

Pathways to a Brighter Future: Narratives and Stories of Latino Students' Perceptions at Community Colleges

College Changes Everything

ISAC

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Executive Summary

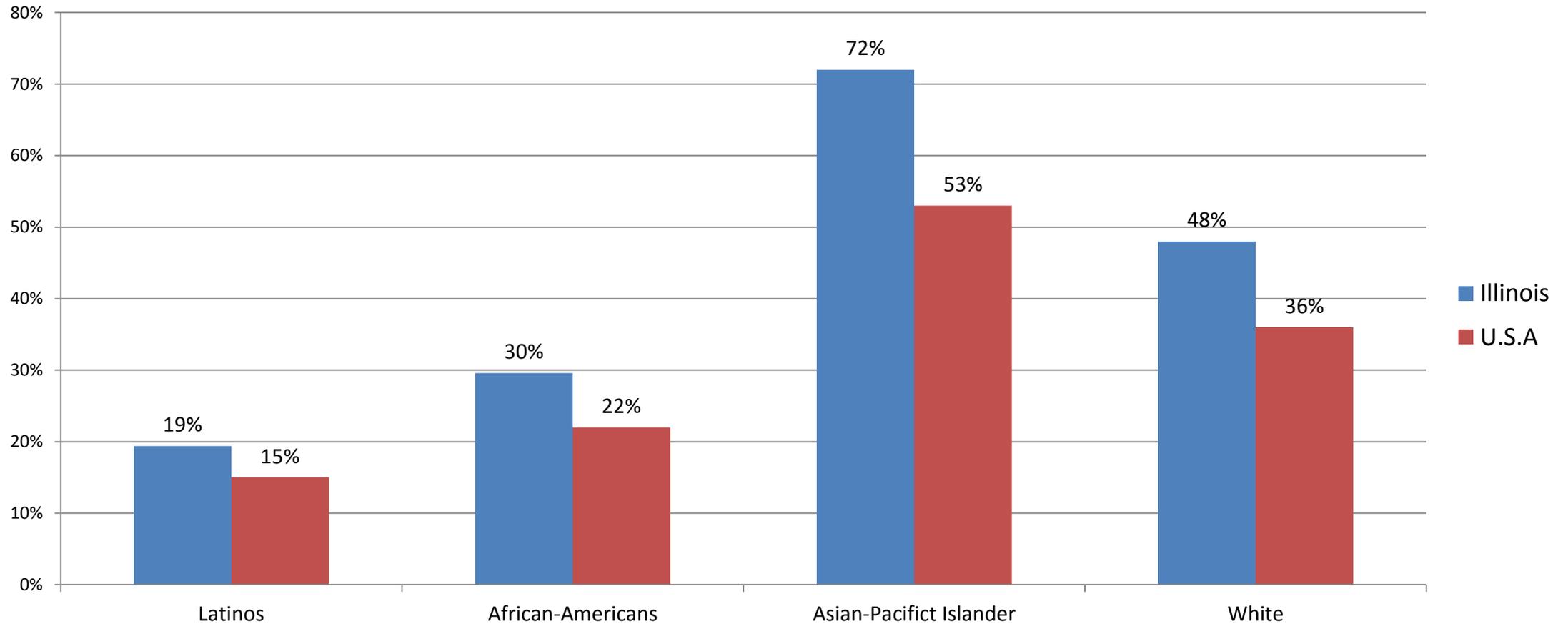
- Overview of this research study
- State of Latinos in Higher Education
- Literature Review
- Research Methodology
- Participants
- Findings
- Recommendations

