



## How Grace Bastidas Built a Media Brand for Modern Families

The founding editor-in-chief of Parents Latina and Ser Padres shares how she launched and built a media brand that infuses multicultural roots and inclusive parenting.

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Alicia Menendez:

Grace Bastidas has one of those dreamy careers, where her life stage and her work have always been in sync. In the most recent incarnation, Grace is, as she puts it, a multicultural mommy and the editor-in-chief of Parents Latina and Ser Padres, a national media brand she launched and has grown to reach an audience of over 3 million. In other words, Grace knows how to identify a core audience, deliver them what they crave, and then use the platform and the power she has to expand who sees themselves reflected.

Grace, I am so glad we finally found the time to do this.

Grace Bastidas:

Me too. I feel like this has been on our radar for ages, so.

Menendez:

Well, that's because you felt like a long-lost friend. When I was first becoming a mom almost five years ago, going to those OB-GYN visits where you sit in the office and you're looking at everyone else and trying to figure out why everyone's there, and looking clues, Is this their first kid? Is this their second kid? And you can always tell, because people who it's their third kid, they're there with a big cup of coffee. They're eating sushi. And your magazine was always sitting there and it felt so relevant to me. And as someone who creates content, I've spent so much time thinking about my core consumer, that it was so funny to be on the other side of it, where I was like, "well, I have been micro-targeted and they got it exactly right."

Bastidas:

I am so delighted to hear that because that is the whole point of Parents Latina, where you feel instantly connected. Even if you're in this waiting room with no one that has a similar life experience to you, or they're on their third or fourth kid or whatever, you open our magazine and you feel like you've found your people.

I grew up in New York, and that's where I lived my whole life. So I've always had my girlfriends, my Latina friends. So when I became a mom, I did feel like I had other people to

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lean on, but not everybody has that. Some people live in communities where they never see anyone like them. The mission of Parents Latina is to help moms feel connected and feel that sense of mission of what they're doing. If they're trying to pass on their traditions, their heritage, their culture, their language. Or if you live somewhere where you don't hear another person speaking Spanish, and you're like, "I feel a little awkward doing this."

You say, "It's fine. Yes, this is what I should be doing. It's okay." And there's power in that. Latinas come in every possible color, hair texture, ethnicity. So we really aim to find what that shared experience is like and to show as many different types of parents as we can.

Menendez: Part of the reason that that experience of picking up Parents Latina stuck with me is because it was in such sharp contrast to the first magazine I ever read. I remember I was at a school board meeting with my mom and her friend sort of leaf through her purse to see if she had anything that would entertain me. I was probably seven or eight at the time. And she handed me Harper's Bazaar. And I was like, "well, what is this? I am eight. What am I supposed to do with Harper's Bazaar?" But I was intrigued, I think by this notion of womanhood and what adult women were and what they did. And even then seven or eight growing up in Union City, New Jersey sitting in that school board meeting. I remember leafing through this magazine and saying, "nothing in here reminds me of the women I know, or the women in my life, or the women I'm in community with. This is not what I imagined womanhood looking like." Do you remember the first magazine you held in your hand, and the experience of reading that magazine?

Bastidas: Goodness. I want to say I do, but I can't. What magazine did I first read? I think I read 17, and Sassy, and all those teen magazines.

Menendez: I was about to say, "please say Sassy."

Bastidas: And Tiger Beat. I had a friend in my apartment building who had Tiger Beat and she introduced me to the New Kids On The Block. I was like, "oh my God, who is this beautiful man?" Jordan, from New Kids On The Block.

Menendez: I was more of a Joey girl, myself.

Bastidas: Really? I would not have pegged you for a Joey girl, but okay. He was cute. I don't remember having that experience of, "oh, wait, I'm not included in here." I grew up playing with Barbies who were all blonde and it just seemed like, well, this is just the way things are. But I also did look at my mom's magazines. So I looked at Vianey Valdez, and TV Y Novelas, and all the magazines that she had. And I felt like, "oh, this is where we are." So it did feel like a divide. My family's from Colombia, and they immigrated from Colombia in the seventies. And we lived in a bubble of Colombian-ness. So we ate the food, we listened to the music, we watched the TV shows. Every year we went to visit my grandmother. And in school I felt super American and hearing about meatloaf. What is meatloaf?

