

A Culturally Responsive Approach to Educational Success through Academic Collectivism: An Ethnographic Narrative Study for Latinos in the United States

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Introduction

This is an ethnographic case study that investigates on how family impacts the decision-making of low-income Latino students to persevere through college. Nine Latino students were interviewed, and their stories are presented in six themes. The study found that family support cannot cease once their children reach college. Continuous support helps Latino students persevere in college.

Retention is a growing concern at many colleges and universities. One study conducted by Tovar and Simon (2003) found that the rate of student retention is decreasing at many community colleges with high enrollment of minority students from low-income families. Community colleges are not alone. Harvard University has a retention rate of 98% and Princeton University has a retention rate of 97%. They mark the two highest graduation rates when compared to all the national universities in the United States (The U.S. News & World Report, 2006). Nevertheless, Astin (1993) urged researchers to look beyond graduation rates. He commented on the need to compare the actual rate to the expected rate. He said, "The study...shows that some institutions with a 'high' graduation rate should really have rates that are even higher, given the kinds of students they admit" (1993, p. 1).

How students are raised is one of the keys to academic success (Tierney, 2002). For the past centuries, many studies have been conducted on how family influences K-12 children in their education (Epstein, 1995; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Baker and Stevenson (1986) defined parents as helpers, encouragers, and counselors in assisting and influencing their children in completing homework assignments and in making their choice of friends. Baker and Stevenson also asserted that children with parents more involved in school activities or have high expectations for their children were more likely to transition to high school with a lesser degree of difficulty (1986).

In fact, children from lower socioeconomic status but with family members who have high expectations for them can do well in academics. Minority parents with only high school diplomas may also set high expectations for their children recognizing education as a means to upward social mobility (Schneider, 1993). These parents are more likely to invest in the education of the children. Success stories of African American learners living in low-income single-parent homes indicate that the parents help their children identify "good" or "bad" behaviors and make sure that the "good" behaviors are positively reinforced (Clark, 1983). In return, children from this type of family try to live up to the expectations of their family (Lee, 1984).

A few scholars have begun to examine family and postsecondary education although the number of studies is minimal. Horn and Chen (1998) found family involvement an important factor in increasing the grades and enrollment of disadvantaged students in postsecondary educational institutions and towards decreasing the high-school dropout rate. Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) focused on Latino students and concluded that family involvement helps first-year Latino students adjust to college. Hernandez (2000) used the quantitative method to confirm that family involvement significantly impacts the decision of Latino students to persist in and graduate from college.

With family as an essential indicator that can potentially impact the lives of lower socioeconomic minority students, this study examines family and postsecondary education, specifically, to trace the effects of family on college retention. This research attempts to answer the question: How do parents of lower socioeconomic Latino students help their children persist in college?

Research Methods

This study employs an eclectic approach of qualitative research that combines ethnographic approaches with narrative inquiry understand parent-student relationship. Individual interviews were conducted with nine Latino undergraduate students enrolled full time at Metropolitan University (MU). Interviews ranged approximately one to one-and-a-half hour long, and multiple interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed over the course of two academic semesters. All interviewees were alumni of the a pre-college academic enrichment program for both students and their parents with a mission to outreach and serve students and families living in the neighboring communities of Metropolitan University. They are also graduates of MU. In addition to the interviews were numerous home visits at the home of three interviewees and a focus group with the teachers of these interviewees. Activities that occurred during each home visits were: sharing of family photos, touring of their home, and meeting their family members and neighbors.

Participants

The nine students interviewed for this study, six women and three males, are all part of a pre-college preparation program, which will be referred to as Culturally Responsive Preparation (CRP), a college preparation program at a private, non-sectarian research university in California. A brief biographical sketch of each student is provided below.

Julia

Julia is the older of two sisters in the family. She is also the first in her family to attend and graduate from college. Her father finished high school but did not further his education, and her mother only completed up to middle school. Julia's father works as a truck driver and her mother as a saleswoman. Her parents have always tried to find jobs where one parent can stay home to care for Julia and her younger sister. Julia graduated 2005 with a major in political science and a minor in international relations, and is currently a law student at Loyola Law School.