Overview of the Research Study

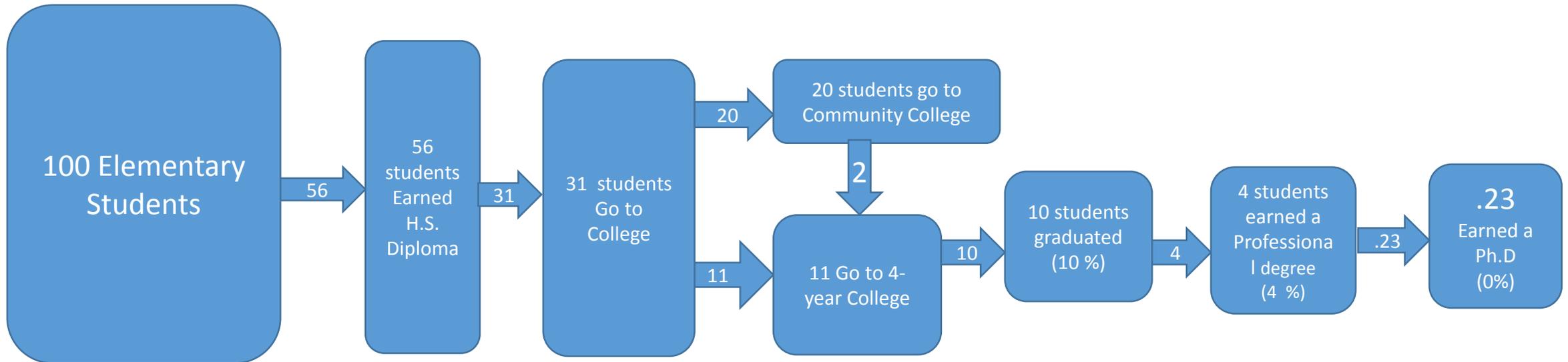
- The purpose of this study was to collect the narratives of Latino students who earned associate degrees at community colleges.
- Research Questions:
 1. What do Latino/as' s narratives reveal about successful completion of the associate degree?
 2. What do narratives or stories reveal about how voice, self-consciousness, and cultural- consciousness contribute to resisting deficit-based stereotypes and dominant cultural norms, overcoming obstacles, and successfully completing the associate's degree?
 3. What actions emerged from voice, self-consciousness, and cultural-consciousness that helped Latino students resist deficit-based stereotypes and dominating cultural norms, overcome obstacles, and complete the associate degree?
- Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory
- Methodology: Facebook's Group Discussion and Individual Interviews

State of Latinos in Higher Education

Degree Attainment
25-64 Years Old



State of Latinos at Higher Education



Literature Review

- Cultural Community Wealth which Latino Students bring to the higher education system helps them to succeed in college(Valencia, 1997; Yosso, 2005).
- Community Colleges are very important institutions in providing the educational advancement of non-traditional students having diverse needs. Community Colleges are the first entry to higher education for over 7 million people in the U.S. (Krogstad & Fry, 2015)
- Community Colleges serve nearly half of the Latinos in higher education because they are closer to home, have an open-door policy, have flexible schedules, and are affordable. They are the most logical place for Latino students to attend after completing their secondary education (Chapa & Schink, 2006).
- Latinos the largest, fastest and youngest ethnic minority group in U.S. Latinos are the least studied ethnic group at the higher education level, particular in the community college system (Santiago, Calderon Galdeano, 2015).
- The results of the educational pipeline are clear evidence of discrimination which Latinos face (Covarrubias, 2011).
- The education structures are governed by postmodern, color-blind, race-neutral and immigration polices and practices which are supported by politicians and the general public (Haney Lopez, 2013; Landson-Billings, 2009; Lederman, 2013).
- Higher Education is not longer a public good, but a private good. “Those kids don’t need college” (Carlson, 2016).

Methodology: Facebook Group Discussion and Individual Interviews

- Recruitment via Facebook-Networking or snowball sampling
- Recruited 9 Latino students
- Phase One: Demographic Data
 - Googledocs Survey (13 demographic questions)
- Phase Two: Facebook Private Group Discussion
- Phase Three: Individual Interviews via Face-to-Face or Online (Skype/Facebook Video Conference)
 - The interviews were led by semi-structured questions

Participants

Nine Latino community college graduates were identified as follows:

- a) Three males & six females
- b) all of the participants identified as first-generation college students,
- c) they were of Mexican descent,
- d) they were attending or had graduated from a community college within in the past five years, and
- e) they were pursuing or had pursued a baccalaureate degree or higher.

The sampling population was designed to investigate the stories of successful Latino community college students and find out how they used their voices, experiences, and cultural- consciousness to complete an associate degree.

