

THE MISSING PIECE IN EDUCATION:  
LATINO FAMILIES' PERCEPTIONS AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE COLLEGE  
PREPARATION PROCESS FROM THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored Latino families' perceptions and involvement in preparing their children for college from the Rio Grande Valley. The Rio Grande Valley is a border region and contains a significant portion of the Latino population within the state of Texas. There has been a growing concern among scholars in education and policymakers to improve the educational outcomes for Latino students. In order to address this issue, much of the literature has focused on the experiences of students and educational agents. However, little is known about the experiences of Latino families' and their involvement in preparing their children for college.

A qualitative case study methodology was used for this study. A single independent school district located in the Rio Grande Valley were nine families' were interviewed to gather all data for this study. I utilized Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model to guide this study and to examine the experiences of Latino families' help their children prepare for college from this particular border region. These families' valued and cared about their children going to college. It was evident these families' defined their involvement differently from how it is defined in the educational research. The way these families' perceived their involvement occurred outside of the school setting to help prepare their children for college. These families' relied heavily on their personal educational experiences to help formulate their college aspirations for their children. In addition, these families' showed no sign of concern about their children's academic ability but had concerns about their children's well-being (i.e., moral and

financial support). Lastly, these families' believed that it is a collective effort or the responsibility of both the families' and school district personnel to help prepare their children for college. Based on the findings, I offer recommendations to improve policies, practices, and programs across regional P-16 educational pipeline to increase family involvement in the Rio Grande Valley.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my immediate family- Juan Cruz Palomín, Ofelia Perez Palomín, Patricia Pena, and Juan Palomín. Thank you for accompanying me on this extensive journey, even when you all did not understand the demands or the process of graduate school. Most importantly, thank you for believing in me and being my biggest supporters. To my better half, Joe thanks for being my rock throughout graduate school. I am forever grateful for your love, support, and encouragement throughout the years. I love you all so much and hope that I have made you all proud. Lastly, to my late grandparents, I know you all are smiling down from heaven and hope to continue your legacy of being a servant leader to our community.

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To the first-generation Latino students from the Rio Grande Valley, know that you belong in these educational spaces. Even when the odds are against you, you feel like quitting because life gets too complicated, or you feel a sense of guilt leaving your family to pursue an education, know that your hard work will not go unrecognized and will eventually pay off-- keep believing, keep thriving, and keep persisting!

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the state of Texas in 2016, the Latino population represented 39% of the total population (United States Census Bureau, 2017). There is growing concern among educational agents, scholars, and state policymakers regarding the state's future economic and educational prosperity, due to the low Latino educational attainment rates. For example, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) published a report explicitly stating that for the state to maintain its economic prosperity; more individuals must receive a higher education, in particular, Latino students. Scholars in the field of education such as Calderón Galdeano and Santiago (2014) reported that 16% of Latino adults aged twenty-five and older, compared to 36% of all the adults in the state of Texas, had earned an associate degree or higher. This higher disparity in educational attainment for Latinos across the state has captured the attention of many with regard to the need to improve the educational outcomes for such a demographic, especially for Latinos from the Texas Borderlands (e.g., Rio Grande Valley (RGV)).

While this educational issue is not new, many scholars have gained interest in Latino student college participation in order to understand this educational issue (Santiago, 2011). For example, Hurtado, Inkleas, Briggs, and Rhee (1997) noted that Latino students, compared to other underserved and underrepresented student groups, were less likely to go through an extensive process for their college of choice. While these scholars published this finding more than two decades ago, the result still resonates and holds true in our current reality. Berbery and O'Brien (2017) found that Latino

students, compared to other student groups, are less likely to engage in an extensive college choice process or to attend college immediately after completing high school. This educational issue gained the attention of scholars in terms of the need to understand the absence or lack of Latino students' college participation (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003; Bui, 2002; Horwedel, 2008; Justiz & Rendon, 1989; Núñez, 2014; Saunders & Serna, 2004; Williams & Butler, 2010). The scholars suggest that student access to the various types of educational resources and opportunities are dependent on various factors, such as academic preparedness, socioeconomic status, first-generation status, and familial relationships and networks.

Latino students who successfully attend college may encounter challenges as they transition and acclimate to the college environment. These difficult transitions tend to influence the academic success of students during their first years of college (Yosso, 2005). These educational experiences of Latino students contribute to the broader educational research narrative that describes Latino students as academically underprepared or culturally deprived (Valencia, 2002; Yosso, 2005). These deficit-based claims from the research literature suggest that scholars have placed importance on the academic preparation of Latino students. As a result, these deficit-based claims place little to no attention to the cultural wealth that Latino students bring with them into the college environment, which may contribute to their academic success.

In order to ensure the academic success of Latino students in the college environment, it is important to understand their experiences during the college choice process to understand how educational contexts can leverage Latino students' cultural

assets to support them. Latino students acquire various forms of cultural capital from their homes and community environments, which prepare them to excel in the college environment (Yosso, 2005). Most importantly, individuals such as parents, siblings, and extended family members who pass on these cultural assets to Latino students go unrecognized or unacknowledged within the educational environments that can play a critical role in preparing them for college.

The literature portrays the Latino familial involvement in education using a deficit perspective. This long-standing narrative depicts the absence of Latino families' in the educational context, and this is ascribed to the community's limited access to education-related resources and information. The literature suggests that Latino parents and families' do not value or care about education. Rather than the literature emphasizing on the academic resources that Latino parents and families' do not possess, the literature should shift its attention to nonacademic resources such as cultural assets that help prepare their children to excel in the college environment (Yosso, 2005). The review of the literature regarding parent involvement has demonstrated a positive effect on student educational outcomes. For example, Ryan and Ream (2016) note that there is a positive relationship between Latino generational status, college knowledge, and student college enrollment. Altschul (2011) focused especially on Mexican-American parents and found a positive relationship between parental involvement and the students' educational outcomes. Park and Holloway (2013) reported that families' of color who were involved in their youth's college preparation process were more likely to see their

children attend college. This finding suggests that Latino families' play a critical role in preparing Latino students for college.

The deficit perspective of Latino parental and familial involvement presented is a result of the manner in which the literature defines the concept of the parent. The concept, shaped by traditional western thought, defines parents as part of a family that consists of two parents and children (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). However, underrepresented and underserved populations suggest that family extends beyond just parents to include extended family members, such as older siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, or grandparents who assist and prepare their child in the educational process. Therefore, there is a need to examine parental and familial involvement in different contexts and across different underserved and underrepresented populations (Anzaldúa, 1999; Bernal, 2001).

Even though the majority of the existing literature uses familial engagement and parental engagement interchangeably to indicate parents (i.e., mother and father), it is important to define how the terms will be used in this study. The parents represented in this study will serve as a proxy that represents an individual family, as a collective unit. I use the terms “family” and “family involvement” to include parents, extended family members, older siblings, or guardians who provide any support or educational resources to the child. For the purpose of the literature review, the researcher also uses the term “parent” or “parent involvement” to denote scholars explicitly mentioning the term in the existing research. In addition to these terms, the researcher will use the term “Latino” in this study. While there is an ongoing conversation regarding the inclusiveness of the

term, a majority of the existing research employs this term. There are other terms such as “Latinx” used in educational research to be more inclusive, but the term is relatively new, and the expansion of the term is currently being studied.

### **Problem Statement**

Scholars have found that family members, peers, and high school agents help shape Latino students’ college participation (Lobao & Saenz, 2002; Perez & McDonough, 2008). The opportunity to access higher education can be a challenge for Latino children and their families’, primarily when the availability of educational resources and physical infrastructures are limited, as in the case in the Texas borderlands. The Texas borderlands consist of forty-three counties along the Texas-México border and contain a significant portion of the Latino population in the state of Texas (Shapleigh, 2008). Allen and Cancino (2012) noted that Latinos living in these border regions experience high levels of social and economic inequality. Shapleigh (2009) stated if the Texas borderlands were a state, it would “...rank last in per capita personal income, first in poverty and fifth in unemployment” (p. 8).

Researchers have also indicated that students located in rural (Milbourne, 2004) and border (Aleman, 2006; Esparza & Donelson, 2008) areas, compared to the students in urban and suburban areas, tend to receive inadequate educational opportunities. These scholars have suggested that geographical context does influence the types of educational opportunities available to the surrounding communities. Latino families’ and children from these border regions may have trouble in making an informed college decision due to limited access to educational resources (McDonough, 1997). This unique



geographic region and the lack of educational opportunities that it provides for the Latino communities may contribute to and widen the higher educational achievement gap. The manner in which Latino families' utilize their cultural assets (e.g., skills sets and cultural knowledge) to help prepare their child for college across the Texas borderlands warrants further examination, especially in the Texas-México border region known as the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) or as South Texas. Scholars have found that these counties are economically challenged and disenfranchised of higher education opportunities (Chlup, Gonzalez, Gonzalez, Aldape, Guerra, Lagunas, & Zorn, 2018; Garza & Landeck, 2004; Lobao & Saenz, 2002). The RGV consists of four border counties: Willacy, Starr, Hidalgo, and Cameron and is situated in a low-income area comprising of densely populated Latino rural communities are culturally influenced (Lynch, 1997) and which have low educational attainment rates compared to the rest of the state.

Borderland/Border theories were informed by Mexican-American scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Américo Paredes, Renato Rosaldo, Hector Calderon, and Jose David Saldívar, which explain the historical, political, social, and cultural aspects of the Latinos, especially those of Mexican descent situated along the México-U.S. border regions (Anzaldúa, 1987; Calderón, Saldívar, Saldívar, Jameson, & Fish, 1991; Paredes, 1958; 1990; Rosaldo, 1993). Michaelson and Johnson (1997) consider the works of these scholars regarding the México-US border regions as “the birthplace, really, of border studies, and its methods of analysis” (p. 1).

Borderland/Border regions can represent either a physical border where Latinos are able to operate in informal spaces that do not adhere to the dominant ideology or an imaginary boundary that limits Latinos' access to social institutions, such as education, class, and race. Anzaldúa (1987) describes it as the following:

The U.S. -Mexican border es una herida abierta<sup>1</sup> where the Third world grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms, it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country-a border culture. Borders are set up to define the spaces that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. (p. 25)

Anzaldúa suggests that Latina/os from the border regions must learn to navigate between two opposing cultures as well as between a newly created third country and border culture. She notes that these three different cultures cause a “cultural collision,” because each culture differs from one another and may project “opposing messages” for Latina/os (1987, p. 100). Elenes and Delgado Bernal (2010) explain that Borderland/Border theories recognize and validate the wealth of knowledge created by Latina/os and other people of color from their lived experiences and understanding of their own reality (p. 73). Although the original intent of Borderland/Border theories is to highlight the discriminatory practices experienced by Mexicans along the Southwest US-

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<sup>1</sup> An open wound

Mexican border, these theories help explain the experiences, life outcomes, access to economic, social and cultural wealth as per the categories of race and class in American society (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010).

Borderland/Border theories allow social scientists to legitimize the lived experiences of people of color by offering an alternative approach of inquiry in order to examine the dominant ideology in American society. For instance, in the field of education, scholars explore the relationship between *space* and *place*. *Space* refers to a conceptual location where individuals or groups are positioned based on race, gender, class, and sexuality (Elenes, 2001; Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010). The *place* is the physical space where individuals or groups are located (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010).

There is limited published research regarding families' and their children who live in densely populated Latino communities (e.g., Texas-México border communities) and their experiences in terms of navigating the college environment. This study seeks to examine how Latino families' from the RGV understand the importance of going to college and their role in preparing their child for college. The relationship between educational institutions and the Latino population warrants attention in order to understand the manner in which Latino families' from these disenfranchised regions utilize their cultural wealth to participate in preparing their child for college.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The Latino population's low educational attainment rates have gained the attention of scholars. This is especially important in terms of the need to understand their

experiences in navigating education contexts, as this would help increase the college participation of the Latino youth. The purpose of this study is to explore RGV Latino families' involvement in their child's pre-college preparation process. The study aims to explore how these families' make meaning of and participate in the pre-college preparation process. As stated earlier, many scholars have found a positive relationship between a family's college aspirations and their child's academic achievement (Ceballo, Maurizi, Suarez, & Aretakis, 2014; Fan & Chen, 2001). Scholars are interested in exploring the avenues through which Latino families' actualize their educational aspirations given their current reality and access to college-related opportunities. The goal is to understand how Latino families' interpret their role in preparing their child for college. In order to understand this social phenomenon of interest, three main research questions guiding this study are the following:

1. What are the perceptions of Latino families' from the RGV about their child going to college?
2. How do Latino families' from the RGV interpret the pre-college preparation process?
3. In what ways do Latino families' from the RGV prepare their children for college?

### **Organization of the Study**

This study aims to demonstrate the manner in which Latino families' from a specific geographic location understand the role that they play in helping their child prepare for college. The purpose of this study is to provide insights into the educational

experiences that Latino families' encounter as part of an attempt to assist their youth to excel in education. The intent is to explore Latino families' interpretation of and contribution to preparing their child for college. Chapter II provides a literature review focused on Latino familial education participation and a summary of the theoretical lens guiding this study. Chapter III outlines the methodological approach used in this study. Chapter IV presents the data analysis understood through the theoretical framework defined by the paper to identify the various ways in which Latino families' utilize their cultural assets to contribute to their child's college preparation experience. Chapter V presents a summary of the findings and offers recommendations as well as directions for future research.

### **Definitions of Terms**

Hidalgo County: Hidalgo County is made up of land and water of 4,099.71 square kilometers. Hidalgo County is the 422<sup>nd</sup> largest county in the United States and is home to 831,073 people.

Cameron County: Cameron County is made up of land and water of 3,306.01 square kilometers. Cameron County is the 541<sup>st</sup> largest county in the United States and is home to 420,392 people.

College: The term represents both private and public higher education institutions such as community colleges or universities.

College application process: The term describes the various processes a student must complete in order to enroll in a community college or university.

Colonias: are unincorporated, impoverished settlements located within or beyond the extraterritorial jurisdiction of cities where people often live in trailers or self-built houses that lack essential services such as sewer, drainage, adequate paving, and street lighting.

Familial and parental involvement: The term will be used interchangeably in representing parents, extended family members, older siblings, or guardians who provide any support or educational resources to the child.

Participant/Parent: The term is a proxy that represents an individual family, as a collective unit.

Rio Grande RGV (RGV): The term will represent terms “The RGV” or “South Texas” as the geographic region.

Starr County: Starr County is made up of land and water of 3,183.36 square kilometers. Starr County is the 571<sup>st</sup> largest county in the United States and is home to 62,955 people.

Willacy County: Willacy County is made up of land and water of 2,031.24 square kilometers. Willacy County is the 1206<sup>th</sup> largest county in the United States and is home to 21,903 people.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study intends to explore Latino families' perceptions of and involvement in navigating the higher education context from a particular geographic location in order to help their child prepare for college. The decision to attend college is an important and exciting milestone for both the children and their families. Preparing for college and understanding its complex and complicated processes may be overwhelming for families and their child, especially for low-income, underserved, and underrepresented populations who are not familiar with the college environment.

Scholars have discussed student access to higher education but have not fully identified a specific set of factors that influence a student's decision-making process for college (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, Moeller, Roddie, Gilliam, & Patton, 2008). These key phases that students and their families must learn to navigate successfully may provide insights regarding how families from unrepresented and underserved groups contribute to the child's decision to attend college (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). These scholars state that the lack of specific findings to help eliminate barriers makes the college preparation process difficult for families (Roderick et al., 2008).

Educational agents from multiple environments provide students support in terms of navigating the college-going process but fail to include families in the process so that students do not benefit and receive assistance from individuals from home and their educational environments. During the students' college careers, they are legally considered an adult and are expected to make their own decisions. However, it is

important to recognize that students from low-income, underrepresented, and underserved communities involve their families in the decision-making process (Tierney, 2002). The perspectives of Latino families' regarding how they assist their child for college will provide insights as to how these families' navigate the pre-college preparation process.

While the issue of family involvement in education is not new, a growing number of studies presented by scholars suggest that there should be a more comprehensive examination of family involvement in the case of all students, particularly that of Latinos. Therefore, it is important to examine the existing literature regarding the importance of incorporating families within the educational environment. Yosso's (2005) "Community Cultural Wealth Model" lends itself to challenge traditional western perspectives on Latino family involvement in higher education.

This framework also shifts the focus from a deficit-based perspective to an asset-based narrative of the family contribution to their child's education as the child transitions into the college environment. It is important to highlight the role that families' play in the educational environment and to examine the manner in which the concept of family involvement has evolved. Next, it is important to understand how the literature describes Latino family involvement. This may offer insights that explain the Latino family's level of participation outside of the educational environment and highlight non-academic behaviors that add value to their child's college transitions. Lastly, it is important to understand the importance of incorporating Latino cultural values into the educational environment.



