

**LATINOS AND THE PURSUIT OF COLLEGE:
FAULTY SYSTEMS OF ADVOCACY**

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Despite being the fastest growing ethnic group in this country, Latinos lag behind all other ethnic groups at the rate in which they earn college degrees, earning 4.2% of bachelors' degrees in 2000 (Perna, 2000; Vernez & Mizell, 2001). Latino numbers now equal 12.5% of the U.S. population and over 32% of California's population, according to the 2000 Census. Yet Latinos drop out of high school at a higher rate than any other ethnic group in California (Gandara et al., 1998). In addition, approximately half of Latinos in the U.S. were born in another country; most of these have never entered U.S. schools (Vernez & Mizell, 2001). Recent studies show that the low education level for Latinos is related to a growth in their low-income numbers (Grogger & Trejo, 2002; Vernez & Mizell, 2001). As a result of these trends, major access and equity issues increasingly exist for the Latino population.

Complex social and cultural factors, as well as educational and economic influences, appear to combine to discourage Latinos from pursuing college degrees. In seeking to explore and understand these issues, a research study was conducted to examine what factors prevent or challenge Latino students in central California from pursuit of a degree. The qualitative study developed grounded theory on culturally and socially related factors that influence rural Latinos in pursuing college. The study employed in-depth interviews to research factors that challenge Latino youth for college, and provided similar comparative data on White youths. Research findings were produced through the application of qualitative analysis methods recommended for

interview data as well as methodologies for developing grounded theory (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1987, 1998).

This article begins by reviewing the need for this research, explains the research methodologies used for the study, and presents the research findings according to advocacy factors that emerged from qualitative analysis and theory development methods. In the final sections of the article, the results are discussed as developing theory and conclusions, as well as the relationship to prior research. Implications for practice and recommendations for research are also discussed.

Need for Study

In spite of nearly twenty years of affirmative action policies, underrepresentation of ethnic and racial groups in higher education continues to be a major social issue today (Chapa & Valencia, 1993; Gandara, 1995; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; McDonough, 1997; Barretto, 2000; Perna, 2000; Schevitz, 2001). In 2000, Blacks equaled 10.0% of undergraduates and received 7.0% of bachelor's degrees granted; Latinos made up 8.0% of undergraduates and earned 4.2% of bachelor's degrees in the U.S. (Perna, 2000).

At the same time, cultural and ethnic diversity have increased rapidly in the United States, in large part due to growth in the Latino population. The country's Latino numbers have increased by 50% in the last decade, with approximately one third of U.S. Latinos living in California (US Census Bureau, 2001). Related to this growth while complicating it, about half of the Latino population in the United States was born in another country.

Most immigrant Latinos have completed only low levels of education, and have never entered U.S. schools (Vernez & Mizell, 2001). This is particularly true of Mexican

Americans, who are a growing segment of immigrants and comprise three-fourths of the 11 million Latinos in California, according to the 2000 Census. Furthermore, in California 69% of Mexican immigrants do not have a high school diploma and 22% of second generation Mexicans do not have diplomas (Grogger & Trejo, 2002). According to Bautista (1984), Latinos' increasing population numbers and decreasing education levels are contributing to a growing phenomenon of age-race stratification.

Cultural and social forces appear to work against students of color in pursuing and attending college. Research studies have concluded that Latino cultural traditions have an influence on their historically low college participation rates (Gandara, 1995; Cortese & Duncan, 1982; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; Perna, 2000). In the Latino culture, family members are commonly rewarded for pursuing familial rather than personal goals.

Females, or Latinas, are disadvantaged in pursuing college due to cultural values that discourage them from living away from home (Gandara, 1995). In recent years, several research studies have focused on Bourdieu's (1977) theories of cultural and social capital as factors in college access and decision-making. In theory, cultural capital is employed by middle and upper-class students and families to trade educational values, attitudes, and knowledge about college for economic capital and social status in life (McDonough & Antonio, 1996; McDonough, 1997; McDonough, Ventresca, & Outcalt, 2000).

Accordingly, first-generation and low-income students from underrepresented groups are disadvantaged through a lack of cultural capital regarding college value, admissions and other factors.

