (emotional expression and third party) (see Figure 1). Gunkel et al. (2016) noted that these conflict styles tend to be culturally inclusive. The data were interpreted to identify meaning of the stories. Next, I represented and visualized the data, by creating charts and diagrams of the themes, which incorporated the narrative and theories within the research aims.
Note. The figure presents a combined version of Blake and Mouton (1964), Rahim (1983), and Thomas (1974). The conflict styles are referenced in Gunkel et al. (2016).

I analyzed the interviews using the procedure outlined in Lieblich et al. (1998), using the following steps were conducted:

1. I read the transcripts several times until a pattern emerged for Dominican and Dominican American identity. Additionally, new participants were recruited until saturation occurred in the themes.
2. I noted the initial and global impressions of the participants.
3. I followed the themes of salient cultural values, sources of conflict, conflict styles, and coping strategies in the narratives.
4. I used colored fonts to indicate the various themes in the story.
5. I followed each theme throughout the transcript, and I organized and recorded the connections and contents between the themes and subsections.
The final step included presenting the themes to the participants to confirm the interpretation.

I used reflective memos, discussed with mentors (who helped unpack experiences), as well as peer debriefing, and I presented the themes to the participants. The memos focused on personal reactions to my experiences during the interviewing process. For example, P10 described using the arts to cope, and he had a mentor who is an artist; I identified with the participant since I had a mentor and used the arts to manage my anxiety. I wanted to react excitedly during the interview, which I did not; I reflected on my experience in the memos.

During the data collection and analysis, I consulted with mentors, including the dissertation chair and a committee member; specifically, one committee member assisted in organizing and structuring the thematic analysis. A doctoral student peer helped process interviews and the analysis; I discussed my personal reactions during the interviews, and the peer reviewer served as a sounding board. I utilized respondent validation to reduce personal bias. Participants had the opportunity to view their transcribed interviews and confirm the interpretation. Three participants responded; two added more details to their experiences with conflict, and one participant added another experience of conflict.

**Validity/Credibility**

The following processes were in place to minimize validity threats and increase the credibility of the conclusions. I, the investigator, have intensive and long-term involvement with many Latinx organizations, sustaining a community presence. I incorporated respondent validation, a system requesting feedback about the participants’ data and conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). After transcribing the interviews, I emailed each participant their interview, and I sent the findings to the participant a second time once the transcript was analyzed. This method assisted in minimizing misinterpretations of the narrative and as a way to identify biases. Various criteria
are incorporated to provide trustworthiness in this constructivist research (Morrow, 2005). Three of the participants reported clarification of their experiences of conflict; they expressed a desire to add more details to the events. Their narratives were expanded by the process of respondent validation.

This study employed fairness, which demands that different constructions be solicited. The participant’s feedback was integral to the analysis process and contributed to facilitating fairness, since the participant received a copy of their transcript for review. During the reporting process, the participants reviewed the themes identified in their narrative. Also, to ensure fairness in the semi-structured interview process, participants were allowed to explore their experiences without judgment within the flexible framework provided. The analysis process used an ontological authenticity perspective, wherein participants’ narratives are expanded and elaborated (Morrow, 2005). Ontological authenticity reflects the degree to which the research has increased each participant’s or group’s consciousness level (Collins et al., 2013). The participant had the opportunity to review the transcribed interview and the opportunity to review the themes generated.

There was a potential for coercion or dual relationships due to my social media presence and membership in several Dominican groups and organizations; however, measures were taken to reduce the impacts, such as excluding former or current students, friends, family members, and known associates. As an active member of these organizations, I was able to advance the study’s goals; my membership facilitated the establishment of rapport, credibility, and in-group safety. I used reflective memos, discussion with mentors (who helped unpack experiences), peer debriefing, and respondent validation to reduce personal bias.
Researcher Reflexivity

Second-generation Dominican journalist, filmmaker, and author, Raquel Cepeda, said in her autobiography, *Bird of Paradise: How I Became Latina*, “[t]he Dominican Republic is my holy land, my Mecca.” This quote reflects my sentiments toward the Dominican Republic as a second-generation Dominican woman. My narrative guided my interest to investigate the cultural influences and interpersonal experiences of second-generation Dominicans. In terms of axiology, my values and lived experience (as a second-generation Dominican) are not separate from the research process.

My parents emigrated from the Dominican Republic to New York in 1976 and 1978. My brother and I were born in Manhattan, New York; he is two years older, raised in the same household. We grew up in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. I identify strongly with Dominican culture, and I identify as a second-generation Dominican. My parents worked odd jobs, and I grew up in a poor working-class neighborhood. I distinctly remember the crack epidemic in Brooklyn, and my parents were hypervigilant to ensure safety.

Our Dominican culture was very present in our home. My parents spoke Spanish exclusively in our home; cooked Dominican dishes; and listened to bachata, merengue, salsa, and Mexican boleros (father’s interest and influence). When I was growing up, my family was my whole world. My parents worked full-time in labor-intensive positions. My mother was more heavily involved in my upbringing; my father worked long hours and sometimes multiple jobs outside of the home. In traditional Dominican households, women raise children, which was the case in my home. My mother cooked every meal, cared for our needs, and made our birthdays extra special. Through modeling, she taught me unconditional love. My first experience of
interpersonal conflict was witnessing the disagreements between my parents, which reflected a
dominating and emotionally expressive conflict style.

I was generally a norm-conforming obedient child that liked school—a true nerd. My
cousins (I have 40 cousins in total but was raised mainly with 20) were my best friends. We
spent weekends and summers together. Disagreements between the cousins sometimes led us to
yelling matches that eventually led to reconciliation. We consider each other as siblings rather
than extended family members. There was considerable distress when there was an argument.
Many of us were emotionally expressive and very direct with our conflict styles. I shift from
avoidance to dominating conflict style, and I am emotionally expressive. I cry when I am hurt,
angry, and more recently when I am happy. We tended to cope by relying on different family
members or talking to mom.

I grew up mostly with my mother’s side of the family. They immigrated to the United
States first and by the time I was 10, all of my aunts and uncles on my mother’s side were in
New York. Most of my father’s side of the family lives in the Dominican Republic. Both of my
parents grew up in rural areas on the island’s northwestern area. My mother grew up in the
mountains of El Cibao, and my father lived close to the city of Santiago de los Caballeros. They
faced many difficulties growing up—mainly poverty. I spent my summers going to my father’s
family’s farm in Botoncillo. The worst parts were the latrine and the bucket baths. The best part
was the animals, especially the calves. The air smelled like warmth, the kind of sensation that
resembles the sky hugging your soul. My brother and I chewed on sugarcane, picked mangos
from the trees, and ran around the farm until the sunset. When the evening arrives, la luz se va
(the electricity [light] goes out), and nothing is scarier (for a city girl) than the pitch darkness of
the night. When I was a child, my parents spoke about poverty compared to Dominicans’
experiences living on the island, where running water, electricity, and food on the table were scarce commodities. We had what we needed, sometimes what we wanted, which always seemed to be more than enough.

We had and continue to have huge family gatherings. It is the norm to engage in constant conversations and gatherings. In New York, we tried to emulate that by celebrating birthdays, baptisms, holidays, etc. There was always music (sometimes from a live merengue _ripiao_ band), Dominican food (home-cooked potluck), beer, and Dominican cake (yellow sponge cake, fruit jam filling, and marshmallow frosting). No matter the occasion, there was always music, food, beer, and cake. Moreover, there is a lot of expressed discomfort and anxiety when there is discord between family members or close friends. Specifically, my mother is emotionally expressive when in conflict with family members; she becomes worried about the status of the relationship when in disagreement to those closest to her.

When I entered kindergarten, I did not speak English. I understood a few terms from my brother and TV shows; however, I was primarily Spanish-speaking. I had never tried a hamburger at that point in my life, and I thought that Sloppy Joes were the most disgusting invention on earth. I was in an English as Second Language (ESL) class, and the administrators and teachers failed to reevaluate my language skills until sixth grade. By the end of kindergarten, I could read basic English books. By the end of first grade, I spoke English relatively fluently. Socializing with my brother and older cousins helped develop my language skills. I did not have many friends outside of my circle of cousins. There was one Dominican family on my street, and they had twin girls who were a year older. It was the only non-familial home I was allowed to visit; my mother was very distrusting. However, we fell out of touch when they moved out of the neighborhood.
When I was in sixth grade, school administrators realized that I did not belong in ESL classes. I was then placed in an English-only speaking class. Even though I did not have any friends in this class initially, sixth grade was the best year of my young life. I was an active member of the school. I was a part of two choirs; I ran for student body president, and I was on the honor roll. Classmates and other students high-fived me wherever I went. It was also a time of sorrow. One of my classmates died of AIDS, and I learned about the disease through that experience. He was 11 years old. Another classmate died due to gun violence. Someone else’s parent died of an overdose.

My parents were highly protective, strict, and conservative. They were and still are very religious. We went to church every Sunday, and I received my Catholic sacraments. Most of my parents’ friends were from the Catholic parish located two streets away from where we lived. I do not identify as Catholic, but my religious upbringing impacted my values and beliefs. Since childhood, I say *bendición* (blessing) as a greeting to my parents and elders, and I pray during difficult times.

My high school was a small public school funded by a Latinx community organization. El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice’s curriculum was based on *Sankofa*—returning to your roots. At a young age, I gained the vocabulary necessary to voice my Dominican identity. Through encouragement, I became a muralist guided by my teachers and mentors. I participated in many social justice protests, marches, and other forms of activism. I engaged in discussions about my identity and the complexity of engaging with Dominican and the U.S. American culture.

During high school, my father opened a small business, a bodega. We were not struggling financially, but we were not by any means middle class. We had less time for parties and
gatherings. My mom started helping my father at the store, and eventually, my brother and I began to help. My family and I worked seven days out of the week for 18-hour shifts. When I was admitted to Cornell University, it was the highlight of my life. Dominican women do not tend to leave home before marriage or later adulthood. Going away to attend college was not the norm, and my parents had difficulties understanding this concept. Unbeknownst to me, my brother, who at the time was attending St. John’s University in Queens and living at home, helped explain to my parents this opportunity. They considered it a U.S. American lifestyle choice, but they eventually supported my decision to attend Cornell. This was the first time I can recall feeling more U.S. American (U.S. White dominant culture) than Dominican. Throughout my childhood, I acknowledged the influences of U.S. dominant culture in my life, and my extended family living in the Dominican Republic reminded me of the differences. However, I never felt fully U.S. American.

During college, I experienced a bit of culture shock. I realized that my thick bilingual tongue plus my New Yorker accent were triggers for prejudicial treatment and discrimination. Class differences between some of the other students and me were very apparent; I did not share my upbringing very often. I gravitated towards Latinx and Black students on campus and I joined the Dominican Alliance club, a Dominican student-led group that organized events. I searched for and found my community.

The conflicts that I experienced with my friends, which did not happen very often, were about time management and spending time with one another. My closest friends behaved avoidantly and then passive aggressively after a confrontation or conflict. During that time, I also majored in Latin American/Spanish Literature to feel closer to my culture and develop my voice. The only two days in 10 years that my father closed the store was when he drove the family for
five hours to Cornell University, when I started my pre-freshman summer program, and when I graduated from college. My privilege of higher education sets me apart from most of my family living in the United States and the Dominican Republic. I focused on myself and developing my voice, which may fall under individualism.

Since then, I have experienced ebbs and flows in how I feel toward my ethnic and cultural identity. There have been moments when I have identified more strongly with Dominican culture than with dominant U.S. American culture, and vice-versa. The racism that I have experienced has led me to identify more closely with my Dominican identity, as I have felt never truly accepted as a U.S. American. Upon self-reflection, I have internalized beliefs and values from both living in the United States and my experiences with Dominican culture. Therefore, my narrative guided my interest to investigate how cultural identity influences interpersonal experiences of second-generation Dominicans living in the United States.