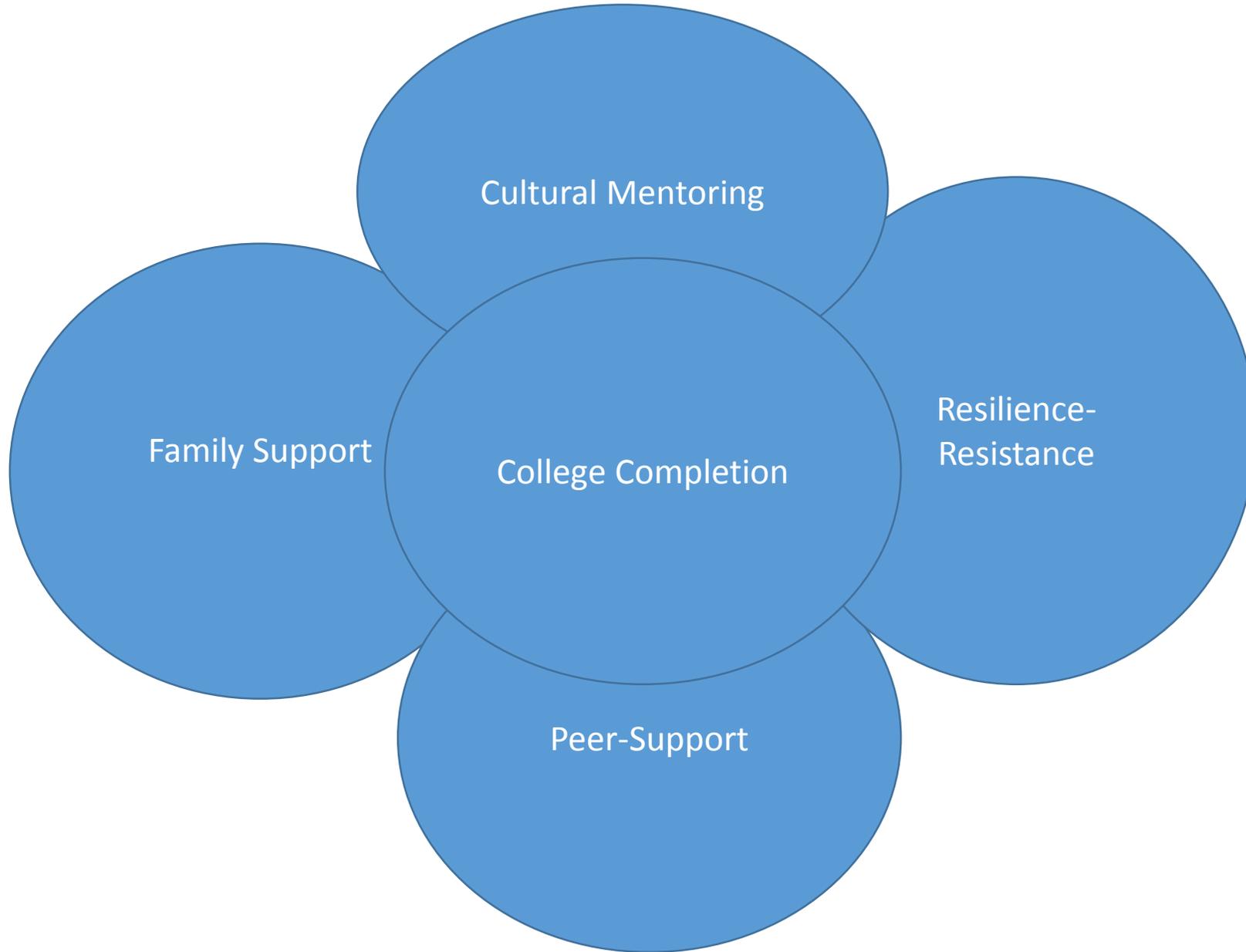
Participants' Profile

Name	U.S. Citizen	Mexican Decent	DACA-Dreamer	Have Children	Spanish Spanish	A.A.	B.A	M.A.
Alma	x	x		x		x	x	
Ariana		x	x		x	x		
Cassandra	x	x		x	x	x		
Ivan		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Jocelyn	x	x			x	x		
Leslie	x	x			x	x		
Marcos	x	x		x	x	x		
Roberto		x	x		x	x		
Victoria		x	x		x	x	x	x