Dramatically reflecting the trends described above, California's huge San Joaquin Valley presents complex challenges for Latinos' access to higher education, evidenced by

rates of college participation, income and employment that are among the lowest in the state (CPEC, 1999, 2000). Roughly the equivalent of the entire geographic area of New England, the San Joaquin Valley stretches 250 miles from Sacramento to Bakersfield; long distances between urban communities create geographical and financial hardships for low-income students to attend college. Rapid growth in the Latino population has occurred in the San Joaquin Valley, where their numbers equaled 40% of the region's growing population in 2000 (Baldassare, 2001; US Census Bureau, 2001). At least three-fourths of Latinos in the Valley region have not had any college education (Baldassare, 2001). The San Joaquin Valley's high incidence of first-generation college participation further challenges students' pursuit of a college degree.

Latinos: Increasing Population, Losing Access

As the most rapidly growing race in the United States, the Latino population almost equals Blacks in number, according to the Census of 2000. A third of United States Latinos live in California, with Mexican immigrants and their descendants comprising 20% of the state's population (CPEC, 2002; Grogger & Trejo, 2002).

Adding issues of educational access and equity to Latino population growth, higher education is experiencing rapidly rising enrollments. Much like the nation, California is undergoing a so-called Tidal Wave II, with an increase of over 714,000 additional students in enrollments forecast for the state's public colleges and universities between 2000 and 2010 (CPEC, 1998).

Almost twenty years ago, increased college admissions for underrepresented, ethnic student populations became institutionalized through higher education policies of affirmative action. In 1978, an affirmative action policy establishing racial and gender

preferences as admissions criteria was passed by the University of California's Regents and supported by the Supreme Court. Affirmative action policies received mixed support and implementation at campuses across the country, and attracted considerable political attention as strategies for improving college access and equity (Cortese & Duncan, 1982). For instance, in 1995 the University of California (UC) banned, then later repealed affirmative action practices. In addition, California law was soon enacted that prohibited affirmative action in state education, hiring and contracting practices (Schevitz, 2001). Since then, admissions initiatives have been proposed at UC, as well as at other major universities, which are expected to impact minority recruitment.

Cultural and Social Issues

According to research studies and literature, cultural and social traditions challenge Latino students in pursuing and participating in college (Gandara, 1995; Cortese & Duncan, 1982; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; Perna, 2000). In the Latino culture, family members are commonly rewarded for pursuing familial rather than personal goals. Girls of the families, or Latinas, are discouraged by cultural values from moving away from home to attend college. Latinos earning doctoral or law degrees, and having parents that did not attend college, were shown to succeed due to family values for high standards of performance, education, and hard work (Gandara, 1995).

Latino historical and cultural literature point to social processes of alienation, acculturation, and subordination as influencing Latinos' access to higher education in the United States (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998; Cortese & Duncan, 1982). Research studies have also reported that Latino psychological factors affecting social behaviors may influence Latinos' college participation (Madsen, 1971; Ramirez & Price-Williams,

1976; Cortese & Duncan, 1982). Specific psychosocial traits of cooperative and non-competitive attitudes, which are encouraged in the Latino culture, have been reported as factors in Latino achievement motivation (Cortese & Duncan, 1982; Madsen, 1971; Ramirez & Price-Williams, 1976). Cortese and Duncan (1982) suggested that common Latino preferences for cooperative and non-competitive behavior conflict with achievement success in American classroom activities and standardized tests.

Research has also indicated that low-income and first-generation college students have been disadvantaged through a lack of knowledge or values known as cultural and social capital, used to trade for financial and social status in life (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2000; Tierney & Jun, 2001). According to this theory, first-generation Latino students are disadvantaged due to a lack of cultural capital regarding college value, processes and other factors. Research has similarly determined that underrepresented students' college decision-making were related to parents' lack of educational and financial attainment (Grogger & Trejo, 2002; Vernez & Mizell, 2001; McDonough & Antonio, 1996).

The implications of the factors described above are that cultural, social, educational, and economic issues combine to challenge rural Latino students in attending college, and demonstrates a need for this study. The following section describes the methodology used to examine the factors influencing Latinos' pursuit of college degrees.