Summary

The investigation’s epistemology heavily focused on the interaction between researcher and participant in capturing second-generation Dominicans’ lived experience. Therein, my involvement as a researcher and my role as a participant-observer intertwine. I am of Dominican descent, and I identify as a second-generation Dominican. I am conscious that my biases, values, and experiences may have impacted the research investigation, although I took steps to reduce bias. Blind spots may have arisen due to the perceived familiarity of the content. Therefore, self-awareness, self-knowledge, and sensitivity throughout the research process were at the core of reflexivity as an investigator. In this study, utilizing Berger’s (2015) recommendation, three measures helped maintain a balance between my researcher’s position and the participants’ position, including the use of a journal, repeated review, and peer debriefing.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The results of the study are in two sections. The first section is the global impression of the participants’ narratives, which focuses on their ethnic identity and most salient cultural experiences that impact the development of the self and relationships. Gaining insight into second-generation Dominicans’ most influential cultural elements, such as values and norms, provides context for understanding their relationship patterns, sources of dissonance, and conflict styles.

The second section consists of broader themes from the participants’ descriptions that directly address the two research questions. Research Question 1: How does ethnic and cultural identity for second-generation Dominicans living in the United States inform the experience of interpersonal conflict and stress? Research Question 2: What are the various ways second generation Dominicans cope with interpersonal stress? The thematic structure can be found in Table 1.

Section One: Global Impressions of the Experience of Ethnic and Cultural Identity

Dominican Identity Salience and Group Belonging

The majority of the participants identified as Dominican, referring to the Dominican Republic as their home base. They acknowledged the presence of the U.S. American cultural influences; however, they noted a stronger emotional connection to Dominican culture. Their Dominican ethnic identity linked the participants to their family, values, traditions, and cultural elements, fostering a sense of belonging.

Participants described their shared experiences of Dominican culture with other Dominicans as familiar. They discussed their time spent in the Dominican Republic, engaging
with Dominican culture through their interactions with music, dancing, enjoying traditional cuisines, speaking the Spanish language, and enjoying the physical environment.

P4 spoke of the complexity of being born in the United States and identifying as Dominican, both in New York and in the Dominican Republic. P4 said:

I would say I’m Dominican, and I was born in New York, that’s what I would say. I would never say I’m Dominican American... No, even when I go to D.R., I’m like, “I’m Dominican.” And they be like, “No, you’re not. You’re American.” I’m like, “Why can’t I be identified as Dominican if my parents are Dominican?” And they be like, “No, because you were born there.” So, I don’t know, people always make a fight over it.

This experience resonated with other participants; they received messages from their family members about their Dominican identity. P5 said that his mother conveyed, “well, you were born here, so you should tell people you’re American.” P5 stated that she is Dominican, and she would never “say Dominican American,” and she tells people that she was “born and raised here in New York.” Participants were told that they are not “Dominican,” or they do not fully belong because they were born in the United States. P7 said, “my family, they never let that go. They’re Dominicans and they’re Dominicans. They give thanks to America, but they’re Dominicans.”

The messages they received from family facilitated the participants’ strong identification with Dominican culture. Participants spoke to the complexity of being a part of both cultures. P13 narrated that he never found himself close to American culture; however, he finds difficulty participating in Dominican culture. For example, he does not speak Spanish fluently, and he “cannot dance.” He noted a disconnection from Dominican culture because of the language barrier.
Some of the participants noted that one of the factors that makes it challenging to identify as American is the racial and ethnic discrimination that they have dealt with throughout their lives. P8 reported, “I definitely don’t feel accepted in the U.S. Too much, you know, racism. It’s hard to feel like an American when so many people don’t treat you like one.” Others noted that they do not feel emotionally tied to the United States, because they have not felt accepted into American society.

Religion has played various roles for participants identifying as Dominican. They described deriving their core values and beliefs from religion and basing their daily living activities on religious holidays. While half of the participants actively identified as Catholic, seven additional participants either followed another Christian denomination or expressed a general belief in Jesus Christ. The participants reported receiving multiple messages about good behavior, treating people with kindness, and respecting oneself and others.

**Dominican American Identity Salience and Cultural Experience**

Four participants identified as Dominican American. The participants attributed their identity to their experiences growing up in a traditional Dominican household and interacting with the U.S. American culture. Three participants identified more strongly as Dominican during their early childhood, middle childhood, and early adolescence. Later in adolescence and in early adulthood, they identified as both U.S. American and Dominican. Identifying with both cultures, they saw part of themselves reflected in the physical environments and cultural elements such as music, food, values, and norms. P10 said:

I’ve always thought of myself as an American kid. I never really identify a lot with Dominican culture until I went to Dominican Republic. . . . And during that moment I felt
sort of like I belonged, I didn’t feel different, which was an interesting feeling. I felt like I could blend it.

He also stated that he does not yearn to connect with Dominican culture, even though it exists. The affiliation with both cultures was present in his life. His experience was similar to that of P9. She illustrated the impact of U.S. American culture and reported that as a result of interacting with other Latin Americans in New York, she lost her Dominican accent. She felt more Dominican growing up, but she feels connected to both the United States and Dominican Republic. This experience is similar to that of P14. She said:

I have some sense of culture in D.R., but I grew up here [in the United States]. The last time I was in D.R., I was 4. So, the U.S. is the only place I’ve actually ever known. . . . So, my mom, as much as she tried to keep a Dominican culture in us, like learning Spanish and stuff like that, we weren’t entirely exposed to all these Dominican traditions. . . . We’ll celebrate the regular American holidays. I can more or less speak Spanish, but she’s tried to hold on to that. It just didn’t really stick. We had an American upbringing.

Likewise, other participants reported that their families were more likely to celebrate American holidays. P14 highlighted being able to interact with both cultures, emphasizing the impact of growing up in New York.

Participants reflected that music connected them to different parts of themselves. P15 reported that she listens to Spanish music (merengue and bachata) when she is feeling nostalgic. In many instances, musical preferences related to connecting more strongly with their ethnic and cultural identity. P10 referred to his playlist when speaking about the different moments that he felt more American than Dominican (and vice versa).
Five participants noted a cultural connection to Black or/and Puerto Rican culture. Second-generation Dominicans attributed this connection to living in proximity to or engaging in cultural influences transmitted through music, food, and colloquial speech. P9’s identification with American culture was based on her connection to Black culture. She noted, “I feel like American culture is Black culture, and that Black culture is the best thing. It doesn’t get better than Black culture. Unfortunately, not all Americans might not feel the same way.” Second-generation Dominicans noted an awareness and appreciation for Black culture. P10 stated:

I grew in Harlem and it was very mixed, there weren’t many White people but there were a lot of Black people, a lot of Puerto Ricans and so there wasn’t any one focus on Dominican culture for me really. Especially when I walked out of my building, there was such a mix of cultures. I feel connected to American culture through Black culture.

P10 referenced Black cultural influences in his neighborhood growing up and how it has impacted his ethnic identity. He reported feeling closer to the U.S. American culture than Dominican culture since childhood. One of the reasons was that Dominican culture was not reinforced by the people or his environment outside of his home. P12 reported on the similarities between Black U.S. American and Dominican culture. She revealed:

When I think about, let’s say, African American culture, it’s very different than the White American culture. It all depends. I think that African Americans just like us Latinos, we put more feelings into what we say. I grew up in East New York, Brooklyn. It is primarily Black. I definitely have some influences from Black culture, which are not that different from you know, the values of Dominicans.
P12 referred to similarities in emotional expression, and she was noting some cultural influences deriving from Black culture. P11 reported exposure to Puerto Rican culture, specifically how music was a bridge between her cultural identity and cultural influences. She said:

So that’s what I remember growing up. Certainly, I am the child of the ‘80s and the ‘90s, I love me some ‘80s and ‘90s merengue kind of style. Well, I grew up also in Williamsburg, which I was surrounded by a lot of Puerto Ricans, so I loved me some salsa, some freestyle. I feel like I had the best of two worlds because I had Dominican side and then I had a Puerto Rican influence. I felt like I was able to blend in pretty well when it came to school and stuff like that, because I had both down, kind of.

She also revealed blending in, knowing the cultural nuances well enough to connect with others with a similar cultural background. P5’s experiences illustrated the complex nature of identity. Second-generation Dominicans’ ethnic and cultural identity is not linear, and she expressed that there are moments in which she has felt more U.S. American by engaging in more of U.S. American cultural elements (Black culture and R&B music), and at other times she felt more Dominican (speaking Spanish and interacting with Dominican cultural factors).

**Section Two: Exploratory Research Questions and Prevalent Themes**

This section presents the most salient and prevalent themes of interpersonal conflict in the broader analysis. The thematic findings of participants are in Table 1 addressing the main research questions (Question 1 and Question 2).

**Question 1: How Does Ethnic and Cultural Identity Inform Second-Generation Dominicans’ Experience of Interpersonal Conflict?**

**Question 2: What are the Multiple Ways Second-Generation Dominicans Cope with Interpersonal Stress?**
Question 1 is addressed through Theme 1: The experience of culture and how it informs relationships and conflict; themes generated described Dominican values as *confianza*, *familismo*, and *personalismo*. Additionally, six subthemes revealed the prevalent sources of conflict with connections to the participants’ cultural value system.

Question 1 is also addressed through Theme 2: Cultural influences on conflict and resolution styles; themes revealed influences from perceived Dominican and U.S. American conflict styles to how second-generation Dominicans behave in conflict. Collectivistic and individualistic traits describe the different conflict modes. Question 2 is addressed in Theme 3: Coping with interpersonal stress. The narrative generated six subthemes. A list of the themes can be found in Table 1.
Table 1

Thematic Structure

Theme 1. The Experience of Culture and How It Informs Relationships and Conflict
   1A. Confianza
       a. Distrust
   1B. Familismo
       a. Privacy and Independence
       b. Women Managing Expectations
       c. Emotional Distance

Theme 2. Cultural Influences on Conflict and Resolution Style
   2A. Dominican Cultural Influences on Conflict and Resolution Style
       (Collectivistic Traits)
       a. Avoidance
       b. Obliging and Accommodating
       c. Third-party (Compromising)
       (Individualistic Traits)
       d. Dominating (Competing and Forcing)
   2B. Dominican + U.S. American Cultural Influences on Conflict and Resolution Styles
       (Collectivistic + Individualistic Traits)
       a. Emotionally Expressive
          (1) Dominican Culture
          (2) Black U.S. American Culture
       b. Integrating (Collaborating and Problem Solving)
          (1) Dominican Culture
          (2) White U.S. American Culture

Theme 3. Coping With Interpersonal Stress
   3A. Support, Validation, and a Desire for Closeness from Others
   3B. Attending Therapy
   3C. Processing Events Alone and Going for a Walk
   3D. Using the Arts to Cope
   3E. Eating Comfort Food
   3F. Redirecting Focus

Theme 1: The Experience of Culture and How It Informs Relationships and Conflict

Second-generation Dominicans created meaning from their relationships and conflict informed by their experiences with the U.S. and Dominican culture. Values, beliefs, and expected norms related to relationships and conflict were modeled and reinforced by their Dominican parents, caregivers, and people closest to them growing up. Participants provided
evidence to support salient Dominican cultural values and norms such as previously documented Latin American cultural values of confianza, familismo, and personalismo (Calzada, Tamis-LeMonda, & Yoshikawa, 2013). The analysis of the narratives generated seven subthemes describing the source of conflict for second-generation Dominicans that relate to the three aforementioned values. The themes are distrust, privacy and independence, impacts of immigration on core values, emotional distance, miscommunication, and power dynamics.

**Theme 1A: Confianza**

To have confianza signifies a firm belief in someone, trust, trustworthiness, and familiarity, as a value, specifically in relationships. All participants noted that their parents and caregivers fostered trust as a value, specifically noting how immigration may have impacted Dominican parents’ high distrust levels. Participants noted that when their parents entered the United States, they had difficulties with the culture and language differences, and many of their parents perceived New Yorkers as cold, emotionally distant, and unwelcoming. Distrust, for their parents, may have stemmed from their hardships and desire to protect their children from a new environment where the social rules were not yet well understood. P15 reported receiving messages of entering or existing in an unsafe external environment, and she felt fearful and hypervigilant as a result. Participants indicated that parents were very strict with their socialization. The participants used confianza to determine and value their friendships. Many reported difficulty trusting others, and they relied on their immediate family for emotional support and companionship. Also, some participants struggled to trust extended family members.