Menendez: No, but I'm curious, are you speaking about the musical artists or the food product?

Bastidas: The food. I was very intrigued by meatloaf as a kid. So I was already living in two different cultures. So the idea that there was a magazine that included white women and blonde women in a very particular experience and then at home, we had magazines that included Latinas and mirrored more my experience that felt like just the norm.

Menendez: I identify very much with that bifurcation. I think for me, what was actually most surprising was the wealth that I was responding to even more than race or ethnicity, which is this blazer in Harper's Bazaar is \$3,000. Like what, who is buying a \$3,000 blazer? That part to me was just wild.

Bastidas: Yeah. I mean, that's crazy, even by any standards. But I also remember watching Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous when I was younger and just, there was this whole other world out there that I was not privy to in any way. And it was, I wouldn't say was even aspirational because as a kid, you're not thinking, "one day I will buy this \$3,000 blazer." It was just kind of, it was make-believe.

Menendez: 100%. No, that's what I thought Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous were. One of the things Grace, I have to admit, I envy so much about you is that it seems your path has always been crystal clear. Like you have known what you want to do and who you want to be basically from the jump.

Bastidas: It is very interesting because I always say that there was always a path for me. I started in journalism in high school. I worked at my school paper, The Tower, and I got all the juicy assignments when I was in high school. I did a profile of the special education department and I remember the head of that department writing a letter to my journalism teacher and applauding me for this empathetic profile. Then for some reason, the president of the New York stock exchange had gone to my high school. So I was picked to interview them. And this is when I didn't even know you can record something. So I long hand wrote out this interview. I just remember my sweaty palms sticking to the paper and I'm just like, "slow down, slow down."

So, and when I entered college, I went to Fordham. I thought it's time to shift and maybe I'll study art history. And I just remember the journalism professor finding me and just kind of putting me back on this path that I was meant to be on. And the one thing that I always excelled at in school was writing. And I skipped a year in English. I got bumped up to the next year, just in English because of my writing. It came naturally to me. So there was no other thing that I can think of doing. And this was path I've been on my whole life.

Menendez: It's pretty anomalous to be on the path your entire life, and then have it work out. But let's start with your first job. Can you explain your first job to me?

Bastidas: Every job I've ever had has matched my life stage perfectly. When I was a culture editor, covering music, movies, and theater at the beginning of my career. And before I would fall asleep before 9:00 PM, I was out in the city. I was taking it all in. Then I decided that I wanted to be a travel writer because I've always enjoyed traveling. I wanted to see the world, experience different cultures. And what better way to do it than by reporting about it? So I did that for a long time. Then I started having kids and I was like, "oh, that's not really conducive to far-flung adventures." As a Latina mom, when I had my first daughter, I realized that I had all these questions like, "oh my gosh, how am I going to teach my kids Spanish if I'm speaking English all the time?" I just felt myself moving away from my culture.

And I just told you the way I was raised was very much in a bubble of Colombian-ness. And I knew my children wouldn't have that experience because my husband is not Latino. I was raised in New York. I was raised in the US so I'm already bi-cultural. I just knew I didn't want to lose that connection. I decided I'm going to write a book about this. And if I'm experiencing this chances are somebody else is. So I started taking down all these notes about raising multicultural children. Mind you, I think my daughter was two at the time. Around that same time, I heard that my company Meredith was launching a magazine for Latino parents. And I thought, "wait a second here, did I just will this into existence?" And I got in touch with the right people. And I went and I interviewed for this job. I was three months pregnant with my second child at the time.

Menendez: Did you let them know? Or did you keep that on the DL?

Bastidas: Of course I let them know. I was like, "full disclosure, I am pregnant."

Menendez: Because I will tell you, I have been in that position. I have just worn an oversized blazer and hoped for the best.