Research Methodology

This qualitative research utilized in-depth interviews to study Latino youths' college challenges and to provide similar comparative data on White youths. One and a half hour interviews were conducted with subjects who were able to contribute a great

deal of information on concepts central and meaningful to the research purpose, as is the premise of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2001; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998). The purposeful sample of twelve college-eligible 18 to 28-year-olds consisted of almost equal numbers of Latinos (seven) and Whites (five), and males (five) and females (seven).

The study's sample of twelve cases was selected from communities surrounding Fresno and Modesto in the rural San Joaquin Valley. High school counselors referred potentially qualified participants who were prescreened on the telephone by the researcher. A sampling distinction was made between individuals who were pursuing a bachelor's degree versus simply attending college, due to attrition and dropout rates for community college that are historically high. Therefore, subjects were sought who did not have plans to earn a degree. A large majority of the cases were not enrolled in college when interviewed; two participants were attending community college part-time.

Purposeful and Conceptual Sampling

The sample was purposefully selected according to potential for meaningful concepts and theory building. As recommended by qualitative methods research literature, sampling was based on depth, relevance and clarity of data rather than size (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Seidman, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). When building theory, as was a central purpose of this qualitative study, a sampling goal was to represent concepts and how the concepts vary (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Accordingly, sampling choices for this study were "driven by a conceptual question, not by a concern for 'repetitiveness'" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29). The desired concepts behind selection of subjects were cultural, social and educational factors that functioned as potential and meaningful

challenges or influences on the pursuit of a college degree for a potential participant. Such concepts or influences were expressed as problems, concerns or doubts to the researcher during telephone conversations conducted to screen and qualify over 120 potential participants, and during similar conversations with referring counselors, family members, or friends. Once interviews had been conducted that produced data reflecting repetition, sufficiency and saturation of research concepts, the sampling was considered purposeful and complete (Seidman, 1998).

Data Analysis for Theory Development

The interview transcripts were analyzed qualitatively to explore conceptual and recurring patterns of meaning. Research findings emerged through the application of qualitative analysis methods recommended for analyzing interview data and for developing grounded theory (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1987, 1998). Introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory development methodology strives to derive meaning from the data and emphasizes building theory on substantive issues involving usefulness to practice. The application of theory development methods required systematic and in-depth qualitative analysis based on comparative methods of connecting concepts and categories within and among interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Merriam, 1998). The interview data was reduced and classified in several iterations, based on subject perceptions regarding influences on college decisions, including individuals, events, values, processes, finances, and other factors. Interview responses were compared within the same interview and with others.

Research validity and reliability were ensured and enhanced through the use and integration of several methods, including collaborative modes of research, investigator's position, peer examination and audit trails. The strategies for enhancing the validity and reliability of qualitative research findings did not follow the traditional dictums of quantitative research, because human behavior and social research are not static (Merriam, 1998). Reporting focused primarily on the use of qualitative descriptive and narrative methods, with some frequency analysis and graphical reporting of data.

Interview Data

Following the overview of demographic data and discussion of the findings provided below, the results are interpreted and further discussed as theory-based conclusions, implications, and recommendations, and related to prior research and literature. Relevant demographic data on the twelve subjects interviewed for this study is presented utilizing pseudonyms, in Table 1 below:

Demographic Data

Table 1

Study Participants: Basic Demographic Data

Subjects	Ethnicity	Gender	Age	GPA/ HS	College Experience	Father/Mother Education	Father/Mother Immigration
Frederick	Latino	Male	23	3.4	4-yr dropout	10 th /8 th grade	Imm/Imm
Maria	Latino	Female	21	2.5	CC off & on	HS/HS	Imm/No
Paula	Latino	Female	18	3.8	CC off & on	6 th /5 th grade	Imm/Imm
Solana	Latino	Female	19	3.7	CC off & on	6 th /6 th grade	Imm/Imm
Mary	Latino	Female	20	3.2	CC dropout	8 th grade/HS	No/No
Thomas	Latino	Male	19	2.5	CC part-time	BA/Some coll	No/No
Sena	Latino	Female	19	3.2	CC 3 sems	6 th /6 th grade	Imm/Imm
Hannah	White	Female	21	4.0	No college	BA/HS+CC	NA
Matthew	White	Male	23	3.5	No college	HS/HS	NA
Holly	White	Female	20	3.0	CC dropout	HS+CC/HS	NA
Tim	White	Male	28	3.0	CC dropout	HS/HS	NA
Mark	White	Male	24	3.3	CC dropout	Some coll/MS	NA

HS = High school; CC = Community college; BA = Bachelor of Arts; MS = Master of Science

Subject Demographic Information

The purposeful sample of twelve subjects included seven females and five males, ranging in age from 18 to 28 years.. The sample also consisted of seven Latino participants and five White subjects. Among the seven Latinos in the sample were five females and two males. Of the five White subjects in the sample, three were male and two were female.