## **Parent Involvement and Student Academic Performance**

Many of the research studies focused on parent involvement revealed a positive relationship between parents' aspirations and students' educational achievement (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2011). This literature examines various aspects of parental involvement in education. For example, Bloom (1980) described parental involvement as being a major factor in the relationship between parents' aspirations and students' academic achievement. Stevenson and Baker (1987) defined parental involvement based on the level of participation by parents in school-organized activities, while Epstein (1991) defined parental involvement as the level of communication between the parents and teachers regarding student academic performance. Other scholars measured the level of parental involvement based on the number of times parents discussed the topic of education with their children (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992). The different aspects of parental involvement reported in these early research studies revealed that scholars had placed emphasis upon those aspects involving the school environment and not those involving the home or community environments. Furthermore, Fan and Chen (2001) suggest that the lack of a standardized definition of parental involvement becomes a challenge when scholars attempt to make meaning of their analyses or determine which forms of parental participation influence a child's academic performance are significant.

## **The Concept of Parent Involvement Reconsidered in Education**

While the current literature has examined the impact of parental involvement within the academic setting, a standardized definition that includes all forms of parental involvement does not exist. Tierney (2002) argues that the term “parent” reflects the traditional western idea “of a nuclear family: a mother, a father, and two or three children” (p. 590). Earlier studies that examined the impact of parental involvement on student academic performance focused on White middle and high-income families and traditional western familial beliefs (Ceballo et al., 2014). The absence of working and low-income families from the educational literature has shaped the current deficit-based narratives regarding underrepresented and underserved populations, in particular, the narrative of Latino families’ not caring about or valuing the importance of education.

Yet, scholars who have studied the contributions of underrepresented and underserved populations found that parents do care about their involvement in their children’s educational experiences (Ceja, 2006; Jeynes, 2011). Tierney (2002) argues that the term “parent” is no longer appropriate to describe the current social structures in terms of the patterns of family formations within low-income, ethnic, and racial families. Scholars have challenged the term of “parent” for it to be more inclusive of underrepresented and underserved communities of color (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Valdés, 2017; Valencia, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Zarate, 2007).

## **Latino Familial Involvement in Education**

The growing concern regarding Latinos in higher education is not new; scholars have noted that this matter is complex and multi-layered, given the various components

that may contribute to Latino students' access to higher education (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Ceja, 2006; Hurtado et al., 1997; Kurlaender, 2006). Over recent years, scholars have gained an interest in the role that Latino families' play in the college choice process (Alvarez, 2010; Ceja, 2006; Kiyama, 2010, 2011; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012). The findings of these studies regarding Latino family involvement revealed that Latino students rely on multiple agents from various contexts to gather information about the college. Scholars found that both parents and siblings or extended family members help Latino students actualize their college aspirations (Alvarez, 2010; Ceja, 2006; Gándara, 1995; Martinez, 2013). These scholars highlight that Latino families' play a critical role in assisting their students during the college choice process.

The grand narratives about the lack of Latino family participation in the educational environment state that they do not care about or value education (Valencia, 2002). In order to disprove this deficit perspective, scholars have focused on the forms of cultural capital that Latino students bring with them to college and the manner in which higher education institutions can integrate and allow these values to co-exist in the college environment (Castellanos, Gloria, Herrera, Kanagui-Munoz, & Flores, 2013; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). Bourdieu (1986) suggested that these forms of cultural capital gained through family culture and practices permit individuals to participate in different social settings. Furthermore, Yosso (2005) suggests shifting from a deficit-based to an asset-based narrative to help understand the contributions from communities of color in educational research. Cultural capital consists of the knowledge,

skills, behaviors, norms, and values that influence individuals' educational aspirations and life experiences. Individuals' mastery of a specific skill set, the education level attained, and an understanding of their reality are some but are a few of the aspects that contribute to cultural capital. Bourdieu recognized that these forms of cultural capital are not immediately achieved, as it takes time for an individual to gain cultural capital through the transfer of materials that an individual can physically or economically possess (Bourdieu, 1987). Yosso argues that students from communities of color carry forms of cultural wealth with them into the educational environment. Scholars highlight how Latino families' involvement in their children's education development comes with various forms of cultural wealth (Auerbach, 2004; 2007; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994).

Majority of Latino students are often the first in their families' to attend college, and similar to other first-generation college students, these students and their families' are unfamiliar with the college environment (Ceja, 2006; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). Torres (2003) found that students with parents who had a college degree experienced an easier transition into the educational environment. As a result, Latino families' encounter obstacles that prevent them from fully participating in their children's educational experiences. Other scholars have also suggested that Latino parents' socioeconomic status influences their level of involvement in their children's educational development (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Gándara, 1995; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Roderick et al., 2011).

Given that many Latino students come from working-class and low-income families', a further examination of Latino familial involvement in education is required

to understand better how this particular group operates within the sphere of education. In particular, RGV families' participating in assisting their children during the college choice process, more information is required to explore further the factors that may encourage these families' to get involved in the pre-college preparation process.

### **Latino Cultural Values and Education**

Cultural values provide a sense of identity that can prepare Latino students for challenges that they may encounter when transitioning to the college environment. Scholars believe that Latino students often experience a difficult transition to college, due to the unfamiliarity of the college culture (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013; Ceja, 2006; Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002; Torrez, 2004). While this may be true, Latino students relying on forms of cultural wealth to help navigate through the college environment may provide useful information about improving their college experiences.

### **Familismo<sup>2</sup>**

Moore (1970) provided the first general description of familism in a monograph on Mexican-Americans: "the most important facet of life for Mexican Americans in South Texas . . . it is the main focus of obligations and also a source of emotional and economic support as well as recognition for accomplishment" (p. 104). Given this general description of familism, Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, Marín, and Perez-

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<sup>2</sup> Familism

Stable (1987) extended the definition by adding three main aspects that makeup *familismo* in the Latino culture.

The three main factors that define familismo are family obligations, perceived support from families, and family as referents. Familial obligations were referred to in terms of the experiences of the family members (Sabogal et al., 1987, p. 401). The second factor emerged from the participants' perceptions of providing support and assisting family members in solving problems. Lastly, the third factor of the family as referents emerged from the participants' perceptions regarding their family members' actions, attitudes, and behaviors. These participants discussed their nuclear and extended families' as a reflection of themselves (Sabogal et al., 1987).

*Familismo* allows Latino families to operate as a unit that creates a personal bond. In addition, this helps strengthen the relationships between family members (Keefe, Padilla, & Carlos, 1979; Marín & Marín, 1991; Sabogal et al., 1987; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Scholars demonstrate the manner in which these aspects of *familismo* can assist Latino students' educational outcomes. For example, Latino students demonstrated a great compulsion to be academically successful to ensure that the sacrifices made by their parents did not go unnoticed (Phinney, Dennis, & Osorio, 2006; Saunders & Serna, 2004). Latino families' that embrace this core value prompt their child to recreate this family-like structure within the college setting (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

### **Respeto<sup>3</sup>**

*Respeto* is another cultural value practiced in Latino families' that place a high value on individuals of a particular age, sex, and social status (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Latino families' view their elders with the utmost esteem, as they hold the authority to make significant decisions, due to their wisdom and experience (Altarriba, & Bauer, 1998). Valdes (1996) suggested that Latino families' stressed the importance of working as a unit using personal narratives that emphasize the fact that selfishness is not valued and which emphasize upon assisting with taking care of family members (e.g., siblings and grandparents), obeying parents and supporting family goals (p. 131). These traditional values within the Latino population have shifted over the years; this is an important factor to consider when attempting to understand Latino students and their motivation underlying their enrollment and persistence in higher education, especially the manner in which this translates differently for female and male students in the classroom (Altarriba, & Bauer, 1998, p. 391).

### **Educación<sup>4</sup>**

Research studies have documented Latino cultural beliefs regarding providing members of the family with another form of education that helps to supplement a formal education (Arellano, Ceballo, & Padilla, 1996; Ceballo, 2004; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Okagaki, Frensch, & Gordon, 1995; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). The concept of *educación* is a form of education that stresses the importance of moral,

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<sup>3</sup> Respect

<sup>4</sup> Education

emotional, and spiritual support. For example, Zarate (2007) noted that Latino parents' definition of parental involvement was focused more on the well-being of their children rather than on their involvement in the academic experience of students. Scholars note that parents expressed that they were not experts regarding the academic material given to their children and that they felt more comfortable not intervening in the schooling process and would leave the academic responsibilities to the school educators (Ceja, 2006; Zalaquett, 2006; Zalaquett & Baez, 2012).

### **Consejos<sup>5</sup>**

Delgado-Gaitan (1994) refers to *consejos* as “nurturing advice” that the family utilizes to support their child (p. 298). *Consejos* or cultural narrative practices used by Latino families’ help reinforce support for family members and strengthen family unity. Delgado-Gaitan (1994) provides insights into the family’s perceptions of the educational systems’ failings in order to recognize the informal educational practices that families’ display outside of the school environment. Delgado-Gaitan explains, “...the educational system is bound by rules, language, and value that privileged some people and exclude others” (1994, p. 284). This missing gap in the experiences of familial involvement in the college choice process is vital to understand their influence on the students’ decision to pursue higher education or attend college. There has been an increase in ongoing efforts to examine parental involvement in the students’ education. In terms of this goal,

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<sup>5</sup> Cultural Narratives



there has been an interest taken by scholars to address the gap in order to define parental involvement.

### **The Texas-México Border Region**

Critical geography studies the social construction of space, which is how geographic spaces influence political and social contexts. Critical geographers believe that the manner in which we interpret and understand the lasting impacts of space on social and political structures can effect change regarding fundamental ideas and practices that would decrease human inequality, especially in education. The state government has implemented alternative education reform approaches to improve the educational achievement gap within the state.

The literature on the Texas-México border regions focuses on the interconnections and outcomes of these two border environments that come together and create a new one (Ward, 1999). This region along the Texas-México border stretches for approximately two thousand miles and has a unique cultural identity created by the dynamics between a first and third world country (Martinez, 1993, p. 14). For example, dynamics such as language, culture, and political contexts shape these regions. Consequently, this unique cultural region influences the lives of many Hispanics in many different ways.

Scholars have noted that individuals living in these areas often have a challenging quality of life and limited opportunities to access education (Guajardo, & Guajardo, 2004; Lobao & Saenz, 2002; Milbourne, 2004; Martinez, Valle, Cortez, Ponjuan, & Sáenz, 2017). In addition, these Texas-México border regions have three out

of the ten poorest counties in the US located within them (Fronczek, 2009). Many scholars have described the living spaces within these regions as *colonias*<sup>6</sup> (Fronczek, 2009; Mier, Ory, Zhan, Conkling, Sharkey, & Burdine, 2008; Ward, 1999). *Colonias* are often described as unincorporated, impoverished settlements located within or beyond the extraterritorial jurisdiction of cities. These are places where people often live in trailers or self-built houses and lack basic services such as sewers, drainage, adequate paving, and street lighting (Ward, 1999). Although there is a lack of accurate government data on *colonias*, a majority of the residents in these areas are poor, have limited education attainment rates, have high unemployment rates, and have limited access to adequate medical services (Dutton, Weldon, Shannon, Bowcock, Tackett-Gibson, Blakely, & Betru, 2000; Mier et al., 2008). These studies suggest how the quality of life and underdeveloped infrastructures within these Texas-México border counties or regions provide insufficient educational opportunities to Latino families. There is limited higher educational research that explores how these regional border areas influence the educational experiences of Latino students.

### **College Choice Model Revised**

Bourdieu (1987) suggested that individuals positioned within the hierarchical social structure that distributes wealth through material and psychological forms do not have access to the same opportunities. Perna's (2006) model is influenced by a sociological and economic perspective that accounts for human capital and social wealth

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<sup>6</sup> Neighborhoods

that determines one life experiences and opportunities. Perna (2006) presents the idea that an individual's habitus or "situated context" determines their life experiences and educational opportunities. Perna places an individual's "situated context" at the center of the model to indicate that an individual's social capital consists of social networks or circles that determine how well they are connected and can leverage people who can work in their favor and provide opportunities into institutions or structures that normally would not be available (p. 116).

Perna (2006) synthesized previous college choice models' recommendations and reviews of the literature regarding the stratification of college access and choice (Hossler, Braxton, Coppersmith, 1989; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; 1989; Jackson, 1982; Litten, 1982), and proposed the "College Access and Choice Model." The development of earlier college choice models was undertaken to help institutions of higher learning reexamine and develop more effective outreach marketing strategies in order to target non-traditional students, due to the decline in the number of traditional college-aged college students (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

These previous models all operated based on the underlying assumption that all students, regardless of demographic characteristics, encounter the same educational experiences. As a result, Perna's (2006) conceptual model allows scholars to examine all aspects of college choice and include different underserved and underrepresented student populations. For example, Jackson's (1982) college choice model focused on examining students' preference, exclusion, and evaluation. Alternatively, Litten's (1982) college choice model examines the desire and decision to attend college, research on college,

admissions applications, and college enrollment. These scholars found that a relationship between students' prior knowledge, experience, and students' college aspirations informed the manner in which students choose a college to attend.

Perna's (2006) model provides a comprehensive, thorough approach that allows researchers to examine different contexts that influence the college process of students. The "College Access and Choice Model" consists of four different layers: (a) habitus layer, (b) school and community context layer, (c) the higher education context layer, and (d) social, economic, and policy context layer. The habitus layer is the first layer, and it focuses on individual demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) that influence their cultural and social capital. The school and community context is the second layer of the model and includes the availability of resources, types of educational resources provided, and relationships and organizations that support or create barriers for students during the college process (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Indelicate, 2006; Vela, Lu, Veliz, Johnson, & Castro, 2014). The higher education context is the third layer of the model and consists of the various factors (e.g., recruiting efforts, disseminating information, and institutional characteristics) that support or obstruct a student's college choice. The fourth layer examines the social, economic, and policy contexts that influence a student's college choice.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Lareau (2011) examines the manner in which forms of capital shape the lives of individuals and their experiences based on their social class and economic status. Lareau explained, "...families' from elite backgrounds tend to participate in institutions serving the elite, and families' in poverty tend to be involved with institutions serving the poor" (p. 15). Two preliminary themes emerge from the study: concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth. Concerted cultivation describes children from middle-class families, whose parents emphasize "on children's structured activities, language development and reasoning in the home, and active intervention in schooling" (p. 32). The theme of the accomplishment of natural growth describes students from working-class and poor families, whose parents allow their "children to hang out and play, often with relatives, are given clear directives from parents with limited negotiation, and are granted more autonomy to manage their own affairs in institutions outside of the home" (p. 32). Scholars found that Latino students often encounter challenges in trying to balance these in different contexts and in successfully navigating college (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Martinez & Welton, 2014; Welton & Martinez, 2014). Therefore, this suggests that we must focus our attention on students and families' interaction in order to understand their lived experiences and educational opportunities.

The literature demonstrates that Latino families' have high educational expectations for their children and do value its importance but are often not familiar with or do not understand college-related information required to assist their children. It is evident that institutional structures play a critical role in shaping opportunities available

to these families. For this study, I have utilized Yosso's cultural wealth model to explore how Latino families' from the RGV understand and are involved in preparing their son or daughter for college. Yosso's (2005) "Community Cultural Wealth Model" permits the researcher to consider various forms of capital that are overlooked within the literature. Most importantly, Yosso's (2005) model allows the researcher to place underrepresented and underserved populations as the main group rather than use the White population as the comparison group. Yosso provides the researcher with the opportunity to examine how these individuals' life experiences, shaped by their cultural wealth, influence their educational outcomes (Bourdieu, 1987). Yosso believed that this underlying assumption "... exposes White, middle-class culture as the standard and therefore all other forms and expressions of 'culture' are judged in comparison to this 'norm'" (2005, p. 76).

### **Community Cultural Wealth Model**

Yosso examines community cultural wealth through the lens of critical race theory (CRT). CRT builds on the existing literature regarding Critical Theory, which serves to examine institutions that create inequality among individuals in American society (Fay, 1987; Tierney, 1993). CRT challenges the dominant cultural perspective or traditional approach regarding how individuals make sense of their lived experiences and society (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013; Bell, 1980; Brayboy, 2005; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 2004; Patton, Haynes, Harris, & Ivery, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Similar to these scholars, Yosso uses CRT to analyze the assumption that communities of color lack the social and cultural capital required for social mobility, specifically in education.

Yosso (2005) argues that the concept of race refers to a “cultural difference” in the school systems that allow for different forms of contemporary racism to exist. The two common forms of deficit narratives are that students are not equipped with the requisite normative cultural knowledge and skills to be successful in school and that parents do not value or support education (Yosso, 2005). Yosso argues that we must shift from the deficit narrative to an asset-based narrative that focuses on what communities of color offer in assisting their son or daughter’s academic achievement and that we must recognize the fact that institutions must adapt to the changing underserved and underrepresented student groups’ student populations, which they serve.

Yosso calls attention to the social and racial inequality in the US school systems. She also highlights the fact that one’s family can inherit the forms of capital or gain through formal schooling. Yosso analyzes Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital and supports the idea that the cultural capital of some communities is valued more than others. Cultural capital is an accumulation of the social assets of an individual. These assets include but are not limited to linguistic skills, traditions, and ways of thinking that lend insights into an individual’s social status within a stratified society. Cultural capital consists of knowledge, skills, behaviors, norms, and values that influence individuals’ educational aspirations and life experiences. Individuals’ mastery of a specific skill set, the education level attained, and an understanding of their reality are some but not all forms that describe cultural capital. Bourdieu (1987) stated an individual does not immediately achieve cultural capital, as it takes time in order to gain cultural capital.