Narratives

- The advantage of this methodology was that it validated and centered the Latino community college students' voices and the relationship of their experiences to their perceptions and their academic success (Rendon, 1993).
- The revealing students' voices created a platform for their stories, explanations, and underlying assumptions that often times are developed by the dominant cultural discourse (Delgado, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). The narratives preserved authentic voices of Latino students who successfully completed their associate degrees.
- The narratives of the dominant culture could be destabilized as “the way” to interpret community college experiences for all students (Delgado, 2013; Ramirez, 2011; Solórzano et al., 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001a).
- The main findings or themes that emerged were linked with Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth discussion are as follows: family-support, peer-support, cultural-mentoring, and the resilience-resistance characteristics, which the Latino group possessed and helped them overcome difficult experiences.

Findings



Cultural Mentoring

Family Support

College Completion

Resilience-
Resistance

Peer-Support

Family Support

- Family-Support: The family support and hopes that students bring to higher education.
- Family-support overlaps in the participants' stories. The majority of the participants in this study shared stories about the level of support they received from their families and how each family valued education and encouraged them to keep striving toward their educational goals. They used their parents' experiences and struggles as motivation to keep working hard in their college education, so they could provide better opportunities for their family members, parents, siblings and children (Yosso, 2005; Rendon, 2016).

Family Support

Ariana

- “My family was a big part of my motivation. I wanted to finish my associate degree, even if I was uncertain about continuing with my education. I wanted to make them proud and help them in any way I could.” Her dream was to help her family and have an education degree. She was not thinking of her future alone, but also wanted her family to be able to have a brighter future.
- “When I hear negative comments about Latinos not caring for education, I know that is not true. My parents value education and [they] were doing their best for my dream to come true. I was also getting straight A’s and doing better than English speakers. My parents assured me that I was capable of doing great things for myself, and I could persevere no matter what. Home is a safe place for me [going home] was a reward to me for working hard and having a high GPA. My parents taught me to be proud of my heritage, accent, and culture. I would not change it for the world.”

Family Support

Cassandra

- Cassandra felt supported by her parents to continue her education after she became a mother of a “beautiful” boy. She knew that going back to college to complete her associate degree was not going to be an easy task, but that was the challenge which she was willing to take in order to provide a better future for her son. She knew that working long hours, taking night classes, and being away from her son were sacrifices that she needed to do in order to complete her education and provide a better future for her son. She was fortunate to have her parents, who provided her with childcare, while she went to work and attended night classes.
- “One of my major challenges was when I went back to school to finish my associate, leaving my baby with my parents, but I know it’s for a better future”.

Family Support

Jocelyn

- Jocelyn always felt that her family supported her college education. “My parents have been supportive of me going to college. They never denied me going to school. My mom and sometimes my dad would go on college visits with me. Whenever I kind of doubted myself, my family were always there pushing me.”
- “For my parents, my school always came first; they also told me to cut my [work] hours. They told me that I could always stop working if I needed to spend more time at school, and that was very helpful for me, as well.”

Family Support

Roberto

- Roberto described his family as emotionally supportive, especially his sister. “My sister has been my main support, my parents in Mexico too, but their support is more mentally, but here at the U.S. my sister has been very supportive.”

Family is very important to Latino students. Latino students valued and appreciated the efforts which their parents and family members do in order for to them to continue with their education. To these participants, having family support means commitment, encouragement, and keeping the family united. Some of the participants talked about how they influenced others to go to college, which created a ripple effect with their younger siblings and their own children.

Peer Support

- Peer-Support: students build their own peer-network and communities where students' motives, guided and helped each other.
- The participants mentioned how significant and valuable it was for them to have peers who understood and encouraged them when they felt overwhelmed with school, family and work responsibilities.

