FAMILY AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR FOR LATINO STUDENTS TO OBTAIN A BACHELOR’S DEGREE

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THESIS

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Division of Social Work
Abstract

of

FAMILY AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR FOR LATINO STUDENTS TO OBTAIN A BACHELOR’S DEGREE

by

Elizabeth Carranza

Of every 100 Latino kindergarten children, only 11 of those Latino children will obtain at least a bachelor’s degree. Currently, Latinos are the fastest growing non-dominant ethnic group in the United States, as well as the ethnic group with the lowest level of formal education. The bachelor’s degree attainment gap is currently extremely wide, only 10% of Latinos have a bachelor’s degree versus 34% of Caucasians and 54% of Asian Americans. As a result, the Latino population is overrepresented among the poor with about a third of families living below the poverty level. The lack of Latinos obtaining a higher education is a subject of widespread concern. The absence of an education will impede this large group from contributing to the long-term economic health of the United States. Thus, it is imperative to increase the rate of Latinos in higher education by identifying the protective factors that contribute to Latino students’ academic success.

_________________________________________, Committee Chair
Susan Talamantes Eggman, Ph.D., MSW

______________________________
Date

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the woman who inspired this thesis, Emma Duran Carranza, my mother. At a young age, she instilled in me the value and importance of an education. Her endless support, heartfelt advice, and unconditional love have encouraged me to attain my educational goals. God has blessed me to have a mother like you. I am eternally grateful to you. I love you!

To my brother, Alfredo Carranza, who has kept me focused on the important things in life and has helped me stay balanced throughout this entire thesis. Thanks brother.

Thank you for believing in me!

Dedicado a la mujer que inspiro esta tesis, Emma Duran Carranza, mi madre. A una temprana edad, ella me inculco el valor y la importancia de una educación. Su apoyo interminable, consejos sinceros, y amor incondicional me han motivado a realizar me meta de una educación universitaria. Dios me ha bendecido a tener una madre como tú. Estoy eternamente agradecida. ¡Te amo!

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Chapter 1
THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Of every 100 Latino kindergarten children, only 11 of those Latino children will obtain at least a bachelor’s degree (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). The Latino population is now the largest and the fastest growing non-dominant group in the United States, surpassing the African American population in 2002 (Zalaquett, 2006; Vernez & Mizell, 2001; Santiago & Brown, 2004; Locks, Oseguera, & Vega, 2009; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). One of the main reasons that this population is growing at such a rapid pace is because it is also the youngest minority group in the country; the median age in the Latino population is 26-years-old (Zalaquett, 2006; Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). Hence, this young population has more childbearing years ahead of them, then the older population (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). It is projected that by 2025, about one fourth of all public schools in the United States will be made up of Latinos (as) younger than 18-years-old (Locks et al., 2009; Zalaquett, 2006).

Latinos in California make up half of the population under the age of five versus only 30% of Whites in this age group. In California, Latinos also make up the largest number of school-aged children, college-age students, and recent entries in the work force populations; overall Latinos in California have the largest population of each age group, up to the age of 35 (Chapa & Schink, 2006). Demographic trends estimate that in 50 years the Latino population will make up more than half of the
population growth, which will then increase to one fourth of the entire US population (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009).

The Latino population is expected to continue rapidly growing. Unfortunately, Latinos currently have the lowest rates of college enrollment, highest high school drop-out rate, and lowest bachelor’s degree attainment than any other major ethnic group in the country (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005; Ceballo, 2004; Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004; Vernez & Mizell, 2001; Miller & Garcia, 2004; Zalaquett, 2006). In the past 20 years, the percent of Latino college enrollment has increased dramatically however; a high enrollment rate does not equal a high graduation rate (Fry, 2002; Downs et al., 2008). Of all the Latino students who enroll in college only about 46% obtain their bachelor’s degree. Of Latinos 25 through 29 years of age, only 10% have a bachelor’s degree, which is far below Caucasians, Asian Americans, and African Americans (Miller & Garcia, 2004; Locks et al., 2009; Cerna et al., 2009). Therefore, these low educational rates make the Latino population the lowest educated major ethnic group in the United States (Fry, 2002).

Each year nearly 1.2 million Latino high school graduates pursue post-secondary education at community colleges or four-year institutions. Many of these students do not graduate because of various barriers such as lack of financial resources, academically unprepared, and lack of parental support (Fry, 2002). The dramatic growth in the Latino population and the low academic achievement rates can not be ignored or minimized by society because of the great impact these numbers will have on the entire nation (Cerna et al., 2009). It is essential to pay
attention and create change towards the issues, problems, and policies that relate to Latinos in education (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). The Latino population will have a tremendous impact on the nation and therefore, now is the time to assure this population academically succeeds.

Background of the Problem

The civil rights movement encouraged the Latino community to unite and become activists in order for their voices to be heard by politicians and policymakers. Historically, the Latino population had been neglected, but in the 1960s the Latino community demanded change, especially in the field of higher education (MacDonald, Botti, & Hoffman, 2007). President Lyndon B. Johnson passed legislative acts that were designed to create new policies and protect current political and social/economic opportunities for traditionally disadvantaged groups; the Higher Education Act of 1965 was passed and contributed to the ability for Latinos to access college (MacDonald et al., 2007).

Between 1970 to 1990, the Latino population made drastic progress in higher education graduation rates; the increase was greater than any other ethnic group during that time period (Vernez & Mizell, 2001). The gap in bachelor’s degree completion between Latinos and Caucasians had decreased from 14% to 11% by 1990. Latinos have not made any further progress since that time period (Vernez & Mizell, 2001). Over 30 years ago, colleges and universities began a widespread effort to increase the graduation rate, enrollment, and retention of Latinos and other minority groups in post-secondary education (Miller & Garcia, 2004). Currently, the
nation has seen progress of Latino college enrollment and degree completion. Unfortunately, these increases are not enough because the Latino population continues to grow and they still lag behind other racial groups in the nation (Downs et al., 2008; Miller & Garcia, 2004; Cerna et al., 2009). Studies show that more than 70% of Latinos have a high school diploma or less (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). Currently, the bachelor degree attainment gap is extremely wide; only 10% of Latinos have a bachelor’s degree compared to 34% of Caucasians, 54% of Asian Americans, and 18% of African Americans (Miller & Garcia, 2004; Cerna et al., 2009).

Today, about 60% of students in post-secondary education are considered to be non-traditional students, which include many Latinos. The characteristics of many Latino students are: first-generation, low-income, enrolled in community college, less academically prepared, sustain full-time jobs, and attend college part-time (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003; Zalaquett, 2006; Santiago & Brown, 2004). Most Latinos that are enrolling in college are only focused on attending a two-year educational institution versus a four-year university therefore, many Latinos are ending their higher education with an associate’s degree or no degree at all (Miller & Garcia, 2004). Statistics have proven that Latinos obtain an associate’s degree at the same rate as their Caucasian and African American counterparts, unfortunately there is a big disparity when it refers to a bachelor’s degree (Chapa & Schink, 2006).

More than 60% of Latino undergraduates begin their post-secondary education at a two-year college and often times only on a part-time basis (Fry, 2004;
Santiago & Brown, 2004; Fry, 2002; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). Several incentives have been identified as to why community colleges are so popular among the Latino community such as; inexpensive tuition compared to four-year colleges, degree programs that are designed to accommodate part-time students, classes offered in the evening for those with full time jobs, courses to improve job skills, open enrollment for academically lower performers, and technical training certificate programs (Fry, 2002; Haro, 2004).

The U.S. Department of Education did a study and found that students who attend college on a part-time basis are at risk for not completing their degree, regardless if they attend a two-year college or a four-year university (Fry, 2002). For decades, the U.S. Department of Education has also been researching the Latino graduation rates of students who began their undergraduate work at a two-year college. Statistics show that more than half of those students who begin at a community college never obtain a bachelor’s degree (Fry, 2004; Fry, 2002). Therefore, many Latino students at the community college level are only earning an associate’s degree because they continue to postpone their education, they receive vocational-training, or a certification program that promises to get them ready for the work force (Haro, 2004; Santiago & Brown, 2004). As a result, less than 30% of Latinos who begin their post-secondary education at a community college complete a bachelor’s degree (Fry, 2004).
As a result of Latinos being the most underrepresented group in higher education, they are overrepresented among the poor with about a third of families with a socioeconomic status below the poverty line (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Olivia, 2008). These numbers have underscored the financial importance that a bachelor’s degree can make towards a families socioeconomic status (Fry, 2002). Therefore, it is essential to identify the economic concerns that this issue will bring not only the Latino community but the United States as a whole.

Statement of the Research Problem

While a great deal of literature studies the risks and reasons why Latinos do not obtain a college degree, little attention has been paid to the protective family factors that support higher education. It is necessary to start researching academically successful Latinos in order to identify what they are doing right and share those positive findings with the Latino community. The importance of family in the Latino community may prove to be a positive factor to why some Latinos persist in college and graduate. Latino families may act as protective factors for why Latino students demonstrate resilience towards adversity. This study will explore the impact that family support may have on academic successful Latinos.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to understand how family can act as a protective factor towards Latinos obtaining a bachelor’s degree. Academically successful
Latino students will identify the various ways that their families supported them through their educational endeavors, and if family acted as a protective factor for them to persist towards their degree. It is vital to educate Latino students and families about the importance of higher education, and provide them with the proper tools on how to be academically successful. Latinos are known to have strong family ties therefore; if the family does not recognize the importance of an education then most likely the student will not either. It may be a possibility that in the Latino community a person is expected to work right after high school in order to start earning an income instead of paying for an education. Latinos might believe in the value system of “then and now” versus later. Therefore, re-educating them about the importance and value of an education might transform their thoughts and eventually their actions. The researcher hopes to identify how families can act as a protective factor for young Latinos to earn a college degree.

*Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical frameworks that will guide this research study are empowerment perspective and resilience theory. Empowerment perspective consists of identifying a client's power blocks. Power blocks are factors that prevent an individual from succeeding whether it is personally, academically or professionally (Payne, 2005). Conversely with empowerment perspective, practitioners assist clients in identifying those power blocks with the purpose of having clients take action, and overcoming the identified obstacles. Empowerment perspective asserts
that everyone has the power to overcome any challenge in order to be successful because people have control over their own lives (Germain & Gitterman, 1996)

Empowerment perspective will help Latinos understand that they have the power to overcome any adversity. By Latino students identifying the power blocks that are preventing them from academically succeeding, they can take action in making a change in their lives. Through empowerment perspective Latino students will be able to deconstruct and reconstruct their sense of self in order to accomplish their educational goals. The researcher wants to find a significant relationship between the family system and higher education. Therefore, if a significant relationship is identified then Latino families can be empowered to have stronger family systems in order to assure their child’s educational success.