Enrique

Enrique was born in Los Angeles to a father of Mexican descent and a mother of El Salvadorian descent. After Enrique's parents were married, his mother milked cows and mended clothes to earn extra money, yet this money, in addition to the money from his father's job, was not enough for the family to live comfortably in Mexico. Enrique's mother currently works as a seamstress and his father as an airport employee driving the passenger luggage carts. In December 2005, Enrique graduated from MU with a major in economics.

Pablo

As a child, Pablo spent most of his time with his older brother and his younger sister. He has an older sister but had very limited interaction with her, because she left home at the age of fifteen and was later pregnant and married. Pablo's mother is a seamstress, and his father is currently unemployed. His father worked many years for an industrial laundry company until he encountered a work accident that led to the lost of one of his legs. The family now relies on his mother and his older brother for financial means. He graduated from MU in December 2005 with a political science degree.

Bernadette

Although Bernadette is now living in a two-parent household, she does not get along with her stepfather. Her parents were divorced when she was in grade school; therefore, Bernadette can only see her biological father during holidays. She, her three brothers, her mother, and her stepfather live in a three-bedroom house. Denied by MU when she first applied in her senior year of high school, Bernadette attended a nearby community college then transferred to MU. Bernadette graduated from MU in Spring 2006 majoring in sociology, and she is pursuing a master's degree in public policy.

Juanita

Juanita lives in a single-parent home and has never met her father. She was raised by her grandmother while her mother worked daily including weekends. Before her grandmother passed away, Juanita rarely saw and spent time with her mother due to her work schedule. She was denied admission to MU during her senior year in high school but was determined to receive a bachelor's degree from MU. Juanita studied at a nearby community college for three years and transferred to MU. Juanita graduated from MU in May 2007 with a major in political science.

Marla

Born in Los Angeles after her parents immigrated to the United States from El Salvador, Marla is the oldest of three siblings and is the first in her family to attend and graduate from college. Her father is a high school graduate and works as a shipping clerk. Her mother finished fourth grade and works part-time as a housekeeper. Marla graduated from MU with a major in psychology and a minor in social work in May 2007. She hopes to become a psychologist.

Tatiana

Tatiana is the younger sister of Enrique. Growing up, Tatiana did not see much of her parents, because her parents had to maintain a rigid work schedule. Therefore, she relied on her oldest brother to care for them. Tatiana graduated from MU in May 2007 with a public policy major and a social work minor.

Guadalupe

Guadalupe and her family are from Ecuador, and they moved to California when she was four years old. Because of the age gap between her four older sisters and her, Guadalupe was the only one in the family who was educated in the United States. Her three sisters and their families live in close proximity to her parents. Guadalupe's father currently works as a machine cutter and her mom takes care of the family. Guadalupe is the first in her family to attend and graduate from college. Guadalupe graduated from MU in May 2007 with a major in international relations.

Elena

Elena has three older sisters and two older brothers. Her father, to whom her mother was never married, lives in Guatemala. Because her father was an alcoholic, her mother and her siblings moved to Los Angeles when she was six years old. As a child, her mother babysat to earn \$10,000 a year while her older brothers and sisters worked to earn additional money for the family. Elena graduated from MU with a major in sociology and a minor in social work. She hopes to one day establish her own day care center.

The nine key informants share many similar backgrounds; one of which is that they have all been raised in families with limited financial means. Yet these students have somehow learned to stay in and graduate from college. Their stories are grouped to nine categories: (1) academic support, (2) emotional support, (3) expectation, (4) high school environment and peer pressure, (5) new capital, and (6) college life with home responsibility.

Academic Support

The following describes the kind of environment in which these lower socioeconomic minority students live: lack of space, over crowdedness, and sirens or the sound of gunshots occurring at least once a week. The students did not grow up having a car and relied on public transportation. To survive in the midst of such economic hardships and somehow do well in school, these students learned to "grow up really fast" in this kind of surrounding. Despite the condition of the community, they continue to value family because their family has provided them support and love so they could go to and graduate from college.

Home was not only a place they felt loved and cared for but also a place where they received academic support. Julia never felt she lacked parental support. Her parents took time to know how she was doing in school even though they did not speak fluent English. Julia told me how her father responded when she asked him to help her understand a math problem, "My dad was always like, 'Well, I don't really understand but we could try figuring it out.'"

Language barriers were not a hindrance in their communication because her father took the time to comprehend the academic subjects that Julia was learning. Other than helping her in homework, Julia's parents also went to parent meetings, open houses, and other school events that required their attendance.