**Distrust.** Second-generation Dominicans stated that one of the most challenging aspects in a relationship is maintaining confianza; when the value is threatened or broken, it is a source of conflict. P14 reported an argument with her mother, wherein her mother did not believe that
she was focused on her studies; P14 was away at college, and she felt that her mother could not trust her to complete her studies, which was hurtful and upsetting. P11 noted that her father did not trust the external environment and the participant; therefore, going out with friends was a source of conflict, even in early adulthood. Other examples of conflict described broken trust between friends and participants feeling as though they could rely on friends; they revealed those relationships as disingenuous, disloyal, and untrustworthy.

**Theme 1B: Familismo**

Second-generation Dominicans in this study were socialized to prioritize family, which was revealed in their narratives. All the participants noted the high value and importance family plays in their lives, and they were taught to value relationships with immediate and extended members. Family facilitated values and beliefs, provided comfort and safety, and are representative of *home*. Participants had a desire to participate in large family gatherings. Many participants with families of their own reflected on how they teach this value to their children.

A few participants noted discord with their fathers, and three participants reported distant relationships with their mothers. A reason provided was second-generation Dominicans prioritizing the individualistic value of privacy and independence, which contrasted with their parents’ worldview. Many of their fathers behaved in ways that were described as *Machista*. It was one of the sources of conflict that second-generation Dominican women noted as difficult to manage as children and adults. Many of the participants shared that they experienced one parent being emotionally distant. When conflict arose in the parent-child dyad, participants expressed disappointment at unmet expectations, lack of emotional support, unfair treatment, judgments, and unrealistic standards; they noted experiencing distress and avoidance. There was a desire to safeguard the family unit, maintain cohesion, and sustain familial relationships, even in conflict.
**Privacy and Independence.** Participants noted that while they were growing up, their parents did not consider privacy and independence as values; instead, participants associated these values with U.S. culture. Participants revealed that the perceived lack of privacy and independence as children and adults (when living at home) was a cause of conflict. They noted that it applied more heavily to second-generation Dominicans than later generations (their children, nieces, and nephews). Participants also indicated that girls and women had a more challenging time exerting independence and privacy than their male family members.

**Women Managing Expectations.** Participants revealed messages that they received from their family and society stemming from traditional Dominican norms for gender roles and expectations. Mothers and female providers took the lead role in raising the children, and many worked in full-time paid employment. Many mothers were first to arrive in the United States, building the family unit’s foundation. Participants reported family decisions, child-rearing, and significant celebrations that their grandmothers organized; their abuelas/grandmothers were described as the matriarchs in their family. Participants noted that women are expected to behave in reflection of traditional Dominican roles that followed Christian doctrine. They received messages that married heterosexual partnerships were preferred, and until a woman is married, she is expected to help care for any younger siblings and the household. Marianismo and machismo are descriptors that resonated within their family dynamics. Participants acknowledged the difficulty of managing female expectations and their desire for more gender egalitarian roles, which many noted as being a part of U.S. values. As aforementioned, many second-generation Dominicans revealed valuing independence and privacy. Within the context of gender, many of the female participants were not afforded the confianza and freedom to be as independent as their brothers and male cousins. P4 also noted that her mother showed
preferential treatment to her brother. She described that her mother gave him more verbal and physical affirmations, and this treatment was a source of conflict.

Participants noted having difficulty relating with their fathers due to their *machista* attitudes and behavior; this difficulty was described in the conflicts they revealed. P1 reported disagreeing with her father about how he treated her mother, the expected conservative female gender roles placed on her, and preferential treatment towards her brother. These areas were identified as sources of conflict for second-generation Dominicans.

**Emotional Distance.** As previously noted, all participants reported the multi-faceted challenges their family members faced coming to the United States, adapting and adjusting to a new way of life. A few participants indicated that their family members changed their values. P9 noted a transition in worldview, from collectivistic to more individualistic. She referenced a separation from traditional Dominican norms of *familismo* due to the sacrifices made to provide financially for the family. She described that her parents spent less time at home, and her caregivers had less emotional energy to expend. Her family members took on individualistic traits, in which financial stability and individual success became a priority. P8 also reported expectations derived from the experience of witnessing her family members sacrifice their lives for the betterment of their children.

Five participants reported perceiving their parents as emotionally distant, which they described as showing minimal physical affection, lacking emotional support, dissociated, and giving few verbal affirmations. Two ways of managing conflict were revealed as: (a) participants responded to the emotional distance with anger and confrontation; and (b) the participants engaged in avoidance when in conflict with the person. All five of these participants noted that
they experienced strong emotional connections with either the other parent or a close family member.

**Theme 1C: Personalismo y Respeto**

Participants noted that building relationships, expressing relational warmth, politeness, and courtesy are essential values. Additionally, participants reported valuing close bonds that are considered safe and loyal. They related *personalismo* to how they experience Dominicans living in the Dominican Republic and how they interact with one another in New York. The core value of *respeto* (*respect*) in relationships and *personalismo* were prevalent themes for second-generation Dominicans, and perceiving disrespect was a leading cause of conflict. P15 was in a disagreement with his co-worker on the job, and he perceived her as disrespectful. P15 stated, “when I felt like I was being disrespected, especially in front of other people, it upsets me.” The participant further described that in the moment he felt infantilized, which escalated his direct confrontation style. Other participants related by describing the experience of being disrespected with perceiving passive aggressiveness and disingenuous behavior. They perceived some White U.S. Americans as using passive aggressiveness in conflict. P11 described her experience with White U.S. Americans. She said,

Well, I don’t deal well with passive aggressiveness. I’m like, “give it to me or don’t give it to me, but don’t give me that underhanded, I’m upset but I’m not going to tell you I’m upset. I’m going to make you feel I’m upset.” Or hints I’m upset. So, to me, my experience with White people, in general, would be like passive aggressiveness, which is a huge trigger for me, for the most part, and entitlements is a big thing too. I feel like there’s a way in which people kind of express or project their feelings or their attitudes in ways that are very inconsiderate to others. It’s kind of like self-absorbed. Like, “this is
happening to me,” and not really taking into consideration the larger context of what’s happening around them.

P11 described the differences in handling conflict between White Americans and Dominicans. She noted many Dominicans as having a more direct confrontational style. The participant revealed in the quote above that her perception of White U.S. Americans’ passive aggressiveness is considered disingenuous because it is presented as subtle behavior, yet the person’s actions seems apparent. P11 felt disrespected as a result of perceived disingenuousness, entitlement, inconsideration, and self-centered behavior.

Miscommunication. Second-generation Dominicans revealed a key theme in personalismo: communication, which extended to relaying information and understanding the context of events. Miscommunication created an area of ambiguity and at times distress. P3 said, “you can communicate with a person, but if they can’t comprehend what you’re trying to say, then you’re not getting anywhere. You’re not going to go anywhere.” She provided an example of losing a friendship after an argument, due to miscommunication; the participants started to focus on building a career, and she had less time to cultivate a friendship; she attempted to communicate her position, but she felt her friend did not understand where the participant was coming from. The participant also reported feeling confused that her friend did not seem to accept or understand a shift in her priorities.

Miscommunication was a source of stress with family members as well. Participants noted difficulty communicating their needs to their parents who regarded their requests as “American and inappropriate.” P11 noted having a hard time explaining to her parents her desire to go away to college; her traditional Dominican parents stated that it is cheaper and safer to live at home, and she does not need to leave home to gain an education. P11 communicated valuing
independence as part of the experiential academic experience; her parents responded with the practicality of studying from home. There is a disconnect that is led by a miscommunication of values and beliefs. The miscommunication primarily falls under both the participant and her parents not being able to accept or understand each other’s point of view or the context of their argument. The interaction between the participants and their parents can be described as intergenerational cultural conflict, in which second-generation Dominicans and their parents have different worldviews and act according to their values.

**Power Dynamics.** Three participants reported their supervisors taking advantage of the power differential in the relationship, which became a source of conflict. P10 stated that he felt powerless in his discord with his supervisor due to his unassertiveness. He suspects that his interactions with his supervisor were racially motivated. P4 reported that she was unfairly targeted by the business owner; she was an employee. One of the reasons she felt slighted was because P4 described personalismo in the Dominican Republic as a source of context for how she expects to be treated in all relationships. She noted that the power dynamics made it difficult to approach her supervisor, which impacted her behavior.

In summary, the analysis of the narratives generated six subthemes, and Dominican and U.S. cultural values provide context for the prevalent sources of conflict for second-generation Dominicans. Figure 2 demonstrates the themes and subsections of Theme 1. The solid lines represent direct connections derived from the participant’s narrative, and dashed lines are indirect links revealed in the analysis. The gray boxes represent Dominican and U.S. American cultural influences. The clear boxes represent cultural values and sources of conflict. The gray ovals are social constructs (machismo and racism) and the experiences with immigration. Figure 2 demonstrates how Dominican and U.S. American cultural values are connected explicitly and
implicitly with the sources of conflict, which seem to be linked to immigration, racism, and 
machismo (gender norms).

**Figure 2**

*The Experience of Culture and How It Informs Relationships and Conflict*

**Theme 2: Cultural Influences on Conflict and Resolution Styles**

Thirteen out of 15 participants reported both individualistic and collectivistic conflict styles. Two participants reported using a collectivistic conflict style. Their narratives generated seven subthemes that fall under the two main themes of collectivistic and individualistic conflict and resolution styles. Collectivistic conflict and resolution styles are found in three subthemes: avoidance and withdrawing, obliging and accommodating, and third-party conflict. Two subthemes (integrating and emotionally expressive conflict styles) have both collectivistic and individualistic traits. Dominating/controlling mode is considered individualistic.
**Theme 2A: Dominican Cultural Influences on Conflict and Resolution Styles: Collectivistic and Individualistic Traits**

**Avoidance and Withdrawing.** Avoidance is evading the topic, party, or situation. Participants noted trying to maintain harmony between both parties by not engaging in the conflict. There is a deep concern for the other person and low regard for themselves.

**Dominicans.** Participants described perceiving Dominicans as behaving in an avoidant way or transitioning from a direct conflict style to avoidant and withdrawing. P9 described her mother’s conflict style as, “she’ll just swallow the whole argument. She won’t say anything,” after emotionally expressing herself. P14 also described the experience as:

> It starts off as yelling and then it can either result in just silence and not speaking for weeks or months or whatever, or it can turn into a full-blown fight . . . I have a hard time communicating with people, this is what went wrong and this is how we can fix it together.

The experience of conflict in this example shows that avoidance hinders open discussions, and there are other conflict styles present, such as emotionally expressive direct conflict style. P4 stated that her main difficulty is attempting to engage in communication with Dominicans during conflict, due to avoidance. She was eliciting open and direct communication in her relationship, which could be considered individualistic.

**Second-Generation Dominicans.** Avoidance and withdrawing were prevalent in the second-generation Dominicans’ narratives. Avoidance was the only conflict style present at some point during the conflict; participants reported engaging in the conflict style as an initial, second, third, or fourth conflict style. They revealed that they are more likely to be avoidant with acquaintances, co-workers, supervisors, and sometimes parents (if they feel their needs will not
be met). P3 said, “I left it as is, and just walked away. And then that was the end of that, I didn’t continue arguing.” P5 described a conflict with her mother, and she said, “I’m not actually just going to go up to you and just tell you the problem. So, I was just like, all right, she’s going to avoid me. I’m going to avoid her as well. . . . I address what is happening and walk away.” P9 described her experience with avoidance; she said, “I get very quiet. Very quiet, and just dangerously quiet. Sometimes, I will go and do a task, like do the dishes quietly, just won’t talk to anybody, or lock myself in my room, or avoid everyone.” P14 said, “I’m normally pretty standoffish when I’m upset. I’m quiet. I have a straight face. I’m not talking. I’m just sitting in a room.” Additionally, P14 revealed her feelings after interacting with her mother, who accused the participant of not paying attention to her schoolwork. She said:

It was pure anger because I know where my priorities fall. I know where my head is at, majority of the time. So, I didn’t like the fact that she was yelling at me, calling me things. I wanted to scream at her so bad and tell her, “you don’t know anything about what’s really going on.” After that, I didn’t call [my mother] for three days. I didn’t want to talk to her. I didn’t want to see her. Nothing.