Five of the seven Latinos had high school GPAs (Grade Point Averages) of 3.0 or higher, with the two highest being 3.8 and 3.7. All of the five White subjects had high

school GPAs of 3.0 or higher, with the highest at 4.0. Only one of the Latino subjects had attended a 4-year college (before dropping out); the others had attended community colleges at some point. Two of the five White subjects had not attended college at all; the other three had attended community college before dropping out.

For none of the twelve subjects had both parents completed a bachelor's degree. Only one of the seven Latino subjects had a parent with a bachelor's degree or even a parent who had attended some college. Three of the White subjects (60%) had at least one parent with some college experience. Two of the White subjects (40%) had one parent who had completed a bachelor's degree or higher.

Of the seven Latino subjects, five (71.4%) had one or two immigrant parents from Mexico. For the Latino subjects, five parents of fourteen total parents (35.7%) had completed high school. For three Latino subjects, both parents had graduated from high school. For all five White subjects, both parents had completed high school.

Additionally, six of the seven Latino subjects (85.8%) had parents who were still married; a single mother had raised the other Latino subject. Three of the five White subjects (60%) had parents who were still married to each other. Therefore, 40% of the White subjects had parents who had divorced (marital figures are not in the table).

Interview Profiles

As a means of describing the data, individual participant's responses were presented in the form of twelve first-person narratives called profiles or vignettes. According to Seidman (1998), a profile in the words of each subject is the data presentation product most effective and consistent with the process of interviewing. Profiles allow the researcher to describe, share and "present the participant in context, to

clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time, all central components of qualitative analysis” (Seidman, 1998, p. 102). The profiles of this study’s sample of twelve subjects were presented using pseudonyms for the names of all persons.

Findings

The findings emerged through the application of qualitative analysis methods for developing grounded theory and for analyzing interview data, as described above (Strauss & Corbin, 1987, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998). The research findings were developed according to concepts (categories) and related factors (subcategories). The results are presented below for Latino and White subjects, following a definition of the “system of advocacy” concept that emerged from theoretical analysis of key factors.

System of Advocacy Concept

During analysis of the study’s interview data, a common concept emerged as a link among related factors and findings, which influenced the subjects in their pursuit of college degrees. The concept was referred to as a system of college advocacy and evolved as an concept category overriding subcategories of mentors and messages. In essence, the twelve young adults in this study were often prevented or challenged in pursuing college degrees by factors categorized as a lack of mentors and/or clear messages, needed to support a path to a college degree. Messages primarily consisted of mixed value messages and/or a lack of information messages. The findings supporting a faulty system of college advocacy are presented below using matrix tables and discussions to summarize mentors and messages factors for Latinos, then White subjects.

Findings on Latino Subjects

The research findings for the Latino subjects are summarized in Table 2 below, and discussed according to key factors that challenged each Latino in his or her struggle to attain a college degree:

Table 2

Summary of Findings: Latino Subjects' Challenges

Subjects	Mentors w/ College Degree	Mixed Value Messages	College Info Available	Father/Mother Education	Father/Mother Immigration
Frederick	None/family None/HS	Family vs. individual goals	None/family Some/HS	10 th /8 th grade	Imm/Imm
Maria	None/family None/ HS	Degree as “right” path for her	Low/family Low/HS	HS/HS	Imm/No
Paula	None/family None/HS	Value vs. cost of college	None/family Low/HS	6 th /5 th grade	Imm/Imm
Solana	None/family HS counselor	Latina values vs. college	Low/family Ample /HS	6 th /6 th grade	Imm/Imm
Mary	None/family None/HS	Degree as right for her	Some/family Low/HS Low/college	8 th grade/HS	No/No
Thomas	Father None/HS	College vs. work vs. family goals	Some/family Low/HS	BA/Some coll	No/No