Not to mention, if an individual could acquire different forms of capital through formal schooling or family, this idea essentially favored the White middle and upper class: the dominant group who benefited from all these forms of capital, since they were more likely than other groups to have access to formal schooling or inherit various forms of capital. In other words, Bourdieu's theory determined the fact that there are some communities, compared to others, that are more culturally wealthy (Yosso, 2005). Given this, cultural capital for such a group is not only common, as it exists within the middle class, but this privileged group also has specific skill sets and acquired knowledge.

Yosso identified six forms of capital that embody the notion of community cultural wealth: (a) aspirational capital, (b) linguistic capital, (c) familial capital, (d) social capital, (e) navigational capital, and (f) resistant capital. Yosso described six forms of cultural wealth as "behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people. Culture can be described as material and nonmaterial productions of people (2005, p. 75). Aspirational capital suggests the ability to hold on to hopes and dreams despite the circumstances and challenges (Yosso, 2005). Linguistic capital refers to the knowledge and social skills acquired through communication in more than one language and style (Yosso, 2005). Students from communities of color are often active participants in traditional storytelling (e.g., *dichos* (proverbs), *cuentos* (stories), and oral histories). The social skills acquired through these forms of communication allow students to navigate between different contexts. Familial capital refers to the concept of family that is reconsidered by including extended family members (e.g., aunts, uncles, grandparents) and it emphasizes on the well-being and cultural knowledge of each



member within the family (Yosso, 2005). Social capital describes “the networks of people and community resources” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). The various social groups serve as instruments and sources of emotional support to help navigate through different social institutions. Navigational capital refers to an individual’s ability to navigate through social institutions that keep in mind and support communities of color (Yosso, 2005). Resistant capital refers to the oppositional behavioral practices among communities of color undertaken in order to resist subordination that disrupts inequality by using knowledge and skills that disrupt inequality (Yosso, 2005).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

The chapter provides an extensive overview of the qualitative research methods used to guide this study. Creswell (1998) describes qualitative research as:

An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p.15).

Qualitative research served as the appropriate method to explore the multiple ways in which Latino families' from the RGV prepare their children for college. This method allowed the researcher to explore and acknowledge there are multiple ways in which these families' prepare their children for college. In addition, qualitative research enabled the researcher to examine how families' from a specific ethnic and racial group interpreted the pre-college preparation process and guided the researcher to acknowledge that there is no absolute standard to evaluate our knowledge and perception of the world. This belief, also known as relativism, enabled the researcher to explore the given context of a particular group or culture shaped by multiple realities. Apart from this research approach providing a space for the participants to share their perceptions and experience, it also allowed the researcher to gain insights from an insider's perspective. Data gathering techniques such as interviews were used, which provided in-depth contexts in order to enhance our understanding of the pre-college preparation process.

## **Research Design**

The researcher has utilized a case study research design for this study. A case study approach also provides “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 21). The researcher was interested in examining how Latino families’ from the RGV interpret the pre-college preparation process. For this case study, the researcher focused on Latino families’ from a single independent school district in the RGV to understand how they prepare their children for college. The researcher used an instrumental single case study research design as the strategy of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The instrumental case is appropriate when the researcher would like to study a topic of interest in-depth. This in-depth examination of a phenomenon allows the researcher, and the participants, to play a critical role in reconstructing an experience. Rather than following a multiple-case study approach, in which the researcher would examine the issue regarding how families’ help prepare their children for college across many school districts, a single case study approach allowed the researcher to understand the process and discover in-depth insights within the real-world setting of an event, process, or phenomenon (Yin, 2013). Focusing on only one group in a given context allowed the researcher to discover as much as possible regarding families’ from a specific area under the topic of interest and draw on the common culture that these families’ share. The valuable insights gained from an instrumental case study can

influence future policies, practices, and procedures related to the phenomenon within the given context.

### **The Context of the Site**

The independent school district (ISD) highlighted in this study is a predominately Latino public school district located in South Texas. The district consists of six early college high schools, eight middle schools, and twenty-six elementary schools. The district also had special campuses for specific sub-student populations (e.g., dropout recovery programs and Dual Language Enrichment Program). In addition, the school district offers opportunities for parents to be involved in order to help improve parent participation rates, which incorporate Latino culture, fortify community trust, and enhance the educational development of these communities. The district serves more than thirty thousand Latino students, many of whom belong to families' that have lived in the area for generations or families' that are first-generation immigrants from México. The school district representatives who belong to the district's central administration office recruited families' across the six high schools that met the participant criteria. The families' that responded to the invitation represented two early college high schools. Pseudonyms were used for the high schools for the purposes of confidentiality.

The first high school, Cesar Chávez, is a renovated high school located within the city, which provides educational opportunities for all students and specializes in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. The high school serves more than six-hundred students, more than 70 percent of whom are economically disadvantaged, more than 10 percent of whom are English Language Learners, and more than 25 percent of

whom are at-risk students, and all of them are enrolled in Early College High School Programs. The campus received two out of the seven distinction designations that a school can receive from the Texas Education Agency. The second high school, Esperanza, is one of the newest additions to the district. It is a designated early college high school and is located closer to the outskirts of the city limits, near undeveloped communities. This high school serves almost 1,800 students, of whom 96 percent are economically disadvantaged, more than 40 percent of whom are English Language Learners, and it has more than 60 percent of at-risk students. Table 1: High School Profiles presents an overview of the two high school profiles highlighted in this study.

**Table 1: High School Profiles**

RGV ISD	Cesar Chávez High School	Esperanza High School
Total student population	600	1800
% economically disadvantaged	70	96
English Language Learners	10	40
% academically at-risk	25	60

## **Data Sample**

The researcher worked with school district personnel to identify families for this study. These school personnel served as mediators between the participants and the researcher (Creswell, 1998). The researcher provided the school district personnel with documents to help recruit the families. These documents included a recruiting email, an interview protocol, consent form, and a demographic sheet to provide to prospective Latino families to review. The recruitment documents are included in Appendix A.

The researcher used purposive sampling to gather the sample for this study. Purposive sampling is a type of sampling strategy used in qualitative research to gain an understanding of a phenomenon of interest. Merriam (1988) explains, “purposive sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore, one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most” (p. 48). This sampling strategy allowed the researcher to select participants who fit the participant criteria and had experienced the topic of interest (Huberman & Miles, 1994). In addition to purposive sampling, the researcher also utilized snowball sampling to identify potential participants for this study in order to ensure that the researcher captured a holistic perspective on how Latino families from one independent school district located in a geographic location interpret the college preparation process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The researcher interviewed twelve participants about their experiences in assisting their child with the pre-college preparation process. These participants represented a family as a collective unit. These participants represented nine Latino

families' and shared their perceptions and experiences regarding preparing their child for college. Each Latino family had a child in the study that was either a freshman, sophomore, or junior who had experienced the pre-college preparation process at the time of the interview. The researcher did not interview Latino families' with a child who was a senior, as they are beyond the pre-college preparation process and may not provide in-depth, rich descriptions regarding their experiences.

### **Participant Profiles**

The researcher replaced the participant's names with pseudonyms for the purposes of confidentiality. For a majority of the participants, it was the first time that they were approached to participate in research to share their experiences regarding the college preparation process. Table 2: Participant Profiles provides a visual overview of the participant profiles that represent nine families as a collective unit. The figure includes information regarding the relationship between the participant and the child enrolled in high school, the high school that their child attends the participant's occupation, and the participant's educational qualifications. The information in the table is taken from the demographic profile sheets that the participants completed voluntarily, excluding one participant who did not complete the form during the interviews.

Patricia and Jose. She is in her mid-forties and is a mother to three sons. Jose is the oldest, Patricia's middle child attends at Cesar Chávez High School, and she has a three-year-old son in a head start program. Patricia is a housewife and an active parent volunteer for the ISD. She earned an associate degree in Education. Jose, who is Patricia's oldest son, is a former student of Cesar Chávez High School. He has an

associate degree in Biology and is an undergraduate at the local university. Apart from school, he is very active in his local Catholic church, where he leads the Sunday bible school. He is also a mentor at Cesar Chávez High School.

Maricela and Marcos. Maricela is in her late thirties and is a Health Network Coordinator for a local hospital. Marcos, Maricela's husband, is also in his late thirties and is a District Manager for a phone carrier. They are the parents to two daughters; their oldest daughter attends Cesar Chávez High School. Initially, Maricela and Marcos had their daughters enrolled in a public charter school but transferred them out due to the lack of higher education opportunities. Marcos earned a college degree and Maricela has had exposure to a college education.

Estella and Joel. Estella is in her mid-forties and has earned a bachelor's degree in México. She is a housewife and a parent volunteer at ISD. Joel, Estella's husband, is also in his mid-forties and is a parent volunteer at ISD. Estella and Joel are the parents of three boys. Their oldest son attends Cesar Chávez High School.

Vanessa. Vanessa is in her mid-thirties and is a mother of three children. Her oldest daughter is a sophomore at Esperanza High School and two boys, aged ten and eleven, attend the ISD. Vanessa is a first-generation college student with a bachelor's degree in Psychology. She holds a position as an office manager for a law firm.

Elena. Elena is in her early forties and is the mother of three children. Her two oldest boys are former students of the ISD and are currently in college. Her daughter is a junior and attends Esperanza High School. Elena has been a first-grade teacher at the ISD for seven years. Before her current position, she was a head start teacher for five years.



Ofelia. Ofelia is in her late forties and is the mother of three children. Her oldest daughter is an alumna of Esperanza High School and will be graduating from the local university in May. Her son is a junior and attends Esperanza High School, and her youngest daughter is an eighth grader. Ofelia is a high school teacher and the Assistant Head Soccer Coach at Esperanza High School. Ofelia is a first-generation immigrant from México and received her master's degree from the local university.

Rubi. Rubi is in her early forties and is the mother of three children. Her oldest son is an alumnus of Esperanza High School and is currently in college. Her daughter is a freshman and attends Esperanza High School. Her youngest son is in middle school. Rubi is a Financial Aid Counselor at Esperanza High School. She earned her bachelor's degree from the local university. Rubi referred Vanessa, Elena, Carmen, and Rosa to the researcher.

Carmen. Carmen is in her late thirties and is the mother of three children. Her oldest son is an alumnus of the ISD and is a freshman at a four-year university in San Antonio. Carmen's daughter and son attend Esperanza High School. Carmen graduated from college before she completed six years in the National Guard.

Rosa. Rosa is Rubi's older sister. Rosa is in her late forties and is a single mother of two daughters. Her oldest daughter is an alumna from the ISD and is a college graduate from a Midwestern four-year institution. Her youngest daughter is a junior at Esperanza High School. With the support of her parents and siblings, Rosa was able to raise her two daughters. Rosa earned a bachelor's degree and is currently a case manager.

**Table 2: Participant Profiles**

#	Pseudonym	Relationship to the Child	Child's High School	Participant's Occupation	Participant's Education
1	Patricia	Mother	Cesar Chávez High School	Housewife and Substitute Teacher	Associate Degree
1	Jose	Brother	Cesar Chávez High School alumni	Pre-Nursing student	Associate Degree
2	Marcos	Father	Cesar Chávez High School	District Manager for T-Mobile	Some College
2	Maricela	Mother	Cesar Chávez High School	Health Network Coordinator	Some College
3	Estella	Mother	Cesar Chávez High School	Housewife and Parent Volunteer	Bachelor Degree
3	Joel	Father	Cesar Chávez High School	Parent Volunteer	Some College
4	Vanessa	Mother	Esperanza High School	Office Manager	Bachelor Degree
5	Elena	Mother	Esperanza High School	Elementary Teacher	Bachelor Degree
6	Ofelia	Mother	Esperanza High School	High School Teacher	Master Degree
7	Rubi	Mother	Esperanza High School	High School Financial Aid Officer	Bachelor Degree
8	Carmen	Mother	Esperanza High School	N/A	Bachelor Degree
9	Rosa	Mother	Esperanza High School	Case Manager	Bachelor Degree

### **Interview Questions**

The development of preliminary interview questions was key to gaining insightful information regarding the topic of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Conducting semi-structured interviews allowed the questions to be modified based on the themes that may have emerged from the participant interviews (Stake, 1995). The questions derived from the existing literature focused on Latino familial involvement in the college preparation process. This focus was maintained in order to create critical constructs to guide topical questions and to explore the participants' experiences as well as provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher designed the interview questions to be reader-friendly and to adhere to the Institution's Review Board (IRB) study guidelines. Yosso's (2005) "Community Cultural Wealth Model" six forms of capital: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital guided the development of the interview questions to provide an in-depth, rich description of the topic of interest.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher was the main instrument for collecting data for the study to build an in-depth description of the topic of interest (Yin, 2013). The researcher contacted the participants via phone to establish trust with them and their families before scheduling an in-person interview. These initial contacts allowed the participants to discuss their

questions or concerns about the study with the researcher. More than half of the participants chose to be interviewed in the comfort and privacy of their homes, and the remaining participant interviews were completed at a public library or a local restaurant near their homes. The participant interviews lasted from 45–60 minutes and were semi-structured, in-person interviews. The participants signed a consent form to participate in this study. However, the researcher informed the participants that they could choose to leave or withdraw from the study at any given time. The researcher used a digital recorder to record the participant interviews. While the original intent was to interview participants in English and Spanish, for the IRB's verification purposes, the researcher conducted the interviews in English. The researcher also took field notes during the interviews to note thoughts or observations and this allowed the researcher to choose their level of involvement, ranging from being a complete outsider to being a complete insider (Jorgensen, 1989).

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher transcribed all the digital interview recordings verbatim. The researcher used a transcription software to convert the audio recording to text. After the completion of every transcript, the researcher would review for any edits and the accuracy of the audio interviews. The researcher also translated the participant responses, because they would intuitively code-switch their responses from English to Spanish or vice-versa. The translations of the participant's excerpts used in this study are included in Appendix B. This process permitted the researcher to become increasingly intimate with and immersed in the interview data.

After the completion of the transcription of the interview recordings, the researcher scrubbed each transcript to de-identify the data and assigned each participant a pseudonym for the purposes of confidentiality. The researcher created a master key that was saved as an encrypted file. This protected file included the participant's original information. Only the dissertation chair and the researcher have access to the master key list which contains the list of the participants and their information. The master list provided a physical paper trail for auditing purposes to demonstrate that the study was done ethically and professionally.

The researcher uploaded the de-identified transcripts into a software program, Dedoose®, to manage and organize the data, before beginning the data analysis. The researcher continued to review the scrubbed transcripts and referred back to the field notes taken during the interviews to become familiar with the data. The researcher began to identify common codes or categories from the interview data. This open-coding process helped identify recurring categories emerging from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The codes were reviewed for “patterns” and were grouped to develop themes that provided insights to the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 194). Once the codes had been exhausted and had reached saturation, categories emerged from the data in order to help interpret the data. This helped gain a shared meaning of the data collected, also known as “lessons learned” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell and Poth (2017) describe the “interpretation of qualitative research involves abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data” (p. 194).

The codes included information that would be expected or surprising to find in this study based on the preliminary interview questions. The categories provided insights into “issue-relevant meanings” that will expand upon or dispute the literature regarding the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2017). These insights permit the researcher to report the naturalistic generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that help make sense of the data to help learn more about the central phenomenon of interest across different populations (Creswell & Poth, 2017). According to Creswell and Poth (2017), these findings can help people “learn from the case for themselves, apply learnings to a population of cases, or transfer them to another similar context” (p. 206). Nonetheless, these findings provide critical insights into the central topic of interest, as the topic relates to a particular population from a specific region. If the findings demonstrate a contrary case analysis that does not support the phenomenon, the researcher will report the negative case study analysis to ensure a holistic assessment of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yin, 2013). The interview data were analyzed utilizing Yosso’s (2005) “Community Cultural Wealth Model.”

The researcher employed evaluation strategies such as credibility and validation to help establish trustworthiness. These multiple methods of data collection create the tracing and measurement of the central phenomenon of interest to validate findings in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The first method was the field notes. The researcher took field notes during the interviews to help contextualize and provide a rich, in-depth, thick description of the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Poth 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2014). Second, the researcher collected other forms of documentation

offered by the families', which supported and validated the findings of this study. Third, the researcher engaged in reflexive journaling, which allowed the researcher to modify, eliminate, or improve the methods of collecting data that were appropriate to the needs of the participants and to assist with the data analysis process. This method also helped create a log to track the researcher's decisions made during the data collection process based on the interviews and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lastly, the researcher applied the methods of respondent validation and member checking to ensure that the data collected was accurate (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

### **Assumptions**

It is important to note the assumptions of the qualitative research study. The first assumption is that the researcher assumed that the participants interviewed understood the interview questions and they have provided honest responses. The second assumption is that the interpretation of the interview data accurately reflects the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Lastly, the qualitative research design selected to guide and examine the central phenomenon of interest in this study is reasonable and appropriate.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

Qualitative research permits the researcher to be the human instrument that engages actively in the examination of the site and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike quantitative researchers who value the importance of objectivity and detachment from their area of interest, qualitative researchers see that the value of reflectivity adds to the study. Some of the most notable critiques in terms of the qualitative inquiry are that

the researcher involved in the qualitative research will develop biased findings, and this may lead to questions regarding the trustworthiness and validity of the study. The researcher acknowledged these critiques and pursued this research approach to study the multifaceted educational issue of family involvement in the pre-college preparation process.