Peer Support

Alma

- Alma felt that peer-support helped her to overcome academic challenges. It was helpful to know that she was not alone in her academic and cultural struggles.
- She associated herself with Latino students and became a member of the Latino Club. At the Latino Club, she learned that many of the students were facing similar struggles, so she felt very supported by them. She learned how to form study groups and learned how to study. “I studied with people who had good study habits. I was able to adopt new study habits and go from part-time classes to full-time, and graduated quickly”.
- She said that during her childhood she was afraid to say she was of Mexican descent because she had always heard negative stereotypes about Mexican people. She was afraid of not being accepted because of the brown skin and eyes, but it was helpful to her that she no longer needed to hide her identity at the college. Most importantly, her peers accepted her and supported her during her community college career.

Peer Support

Leslie

- For Leslie having peer-support helped her to stay motivated in completing her college education, as well as, resisting societal oppression. “I think at [community college] I tried to surround myself with positive people. Always helping others, not thinking that you are better than anyone else, understanding others and trying to help. Being involved with other Latino students and the student club helped me to be more comfortable with my Spanish and helped me to understand my culture. The Latino Alliance helped me to get closer and understand better where I came from
- Leslie felt that being surrounded by other Latino students and college staff members helped her to feel more assertive of her identity. She felt that having this type of support helped her to be positive about her college experience and to value her family and culture.

Peer Support

Marcos

- Marcos felt out of place when he began his college career. “The biggest barrier I encountered was the cultural aspect of things. I joined the soccer team at my college and got to meet many people from diverse backgrounds. Within the team, we made bonds that will never be broken. My team consisted of Mexicans, Salvadorans, White Americans, Bosnians, Croatians, and some Africans. This strategy helped me feel more comfortable at my school”.
- For Marcos, soccer helped him to cope with the college environment. This sport also helped him to feel connected to his identity and nationality. Soccer is a sport that he had been practicing since he was young child. Soccer is very important within the Latino Community and that is how he was able to find a common bond between college and his culture.

Peer Support

Victoria

- Victoria felt that her peers' support played a critical part of her college completion. "Honestly, had it not been for my boyfriend and his eternal support, I don't think I would have gotten to where I am. The *Calendaria Martinez* banquets were nice and made me feel part of something."
- Victoria relied on her boyfriend as well as a friend from high school to navigate the college environment and understand the college policies. "Once I found that I could major in Social Work, I clung to a high school friend, who I knew was in a very similar situation as I was. She was a couple of years ahead of me in school and as I discovered new things or as I needed information about what to do next, she was the one I turned to."

Peer-supported, community-capital wealth is a resource that Latino students draw upon to resist macro- and micro- forms of aggression. Social capital is one of six forms of community capital wealth (Rendon, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Social capital helped the participants of this study find networks of people and community resources that they utilized to feel emotionally supported, and which helped them complete their associate degrees.

Cultural Mentoring

- Cultural mentoring is an informal mentoring role, which a bilingual and bicultural college faculty or staff took on to guide and encourage the participants.
- Participants identified these Latino people as someone with whom they felt naturally connected because of their cultural background.
- The participants felt that these individuals were trust-worthy and understood the students' challenges.
- These cultural mentors made the students feel welcomed and accepted.
- Participants looked for cultural mentors and built their networks of people and community resources to feel emotionally supported, which allowed them to complete their college degree.

Cultural Mentoring

Alma

- Alma's social capital wealth helped her do well in her college career. "[Alejandro], if it weren't for him asking me to join the Latino Alliance, I would have never known the opportunities available throughout the college. I may have not even completed it".
- She met Alejandro and she felt comfortable seeking his support and guidance. She also mentioned that she went to him because she knew she could ask him anything and he would direct her to the right person.
- "Alejandro, and the student services, they helped me to push myself and not give up, and things will always come up...So school was not necessarily easier to manage, but I was able to manage my family, and finished my school".

Cultural Mentoring

Cassandra

- Cassandra found cultural mentors who understood her challenges and were always encouraging. “After my 1st year attending [college], I met wonderful and supportive staff that always encouraged us Latinos to be someone and to not give up and to continue with our education. Also, any struggle I had they were there for me, to hear me out and give me the best advice they had. Thanks to them I was able to finish and appreciate it a lot.” She felt she was able to complete her associate degree due to the unconditional support and guidance of her cultural mentors.