HS = High school; BA = Bachelor of Arts

Discussion of Findings: Latino Subjects

The interviews with the Latino subjects revealed that all were challenged by factors classified as mentors and messages, which included mixed value messages about college and a lack of available college information from family and/or high school. All of the seven Latino respondents considered one or more family members to be mentors; however, only one of the Latino subjects (Thomas) had a family mentor that had a college degree. Five of the Latino subjects had parents that were immigrants, with only

one of the immigrant parents having completed high school. In addition, only one Latino subject (Mary) had a sibling with a college degree. As a result, most of the Latino participants had family mentors who could not serve as role models for pursuing a college degree. Additionally, four (Frederick, Maria, Paula, and Mary) of the Latino subjects did not consider any of their teachers or counselors in high school to be mentors, who would fill a family void in role models for earning a college degree. Mary, a 21-year-old Latina and single mother, recalled, “I don’t think I had any role models or mentors in high school ... there wasn’t anybody.”

Likewise, most Latino subjects had family mentors who were not able to function as college advocates by providing the subjects with values and information on college. Sena, a 19-year-old Latina, described her immigrant Latino parents of 6th grade education this way, “They didn’t really know how it works, the system (giggled), what degrees follow what ... since they didn’t go to college.” The seven Latino subjects all discussed having received mixed value messages from family that appeared to challenge, contradict or compromise their pursuit of a college degree. In Frederick’s college experience, “I dropped out in my 3rd year – because of family problems.... and family comes first.” Frequent examples of such mixed value messages were variations of similar messages about family taking priority over individual goals, and about Latinas (females) living in the family home until marriage. Solana reflected on her experience as a Latina, “I live at home and I still feel like my mom, my parents have to protect me.” Another Latina, Sena, explained it this way, “My parents want me home; they would rather have me live at home.” As Frederick described it, “Most of my friends... were good students, like me, but they didn’t go to college. Their parents said, ‘Don’t leave. Stay and help the family.’”

In addition to challenges through factors involving mentors and mixed value messages, all of the Latino subjects described issues due to a lack in availability of college process information from family and/or high school sources. According to the responses, all of the Latino subjects referenced inadequate college information available through family sources. Four subjects (Frederick, Maria, Paula, and Solana) discussed receiving almost no process information about college through family. Frederick's immigrant-family experience was a common one, "What my parents knew about college came from me." All four of these Latino subjects had immigrant parents and did not have any family members with a college degree. Solana, as a child of immigrant parents, summarized her common Latino experience, "We're the older kids; we're first generation [for college]."

Some of the Latino participants, especially those with immigrant parents, described serious hurdles due to a lack of college mentors and messages from family and school. Three (Frederick, Maria and Paula) of the Latino subjects with immigrant parents discussed major challenges in availability of college mentors and information from high school and/or college, as well as from family. Maria described these hurdles, "I didn't really have any mentors in high school... Counselors would only come to students who wanted information... My teachers weren't really helpful about college." And Mary further experienced and depicted the situation this way, "I don't think I even got to see a counselor my senior year... I think if I'd had more information, it would have been different." Three of the Latino participants (Frederick, Maria and Paula) also had no family members, mentors, or role models with a college degree, and received mixed value messages about college.

Findings on White Subjects

Because the study’s research problem and question were focused on factors that challenged Latinos in pursuit of a college degree, the research on White subjects was conducted for comparative purposes. Therefore, the White participants’ interviews provided data on primary factors that challenged five members of the majority population. The results of the interview responses from the White subjects are presented using a matrix (see Table 3), and a discussion of primary factors that challenged each participant’s pursuit of a college degree, as follows:

Table 3

Summary of Findings: White Subjects’ Challenges

Subjects	Mentors w/ College Degree	Mixed Value Messages	College Info Available	Father/Mother Education
Hannah	None/family (mom=mentor) None/HS	College path vs personal choices	Ample/family Adequate/ HS	BA/HS
Matthew	None/family None/ HS	Not “college material”	Low/family Adequate/HS	HS/HS
Holly	None/family Coaches	Unclear goals; value vs. cost of college	Low/family Adequate/HS	HS/HS+CC
Tim	None/family 2 tchrs/HS	Unclear goals & value re: college	Low/family Low/HS	HS+ CC/HS
Mark	None/family (dad=mentor) Counselor/HS	Conflicting values for college	Adequate/family Ample/HS	Some coll/MS