Guadalupe's mother also supported her, but not in the same way as Julia's parents. Guadalupe's mother did not finish high school and felt more at ease to send Guadalupe to CRP for academic support. She attended all the CRP meetings for parents despite her language barrier and met with her daughter's CRP teachers to be more aware of the academic subjects that Guadalupe was learning and be acquainted with her teachers. Guadalupe explained, "She would get to know my teachers, because she knew that she could not get involved in other ways, like helping me with homework assignments." Guadalupe's mother participated in as many CRP activities as possible while Guadalupe was in middle and high schools. Her trust in CRP and active participation in CRP activities for parents were her ways of supporting Guadalupe.

How Elena's mother supported her was different from Guadalupe's mother. Elena's mother knew that Elena needed space in order to study and stay focused. Therefore, her way of supporting Elena academically was to reduce her chores. Elena continued:

She just stayed out of my way. She gave me my space. When she knew that I [was] doing homework, she won't bother me. Once I [was] done, if she kn[ew] that I [was] done, I would come [out of my room] and say, "I am done, what do I have to do?" That was her way of helping me [by] not bothering me and putting extra stuff on me.

Elena explained how her mother was unable to help her with homework having only a second grade education; nevertheless, she sensed her mother trying her best to take on most of the family responsibilities herself. This, to Elena, was her mother's way of academic support.

Marla's mother father was the main parent who acted as the disciplinarian to ensure that Marla met a certain grade-point-average. Maintaining a competitive GPA was not always easy in high school. Marla admitted she had received a few Cs and Ds on her tests. When she received a C or below, her father would set boundaries for her. Marla described a time when she received a D on a test:

I would feel bad, and my dad would be like, "Explain this to me. Why is there a D on this paper?" I would tell him that I didn't understand this, but now I do. I would say, "Okay Dad, I know I got a D. But, it's going to come up. So don't worry about it." I would always take that approach. I would just tell him, "Look Dad, this was the problem. But I'll get it fixed." So, he doesn't have to worry about it. If there was a problem, I would do something about it, and I would say that, "Yes, I did get this wrong, but I'll go in earlier for tutoring. I understand it now, and the next test when it comes up, it will be better." And it was. It did get better, but not good enough. He was, if anything, he was supportive. Very supportive. A D on an exam doesn't look good. But he wouldn't get angry. He wouldn't say, "What's wrong with you!" He never took that approach. He would just say, "Okay, you need to stop watching TV, or less TV and more studying."

Marla's father limited her TV time when her grades did not meet his standard. However, her father also showed his willingness to help. He searched for resources that could potentially benefit Marla's learning experiences. He talked with her to understand the reasons behind the low grades and encouraged her to seek additional help. Even if he had to wake up early to take her to tutoring, he was willing to sacrifice sleep for her achievement.

Enrique and Tatiana credited their oldest brother for helping them in schoolwork throughout their high school years. Tatiana said, "He was a father figure more so than a brother." This brother helped them in homework and prepared meals for Enrique and Tatiana. Enrique also expressed that his brother "picked Tatiana and me up from school, and made sure we ate dinner, because sometimes my parents weren't there during dinnertime. He made sure that we did our schoolwork. He would sign our fieldtrip slip. Things like that. He was kind of like our babysitter/mom and dad." Enrique's brother "paved the way" for Enrique and his sister by being the first person in the family to go to and graduate from college. When Enrique was in high school, his brother encouraged and directed him on the proper path to become college bound. Enrique said, "My brother was the big thing. He was the first one to go to college, so that was a big deal for me. He was always there to talk to me."

Emotional Support

Julia received emotional support from her parents even when her parents were dealing with financial difficulties. During the 1992 Los Angeles Rodney King riot, Julia's family business was burnt down. Unfortunately, the property did not have insurance at the time of the riot. They lost everything in which they invested and were unable to continue with the business. But this incident only kept Julia and her family closer together. Reminiscing about the past, Julia said:

Everything was lost. Several years after that, it was really tough on [my parents] economically to keep up with the house, the property rent, and everything they needed to provide for me and my sister. It was rough, but the focus was never lost. For them, we are going to college, even though they knew they didn't have the money to pay for it."

The tragedy could have left the family hopeless. Her parents, nevertheless, was not disheartened. They did not let the misfortune replace their optimism for Julia and her younger sister to go to college.