The participant avoided her mother and the conflict. Many participants noted that they avoid engaging in conflict because they assume their point of view will not be accepted, understood, or heard. Three participants described their experience as “shutting down” during conflict. P15 also said:

I’m like okay that’s it, I shut down. I completely shut down and I have to process whatever I’m dealing with or whatever. And then, but you could tell because my face is my face. The energy, like something shifted.
The participant illustrated the propensity to not speak with the other person or express their thoughts and experience. However, P15 relied on non-verbal physical cues to communicate her state of mind. Participants revealed shutting down to avoid escalating conflict. Many noted wanting to take time to process their thoughts and feelings before reengaging with the person.

**Obliging and Accommodating.** This is a collectivistic conflict style that was prevalent after the participant endorsed avoidance and withdrawing. Second-generation Dominicans perceived other Dominicans and themselves as engaging in this indirect conflict mode. They described giving in to the other person’s concerns while giving up their own needs and interests. P4 said, “you could tell me anything, and I would say, ‘sure,’ and I would never say how I feel, and that just stuck with me, and I’ll feel a type of way towards a person.” P9 reported:

> So, sometimes I do go along with what is being said, for the sake of just not arguing, it takes me a while, in spite of my upbringing, where nobody modeled this shit for me, for me to raise my own head up high, and be like, “no, no, you’re not going to put up with that shit.”

P9 described being obliging to discontinue the conflict; however, she described feeling conflicted over her conflict style. From her statement, it is clear that she finds obliging to be a negative behavior, representing a lack of assertiveness. Four participants used obliging and accommodating as a conflict resolution style to maintain familial harmony. P6 reported that he consciously agreed with his mother to maintain peace. He also noted that he tolerated her point of view because “a son always forgives.” For P6, it seems that forgiveness was presented to make peace and oblige, rather than as a release of resentment or acceptance.

**Third-Party Conflict Styles.** Participants described using another person to help mediate the conflict, which tends to maintain harmony and discourage argumentativeness. Third-party
conflict style is considered a collectivistic trait, and it was used as a third or fourth conflict style. In the family therapy field, this conflict style is called triangulation, whereby a third person is used to deflect the tension between two people (Bowen, 1978; Evert et al. 1984). For example, P6 had a disagreement with his mother; after being avoidant, he reached out to his father, who was then able to mediate the conflict between them. He was able to come to an agreement with his mother. Another example was reported by P11, who said:

   my mom was like, “you got to come home.” And I was like, “why am I going back home if he’s going to be the jerk he is?” I feel bad because I feel like my mom was always the mediator trying to intervene.

P11 shared this experience about a conflict with her father; her mother helped facilitate communication with her father. The participant also noted that for a significant part of her life, her mother helped mend the relationship between her and her father; more recently, the participant stated that she and her father get along, and they can communicate more effectively. The participant noted that when she was younger, she and her father had difficulty reaching a compromise, mainly due to generational differences and miscommunication between them.

**Dominating (Competing and Forcing).** This individualistic conflict style is based on a high concern for one’s interests and a low concern for others’ interests. This conflict mode has forceful tactics, such as threats, put-downs, an unwillingness to move from one’s initial position, and a focus on winning the argument. P9 reported:

   I think it depends on class, because my parents are from de Campo. Not them, them, but people in their area had shouting matches, getting physical, either throwing dishes, which my mom has done when she’s angry, or getting physically violent with another
But shouting matches, yeah, definitely, and somehow communicating the upset.

She highlighted the importance of communication, and she feels she has a difficult time conveying her experience with Dominicans during conflict due to their direct style. Seven of the participants reported a similar description of their Dominican parents’ conflict styles. Some noted that their parents experienced difficult childhoods. P4 referenced the possibility of intergenerational trauma and how Dominican parents communicate the way they learned, which is direct and confrontational. P8 said, “Dominican parents, they will hit you, they will do whatever they got to do to make the correction there, instead of sitting down and talking and understanding. It’s how they grew up, so I think that’s normal for them.” P9 revealed, “I know some people that they just only act, instead of just thinking before they act.” P11 described Dominicans using dominating style as, “a very forward way of communicating that can be offensive.” She continued, “it’s very much what I experienced, especially with my parents’ generation. They don’t hold back, whether good or bad. It’s up to you to have the time if you want to process, kind of thing.”

This conflict style falls under individualism, which is a direct communication mode. P13 reported, “I guess it’s in general, but we’re known and that’s why everybody says. Everybody finds out I’m Dominican, they’re like, ‘Oh, watch out.’ Because we are known for being very hot-headed and very aggressive and short-tempered.” He is describing how generally Dominicans are perceived, which tends to be described as confrontational, forceful, and emotionally expressive.

Second-Generation Dominicans. Participants reported a dominating conflict style as their second or third conflict style; it was not revealed as an initial conflict style nor the last
mode. Second-generation Dominicans mostly used this style with family members and significant others; their behavior ranged from being direct and confrontational to behaving verbally forcefully. No participant reported behaving violently toward someone; two incidents of physical self-defense were reported.

P13 described his behavior as, “I have a foul mouth. That’s when my voice elevates and my language definitely gets a lot more rated R, let’s put it that way, I am definitely more confrontational.” The participant reported engaging in a direct and confrontational manner; he also noted that he felt activated by the person’s tone of voice. He perceived her to be aggressive, and then he became confrontational. P10 described his conflict style as:

I start to talk back, I’m loud, and I’m breathing heavy. But people in my inner immediate family see me as explosive. I go zero to a hundred to people in my circle. And apparently my mom is infamous for knowing it, for being like that. And when I say explode, I don’t mean get violent, but I get loud, I talk over people, that’s what I get accused of.

P10 described talking over people and being loud, and he was also illustrating how dominating and emotionally expressive conflict style tend to co-occur. He was being forceful, while also expressing his anger. P15 revealed her conflict with her father, and she described their reaction as “loud, explosive, and confrontational.” Her experience provided another example of the connection between emotionally expressive and dominating (direct) conflict style. During conflict, she thought about her child being exposed to aggressiveness and direct confrontational behavior from her father, and this was very activating (causing her to feel angry) for the participant; in response, she became confrontational.
Theme 2B: Dominican and U.S. American Cultural Influences on Conflict and Resolution Style

(Collectivistic and Individualistic Traits)

**Emotionally Expressive Conflict Style.** In the literature, researchers have shown that emotionally expressive conflict style is utilized by both collectivistic and individualistic cultures (Gunkel, Schlaegel, & Taras, 2014). Participants described verbal and physical display of their emotions, and they relied on emoting to guide their conflict response or resolution. The participants perceived Dominicans and U.S. Americans as using an emotionally expressive conflict style.

**Dominican Cultural Influences.** Participants described Dominicans as expressing anger in an argumentative manner. They revealed that for Dominicans, emotionally expressive styles usually occur with or precede a direct and dominating conflict style. P10 stated, “my mom is loud, very outgoing, very in your face, and confrontational.” P13 stated:

Dominicans are loud. We’re very explosive. I think acting genuine is very loud. I want to say extra. I would say we are very extra. Passionate, to twist it to something positive. I would be like, you’re passionate. No, but we’re definitely, I’d definitely say extra dramatic.

P13 described how he perceived Dominicans as emotionally and verbally expressive by increasing their tone of voice and behaving directly. He was capturing a nuanced way of communicating and behaving, which includes a relationship between how one feels and how one sounds. P8 provided another example:

Dominicans let you know when they are upset. I’ve never met a Dominican that doesn’t express it like that. They are ready to defend themselves and their point. It comes off as intense and passionate. Especially when they are hurt about something. You’ll never hear
that they were hurt, way too much pride, but they’ll show you how angry they are by
their tone.

P8’s example shows that emotional expression demonstrates Dominicans’ internal mood, and it
is a part of their communication style. According to the participants, Dominicans inform the
other person of their emotional state (verbally and physically), describe their point of view,
change their tonality, and demonstrate genuineness. It is important to note that the participant
mentioned that she experiences Dominican culture as accepting anger more than showing pain or
being hurt, which the literature describes as a collectivistic trait (Triandis, 2018).

**U.S. Cultural Influences.** Participants perceived Dominicans, living in the United States
and the Dominican Republic, and Black Americans as demonstrating a similar conflict style. P12
stated, “when I think about, let’s say, African American culture, it’s very different than the
White American culture. It all depends. I think that African Americans just like us Latinos, we
put more feelings into what we say.” Throughout their narratives, participants noted their
perceived connection to Black culture, and they felt more connected to the United States by way
of interacting with Black U.S. Americans. P9 described Dominicans and Black U.S. Americans
connecting through their shared experiences, such as those with race and discrimination. The
participants perceived the attitudes and behaviors of Dominicans and Black U.S. Americans to
be similar, particularly in the expression of emotions.

Participants compared Dominicans’ and White U.S. Americans’ emotional expression
during conflict. P12 stated that her perception of White Americans’ conflict style is that it is less
emotionally expressive than Dominicans’, and that White U.S. Americans tend to have a more
indirect conflict style or a violent one (referencing mass shootings). It can be noted that many of
the participants do not have many close relationships with White U.S. Americans. P10 also reported the difference in emotional expression between the groups.

In describing her experience of White U.S. Americans, P8 said:

I see people here get upset. They’ll say things to each other. You can tell that they’re upset by their face and probably their tone, but they won’t curse at each other, right? I think Whites are . . . they’re easier to tell you off and have a straight face and not show emotion and make you feel a little confused.

The participant is illustrating that White Americans seem to be physically less emotionally expressive, but they are more verbal about their experience. Based on the participant’s narrative, verbally expressing their experience seems to be one of the ways second-generation Dominicans behave during conflict.

**Second-Generation Dominicans.** Participants used an emotionally expressive mode as their initial conflict style with close family and friends. This conflict style presented concurrently with another style, and it usually preceded a dominating (direct mode) or avoidant style of conflict. Nine individuals reported verbally expressing their anger. P5 stated, “I tend to get mad easily, I tell the person, and I tend to [give] a lot of attitude.” P8 reported, “I am a hot head. I tend to lose my temper pretty quickly. A part of that comes from feeling like I am not being heard. It activates me in a way that I feel very intensely anger.” Twelve participants reported their emotions as sad, hurt/pain, and angry while engaging in conflict. P9 stated that her initial reaction was to be sad and then angry. P11 said:

Anger, oh, I wear it on my sleeve. You can see it in my face, I’ll just look upset. As you get older, you learn to figure it out. I’ll verbalize what I’m feeling. But yeah, I express it in more ways than one.
P11 revealed that people would be able to tell she is upset, since she is physically displaying her emotions, but she is also verbalizing her feelings. By doing so, it seems to show a commitment and value to communicate her emotions. P1 described her conflict style as, “I tend to cry at first, then I tend to be short-tempered, very responsive, snappy, now, I have learned how to take a step back.” P12 noted that she initially cries out of frustration when feeling angry, and she is avoidant after becoming emotionally expressive. P6 noted feeling numb when his mother falsely accused him of harming her. He later expressed feelings of anger, pain, and hurt. Five participants reported internalizing their experience with conflict. P8 reported, “afterward, I kept thinking about the situation. Like, what I said, what he said. It really stayed with me.” Additionally, P4 described her anxiety experience, specifically rumination and worrying about the event.

**Integrating (Collaborating and Problem Solving).** Participants expressed a willingness to exchange information openly, to address differences constructively, and to make every effort to pursue a solution that will be mutually acceptable. This conflict style is considered collectivistic and individualistic, and it involves mutual understanding of events. Participants described Dominicans, U.S. Americans, and themselves as utilizing this conflict style.

**Dominicans.** Four participants noted that while they view most Dominicans as expressing direct conflict styles, their parents’ experience was not confrontational. P2 described experiencing her parents engaging in an integrating conflict style, which seemed to focus on keeping the family unit together. P12 reported a similar experience and noted:

> My dad never raised his voice on my mom. I don’t have any siblings in the street. I’ve never seen my dad drunk. My dad never put his hands on us, me, my brother and my sister. It was a really good relationship. They listened to each other and worked together.
They were really good role models. I mean, my dad worked a lot and my mom too, but when they were together, it was great.

The participant was emphasizing experiencing her parents getting along well, working together, and they modeled for her a well-balanced relationship.

