Spanish-Speaking Immigrant Parents and Their Children: Reflections on the Path to College

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Abstract:

Immigrant parents in a new cultural setting may experience both structural and individual barriers, which complicate the process of helping their children plan for college. Focus group interviews were conducted with 15 Spanish-speaking immigrant parents to highlight their perceptions and experiences. Critical humanism frames a counseling response to these concerns.

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Article:

Newcomers to the United States have a steep learning curve to navigate. Adaptation to U.S. culture is an intensive process that involves understanding language, customs and norms, laws, social systems, values, daily routines, and worldview (Chung, Bemak, Ortiz, & Sandoval-Perez, 2008). In addition, adults in immigrant families are often focused on providing for the basic needs of their families (e.g., food, shelter, safety) in an unfamiliar context (Maslow, 1943). In terms of motivation, many immigrant adults come to the United States to create a better life for their children via education or work (Hagelskamp, SuárezOrozco, & Hughes, 2010). Their typical aspirations are that their children will have opportunities for self-actualization, which are present in the host country (e.g., educational attainment, nonmanual labor, changes in social class or self-concept), even though the parents themselves may not have the same opportunities (Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson, 2013).

In humanist theoretical traditions, there are two lenses that may be used to consider the situation of immigrant families. Psychologist Carl Rogers (2012) described helping individuals self-actualize to create the "fullest versions of their lives" (Nemiroff, 1992, p. 38), while acknowledging to some degree the complexity of the social and cultural environments they inhabited. In contrast, critical theorist Paolo Freire (1970) emphasized the oppressive nature of social structures as he called for an emancipatory stance toward the disenfranchised groups in society, but perhaps he paid less attention to individual psychology. Nemiroff (1992) blended

both approaches into a framework of critical humanism, which addresses both the individual psychology of self-determination and the impact of unequal social structures on striving or self-actualizing. In critical humanism, people are perceived as capable and their individual aspirations are important, but structural barriers may impede their fullest expression of self (Brady-Amoon, 2011; Nemiroff, 1992). When immigrant parents experience such barriers, it becomes challenging for them to meet basic needs or address the self-actualization of their children.

Even though immigrant parents have strengths based in their cultural traditions, they may experience a host of barriers to educational involvement at both the individual and the social/structural level. For example, traditional Latino cultural values might indicate that parents should focus on the home, raising children with good values and character, and that educational professionals should be left in charge of college and career planning (Auerbach, 2007). In this way, individual beliefs might limit the extent to which immigrant parents become involved with their children's educational planning and self-actualization. Immigrant parents may also feel uncertain of their ability to advise their children about educational matters or to interact effectively with school personnel because of a lack of personal experience (Sosa, 1997).

In addition, some barriers are structural. Freire (1970) highlighted social systems, including schools, that reproduced the existing power structures and kept some groups isolated and disenfranchised. Contemporary researchers have examined structural barriers to involvement, such as lack of access to computer-based educational information, English language fluency, available child care or time away from work to attend meetings at school, and limited transportation (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Sosa, 1997). Parents who have not participated in the U.S. postsecondary educational system themselves do not have the same knowledge of the steps and procedures as other parents do (Fann, Jarsky, & McDonough, 2009; Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002). Concerns about documented status, finances, and discrimination are present for some immigrant parents as well (Edwards & Romero, 2008; Motel & Patten, 2013).

The studies cited have created a framework for thinking about the barriers to parental participation in college planning (and other tasks) with their children, but few have highlighted the perspectives and voices of the immigrant parents themselves. An exception is the series of compelling ethnographic studies on educational participation conducted by Auerbach (2002, 2004, 2006) in Los Angeles. Her participants were immigrant parents, but they were living in a city and state with a long history of Latino presence and a high percentage of Latino families. Thus, we hope to fill a gap in the literature by attending to Latino parent voices in an emerging immigrant context, in which families have fewer existing resources to draw on in their communities and greater structural challenges.