Their emotional support did not end after Julia finished high school. While her parents were less likely to guide Julia in choosing appropriate college courses, they continued to support her emotionally when she was in college. In her first year at MU, Julia struggled with her classes; but in midst of her obstacles, Julia found her family as her ultimate support. She expressed, "My family was my biggest support when I was upset about something. When I didn't understand something, they said, "Don't worry. Don't be afraid to look for help if you need [help]. Nobody is going to think less [of you] if you don't understand." Julia even moved back home after her first year at MU, because she was emotionally tied to her family.

Guadalupe remembered how she feared going to classes because she could not identify with her classmates at MU. Her initial impression of MU prior to attending college was that she would meet many Latino students. Yet she was shocked to see mostly Caucasian students in her classes. Above all, Guadalupe did not receive the grades she had hoped even after hours of studying. Whenever she did not receive her expected grades, she returned home for comfort. She explained how her mother supported her:

[She] listens. The first exam I studied so hard and I honestly thought that I did crappy. I started crying after I got out of class. I went back home before I went to work. I was shaking and crying, and my mom just hugged me and told me, "College is hard It's your first year. Don't be so hard on yourself. Don't go to work if you don't feel good." My stress became her stress, because she wished that she could give me more. So that's why she always tries to be there emotionally. She does what's available to her, which is emotional support.

Marla also had similar experiences as Guadalupe. She described in detail how she felt adjusting to the college environment. She said:

I spent my first semester crying. I was angry, because I felt like I was not as prepared as other students who went to private schools. At a public school, you are already in a disadvantage. Let alone [the high school I attended]. I was angry, and I cr[ie]d because I would get my tests back [after staying up in] ridiculous hours. I never pulled an all nighter but I stayed up to 3 or 4 in the morning doing my homework, but I would find my tests as Ds and Fs. That's all I've ever seen in my psychology courses. Awk! I felt the worse at my freshman year. I hated my writing classes [as well]. In addition to the content, I also hated it because I was the only Latino there. Everyone else was white. There was no black students there. I felt like I was alone.

Marla not only was adjusting to the rigor of the college courses, she did not feel connected with her classmates because of her ethnicity. In midst of adjusting to college life, her parents were supporting her. Marla continued:

They would say, "It's okay. It will get better." They would be like, "It's okay. You are in college. You are not failing out. The important thing is that you are studying. Not many people get this opportunity." My parents would tell me that [the family immigrated to the US] to give [me] a better education. The fact that [I am] at MU, [they] are really happy and proud of me. They were always there [for me]. They would tell me that they are proud.

Marla expounded:

They would tell me to keep going. You are at the university now. They made sure that I keep my grades up [by saying], “Now that you are in the university, don’t get caught up in your social life. It doesn’t end here.” They would tell me [that] the family is always here. What [I] need to take care of is schoolwork, and [I shouldn’t] worry about [them].

Not all the key informants were raised in a supportive home. Bernadette was one of the students who was not raised in a supportive home. Issues at home prohibited Bernadette’s mother from supporting her as much as Bernadette had wanted. Bernadette grew up with a stepfather who verbally and physically abused her mother. Her mother, therefore, was living each day avoiding further abuses. Consequently, she neglected to pay more attention to Bernadette.

Pablo also did not receive much support from his parents. Pablo watched his parents struggle in their marriage, and finally in the second semester of his college freshman year, they were separated. He explained, “They have always had marital issues. I remember waking up in the morning and my parents were always...they always had problems. So they separated, and when they separated, it was for about one year.” Pablo continued:

I moved to campus and I stayed in the university apartments. At that time, they were going through separation. Even though the scholarship gave me a lot of money, I was still having money problems. I was pretty much financing on my own. My parents couldn’t help me out too much, at least I felt like I couldn’t ask them.

Pablo not only had to deal with issues at home, he also needed to make ends meet. He worked 20 hours a week to earn extra cash. Changes at his home eventually affected him academically. Pablo could not remain focused during classes. He said:

I remember feeling kind of bad in school. I felt bad studying and my parents were having problems. My first semester, I did really badly. I was not going to classes. I skip[ped] a lot of classes. I wasn’t feeling comfortable being in school at that time. I just felt that I needed to be away from school for a while.

The separation had impacted Pablo’s grades, and he later took time off from school after receiving a probation notification.