Resilience theory is defined as the capacity for an individual to overcome, strengthen and transform by experiences of adversity (Greene, 2008). Resilience theory helps understand the protective factors that exist in the lives of successful individual who have overcome adversity. When at least some of the protective factors are present, individuals develop resiliency. There are at least four characteristics of a resilient individual which are: social competence, problem solving-skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future (Greene, 2008). Resiliency can be found at different system levels such as children, adults, families, and communities. This theory explains how disadvantaged individuals can overcome the obstacles in their life and become successful despite adversity. Resilience theory
states that everyone has the innate power to take control of their life and be successful. For example, most Latino college students are described as low-income therefore; according to resiliency theory Latinos have the power to overcome this financial challenge and successfully attain a college degree. Through resilience theory Latino students can search and utilize the protective factors that will assist them in obtaining a college degree.

Empowerment perspective and resilience theory both believe that people have the innate power to overcome any barriers despite the adversity. Unfortunately, many Latino students face several obstacles when pursuing a higher education but it has been proven that these individuals can be academically successful. Latino students can use these harsh experiences to help them transform and use it as an educational tool that will help them reach their educational goal.

Definition of Terms

Apoyo: Intangible support
At-risk students: Students who are identified as having a higher than normal probability of dropping out of school. Students are usually identified as being at-risk for some of the following factors; low socioeconomic status, underrepresented student, few support systems, poor school performance, low parental educational levels, and residing in high crime neighborhoods.
Buen Camino: The right path
Consejos: Cultural narrative advice that Latino parents give their children in order to guide them to the right path by making good decisions.

Familismo: A strong cultural value that focuses on a family’s sense of commitment, obligation, loyalty, reciprocity, and responsibility towards all family members.

First-generation students: Students whose parents did not attend or graduate college in the United States.

Non-traditional students: College students who are older (usually older than the traditional college age 18 to 25 years old), first-generation, attend college part-time, and less academically prepared.

Assumptions

This research is based on the premise that family support is a positive protective factor for Latino students’ academic success. The researcher rejects the idea that families can act as a barrier towards Latinos obtaining a higher education. Further, the researcher believes that if families are well-informed on the importance of parental involvement in education they will most likely promote education to their children.

Justification

This thesis is important to the field of social work because it educates individuals on the Latino population. The Latino population is the fastest growing non-dominant ethnic group, with the lowest level of education of all the major ethnic
groups in the United States. Obtaining a high school diploma is no longer the key to having a successful career. Earning a bachelor’s degree is essential for individuals to obtain a career and be able to provide for themselves and a family. Therefore, if Latinos are not graduating with a college degree the odds of them having a successful career are very slim, which will place this large population in low paying jobs, unemployment, or utilizing social services. Having a large uneducated population may eventually take a negative toll on the entire nation.

Even though this study is focused on education there are several factors within the study that are of interest to social workers. Having the ability to identify Latinos values and beliefs on education will help social workers understand and become culturally competent when working with this particular population. It is vital that social workers are culturally competent because it enables them to better assist Latino clients. We as social workers need to be aware of how this large population will impact the entire nation. The ability to learn more about the Latino culture increases the competency needed to help this ever-growing population. With an increased understanding, social workers will be able to effectively advocate and inform Latinos about the importance of obtaining a higher education.

Limitations

The researcher will only collect data from participants in Northern California; statistics show that Latinos in Northern California are predominantly made up of one sub-group, Mexicans. Therefore, the research may only be looking at one group of
Latinos and exclude the other Latino groups from the study. Secondly, the sample size will be small which may not be representative of the whole Latino population. Third, qualitative research contains limitations such as the researcher being subjective in interpreting the participants’ responses (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). The researcher may have prior life experiences and biases that may affect how the responses in the study are viewed and interpreted therefore; qualitative research has the limitation of being subjective. Lastly, qualitative research results cannot be generalized; findings may only be unique to the participants in the study, and not to the general population (Rubin & Babbie, 2008).
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review for this chapter will be divided into four sections. The first section will explore some of the barriers that hinder Latinos from obtaining a bachelor’s degree. These barriers include Latinos being academically less prepared for college; lack of vital college information; parent limitations; and the revolving door theory. The literature review also explores family support as a protective factor that empowers Latino students to persist in higher education. The family support includes consejos/moral support; placing school as a priority; strong work ethic; siblings as mentors; and family collaboration with educational resources. The third section will focus on the relationship between familismo or family interdependence and achieving a post-secondary education. Finally, this literature review will explore important federal programs that are designed to assist Latino families and their students to obtain a four-year degree.

Latino Barriers in Higher Education

Major research has been done to try to identify what are some of the barriers or factors that are preventing Latinos from graduating from a four-year educational institution. Some of the many factors that have been identified in the literature are: poverty, poorly prepared educators, lack of mentors or positive role models, institutional racism, being a first-generation student, lack of college information by counselors, and holding a part-time or full-time job (Zalaquett, 2006; Provitera McGlynn, 2004; Downs et al., 2008). It is clear that there are numerous obstacles
and barriers that are impeding Latinos from attending and graduating from a post-secondary institution. In the literature, there are a few obstacles that repeatedly have been highlighted as main barriers such as: academically less prepared, inadequate school counseling, miscommunication between family and the US education system, and the revolving door theory (Haro, Rodriguez Jr., & Gonzalez Jr., 1994; Miller & Garcia, 2004; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Auerbach, 2006).

Academically Less Prepared

Traditionally, secondary education sets the academic stage for students who wish to pursue a post-secondary education, unfortunately for many Latinos that has not been the case. Miller and Garcia (2004) found that after reviewing GPA’s for the high school graduating class of 2002, who took the SAT’s, Latinos were found to have a lower GPA than their Caucasian and Asian American counter parts. For Mexican American’s the average SAT GPA was 3.21, for Puerto Ricans it was 3.07, and other Latinos had a 3.14 whereas Caucasians had a 3.37 and Asian Americans had 3.43 (Miller & Garcia, 2004). Unfortunately all standardized tests administered to high school students suggests that nationally Latinos are greatly underrepresented among seniors who are academically prepared to attend a four-year institution (Miller & Garcia, 2004). Statistics show that only a few number of Latinos are taking college preparatory courses compared to Caucasian and Asian American students. For example, nationally the graduating high school class of 1998, only 26 percent of Latinos reported taking a full set of college prep math courses versus 45 percent of white students and 55 percent of Asian American students (Miller &
Garcia, 2004). These disappointing numbers suggest that many Latinos are not academically prepared for the high academic demands of college.

Measured by grades, standardized test scores, college admission, and weakness in high school academic programs are several indicators that Latinos are not academically prepared for college. Therefore, Latino college students are expected to perform academically lower than Caucasian and Asian American students (Miller & Garcia, 2004). Inadequate secondary school preparation may become a hindrance for Latino students to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution and/or to obtain a bachelor’s degree (Melguizo, 2007). Unfortunately, after reviewing all these statistics that label many Latinos as academically unprepared for college, it poses the question why are these students academically unprepared for higher education? Sciarra & Whitson (2007) state that many Latinos attend high poverty schools where the educators are unqualified. The teachers are labeled as under qualified because they lack a major or minor in the field they are teaching (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). Statistics have proven that 41 percent of math courses are taught by teachers without a bachelor’s degree in mathematics in schools where there is a high population of students of color. Versus, only 21 percent of math courses being taught by non-math degree educators in schools with a low population of students of color. Therefore, the quality of instruction that Latinos are receiving in high schools tends to be less than their Caucasian peers (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007).
Lack of College Information

Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffīn, & Allen (2008) found that low-income Latinos who attend urban, high poverty schools are less likely to receive timely, ample information about college admission, as well as financing for college. This lack of valid information presents a major barrier to pursue a post-secondary education for these students (Zalaquett, 2006). Unfortunately, one of the main reasons that these students are not obtaining this fundamental college information is of a lack of effective college counseling in the high school system (Kimura-Walsh et al., 2008; Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004). School counselors are found to be vital college informants for all students, especially first-generation students, whose parents lack the college experience (Corwin et al., 2004; Perna et al., 2008). Nationwide their has been a continuous problem with inadequate college counseling in overcrowded high schools and unfortunately, overcrowded schools are most likely to take place in schools where there is a large minority enrollment (Kimura-Walsh et al., 2008; Corwin et al., 2004)

According to the American School Counselor Association (as cited in Perna et al., 2008), the recommended student-to-counselor ratio should be 100:1 but oftentimes those numbers are extremley larger in high populated schools. Nationwide the student-to-counselor ratio is about 229:1 and in California the rate doubles to 543:1 (California Department of Education, 2002; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2008). Oftentimes school counselors are overburdened with huge case loads and consequently focus most of their time with advanced placement students or those
with disciplinary problems (Kimura-Walsh et al., 2008; Venezia & Kirst, 2005; 
Perna et al., 2008; Corwin et al., 2004; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). It is not 
uncommon for school counselors with enormous case loads to provide inadequate 
college counseling as well as neglect certain student groups (Gonzalez, Stone, & 
Jovel, 2003; Corwin et al., 2004).

Corwin et al. (2004) interviewed teachers, counselors, assistant principals, 
principal and students at a Los Angeles area high school. The study aimed to 
examine the role of appropriate guidance towards attending college. The study found 
that there was an incredible amount of disconnect between the intended affects of 
counseling and the students perception of the usefulness of guidance counseling at 
the school. Guidance counselors sometimes even served as obstacles to college 
access. In the study students expressed their frustration towards counselors not 
enrolling them in the proper college ready courses, counselors being inaccessible, 
and having the perception that school counselors did not care about their well-being. 
A student in the study illustrated how a friend of hers was unable to fulfill the 
eligibility requirements of the California State University system because of a school 
counselor that told him “you aren’t going to college” (2004, p. 452). This 
impediment sends a message to the students that college is not an option.

Perna et al. (2008) studied 15 high schools in five different states; California, 
Florida, Georgia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. The study was designed to explore 
various layers of context associated with college counseling at selected high schools. 
After interviewing 596 participants made up of students, teachers, counselors, and
parents; researchers found that college counseling was limited because of the large school counselor case loads as well as schools and counselors having other priorities. Counselors at low-resource schools recognize that they had other priorities, such as ensuring that students graduate from high school instead of practicing college counseling. The study also demonstrated that students who do not proactively seek college counseling or if students attend a high school where higher education is not the norm, they most likely will not receive ample college counseling. As a result, students who have the biggest need for college counseling oftentimes encounter structural barriers that prevent them from receiving that much needed counseling.