Our study sought to describe the experience of Spanish-speaking immigrant parents as they prepared to assist their children in the educational planning process. This task requires both child and parent aspirations for self-actualization via a college degree and knowledge of how to interact with the sociopolitical structure of U.S. higher education. Thus, our study exemplifies a challenging task for immigrant families within a critical humanistic framework (e.g., both individual and systemic issues; Nemiroff, 1992). This study has a broader importance because it may also inform counselors or advocates working with other marginalized groups who aspire to

self-actualize but struggle to access structural resources in education, work, and mental or physical health. Because of the limited research on emerging immigrant communities and our interest in uncovering hidden narratives, a qualitative methodology was appropriate to focus on the perspectives of the participants (Hunt, 2011).

Method

Recruitment

We made contact with several Spanish-speaking individuals who provided resources to Latino immigrant parents in a southeastern state with an emerging Latino population. Two of these community contacts—a pastor of a church and a program director of a community agency—agreed to hold a focus group at their sites. Following institutional review board (IRB) approval, we distributed recruitment materials describing the purpose of the focus groups in Spanish, and the community contacts spoke with individuals who might be willing to participate. Spanish-speaking parents with children in Grades 8 to 12 were invited to provide their perspectives and experiences, and they were informed that child care, refreshments, and a small gift card would be available to them. Because of the possibility of undocumented legal status in the participant pool, the organizers did not share any participant information with us but directed interested parents to be present at the focus group location on the date and time indicated. We came to the church and the community agency to allow the parents to stay in a familiar environment during the focus groups.

Participants

In the first focus group, seven Spanish-speaking immigrant parents (both mothers and fathers) were present at their church. Two participants were from Colombia, two from Honduras, one from Argentina, one from Mexico, and one from Peru. Only two of the children discussed during this focus group were born in the United States. On average, the parents had lived 14 years in the United States, with a range of 7 to 21 years. These parents reported fairly high levels of formal education; most had completed a few years of university or an associate's or technical degree, and one had finished 12th grade. Five reported speaking both English and Spanish at home, whereas two spoke only in Spanish. All seven parents indicated that they were able to use some English when they wished to speak with their children's teachers.

In the second focus group, eight Spanish-speaking immigrant mothers and fathers were present at a community service agency. All were originally from Mexico. Only two of the families had children who were born in the United States. This group also had an average of 14 years living in the United States, with a range from 9 to 20 years. Parents reported a slightly lower level of formal education in this group, with only two having studied in college. The remaining six parents attained an education between fourth and 10th grade. Only one parent spoke both English and Spanish at home; the rest spoke Spanish only. They used a combination of Spanish, English, or interpreters to communicate with their children's schools.

Research Team

Both facilitators of the focus groups (i.e., first and second authors) were bilingual counselor educators; one was a Latino man born in the United States, and the other was a European American woman with family ties to the Latino community. The facilitators participated in a bracketing exercise in which they wrote down their assumptions or biases that could influence the focus group interview or the subsequent coding of themes. They identified concerns that the parents might misunderstand the facilitators or be misunderstood by them (linguistically), that the parents might have little information about college planning to reflect on but would likely state high aspirations, that the offer of gift cards might seem disrespectful, that undocumented individuals (if present) might not trust the facilitators, that our university affiliation might distance us from the participants, and that most participants would have less social privilege than the facilitators. The bracketing was shared to minimize the impact on data gathering and interpretation. The third author assisted with the organization of the focus groups and served as auditor.

Interview Materials

The university IRB approved the questions in the interview protocol, and we wrote these questions to learn the following: (a) parents' aspirations for their children's educational attainment; (b) parents' current efforts to facilitate postsecondary aspirations; (c) college-planning resources the parents had identified or used, including people, materials, and programs; and (d) supports, barriers, concerns, and areas of strength the parents had identified during their efforts to support their children in college planning. The research team generated the questions, which were based on our knowledge and experience of the college planning process and on literature reflecting the ways that immigrant parents might be excluded from participating. We implemented the interview protocol with fidelity, but there was natural variation in the responses in each group.