*U.S. Americans.* P1 emphasized that U.S. Americans communicate more. She said, “over here [in the United States] they understand that you need to express their side, and the other person expresses their side. They come to an understanding, and they agree to disagree that communication should be the first thing.” P1 noted that the U.S. American culture tends to give the message of effective communication. She does not think all Americans can communicate well; however, she believes that good communication is taught as a value. P1 compared U.S. American culture’s expression of emotions to facets of her upbringing in a Dominican household where they did not have conversations about expressing emotions. She revealed that in Dominican culture, parents hold a higher hierarchical status. As such, parents are to be respected, and children should follow their lead without objection.

P12 idealized White U.S. Americans’ conflict style, based on her impressions at work, which demonstrated collaboration and open communication. P4 reflected on White U.S. Americans’ behavior in conflict based on professional settings. P12 described perceived White U.S. Americans’ passive aggressiveness and change in tonality during conflict, and she also noted that because it is a professional setting, their behavior at work might differ from their behavior in other settings.

*Second-Generation Dominicans.* Participants usually used integrating as the last source of conflict and resolution style. For example, P5 described a disagreement with her cousin in
which there was not clarity over her aunt’s involvement (gossip) with the participant’s then boyfriend’s past behavior; she revealed,

at the same time, I was trying to also see her point of view because I’m the type of person that I’m not going to only attack you. I’m also going to see your point as well. So, I kind of . . . I was angry, but at the same time, I was also trying to understand her as well.

P5 described taking the time to cooperate with others, regardless of how she feels initially. This example also showed that the participant engaged in multiple conflict styles; she noted emotionally expressive, dominating, and integrating. Another example provided by P12 stated:

If I think I’m close to you, I pull away first before I say something because I like to watch what I say. I really do believe that you should think before you talk. When I’m upset, I just shut down. And then if I’m comfortable with you, I’ll come back and be like, “listen, this bothered me, X, Y, and Z. Please don’t do that again. I apologize if I offend you.” I have no issue apologizing to anybody. And, I listen to their point of view and work it out together.

The participant described that her conflict style is dependent on whom she interacts with, and she engages in avoidance and a collaborative manner with the people she considers close. P6 described his conflict styles as:

I always step away, think. I rethink things, take a deep breath and get my mind straight. That way, when I come back, I’m not explosive. I already have things in mind, like what to say. If I was at fault, I would tell the person, or I would just try to fix the problem, nice and calm.

The participant was describing being mindful of his behavior, and he is contemplating solutions for conflict. Similarly, P15 was concerned with her self-expression, worried about her
relationship with her father, and she created a resolution for the conflict. She had an altercation with her father, and she became upset because he left his mask. The mask is required due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The participant responded in anger and frustration to her reaction than she used an integrating mode. She attempted to understand where her father was coming from, reconcile with her reactions, and then found a way to help him (by providing multiple masks). Participants provided examples of self-assertiveness, frankness, and openness to discuss their perspectives.

**Patterns of Conflict Style**

Dominican conflict styles have not previously been reported in the literature. Second-generation Dominicans’ narratives revealed that they do not have a primary conflict style. However, conflict style patterns emerged. In conflict, collectivistic-individualistic strategies and types of communication coexist and may surface depending on the context (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Triandis, 2018).

Patterns illustrate that participants reported initially engaging in a conflict style that is moderately collectivistic-individualistic, followed by an individualistic style, and ending with a moderate or collectivistic trait. For example, eight participants endorsed an emotionally expressive period with a direct conflict style, followed by integrating behavior, and when the conflict was unresolved, the participant became avoidant or withdrawn. The results suggest that participants initially desire to express themselves directly and collaborate with the other person. If the conflict continues, the person disengages from the activating event and the other individual, as seen in Figure 3.
Figure 3

*Most Common Conflict Style Pattern*

Figure 3 shows the most common conflict style pattern for second-generation Dominicans. Eight participants reported using this conflict style, and two of the eight engaged in the same pattern with different people and events. Many participants said they interpret Dominicans engaging in an emotionally expressive and dominating style, and they perceive U.S. Americans as engaging in an integrating style.

For example, P5 described a disagreement with her cousin in which there was not clarity over her aunt’s involvement (gossip) with the participant’s then boyfriend’s past behavior. The participant expressed both individualistic and collectivistic conflict styles. She reported self-assertiveness in expressing her position, and she was *emotionally expressive*; she stated, “I have no problem trying to express myself.” She became *angry, aggressive in tone, and direct*. In describing her state during conflict, she said, “I tend to get mad easily and I tend to [give] a lot of attitude.” During the conflict, she expressed the collectivistic trait of integrating. She stated,
I was trying to also see her point of view because I’m the type of person that I’m not going to only attack you. I’m also going to see your point as well. So, I kind of . . . I was angry, but at the same time, I was also trying to understand her as well.

She endorsed an *avoidant and withdrawing conflict style* when she stated her point: “I was just like, all right, she’s going to avoid me. I’m going to avoid her as well.” The participant and her cousin avoided addressing the event for a year. Eventually, the participant endorsed a collectivistic conflict resolution style. She was able to unite with her cousin and discuss their positions to retain harmony and peace. They were able to tolerate each other’s views, reconnect emotionally, and they forgave each other.

Additional examples of conflict style patterns for second-generation Dominicans also emerged. Nine participants reported using the pattern of conflict styles illustrated in Figure 4.

The participants noted that they became emotionally expressive and dominating, avoidant, and then endorsed several other conflict styles (as seen in Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*Emotionally Expressive and Dominating Conflict Style as an Initial Response*

\[
\text{Conflict} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Emotionally Expressive and Dominating} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Avoidant and Withdrawing} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{End of Conflict (n = 3)} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Third Party (n = 2)} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Integrating (n = 2)} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{Obliging + Accommodating (n = 2)}
\]
Figure 5 demonstrates other patterns of conflict styles, which illustrated that individuals initially become avoidant during conflict and then endorse other conflict styles.

**Figure 5**

Avoidance Conflict Style as an Initial Response

For instance, P9 reported a disagreement with a former romantic partner. He was insisting that the participant follow through with something that she was not comfortable doing. She did not address him directly. P9 stated that she became quiet, and she did not talk to him; she avoided him and the conversation. She revealed feeling obligated to accommodate him regardless of her emotions. After some time passed, she addressed him directly, showing a more emotionally expressive side, which is reflective of an individualistic conflict style. She said that initially she was “crying and being . . . irritable as hell.” She stated that she tried to see his point of view and come together to find a solution; she endorsed an integrating conflict style. However, the participant said, “there wasn't really a resolution. I would say it fell apart because I
wouldn’t bend in that way and I wouldn’t put up with [it].” The romantic relationship ended; however, P9 noted that her friendship with him did not end. This shows a desire for cohesiveness of interpersonal relatedness, which is collectivistic in nature.

Many of the participants found that when Dominicans are not initially emotionally expressive and using a dominating conflict style, they tend to initially endorse an avoidance conflict style, which is seen above. The overall findings suggest no singular conflict style or collectivistic-individualistic style that represents second-generation Dominicans’ experience. Their conflict style seems to reflect a move toward maintaining relationships, which tends to be viewed as collectivistic.

Question 2: What are the multiple ways second-generation Dominicans cope with interpersonal stress?

**Theme 3: Coping With Interpersonal Stress**

This section presents the myriad of strategies second-generation Dominicans use to cope with conflict and interpersonal stress. The participants’ narratives revealed six different strategies, such as support, validation, and a desire for closeness from others; attending therapy; processing events alone and going for a walk; using the arts to cope; eating comfort food; and mindful tasks.

**Support, Validation, and a Desire for Closeness From Others**

Ten participants reported seeking emotional support, validation, and closeness from others not involved in the conflict. Participants spoke with a parent (P2, P6, P12, P13, and P15), spouse (P1, P10, and P15), sibling (P8, P12), cousin (P4), and a close friend (P10). P1 said, “I have to talk it out to other people. I have to emote it to my husband or my sister. And, it feels
better to let it be.” P4 stated that she talks to her closest cousin to process, reflect, and vent. P12 said,

what made me feel better was that I knew that I was doing what was right for my father
and that’s it. And then I spoke about it with my mom, spoke about it with my brother, and
I was like, “this is what’s going on.”

Other participants noted that they reflect on their feelings, behavior, the situation, and any
potential next steps.

Attending Therapy

Five participants were actively in treatment and two participants said they were in
therapy in the past. They reported processing events, learning how to cope, managing conflict,
and other areas in their lives. P8 said she started seeing a therapist to help manage her anger
towards her daughter’s father. She said, “I started to notice that my anger toward him was a
reflection of my anger toward my father, for never being there.” P7 said she sees a counselor to
process the relationship with her father and past domestic violence relationship. P11 reported that
she has been in therapy for many years. P4 noted that talking to her guidance counselor helped
her gain insight into her mother’s behavior toward her, which helped her empathize with her
mother. P9 revealed her experience in therapy:

After I would process it, I felt, I guess, proud in a way, because it forced me to confront
certain things about myself. Lately, I’ve been sitting with it, and letting myself feel the
feelings, and trying not to eat my feelings. I think at that point, I was going for walks
instead.

In this example, the participant described the process of change by emoting and expressing
herself in a contained space, through which she was able to understand herself better. Many of
the participants reported using mindfulness breathing exercises to help manage stress. P14 perceived White U.S. Americans used therapy more frequently than Dominicans, and she related it to the stigma associated with attending therapy in the Dominican Republic.

**Processing Events Alone and Going for a Walk**

Nine participants reported taking time to process events, stepping away, and going for a walk. P2 said, “I love walking by the piers, thinking, and being by the water. It calms me.” P3 said, “I don’t know, for long walk.” P4 noted that she goes for a walk and needs to alone. P13 stated, “I kind of like to reflect inwards before I let anybody outward in.” The participants are describing processing their experience to help bring awareness to their thoughts and behaviors. Many noted that they do not know if their desire to process events alone is more Dominican or U.S. American, but they allow themselves the time to process.

**Using the Arts to Cope**

Nine of the participants revealed listening to music, writing, painting, drawing, and watching TV/movies as ways to cope with stress. P1, P2, P6, P8, and P12 noted listening to music when they are upset. They reported relating either to the lyrics or to the pace of the tempo, or a need to feel their feelings through the music. P8 said, “listening to bachata after a break-up is the most cathartic like it gives voice to my feelings, and I can contain it there in the song.” P1 and P8 noted they write in a journal when processing events. P10 and P14 reported that they engage in painting and drawing to cope with their feelings. P14 said, “I typically resort to going back and painting, coloring, those types of things that help me calm down, or at least just keep peace of mind for a moment and be.” P15 writes and performs poetry. He said, “I do write about a lot of my experiences and a lot of my poetry comes from strong emotions. So, it helps me to
write about a lot of things.” The arts provide a space for the participants to process, reflect, and reengage in their experiences by being an active participant or artist.

**Eating Comfort Food**

Four participants reported eating to cope with events. P4 said, “I hate the fact that sometimes I turn to comfort food.” P10 noted that he eats, “which is not healthy at all.” P9 said that she eats her feelings away. P8 said she turns to food; she noted that all her family sees food as the central part of socialization, and that they consider food to be an accessible source of comfort. The participants noted that Dominican culture heavily focuses on food by including large quantities and quality of it in social gatherings and daily living. Food is readily available and spoken about often. Feeling good is about eating well, and a few participants use food to cope with stressful events.

**Redirecting Focus**

Five participants noted that when facing interpersonal stress, they try to be productive in other areas in their lives by thoughtfully shifting their focus and energy toward positivity. P8 said, “I focus on keeping my household together, completing tasks, and creating activities for myself and my daughter. You know, positive things.” P5 reported that she focuses on being productive with schoolwork, her job, and other tasks at hand. P10 stated that he actively tries to occupy himself with other things. P1 reported that she focuses her energy on her children and her husband.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The present study explored how second-generation Dominicans’ ethnic and cultural identity contributes to interpersonal conflict strategies. The investigation attempted to advance the understanding of second-generation Dominicans’ lives to inform researchers, clinicians, and policymakers.