Parents can also negatively influence their child, just like in Pablo and Bernadette’s story. When Bernadette and Pablo sensed issues at home, their emotions and grades were affected. Bernadette was on her own to prepare for college admissions because her mother was preoccupied with trying to avoid any form of abuse from her stepfather. Pablo was without a supportive family during college transition due to his parents’ years of unresolved marital issues. The consequences of the lack of support were the rejection letter from MU and the academic probation.

Expectation

While many of the students received emotional support, they also learned to identify the expectations of their parents. At home, Julia needed to fulfill her family responsibilities such as cleaning the house and washing the dishes. But her main responsibility, she was told, was to go to and graduate from college. This expectation eventually became a goal that she had hoped to accomplish in order to make her parents proud. Julia shared how she identified her parents’ expectations. Her parents said to her when they drove by MU one day, “Oh, we are so hoping that you would come here one day and that you can graduate from here. Such a beautiful university!” This simple comment was already a nudge to make college admissions and completion her goal.

For Marla, earning a B or better became the standard. Good grades were important to her parents, Marla affirmed, because that was the pathway to college. Marla continued, “As long as I went to a college or a university, they would be happy. As long as I pursue something more than a high school degree or more than a community college associate’s degree. [It is] a four year university.” Marla knew that being the first in her family to go to college was her parents’ dream, and she pushed herself to meet their expectation.

Going to college was also the expectation Guadalupe's mother had for her since she was in middle school. CRP's continuous reminder to parents about the importance of a college education also increased her mother's awareness in keeping a high standard for Guadalupe. When Guadalupe was in high school, she overheard a conversation her mother had with a friend:

She told her friend on the phone, "My daughter got into MU." She already talked like I was in MU, because my mom would talk on the phone a lot in the morning, and I was at a CRP event, and I would come home and she's on the phone, and she would say, "She just came back from MU." She knew that I was not in college, but she made it sound like [I was at a] Universidad. Very technical.

From conversations like this, Guadalupe knew that her mother's best interest for her was admissions to MU. Her mother was proud of Guadalupe, and Guadalupe did not want to disappoint her mother but only hoped to live up to her mother's expectation.

Guadalupe also knew that she must also graduate from college. She expressed:

Although [my parents] are the type of people that whatever decision [I] make, whether it be moving or dropping out of school, [that] they support with the decision I [make]. I feel like there is always that pressure [of that] I am doing this also for them, because they've never seen something and have the opportunities to see someone go off to college. For me, I feel like if I do not do all these, indirectly, they would see it as I blew it.

Despite the fact that her mother was supportive in all her decisions, Guadalupe knew that dropping out of college meant failing to meet her parents' expectation.

When Elena was in high school, her mother was no longer just encouraging her to graduate from high school. Elena's mother learned the importance of a college degree and began to push Elena to work harder. She told Elena that she believed in her and that "[she] could make it." Elena expounded, "My mother said, 'You are our last hope.' No one has graduated [from college]." Elena's mother set a high goal for Elena and wanted Elena to live up to her full potential.

Not only must Enrique and Tatiana learn to meet their parents' expectation, they must also meet the expectation of their oldest brother. Their first year in college did not go as smoothly as they had hoped. Tatiana struggled to maintain a C+ average after the first semester, but in the midst of her struggle, she remembered her oldest brother who is now a practicing physician. She said, "In my mind, I would say that I am struggling, but [my oldest brother] did too, and he's gone through it, so I can get through it too." His brother had already set a high standard for them by paving the way and being a positive role model, and consequently, Enrique and Maria graduated from college because of him.

Not all the students were given the expectation to go to college. Pablo said, "[They] never had any set expectations. I don't think my parents understand the way the school system works. So, they just figured that [I] knew better than they did." Bernadette also grew up not having high expectations from her mother. Her mother assigned her with house chores but did not expect Bernadette to go to college because no one in her family went to college.

High School Environment and Peer Pressure

The attempt to meet parental expectations did not come without a cost. These students must also learn to face peer pressure at schools. During the focus group interview with the CRP teachers, one of the teachers commented on the academic situation at his school, "Students have a lack of common goals. We ask kids, and they are like, 'I don't know.' If 20% pass the exit exam, I will be pleasantly surprised." Another CRP teacher agreed. He said that he must ask the students to "take out a pencil and a piece of paper, pick up the pencil, and then write on the paper." He explained that his students may not come to class prepared with a pencil or a paper, and he must provide these supplies to the students. Other teachers agreed on their need to discipline the students for the majority of the class time and thus were unable to teach the students. These teachers clearly illustrated the culture of the high school to which the nine key informants attend.