Procedure

The facilitators conducted both focus groups in Spanish, the preferred language of the participants. Parents were provided an oral version of the informed consent, because the requirement for signed consent had been waived by IRB. These verbal consents and the entire focus group proceedings were audio recorded. Parents were given participant numbers to identify themselves on the demographic sheet and when they spoke, so no names were obtained. One of the facilitators convened the meeting, asking the focus group questions and directing follow-up inquiries. The second facilitator observed group process to ensure that each person had contributed at some point and that the interview protocol was completed. At the end of the focus group, facilitators gave a $25 gift card to each participant as a token of appreciation, along with materials related to college access and financial aid. The facilitators determined that similar themes had emerged in each focus group except for some site-specific differences, and thus the data were saturated.

Analysis

A vendor transcribed and translated the transcripts into English. Then, we analyzed the transcripts using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA; Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty,

& Hendry, 2011; Smith, 2004). We selected IPA because of two assumptions: (a) The Latino immigrant community contains multiple lived realities, which could be best described directly by participants and (b) we could play a role in organizing those experiences, given our greater familiarity with the cultural setting (Hays & Wood, 2011; Pringle et al., 2011).

The two facilitators followed the steps in the IPA coding process independently, using previous IPA research with focus groups as a guide (Adams, Rodham, & Gavin, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008). First, we read the transcripts multiple times, making written comments in the left-hand margin about what seemed to be most significant or important about the participant statements. These comments were condensed summaries of the participant language, but not interpretations. Second, we reviewed those written comments, identifying nonoverlapping discrete statements. Written comments were made in the right-hand margin to capture the essence of the participants' words, including noted similarities or differences. These were the emergent themes.

Next, we listed the emergent themes on a new sheet of paper, and each coder independently clustered them into superordinate themes (e.g., structural description; Hays & Wood, 2011). We then met to discuss our lists of emergent and superordinate themes for each focus group and came to a consensus about the meaning and structure of what had been captured. The previous bracketing exercise was reviewed at these meetings to guard against personal bias during interpretation.

To enhance trustworthiness of the coding process, the research team forwarded the transcripts and the themes to the auditor (Creswell & Miller, 2000), who verified that all stated themes were reasonable interpretations of the participants' words and that no important material had gone unattended. The consensus process between the two coders/facilitators was another form of validation, especially because both individuals had experienced the focus groups first hand and could recall the intonation or nonverbal expression of the participants. Because of the translation from Spanish to English, the bilingual coders also verified that the basic meaning of the participants had been preserved throughout. We invited the two community contacts who had organized the groups to review the final themes and comment, but neither opted to do so. Most important, the words of the participants are presented directly in the findings so that readers can access them and evaluate the trustworthiness of the coding.

Findings

The superordinate themes that emerged from the focus groups were (a) structural barriers to college access, (b) supports to college access, (c) parents' experiences with schools, (d) parents' self-expectations, and (e) feelings about their children. Each of these also contained emergent themes, which will be described.

Structural Barriers to College Access

Documentation status. Although we did not specifically inquire about undocumented status, parents volunteered that legal documentation could be a barrier. One parent acknowledged, "For me, the biggest obstacle is his immigration status." Even when students are U.S. citizens, the legal status of their parents can be a cause for concern (e.g., possible deportation of wage-earning

adults, fears about completing applications for financial aid without social security numbers). For example, one parent indicated that teachers "told my oldest son in seventh grade that he was never going to succeed because he had undocumented parents." Federal and state policies related to educational access for undocumented students were mentioned in one of the groups:

> Unfortunately, this is a country of systems, and if we don't become part of the system, it's going to be very hard. We are learning that the legal part might be omitted depending on the kids' effort[s]. There are doors that are being opened … with the Dream Act, so in the future, those who excel may be given opportunit[ies].