Cultural Mentoring

Ivan

- Ivan was a very conscientious person and he knew that for him to be able to fulfill his dreams he needed to find the right support system. When he went to his community college he was unsure of how to prepare for a career.
- “I got involved with Latino Club, International Club, and Met [Mr. Alejandro]. He did a lot of good things for me, but if it was not for [Maria Garcia], I would have not met all the people, like [Dr. Rivera, Francisco Villa, Dolores], and many other people, who talked to you. Look at these people, they were good role models. I think it is very important to have role models. I did not go with my parents, because one is not alive and the other parent did not know. But, I went to other people instead and these people really helped me, because they were Latinos and were people who already lived this type of life and understand what exactly you go through. or what it is like”.

Cultural Mentoring

Roberto

- Roberto, found his network with Latino professional college staff and peers who motivated him to continue his education. He says, “While attending the community college I met wonderful people that helped me grow as a student and as a person, they became my mentors. They (my mentors) were not afraid to speak Spanish to you and make you feel welcomed. I went back to college to finish my associate degree because my mentors pushed me to go back and finish.”
- For him, not being able to qualify for financial aid and not having his parents close to him was very difficult. But, having mentors and peer support meant a great deal. His mentors and support system guided him on the right path and helped him to stay on track.

Cultural-mentoring helped the participants feel connected with their cultural identity, making them feel acceptance within their college campus. The participants were aware of the underlying Eurocentric and cultural expectations at their community college, but they never mentioned it, yet, they implied how helpful it was to have people they culturally identified with and whom they could seek guidance from.

Resilience-Resistance

- Resistant-Resilience: Student were culturally conscious and kept moving forward despite the macro-aggression comments, which they experienced. They were determined to complete their degree and nothing was going to stop them.
- The participants did what they needed to do in order for them to succeed in their college studies, surviving and exiting as intact individuals.
- They used the micro- aggressions directed towards them to push themselves and finish their associate degree.
- They knew their associate degree was just a stepping stone, which they needed in order for them to reach their final goal-- their bachelor's degree or higher.

Resilience-Resistance

Alma

- Alma did not feel discriminated during her college years, but she experienced discrimination while growing up. “Growing up, I grew up in a community that was not diverse. I am Mexican, Irish and Scottish, and I do not resemble my Caucasian side, so it was very difficult for me growing up. I always felt ashamed. I did not understand anything, except for negativity that I heard while growing up, of Mexicans. I remember trying to avoid talking to anyone. I remember being sent to another school because of my nationality, it was not a good place for me to grow up, so when I became a teenager I moved out and took care of myself. I did not know anyone. I did not know anything positive. It was very refreshing going to college and I learned that it was okay to be Mexican. I never knew that it was okay.”
- She made it because of the positive people she met during her college career and also because at an early age she developed resistance capital wealth, which helped her to survive the micro-aggression that she experienced at her early age.

Resilience-Resistance

Ariana

- She felt that it was important for her to succeed in college and not fall under the status quo. “All of my experiences as a first-generation college student, people looking down on us because of our accent made me a stronger person. Nothing is going to stop me from getting [to] my goals. I have always been interested in international business, and I chose this career [path] because I liked working with international people and to also prove the others wrong. I want to prove to them that I can do this type of major, that I could climb the social ladder by getting a prestigious career. I could have any job not just the typical stereotype jobs that society expects us to take.”

Resilience-Resistance

Ivan

- He was determined to complete both associate and bachelor's degrees despite his language and immigration challenges by working hard to reach his goals. Ivan mentioned that, "I describe myself as an immigrant who refuses to follow the stereotypes that society puts on us."
- He shared with the Facebook discussion group that his college friends and one of his professors thought that he liked to drink only because he was Mexican and had an accent.

"Some Friends I made in college even asked me 'how come I didn't drink if I was Mexican?' One professor also said to me 'I can tell you like to drink a lot' when I do not even drink at all. However, the one that really made me angry was when a professor called me José for more than half of the semester. I explained to her several times that I was Mexican and my name was not José, but she kept calling me José until I dropped the class".