Juanita did not think that her high school provided a campus conducive to learning. She said, “If you look [at MU], you have nice chairs that are high enough to sit and work comfortably. If you go to [my school], the floors are bad. It is the setting itself.” She continued, “Sometimes the kids there don’t even know what is SAT. That’s really sad. If you are not informed, how do you know when to apply?” Julia also said that her high school environment did not promote learning even if the teachers were trying to help them become college ready. She continued, “I guess you can say that, that’s what all high schools are supposed to be doing, but unfortunately, that’s not always the case. The school is crowded, classes are not always offered, and they don’t always offer classes to certain kids.” The key informants faced these adversities in their high schools while attempting to advance to college.

Other than the environment, the nine key informants must also deal with name-calling and the need to break away from the friends with whom they used to “hang out.” When Julia was in high school, she was always teased for being in CRP. Julia said, “They would say that we [were] show-offs. Maybe our projects [were] slightly more advanced, ‘You guys are always studying.’” Marla was also teased frequently for being a nerd. She expressed, “So, they would associate Marla and smart, or Marla and nerd, or Marla and she knows everything so go ask her.”

Sometimes, the lack of time with their non-CRP friends eventually led to the end of many great friendships. Tatiana no longer could relate with her non-CRP friends due to the lack of common interest. Whereas she was interested in college, her non-CRP friends chose to work after high school. Julia also felt the same way. In the beginning, Julia was not spending enough time with her friends. “Instead of going to a nearby burger stand with her friends,” Julia continued to explain, “I went to CRP’s after school tutoring program.” Her relationship with her high school friends began to drift apart, particularly with her best friend. Julia continued, “She was not in the CRP, so in our senior year, we really started distancing. I was going to college, and she wasn’t sure what she wanted to do.”

The goal to attend and graduate from college came with a cost. The nine key informants did not go to high schools that best prepared them for college; therefore, they chose CRP to assist them in their academics. However, being in CRP limited their time with their non-CRP friends, and eventually many of their great friendships ended.

New Capital

“I was thrilled when I got my acceptance letter from MU,” Julia smiled as she spoke. But the letter was only the beginning of their college years. Transitioning to college life was not easy. The CRP had encouraged students to live away from home, as scholarly studies have also shown that living on campus can help students quickly adapt to the academic and social life of an university. All students admitted to MU in their freshman year did exactly what the research study recommended and staff at the CRP encouraged.

Julia lived in the same residential hall with four other CRP graduates. As a group, they tried to manage the new atmosphere and found each other for support. However, as the months went by, Julia realized that for her to remain focused in her study, she had to “break away from this group which she was so attached to.” She continued,

I was so used to being with the group of people that I had known for so long. By that time, I had known them for four years. I am so used to them that I wasn’t giving myself a chance to meet other people and learn from others outside that group. At that point, it was very overwhelming. In CRP, we were all we had. But in college, we had so much more that it felt kind of restrictive to stick to that group. I still talk to a lot of them. But, I think we grew better away from each other. We were really attached the first year.

On her own, her first lesson was to expand her social network. She was no longer relying on her CRP friends but learning to use college resources and meet other people to gain a more enriching college experience.

Julia also grasped on to every opportunity that could help her in her future career. In her third year at MU, Julia was accepted to an internship program at Washington DC to learn more about public policy and prepare her for law school. She lauded the experience as the best time she had in college:

It was totally different. I was miles away, and I couldn't turn back and say I am going home. It was a bit of a shock, because I had never been outside of my house by myself. I've never been outside late by myself. I've always traveled with my parents, if we traveled at all. I had never been to the east coast, and it was a great experience. I really learned how to rely on my...well, I had to really work on relying on myself. That was the best semester I had.

At Washington D.C., Julia not only networked with policymakers and improved her writing skills but also learned to be more independent.

Marla enjoyed living in the residential hall with her friends. She chose to live in the Latino floor because she wanted to expand her social Marla also became actively involved in a student organization which her roommate had established to help developing countries plan long-term solutions for poverty and hunger. By being in the organization, she gained leadership. She also broadened her social network and became more involved in social issues.