HS = High school; CC = Community college; BA = Bachelor of Arts; MS = Masters of Science

Discussion of Findings: White Subjects

The interviews with the White subjects revealed that all were challenged by factors classified as mentors and messages, including conflicting value messages regarding college and/or some lack of available college information from family. Key findings from the interviews revealed that all of the five White subjects had family (or

other) mentors without a college degree; two of the White subjects (Hannah and Matthew) did not have educators as mentors in high school.

All subjects had received mixed value messages regarding the need, aptitude, or value of college for them. As Matthew, a 3.5-GPA high school graduate, recalled, “I remember my stepfather asked me what was I doing about college.... I was getting ready to apply for colleges. Then he said, ‘Come on, Matt, we both know you’re not college material.’ I didn’t go [to college].” Hannah was a 4.0 student in high school who remembered her decision to attend beauty school this way, “My dad joked around that I was saving him thousands of dollars – in college tuition. (Laughed)... I just became the black sheep.”

Three of the White subjects (Matthew, Holly, and Tim) had parents without college degrees and only a little college information available in their family. One of these (Tim) also had a high school that was a poor source of college information. As Tim described high school advisor experiences, “I didn’t talk to any counselors when I was in high school. We had a new counselor every year.... We only had a counselor for half a year for our senior year. ” Further challenging the White subjects, none had an older sibling who had earned a college degree.

Comparative Discussion of Findings: Latino and White Subjects

Each of the twelve young adults in this study was challenged in pursuing a degree by having a lack of college advocacy. The interviews revealed that all subjects were influenced by factors classified as mentors and message factors, which included mixed value messages about college and/or a lack of available college information. Almost none of the Latino and White subjects had mentors with college degrees. Furthermore, the

Latino subjects often looked to family members who were immigrants or recent descendents with little education, to be mentors. As emphasized by Solana, her immigrant parents were her “big role models.”

The White participants received more college guidance and information from their high school-educated families than did the Latino subjects, who received little mentoring or assistance in college pursuits from mostly immigrant parents. As a result, most of the Latino subjects were vulnerable to a lack or loss of college mentors, values and information from school and other sources. All of the Latino subjects described hurdles due to a lack in availability of college process information from family and/or high school sources. As Mary said poignantly, “I think if I’d had more information, it would have been different.” Generally, the White subjects had more college information available to them, especially through family.

Like the Latino youth, the White subjects also suffered from weak college advocacy due to a lack of clear value messages supporting college. The mixed messages received by Latino versus White youth were different in the content of the conflicting values. The Latino subjects all discussed having received mixed value messages from family that challenged, contradicted or compromised their pursuit of a college degree, often due to messages about family taking priority over individual goals. Frederick’s college experience clearly demonstrates this factor, “I dropped out in my 3rd year – because of family problems.... and family comes first.” All the White subjects had received conflicting value messages regarding their lack of need, aptitude, or value of college. As Holly, a talented athlete, musician and dancer in high school, recalled, “Teachers or counselors would say, ‘You should go to school.’ But they didn’t really

elaborate on it... Coaches said, 'You need to go to a four-year school.' Their reasons weren't really clear.... I didn't apply to any college. I didn't really have a goal when I was in high school, so it didn't make sense to me to go to school."

In summary, all the rural youth in this study were challenged in their pursuit of college at one or more weak point(s) in a system of advocacy, as a result of a lack of college mentors and related messages that provided unclear values and/or inadequate information. Based on the findings, research conclusions developed as theory from college advocacy factors involving mentors and messages.

Conclusions

According to this study's proposal hypothesis, complex social and cultural factors, combined with educational and economic influences, appeared to discourage Latino students from participating in college. In seeking to explore and understand this problem, this qualitative study developed grounded theory about socially and culturally related factors that challenge Latinos in pursuing a college degree.