There is a large body of literature that explores the implications of inadequate college counseling in the high school systems, especially in overcrowded schools. Low-income, first-generation, students of color are most likely to attend high populated high schools (Corwin et al., 2004; Perna et al., 2008). Therefore, these students oftentimes have support from their parents but the parents are unable to provide their children with privileged information about college. In that event, students lack the knowledge of college requirements, college application process and availability of financial aid (Corwin et al., 2004; Perna et al., 2008; Zalaquett, 2006; Gonzalez et al., 2003; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). Hence, there is a greater need for appropriate college counseling in overcrowded high schools in order for Latino students to successfully pursue a post-secondary education (Perna et al., 2008).
Parent Limitations

An important characteristic identified for Latino students in the U.S. educational system is that many are first-generation students (Brown et al., 2003). As a result, it is not unusual for U.S. educators to witness a lack of immigrant parent involvement in their child’s education (Lopez, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). In the United States, educators expect parents to be active participants in their children’s education; in practices traditionally associated with White-middle class parents (Auerbach, 2006; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Teachers and administrators expect parents to assist in homework assignments, volunteer in the classroom, attend school functions, and organize fundraisers (Lopez, 2001; Auerbach, 2006; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Gandara, 1995). Latino immigrant parents arrive to the United States with very different cultural models than those found among White-middle class parents. Also, many Latino parents have limited education, lack proficiency of the English language, and class-based barriers that hinder their school participation (Ceballo, 2004; Lopez, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Auerbach, 2006; Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007; Plunkett & Bamacal-Gomez, 2003).

Ceballo (2004) states that in many instances, Latino parents are uncomfortable assisting their children with reading or math assignments because of the lack of proficiency in the English language. Therefore, Latino parents are oftentimes unable to assist their children with school work or other classroom assignments. Also, due to English language deficit, they are uncomfortable attending
school functions or participating on parent advisory boards. The literature explores how Latino parents tend to stay away from school function for various reasons, such as lack of Spanish-speaking school staff, alienated by school educators, lack of transportation, heavy work demands, and lack of child care resources. Unfortunately, if Latino parents are not active participants in their child’s education, Many American educators assume that they do not promote their child’s school progress (Auerbach, 2006; Gandara, 1995; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

Chrispeels and Rivero (2001) state that Latino parents are genuinely interested in their child’s education, but often have different expectations compared to the U.S. educational system, and frequently have limited formal educational experience. Latino immigrant parents often are not able to assist their children in the higher education process because they do not have the knowledge or educational resources to properly guide their child (Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007; Zalaquett, 2006).

In a qualitative study conducted by Zalaquett (2006) participants identified barriers that affected their access to higher education. The 12 participants attended a large urban university and were recipients of an urban university’s Latino scholarship program; 10 participants were first-generation students. Zalaquett found that the majority of the participants received minimal guidance from their parents in making educational choices. The students explained how their parents supported their education, but were not English proficient and they lacked higher education
experience. A student illustrated this barrier as, “My major obstacle was that my parents couldn’t help me with any of my applications because neither of them went to school and neither of them spoke English” (2006, p. 38).

Further, Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain (2007) studied 104 recent high school graduates who were either attending community college or not enrolled in any post-secondary education. The study explored how family experiences contribute to higher education attainment in Mexican American students. The study found that parents encouraged their children to pursue a higher education even though they were unable to assist their children with class assignments. More than half of the participants in the study explained how their parents had less than a high school education. Therefore, parents had limited educational experiences that hindered assisting their children with their school work.

*Revolving Door Theory*

The last barrier that the literature focused on was the “revolving door” theory. According to Olivia (2008), many colleges and universities expect current Latino students to have the same level of information, understanding, foundation, and or financial resources as traditional college students. Many educational institutions enroll Latino students, but they do not have programs or services to support these students with their specific needs. These programs are essential to succeed in college, otherwise Latino students will be enrolling in college but not completing, which is seen as a revolving door (Haro et al., 1994; Olivia, 2008). The literature explores how although some Latinos are continuing their post-secondary
education, many do not graduate. This is due to the fact that some colleges and universities do not have retention programs/services or the services are not advertised to students that have academic difficulties, trouble accessing financial resources, and many cultural issues. These are some of the main barriers why many Latino students tend to drop out of college (Haro et al., 1994).

Family Support

For many Latinos who persist in obtaining a four-year education, it has become evident that parents are not able to guide them through the difficult processes of applying to colleges and academic planning once accepted (Gonzalez et al., 2003; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2008; Ceballo, 2004; Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006). Nevertheless, there is a large body of literature that suggests that parents are the number one protective factor that motivates Latino students to have college aspirations as well as successfully obtain a bachelor’s degree. (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Cerna et al., 2009; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2008; Zalaquett, 2006). Also, many Latinos who are near completion, or have successfully graduated from a four-year institution, have identified parental support as one of the strongest factors for their academic success (Ceballo, 2004; Zalaquett, 2006; Ong et al., 2006; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007).

In a qualitative study done by Ceballo (2004) she recognized a distinct theme when interviewing 10 first-generation, U.S. born Latino students attending Yale University. The findings identified how immigrant parents viewed education as the main vehicle for social and economic mobility in the United States. These
immigrant parents knew the value of education, and the potential education had to change an individual’s life, and, as a result, they supported their child’s educational endeavors. The participants identified family support as a major contribution to their academic achievement.

Ong et al. (2006) state that the participation of persistent parental support may be important in defining the reason why Latinos with a low socioeconomic status demonstrate resilience in obtaining a bachelor’s degree. Auerbach (2006) describes how, without family support, some Latino students may be forced to obtain a full-time job after high school instead of enrolling in college. For Latinas the lack of parental support may mean that they are unable to move away for college because of traditionally strict family values (Gonzalez, Jovel, & Stoner, 2004). The deficit of parental support may also define the reason why some Latino students from a low socioeconomic status may not persist in pursuing higher education (Ong et al., 2006). It is clear that many Latino families who do promote education assist their children’s education in non-traditional forms such as consejos, motivation, life stories, prioritizing education, older siblings as mentors, displaying a strong work ethic, and parental collaboration in successful retention and outreach programs.

Moral Support/Consejos

Consejos are defined by Auerbach (2006) and Delgado-Gaitan(1994) as cultural narratives that many Latino parents use to convey to their children family values and morals such as the importance of higher education. Consejos to Latinos imply a cultural domain of communication that is infused with emotional empathy
and family expectations (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valades, 1996). Auerbach (2006) states that *consejos* are often used by less educated Latino families as a technique to guide and strengthen their children especially in the value of education. There is an abundance of literature that identifies parental support as a key factor for Latinos persisting in college, especially through *consejos* (Saucedo Ramos, 2003; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valades, 1996; Auerbach, 2006; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994).

Romo and Falbo (1996) studied 100 Hispanic teenagers who were classified by their school district as at-risk students. The qualitative study aimed to explain how at-risk Hispanic youth overcame the odds, and successfully graduated from high school. The four-year longitudinal study collected data from the at-risk students, their families, and their schools. The researchers found that parents in the study conveyed the importance of obtaining an education through *consejos*. *Consejos* was one of the techniques utilized by the parents to motivate their at-risk teenager to stay in school, and get that high school diploma.

Many Latinos who are born to immigrant parents identify that their family’s emotional and moral support through *consejos* was the key component to their academic success (Auerbach, 2006). The literature suggests that even though Latino families are oftentimes seen as powerless, when it refers to education and the concept of *consejos*, Latino families are able to create a strong bond that helps one another. This bond creates a unity and a force within families, which enables them to share experiences on how to take care of each other as well as support one another.
in various situations. Therefore, *consejos* act as a protective factor for families in the Latino community (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Auerbach, 2006; Valades, 1996).

The literature identifies how most of the moral support provided by Latino parents is in the form of verbal communication; parents become empowered by their linguistic strength, and support their children’s navigation through the U.S. education system (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Auerbach, 2006; Zalaquett, 2006). This support is illustrated by the words of a Latina college student; “What motivated me the most to move on to college were my parents. They instilled in me values and morals that education was an important part of. My parents never stopped reminding me of how crucial an education is to a stable future by telling me how difficult it was for them to get where they are now when they came to this country,” (Zalaquett, 2006, p. 40).

Auerbach (2006) conducted an ethnographic study to explore the possibilities and constraints of parents’ moral support. She interviewed parents and students who were part of a college access program at the University of California, Los Angeles. The researcher found that moral support is the foundation of how Latino families support their child’s education, and encourage them to do well academically. For many Latino parents in this study, especially those who are Spanish speaking, their definition of school involvement is *apoyo*, which means support rather than physical involvement. Moral support encompasses stressing the value of an education, encouraging their children to work hard and study harder, and motivating them to always persist in college aspirations. These are mainly done through narrative advice, and other effective forms. Parents in the study set the moral foundation to
urge their children to pursue higher education in hopes that independently they will obtain their academic goals (Auerbach, 2006).

Ceballo (2004) found after interviewing 10 first-generation, academically successful Latino students that they were greatly influenced by their parents’ verbal statements on the importance of education, nonverbal support for academic success, and the complete trust parents relayed to their children. Latino parents demonstrate an incredible amount of trust in their children to follow the buen camino (the right path) in all aspects of their life, including education. Therefore, parents tend to not get involved in the educational choices that their children may make; giving their children a “blank check” when it comes to all academic matters (Auerbach, 2006; Ceballo, 2004). Parents believe that through all the moral support and consejos they have provided their children over the years they are capable of doing well in school, and finding the proper resources that are needed to enroll and successfully graduate from college (Auerbach, 2006; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Ceballo, 2004).

School as a Priority

Family support is a positive factor that contributes to the academic success of Latino students each year. It was identified that parents not only display their support verbally but also non-verbally. Ceballo (2004) interviewed 10 first-generation, U.S. born, Latino students attending Yale University. The study examined the role of parents and home characteristics on the academic achievement of low-income, first-generation Latino students. The researcher found that there were four family
attributes that were main contributors to the students’ academic success. Ceballo (2004) identified that making education a priority is a form of non-verbal support that parents were giving their children. Participants in the study stated that their immigrant families could have used the extra money they could earn by entering the workforce, but their parents wanted them to focus all their time on their studies, and denied them the opportunity to get a job. Many immigrant parents even made a drastic change in their families lives to demonstrate the importance of education; they would stop migrating for seasonal work in order for their children to not miss any portion of the school year. This displayed to young Latino children the high value that their immigrant parents placed on education (Ceballo, 2004).