Dominicans’ cultural system emphasizes maintaining relationships as a core value. Comprehending relational patterns offers insight into their salient ethnic and cultural identities. Uncovering prevalent coping methods for this population provides clinicians and researchers a comparative picture of adaptive strategies. This chapter comprises the discussion of the results, strengths, limitations, suggestions for future research, and clinical implications.

This qualitative study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How does ethnic and cultural identity for second-generation Dominicans living in the U.S. influence the experience of interpersonal conflict and stress?

2. What are the various ways second-generation Dominicans cope with interpersonal stress?

As a general theoretical framework, collectivism and individualism guided the examination of ethnic and bicultural identity for second-generation Dominicans living in the United States; also, the constructs facilitated the analysis of the personal experiences with interpersonal conflict and coping strategies for second-generation Dominicans.

I recruited 15 self-identifying second-generation Dominicans living in New York City. Semi-structured interviews provided data, which were examined through a thematic analysis. The narratives generated themes describing Dominican values as confianza, familismo, and personalismo as a cultural context for the varied sources of conflict. Additional subthemes of
distrust, privacy, impacts of immigration on core values, emotional distant, miscommunication, and power dynamics were revealed in connection to the values.

The second section presented six subthemes of conflict styles (avoidance and withdrawing, obliging and accommodating, third-party, emotionally expressive, integrating, and dominating), that fall under the two main themes of collectivistic and individualistic conflict and resolution styles. Each conflict style was described, indicating the most salient Dominican and the U.S. American cultural elements. Additionally, the data revealed six coping strategies: (a) support, validation, and a desire for closeness; (b) attending therapy; (c) processing events alone and going for a walk; (d) using the arts to cope; (e) eating comfort food; and (f) redirecting focus.

**Discussion of Results**

Literature on ethnic and cultural identity has posited that many second-generation Dominicans identify as Dominican American and bicultural individuals (Araujio-Dawson, 2015). However, the majority of the participants in the current study, 11 out of 15, identified as Dominican. Participants acknowledged U.S. American cultural influences and indicated that they participate within American culture. However, ethnically and culturally, they identified as Dominican. They expressed feeling connected to Dominican culture through traditions, values, beliefs, music, dance, food, family, and the country (physical environment). This sense of connection, however, appears to be restricted depending on the person’s Spanish proficiency; one participant revealed that he was limited in his involvement with cultural events with monolingual Spanish-speaking Dominicans.

Racial identity was not a prevalent theme in this study. This lack of finding is congruent with the literature. Baily (2001) noted that second-generation Dominicans do not necessarily
identify with their race in terms of Black or White, as a dichotomous construct often utilized in the United States according to skin color. Second-generation Dominicans, in this study, identified ethnolinguistically as Dominican/Spanish/Hispanic/Latinx. Two participants identified as Afro-Latina/x, one participant identified as White Latina/x, and the others did not provide a distinct racial identity. The participants mostly shared their conflicts with family members and romantic partners. The events described were not race specific, suggesting that the participants’ race and racial identity within their family unit was not a primary source of conflict. Discussions of race were present for the participants, as they shared their experiences with racism and discrimination with supervisors, customers, and classmates. P10 felt a racial micro-aggression with his supervisor after being given a directive. He felt the supervisor’s tone and attitude were suggestive of racial prejudice. P13 shared her experiences at her college, as she was singled out as being neither Latinx nor Black (she identifies as Afro-Latina), but the event was not shared as a salient source of conflict for the participant.

Historically, Dominicans’ racial identity has often presented as a denial of Black race identification (Duany, 1998) for those who are perceived as Black; racial identification is deeply rooted in their cultural norms and can be ingrained in their identities and self-esteem (Rodriguez, 2001). While participants did not speak to racial identity, participants in this study noted a possible association between connecting and engaging with Black culture and identifying more strongly with the U.S. culture through this venue. Many participants attributed living near or by meaningful Black or/and Puerto Rican cultural influences transmitted through music, food, shared experiences, and everyday speech. They revealed strong emotional bonds with Black U.S. Americans and Puerto Ricans given the proximity of living, which contributed to a sense of connectedness or shared experience (Rodriguez, 2019). Additionally, they suggest that while
experiences of colorism and in-group discrimination were present, they were not salient for these participants, at the moment of interview. These findings suggest that utilizing the term *bicultural identity* may not reflect additional cultural influences and nuances of regional culture that are present.

Additionally, it seems that experiences of discrimination weaken second-generation Dominicans’ connection to the U.S. American culture. Participants suggested that they receive messages of not belonging and being the other (separate from White U.S. Americans), and identifying as Dominican offers an active sense of belonging. Participants who identified as Dominicans showed low regard for assimilation. They reported that they interacted less with dominant U.S. American culture, and they hold on to Dominican norms and values. Many refused to call themselves American, even though they were born in the United States. In the bicultural literature, this experience falls under the separation strategy, which includes involvement in the ethnic culture, to the exclusion of other practices or dimensions of identity (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007, 2010).

Participants who identified as Dominican Americans indicated an acculturative integration strategy, by which they embraced both U.S. American and Dominican cultures (Phinney & Flores, 2002). Four out of the 15 participants identified as Dominican American, and they reported feeling connected to both cultures. All of the participants noted that there were times when they felt connected with Dominican culture and other moments where they identified more with American culture. The participants described engaging in cultural frame switching when they revealed their experiences with both cultures (Huynh et al., 2011).

Second-generation Dominicans develop meaning out of their relationships in ways that are informed by their experiences with the U.S. American and Dominican culture. Their
Dominican parents and caregivers modeled and reinforced their values, beliefs, and expected norms related to relationships. Previous research identified confianza, familismo, and personalismo as core values and characteristics of Latin Americans (Calzada, Tamis-LeMonda, & Yoshikawa, 2013; Schwartz, 2007). Identified in the narratives was the importance of trust (confianza), honoring family (familismo), valuing and building interpersonal relationships (personalismo), and relational warmth and the myriad ways to be a good person. The analysis of the narratives generated six subthemes. Dominican and U.S. American cultural values provide context for the prevalent sources of conflict for second-generation Dominicans.

Specifically, the value of confianza, a firm belief in someone, trustworthiness, and familiarity, was a prominent theme. All participants revealed that their caregivers fostered trust as a value, specifically noting how immigration may have impacted Dominican parents’ high levels of distrust or uncertainty about the trustworthiness of others outside of the home or cultural circle. Second-generation Dominicans reported using confianza to determine their level of commitment in relationships. Second-generation Dominicans stated that the most challenging aspect in a relationship is maintaining confianza, and when the value is threatened or broken, it is a source of conflict.

Many of the participants noted that Catholicism plays various roles in their lives. Many second-generation Dominicans described deriving their core values and structuring daily lives with their religious beliefs in mind. They reported that families united frequently around religious holidays and activities, and they described Dominicans as honoring familismo as a core value, specifically the relationship between parent and child. When discussing conflict that arose in the parent-child dyad, participants expressed disappointment about unmet expectations, lack of emotional support, unfair treatment, judgments, and unrealistic standards; they noted
experiencing dissonance and avoidance. There is a desire to safeguard the family unit, maintain cohesion, and sustain the familial relationship, even in conflict.

Three participants identified the U.S. American values of privacy, freedom, and the right to choose as salient themes; it is essential to note that independence, historically, is a central characteristic often associated with individualism (Triandis, 2018). Participants revealed that the lack of privacy and independence as a child and adult (when living at home) was a cause of conflict. In addition, intergenerational cultural differences contribute to maintaining conflict. For example, participants noted that traditional Dominican norms encourage codependency between parents and children and discourage independence until their child is an adult with their own family. Duany (2008) noted the transnational and cultural intergenerational differences between first- and second-generation Dominicans, which was supported in this study.

All of the participants discussed multi-faceted challenges their family members faced in immigrating to the United States, including adapting and adjusting to a new culture and lifestyle. Some family members changed their worldview from collectivistic (prioritizing the family unit) to individualistic (focusing on themselves). Many of the participants noted a direct connection to their family’s experience in New York after immigrating to their change in values; most of them described their parents as facing many adversities and building few genuine relationships outside of the family. Participants offered examples of their reaction to perceiving a family member as emotionally distant, leading to arguments and conflict. They noted that they have strong emotional bonds with other family members, and usually, it is one parent or a family member that they consider emotionally distant. They hypothesized that their experience of an emotionally distant relative might stem from working long hours, possible history of trauma, or symptoms of depression related to acculturation stress. On another note, a participant reflected that second-
generation experiences and voices on immigration are limited in the current scholarly literature and do not find themselves or their experiences represented. She is a social worker and counselor, and she was referring to the lack of Dominican research and academic work in the social sciences.

Participants revealed messages that they received from their family and society stemming from traditional Dominican norms for gender roles and expectations. Participants noted having difficulty relating with their fathers due to their machista attitudes and behavior, and a few of the women noted that their mothers showed preferential treatment to their brothers, which was a source of conflict.

When collectivistic Dominican cultural influences such as core values confianza, familismo, personalismo, and respeto are threatened or broken, conflict sources arise for second-generation Dominicans. The areas that escalate disagreements or arguments are distrust, miscommunication, power dynamics, privacy, independence, emotional distance, and women managing unrealistic expectations connected to Dominican values. Many of these conflict areas are impacted by U.S. American cultural values such as independence and privacy, U.S. American gender norms vs. Machismo, racism, and immigration.

Daniel Katz (1965) revealed three primary sources of conflict: economic, value, and power (Fisher, 2000). Second-generation Dominicans reported that value and power were the two more salient sources of conflict with family members and romantic partners. Previous literature documented that interpersonal conflict arises when immigrant parents expect their children to follow their traditions (Castillo et al., 2008), revealing a power struggle within the dynamic. Intergenerational cultural differences can describe sources of conflict for second-generation Dominicans, such as distrust and miscommunication. Previous findings on children’s and parents’ acculturation gaps and U.S. cultural
involvement revealed influences on family cohesion, adaptability, *familismo*, and parent-adolescent dyads. Differences in gender expectations between parents and children were connected to traditional and conservative norms, impacted by Christian doctrine, and revealed another power dynamic example. Past studies have reflected on negative emotional factors when Latinx beliefs are not congruent with traditional society terms of gender roles (Miville, 2013; Nunez et al., 2016). Lee et al. (2017) noted that Dominicans experience high social instability due to transmigration patterns and poverty. Therefore, the immigration experience and its impact on further generations set the context for emotion dysregulation, stress, and emotional distance. Racism is set within the context of power imbalance, and it was present through two examples of conflict with supervisors provided by participants.

**Interpersonal Conflict**

Participants described, at most, two experiences of conflict. The sources of conflict varied, and they included disagreements around accountability, feeling misunderstood and judged, being mistreated, having different values, perceiving power dynamics, and identifying unreasonable behavior. Two participants acted physically in self-defense; no other physical violence was reported. Most participants revealed a conflict with one of their parents or a family member (i.e., sibling or cousin). A main source of conflict was feeling infantilized by their parents. Three conflict experiences were with a significant other; in these cases, the participants felt that they were treated poorly. Two incidents of conflict occurred at the workplace; they described an abuse of power by their supervisors.

Dominican conflict styles have not previously been reported in the literature. In conflict, collectivistic-individualistic strategies and styles of communication coexist and may surface depending on the context (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Triandis, 2018). Patterns emerged wherein participants engaged in multiple conflict styles that are moderately collectivistic-
individualistic, individualistic, and collectivistic. For example, eight participants endorsed an emotionally expressive period with a direct conflict style, followed by integrating behavior, and when the conflict was unresolved, the participants became avoidant or withdrawn. Participants shared their attempts to express themselves directly, which they could be drawing from the individualistic value of independence. Once they had directly expressed themselves, there was an effort to collaborate and maintain the relationship, which falls under collectivism. If the conflict was unresolved, the participant became avoidant or withdrawing (a collectivistic conflict style). See Figure 3, 4, and 5 (located in Chapter 4) for additional examples of conflict style patterns.

The participants reported that they perceive Dominicans as having an emotionally expressive and dominating conflict style, and this is how they described the first stage of most common conflict style patterns. The results imply that no primary conflict style or collectivistic-individualistic style represents second-generation Dominicans’ experience. Previous literature has focused on primary and initial styles of conflict (Gunkel et al., 2016).