For the Latinos in this study, major college issues were often related to having immigrant parents or families, who were challenged by language, cultural and social barriers and had little experience or knowledge about the college system. Related to this was the fact that the Latinos in the study usually looked to family members, often parents, to be their mentors and role models. Without college experience, their family mentors did not provide adequate advice or clear values for guiding the young Latinos through college to a degree. If older siblings (or cousins) had attended some college, albeit usually before dropping out, they frequently provided the younger Latinos with

some college information; these older, college-experienced siblings were usually brothers.

The issue of a lack of college mentors and role models was even more pronounced for the Latinas, who had mothers or sisters as mentors that had less experience in and understanding of college than did Latino males. A final issue was that the Latinos' high school counseling departments were sometimes poorly staffed and prepared to assist youth who were unknowledgeable and uncertain about pursuing college as the "right" path for them. For the young Latinos in the study, these issues and findings created major challenges to a college degree.

Developing Theory: System of Advocacy

By connecting the above factors and issues in the findings, a key concept emerged as grounded theory from the overriding, umbrella category of advocacy factors. The concept was referred to as a system of college advocacy, or simply, a system of advocacy. According to this theory, an individual's system of advocacy includes mentors and role models who advocate college, as well as provide messages that give him or her values and information needed to support pursuit of a college degree. According to the developing theory, rural youth may be challenged in pursuit of college at one or more weak point(s) in their systems of advocacy, due to a lack of college mentors and related messages of unclear college values and/or inadequate information.

Each of the twelve young adults in this study were challenged in pursuing college degrees by having a faulty system of college advocacy at a critical point. Primarily because the young Latinos often had little contribution from an immigrant family within their system of college advocacy, they were also vulnerable to a lack or loss of college

mentors, clear values and process information from school or other sources. The White youth in the study, who received more messages of college information from their family than did the Latino youth, were also subject to weak points in their systems of advocacy due to a lack of college mentors and clear value messages.

Related Research

College issues for the Latinos of this study were often related to having immigrant parents or families, who had little experience or knowledge about the college system and were challenged by language, cultural and social barriers. Prior research has indicated that first-generation and low-income college students from underrepresented groups have been disadvantaged through a lack of knowledge or values, also known as cultural and social capital, which are used to trade for financial and social status in life (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2000; Tierney & Jun, 2001; Vernez & Mizell, 2001). Accordingly, Latino students are disadvantaged due to a lack of cultural and social capital regarding college values, processes and other factors. Conversely, research has reported that high education Latinos, who earned doctoral or law degrees and had parents who did not attend college, succeeded in spite of a lack of cultural and social capital due to mitigating value factors from their parents (Gandara, 1995).

Related to the issue of cultural capital, the young Latinos in this study usually looked to family members, often parents, to be their mentors and role models. Without college experience, their family mentors did not provide adequate advice or clear values for guiding the Latino youth through college to a degree. Related research has also concluded that low educational attainment of underrepresented parents hindered offspring

in their college decision-making (McDonough & Antonio, 1996). In this study, Latino parents with low education levels were found to be less likely than more educated White parents to assist their children in academic pursuits and college preparation. Conversely, certain Latino family elements have been reported to exert major positive influences upon offspring's pursuits of college degrees. In Gandara's (1995) research on factors that influenced high achieving Latinos in attainment of a college education, fifty Latinos were interviewed who had high academic achievement and came from low-income homes with little formal education. Gandara concluded that the subjects' parents supported their children's educational goals, set high performance standards, and frequently modeled a hard-work, education-as-mobility ethic.

Several research studies have suggested that certain cultural values and social traditions may work against Latino students in pursuing and participating in college (Gandara et al., 1998; Cortese & Duncan, 1982; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; Perna, 2000). In the Latino culture, family members are commonly rewarded for pursuing familial rather than personal goals. Research by Ramirez and Price-Williams (1976) produced evidence that Mexican-American children were higher in family achievement values and behaviors, and lower in personal need-achievement attitudes, than White children. The Latino youth in this study received value messages from family that challenged, contradicted or compromised their pursuit of a college degree. For the young Latinos, frequent examples of mixed value messages were variations about family taking priority over individual goals; for instance, family comes first, and Latinas (females) should live and help at home. Latinas are particularly disadvantaged in pursuing college due to cultural values that keep them home to take care of siblings and discourage them

from living away from home (Gandara, 1995). Additionally, in the study at hand, issues involving a lack of college advocates were more pronounced for the Latinas, who often had mothers or sisters as mentors that had less experience in and understanding of college than did Latino males. And if older siblings (or cousins) had attended some college, these were usually males.