The researcher encountered experiences similar to those of the participants interviewed, although the researcher may have had different experiences to those of the participants interviewed. As a former financial aid advisor, academic success program coordinator and college student, the researcher had extensive experience working with college students transitioning into college. The researcher witnessed the abundant cultural capital that these students brought with them to the college setting. The researcher was always interested in the family contributions that allowed these students to transition to college.

Similar to the students, the researcher relied on her family to help navigate the pre-college preparation process to ease the transition to college. The researcher is a first-generation, Mexican-American college graduate and is a native of South Texas, also known as the RGV. This bilingual, bicultural, and binational geographic region shaped the lived experience and worldview of the researcher. The researcher grew up in a non-traditional Mexican household, with a mother served in the Army as a Staff Sergeant for twenty-five years and with a father who was involved in the researcher's educational development. For the researcher's father, the highest level of education was a high school diploma, and the mother had some college experience but did not earn a college



degree. The researcher did not have the economic or social capital to understand the demands, requirements, and the expectations of college but was able to draw upon their family's cultural capital to help transition to and navigate college. The researcher's familiarity with the issue and their ability to relate to the participants led to the interest in this research study.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of the study is to examine the perceptions of the Latino families' from the RGV regarding what their children's needs were to prepare them for college and the manner in which these families' were involved in preparing their children for college. In this study, the researcher sought to provide insights into the ways in which Latino families' from a heavily Latino populated region assist their children in preparing for college. The participants provided in-depth descriptions as to how their own educational experiences influenced their approach in terms of how they assist and prepare their children for college. It seems clear that the decision to go to college is made as a family. These families' described how they rely on their existing cultural and social wealth to prepare their child for college (Yosso, 2005).

The primary theoretical framework guiding this research was Yosso's (2005) "Community Cultural Wealth Model" in order to make meaning of the experiences of Latino families from a border region. Yosso's model allowed the researcher to identify forms of cultural wealth demonstrated by Latino families' from the RGV. This enabled the researcher to go beyond the examination of traditional parental involvement to include other members in the family who are just as involved as parents are and who play a critical role in the process of preparing the child for college participation. In other words, Latino families' do have valuable cultural capital, and this has gained the interest of scholars with regard to determining the forms of cultural capital that Latino students

bring with them into the college classroom, which have been provided by their families, both nuclear and extended, and by their communities.

Latino families' must learn to navigate various environments successfully (e.g., school, college, home) to assist their children in preparing for college. This study highlights how these families' are heavily involved in the college preparation process for their children. The findings debunk the common beliefs found in much of the current research literature that state that Latino families' do not value or care about their children's education and that these families' are to blame for the lack of effort or investment in their children's education. Due to these popular beliefs, the research of various scholars has viewed Latino familial involvement from a deficit perspective, in terms of what they tend to lack, rather than an asset-based perspective in terms of what they indeed do contribute to their children's education. These beliefs also allow research in the field of education to reinforce misconceptions regarding Latino families, such as a lack of formal education of parents or parents not having jobs being factors that prevent their children from gaining access to college-related. These popular misunderstandings about Latino families' involved in their children's education that are discussed in the research literature often overlook and undervalue the family's contributions and sacrifices that occur in non-educational spaces. Through theoretical lenses, this study provides insights into the cultural capital that Latino families' gather from immediate and extended family members to help prepare their child for college. These insights as to how Latino families' from the RGV prepare their children for college provide and identify additional information concerning Latino families' involvement in education.

The organization of this chapter consists of the three research questions, followed by emerging themes for each question, and a summary after each research question that discusses how these families' from the RGV rely on multiple forms of capital that influence their approach in assisting their children in preparing for college.

**Research Question #1: What are the perceptions of Latino families' from the RGV about their child going to college?**

The first research question asked Latino families' from the RGV to describe their thoughts about their child attending college. Based on participant interviews, four themes emerged that best describe their thoughts about their child going to college. First, it was no surprise that these Latino families' from the RGV wanted their children to go to college after graduating high school. What was interesting was that despite the differences in the two high schools represented in the study, the perceptions of families' regarding their children going to college were similar. All the Latino families' described how important it was for their children to not only attend college but also live a better life than what many of these families' were currently living. In other words, these families' believed that there was no excuse for the children not to be better off than they were, because their children have the support of their family, as opposed to their parents' own experiences growing up. It was evident that the personal educational experiences of these participants when they were growing up shaped their perceptions about their children going to college. The families' attitudes regarding their children going to college was not a choice for them; it was an expectation. Latino family perceptions played a role only in terms of where their child would go to college. In other words,

what was of concern was whether to allow their son or daughter to leave the RGV for college or have them stay at home and attend a local college or university. These families' viewpoints with regard to this topic highlighted the effect that these families' have on their child's decision as to where the child would go to college.

### **Latino Families' Want Their Children to Attend College to Have a Better Life**

The Latino families' from the RGV had high college aspirations for their children. These families indicated that they want their children to go to college so that they could further their education as well as enjoy a better lifestyle. These families' appreciated the life that their own parents were able to give them, but their personal experiences influenced their college aspirations for their children. The families' believed their children had no reason not to attend college because they had many more college-related opportunities and more support from their families.

Marcos and his wife Maricela talked about how their decision of moving their oldest daughter from a charter school to Cesar Chávez High School was the best decision they could have made to prepare their daughter for college. Cesar Chávez High School offered their daughter the opportunity to participate in the dual enrollment program that would allow her to take both high school and college courses simultaneously; where she would graduate with college credits before graduating high school. Marcos described the benefits of his daughter earning college credit while still in high school. This would allow her to have many more opportunities than both he and his wife had when they graduated from high school:

I mean, it also has to do with our experiences, right. It took us so many years to be where we are at, versus them getting out of school with much more, you know. It also gives them an opportunity to not start from the bottom.

Maricela also added that her daughter having a college degree before graduating from high school would allow her to start working and earn more money than if she had only earned a high school diploma:

I want my kids to have a much better opportunity for growth as soon as they get out of school. They are going to be earning a lot more, and they will have a much brighter future in front of them.

Patricia explained that Jose and his younger siblings going to college would allow them to have a better start to their higher education. She was overwhelmed with pride when she said, “I feel proud. As a parent, I want them to do more than what I did, be successful, and to get a better paying job. Moreover, they can accomplish anything if they are willing to pursue it.”

Vanessa’s family shared similar thoughts to the two previous families’ regarding the importance of her daughter going to college so that she could have access to opportunities that generations before her were not able to experience when they went to college:

I want my kids to pick whatever degree they want, just as long as it is better or that it is a better option. For me, to think that she has the option of going anywhere, it opens up her possibilities and that is something that I have always told them: if you want power then you need knowledge, to get knowledge, you

need to study hard and you always need to know [that] as difficult as it may seem, it is possible.

While these Latino families' from the RGV aspired for their children to attend college, Joel and Estella expressed hesitation, because their oldest son has Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and they must think carefully about how to prepare him for college. During their interview, Joel and Estella did not doubt their son's academic ability to do well in college, because Joel has always taught his son to strive and be the best version of himself:

I want them to do what makes them happy. I always tell my boys, whatever you want to do, you can do, but I want you to be the best at it. I want you guys to be the best and be number one.

Joel's affirmations of his son's abilities suggested that he had taught him to overcome adversity and to strive to achieve his dreams of being an engineer or of attending a prestigious university, such as The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Joel's actions demonstrated how this particular family validated and supported their son's future aspirations despite their son's condition.

Most importantly, these Latino families' discussed how their child going to college would change the course of their future for succeeding generations. These families' college aspirations for their children was their way of breaking the vicious cycle of low educational attainment that had been prevalent for previous family generations. These families' were thinking beyond their child and the benefits that the family would reap by them going to college. These families' were thinking long-term

about how this one decision of encouraging their child to attend college would change the family's outcome for the future. For instance, Rosa and her siblings were the first in their family to go to college and know how difficult it was to navigate college since their parents did not go to college. Rosa and her siblings' decision of going to college helped change the course of their family's future for generations to come. Rosa explained that her daughter going to college would continue to improve the education of the family as a collective unit:

The main reason that it is important for me is because I am a first-generation student that attended college. A couple of my siblings and myself [did attend college]. Since my parents did not have an education, I would like my daughter to better herself in life, be somebody, and succeed.

It was evident that these families' wanted a better future for their children and one way to accomplish this was for their children to go to college. These Latino families' college aspirations for their children also demonstrated how this one decision would result in the evolution of their family's future for generations to come. While these families' recognized the benefits of their children going to college and gaining a better life for himself or herself than what their families' could currently offer, they were also thinking about how this one critical decision would benefit the entire family on a long-term basis. These families' were positioning their family for success through their college aspirations for their children. With their children going to college, they would continue to contribute to the family's legacy and pave the road for their younger siblings and other family members.



## **Latino Families' Past Educational Experiences Influencing their College**

### **Aspirations**

These Latino families' mentioned how their own educational experiences influenced their college aspirations for their children in order for them to have a better life than what these families' had experienced themselves. Many of these family members shared their educational life stories about being the first in their families to attend college. Many shared that they longed to have a different life than what their parents and previous generations had. These family members admitted, when reflecting on their own college experiences, that they were not familiar with the demands and expectations of college or that their parents and siblings did not know how to help them. While these families' acknowledge that college was not easy for them, they believed that sharing their stories about overcoming adversity in relation to their own experiences would encourage their children to avoid what they had gone through and go to college. These families' hoped that sharing their own experiences with their children would help encourage them to attend college. These families' offered their own educational experiences as a form of support and *consejos* (advice) to their children about college.

Many of these families' reflected upon their childhood and shared how their parents encouraged them to further their education. Hearing these participants recall their own stories in terms of how their parents were the reason that they pursued a higher education highlighted the past generations' determination to further their families' future. Many of the family members recalled their own educational experiences with

their own parents while growing up — the families' shared stories of their own parents being catalysts for their decision to pursue higher education.

The reflections that the families' provided as part of the study indicated that two of them had at least one parent with a college degree. Elena's mother, who is the grandmother of the child, was the first in their family to earn a bachelor's degree when the factory she worked for closed down and they offered to pay for the college education of their employees. Elena mentioned that she became pregnant right after graduating from high school and attended college after her daughter was born. Elena attributes the motivation for her to go back to college to her daughter's birth so that her daughter could have a role model:

My sons, of course, are older, but when Jovie was born, that is when I decided to go to school because I was not going to school, so I said that I needed to do something. I wanted to be a good role model. Or someone they can look up to and so that was one of the reasons why I decided to go to school.

Ofelia's family was the second family that had a family member with a college education. Ofelia's father, the grandfather of Ofelia's children, had a college degree and was a medical doctor in México. When she recalled her personal experiences, she credits her mother's determination and her visionary character as being factors that shaped Ofelia's view on her children going to college. Ofelia's mother advocated for her daughter going to school in the US. Her mother insisted that the family migrate to the US so Ofelia could attend school. Her mother crossed the border into the US every day

for work and aspired for her daughter to have access to the educational opportunities offered in the States:

We are first-generation immigrants...When it was decided that I would come to school in [omitted name of border town], my mom was very determined to bring me over, and my dad was not very happy about that. My parents are very traditional Mexican parents. My father had this idea that it was a very liberal environment in the American schools. He had the idea that drugs were flowing up and down and that they would force them on me and he was just not happy with the idea at all, but I think my mom had a different vision. I think she understood the importance of the opportunities that would be offered to me coming to school here and she won. She brought me over.

Her mother's experience for her, fueled by a mindset that went against traditional cultural values, fostered and shaped Ofelia's perspective regarding the importance of her son going to college.

These families' were aware that college was not something that their parents talked to them about or that their parents even believed was an option for them as they grew up. The knowledge gained by these families' from their own life experiences enabled them to want a different life experience for their children. The strong college aspirations that these families' shared during their interviews indicated that they wanted to provide a different life experience for a better life for their children that they never had when they were growing up.

For instance, take Vanessa's personal educational experience. She was the first in her family to go to college and earn a college degree. She believed that going to college would allow her to live a different life than that of her mother's. Vanessa witnessed her mother rely on her father throughout her upbringing, and she did not want to live her life by depending on her future spouse. She wanted to be able to depend on herself. Vanessa linked earning a college degree to being independent:

Yeah, so my parents never encouraged me to go to college, and they said that high school was fine. Since they never did that but I wanted to go to college. I did not have the support from my parents...From my family, I have been the only one to go to college. I want to be better than to depend on my husband because my dad has been a taxi driver for my whole life and so he has always been the main provider. I did not want that lifestyle; my mom's lifestyle. I did not want to be supported by a husband. I did not want to depend on anyone to do things for me.

Vanessa stressed the importance of surrounding her oldest daughter with positive female role models. In addition to relying on her own educational experiences, she also relied on her sister-in-law and nieces to share their college experiences with her daughter. Her sister-in-law is currently pursuing a doctorate and works at a four-year university located in central Texas. Vanessa's niece who attends college outside of the RGV and who has studied abroad is essential for Vanessa's oldest daughter to see educated and self-confident women within the home environment. Most importantly,

Vanessa wants her daughter to know that her family will support all her college-related desires.

Carmen, another mother, also discussed how her interactions with her family were the driving force behind her academic success, which shaped the way in which her family encourages her children in terms of college. Carmen's own educational experiences with her mother encouraged her to go back to college. While Carmen earned her degree, she is aware that she did not do it by herself and acknowledges that her mom was part of the accomplishment: "My mom watched the kids...My mom would work graveyard so that she can work at night and watch my kids in the morning and she did that for about ten years just so that I can go to school."

As Carmen continued to reflect on her own college experiences, she mentioned that her life was not easy, but with the help of her family and hard work, she was determined to finish college:

I had to get student loans, and I lived off student loans. I had a full-time job, and I still did not have enough to make ends meet. I had a child, I had diapers, and even with my husband working, we struggled to live. I told myself that I was not going to live with my parents and that I had to be independent. If it were not for the fact that I had a full-time job or my husband had a full-time job, I would not have gone to college.

These participants' educational experiences not only influenced the way they encourage their children to go to college but suggest how the females in their families' played a critical role in not only preparing their children for college but also breaking

down gender norms reinforced by patriarchal beliefs within their families. Most of the participants were females and mothers who served as proxies for their families. These women expressed egalitarian and independent identities that challenged patriarchal cultural norms within their households. These mothers equated earning a college degree to being an equally contributing member within their families. These mothers were aware of their self-worth and contributions within their own families.

### **My Child is Going to College**

These families' recognized the fact that their own educational experiences had a strong influence on their thoughts regarding the importance of their children going to college. These families' expected their children to go to college. Many of these families' felt that if they were able to earn a degree while attending to other responsibilities, then there is no excuse for their children to not go to college, especially when their children do not have responsibilities that are life-altering (e.g., jobs, family of their own) and have the support from other family members to be successful. Some of these families' had earned a college certificate or a degree while raising a family and working full-time.

For instance, Ofelia captured the very essence of the idea by saying that many Latino families' believed that they had a responsibility to lead by example; to communicate and to help communicate the expectations for their children:

I am a strong believer in you teach children by example, and that is why I killed myself to get a master's degree. I came in with a 4.0 and left with a 4.0 because now I tell my kids, look, I did this while having a full-time job, having to take care of my family, a husband, and three dogs. There is no excuse for you because

this is the only responsibility that you have, so do not tell me that it cannot be done, because here is my proof that it can be done.

Ofelia positioned herself as a role model for what she expected from her children when they go to college. More importantly, she did not want to give her children a reason to not do well in college.

Patricia was the first in her immediate family to attend college. Patricia disclosed that she had to take computer literacy classes to learn how to use a computer and basic software before she could earn her General Education Diploma (G.E.D). She faced much criticism from her husband and sons about her academic ability. Patricia used her family's criticism as motivation to pursue a college degree and prove her family wrong. She also credits her mother for teaching her to be resilient in the face of adversity. Patricia's own experience with her mother influenced her low tolerance towards her children not attending college:

I was able to graduate from college because of my mother. My mother was a strong person of character, and she taught me how to get ahead. She told me if you want something, strive for it. She came from a family where she was not given the opportunity to study. They never had the education, and I told myself, I said, I have the opportunity. I can be the change for my family for them to see what they can achieve to go to school.