Academically successful Latinos have also stated that their parents confirmed the importance of education by always placing their school work above all other things that could be a distraction. This included being excused from doing their chores, visiting family, attending church services, and working while in school (Cooper, 2002; Ceballo, 2004; Auerbach, 2006; Zalaquett, 2006; Lopez, 2001). Some parents were even described as attempting to make their home a better study environment by lowering the television, and making sure siblings were not disrupting the student (Ceballo, 2004). Placing academics above many other things in the lives of Latinos reinforced to these students the great value and importance of education. Other non-verbal support included nurturing behaviors such as providing their child with snacks to eat while they work on school work throughout the night, giving them a hug when they stay up late writing a paper, and waking a child up at
dawn to make sure they can complete their class project (Ceballo, 2004). These behaviors that placed academics as a priority reinforced to the Latino students in the research study that their parents truly valued academics, and overall wanted them to also prioritize education (Ceballo, 2004).

**Strong Work Ethic**

In the Latino culture, the value of hard work is an essential attribute of a person’s life style. Many Latino parents have a strong work ethic, and, therefore, the majority of the time they expect their child to adhere to that standard. Gandara (1995) found that many academically successful Latinos described their parents as the “hardest working people they had ever known” (p 31). The parents’ hard work served as a model of behavior that gets translated to their children to work just as hard academically (Gandara, 1995; Lopez, 2001). Cabrera and Padilla (2004) studied two Stanford University students of Mexican heritage, a male and a female, in order to explore their academic resilience. The study found that at a very young age both informants knew the value of a strong work ethic because they would accompany their parents when they worked the fields (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). These students were able to experience firsthand the harsh working conditions that their parents’ jobs required.

Further, Cabrera & Padilla (2004) found that having Latino children observe their migrant parents hard at work motivated them to want something better for their lives. Parents would constantly remind these children that they should strive for
more in their lives, especially in a country with so many opportunities. One Latino student recalled, “My dad always tells us you don’t want to work or end up like me, working as a laborer, having people tell you what to do” (Mendoza, 2005, p.1). Parents used these tactics to motivate their children to continue their education and graduate from college in a country that many parents viewed as the “land of opportunity” (Kimura-Walsh et al., 2008; Haro et al., 1994).

Lopez (2001) conducted a qualitative study with five immigrant families residing in Texas. The study was aimed at exploring how families negotiated their involvement in their children’s education. In Lopez’s study he decided to only elaborate on one particular family, the Padilla family. The Padilla family was a very unique family; the parents were migrant workers who only spoke Spanish, and yet they managed to raise five academically successful children. All five children graduated from high school in the top 10 percent of their class. Although the Padilla parents were unable to assist their children in their school work, they successfully were able to demonstrate and promote the importance of hard work.

The researcher found that the Padilla parents not only integrated a strong work ethic in the family’s daily life, but also used it as a motivational tool to promote education to their children. All of the children experienced hard labor at a very early age and were constantly reminded, by their parents, of the limited opportunities for individuals who lacked an education. One of the children in the study illustrated how the Padilla parents used hard work as a motivational tool, “And they took us with
them [to work] to show us what it was like to work. And, well, they always told us, ‘you have a choice: you could either work hard in school or you could work hard in the fields’” (Lopez, 2001, para.31). Through non-traditional forms of parent involvement, the Padilla parents were able to successfully shape their children’s thoughts in regards to a strong work ethic as well as a positive orientation towards education (Lopez, 2001).

**Siblings as Mentors**

Although there is substantial literature that suggests that many Latino students are not able to count on their parents for tangible academic support, there are other members in the family unit, siblings can provide that assistance (Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007; Gonzalez et al., 2003). Gandara (1995) found that a number of academically successful Latinos reported that older siblings played a very important role in paving the way towards a post-secondary education. In several studies Latino students have credited their older siblings, who successfully attended college, with motivating them and especially for making it seem possible for them to also pursue a college degree (Gandara, 1995; Mendoza, 2005; Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007). For many Latino students their older siblings became the mentors that gave them the resilience to continue their education.

Gonzalez et al. (2003) studied different groups of Latina students; one group was attending a four-year university and the second group was attending a California community college. The researchers aimed to understand how relationships with
family and school personnel affected higher education opportunities. The study found that siblings were described as agents of social capital by the participants. The informants explained that their parents were unable to provide them with information or knowledge about college, but their siblings did have the ability to provide them with that information. A participant describes, “College was not known to my parents. The main thing for my parents was for me to finish high school because that is all they knew. So, it was my siblings who I went to for advice and who told me about it” (p. 155).

Older siblings are often viewed as a bridge that connects the Latino home to the U.S. educational system (Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007). Studies have proven that in many Latino families older brothers and sisters assist their younger siblings with reading and math, as well as educated them about school expectations (Cooper, 2002). These siblings are able to provide their younger brothers and sister with the proper tools that are needed to succeed in school and pursue a post-secondary education. Older siblings, with college experience, act as role models and informants for younger siblings. They provide support with the enrollment process in the areas of college preparatory courses, entrance exams, financial aid applications, and college applications (Mendoza, 2005; Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007). College educated siblings have the ability to demonstrate to their younger siblings that obtaining a college degree is tangible and beneficial for enhanced career opportunities and financial success (Mendoza, 2005).
**Family Collaboration with Educational Programs**

Several college outreach/retention programs have been developed in order to guide first-generation college students through the difficult college process; some of the successful programs are Puente Project, AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination, Upward Bound, federal TRIO programs, MESA(Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement), CAMP(College Assistance Migrant Program), ENLACE (ENgaging LAtino Communities for Education) (Locks, Oseguera, & Vega, 2009; Cooper, 2002). These programs provide Latino students the proper resources to pursue post-secondary education and successfully obtain a four-year degree. Ortiz (2004) states that many of these successful outreach and or retention programs work because they understand that Latino students are part of a family system therefore, parents as well as students are educated and involved in the college process. Mina, Cabrales, Juarez, & Rodriguez-Vasquez (2004) found that several academically successful Latinos indicated that university, family, and community partnerships are essential for college completion.

One of the most successful programs in California is the Puente Project (meaning bridge in Spanish) program, which was launched in the Bay Area in 1981(Mendoza, 2005; Haro R., 2004). The mission of this effective program is to increase the number of minority students who successfully enroll and graduate from a four-year institution (Mendoza, 2005). The program is composed of three areas; a 2-year college-prep English course, a mentor program, and a Puente counselor. The dominant population that the program serves are Latino students consequently, the
mentors as well as the counselors are Spanish speaking Latinos. The reasoning behind this is because the program wants its staff members to be able to serve as role models and connect with the students and their families (Haro, 2004).

The Puente Project program goes through two different stages; first, it recruits students at the high school level and prepares them for college; second, it prepares and mentors students to successfully transfer to a four-year educational institution (Haro, 2004). Puente counselors focus on working with students and their parents to ensure that students are enrolled in the proper college-preparatory courses. The Puente counselors guarantee that parents have the proper information to be able to effectively support their child's educational success (Haro, 2004). Furthermore, students who have participated in the Puente program are known to do as well or better academically in a four-year university than students who did not participate in the Puente program (Haro, 2004). Most outreach/retention programs focus on parental involvement in their child’s education because of literature and studies that have identify parents as a protective factor for Latino students’ academic success.

Family Interdependence/Familismo

The Latino population identifies as being a collectivist culture which is in contrast to the individualistic beliefs of the American population (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Valades, 1996; Sy, 2006). Collectivist cultures emphasize the goals, interests and successes not on individualism or independence, but on a family network (Fuligni et al., 1999;
Valades, 1996). In the Latino culture familismo is defined as a strong cultural value that focuses on a family’s sense of commitment, obligation, loyalty, reciprocity, and responsibility towards all family members (Zalaquett, 2006; Sy & Romero, 2008; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). The literature review thus far has stated the importance for Latino students to obtain family support in order to be academically successful. In this section, literature will be introduced on how Latino students feel a sense of obligation towards their family through familismo, which also acts as a protective factor for higher education.

At a young age children who are a part of a collectivist culture are raised to respect their family, contribute to the household, and assist parents in dealing with the outside world (Fuligni et al., 1999; Fuligni, 1997). For Latino children familismo is taught through family obligations and responsibilities such as; translating documents, work around the house, caring over siblings, financially contributing to the household and interpreting for immigrant parents because of the child’s greater knowledge of the English language and U.S. customs (Auerbach, 2006; Sy & Romero, 2008; Fuligni et al., 1999; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Therefore, at a very young age Latinos are taught that they are members of a family unit and the importance of loyalty to the family system as well as the value of reciprocity towards their parents (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Valades, 1996; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995).
Ong et al. (2006) studied 123 Latino college students from different Latino backgrounds, such as Mexican American, Central American, and a mixture of the two. The longitudinal study aimed at exploring the protective influences of psychological and family factors on Latino academic success. The researchers found that family interdependence and obligation to a family system are factors that motivate many Latinos to persist in higher education. The study found that Latino students had a desire to academically succeed because they wanted to repay their immigrant parents for all their sacrifices. As expressed by a Latina college student, “It reminds me that it’s not all about the career, that it’s the family….I have to get the money, I have to do well in a career” (Sy & Romero, 2008, p. 222).

Latino children, especially those with immigrant parents, understand the hardships that their parents had to endure to come to the United States to provide their children with a better future. These children are aware of the sacrifices and difficulties that have been made by the parents and hence develop a sense of obligation and responsibility to their parents (Fuligni, 1997; Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Fuligni, 1999; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Valades, 1996). Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995) conducted a study of 189 adolescents which were divided into four different groups; Mexicans, born and living in Mexico; Mexican immigrants, born in Mexico and living in the United States; Second-generation Mexican Americans, born and raised in the United States to Mexican immigrant parents; White Americans, born and raised in the United States to non-Hispanic parents. A portion of the study was designed to examine the nature of
*familismo* in the four groups. The researchers found that family interdependence was important in all Latino cultures.

Further, Mexican immigrants and second-generation Mexican Americans in the study demonstrated a stronger sense of obligation toward the family. One of the reasons for this outcome may be that both of these groups have immigrant parents. Latino adolescents in the study recognize and appreciate the sacrifices that their immigrant parents have made by moving to the United States. As a result, many Latino students obtain a bachelor’s degree to honor their parents as well as enable them to secure a well paid career; a career that will allow them to financially provide for their parents (Sy & Romero, 2008; Zalaquett, 2006; Fuligni & Pedersen 2002; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). These Latino students are motivated by their parents’ sacrifices and they achieve academic success in order to repay their parents for what they have done on their behalf, which is defined as reciprocity (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995).