Participants also described their perception of Dominican conflict style (living in the United States and the Dominican Republic). They described the modes as direct, confrontational, emotionally expressive, avoidant, and withdrawing; they expressed both individualistic and collectivistic styles and values in their conflict styles. Most participants reported the belief that White U.S. Americans have a cooperating and collaborating (moderate collectivistic and individualistic) and dominating/aggressive (individualistic) conflict style, and Black U.S. Americans have an emotionally expressive conflict style.

Participants noted having similar experiences with racism and discrimination to Black U.S. Americans. These experiences may connect them to expressing themselves emotionally in what is perceived as familiar ways. It has been argued that encounters that derive from racism
contribute to Black people’s sense of invisibility (Franklin, 2004). Constantly suppressing anger is an aspect of self-formation and a manifestation of their critical consciousness (El-Khoury, 2012). The fear of expressing anger was investigated in connection to the racial identity of Black people (Carter, Pieterse, & Smith, 2008). El-Khoury (2012) documented how the “management of emotions” signifies empowerment and opposition to social control. There is a connection between an unwillingness to suppress emotions and emotion regulation throughout the conflict for second-generation Dominicans. For example, participants emotionally and directly expressed themselves and collaborated, which is a form of emotion regulation and management.

On another note, a few participants reported perceiving U.S. Americans as having a complex conflict style. They reported perceiving that U.S. Americans are more communicative, seek to comprehend the conflict, maintain a calmer affect, or are more violent (referencing mass shootings). One participant noted that perhaps education and class may be confounding. These social statuses generate different cultural elements impacting conflict style.

In this study, 14 participants revealed individualistic and collectivistic conflict resolution styles. One participant showed only collectivistic conflict styles. The participants’ narratives generated seven subthemes that fall under the two main themes of collectivistic and individualistic conflict and resolution styles. Avoidance and withdrawing (collectivistic) and emotionally expressive (collectivistic-individualistic) were the two most endorsed conflict styles, which are similar to how the participants described their experiences of Dominicans (living in the United States and the Dominican Republic).

The literature suggests that second-generation individuals identifying with dominant U.S. American culture use integrating, compromising, and emotionally expressive conflict styles more than individuals with a weak U.S. American cultural identity (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000).
However, 12 participants, regardless of Dominican or Dominican American identity, endorsed emotionally expressive conflict styles, and half used integrating. The degree of ethnic and cultural identity is beyond the scope of this investigation; however, these findings suggest that ethnic identity may not be the best predictor of behavior, and the findings of this research imply that cultural identity can provide better descriptors of interpersonal conflict styles.

Second-generation Dominicans used emotional expression conflict style either as an initial response or in combination with a dominating style; it was used primarily with close family and friends. A few participants noted that they perceive Black Americans as expressing themselves similarly. One participant reported that in managing some relational conflicts, emotional expression is an accepted Dominican cultural communication style. For example, cultural standards differ in defining aggressive and loud behavior; for participants in the study, high-pitched vocal expression is a normative way to communicate thoughts and feelings when relating with family and friends. The experience of conflict in this example shows that messages are being received that are activating. How the individuals respond to these messages becomes essential in communicating because they expressed sensitivity of the meaning-making inherent individual interpretation of responses.

Clinical literature tends to relate high emotional expression to distress and dysregulation of emotions (Southward & Cheavens, 2017), which can be erroneously pathologizing as aggression. Inflection in pitch, volume, and tone can be confused with confrontation. Additionally, it is important to note that intensity of communication and expression of anger can be protective and defensive communication styles for recent immigrants who are unsure about the trustworthiness or safety of others outside their own social and cultural circles (Marian & Kaushanskaya, 2008).
For second-generation Dominicans, dominating styles tends to be a direct way of handling conflict. Participants shared a desire to be assertive, and it was expressed as dominating. A direct conflict style followed or occurred concurrently with an emotionally expressive conflict style, which is followed by one or two collectivistic conflict styles. They addressed their emotions, such as anger and hurt, directly, and then they attempted to engage in a way that maintained the relationship or resolved the problem. Safety and trust are salient themes for second-generation Dominicans, and it seems that being vocal and emotionally expressive transmits the messages of protection and visibility.

All of the participants reported engaging in avoidance and withdrawing at some point during experiences of conflict. All participants described an avoidant conflict style congruent with their perception of Dominicans. Second-generation Dominicans tend to preserve the integrity of their relationships, and many have avoided engaging in conflict to maintain a degree of cohesion. Avoidance and withdrawing have been documented as a conflict style practiced by collectivistic individuals and cultures (Triandis, 2008) to maintain relationships. Many participants noted fear of engaging in conflict, seeking to avoid creating a rupture or ending the relationships. Others indicated that continuing the conflict will not lead to an agreement, understanding of the other person, or being heard. Half of the participants endorsed dominating/aggressive conflict style and integrating, which is similar to how White U.S. Americans were perceived to handle conflict. Also, obliging and accommodating fall under the umbrella of sustaining or re-establishing harmony in the relationship. Participants reported that obliging and accommodating were usually followed by an avoidance style.

Third-party style is present in conflict and resolution, which reinforces a desire to maintain the relationship in conflict by allowing someone to mediate the situation; there is a
message illustrating cohesion and obtaining harmony and relational strategies to facilitate these goals. Third-party style is present in conflict and resolution, reinforcing a desire to maintain the relationship in conflict by allowing someone to mediate the situation; underlying this practice is a message illustrating cohesion and obtaining harmony and relational strategies to facilitate these goals. Third-party conflict style is similar to the phenomenon of triangulation, which is defined in the AAMFT Family Therapy Glossary as the “process that occurs when a third person is introduced into a dyadic relationship to balance either excessive intimacy, conflict, or distance and provide stability in the system” (Evert et al., 1984, p. 32). Murray Bowen (1978) saw triangulation as a way to reduce anxiety in a dyadic relationship. It is meaningful to note that second-generation Dominicans reported using a third-party conflict style to mediate the conflict, mend a rupture in the relationship, and resolve differences, which may be a culturally appropriate way of maximizing a communal stance in relationships.

Half of the participants used an integrating conflict style; second-generation Dominicans embraced its value and recognized it in the U.S. American culture while simultaneously holding on to Dominican cultural traits. Integrating tends to be the last conflict style, and it was mainly used as a conflict resolution strategy. Participants used it to collaborate and work towards maintaining the relationship. Ting-Toomey et al. (2000) also noted that bicultural, assimilated, and tradition-oriented groups use integrating and compromising conflict styles.

Overall, second-generation Dominicans endorsed both individualistic and collectivistic conflict styles; both cultural descriptors were salient in their experiences. The participants mentioned that they are more likely to be direct with family and close friends than with associates.
Coping

Second-generation Dominicans described six different coping strategies. Two of those coping methods involved interdependence by relating with another person. Participants relied on support and validation from those closest to them, and they reported attending therapy. Five participants are actively in treatment, and two participants said they were in therapy in the past. Psychotherapy has historically been stigmatized in the Dominican Republic, and it is meaningful to note that second-generation Dominicans are redefining its value. One of the values that has been noted in Dominican culture is personalismo, and it informs two of the reasons the participants desire closeness with others to manage their stress and anxiety. Ten participants described connecting with close family and friends for validation and emotional support. On the other hand, they also reported valuing independence and incorporating self-care strategies, such as utilizing mindfulness to decrease stress and anxiety. A few participants reported processing events independently, such as by going for a walk and reflecting on events. These activities suggest that coping involves an embodied component, and it is consistent with the participants’ description of expressiveness in the body.

The most robust venue for coping revealed participants’ utilization of the arts (music, writing, performing poetry, painting, drawing, and film) to manage their distress and cope with conflict. Dominican and U.S. American cultural influences were noted in the participants’ involvement in the arts. Specifically, they revealed listening to both U.S. American and Dominican music to cope. Previous literature noted Dominicans living in the Dominican Republic using music to cope with stress (Thomas et al., 2017). However, no previous studies have documented second-generation Dominicans’ use of media of art to cope. A few reported engaging in eating as a tool for self-soothing or as a measure of comfort. Participants reported
that a significant part of socializing in the Dominican Republic is getting together to eat, and eating is associated with warmth, comfort, and *familismo*. Currently, there are no findings to suggest an association between Dominican culture and the use of eating as a means to cope for second-generation Dominicans.

Some second-generation Dominicans redirected their stress by establishing balance and stability. For example, participants noted trying to be productive in other areas, such as completing household chores and finishing tasks; they reported feeling more grounded when engaging in these activities. Participants reported that they actively engage in an activity to help manage stress.

**Strengths and Limitations**

The present study is the first to document the cultural influences on second-generation Dominicans’ conflict style through an individualistic and collectivistic framework. My identity as a second-generation Dominican woman provided depth to the analysis, as I perceived cultural nuances with minimal judgment and approached the interview process from an in-group perspective. Often, participants spoke in Spanish or shifted in and out of English and Spanish, depending on the conversation topics. This experience allowed participants to express themselves with full vocabulary and language and relate in ways that were congruent for them (Ramos-Sanchez, 2007). The investigation results provide a foundation for clinical implications and further research for this population by offering a glimpse of second-generation Dominicans’ lived experiences.

My identity as a second-generation Dominican could be a possible confound or source of bias. I have become acutely aware that commonalities in cultural background can lead to blind spots. During journaling, I documented similarities and differences, which helped the process of
analysis. For example, I was better able to conceptualize emotional expression in conflict by highlighting the contextual events, which provide nuanced details of events.

Most of the participants (11) self-identified as cis-gender women, which does not fully represent second-generation Dominicans. Transgender men and women, queer, and non-binary individuals are not presented in the data, which mirrors a trend in scholarly literature. Also, most participants self-identified as heterosexual, with one participant identifying as gay. The study calls for more representation of different social identities and a nuanced understanding of intersecting identities.

The analysis performed used conflict styles from the previous research literature: Rahim’s (1983) five conflict style dimensions (integrating, avoidance, dominating, compromising, and accommodating), plus two additional conflict factors (emotional expression and third party) (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000) were salient in the participants’ narratives. The analysis process used both deductive (using previously documented conflict styles) and inductive inquiry (sources of conflict). Deductive inquiry alone might have led to blind spots about unique storylines or themes in the participants’ narratives, possibly leading to unidentified conflict modes for second-generation Dominicans’ experience.

Suggestions for Future Research

To further comprehend this population, similar qualitative studies should be conducted throughout the United States, with more diverse samples and varied social identities. This investigation specifically studied second-generation Dominicans living in New York City due to its large Dominican population. However, it is crucial to examine Dominicans residing in the Dominican Republic to be able to make comparisons and complex analyses of cultural values,
beliefs, and norms, specifically how emigration from the Dominican Republic to the United States has impacted Dominican culture and relational dynamics.

This study uncovered several cultural and socioeconomic factors that, if explored further in future studies, could lead to additional insights about Dominicans’ conflict styles. Religion is an essential cultural element in second-generation Dominicans’ lives; further research can expand the nuanced ways religious practices inform behavior and attitudes. Many of the participants’ mothers arrived first in the United States, working multiple jobs and establishing a home base for the family; this is an area that is unexplored in the literature. Abuela (grandmother), as the matriarch in Dominican families, is not present in the literature. Music and food are elements that reveal cultural affiliation and that are used as coping strategies; it is worth exploring the different roles music and food play in cultural identification and impacts on behavior. Additionally, Black and Puerto Rican cultures influence second-generation Dominicans living in the area of New York City, and the intergroup dynamic and cultural reciprocity can also help inform how cultural identity is shaped. Socioeconomic status was not a salient cultural theme; participants discussed noting class differences in emotional expression and access to resources. Further research can analyze how the cultural influences of class impact Dominicans’ conflict styles living in the United States and Dominican Republic.

It is essential to examine the quantitative impacts of Dominican culture on interpersonal conflict styles within the collectivism and individualism framework; this would provide data determining the degree of influence of ethnic and cultural identity on relational patterns.

It is of interest to focus on internalizing behaviors, such as anxiety and depression, for this population. A few participants mentioned difficulty managing their anxiety and mood. Understanding how internalization occurs while maintaining harmony or as a result of avoidance
can be meaningful. Future studies can further explore the connection between cultural influences and coping strategies for second-generation Dominicans.