Elena wanted to redefine what it meant to be a Latina in a traditional Mexican family. She was the first in her family to go to college and believes that going to college changed her perspective on how she makes meaning of her life that is vastly different

from the life she experienced during her childhood. She continued to explain how when growing up; there was an expectation to go to college:

When I went to school, it was not a common language to hear where you are going to go to college. Where are you going to go to college? I am smart. I was a smart student, but I never went to the counselor's office to talk about what I was going to do in the future. I think to do things such a stepping it up like that and making it where it is expected, or that thinking that it is an option that you need to consider is new because before it was not expected.

Her family's previous educational attainment experiences influenced her college aspirations for her children:

For example, everyone in this family is going to go to college. My husband's family, it was not an expectation. In my family, it was an expectation but was not enforced. However, I enforce it in my family now. It keeps changing as a generation goes through but I think for my students, I always want them to be aware of the things that they can do and why going to college is important.

During the interview, Elena expressed that her expectations for her immediate family were different from the expectations that she and her husband experienced during their upbringing. She wanted to make it clear that her children had the support that they needed to ensure that they were successful in college.

Another family that made it clear that going to college was certain in their children's future was Carmen's family. She and her husband would have conversations with the children about their plans for college. The conversations about college were not



about if Carmen's children would be going to college, but where and what major they planned to pursue. Carmen continued by saying that her children have known for a long time which college they plan to attend, their major, and what career they plan to pursue:

They do not have a choice; that is what we tell our kids. They do not have a choice. We tell them, what is the game plan? What are we going to do? We constantly tell them. We do ask them. They already have it in their heads since they were young on what they wanted to do.

Carmen mentioned that her two youngest children enrolled at Esperanza High School plan to follow her and her husband's footsteps by joining the military and going to college after their complete their service term. Carmen's children did not want them to worry about how they would pay for college expenses if the military can offer educational benefits.

These Latino families' would reference their own educational experiences to make the point that they expected nothing less of their children than a college degree. These forms of communication that the families' used to talk to their children about college are critical in helping them prepare for college. The conversations allowed these families' and their children to understand what they need to prepare for college. The Latino families' behavior of continually talking to their children about college helped normalized this college-going behavior and environment in their households. These Latino families' lend insights into how the importance of college in their family has evolved across previous generations.

### **The Dilemma: Stay or Leave the RGV for College?**

A majority of the Latino families' expressed the idea that in order to ensure that they improve their child's quality of life, they would need to attend college. It is evident across the participant interviews that going to college was not a choice for their children and was more of a conversation about where their children would be going to college. There was an inherent tension between families regarding the decision of their child staying in or leaving the RGV to attend an institution of higher learning. More than half of the participants expressed that they were open to allowing their child to leave the RGV for college. The rest of the families' preferred that their child stay in the RGV and attend a regional college. The latter families' believed that the value and experience of earning a college degree outside of the RGV would be the same as if their child would stay in the RGV for college.

Certain families' wanted their child to leave the RGV to pursue a college degree as a way of offering their children an opportunity to experience what they did not experience during their upbringing. These families' also expressed that their children leaving the RGV for college would offer abundant work opportunities and provide a college experience vastly different than that if their children attended a local higher education institution. These Latino families' did not want to restrict their children in terms of where they can attend college to earn a college degree. Most of these Latino families' have lived a majority of their lives in the RGV, and through their stories, it is evident that they often relied on family members who did leave the RGV for college to help them with their children by providing insights on what college is like outside of the

valley. For instance, some of the families' mentioned how they would let their children visit family members who lived outside of the RGV or the state so that they could experience for themselves what it is like to leave the RGV.

For example, Vanessa expressed the importance of her children seeing various college-related opportunities outside of the RGV. With the help of her extended family members who are attending college outside of the RGV to encourage her children to consider doing the same. Vanessa allows her children to spend a few weeks over the summer with her sister-in-law who lives outside of the RGV and attends graduate school. She views her sister-in-law as a role model that her children can look up to; to help expose them to college-related opportunities and to allow them to experience life outside of the RGV. Vanessa also discussed the fact that the career and educational opportunities offered in the RGV are limited. She did not want her children to settle for a career because it was the only opportunity available, rather than pursuing their college aspirations. Vanessa further explains her reasoning behind why it is important for her students to leave the RGV for college:

In the RGV, you only have certain jobs that you can have, until you have to see the possibilities to see what your other options can be, rather than 'I am going to be working at a doctor's office where I can only do nursing here or whatever. I mean the possibilities can be endless for them, and so for me, success would be for them so – they can do it here, but to know that they can go further than just here. I feel that success with my children would be for them to pursue whatever it

is they want to be rather than to look at the options that you have here and pick something because that would be limiting them to what they can achieve.

Carmen and her husband also allow her children to visit, during the summer months, extended family who live outside Texas. Carmen was born and raised in a large metropolitan city outside of Texas. She would like to expose her children to other cultures and racially diverse and ethnic groups that are different from what they see in the RGV. Carmen knows that her children are going to follow her oldest son's footsteps in leaving the RGV for college, but her youngest children do not want to be too far from the RGV. Carmen shared a few of her family's conversations regarding her children leaving for college, "They tell us, mom, we want to leave; the RGV has nothing for us. They want to leave, but they do not want to leave too far from home..."

In addition to Carmen's family, the sisters Rubi and Rosa also talked about them wanting their children to leave the RGV for college. At first, there was some hesitation in them letting their children go to college outside of the RGV, as Rubi and her sister Rosa never left the RGV for college and were not familiar with what their children should expect. Therefore, they both relied heavily on their brother who did leave Texas to attend college. Rosa's youngest sister Rubi described her brother as the brains of the family. He was the first in their family to attend college and leave the RGV to pursue a college degree. Rubi recalled being admitted to a university outside of the RGV, but her parents did not allow her to go to college, because it was no place for a young woman to be on her own without her family. Therefore, she had no choice but to stay in the RGV and attend a local higher education institution. Rubi was determined to let her daughter

experience what she could not and encouraged her daughter to leave the RGV for college. Rubi's daughter planned to leave the RGV for college, "My second oldest, she wants to live far away from Texas. She wants to go to Michigan State. They have an outstanding dentistry program over there."

Even though she has already experienced her son leaving the RGV for college, she was still worried about her daughter's safety if the latter left the RGV for college. She felt different about her daughter leaving for college than she did when her oldest son left the RGV for college. Rubi talked about how she first felt about her oldest son leaving the RGV for college.

With my oldest one, yes, I was scared. You have to be scared for them...Self-defense, you need to learn how to defend yourself...Two, how to take care of yourself...It is an ugly feeling when they leave, but it is an awesome feeling when they come back for the holidays. We cannot always have them right next to us. We need to let their wings expand and see what is out there for them.

Rosa's daughter had the opportunity to leave the RGV for college, but Rosa's mother felt that it was not appropriate for a young woman to be on her own in an unknown place without family. Rosa recalled her younger sister Rubi's experience of being accepted to college outside of the RGV but who did not leave, because their mother did not think it was in her best interest to leave. Despite her daughter having an experience similar to that of her younger sister Rubi, Rosa mentioned that she was concerned about her daughter's safety, as she was living on her own, far from the family. However, Rosa's brother reassured her that her daughter would be safe on her own. She

shared her initial thoughts when her oldest daughter left the RGV for college by saying the following:

I would hear that so-and-so was attacked at the school, and so that mentality exists but no, she wanted to go, and I will support you. I want you to go out there and be exposed. My only concern was that if you go over there, you are very close with her to have her take a self-defense class, which she did. [Laughs] For me, the fear was that what if somebody did something to her. How am I going to find out? My fear was not that she was going to leave it was just that but when she took that course, I was more relaxed.

Rosa mentioned that if her mother had known what she now knows about her granddaughter being safe, maybe she would have let her younger daughter Rubi leave for college.

Similar to Rubi and Rosa's concerns about their daughters leaving the RGV for college, Elena shared that she feared for her daughter's safety if her daughter decided to leave the RGV for college. Even though Elena's two oldest sons had left the RGV for college, it was a different hesitation with the thought of her daughter leaving the RGV for school:

My thought is that she can go. If she wants to go wherever she wants to go, she can go. It is scary because she is a young lady and you are scared of her safety. I think I can just get her into defense classes those are my thoughts.

Regardless of which child would leave the RGV for college, all the families' discussed their initial hesitations regarding their child's safety in a new place that is different from the RGV.

Joel and Estella's family shared their concerns about their oldest son leaving the RGV for college. Their oldest son would like to pursue a degree in Aerospace Engineering, but the closest institution to offer this type of degree is located outside of the RGV. Joel shared how he started to look up the colleges that offer this type of degree, "Our oldest son told us that he wants to study Aerospace Engineering. Okay. I started looking up what college or universities have Aerospace Engineering."

Although their oldest son would be the first in their family to leave the RGV for college, they had no doubts about their son performing well academically in college. They feared that strangers would take advantage of their son, due to his learning disability. At the beginning of the interview, this family disclosed that all three of their sons have a learning disability and that they faced a challenge in trying to figure out how to keep them focused in school. Joel shared his thoughts about strangers taking advantage of his son's kindness if he were to leave the RGV for college:

Our son is autistic, our older son. If you met him, he is the kindest person you will ever meet. We are just afraid, and I always talk to him and explain to him that if someone tells you to try something or do anything, do not do it. I tell him to tell them to do it first. I try to give him advice on how others may try to take advantage of his kindness. I know he is going to do great. I know he is going to do great because I always talk to him and I always tell him do not give your trust.

It was evident that some Latino families' had some hesitations about their son or daughter leaving the RGV for college. However, these Latino families' hesitations were not about their children performing well academically but about their child's safety. These families are aware that if something were to happen to their children if they left the RGV for college, they would not be able to assist them right away. These families were also aware that the closest institution of higher learning is two hours away. They are also aware that the RGV region is closer in proximity to México than to a large metropolitan city in Texas.

The RGV's lack of proximity to the rest of the state of Texas is a concern for some Latino families'. They expressed it was in the best interest of the family to have their children attend local higher education institutions. These Latino families' believed that there was no need for their child to leave the RGV to attend college because a college degree holds the same prestige and merit when earned at any higher education institution. For example, Ofelia discussed how an individual reflects the degree earned and not the higher education institution they earned it from, "I tell them do not ever think that a degree from a university is worth more than others because it is all on how you sell yourself and how you represent that degree as a person."

Similar to Ofelia's family, Maricela and Marcos shared the same sentiment about their daughter leaving the RGV for college. Maricela expressed that the significance of a degree earned from a local university and one earned from a university outside of the RGV is the same. Through Maricela's experience of working in the medical field, she has witnessed first-hand that it does not matter where an individual receives their college



degree; the degrees are the same. Maricela did not feel that her daughter needed to leave the RGV to attend college because her daughter would gain the same experience, opportunities, and the same pay by earning a degree from a local college. Maricela expressed her thoughts on this issue by saying, “I think staying in the RGV is fine. I mean a degree is a degree anywhere. I do background checks on doctors, and he can come from Harvard. They are all going to get paid the same.”

Maricela’s husband, Marcos, also felt the same way about why the location of the college that his daughter earned her college degree from did not matter. Marcos agreed with Maricela’s perspective regarding the value of which college the degree was earned from because what employers are interested in are the skill sets and the character of the individual. He mentioned how the conversations between him and his oldest daughter are about looking past the location of college the degree earned and are about the importance of earning a degree instead by saying: “We tell her, a degree is a degree. I interview a numerous amount of people that have degrees and at the end of the day; it is more about the skills set and about the individual as well.” Marcos also added that he did think it was in his family’s best interest for his daughter to leave the RGV for college because he felt that they would set her up to fail. In other words, the family would set their daughter up to fail if she left the RGV for college because she would experience culture shock. He highlighted that the RGV is vastly different from the rest of the state of Texas. Marcos had no doubts about his daughter’s academic ability if she went to a college outside of the RGV. His concern was more about her well-being and her experiencing a cultural shock. He goes on to explain that the RGV is the only

environment that his daughter has known and removing her from this environment would be setting her up for failure. Marcos was aware of how difficult the transition would be for his daughter and was not willing to put her in that type of situation:

Yeah, I think sometimes you set them up for failure as well, because they are so used to the culture down here and then you go and say, hey you are on your own now, go figure it out yourself. It is setting them up for failure.

These Latino families' from the RGV described their perceptions about their children going to college. Four themes emerged that best described the families' perspectives regarding why it was important for their children to go to college. These families' discussed that it was vital for their children to go to college because they wanted them to have a better future than what the family members had themselves. These families' did not want their children to struggle the way many of them did to maintain and support a family. Many family members' personal educational experiences shaped their college aspirations for their child. These families' felt that if they encouraged their children to go to college, they would not have to go through similar experiences that their family members and previous generations had encountered.

Furthermore, these families' understood the importance of their children going to college and they mentioned that it was an expectation in their household for their children to attend college. Many of these Latino families' expressed that when they talk to their children about college, they discuss how going to college is nonnegotiable. These families' had made up their minds that their children were going to attend college

after graduating high school and that it was just a matter of figuring out what college they were are going to attend and which degree they planned to pursue.

**Research Question #2: How do Latino families' from the RGV interpret the pre-college preparation process?**

Latino families' from the RGV shared their thoughts about what they believed their children needed from them to prepare for college. These Latino families' shared their perceptions regarding why their children needed to go to college. While these families' were acutely aware of the significance of their children going to college, it is also critical to explore if these families' understood what their children needed from their families' to prepare for college. Regarding their children' academic ability in college, these families' showed no sign of concern. The families' highlighted three main necessities that their children would need to prepare for college beyond the sphere of academics.

**Financial Support**

It was evident that these Latino families' had no doubt that their children would do well academically in college. What they were concerned about the most was how they would pay for college. These participants primarily associated college-related expenses with the expenditure of large amounts of money. The topic of college costs heavily influenced the families' decisions related to college. For instance, college-related costs were the main reason for some families' wanting their child to stay in the RGV and attend a local higher education institution. Some families' believed that it was in their best interest for their child to attend school in the RGV because it would be less

expensive. The same families' further discussed that there was no need for their family to pay additional expenses (e.g., rent, utility, and food) as in the case of if their child were to leave the RGV for college when the family currently provides these basic needs for their child.

For example, Patricia's family felt it was best for her oldest son, Jose, to stay in the RGV for college after realizing how much they would spend on college costs each month. Patricia expressed concern about her family's finances since they were only living off one person's income. She thought about going back to work to help pay Jose's college expenses if he decided to leave the RGV for college. However, after careful consideration and family discussions, they realized that Jose leaving the RGV for college would have a negative impact on the family. If Patricia went back to work, she was not sure who would take care of their youngest son if they could not afford daycare and if all her relatives nearby were working. Even though Patricia's family had other family members that lived outside of the RGV near the college that Jose was interested in attending, it would create unwanted expenses for the family.

Jose shared how he felt responsible for the unnecessary stress that he caused his family when they were trying to figure out how they were going to pay for his expenses if he decided to leave the RGV for college. Jose did not want to place that financial burden on his family and decided to stay at home and attend the local university. He explained how thinking about college-related expenses was too much:

I am going to have to have enough money to get there because it is a lot: housing, transportation, food, clothes, books, and everything costs money. In the end, I

just decided to stay here...I did not want them to be worried, and I did not want them to have to pay for it.

Patricia's family were not the only ones who worried about paying for college tuition, as Maricela and Marcos also admitted that the extensive costs associated with college were one of the reasons why they wanted their daughter to stay in the RGV for college. Both of them talked about how the additional expenses required sending their daughter off to college outside of the RGV was something that they were unwilling to take on. Marcos also mentioned how they would have to purchase a vehicle for their daughter if she left the RGV for college. A car is something that their family could not afford. Marcos candidly let his daughter know that they would support her financially under the condition that she stayed in the RGV: "I tell my daughter...if you want me to support you financially, I will take care of you here."

As the only single mother, Rosa was not sure how she would financially support her daughter if she decided to leave for college. She recalled how difficult it was to support her oldest daughter when she left the RGV for college. She admitted that there were times when her siblings and extended family members had to step in and help cover some of her oldest daughter's college-related expenses:

The oldest one there are ways in which I helped her and ways that I did not. I know financial aid will only cover certain things. I had to provide the extra things that financial aid would not cover, like her meals, food, gas, or when she was sick, her health insurance.

She continued to discuss how important it is for her to have the support of her siblings and extended family members, because she could not financially support her oldest daughter on her own:

I guess without family support, she probably would have ended up as a [college] dropout. There were times that my siblings would send her money to move on.

For me, that is very important for you to have somebody that a sense of support or to support.

Rosa felt torn about her predicament, because she wanted her youngest daughter to have the same opportunity that her oldest did, but she was not sure if it was worth placing the financial burden on her family.

Similar to Rosa's experience, Ofelia's family discussed letting her children leave the RGV for college. However, they knew that between her and her husband's income, they would not be able to afford their college expenses. If Ofelia's children stayed in the RGV for college, she and her husband are willing to pay:

...we always told my kids, you have a home, you have food, we will pay for gas, we will pay for your car, we will pay for your insurance, and we will pay for everything that we can provide for your basic needs.