Resilience-Resistance

Jocelyn

- She also experienced micro-aggression and comments against immigrants. She said that oftentimes she was the only Latino or Mexican American student in her class and people often made very negative comments. In English class, Jocelyn found her classmates' comments to be very offensive and cruel and her teacher did nothing to help to defuse the situation. "In my English class, it was a writing topic and obviously, some people shared their thoughts, we talked about immigration. A lot of people said mean stuff, I did not say anything...I did not want to get into it". She did not want to get involved, because she felt intimidated by her classmates, and she felt that she did not have the support of her teacher to back up her argument.

"I think by just not giving up and not losing hope, everything ends up working out. I got my associate degree and transferred".

Resilience-Resistance

Leslie

- Leslie did not recall being stereotyped at college, but did share a few stories where she had witnessed stereotypical treatment outside of the classroom. “I used to get really mad when people would make racist comments, but I am not going to lower myself to your level or play your game...”.
- The negative comments remind Leslie of why she is studying and why she feels she needs to be the person who can motivate students to fight for their dreams and not to let negative stereotypes hold them back.

Resilience-Resistance

Marcos

- Marcos experienced micro-aggression comments against students of color on his college campus, but he decided to ignore them and to keep moving forward. He was determined to meet his college goals and nothing negative was going to stop him. “In most of my classes I am the only Mexican or maybe two or three more...so usually teachers will make negative comments about minorities, but I don’t think that they know what they said is offensive to the students like me, perhaps, they do not mean it that way. They make comments like ‘those people.’ Comments like that make you feel very uncomfortable, but they are not directed at you.”

The Latino students knew that for them to complete their associate degrees they would have to ignore the labels often created by deficit-thinking models; they also had to draw from their resistance capital to survive the oppression and prejudice that they faced during their community college careers (Yosso et al., 2009).

What did I learn from this research study?

Validation from students' experiences

- The Latino families have high aspirations for educational attainment of their children but lack of knowledge about the process.
- For Latino students, their educational attainment is a commitment and obligation to their family and community.
- Latinos have the skills that they need to succeed but they need reassurance that they have potential to succeed. This reassurance helps them to overcome their fears of their academic ability. It helps them to feel part of the campus and gives them a sense of belonging and self actualization (Tough, 2014).
- When Latino families have access to informational resources and opportunities, their children succeed in education (APA, 2012).

College of Lake County and University Center of Lake County Initiatives

- EXITO PROGRAM
- ALICIA HERNANDEZ SCHOLARSHIP BANQUET
- LAKE COUNTY FAFSA COMPLETION CAMPAIGN
- TASTE OF COLLEGE PROGRAM
- YOUNG LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
- DIA DE LAS MADRES FEST
- SUMMER BRIDGE TO SUCCESS PROGRAM
- FAMILIAS EN EDUCACION-CONFERENCE

Summary

- This study focused on the Latino students' voices and experiences that each of the students brought. According to the findings of this study, each student brought familial, social and community capital that helped them to resist the deficit thinking models in the community college (Yosso et al., 2009).
- These experiences are validated and centralized by CRT and LatCrit. These findings illustrated the experiential knowledge that people in higher education need to regard and respect the voices of Latino students.
- These voices and experiences narrate stories that show that higher education structures are not friendly towards Latino students, yet with the support from Latino professionals and others who are there to help they become easier to navigate. While the type of support that Latino students receive is not the norm, as seen in the literature review, it becomes necessary for institutions of higher education to increase the graduation rate of Latino students by becoming culturally responsive to the needs of students of color (Yosso, 2005; Rosales, 2006).

Recommendations

“Get Involved”

- Adapt policies and practices to promote college completion. They should emphasize the following factors: family involvement, cultural mentoring, community support programs, “Provide a sense of identity” (Tough, 2014), and recognition of individual students’ stories.
- Build and maintain relationships with community college leaders, community leaders, parents, faith organizations and legislators.
- Developed family and community events which could keep going the college going culture among Latino families.
- Considered mentoring undergraduate and graduated students, so they could considered a career in Higher Education.
- Believe in hope for social change.

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