Second-generation Dominicans make up a sizeable and growing population in the United States; therefore, further research is crucial to comprehend the experiences of this large and burgeoning population. Deeper understanding of the experience of second-generation Dominicans in the United States is imperative for scholars, academics, researchers, and clinicians that are committed to culturally reflective and humble work.

**Clinical Implications**

This study’s findings provide suggestions for clinical practice for providers working with second-generation Dominicans. Conflict styles reveal attitudes and behaviors toward relational dynamics. Second-generation Dominicans endorsed behaviors such as avoidance and withdrawing from confrontations, but they also reported becoming emotionally expressive during the conflict. Historically, high emotional expression has been related to and conceptualized as distress and dysregulation of emotions, which may erroneously pathologize this group (Marian & Kaushanskaya, 2008). Emotional expression may be an acceptable Dominican American communication style, which can be better understood for its value and function. Dominicans’ direct conflict style can be perceived as confrontational and aggressive, but their behavior may serve as attempts to be assertive and expressive of their experience. This perspective is imperative in settings such as inpatient units or other care facilities, where decisions are made around perceived aggressive behavior.

It is valuable to focus on second-generation Dominicans’ internalizing behaviors, such as anxiety and depression; a few participants mentioned difficulty managing their anxiety and mood symptoms. *Confianza* can function as a protective and insulating factor for establishing trust and
safety in a new cultural context. Contextualizing the relational process of rapport-building and trust for second generation Dominicans may be particularly valuable in therapy.

Individual differences in bicultural identity dynamics have important theoretical and clinical implications for comprehending the psychological processes, such as socialization patterns and immigrants’ well-being. Familial socialization and the developmental processes function as protective factors influencing Dominicans’ mental health. The findings’ implications apply to both practice (i.e., psychotherapy) and further investigative literature. Clinicians can use the results of this study to expand their knowledge base of the intersection among relational dynamics, identity, and emotional expression.

Conclusion

This qualitative study aimed to explore the narratives of 15 second-generation Dominicans residing in New York City. Their experiences illustrated the complexity of internalizing multiple cultures and how values and beliefs inform their attitudes and behaviors. Collectivistic traits were revealed through their descriptions of the family unit, a desire to build and maintain interpersonal connections, and a hope to facilitate transmission of their values and beliefs to the next generation. Black and Puerto Rican cultures fostered connections to the U.S. culture. Individualistic traits were revealed through salient themes of valuing independence, privacy and a desire to form their worldview; the participants revealed that they experience U.S. American culture through different musical music genres. These cultural elements help define their identity and impact the dual presence of collectivistic and individualistic traits found in their conflict and resolution styles. In this study, it is reinforced that Dominican culture is not synonymous with collectivism and U.S. culture is not solely individualistic (the United States is a conglomerate of cultures). Also, second-generation Dominicans do not have a primary
collectivistic-individualistic conflict style. Instead, second-generation Dominicans’ definition of conflict and their conflict style is understood through a pattern of collectivistic-individualistic traits. They desire to strengthen their relationships by showing concern for others, with the awareness of their needs. They expressed wanting to sustain harmony and cohesion by emotionally expressing their perspective and broadening the understanding of others.

Many participants reported learning about their cultures through observation and experientially rather than receiving direct messages/lessons. For second-generation Dominicans, cultural knowledge acquisition is an evolving process that involves acceptance, adaptation, modification, or/and rejection of values, beliefs, standards, and expectations that impacts identity. Familial socialization and ethnic identity development secure their strong sense of self and a desire to maintain relational bonds. Therefore, to understand second-generation Dominicans’ experiences, clinical and research interventions need to be contextually grounded and culturally informed.
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Appendix A

Letter of Solicitation
Dear [Name],

I am a fourth-year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy, in the College of Education and Human Services, at Seton Hall University. I am conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Noelany Pelc, Assistant Professor in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy at Seton Hall University.

This investigation is exploring the cultural experiences of second-generation Dominican Americans in their relationships, particularly their perspective on conflict, resolution, and coping. I am particularly interested in how second-generation Dominican Americans describe their close relationships and conflict experience within the context of their cultural backgrounds. If you are a second-generation Dominican age 18 or older, and if you are interested in this study and you would like to learn more about it, please contact me, Yubelky Rodriguez at Yubelky.rodriguez@student.shu.edu.

Sincerely,

Yubelky Rodriguez
Appendix B

Informed Consent
Researchers’ Affiliation
The principal investigator, Yubelky Rodriguez, is a fourth-year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program of the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy, in the College of Education and Human Services, at Seton Hall University. The researcher is conducting this study as a part of her program under the supervision of her mentor, Dr. Noelany Pelc, Assistant Professor in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy at Seton Hall University.

Purpose of the Study and Estimated Duration
This study examines the experiences of Dominican Americans and their relationships. The research focuses on how cultural identity informs the experiences of conflict, and how Dominicans cope with stress. Participants will be interviewed individually via the website doxy.me for about 60–90 minutes. The questionnaire will take about 5 minutes.

Procedures
Participants will be asked to sign this informed consent form and submit the form along with the completed demographic questionnaire to the principal investigator before interview begins. Both the informed consent and the demographic questionnaire will be completed online via Qualtrics, the links for which will be provided via email. Participants will then be invited to participate in an individual interview with the principal investigator online via Doxy.me, a secure website to ensure privacy. The interview will be audio recorded. Participants will be given the opportunity to read the interviews and the summary of the researcher’s findings, and they will be invited to provide any questions. Participants may also be contacted with follow-up questions about the interview to better understand the information they shared with the researcher.

Instruments
Participants will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, comprised of questions about the participant’s age, gender, relationship status, education, employment, religion, current household income.

Voluntary Nature of Participation
Participation in the study is completely voluntary and there is no penalty for refusing to participate. Participants may choose to not answer any of the questions. They may end participation without penalty.
Anonymity & Confidentiality
The study involves individual interviews that will be audio recorded and stored on a password-protected USB drive in the PI’s possession. The PI will transcribe the recordings and store them on a separate password-protected USB drive. The transcripts of the interviews will be de-identified (i.e., the transcriptions will not include identifiable data). Research data with identifying information will be stored for five years and then subsequently destroyed. The results of the study may be disseminated at professional conference presentations and published in academic journals; however, identifying information will not be included in the presentations or publications.

Risks
Some of the personal experiences that participants explore may be emotionally arousing and could result in psychological distress. Risks to participants are minimized by the following actions: 1. Participants are free to leave from the study at any time without penalty; 2. The PI will observe the participants’ nonverbal behaviors during the interview and look for potential signs of distress. If the PI observes signs of distress, she will stop the interview and assess the participant's ability and willingness to proceed with the interview; 3. Participants will be reminded that they have the right to not answer any questions during the interview if they so desire; and 4. The PI will encourage participants who do experience significant distress to discuss those feelings with a mental health professional in their community or by contacting the National Crisis Hotline at 1-800-273-8255.

Benefits
Participants will receive a $10 Amazon gift card for their participation. The information received from the study may help mental health services for Dominican Americans. Participation in this study may give participants a new perspective on their relationships and the many ways they cope with stress from conflict.

Contact Information
If participants have questions or concerns about this study, they should contact the principal investigator, Yubelky Rodriguez, at Yubelky.rodriguez@student.shu.edu or (347) 528-5998, or her research advisor, Noelany Pelc, Ph.D., at Noelany.pelc@shu.edu or (973) 275-2855. Participants should contact the director of Seton Hall University’s Institutional Review Board, Michael LaFountaine, Ed.D., at irb@shu.edu or (973) 313-6314 with any questions or concerns regarding their rights as human subjects.

Signature & Copy of Form
By typing my name and date below, I am stating that I have read the above information and electronically signing consent to participate in this study, which includes video-recording of the interview. A copy of the signed and dated consent form will be e-mailed to the participant prior to the interview.

_________________________________    ____________

Subject                          Date
Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire
1. Gender:
☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Transgender/Trans-man/Trans-woman
☐ Intersex
☐ Queer/Gender Non-conforming
☐ Other, please identify_____________________

2. Age (in years): __________

3. Race/ethnicity (please mark the category that best describes your race/ethnicity):
☐ Hispanic/Latino/a/x
☐ Native American/Alaskan Native/Indigenous
☐ Bi –or Multiracial/Ethnic (Specify all): _____________________
☐ Other, Please Specify: _____________________

4. Sexual Orientation:
☐ Gay/Lesbian
☐ Straight/heterosexual
☐ Bisexual
☐ Pansexual
☐ Asexual
☐ Other (Please Specify): _____________________

5. Relationship Status (select your answer below):
☐ Single    ☐ Married    ☐ Separated    ☐ Divorced    ☐ Other; Please Specify_______________

6. Education status (select one):
☐ Some High School
☐ High School Graduate or equivalent: (Graduation Year):___________
☐ Some College (Graduation Year): ________________
☐ College Graduate (Graduation Year): ________________
☐ Graduate/Professional Degree (Graduation Year): ________________
☐ Other, Please Specify: _____________________

7. Employment status (select one):
☐ Employed    ☐ Unemployed    ☐ Seeking employment    ☐ Other __________

8. What religion did your family practice when you were growing up? (Please select from the following):
☐ Buddhism
☐ Christianity
☐ Catholicism
☐ Judaism
☐ Protestantism (e.g.: Baptist, Lutheran, and Methodist)
☐ Islam
☐ Sikhism
☐ Hinduism
☐ Atheism
☐ Agnosticism
☐ No Religion
☐ Areligious/Spiritual
☐ Other, Please Specify ____________________

Please indicate if you still practice the same religion (select one): Yes No
If not, please indicate what religion, if any, you are currently practicing: _____________

9. Current household income (combined income of those in your household) (select one):
☐ Less than $20,000
☐ $20,000 – $44,999
☐ $45,000 – $139,999
☐ $140,000 – $149,999
☐ $150,000 – $199,999
☐ $200,000+
Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Guide
Research Questions:

1) How does ethnic and cultural identity for second generation Dominicans living in the United States influence the experience of interpersonal conflict and stress?

2) What are the various ways second generation Dominicans cope with interpersonal stress?

Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your upbringing?
   1. Where were you raised? Who raised you?
   2. What is the most important aspect of relationships?
   3. Where do these values and beliefs come from?
   4. Who do you consider close to you? Describe the relationship?
   5. Are there differences in the way American U.S. culture (Dominant culture) and Dominican culture (in the United States and in the Dominican Republic) differ in how they see view/see close relationships?
      a. Can you describe how you are in relationships?
   6. Can you tell me a time that you had difficulty with a disagreement, problem, conflict, or a “fight” with someone?
      a. How did it make you feel?
      b. How did you react during and afterwards?
      c. How did you handle the event?
      d. What are some of things that you did during the event? After the event?
      e. How is your relationship with them now?
   7. How did you try to cope with the conflict?
a. Can you give me another example of a relationship that you found stressful that we haven’t discussed?

8. When it comes to relationships with other people, what aspects of these relationships do you find the most challenging?

9. Generally speaking, do you think that other Dominicans behave in the same manner that you did to conflict? Do you think U.S. Americans act in the same way?

10. When you someone says to you, what is Dominican culture, what comes to mind? What about U.S. Culture? Which one do you describe as most influential to how you live your life? Why?
Appendix E

Participant Demographics
### Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Education Status</th>
<th>Household Income</th>
</tr>
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<td>Woman</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
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<td>Fluid</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Dominican American</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Enrolled</td>
<td>$22,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>$140,000+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.*

*Participant is enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program
+Participant identifies as gay (all other participants identify as heterosexual)
Appendix F

Institutional Review Board Approval
July 9, 2020

Yubelky Rodriguez

Re: Study ID# 2020-116

Dear Mr. Rodriguez:

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled, “Dominican Identity and the Experience of Interpersonal Conflict” as resubmitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study’s approval as exempt. If your study included an informed consent form, letter of solicitation or flyer, a stamped copy is included for your use.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Mara C. Poolley, PhD, OTR
Associate Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Office of the Institutional Review Board
Presidents Hall · 400 South Orange Avenue · South Orange, New Jersey 07079 · Tel: 973.275.4654 · Fax 973.275.2978 · www.shu.edu

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