Even though Ofelia's family income was not enough to financially support her children if they left for college, she clarified that a family income should not determine or serve as an excuse to limit her children to stay in the RGV for college.

Nevertheless, Ofelia said if her children decided to leave the RGV for college, they must finance their way through school, because she and husband could not afford to pay for college:

I tell my kids that this is what I can afford to pay, but if you by self-merit earn a scholarship to go even out of state or anywhere, we will never hold you. You are free to go. The sky is the limit on whatever you will achieve by merit; we are here to support you. If we are going to have to pay for it, this is all we can offer you, and this is all that we can afford to pay for is [name of regional university].

Carmen knew what her children needed from her and the family to prepare for college, “Unfortunately, it is money. That is the key thing; no matter what it is always money. Money has to do with everything!” Carmen mentioned that one way her children could pay for college was by joining the military. She and her husband are military veterans and supported their children to enlist in the military to help pay for college. She continues to explain her thought process:

My thing is that if the military is going to pay for them, although they get great grades and scholarships, that is a full ride that they get to pay for it. I do not have to worry about as a parent.

Carmen and her husband decided to transfer their military educational benefits to their children. Her daughter or youngest son would use her military educational benefits, and her oldest son was already using her husband’s military educational benefits.

Through her experience, she realized that a family needs money to support their children’s college aspirations financially. When her son decided to leave the RGV for

college, she and her family were trying to determine how they would pay for her son's college expenses but realized that they would be losing money during the years that he would be away for college. As a result, her family decided to use her retirement fund to purchase a home in San Antonio where her children, extended family members, and family friends can live while her children attend college:

My son told me that he was going to go to the college that gave him the best scholarship...The Lady of our Lake had offered him \$68,000, but when we got the first bill...we could not afford to send him to college. Room and board we were going to pay \$8,000 a semester. We did the math, and I said that is \$64,000 in four years. At \$64,000, I will buy a house. I pulled out my retirement and paid for a house in cash. Now, I do not have a retirement, but my kids are taken care of.

Carmen's family did not have the financial means to pay for her son's college experiences, but as they wanted to make sure that her children were cared for in the long-term, she purchased a house with her retirement fund.

### **Moral Support**

Latino families' believed that moral support was the second element that their children needed to prepare for college. These families' demonstrate moral support in various forms, such as encouraging messages or behaviors of support. These families' believed that their children would benefit from moral support from their families' in order to help them transition to college. They said that their children would benefit from moral support because it allows them to know that their family supports them.



For instance, one approach that Vanessa utilized to demonstrate moral support was by asking her daughter questions regarding college. She believes that this action of support lets her daughter know that she cares about her college aspirations, “Basically, encouragement. If it [college] is never discussed, then it is a topic that is not important. So always keeping in mind, what do you think about this college?” Vanessa suggests that families’ must invest in asking their children about their college aspirations to show them support.

Similar to Vanessa, Jose mentioned that investing some time to talk to his brother about matters related to college implies that he genuinely cares about his future college aspirations. Jose also believes that initiating conversations with his brother about college helped normalize the idea of college as being attainable and practical:

Well, I tell them that it is going to be hard. If you want to get somewhere in life, it is not going to be easy. If it is, it will be probably temporary for you. You want something that is long lasting. I tell them that it is going to be difficult. If you need help, we are here for you.

Maricela also agreed that it was essential to show her daughter moral support by checking in on her during the day to make sure that she was okay. She believes that taking the time to share some words of encouragement and reminding her daughter that she is doing great lets her know that her family supports her:

Even when she is in school, I text her, how are things going? Is everything okay? Is something is bothering you, let me know. She has that support from me all the

time that a mom is always on the lookout to see because especially right now, when they are teenagers. They go through a lot.

Similar to the ways Vanessa, Jose, and Maricela showed their children support by checking in on them or asking about their college aspirations, Rosa highlighted how providing moral support when her daughter failed college was essential to her daughter's well-being. Rosa remembered her oldest daughter calling her and telling her the devastating news that she would need to take a semester off, because she had failed to remain in good academic standing and had lost her financial aid award. Her daughter was afraid to tell Rosa about the news, because she thought that Rosa would be disappointed. Rosa reassured her daughter that she did not fail or disappoint her; she understood that leaving the RGV for college would be hard on her during the first year but did not doubt her daughter's ability to succeed. Rosa even told her daughter that she was more than welcome to move back home and finish school at the local university, but her daughter refused the offer:

Her thing was like she did not want to – how could I put this? She is out there; she did not want to step back here, and for her, she is going to do it. I mean, I do not want her to feel that I was not proud of her. I told her, well, come back – there are other colleges you can go to, and she said, no, mom. I am going to stick it out here. I am going to graduate from here.

Rosa's case highlights the powerful impact that familial moral support had on her daughter's college experience. In other words, Rosa's daughter may not have wanted to hear about the reality of the situation; she needed her mother's support and reassurance

as opposed to seeing her mother be upset about her not passing her college courses. Rosa and the rest of the families' experiences suggest that the well-being of their children is a priority in order for them to be academically successful in college. These families' demonstrated the various forms of support that influence their children's success. Some families' discussed the extent to which moral support is good for the well-being of their child. These families' wanted their child to be successful in college but also wanted to make sure that their child's college aspirations were attainable. The families' dilemma is regarding how to provide practical moral support to their children, especially in terms of the differences between the expectations and realities of college.

Elena revealed the dilemma that she faced when she was talking to her daughter about her career interests:

Yes, and that is a thing with [my daughter] right now, she wanted to be a dermatologist, and now she wants to be a cosmetologist for the famous. I told her, yes, you could, but I am cringing inside because one out of a hundred thousand or two hundred thousand or a million people get that job, but no, I do not want her to think that it is not possible.

The educator in Elena wants to make sure that her daughter's career interest is achievable, but the mother in her does not have the heart to discourage her daughter from pursuing her career interest:

I kind of cringe because of the difference in pay but I do want her to be happy. Even though, I know what it takes. I do not want them not to try because some people did try and their dreams come true.

Rubi and her family also struggled with the same predicament when her oldest son was struggling to pass his classes during his first year of college. This was when they realized that college might not be for everyone:

An older person has always told me you look at your five fingers. Not all five fingers are the same, so that means that not all your children will be the same either, so ever since then that little lecture or that talk that we had has made me realize that college is not for everybody at the same moment.

However, she struggled to accept her role in deciding which career her children should pursue:

I guess it comes from home and what career you want to follow. What they would need is our support, and I guess not telling them...well, that is not your career, or that is not the career that you are able or capable of doing. Hey, you know what? Do whatever you want.

Ofelia also shared her thoughts regarding this dilemma of whether college is for everyone, because she often feels that school agents provide false hopes to children despite knowing the reality of their situation. She believes that this sets these children up to fail, because the families' are too afraid to crush their children's dreams of college:

You know it is interesting to me that we push all our students to be college complete, college ready, or college focused. However, the reality is, not all students are college material. That is why we have so many dropouts, and that is why we have so many students that feel like they failed in college because they could not succeed.

Similar to Elena's experience, the educator in Ofelia allows her to acknowledge the harsh reality that a four-year college experience might not be ideal for all her students in the classroom or for her own children. She believes that a student's family dynamics and the role that they hold within the family determine their career choice.

Ofelia suggested that school districts and higher education agents must redefine their college marketing strategies by highlighting alternative career pathways, such as technical and vocational certifications. She explains that this will benefit all children in knowing that they are college-ready, but instead of going to college for four years, one can pursue a college career that takes less than two years to complete:

I tell my students, maybe not everybody is meant to have a four-year career. I mean I need a mechanic. I need a plumber. I need an electrician. Whenever I call one, I want someone who has a license that he is well certified to do this job, and maybe that is your calling. As you said, there is nothing wrong with that, because we need this type of certified people to be out there in the workplace.

Marcos's personal educational experiences further highlight Elena, Carmen, and Ofelia's perspective regarding college. While Marco's educational experience does not indicate that he was not college material, his story offers valuable insights into the fact that earning a college certificate specializing in a given trade is just as important as a four-year college degree. Not to mention, he agrees with Ofelia about placing value on alternative education pathways that do not follow the footsteps of a four-year college degree:

I have a certificate. I did not go to college. I have a computerized bookkeeping specialist certificate. Right after finishing [earning his certificate], the hourly rate was not as attractive as it should be, right. Even though I graduated with honors and all that really good stuff, but...it was not really a degree. It was just a certificate.

### **The Other Form of Education**

Coupled with financial and moral support, these families' discussed the importance of their children learning about the other form of education. *Educación* [education] is a form of education that children acquire within the home and community environments. Family or community members teach children about cultural values such as compassion, servant-leadership, and respect, which allow their children to be well-rounded, educated individuals both inside and outside of the college environment — these families' mentioned that this form of *educación* is just as important as formal education.

For example, Ofelia and her husband believe that it is important for her students as well as her own children to learn about this type of education. Her family discussed the fact that this form of education is taught in the home environment and that it complements the formal education of the children. However, she also recognized the fact that not many students that she teaches in the school setting might have access to this type of education. Therefore, Ofelia and her husband do their best to intercede and impart this form of education in and out of the classroom:

I cannot replace or do the job of the parents in the sense of educating them about the values or the norms. I can help them if there is no structure at home, sometimes, I can lead by example to teach my students this is how we are supposed to be, this is how we are supposed to work, but one cannot replace the other. You can be a very knowledgeable individual in the books but if you lacked those values, norms, and ethics then, in my opinion, you are not a well-rounded person. You are not a well-rounded, educated person because you lacked that type of education.

Carmen and her family have emphasized to their children about the importance of paying it forward and giving back to their community. Her family believes that it is important for their children to contribute to their community. Carmen and her husband have their car club that consists of family members and "...lawyers, doctors, we have teachers, and I was in a government entity for ten years. We have [members] in the military. We have anybody or everybody..." She continued to explain that the organization is family-oriented; driven to allow members of the community to "...get together, get organized, and do so much charity work..." While she acknowledges that her children may not want to be around her and her family sometimes, she wants her children to understand the importance of giving back to the community through their car club organization. Carmen believes in teaching her children to be selfless servants to the community and to expose her children to the notion of how fortunate they are in many aspects of their lives compared to others in the community:

My kids get to see all of that. If it were not for that, they would not see how fortunate they are. They do not hide the fact that yes, they are fortunate and that I have this or that I have that.

In Joel and Estella's family, it is essential for them to teach their sons about the sacrifices that the past generations have made in order to provide them with the life that they have now. It was important for their oldest son to learn about and value their family's history:

Parents should always explain to their kids where they came from...I always have to tell him never to forget where you came from. He always tells me that he never will... What we went through was being from a simple background, as my wife was raised in México and was a United States citizen and she went to a university, and we tell them that it was hard. Our kids sit there, and they listen to what we have to tell them. They understand that it is easier for them right now and that it is not that hard because they have our support.

Patricia stressed the importance of her children having a strong faith in their background. She raised her children to be rooted in their faith in order to allow her children to endure anything that life brings their way. For example, Jose acknowledges that his faith has helped him do well academically in college. He also believes that his faith will favor him as he begins to explore his career options in the medical field:

One of the easiest ways you can make God laugh is to tell him your plans. What you want to do, because nothing is set in stone. [Laughs] You can always tell God, hey, I want to do this, and this is how we are going to do it. God is going to



tell you, hold on, I tell you what you want to do and if that is what you want to do then let us talk about it. Let us pray about it. We will see what goes on or what happens.

Jose continued to share his thoughts about how his family values have allowed him to cross paths with his current mentor, who assisted him throughout his academic career in Nursing:

When I went to the church, this is five years ago. I think I was in 8th grade entering 9th grade and I met him when we were doing the summer school bible studies...He was the one that helped me decide if I wanted to become a nurse or not. [Laughs] I heard stories where he had to – since the hospitals were full and he had to deliver children in the hallway. The pregnant lady was there in the hallway and said I could not hold it anymore; it is going to come out. [Laughs]

Some families' were concerned about how they would pay for college and how it would influence their son or daughter's college aspirations. Some families' were grappling with the question of what type of moral support would be appropriate to help prepare their children for college. These families' believed that the role of the family was to provide moral support to their children to help them manage their transition to college. It was also crucial for their children to have a strong sense of identity and cultural awareness that these families' describe as a form of education that does not replace but instead compliments their formal education. These families' stated that this form of education serves as a foundation that consists of the assets and resources that their children can rely on as they prepare for and navigate college. These families'

highlight the fact that their role in preparing their child for college was to help eliminate other barriers such as financial stressors that may impede their child's academic success. These families' highlight the fact that the role of preparing their child for college was to help eliminate other barriers such as financial stressors that may impede their child's academic success. These families' were not concerned about their children being college-ready; they emphasized concerns related to their children's well-being.

**Research Question #3: In what ways do Latino families' from the RGV prepare their children for college?**

Coupled with the importance of going to college and ensuring the well-being of their children, the Latino families' believed that it is a collective effort, ranging from that of the family members to that of the school district and higher education agents, to help prepare their children for college. These families' believed that representatives from different social contexts (e.g., home and school) have the responsibility to prepare their children to experience a successful transition to college. These Latino families' explain how these different environments have valuable information related to college that can assist them in preparing their children for college. These families' relied heavily on these social networks, and the resources offered to help prepare their children for college. They provided insights on key family members and school counselors playing a critical role in helping their children prepare for college. It was apparent that these Latino families' would like to see better alignment between their home and school environments in order to prepare their children for college.

**Father Involvement**

A majority of the participants that served as a proxy for their families' were females, and they discussed the importance of both the mother and father being involved in preparing their children for college. Except for Rosa, the mothers believed that the well-being and academic abilities of their children should be the responsibility of both parents and not just the mothers. Many of these mothers shared their candid perspectives on why it is necessary for their children to see both parents actively engaged in their school-related activities. Based on the interviews, many stated that they as well as their spouses shared household responsibilities. This observation was interesting to witness, for it contradicted what scholars have found about Latino mothers being the principal agents that are responsible for the well-being and outcomes of their children. For instance, Ofelia describes her upbringing that reflected traditional gender roles:

In our culture, the mother is responsible, whatever turns out of the kids, because they are the primary caretakers. My dad and I, I cannot say that we really had a relationship, because he was never interested in what was going on with me in school. All those meetings that I was talking about, it was always my mom attending, because my dad was always working and that was not within his functions in the family.

Based on these mothers' personal educational experiences, many acknowledged the fact that their mothers, compared to their fathers, were more involved in their educational development and well-being. The traditional gender roles that these mothers witnessed while growing up influenced their perspectives regarding the importance of their spouses being involved in their children's educational development. The mothers in

this study did not want their children to experience what they had experienced due to their fathers' lack of involvement in their educational development, and they were determined to challenge the traditional cultural norms.

Many of the mothers offered their perspectives regarding the parental roles within the own home environment and suggested that the traditional gender roles practiced within Latino families' are gradually shifting towards equal roles. For instance, Elena's family is redefining gender roles in terms of shared responsibility. She mentioned how she is financially providing for her family while her husband is in charge of maintaining their household and helping with the kids:

It is not as common for this dad to stay at home. I guess it is still the thought about the dad being the breadwinner and the mom staying home ...in my situation, I make more money or at least it is stable because my husband makes good money too but he is a car salesman, and so it is dependent on him selling a car. It just happens that my husband has more time and [his schedule] is more flexible. He is able to be at home, pick her up, take her to wherever she needs to go, be home, get her food, and I cannot.

However, she disclosed that it was difficult for her at times, because school agents such as teachers or counselors misinterpret her lack of involvement in the educational environment as her not caring about her child's educational development. She expressed her emotions, "Yes, it is hard for me because [my daughter's] teachers never knew me and they always knew my husband. When I would go, they would be like who are you? It was heartbreaking..."

Two Latino families' with the father present during the interview provided insights from a father's perspective regarding participating in their children's educational development. During Maricela and Marcos' interview, when topics related to preparing their daughter for college were mentioned, the conversation became intense when they each shared their thoughts regarding their involvement in the issue. Maricela and Marcos were both willing to discuss this matter throughout the interview, and Marcos openly acknowledged the explicit tension by saying, "I will tell you, my wife is the one that talks to my kids the most. She is the one that is most connected to my kids..." He continued to discuss the matter, "I know her and I were having a discussion on how I need to be more invested in the girls because they are growing fast."

Marcos mentioned that while he is working on being more involved with his girls' school-related events, it is a challenge to attend some of their events because of his work schedule:

I do not feel any different essentially of me not able to connect with my daughters. It is more about the time. I think we both play an important role when it comes down to their education. I am kind of the authority of the house. Our kids respect me, so when it comes down to it, they do not want to disappoint me with bad grades or disappoint me about the fact that they are not going to college.

Maricela supported her husband's role by saying, "Well, I mean, he is the authority [figure], and so they respect him a lot. They respect me too, but they know he sets the rules."