Bastidas: But you know what? I think this was different because I felt like being pregnant with the second child, I'm even more qualified for this job. I was pretty candid about it and I was hired on the spot. So, matching my career to my life stage has always just made it more about what I'm passionate about than it being strictly a job. Obviously it's still a job, you're working for a big corporation, there's expectations. But it just made it easier to kind of blend my life with my career.

Menendez: What I find interesting about that jump to Parents Latina is that it's the first time you're an editor-in-chief. And you're not just an editor-in-chief, you're a founding editor-in-chief, which meant that you weren't just taking over a product that already had a vision, a voice, a clear audience. You were building all of it in real time. So take me back to those initial

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meetings. The initial thought work you were doing in terms of identifying who this reader was, what she wanted, and how you were going to serve her.

**Bastidas:** Lots of big questions there. So Parents Latina is a sister magazine to Parents. There was a really good template to follow in Parents. I was just making it very much more specific to our audience. And I was the audience. I was this potential reader. I knew that lots of modern moms are second and third generation. Many times they're married to someone of a different culture. And I knew what was important to this reader, just because of my own feelings about how I wanted to raise my children. There were also insights that I looked into because I don't pretend to know every single reader. I do think that living in New York and just being around so many different cultures is super helpful. But I had to do a lot of listening and to see what that experience of being say, a Mexican American mom in Los Angeles, versus being a Cuban-American mom in Miami, versus being a Puerto Rican mom in New York. And I say mom a lot because in the beginning, that was really who we were targeting. We've become much more inclusive.

**Menendez:** I know, your most recent cover, I got chills when I saw it.

**Bastidas:** Yes. We had a single gay dad. He's a big celeb on TikTok. His name is José Rolón. When I talked to him about being on the cover, which I never really call anybody and say like, "Hey, I'm going to put you on our cover." But I did with him. And he was like, "are you sure? Are you sure that this reader is ready for me?" I said, "yes, yes. And if this reader isn't ready, we will get them ready. They have to know your story. And it's about time to show a gay dad. And that you're single is even more empowering." As Parents Latina has evolved, the brand has to evolve with the times. And if we want to change the narrative about who's doing the parenting load at home, we have to be super inclusive of dads as well. In the beginning, it was a lot of focus on the moms and really empowering her to find her own journey as a parent. Because we were raised in a very specific way and we have to be able to take the good and leave behind the bad.

**Menendez:** Talk to me about that because I mean, the language thing is crystal clear. And I think it actually is telling that you went through when your daughter was two, because that's when they're developing language. And so you really start saying to yourself, "am I going to be serious about bilingualism?" It feels like a make or break moment. At least that's what happened for us. Beyond language, what are the things that make a Latino parent different than a non Latino parent?

**Bastidas:** The reliance on our family and them, abuela and abuelo really being part of the process and how we are raising our children, and that respect for them, and the wisdom that they bring, and how they're able to pass their culture onto your children. So the role that the grandparents play is huge in our community. And we've done studies that one in three Latinas have the grandparent as the babysitter, because that's the person they trust the most. And you know what? Her hustle. There is that certain hustle that comes with being a Latina to Latina: How Grace Bastidas Built a Media Brand for Modern Families

Latina mom, because that's what we grew up seeing. Right? So our parents sacrifice so much for us. So we want to give our kids a better life and we really try to find the best in any situation. So that hustle, that ability to work hard and be passionate about what's important to us is really special.

Menendez: Talk to me a little bit about how you build your magazine and also how you build your team, because you're operating with a fairly small team to put out what is an incredibly glossy and information dense publication.

Bastidas: Yes. We'll find ways to take a story, and how can we dissect this story for social media? How can we turn it into something else for digital? If we interview someone, "Hmm, what, where else could this person fit in?" Or maybe something coming up, oh, they're a mom, but they're also a psychologist. Maybe we use them in this story coming up, so that we are as efficient and we get to maximize the effort as much as possible. When we're building the magazine, we do have a goal of showcasing as many voices as possible, because I think that's where the magic lies, where people are reading this and think like, "Hey, this sounds like my girlfriend. Or this sounds like me. Or this sounds like my husband."