Enrique joined a fraternity in his first semester in college where he found his study partners. As the years progressed, Enrique became the president of this fraternity and an active member in many student organizations. He also worked for the CRP as a student worker. Being active in college, he learned that networking skills are essential in life, because "people are going to help them out eventually, even their peers."

During her first year at MU, Guadalupe quickly found several jobs and worked many hours to be economically independent. She asserted, "I know honestly, economically, I cannot go to my parents. I know their circumstances, and I don't want to burden them with that." In her first year, Guadalupe split her time between work and school and gained economic independence in her first year at MU. But simply working and attending classes was not the kind of college life she had hoped.

In her second year, Guadalupe quit her job and joined multiple student organizations, and one organization was the multi-cultural sorority. Guadalupe continued:

[You need to] be open-minded and be exposed to the things around you and be able to network with people all around you, because I really feel that if you are able to do that, you will be able to survive in the real world. I think academics have a big impact on what you are going to do later in life. But if you are not able to network or interact with people, it's going to be really hard.

Guadalupe learned the importance of social network and realized that student organizations, such as the sorority, were the best ways to meet people.

College Life with Home Responsibility

These students have gained new capital of social network and independence but must continue to manage home responsibilities. While five of the nine students lived on campus or with their friends, the remaining four students preferred to live at home. Living at home, however, meant juggling between school and family responsibilities. In addition to washing dishes and doing laundry, Julia also drove her younger sister to and from school. Julia explained how she felt:

We had homework to do and [college was] no longer like high school [where] we could just do our homework for a few hours. Sometimes I had a lot of work to do, but I had to pick up my mom or my sister. It was tough in that sense, because I started acquiring responsibilities that I shouldn't have, like picking up my sister every day. It is a responsibility that I still have.

Julia developed new capital from being in college. But coming from a culture where interdependence was the value, Julia had to learn how to manage the differences between the dominant and her own cultural values. Whereas she was learning to be independence and expanding her social network by being in college, Julia must also remain available for her family as a way to maintain her cultural identity.

Living in a single-parent household, Juanita had learned to balance not only school pressure but also multiple jobs in order to alleviate the family financial burden. She explained:

Well, like last year, my mom had just lost her job, so I kind of feel like I needed to help her. I became full time at my job. I was then full time at my job, full time at a community college. And, that, to me...it was hard at first, because it was a big load. I was taking five classes. It was a lot.

Financial burden demanded her to work full time. In order to transfer to MU, Juanita had to remain committed to her responsibilities as a student as well. Her weekly schedule was as follows:

I worked [on] Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Tuesdays and Thursdays and Fridays, I worked from 11:30am to 8pm. Saturdays and Sundays, I worked from 8am to 4:30pm. Monday and Wednesday, it was reserved for school. So I was at school from 8am until probably at 6pm.

Juanita must manage her schedule well in order to earn passing grades and help her family financially. She also said that with her busy schedule, she did not have time to meet friends.

Elena moved back home after her sophomore year in college. Elena felt that moving home would help her mother in her pursuit to learn English at a local high school. Elena quizzed her mother and answered her questions so that she was prepared for her tests. "Now the role is reversed," laughed Elena. Elena sacrificed living with her friends to help her mother learn conversational English.

Implications for Practice

Based on the narrative accounts of the nine participants in this yearlong study, the following policy implications have emerged from the data. These implications are central to the notion that academic success for these nine Latino students is rooted in a culturally responsive approach to education that does not divorce academic success from central collectivistic notions of a particular culture.

Create the right home environment

The environment parents create to nurture their children impacts how the child excels academically and grows emotionally. This theme is shown across all the students whether they live in a one- or a two-parent household. The stories of Julia, Marla, Guadalupe, Tatiana, and Enrique were presented. These students grew up in a two-parent household and were raised in an environment where their parents demonstrated their love to them.

Whereas research studies have shown that the two-parent household increases the well-being of children, studies also have found that it is also possible for children who are raised by single parents to attain educational success (Clark, 1983). Additionally, these children do not necessarily have to grow up in a two-parent household in order to feel loved (1983). Elena is a perfect example. Elena did not grow up in a two-parent household, but her mother was constantly aware of Elena's daily actions and provided both academic and emotional support at the time most needed. Elena's mother created warmth and security although in a fatherless home, and as a result, she gave Elena nothing but fond memories.