Joel and Estella's family, the second family with both parents being present, discussed the importance of both of them being involved in preparing their sons for college, whether it is helping with class assignments or extra-curricular activities. Joel and Estella are both actively involved as parent volunteers within the school district. Joel discussed the importance of students seeing both parents invested in preparing them for college. He explains that the children notice which parent is interested in their career:

Well, it is very important. It is very important for me for both parents to be involved because I mean – they know. They notice. They know who is involved and who has an interest in what they are doing, they know. I do not know what goes through other parents' minds, but they know when we are involved and what they are doing and they know that we know everything that they are doing.

Estella follows her husband's comment by offering her opinion on the matter that fathers might be absent from the educational setting because they do not know any better since they did not grow up in an environment where perhaps their fathers were involved, "Thinking about to say in other families' perhaps has to depend on how they were raised. I mean the father, not the students." She also suggested that mothers should attempt to have an open dialogue with their husbands about getting involved in their children's lives more actively:

...the wife should interfere a little and be able to talk with him to say, hey, he is also your son. He wants your attention. He wants your support. You need to learn more about him or them. What does he like? What does he want him to do so he feels motivated to do what he wants in life? Unfortunately, it also depends a lot on the education that they have because you cannot do much or nothing because you are too far behind.

## **Counselors**

High school counselors play a critical role in assisting Latino families' in preparing their children for college. Some of the families' expressed concerns about the time that the counselors from Esperanza and Cesar Chávez High School got to spend with their students, because the counselor-to-student ratio is insurmountable. These families' even questioned the counselors' familiarity with college information in assisting children with the college process. Based on some Latino family interactions with high school counselors, they said that the counselors are essential personnel to gain access to crucial college-related information that these families' needed to help their children navigate college.

For example, Rosa recalled her negative experience with one of the high school counselors at Esperanza High School. Rosa was disappointed with the counselor assigned to her daughter and did not appreciate how the counselor handled the situation. For context, Rosa's daughter was trying to change her class schedule, because she was missing specific class requirements, but the counselor refused to authorize the change without the presence of a legal guardian. While she was aware that it was a school policy, it was difficult for her to take a leave of absence from work, since she is a single mother and cannot afford to take days off. Rosa showed up at Esperanza High School to approve her daughter's class schedule, but the interactions with the counselor were unhelpful:

No, she never tried to help or try to guide me. I do not know if she was a new counselor or she has been there. I do not know. As a counselor, I think it would



be nice for them to schedule a meeting in between your kid's school year to see where they are going and how they are doing in school...to see if they are on track.

After her negative encounter with the high school counselor, she preferred to rely on her co-worker, who at the time was in her early twenties and working on her Master's degree help Rosa understand the college-related information. She mentioned how her co-worker was much more helpful in assisting her in understanding the college information:

We have one girl who graduated from college at 20, and she was working on her Masters. I would ask her questions: what do you think my daughter should do you? She would guide me, and so I am getting all these answers from the community and not from school.

Carmen's family was also dissatisfied with the college services provided by the school counselors at Esperanza High School. Carmen's first encounter with the high school counselors was when she had to assist her neighbor in enquiring about information regarding her son's academic progress. However, neither she nor her neighbor was able to receive such information from the counselor. Then, the second time that Carmen had a negative experience with a high school counselor was when it regarded her oldest son. Carmen's oldest son was accepted into a private university and planned on attending it, until the university informed them that they would not honor her spouse's military educational benefits. Her family could have avoided this incident if the high school counselor had informed her family about the differences between a private and public university.

Carmen expressed disappointment with the high school counselors by saying, “Our counselors are just full of it, they are so full of s\*\*\*. I hate to sound unprofessional, but they are just being given a paycheck.” While she tried to give the high school counselors the benefit of the doubt, she said the following:

I do not support that system. Yes, you are overworked...Your focus is on too much...I have to counsel you on your problems, and I also have to counsel you on your education, and I have to hold your hand to do this – it is too much for one counselor to have to do that for 1,000 students or 2,000 students. Let us say that the school has five counselors, even to do 300 students and if they divided the responsibilities.

Joel and Estella also expressed concern regarding the counselor-to-student ratio at Cesar Chávez High School. This family felt that the counselors’ assigned responsibilities and workloads are absurd and overwhelming. They felt that the lack of attention from the high school and district personnel to help address this issue that negatively affects their children and their families. Joel and Estella agreed that it was not fair for school personnel to ignore families who really need assistance to help their children for college because they were overwhelmed with their workload. Joel stated the following:

I know it is hard. We know it is hard on the counselors. For example, Esperanza High School is a big school, and there are so many students, I do not know how many students there are, but they have many students, but they only have three counselors, and that is not enough, a counselor for each grade level. They need more people to help them with the students.

Estella reiterated her husband's comment regarding the high school counselors and added that the attention that the counselors should give to preparing their students for college is nonexistent, "There are a few people for too many students. It is too much, and they do not have the attention they should put on students."

### **Increase Community and School Partnerships**

These families understood that various agents who represent a different context, such as home, school, and community, influence their child's level of preparation for college. They felt that there are areas of opportunities where the school district can increase their community outreach efforts to assist families and students in relation to college. They also believed that the school districts' efforts would benefit the surrounding communities. The participants' suggestion for the school district to strengthen school and community partnerships highlights the power of community activism in increasing their community's prosperity. The demands that these families' advocated would help create opportunities for community participation. The participants' recommendations and responses to increasing community participation within the school environments suggested that these families' viewed themselves as equal thought partners when it came to the well-being of their children and practical practices to prepare their children for college.

**Home Environment.** Most of the Latino families' were somewhat familiar with the expectations and demands placed on their child to prepare for college, as a result of their personal and familial educational experiences. These families' argued that this is not the case for all families' and children across the school district. Therefore, the

participants emphasized the importance of the school district in strengthening their college outreach efforts in order to educate families' across the district communities about college. The families' recognized the fact that the school district offers plenty of resources regarding college. However, many of these families' felt that some of the resources offered by the school district focused more on advanced college topics. While many of these families' had members who had earned a college degree, they still had trouble making sense of the college information regarding requirements, processes, and expectations. These families' discussed that if they were having difficulty understanding complex and complicated college-related topics, they could imagine the plight of the families' and children who were not familiar with the college environment.

Many of the families' reflected on their own educational experiences to offer recommendations to the school district so that the latter could increase school and community outreach efforts. They felt that the school district needed to teach the communities about the basics of college to empower families' and increase familial participation. For example, Carmen recognized that there might be families' that include parents who are manual laborers or those who hold a low-wage job and are not familiar with the school contexts. Therefore, it is possible for the district to educate these types of families' that require more information on the fundamentals of how to navigate the school setting and the benefits of college:

My mom, I can tell you, was not educated on how to get to college. My husband was not educated on how to get to college. I had to beg, borrow, walk to school, and have that drive and only because my husband encouraged me...the support

system has to be there...how to ask questions because they are old school – like my mom, she is real *rancho* [person who lives in the farm or has an occupation that is labor-intensive]. She got no clue.

As an educator, Ofelia also shared the same sentiment as Carmen and emphasized on the need to educate surrounding Latino communities about how to navigate the school environment and the long-term goals of their children going to college:

I think for our area, in particular, the problem is that we live in a high-need area. Many of our parents are first-time immigrants, the families' have economic needs, and their main focus is sometimes to get this student to work a part-time job so that they can help the family and I see that on a daily basis with my students. It is hard because if you have to work to help your family. I told them, if you got to work then you got to work there is just no way around it, but you have to think of the bigger benefit.

Given Rosa's experience with the high school counselors, she suggested that the district, along with the counselors, must meet the families' where they are located and reach out to the communities to convey college-related information:

Or gather as many parents as they can and inform them or keep them informed. I mean if the parents do not have means of transportation to go over there, why not come out here. There are a lot of – there is a fire department, I am pretty sure they will lend them the room. There is that housing project *tambien* [also], and

the school is right there. I mean there are a lot of options [places] out there that can help keep parents informed.

Rosa proposed a solution to not only increase college awareness, but also help eliminate barriers to the college application process among families' by presenting common scenarios that high school counselors notice children and their families' encountering as they prepare for college, "Or like I said not classes, but during orientation, give a scenario and explain to them what they should do. If you have any questions or to make the kids feel comfortable or them in order to ask you questions."

**School Environment.** In addition to the home environments, the families' mentioned the importance of the school environment in understanding the needs of the communities surrounding the school district. These Latino families' felt that the agents who represent the school environment should align the college-related resources and materials to inform and prepare children and their families for college. The interaction between the school and home environments can offer insights into the role that the school environment plays in preparing their children for college. The Latino families' expressed mixed emotions about the assistance provided by the agents within the school environments in relating complex and complicated college information and preparing their children for the college.

For instance, Maricela and Marcos disclosed that they initially had they daughters enrolled in another school district, until they found out about the college opportunities that the current school district offered to children and their families. They

mentioned how, as a family, they are saving money in terms of college because of the district's dual enrollment program:

I enrolled her into Cesar Chávez High School that does offer the dual enrollment for the students, which I think, is a great opportunity for them because she can earn an associate's degree, while in high school...It saves money for us, because [the school district] also pays for it.

Maricela also mentioned that her daughter's participation in college courses while still in high school would help her acclimate to college with ease: "She already has a sense of how it [college] is, which a great opportunity the school district offers is." Responding to Maricela's point, Marcos points out that the dual enrollment program offers their daughter the opportunity to interact with college children: "Yeah, it is cool that she is already interacting with college students."

Both Joel and Estella discussed how Cesar Chávez High School provides their son with a structured environment to help him get accustomed to the college environment. They recognize the school district's efforts to prepare their son for college so that he can be a responsible, independent, and proactive college student in the future. Estella appreciated the district's efforts in teaching their children time management skills, which they believe will allow their son to be college-ready:

Well, thank God at the school where our son goes, it is going well. They are supporting him very well. We like it; above all, we chose the school because of, as one of the reasons, how they handled their high school students by already preparing them for college.

They also shared that the school environment has allowed them to meet other parents and share effective practices to prepare their children for college. Joel shared him, and his wife identified practical parenting strategies that helped reduce family anxiety and empowered their sons to stay focused:

We take advice from other parents. Our older son, he is still considered Special Ed. because of his Autism. I had many meetings that we have been [to where] we take the advice to see what works for us and what does not...We would always ask each other what is going to work best for us so that they can do their homework, because they are super hyper by the time that they get home.

The strategies that these families' used to gain access to college information across two vastly different networks and environments provide insights into the manner in which families' assisted their students in preparing for college. As a collective group, these families' were inconspicuous pathbreakers and permitted access to resources and information related to college to other families. These families' used strategies to help create and foster resistance as a collective group in order to challenge the education inequalities.



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSION

#### **Discussion**

This case study examined the perceptions of the Latino families' from the RGV regarding their involvement in preparing their child for college. This study intended to examine the beliefs of Latino families' from a specific geographic region regarding the importance of their child going to college, what their child needs from the family to go to college, and the ways in which Latino families' are involved in helping their child go to college. This study explores the manner in which these families' draw on their cultural wealth, as a collective unit, to help prepare their child for college. Very little research has focused on the experiences of family members who assist and empower their child to attend college, especially in terms of culturally rich geographic regions such as the RGV. Unlike previous studies that focused on student perspectives to examine how they make meaning of family involvement in helping them navigate the college environment, this study examined family involvement and the manner in which the family prepares their child for college.

#### **Latino Families' Care About and Value their Student's College Participation**

The educational research does not acknowledge and recognize Latino families' contributions that shape their children's educational development outside of the school contexts. As a result, the existing research has portrayed Latino family involvement using a deficit perspective, stating that they do not care about or value education.

Yosso's (2005) "Community Cultural Wealth Model" allows us to challenge these traditional interpretations of Latino familial participation in education. These various forms of contributions that Latino families' provide help to influence their children's educational development.

However, the findings of this study do not mirror these perspectives. It was evident among the families' that they do care about their child going to college and that they value education. For many of these families', their child going to college was an expectation, not a choice. The extensive contributions that the families' demonstrate within their households are rendered possible through their entire family's collective efforts. The findings of the first research question are regarding how Latino families' from the RGV describe the importance of their children going to college. This guiding question emerged from the education-related literature that has reported that Latino families' do not value or care about their children's educational participation.

The experiences of the Latino participants who represented their family's collective contribution suggest that they do in fact value or care about their child's education. These families' had high educational aspirations for their children. Their hopes and dreams about their children going to college were rooted in these families' desire to provide the best life possible for their children. Their personal educational experiences influenced the families'' aspirations for their children. The aspirational wealth that is passed on by the families', *testimonios* (life stories), about overcoming challenges throughout their educational experiences allows their children to envision their future despite the apparent education-related disparities that persist in their lives

(Yosso, 2005). These Latino parents and families' expressed high aspirations for college attendance for their children but were not familiar with the process to turn their aspirations into tangible means to help their children (Zarate, 2007). A majority of the participants received a formal education that did not prove useful in relation to their knowledge of what their child needs to attend college (Ceja, 2004), especially when many of the participants completed college and earned a certificate or degree from the local community college or university.

The participants' interviews suggested that Latino parents and other extended members (e.g., uncles, siblings, and grandparents) served as validating agents in actualizing their child's college aspirations. As representatives of the family, these Latino parents believed that their child would be going to college, despite the limited access available to their families'. The strong family beliefs shared with their children about going to college provide insights regarding how Latino families' validate their children's ability to succeed in the higher educational environment. In other words, the continuous references made by family members about their children's college aspirations help foster a college-going environment, increase their confidence of belonging in college, and allow their children to trust in their academic abilities.

Aside from these families' relying on their personal educational experiences that served as *cuentos* (stories) in which participants recounted their upbringing, many included the experiences of extended family members to understand the importance of their family's past generations and be able to form a bond with such people (Yosso, 2005). This bond would allow the children to connect with present and living family

members. There was an apparent inherent tension amongst the families' regarding their child's decision to stay in the RGV or leave the RGV for college. These families' relied on familial capital, which shaped their child's decision of where they would go to college (Yosso, 2005). These families' provided justifications that supported their decisions regarding their child's college choice.

The reasons provided by the families' regarding affordability, financial support, and the impact of the child's absence on the family serves to support Perna's (2006) "College Access and Choice Model" in which she discusses the fact that family income has a positive relationship with a student's college-choice outcomes. Tuition costs and college-related expenses determined the family's decision to allow their child to stay or leave the RGV for college. Scholars that examine students' college-choices found that families' and children would consider whether the college costs outweighed the benefits of investing in the child's post-secondary education in order to determine their decision pertaining to college choice (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Hurtado et al., 1997; Perna, 2000; 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005).

The data collected from the interviews suggested that these families' understood that it was important for their child to attend college. The family's demographic characteristics influenced their children's choice of college, and these families' relied on their aspirational, linguistic, and familial forms of capital to communicate their thoughts about their children going to college. The families' used these forms of capital to communicate with their children regarding them going to college, which allowed the families' to create an absolute belief in the possibility that would connect former and

present family generations' experiences. Many learned to navigate the college process through trial and error, but most of the participants still did not have a complete understanding of what documentation or processes were required to prepare their children for college. However, these families' learned to navigate the college environment the best way by knowing how to prepare them. In this way, these families' hoped to break the link between the families' previous and present occupational status (e.g., manual laborer) and the children's future academic experiences (e.g., Bachelors, Masters) (Auerbach 2006; Gándara, 1995; Yosso, 2005).

### **Latino Families' Learning to Coexist Between Two Different Worlds**

The second guiding question that emerged from the education research found that many low-income families' had high college aspirations for their children but were unsure how they needed to assist them in helping their hopes and dreams become a reality (Gándara 1995; Perna, 2006; Yosso, 2005). The first necessity that these families' must provide their children with is financial support. Many families' discussed how they would pay for their child's college tuition and costs. While the issue surrounding college affordability is not new, these families' expressed concerns regarding how they would financially support their child for college. The next necessity that these families' believed that their child needed from them was moral support. Regardless of the college or degree that their child wanted to pursue, a majority of the families' agreed that they needed to provide psychological, emotional, and spiritual support. These families' felt that their child's well-being was essential to their success in college. In addition to college costs and moral support, these families' felt that it was important for their

children to have specific morals, values, and beliefs that would complement their formal education. Latino families' provide this form of education to their children in the home environment through messages that allow their children to internalize and interpret the manner in which such values contribute to their educational success. These families' perspectives offer insights into the contributions and support that shape their children's educational outcomes. It was essential to examine how Latino families' make meaning and understand what they believe that their child needed from them to help prepare for college. The data from the interviews suggest that these families' believed that their children needed their support and their help in terms of their well-being rather than help in the case of their academic ability.

For these families', tuition costs and college-related expenses were the leading factors that influenced their child's choice of staying or leaving the RGV for college. Ultimately, some families' realized that the college expenses far exceeded the benefits of earning a college degree outside of the RGV (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006). These parents discussed the fact that their lack of financial wealth limits their ability to support their children's choice of college interests. The financial burdens that these families' discuss in their interviews suggest that this factor places unnecessary stress and impedes Latino families' and their children from navigating through the school environment. Therefore, it forces Latino families' to equip children with strategies and skill sets that will assist them in successfully navigating an environment that is not "created with communities of color in mind" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80).