However, there are some studies that contradict that *familismo* is a protective factor for Latino academic success. Desmond and Lopez Turley (2009) surveyed 13,803 seniors in 96 Texas public high schools, selected through random sampling. The study was designed to examine the ethnic differences in college application patterns, and to analyze to what extend these differences can be explained by students wishing to live at home during college. The study found that Hispanic *familismo* can be a hindrance to students’ educational success. According to the
study, Hispanics in Texas are most likely to feel that living at home during college is important. Participants in the study who indicated that it is important to stay at home during college are significantly less likely to apply for college, especially a four-year educational institution. It is also important to state that post-secondary educational institutions are a significant distance away from the rural Texas areas were many Hispanics reside. As a result, it is not uncommon for other researchers to find negative correlations between Latino family interdependence and academic success. Some have stated that Latino familismo cripples an individual’s achievement motivation because of the lack of independent training (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Desmond & Lopez Turley, 2009).

Nevertheless, family interdependence has been identified as an important protective factor that encourages Latinos to strive for academic success, and it is vital for educational institutions to take this factor into consideration. Currently many universities promote the separation of students from their families with the purpose of developing self-reliant and independent students who rank academics as their highest priority (Sy & Romero, 2008). The values that are implemented in the U.S. higher educational system completely differ from the Latino value of familismo, which has been proven to work for the Latino community (Sy & Romero, 2008). As a result, universities and colleges are urged to recognize the importance of family integration when developing programs for Latino students (Haro et al., 1994). Ortiz (2004) found that college programs and professionals who have successfully worked
with the Latino population have done so because they have collaborated with the students’ family system by also integrating them in the college experience.

**Government Providing Latinos Access to Higher Education**

Financial aid plays a very important role in Latinos having the opportunity to pursue a post-secondary education. Many Latino students and their families are unaware of the vast amount of financial resources that are available to finance a college education. Students and their families are often unaware of the different types of financial aid programs that are available and accessible to them. Consequently, many Latino students and their families believe that four-year institutions are out of reach financially, and students choose to attend a community college because it is less expensive (Brown et al., 2003). It is vital that Latino student, as well as their families, are educated about the federal, state, and institutional aid that is available to ensure that economic barriers do not impede students from obtaining a college degree (Santiago & Brown, 2004).

In 1965 the federal government passed an important policy that gave minority students financial access to college, the Higher Education Act (HEA) (Jun, 2001; Santiago & Brown, 2004; Gandara, 1995; Brown et al., 2003). The main function of the Higher Education Act is to authorize the major federal programs that support higher education in the U.S. The HEA is reauthorized every five years in order to accommodate the ever-changing U.S. demographics (Santiago & Brown, 2004). The HEA contains several programs that focus on the positive contributors in higher
education such as students, parents, educators, and educational institutions. Some of the HEA programs that have had a positive influence on Latino college students are student support services, funding for educational institution support, and student financial aid (Santiago & Brown, 2004).

One of the HEA programs that directly serves the Latino college community is Title V- the Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions Program (HSIs). Title V is designed to provide HSIs with five year grants for institutional development. All HSIs are accredited, nonprofit, educational institutions, with 25% or more of their student body made up of full-time, undergraduate Latino students (Brown et al., 2003; Santiago & Brown, 2004). Currently, there are about 200 grants averaging $375,000 awarded to these educational institutions each year (Santiago & Brown, 2004). Though many HSIs were not created solely to serve Latino students, many of these institutions are located in areas with large Latino populations. This enables a large number of Latinos to have access to resources, information, and services related to post-secondary education at a very young age (Brown et al., 2003). Presently, about 45% of Latinos pursuing a post-secondary education are enrolled in HSIs (Santiago & Brown, 2004).

The HEA also authorizes financial aid programs that are available through the federal government. The majority of these programs are loans and grants such as Pell grants, federal supplemental educational opportunity grants (SEOG), unsubsidized loans, PLUS loans, loan forgiveness for teachers, college work-study,
and Perkins loans (Brown et al., 2003; Santiago & Brown, 2004; Jun, 2001). The federal government wants to provide low-income students with various financial resources that will help them successfully attend a higher educational institution (Jun, 2001). In the 2003-2004 academic school year, 50% of undergraduate Latinos received federal aid, reinforcing the importance of federal financial aid assistance (Santiago & Cunningham, 2005).

In addition to financial aid programs and institutional development, HEA also authorizes support services such as TRIO programs and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP), that prepare students for higher education as well as support them to persist through college (Jun, 2001; Santiago & Brown, 2004; Brown et al., 2003). The GEAR-UP program was created 11 years ago to raise the number of low-income students who are prepared to attend and graduate college. The program supplies five-year grants to states and institutions in order for them to provide services at economically disadvantaged middle and high schools (Brown et al., 2003; Santiago & Brown, 2004). In 2003, the GEAR-UP program served an estimated 1.3 million students, many of whom were Latinos (Santiago & Brown, 2004).

There are a total of eight outreach and student support programs housed under the Federal TRIO Programs; Talent Search, Upward Bound, Upward Bound-Math/Science, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate, TRIO Dissemination Partnership, and Training
Program for Federal TRIO Programs. The programs are designed to assist low-income, first-generation students from middle school to graduate school (Santiago & Brown, 2004). The programs support students’ academic progress, career and financial counseling, tutoring, mentoring and grants to prepare students for doctoral studies. The federal government allocated $802 million to the TRIO programs in 2002 (Santiago & Brown, 2004). Studies have shown that these programs have improved Latino access to higher education as well as that of other underserved ethnic groups (Brown et al., 2003).

**Gaps in the Literature**

In the literature review, the researcher identified an important gap in the literature. The literature did not identify how living in a negative environment could impede Latinos from obtaining a higher education. Unfortunately, most negative environments are found in low-income neighborhoods because of higher crime rate, lack of school resources, high drug activity, and large school dropout rates. The researcher believes that this was an important gap because the literature recognized that the majority of Latinos are of a low socioeconomic status therefore, it is probable that they reside in low-income neighborhoods. Oftentimes individuals who are surrounded by a negative environment can participate in negative behavior such as dropping out of school, gangs, substance abuse, and theft. Consequently, a negative environment can place Latinos at-risk for not pursuing and obtaining a higher education.
Although there have been hundreds of studies designed to identify the barriers for Latinos in higher education, this particular study is designed to focus on the positive factors. This study is designed to analyze and identify the protective factors that assist Latinos with post-secondary education. The researcher felt that it was important to briefly touch on some higher education barriers but not to make it the main focus of the study. Therefore, the focus of this study is to identify the protective factors of academically successful Latinos.

Summary

Latinos in higher education often experience a number of barriers such as lack of college information, parental limitations, lack of college retention, and being less prepared academically to enter college. Therefore, it is often vital for these students to have family support, which is described in the dominant culture as non-traditional support. Latino families demonstrate their support through consejos and moral support, making education a high priority, demonstrating a strong work ethic, siblings as mentors, and parents collaborating with educational programs. In addition to having family support, the literature found that family interdependence is another important protective factor. Latino students have a stronger motivation than their non-Latino peers to obtain a higher education because they want to repay their parents for their sacrifices. Finally, Latino students and their families need to be educated about the vast number of federal programs that have been created to assist them in college. The Higher Education Act has developed programs that assist
students with financial aid, funding for student support services, and grants for educational institutional support, which can be great resources for Latino college students.
Chapter 3

METHODS

The research methods used for this study will be described in five sections. The first section explains the study design. The second section describes the sampling procedures used by the researcher. The third section explains the instruments used and the data collection procedure. The fourth section illustrates the data analysis approaches. Finally, the protection of human subjects is explained.

Study Design

The purpose of the research study is to explore and describe the impact of family support as a protective factor for Latino students obtaining a college degree. This study will use qualitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation. During analysis of the transcriptions, the researcher will locate emerging themes from the interviews and will interpret them in the preparation for the findings of the study.

A qualitative design was used because the researcher wants in depth and in detail descriptions on how family is a protective factor for academically successful Latinos. Qualitative research is designed to explore the deeper meaning of people’s life experiences, and from those findings is able to create significant theoretical observations (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). The researcher felt that in order to effectively understand this population’s reality of education it was most appropriate to use a qualitative design.
Sampling Procedures

The sampling design that was used for this research was the snowball sampling method. The researcher initially recruited participants by word-of-mouth and later on by referral source. The participant criteria were Latinos who have successfully obtained a bachelor’s degree. The researcher recruited a few participants by word-of-mouth then she requested those participants to refer others who met the participant criteria. A few names and contact information was given to the researcher. The researcher contacted and explained the study via email to the potential participants. Subsequently, a few additional participants agreed to take part in the study. All participants in the research were recruited from the Northern California area.

Instruments and Data Collection

The instruments used for this study were a consent form, a demographics questionnaire, and 12 open-ended interview questions. All participants were given an informed consent form prior to beginning the interviews (See Appendix A). The researcher reviewed and explained the consent form to all the participants before they signed the form. Once the consent form was reviewed and read over by the all participants they were required to sign and date the form. The interviews were recorded with the participants’ signed permission. Before beginning with the interviews each participant was given a demographics questionnaire in order for the researcher to have some general background information about the participant. The demographics questionnaire asked the following: highest level of education, parental
levels of education, current socioeconomic status, profession, Latino subgroup, and college generation (See Appendix B). It was the researchers’ hopes that the data collected via the demographics questionnaire correlate with the participant’s interview responses.

The researcher conducted all the interviews face-to-face in a secure place chosen by the participant. Most often interviews were conducted at the participant’s residency. The interview was made up of 12 open-ended questions that on average lasted to one hour. The researcher recorded all the interviews with a recorder as well as took written notes. The interview questions were designed to focus on several aspects of family and education. The participants were asked to describe any barriers they may have had while in college, explain how parents supported and encouraged education, and in what ways was family involved in their education. In addition, participants were asked about the importance of family interdependence, siblings as role models, and a strong work ethic. Lastly, participants were asked to give advice to Latino students on how to be successful in college (See Appendix C). Data collection took place from January 18, 2010 through March 5, 2010. Once the researcher completed the interviews, the researcher personally transcribed the recorded interviews and organized the information provided from the demographics questionnaire.