The key to academic success is *how* parents manifest their love. It goes without saying that most parents love their own child. But the lack of attention to their child can affect his or her educational success. For Bernadette, her stepfather prevented her mother from demonstrating her concern to Bernadette, and consequently, she was not admitted to MU in her first attempt. For Pablo, his parents' marital issues were the cause of his leave of absence. Their stories eventually revealed that their parents in fact had loved them. But other concerns hindered their parents from focus on loving them as one of their main priorities.

Sometimes, the hindrance may seem unpreventable given the economical circumstances. Juanita's mother worked six to seven days a week to provide financial means for the family, but her lack of time with Juanita gradually exacerbated the relationship. After her grandmother passed away, Juanita contemplated ending her life because her mother did not give her enough attention. Juanita's mother did love her, according to Juanita's story. But her need to work for more money became too much of an emphasis over time and eventually damaged the mother-daughter relationship. Juanita's application to MU was also rejected the first time she had applied.

Establishing positive relationships with family members also goes hand-in-hand with persistence and retention. Although the family's given socioeconomic status is less likely to demonstrate upward mobility at a specific moment in time, the family members can nevertheless assist their children to climb the social ladder. They cannot place meeting economical means as their first priority even if financial difficulties demand their attention. In order for their child to be academically successful, parents need to let their child know that he or she is loved. The child must be a top priority.

Set and reinforce high expectations early

Parents who have high expectations for their children are more likely to challenge their child in meeting or going beyond the expectations. The interviews with the key informants revealed that the students who were admitted to MU in their high school senior year were expected by their parents to finish high school, and attend and graduate from college. The parents presented their expectations to their children based on the characteristics of their child.

In some families, older siblings acted as the parents. The older siblings implanted high expectations on their younger siblings, acted as role models, and supported them emotionally and sometimes even financially to achieve the expectations. Enrique and Tatiana have a brother much older than them who took on the role of the father figure by making sure that they had food on the table, did their homework, and applied to programs that benefited them from becoming college ready.

Lower socioeconomic students with higher expectations from their parents can also do equally well in academics. Older siblings can take on the role of their parents when their parents are occupied with work (Clark, 1983). Sometimes the educational accomplishment of the older siblings becomes an inspiration for their younger siblings to emulate (1983). The students have the potential to move up the social ladder if they recognize education as a means to upward mobility regardless of the educational attainment of the parents (Schneider, 1993).

In sum, a variable that impacts the level of student persistence is the standards set for the students even before they have in college. Family members of the students whom I interviewed had high expectations for them, and they communicated their expectations clearly to the students prior to admissions in college. Having a high expectation from parents is just as important for students to achieve college retention and graduation. Simply put, the mere presentation of the expectations by family or others who care does not guarantee success. Expectations need to be reinforced early and continuously.

Ways for parents to demonstrate support

Parents in this study played different roles in helping their children stay in college. Roles that were shown by parents of the key informants are: encouragers, counselors, and motivators.

Encouragers--Parents acted as encouragers by actively asking their child about his or her educational situation. "How are you doing?", "How is school?", "Are you doing okay?", and "Do you need tutoring?". The parents showed concern by initiating conversations about their college courses. They also shared with their children the stories of their personal struggles. Their sharing was intended to teach their child the ethics of hard work.

Counselors--Once the students were in college, parents continued to provide emotional support. Julia chose to approach her parents for emotional support when she struggled to keep up with the college courses, as opposed to her close friends. Guadalupe also went to her mother as the main provider of her emotional needs. Her mother made sure that Guadalupe felt secure and loved by

Motivators--Latino parents prefer to instill and reinforce educational values to motivate their children (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Relating stories about their immigration hardships is yet another approach to encouragement within the Latino culture. This tactic can lead to the child becoming more aware of their struggles and developing a closer relationship with their parents (2001).

Conclusion

Research studies have found that parents are more likely to play these roles before their children begin college. Baker and Stevenson (1986) have described how lower socioeconomic parents are “helpers, encouragers, and counselors” to their K-12 children. This study, however, show that for parents and family members to continue with these roles is just as important to the children when they are in college. In sum, family support cannot cease once their children reach college. Family members must continue to guide and support their children. Their involvement guides their children to make appropriate decisions.

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