Along with paying college costs, more than half of the families' discussed the importance of moral support in helping their children navigate the college environment. Moral support consists of various strategies and skills that children can draw on to help deal and cope with when placed in stressful conditions (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011; Yosso, 2005). These families' elaborate upon a different form of wealth that is also necessary for their children to obtain. This form of wealth consists of cultural wealth that provides teachings and practices that provide both practical and emotional support to help children navigate the college environment (Yosso, 2005).

Not to mention, these families' alluded to other forms of education that they communicate with their children to help prepare their children for college. For example, these families' discussed the fact that gaining the other form of *educación* is necessary for their children within the home environment. This form of education occurs through family storytelling or recounting oral histories in one or more languages or styles (Yosso, 2005). These families' believe that this form of education will support their children in the course of their formal education (Auerbach, 2006; Castellanos et al., 2013; Ceja, 2004; Espino, 2016; Yosso, 2005). These families' instilled *educación* in a variety of different ways, such as having conversations about factors including their family history, paying it forward within their community, and faith. Scholars have argued that this form of *educación* helps prepare students to navigate college (Arellano et al., 1996; Ceballo, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; 1994). This form of education provides cultural values, beliefs, and practices that Latino children can leverage within the college context (Yosso, 2005).

These families' identified financial support, moral support, and a form of education learned within the home environment as the three factors that their children required from their families' to prepare for college — the essentials elements that these Latino families' believe that their children need from them to be college-ready highlight the challenge that these families' find themselves facing in attempting to navigate multiple contexts (e.g., home, school, and higher education). The experience of Latino families' trying to understand what is needed to complete for each particular aspect of college in order for their children to be able to transition to college is a challenge. These multiple and unique contexts reflect what Anzaldúa (1999) explains as *un choque* (a crash) between worlds with different cultural expectations and demands (p. 78).

These families' understanding of what they believe that college requires of their children highlights the dilemma discussed in the education literature regarding the home environments of low-income and marginalized communities of color being vastly different from the educational environments. Yosso's (2005) model of Community Cultural Wealth highlights the contributions of families' from underrepresented and low-income backgrounds who are deemed in deficit-based narratives in the literature as being culturally deprived or unprepared to enable these student groups in doing well in higher education (Bernal, 2001; Kanagala, Rendón, & Nora, 2016; Yosso, 2005).

### **The Ways Latino Families' Prepare Their Children for College**

The third research question guiding the study highlighted the ways in which Latino families' from the RGV help prepare their child for college. The question emerged from the education literature in terms of the absence of Latino familial involvement in the



educational environment. The data gathered from the interviews suggests that while Latino families' care about and value their children's education, they must learn to develop strategies to help bridge both the home and school environments to prepare their children for college. It was evident that the families' understand that multiple environments play a critical role in preparing their student for college. These families' suggest that these multiple environments have essential information and resources that can help prepare their children for college. Therefore, they believe that the objective of preparing their children for college is a shared responsibility between the family and other educational agents. In other words, these families' had to learn how to bridge the vastly different environments and take advantage of the social capital available across these contexts (Yosso, 2005). The participants described social capital as both groups of people as well as resources of information that help in preparing their children for college. The findings suggested that it takes many individuals from different social contexts to prepare a student for college (Perna, 2006). These families' did not indicate that it was their sole responsibility to help their child but the responsibility of various school agents as well. From the participants' perspectives, preparing a student for college was a collaboration between family members and school counselors.

While it is important to have the support of extended family members, the participants also discussed the need for their children to see their fathers invested and involved in their school-related activities. While scholars have documented the central roles that Latina mothers play in ensuring the well-being of and outcomes for children (Martinez, Cortez, & Sáenz, 2013; Kanagala et al., 2016; Zarate, 2007), the mothers in

this study redefined and expanded family capital by making an effort to involve their spouses in the educational development of their children. These mothers challenged cultural gender norms and discussed their efforts in getting their husbands to play a more significant role in assisting their child in terms of college.

The participants also felt that school district agents such as high school counselors played an essential role in ensuring that their children understand the college demands and requirements. Some of the families' relied on the district to provide resources and opportunities to help ease their child's transition to college. Some of the families' mentioned the strategies that the district offered to prepare their child for college, which would help increase their self-efficacy as college students. Some of the strategies that the district provided to help prepare the student for college included enhancing the student's time management skills and self-discipline so that they may be able to take charge of their learning. Another example used to prepare children for the expectations and demands that a college student might experience in terms of the college environment and its demands was through the dual enrollment program.

In addition to the type of strategies that prepare the student for college, school counselors also play an important role in creating and supporting a college-going environment for students (Smith-Adcock et al., 2006; Vela et al., 2014). More than half of the Latino families' in this study indicated that counselors play a critical role in preparing the student for college (Perna, 2006). These parents described these educational agents as the gatekeepers who possess the college information that is necessary for their children to be successful in college. However, the ratio of counselors

to children is not ideal and is irrational when it comes to counselors attempting to provide the same college information to all their students (Bryan et al., 2011). Many parents understood the importance of sharing their knowledge regarding college with other children and families' from their respective communities (Yosso, 2005). All these parents shared experiences that they had in terms of assisting their children's friends and their families' from the same neighborhood or the children at the two high schools with college-related information. In other words, these participants served as advocates for other Latino parents and their families in relation to gathering information related to college.

The participants described high school counselors as critical educational agents in preparing their children for the college. These educational agents experience intensive student contact within the school environment. In addition to teachers, counselors are the frontline personnel whom children interact with the most and rely on for college-related information (Perna, 2006). While counselors play multiple roles in assisting children with both their academic and social needs, the participants expressed how this limits the attention that their children require to prepare for college. The counselors must be able to provide college-related material and be able to create opportunities for college-related discussions with children and their families. Some of the participants encountered a negative experience with high school counselors regarding college information. The participants recognized that the high school counselors were overwhelmed with responsibilities and that the student-counselor ratio was not a reasonable caseload to manage. The lack of investment on the part of the high school counselors in assisting

these families' has resulted in these families' not trusting the district for sound advice related to college in order to help prepare the student for college.

### **The Significance of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to understand how Latino families' from the RGV contribute to and participate in preparing their children for college. Given the critical need to improve Latino educational attainment rates, this study provides insights regarding Latino family involvement in the pre-college preparation process. The participants' insights contribute to the existing literature focused on Latino family involvement. Specifically, this dissertation's case study offers insights through the perspectives regarding how Latino families', as a collective unit, contribute to preparing their child for college. The family contributions provide insights regarding how the school district and regional higher education institutions should reexamine and modify college outreach practices to increase family engagement. Scholars have found that Latino families' want to be involved in assisting their children in going to college, but they often do not know how to help (Ceballo et al., 2014). Furthermore, the experiences of Latino families' from the RGV can help inform scholars, educational agents, and policymakers in increasing the college participation of Latino families' and strengthening the connection across multiple social contexts (e.g., school and home) to increase Latino families' involvement in the college preparation process of their children. These families' had high college aspirations for their children but could not identify concrete objectives to achieve their aspirations. It was evident that the families' were less concerned about their child being academically prepared for college and more

concerned with the well-being of their child. The participant-related findings indicated that it was not that they did not care about their child being college-ready but that they were confident in their child's academic ability to do well in college.

## **Recommendations**

### **Regional Level Policy Recommendations**

Latino families and children's access to higher education opportunities across the RGV region are limited given the geographic location. This is not to assume that the region does not provide educational opportunities, but the study instead looks at ways to maximize and identify how school districts can build partnerships with community shareholders. The school district and regional shareholders' partnerships would help empower Latino familial college participation efforts and increase the prosperity of the region. This practice of collaboration allows all participating agents across multiple contexts to maximize their collective expertise and skills to inform practice and policy, which in turn influence the same cause. This form of collaboration creates a universal language, responsibility, and the commitment of many agents, which can empower their region to create social change that adheres to the needs of the community at large.

### **District Level Policy Recommendations**

The data revealed two areas in which the school district could increase Latino familial college participation. First, school districts can identify existing policies, programs, and practices that may hinder Latino familial involvement within the school environment. Latino families' believed that high school counselors' unreasonable workloads limited the amount of time they spent in assisting their students. This finding

suggests that the school district should reexamine their case management approach to better support high school counselors and their workloads.

In addition to improving high school counselors' workloads, these families' proposed that the district increase its presence within the communities. They admitted that they would like to see school administrators and staff members outside of the school context and would like to see them possibly host college-related gatherings or other informational events within community buildings (e.g., fire station, community library, supermarket parking lots). This practice eliminates the existing isolation and creates neutral spaces where all families' across social classes and backgrounds can share knowledge related to college (Lareau, 2011).

Second, school districts can enhance how they communicate college-related information to Latino families'. Communication is essential to eliminate any misunderstandings between groups of individuals who hail from multiple contexts. The findings revealed that Latino families' had trouble in understanding complicated and complex college-related information and would appreciate it if the school district would communicate this information in more relatable and straightforward terms.

### **Limitations**

While this case study offered insights regarding Latino family involvement, it is important to address its limitations. The first limitation of this study is that it is limited to Latino families' who have experienced the college preparation process from a specific geographic location and from one school district. The second limitation of this study is a limitation based on the information retrieved from

documents, literature review, the researcher's observations, and participants' interviews, which may not highlight or discuss other aspects in the study to explain the phenomenon of interest. The next limitation of this study is that the sample of the study that captured the perceptions and experiences of families' with college degrees and in English is limited due to the stipulations of the IRB. Finally, given that the findings from this qualitative research study are not generalizable, the findings provided valuable insights into better understanding the experiences of Latino families' during the pre-college preparation process.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This study focused on examining the perceptions of Latino families' who hailed from a particular geographic region regarding how they made meaning of the expectations of college and the ways in which they prepared their children for college. However, interviewing both Latino families' and their children may highlight valuable insights regarding the misalignment between the families' and children in terms of their understanding of college. Being able to compare both groups' perspectives about college would offer insights for education agents on how to better assist these Latino families' and children in relation to college. In addition, perhaps expanding on the findings revealed in this study and interviewing families' from multiple independent school districts across this particular region will be of use to further research. Alternatively, expanding on the findings from this study and interviewing Latino families' from large metropolitan cities across the state of Texas to see if the experiences are similar could also be considered. While the issue regarding the Latino population being a monolithic

group is not new, it was difficult to reach a consensus on how these families' identify, given their personal experiences (Altschul, 2001; Ceja, 2004; Valencia, 2002). The study can explore how families' that live along the Texas-México borderlands make meaning of their identity. Lastly, expanding on the findings to identify other forms of cultural capital (i.e., immigrant capital) Latino family practices within non-educational contexts to prepare their children for college could also be beneficial to future research.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined Latino families' from a specific geographical location in terms of their perceptions and involvement in assisting their children in relation to college. The study aimed to shift the research lens and acknowledge the assets of cultural knowledge, skills, and the abilities of these families' preserved by underserved and underrepresented communities of color. The original intent of the theoretical frameworks utilized to analyze the data collected from the participants' interviews was to identify the various forms of capital involved in the pre-college-choice processes of children, and the absence of these children's families' warrants more attention in understanding their contributions, which go unrecognized in education research. The data collected from this study revealed that there is much more research to explore and make meaning of Latino families' contributions to educational contexts. The findings of the study highlight that there are many more nuances to discover within the Latino population. By working towards a more just educational system, our commitment to an increase in Latino familial participation in education must continue to recognize the strengths and rich cultural practices embedded in this marginalized community of color.



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## APPENDIX A

### RECRUITMENT DOCUMENTS

#### **Demographic Profile Sheet**

The Missing Piece in Education:  
Latino Families' Perceptions and Involvement in the College Preparation Process from  
the Rio Grande Valley

#### **Participant Demographic Profile**

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1. Please provide your first and last name?
1. What is your relationship to the child?
2. Which high school does your child attend?
3. What is your age?
4. How many family members live in your household?
5. How many dependents under the age of 18 live in your household?
6. What is your occupation?
7. What is the highest level of education completed?
  - ☐ Elementary
  - ☐ Middle school
  - ☐ High school
  - ☐ General Education Development or General Education Diploma (G. E. D)
  - ☐ Some college
  - ☐ associate's degree
  - ☐ bachelor's degree
  - ☐ master's degree
  - ☐ doctorate degree
8. How many members of your family are in college?
9. In what ways are you involved in the school district?
  - a. (Optional) Please provide your phone number or email address if you would like for me to follow up with you about this study:
  - b. Phone number:
  - c. Email address:

## **Recruitment Email**

Hello,

My name is Leticia Palomín, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development. As part of my fulfillment of the doctoral program, I am looking for potential Latino families' to participate in my research study. The title of my dissertation is, " The Missing Piece in Education: Latino Families' Perceptions and Involvement in the College Preparation Process from the Rio Grande Valley." You are invited to participate in this study because you have a son/daughter that is a freshman, sophomore, or junior within the school district. The purpose of the interview is to learn more about your thoughts and experiences on preparing your child for college. The findings from the interview will benefit your school district, local colleges, and community organizations to help increase Latino family involvement in the college process.

Your participation in the interview is very important! Please contact the school district representative if you would like to know more about the research study and if you would like to be interviewed.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Leticia Palomín

## Interview Questions

The Missing Piece in Education:  
Latino Families' Perceptions and Involvement in the College Preparation Process from  
the Rio Grande Valley

#	QUESTIONS
1.	Please introduce yourself, tell me about yourself, and what is your relationship to the student(s) enrolled at the school district?
2.	What are some of your hopes and dreams for your student(s)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• As a family member, what does success for your student look like to you?</li></ul>
3.	As a family member, what are some of your thoughts about your student(s) going to college?
4.	What do you think your student(s) needs from you as their family to help them go to college? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are some of the ways you have prepared your student for college?</li></ul>
5.	What are some of the ways you try to encourage or talk to your student(s) about college? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In what ways do you and your family help your student(s) with college?</li></ul>
6.	In your opinion, what are some reasons you and your family may or may not be involved in the school community?
7.	Thank you for all that valuable information, is there anything else you would like to add before we end our interview?

## Consent Form

Title of project: The Missing Piece in Education: Latino Families' Perceptions and Involvement in the College Preparation Process from the Rio Grande Valley

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**Dissertation Chair:** Dr. Luis Ponjuán, Associate Professor, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843, phone: 979-845-2701, email: luis.ponjuan@tamu.edu.

**The study is supported by** Texas A&M University- College Station, TX.

**Why are you being invited to take part in this study?**

You are being asked to take part in the study because you have a son or daughter that attends a high school at P-SJ-A school district. This project is about understanding how you help them go to college.

**What should you know about a research study?**

Someone will explain this research study to you. It is up to you whether you take part in this study. You can choose not to take part in the research study. You can agree to take part in this study and later change your mind. Your decision will not be held against you. You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

**How many people will be studied?**

We expect to enroll about 200 people in this research study at this site.

**How long will the study last?**

You will answer questions for about an hour. You will not get paid to answer questions.

**What happens if I say “yes,” I want to be in this study”?**

If you agree to be a part of this project, the interview will last about an hour. I give my permission for audio recording to be done during my participation in this study. The interview will be audio recorded to help with the study results.

**What happens if I do not want to be in this study?**

You are not required to participate. You can stop at any time. It will not be held against you. You may stop your participation at any time and without any harm.

**What happens to the information collected for this study?**

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and other records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete privacy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the TAMU HRPP/IRB and other representatives of this institution. You may call Texas A&M University by phone at 1-979-458-4067, toll-free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu) if you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about this project.

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Signature

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Date

---

Print name

---

Signature of interviewer

---

Date

## APPENDIX B

### TRANSLATION OF THE PARTICIPANT EXCERPTS

Patricia: Yo por mi madre. Mi madre fue una persona muy fuerte de carácter y ella me salió como salir adelante. Ella me decía si tú quieres algo pónelo y lo vas a lograr y ella venía de una familia que ella no se le dio la oportunidad estudiar. Ellos nunca tuvieron estudio y yo me dije a mí yo dije yo tengo la oportunidad. Yo puedo ser el cambio para mi familia que pueden a lograr ir al colegio.

Joel: Pues es muy importante.

Estela: Pensando así por decir en otras familias tal vez mucho depende de cómo fueron ellos creados. Los padres ósea no los hijos.

Estela: ... la esposa un poco y poder hablar con él oye es tu hijo también. Quiere tu atención. Quiere tu apoyo. Necesitas saber de él o de ellos. ¿Qué le gusta a él? Qué quiere él ósea que él se sienta motivado para poder hacer lo que realmente quiere en la vida. Lamentablemente depende también mucho en la educación que ellos tuvieron también. Porque ha uno no puede ser mucho o nada porque viene muy atrás.

Joel: Nosotros sabemos que es duro para ellos.

Estela: Hay pocas personas para tantos estudiantes. Es demasiado y no tienen la atención que deben de poner a los estudiantes.

Estela: Bueno pues gracias a Dios, en la escuela donde el esta va bien. Y lo andan apoyando muy bien. Este nos gusta sobre todo la escuela porque una de las razones por las cuales que ellos manejan. Es a una manera de que, así como se manejan ahí en la high school ya los están preparando para el colegio.