Data Analysis

All the interviews that were conducted for this researcher were recorded with a recorder to ensure accuracy of the participant’s responses. The researcher also
made sure to take additional notes throughout all the interviews, for self clarification. Before beginning the interviews, the researcher also had the participants complete a demographics questionnaire in order to have vital background information of all the participants. The responses from the demographics questionnaire were later organized in a table that could be easily understood. After completing all the interviews the researcher transcribed the recording.

The researcher separated all of the participant’s responses based on the question number. For example, all the responses for question one were placed in a section; all the responses for question two were placed in a different section and so forth. Then, the researcher searched for common themes through content analysis. Content analysis allowed the researcher to code the themes that were found throughout the interview. The researcher coded the themes by identifying common words or statements from the responses. Lastly, the researcher selected clear and concise quotes from the participants that she would utilize in the findings section.

Protection of Human Subjects

The consent form, demographics questionnaire, and 12 open-ended interview questions were designed by the researcher and submitted with the application for the protection of human subjects to the California State University, Sacramento Division of Social Work Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. The application was reviewed by the committee and was approved as minimal risk (Approval # 09-10-076).
Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The research study seeks to understand how family can act as a protective factor for Latino students to successfully obtain a bachelor’s degree. The study attempted to identify the various ways that families supported their child’s education, and if the Latino families studied served as a protective factor for their children. The researcher interviewed seven participants that identified as Latino/as and had a bachelor’s degree. All the interviews were done face-to-face, and were recorded by the researcher. All the participants were also required to complete a demographic questionnaire before beginning the one hour interview. The interview was composed of 12 open-ended questions. The findings of the study are discussed in the following sections.

Demographics

The participant’s demographic information was organized in a table that identifies the questions, levels, and participant percentages (See Table 1). The participants in the study all identified as being first-generation college students. Six of the seven participants identified their Latino subgroup as Mexican; only one participant identified as being a mixed Latino. Fifty-seven percent of the participants were female, and 43% were male. The participants were asked about their parents’ highest level of education. Two of the seven participants stated that their fathers did not have any type of formal education; the other five participants’ fathers had an
elementary education or lower. All the participants identified their mothers’ highest level of education to be an elementary education or lower. The participants’ parents all attended school in a different country and did not further their education in the United States.

The age level of the participants ranged from 25 to 34 years old. Five of the participants identified their socioeconomic status, while in college, to be of a low socioeconomic status. In regards to their current career, participants’ occupations were teacher, civil engineer, juvenile hall counselor, project manager, youth and family advocate, social worker, and correctional counselor. Seventy-one percent of the participants had obtained up to a bachelor’s degree, and 29% of the participants had obtained a master’s degree.

Table 1
Participants Demographics

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<th>Questions</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fourth-generation</td>
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<td>Cuban</td>
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<td>Venezuelan</td>
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<td>Mixed Latino-Mexican &amp; Spaniard</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes

The interview process was composed of 12 open-ended questions that asked the participants to describe any barriers they had while in college, how their parents supported and encouraged education, family involvement in their education, the
importance of family interdependence, the value of a strong work ethic, siblings as academic role models, and advice for Latino students to become academically successful.

Higher Education Barriers

The two barriers that were identified by the participants were financial barriers and being a first-generation college student. Of the total respondents, 28.5% identified financial barriers as the only obstacle they encountered in college, and another 28.5% only identified being a first-generation college student as a barrier. The remaining 43% identified financial barriers as well as being a first-generation college student as their barriers to higher education. To illustrate, participant Three stated, “Being a first-generation student was a barrier, everything is unknown. I didn’t know what to expect in college, and I couldn’t ask anyone in my family for help.” In addition, participant Six responded, “Not knowing where to go for answers as a first-generation student was an obstacle. The lack of having professionals in my family was hard because I didn’t know what path to take or what career would be best.” Participant Two gave the following response, “My barrier was financial. I didn’t qualify for financial aid so I had to depend on myself to pay for school. I had to work full-time all throughout college to be able to pay for school and survive.”

Non-traditional Family Support

When the participants were asked to describe the type of support that they received from their family in regards to education, all of the participants described non-traditional support. All the participants described how oftentimes their parents
were unable to help them with their schoolwork because of their low education level or their lack of English proficiency. As a result, parents encouraged and supported education through non-traditional methods. Parents were described as supporting and encouraging education by constantly asking their child about school, giving their child consejos, prioritizing homework in grade school, allowing their child to move away to attend college, and allowing them to stay at home during college, rent free. The following are the statements of each participant:

Participant One:

I moved away to go study [to college], and that absolutely would have been out of the question unless it was for studying. My dad would not have let me move out of the house if it wasn’t for that reason.

Participant Two:

I was always in constant communication with my parents. They would always ask me how school was going, and how I was doing in my classes. When I would tell my mom how hard some of my classes were she encouraged me to not give up and keep going.

Participant Three:

My family moved to the United States for better opportunities that they didn’t have in the old country. My parents always valued education so ever since I can remember they have always pushed education. My dad would tell us that he didn’t want us to work in the fields. That is why we needed to take advantage of having the opportunities of being able to get an education.
Participant Four:

Even though my mom didn’t understand my homework, she always made sure that I had finished it before going outside to play. She made sure to check my homework every day.

Participant Five:

Most of the support I received from my family was verbal support. My parents couldn’t help me with my homework because they didn’t speak English. So one of the things they would say to me was, “If you don’t want to end up like us you better do something about it.”

Participant Six:

My parents were not involved in school because they didn’t speak English but they were supportive. The most supportive person was my mom. She gave me advice that encouraged me to get an education. She would tell me, “Your nothing without having an education.” Also when I started college my parents allowed me to stay at home rent free, which helped me save a lot.

Participant Seven:

It’s hard for my parents to ask about college because they don’t understand what it is to go to college. They had to trust that I could do it [graduate college]. My mom would tell me, “Yo se que tu puedes hacer lo que tú quieras” (I know you can do whatever you desire).
All of the participants identified family as the motivation behind their academic success. The participants stated that observing their parents’ struggles, hard work, and sacrifices, motivated them to pursue a higher education and successfully graduate from college. The participants responded that they wanted to make their families proud and prove to them that their sacrifices had paid off. Fifty-seven percent of the participants stated that they wanted to financially provide for their families, and, therefore, they knew they had to obtain a college degree. The participants responded that they wanted to reciprocate for their families’ struggles and hard work by being able to financially provide for them in the near future.

Throughout the entire interview, participants explained the important role that family interdependence played in their families. Several of the participants also explained how they wanted to have a better life than their parents, and eliminate some of the struggles their parents went through. Further, they described how contributing to the family unit was vital, as well as placing family as a priority, which confirmed the strong *familismo* value of the participants.

Participant One:

Once I started school [college] I had to continue. It would have been an embarrassment for me not to finish college. I did not want to disappoint my family so quitting was not an option. If it wasn’t for my family I probably would have quit.
Participant Two:

Seeing all the struggles that they [parents] went through motivated me not to be like them. I knew that an education would get me a better career. In college I always had my parents in mind, and wanted to make them proud.

Participant Three:

The strong family unity has made it possible and easier for me to get to this level. My parents always valued education, and I wanted to achieve what my family wanted for me, an education. I also want to be able to support them so they won’t have to work anymore.

Participant Four:

Graduating college was one of the goals they [parents] wanted for me. Indirectly we knew that my parents sacrificed a lot for us, and we wanted to reach the goal they had set for us of getting an education.

Participant Five:

My family had a lot to do with me obtaining my college degree. Even though they couldn’t help me they gave me a lot of advice. I needed to graduate because I needed to make a difference in my parents’ life as well as prove to myself that I could do it.

Participant Six:

Seeing how my parents struggled to give us a decent life, we were always a family. Nobody was scattered or separate. We might have been poor but we were still together as a family. They struggled so much, and I wanted them to
be proud of me that they sacrificed so much and worked so hard to be here and for us to be well educated and have a better standing in the world. I also want to be able to financially provide for my future family and my parents.

Participant Seven:

I saw the struggles that my mom and dad went through. Especially my mom when my parents got divorced. My mom didn’t speak English, did not have a high school diploma, and my dad didn’t pay child support. I didn’t want to end up like my mom in a bad situation. I want to be self-sufficient, and I want to financially assist my mom to better her situation.

Family contributions. The participants shared how they contributed to the family unit. Seventy-one percent of the participants recalled being employed at the age of 13 in a family restaurant, the fields, or a grocery store in order to be self-sufficient, and eliminate some financial expenses from the family. In addition, the participants explained the importance of voluntarily contributing to the family unit. Four of the seven participants stated that they would constantly perform major duties around the house, and they felt it was their obligation as a member of the family. Lastly, 57% of the participants stated that they provided financial assistance to the family. The participants gave the following answers:

Participant One:

I started working at the age of 13. From that point on I bought all of my stuff, my parents didn’t have to pay for anything of mine. They only paid for the bills and the house [mortgage] but that was it. My dad didn’t want me to
work, but I liked being independent and also it was a way to get out of the
house because my dad was very strict.

Participant Two:

At a very young age I cooked, cleaned, baby sat my brother and sisters, and
helped them with their homework. I was the one in charge of my siblings
because my parents were always at work. I automatically knew that I needed
to take charge because it had to get done. I also started working at the family
restaurant when I was 13 years old.

Participant Three:

I have contributed in many ways. One way is providing financial assistance
to my family. While I was in school I always worked full-time to help my
family. Now, I am also helping my family by acting as a role model to my
little sister and my two older brothers.

Participant Four:

I would come home every month to spend time with my family. I wanted to
make sure the family stayed united because I was the only one that was away.

So every month I made sure to come home.

Participant Five:

I was the oldest so when my parents were at work I did all the cooking,
cleaning, and took care of my little brother and sister. When I was in college I
paid for all my own things and I financially helped my family. I didn’t want
to be a burden on my family because I knew they didn’t have much.
Participant Six:

I financially contributed to the household starting at age 13. I started working in the fields and I would give my parents all my paychecks. I also did all the gardening, pruning, yard work, anything that had to do with the outside of the house. I was always expected to contribute to the household.

Participant Seven:

Well I lived with my mom so I helped take care of my little brothers, cooked, cleaned, and I worked. I also helped pay the bills. When my parents separated, my mom worked from eight in the morning to eight at night so she wasn’t home to feed us or clean the house so it was a necessity for me to help out the family.