We're being inclusive. So we're constantly looking for the experts that really know our demographic and can speak in a competent way about those things that affect Latino children most. We do a mix of service, but also empowering content, inspiring content. We want to hit those emotional chords. So we want to inspire you, want to make you laugh. We want to make you think like, "Hey, this is like my friend giving me some advice."

Menendez: What do you want to do next Grace, given that all of these phases have crescendoed perfectly with your life?

Bastidas: Well, you know, when I think about my career, I think of myself as a storyteller for communities of color, I was always led into this space. Even in college, I was majoring in journalism and I just started taking a bunch of classes on Latin American history and Latin American literature. And then, somebody came up to me and was like, "Hey, if you stay one more semester, you have a whole major in Latin American studies." So I just ended up double majoring because I was interested in these topics. So it just is where my heart is. And I've always leaned on my culture to get my foot in the door. Even as a travel writer, I started writing about Colombia, because I thought, "I have no experience travel writing, but I can market myself as the Colombia expert and tell people that I'm going to change the face of Medellín from the cocaine capital of the world to the most interesting destination for interpret travelers."

Those are the stories I started writing about. One of the platforms that I'm interested in is podcasting. I like video. I enjoy being in front of the camera. And I also love the intimacy of podcasting. And I recently did a podcast on new motherhood that I found really amazing because it let me go back to those early years of having kids, and all the struggles that you feel as a new mom, as you navigate the uncertainty of like, "what am I even doing?" And I love just the intimacy of the platform, and being able to talk to people and ask questions.

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I've always loved asking questions. I really have to hold back because I want to interview you right now.

Menendez: I 100% understand that.

Bastidas: At the end of the day it's really, again, about giving a platform to different people and letting them tell their stories. And people we may not hear from, just giving them that voice to be able to share a little bit of who they are and what they're about. While I enjoy the magazine world and creating content on digital as well, I think that podcasting and video is where I see myself next.

Menendez: I love that.

Bastidas: I do want to say that the parenting thing is just, it's amazing just to be able to think about my children at work and think about my work at home and really bring these worlds together. I enjoy that so much, but I'm learning. I'm a student at heart really. I keep-

Menendez: Well, and you have to, because as you know, your industry is in flux.

Bastidas: Yeah.

Menendez: It's not like being a magazine editor is the job of the future.

Bastidas: Exactly.

Menendez: That skillset will apply to lots of different things. It may not apply to a paper product that comes out once a month.

Bastidas: Yes. While I love magazines and I continue to put my heart into everything that I do, I do realize that things are changing. And you kind of have to go with the flow and realize how you can repurpose these skills and turn them into something else. And I think being able to talk to people, interview people, get a story, get a compelling story, engage listeners or readers is something that I've always done throughout my career, starting in high school. So I think it's about translating those skills.

Menendez: Grace, thank you so much. And thank you for the self-discipline of being on the other side of the interview. I appreciate it.

Bastidas: I have to find a way to ask you some questions now.

Menendez: Here's one of my takeaways from my conversation with Grace. And that is just how rare her situation is to be producing work that is directly tied to her lived experience. And I wonder what would happen if more of us were allowed to bring ourselves to work the way that Grace has been able to infuse her work with very personal questions, curiosities, and lived experiences.

Hey, thank you so much for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantugua and me, Alicia Menendez. Sarah McClure is our senior producer. Our lead producer is Cedric Wilson. Kojin Tashiro is our associate sound designer. Stephen Colón mixed this episode. Jimmy Gutierrez is our managing editor. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor and ad ops lead. We love hearing from you email us at hola at Latinatolatina.com. Slide into our DMs on Instagram or tweet us at Latina to Latina. Remember to subscribe or follow us on radio public, Apple podcast, Google podcast, good pods, wherever you're listening right now. And remember, every time you share the podcast or you leave a review, you help us to grow as a community.

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