A final issue and finding from the study was that high school counseling departments were sometimes poorly staffed and prepared to assist youth, particularly those unknowledgeable and uncertain about pursuing college as a path. Conversely, when high schools did provide Latino students with ample counseling staff and services, and/or teacher mentoring, the youth were able to overcome a family void in their system of college advocacy. McDonough and Antonio (1996) reported that a student-teacher relationship is important for underrepresented students, with the bond and nature of this relationship being related to college choices. In a nationwide study conducted through the Institute of Latino Studies at Notre Dame, Garcia (2002) found that many Latino students reported an absence of mentoring created challenges in completing a Bachelor's degree. Additionally, college support staff considered mentoring to be an essential ingredient to increasing minority student graduation rates.

A related concept emerged during analysis, and was referred to as a system of college advocacy. According to the concept and developing theory, a system of advocacy includes mentors and role models that advocate college and communicate messages, providing a youth with values and process information for pursuing a college degree. In theory, rural youth may be challenged at one or more weak point(s) in their systems of advocacy by a lack of college advocates and mentors, and a lack of related messages

regarding college values and/or information. Each of the twelve young adults in this study were challenged in pursuing college degrees by having a faulty system of college advocacy at a critical time or point. Because the Latino youth often had little involvement in their systems of college advocacy from immigrant families, they were vulnerable to a loss or lack of college mentors, clear values and process information from school or other sources. The White youth in the study, who received more messages of college information from their families than did the Latino youth, were also subject to weak points in their systems of advocacy due to lack of college mentors and clear value messages. For all of the young adults in this study, faulty systems of advocacy created challenges or obstacles for pursuing a college degree.

Implications for Practice

Based on the developing theory of system of advocacy, implications of the study's findings focus upon enhancing the availability of college mentors and messages to Latino youth. Due to the challenges associated with being a member of an immigrant family, Latino youth would benefit from increased access to college mentors and advocates through school, college, and community organizations. McDonough and Antonio (1996) found that the teacher-student mentoring relationship is important in college decisions for Mexican Americans and other students of color, providing a means for securing cultural capital needed to access college. In a recent RAND study, Vernez and Mizell (2001) recommended that outreach programs be implemented to provide mentoring and counseling to Latino students in order to increase their rate of earning college degrees. The counselor/teacher classroom program AVID (Advance Via

Individual Determination) is one such high school initiative for mentoring and counseling students about the path to college.

Improvements in Latino students' college degree rates would result from coordination of support programs during high school and college, as well as between school and community organizations. This approach was recommended by Vernez and Mizell (2001) and is also employed by the ENLACE initiative, Engaging Latino Communities for Education. ENLACE is a national non-profit initiative that forges partnerships between communities, K-12 schools, and colleges to strengthen opportunities and increase the numbers of Latino students earning college degrees (Kellogg Foundation, 2001). In this study, the OASIS financial aid-based counseling program was found to be a college intervention program that effectively supported and guided Latino students, who might further have benefited from also participating in the AVID program in high school. In addition, the rural youth of the San Joaquin Valley, who already face college access challenges, appear to need increased levels of counseling staff and services, as well as expanded mentoring programs at high schools and colleges.

Furthermore, Latino parents and families would likely benefit from receiving college guidance and information, conceivably through schools and community groups. To best accomplish this, parents' direct participation would be increased in outreach programs and initiatives. As an example, the non-profit Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) utilizes a model of nine week classes at California middle and high schools for teaching underrepresented parents how to participate as advocates and resources in their children's education (PIQE, 2001; Sanchez, 2002).

Concluding Recommendations

Additional research is recommended to study and refine developing theory on the system of college advocacy. In addition, research is suggested to further study culturally and socially related factors that challenge Latinos in pursuing college. In-depth interviews are recommended as the methodology for this purpose and population; interview questions should test and expand college advocacy factors related to mentors and messages. It is suggested that participants be located using Latino organizations and peer groups, and through community colleges and outreach groups. Further studies are recommended with rural, as well as urban, Latino youth. Additional research is also called for in order to compare college issues for first-generation Latino immigrants with those of subsequent generations of Latino youth.

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