Prioritizing family. The participants described how family was always placed as a priority. When asked, all of the participants were able to identify an occasion when family was placed as a priority before school. All of the participants emphasized the importance of an education; however several of them stated how they would sacrifice their schooling for their family. One of the participants explained how in the Latino culture it is the norm to place family as a priority, and, therefore, nothing else can be placed before family. Four of the seven participants explained how family is always a priority in their lives because of their deep family ties, signifying their strong *familismo* values.
Participant One:

I always chose to see my family instead of going to school functions. We are a close knit family so my family always came first. Even now, my family is still the most important thing to me.

Participant Two:

We had all the family businesses so there were many times like Cinco de Mayo or other busy occasions where we actually stayed and work at the restaurant instead of going to school.

Participant Three:

One time a family member was sick and we had to go and be with her. So even though I had work to get done I went and got my work done later. Anytime my family needs me I will be there.

Participant Four:

I had to go to L.A. for my niece’s graduation so I had to make arrangements to finish a project at another time. There was no way that I could miss such an important family event.

Participant Five:

As a Mexican you get together with your family every weekend, it is not an option. My school work had to be worked around my family. Family matters always came first.
Participant Six:

All the time I had to put my school work aside to help my family. For us family is a very big part of who we are. We believe God first, family second. Family is the reason why we work hard and strive for better, to give your family a better life.

Participant Seven:

It took me four years to get my AA and transfer out [junior college] because I was helping my mom [financially]. It was hard to just get up and leave because I was used to helping my family. So that is why it took me so long to finish school.

Strong Work Ethic

All the participants stated that a strong work ethic was instilled in them at a very early age. The participants reported that their parents not only talked about the importance of a strong work ethic but also practiced the same ethic. Throughout the entire interview, participants repeatedly stated that their parents were very hard working because they worked in labor intensive jobs, worked extremely long hours, and never took days off. The participants described how their parent’s strong work ethic proved to them that hard work ultimately paid off. Several of the participants emphasized how the value of a strong work ethic continues to impact their lives.

The participants’ parents reminded their children that they had to work hard to accomplish their goals because nothing in life was easy. These parents wanted their children to understand that without an education individuals were required to
work harder, and receive less compensation. In addition, several of the participants stated that their parents required them to work, at an early age, in order to truly understand the meaning of a strong work ethic. Therefore, the seven participants described how a strong work ethic was a major value that was promoted, practiced, and required by their families.

Participant One:

My parents were laborers their entire life. My dad worked in construction and my mom worked in restaurants. My entire life I saw how hard they both worked. My dad did not want his family to live in an apartment so he worked hard to buy a house for us. They demonstrated that through hard work you can get what you want. They instilled in me that hard work is going to get you whatever you need and want.

Participant Two:

My family always said that it is important to demonstrate hard work. My dad always practiced a very strong work ethic. He was always on time to work, never late. No matter what, even if he was sick, he never missed work. Even now when I have a job I never want to call in sick. When I was in college I didn’t miss a day and I always worked my hardest.

Participant Three:

It was instilled in us that if you wanted to accomplish something you needed to work hard for it. I went to the fields with my dad to know the meaning of hard work. My mother always ran the house; she cooked, cleaned, and took

Participant Four:

My parents always taught me to do my chores and always finish what I start. They always told me to follow through, finish what I start, and make sure it is done right. All those things have always stuck with me.

Participant Five:

My dad always worked very hard at work and at home. I never saw my dad take a break. I saw how his hard work was able to support a family of six, so that showed me that I too could work hard and accomplish great things.

Participant Six:

Always to work early, never late were things I always heard. No matter what you are doing you should always try your best at whatever you do. My mom didn’t have the easiest job, but she always came home to cook and clean for us. They taught me how to work. My dad took me to work when I was 13 years old. He had me irrigating, doing ditches like I was an adult.

Participant Seven:

My parents always wanted us to be hard workers and be responsible. So one way they pushed that on us was getting a job, so we had to work. My parents basically just bought our food, everything else we paid for. My parents wanted me to be a hard worker because a hard worker meant being a good person.
Siblings as Academic Role Models

All seven participants reported that, in their families, older siblings were seen as academic role models. Of the total respondents, 43% stated that they were the oldest sibling and an academic role model in the family, and the other 57% stated that they had older siblings who paved the way for them and were their mentors. When asked, three of the seven participants reported that even though their parents could not assist them with their school work they had older siblings that were able to help. The following are the statements made in regards to older siblings as mentors:

Participant One:

I remember my mom and dad did try to help me up to like the second grade maybe, up until where they knew. So many times my older sister had to help me with my homework. My older sister was my role model. She was the second one in my entire family to go to college which was huge. We have a huge family, a lot of cousins and my sister out of everyone was only the second person to get a college education. That made me want to pursue a college education. Especially seeing that she was doing it, it made it seem accomplishable.

Participant Two:

I was a role model to my siblings. My younger sister completed college and she tells me that I motivated her to go. My younger sister has always looked up to me especially when I was in college. She used to tell me, “When I get out [high school] I’m going to college too”.

Participant Three:

I admired my older brothers. They only had a high school diploma but they were very smart. My brothers couldn’t continue their education because they had to work to financially help the family out. So my brothers sacrificed their education for the younger siblings. Currently, I am a role model for my younger sister. I have proven to her that she also can get a college education. If I have been able to do it, and I have difficulties with the language, than she definitely can do it.

Participant Four:

I looked up to my older sisters because they had high school diplomas, and that was something that we were proud of. Now, my nieces and nephews look up to me because I am the first in my family to have a college degree. So now I help them apply for financial aid and organize their class schedules.

Participant Five:

Yes, I am a role model! My younger brother has started college and it is not common for men in my family to go to college. My younger sister is doing very well in school and wants to go to college. I help out my younger siblings with everything: homework, essays, college applications, and choosing classes.

Participant Six:

My older sister was a role model. She got a master’s in education. So seeing her graduate made me want to do it too, and my little sister too because she
got her bachelor’s before I did. They helped me hurry up and want to
graduate sooner.

Participant Seven:

I am a role model for my younger brother but he doesn’t want to go to
college. He only wants to pick up a trade or something short so he can get it
over with. Anytime he has questions about school or school work he always
comes to me for help.

Advice for Academic Success

At the end of the interview the participants were asked to give advice to
Latino students in order to be successful in college. All of the participant’s responses
were very unique and heartfelt.

Participant One:

Think about what it took for the people to get you here. You’re here because
someone else crossed that line. There are so many opportunities here that so
many other people in the world wish they had.

Participant Two:

Put your mind forward. College does get you better jobs! Always keep your
family close to you.

Participant Three:

Work hard, nothing is easy! You will become more valuable with education.
Always take into account where you come from. Always look at the
sacrifices that others have done for you.
Participant Four:

No matter where you come from you have the ability to do anything you set your mind to. Make your dreams come true! Even if you come from a poor family there are programs and grants out there to help with your education.

Participant Five:

Don’t say you can’t until you try it. Don’t say you don’t like it or it’s not for you, you can do it. There are programs that can help students.

Participant Six:

Never give up, always keep going. Don’t turn back. It is like a race, the person in the front who only looks forward always makes it. Don’t stop to look at those who are dropping out. Don’t listen to anyone who says you’re never going to make it. Just keep going; it’s for your own benefit. It will serve you better to be more educated.

Participant Seven:

I have always needed a lot of help in college. I wasn’t a very good writer so I had two writing tutors. So I would say search for resources, and don’t be scared to ask for help!

Summary

The seven participants in the study reported the importance of family in their academic success. All of the participants stated that family was the motivation behind their educational success. They described how all their parents’ hard work, struggles, and sacrifices kept them motivated to want something better in their lives.
The participants described how family interdependence, siblings as mentors, a strong work ethic, and family support were major factors that contributed to their academic success. The participants also expressed the desire to repay their parents for all the sacrifices they have made for them.

All of the participants in the study identified themselves as first-generation college students as well as having parents with less than a high school education. Therefore, the participants identified two major barriers to higher education, financial barriers and being a first-generation college student. All of the participants expressed how their parents were unable to assist them with their academic work; fortunately, many of the participants identified older siblings who were equipped to assist.

All of the participants described that even though their parents did not have a higher education they still promoted the idea. The participants expressed that their parents knew that education was the key to social mobility, hence they desired that success for their children. These parents motivated and encouraged the participants to obtain a higher education through verbal support and the value of a strong work ethic. Finally, the participants shared sincere advice to foster Latino academic success.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to gather data from academically successful Latinos to explore if the participants' families acted as a protective factor for obtaining a higher education. The researcher wanted to identify the ways their families supported and encouraged the participants’ higher education endeavors. In the literature, Latino students were described as encountering several barriers that could impede their academic success such as being first-generation college students, coming from a low socioeconomic status, and being less academically prepared than other students. The researcher believed that family support was a major reason why Latino students demonstrated resiliency towards adversity in higher education. Therefore, the study explored what methods Latino families used to promote and encourage post-secondary education.

The research was based on the assumption that parental support is a protective factor for Latinos’ academic success. The researcher believes that even though Latino parents may not have a college degree, they still value the importance of, and need for, a higher education. Latino families have uprooted from their country of origin in search of a new country with greater opportunities. These families want their children to have a better life than they did, and they are aware that education is the key to living the American Dream.
Research Results

The results uncovered that, for these participants, family was a major protective factor for them to succeed in higher education; therefore the assumptions made by the researcher were confirmed. First, the researcher found that, without exception, the participants identified family as their main motivation for pursuing their education and graduating from college. Eighty-six percent of the participants described that observing their families’ struggles, sacrifices, and hard work encouraged them to obtain a college education. Also the participants expressed the desire to make their parents proud by graduating college. Some of the literature stated that family interdependence was problematic, and could hinder a student from achieving success. However, this research study found that family was a contributor to the participants’ academic success. For these Latino participants success is not based on an individual but on family ties. All these academically successful Latinos have expressed how family was the main factor that motivated them to complete college, signifying that family unity lead them to success.

The fact that all the participants focused largely on their relationships with their family is evidence of their deep familismo values. All the participants viewed family as a priority, and emphasized the importance of contributing to the family unity. The participants genuinely expressed their aspirations to contribute to the welfare of the family, and that in the future they would reciprocate the many sacrifices that their parents had made for them. All of the participants felt the desire to voluntarily contribute to the family unit. In addition, it was very easy for the
participants to describe a time when family was placed as a priority before school; it surprised the researcher that even though education was a strong value, family still managed to come first. Consequently, the participants expressed how family was their priority. As a result everything that they did, such as obtaining a college degree, was for the family.

The participants identified two higher education obstacles, financial barriers and being a first-generation student. All of the participants in the study identified as first-generation students, and, as a result, they all experienced a lack of parental assistance throughout their entire education. They expressed how their parents unfortunately were unable to help them with their school work because they were not English proficient and had minimal formal education. Fortunately, family unity provided these Latino students with siblings who had the ability to help. Second, the study found that older siblings were seen as role models because they assisted younger siblings with school work, and they had successfully graduated from college. This once again demonstrated the strong value of family that these Latino participants embrace. Older siblings were essential for the academic success of the younger sibling, and, as a family network, they had the obligation to support their siblings. Indeed, older siblings played vital roles in the academic success of many of the study’s participants, and demonstrated the importance of strong family ties. In spite of the participants’ parents not being able to help with their child’s school work they still possessed a very positive attitude towards education.
Third, the researcher confirmed that the participants parent’s main support tool was their linguistic skills. All the respondents described how most of their parents support, in regards to education, was done through verbal support. The majority of the verbal support was carried out through *consejos*. *Consejos* were designed to influence a child’s behavior and attitude that would lead them towards *el buen camino*. The interviews and the literature both confirmed that even though Latino parents lack the ability to guide their child through the U.S. educational system, they used their linguistics skills to support and encourage higher education.

These parents were described by the participants as individuals who knew the importance of education. The participants described how their parents had greater aspirations for their children; they did not want their children to follow in their footsteps. Parents would constantly remind the participants that without an education they would be forced to work in the fields or other labor intensive job, just like they were forced to do. In the literature, as well as in an interview, fathers took their children to work in the field to teach them how labor intensive it was, and hopefully encourage them to strive for a better life. The researcher recognized that the participants’ parents supported and encouraged education because they wanted their children to live a better life. Most of the participants’ parents moved to the United States to give their families greater opportunities such as education, therefore it was vital for the participants to take advantage of this opportunity. Education was viewed as the key to social and economic mobility for these families, and as a result these academically successful Latinos have made a stride in that direction.
Fourth, the study found that a strong work ethic was also a key value identified by the respondents. Without exceptions, the participants’ first description of their parents was hard working. They explained how their parents constantly worked hard, had labor intensive jobs, and never took a day off work. The value of a strong work ethic was affirmed by all the participants throughout the entire interview. These parents utilized their labor intensive jobs to encourage positive working skills for the participants, and to serve as an example of how individuals with less education have to work hard while receiving less compensation. Also, the participants described how a strong work ethic was a fundamental value to have in their families. The seven participants translated the strong work ethic they learned from their parents to having to work hard in school to reach academic success. Therefore, according to the participants and the literature, a strong work ethic was constantly incorporated in their family’s daily life and utilized as a motivational tool to promote higher education.

This collectivistic culture demonstrated that family is a protective factor for these academically successful Latinos. The participants characterized their family as the main reason that they successfully completed college. Family contributed to the academic success of these Latinos through verbal support conveyed by consejos, older siblings as mentors, the value of a strong work ethic, and the responsibility of family interdependence. The participants explained how family support helped them overcome adversity and obtain a higher education.
Implementation

The focus of this study was to identify if family was a protective factor for this group of academically successful Latinos. The researcher wanted to identify the techniques that their families would use to support, promote, and encourage the participants to pursue and obtain a college degree. The findings aligned with the literature in which family was a positive protective factor for Latino student academic success. The researcher found four techniques that assisted families in being a protective factor; *familismo*, a strong work ethic, family support, and siblings as mentors.

To improve the study the researcher would make changes to the demographics questionnaire. The researcher would eliminate a few questions, and make important changes to others. For example, questions five and six, asked about their father’s and mother’s highest level of education. The options provided started from high school and above. As a result, when the participants began to answer these questions, 100% of the responses had to be filled-in. All of the participants’ parents had an elementary education or less. Also, certain questions were irrelevant to the study such as questions seven and eight, and they would be eliminated. In addition, the researcher observed how throughout the interviews the participants were constantly repeating themselves. Several of the interview questions would require the same response. Therefore, the researcher believes that the open-ended questions could have been more descriptive. Lastly, the researcher feels that this study could be
Implications for Social Work

The Latino population is the fastest growing, non-dominant ethnic group, with the lowest level of education of all major ethnic groups in the United States. The educational gap between Latinos and other ethnic groups is a subject of widespread concern. The lack of Latinos obtaining a higher education will impede them from attaining economically successful careers; as a result this large ethnic group will be unable to contribute to the long-term economic health of the entire nation. Also it is estimated that college graduates earn twice as much as non-graduates over a lifespan, while also having lower unemployment rates. It is imperative that this large ethnic group attain higher education in order to reach its full potential.

The booming Latino population is changing the face of the United States, and forcing the need for culturally competent social workers who have in-depth knowledge about this diverse community. The social work profession is designed to assist those who are in need, advocate for those who are less fortunate, and address problems in our society. Latinos having the lowest level of education is a massive social problem that can be addressed by social workers.

Social workers are responsible for creating a social change and a cultural shift in regards to this social problem. As social workers we need to be aware of the barriers that this ethnic group faces in obtaining a higher education in order to better assist
this population. In addition, social workers need to understand the positive factors that help this ethnic group succeed, in order to build on those positive factors to generate exponential success.

Research data indicates that students who do not attend college are prone to being unemployed, earn lower wages, receive public assistance, or are in prison. Therefore, it is our duty to ensure that this large population does not add to those statistics. As social workers we have the power to better educate this diverse population on the value of an education. Latino families should be properly informed that earning a college degree is much more valuable in the long run, and can greatly increase lifetime income. By social workers educating and creating awareness about the value of education in the Latino community it may reduce the economic and social divide in American society.

Recommendations for Future Research

The data provided by the participants, and the review of the related literature, stressed a need for more research in the following areas: a comparative study on first-generation Latinos versus second/third-generation Latinos and their values on education; a research study that would focus on other Latino subgroups in regards to family as a protective factor; a deeper study on the value of a strong work ethic and family interdependence on different generations of Latinos; and a study that focuses on the effective resources that assist Latino students to reach academic success.
Summary

The researcher believes that this study contains accurate findings in identifying family as a major protective factor for Latinos’ educational success. The research described vital techniques that families utilized to promote and encourage higher education to their first-generation college students. The seven academically successful participants shared their struggles, motivation, and ambition to obtain a bachelor’s degree in an unfamiliar educational system. The participants described how with the proper family support and adequate resources, at-risk Latinos can succeed in higher education. The findings in this study recognize the need to focus on this population, the students, and their families. Therefore, if all Latino families find the value of education they will promote and support higher education, which will result in an increase of academically successful Latinos. The study confirmed that if families support education then the students may possess the desire to attend college and overcome any adversity they may encounter. These seven participants served as reminders to demonstrate that through resiliency anything is possible. ¡Sí se puede!
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

I hereby agree to participate in a research study that will be conducted by Elizabeth Carranza, a Master Social Work student at California State University, Sacramento.

The research will take place at my choice of location and will require one hour of my time. If I need more than one hour for the interview, then this can be arranged between the researcher and me at that time. I understand that the face to face interview will be audio taped by the researcher and I also understand that I am free to decline being audio taped at, or to decide at a later time to stop the audio tape recording of my interview.

I understand if I experience any discomfort during the interview, I may immediately stop my participation. If after completing the interview, I experience any psychological discomfort, I may call the County of San Joaquin Mental Health Services at (209) 468-8750, located at 1212 North California Street, Stockton, CA 95202 or County of Sacramento Mental Health Services at (916) 875-1055, located at 2150 Stockton Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95817.

The purpose of this research project is to identify the importance of family support as a protective factor, for Latinos who successfully obtained a bachelors’ degree. The research will also look at practices that Latino families use to motivate, support, and encourage their children to pursue a higher education.

I understand that the researcher will maintain my rights to privacy and confidentiality by assuring that I will remain anonymous to everyone but her. Furthermore, I understand that the audio tape recording of my interview will be destroyed once it has been transcribed, no later than one year. Until then, these recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet.

And I understand this research may have the following benefit: to provide information on the importance of family support in order for Latino students to obtain a college degree.

This information was explained to me by Elizabeth Carranza, I understand that she will answer any questions I may have now or later about this research by contacting her via email at ec784@saclink.csus.edu or via phone at 209.401.9885. I understand that this thesis is being supervised by Dr. Susan Talamantes Eggman, Associate professor of Social Work and may be contacted at eggmans@csus.edu or (916) 278-7181.
I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary. I may decline to participate now, or I may discontinue my participation at any time in the future without risk. I understand that the researcher may terminate my participation at any time. My signature indicates that I have read this page and agreed to participate in the research.

Signature of Participant: ___________________________  Date:_________

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________  Date:_________
APPENDIX B

Demographics Questionnaire

Please circle the answer that best fits you. Thank you for your participation!

1. What is your gender?  Female  Male

2. What is your highest level of education?
Bachelor’s Degree   Master’s degree   Doctorate or Professional Degree

3. What is your age?
   20-24   25-29   30-34   35-39   40-above

4. What would you consider your family’s socioeconomic status (SES) while in college?
   Low SES   Middle SES   High SES

5. What is your father’s highest level of education?
   Some high school   High school graduate   Associate Degree   BA or higher

6. What is your mother’s highest level of education?
   Some high school   High school graduate   Associate Degree   BA or higher

7. What did you receive your degree in?

8. What is your current occupation?
9. What range most closely represents your total annual income?
   $0-$34,999   $35,000-$64,999   $65,000-$94,000   $95,000-above

10. What generation college student are you?
    First-generation   Second-generation
    Third-generation   Fourth-generation

11. What is your Latino subgroup?
    Mexican   Puerto Rican   Dominican
    Cuban     Salvadorian    Spaniard
    Venezuelan  Ecuadorian  Colombian
    Other: ____________________
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. What obstacles or challenges (if any) did you have to overcome in order to attend college/university?

2. What elements helped you to overcome these obstacles?

3. What motivated you to pursue and complete your college education?

4. Describe in what ways your parents supported and encouraged you throughout your K-12 education (verbal or nonverbal)?

5. Describe in what ways your parents supported and encouraged you to complete a college degree (verbal or nonverbal)?

6. In what ways were your parents or siblings involved in your academic work? (grade school and college)

7. In what ways did your family demonstrate the importance of hard work (academic, personally, professionally)?

8. Describe in what ways did you contributed to the home or to the family unit?

9. Where older siblings looked at as an academic role model in your family? In what ways?

10. Describe a time when you placed your family first before doing something related to school?

11. Family unity is an important trait in the Latino community. How did Family play a role in you pursuing and obtaining a college degree?

12. What advice would you give Latinos students in order to be successful in college?
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