Language barrier. Parents were also aware of their status as English learners and how that limited their communications with the schools. Even with the range of language acquisition present in the two focus groups, parents were aware of how language barriers affected the community as a whole. One parent commented, "They should have Spanish counselors and offer assistance to parents when they go to school, because, for example, when I go to the meetings, I see some parents completely lost." Another parent stated,

> Sometimes we want to express ourselves; we want to ask and honestly we don't understand. What little we can understand … we can't speak. So what's better than communication in your own language, that one can express what we feel, the needs we have.

Access to information. Related to language barriers, parents indicated that they did not have accurate information about postsecondary education in the United States, or that the information they did have was limited and late in coming. Specific concerns mentioned were barriers in access to technology and the lack of bilingual outreach by school professionals to provide information directly to parents. For example, one parent indicated, "There are few institutions and little help for the institutions that help us Hispanics." Another parent said, "We talked about scholarships through online searching, but there are many, many Hispanics that don't have the time to be on the computer, especially if they don't know how to use it." Another participant suggested that school outreach with college planning information should ideally be personalized, and many other parents agreed: "For me it is better face to face, in person. Over the phone is so impersonal. Personally, I think it's better. It would be the right way." Some parents felt isolated from the schools, noting, "What I would ask is for the information to reach us. If there's going to be a meeting for parents, that they inform us by phone not only on paper."

Financial burden. As reflected in the literature, financial concerns are often prominent for recent immigrants, especially those who are working in hourly wage positions. This caused stress for parent participants on both material and emotional levels:

> To pay for a university and there are two [children]. It's too difficult. Sometimes as parents we get depressed because how can we help our kids economically. It's hard. We have no way. So what do you do when the kids want to study?

Underscoring the immigrant optimism that has been documented in the literature (Perreira, Harris, & Lee, 2006), a parent from the church focus group tried to stay hopeful even while acknowledging the pressure of financial limitations:

> I know that the program in law is very expensive, but I leave this in the hands of God, and I tell [my son] to keep going and do whatever he wants; if he wants to study that, and if that is God's plan, he will do it. I don't know how we are going to do because of the money, but I'm sure something good is going to happen in the future.

Supports to College Access

Participants in the two focus groups had different perceptions about the current supports for parents seeking college access for their children. Those who came to the community resource center were more specific in their ideas about supports, perhaps because of the baseline of information they had received from the program director there, because educational access is part of the mission of the community center.

Mentors and role models. The community center parents mentioned a network of adult friends or older students who advised each other based on their own experiences (e.g., identifying a local community college that allowed dual enrollment with the high school and had the academic program of interest for one student). One parent said of her son, "He hangs out with many persons who orient him; they help him and support him." Parents also instructed children to be role models to their siblings, as shown in the quote, "You have to be an example. You have to do well because you have younger siblings and they are watching you."

Helpful programs. The program director at the community center had clearly been identified as an important source of information and mentoring for a disenfranchised population. One parent captured the spirit of many comments about the center, stating, "Thanks to the [Latino community center] that supports [my children], orients them. This is their second home, one could say. When we can't, they are there." When asked directly about what programs or resources they were aware of that could support educational access, the parents at the church mentioned a school policy handbook translated into Spanish and an AmeriCorps community service program. The focus group facilitator mentioned the names of several college access resources, but the parents did not seem familiar with them. Perhaps because of this lack of familiarity with resources, one parent responded to the question instead with an impassioned statement about the United States as a land of opportunity: "But it's up to us if we want to take them or not." This parent exhorted the other participants to get involved with the local schools regardless of their level of English literacy, saying, "We cannot limit ourselves just because we don't speak the language; we should educate ourselves, and they should teach us; there should be workshops for parents from elementary to high school."

Need to plan ahead. The parents at the church showed an awareness of the need to become familiar with the educational structure and to plan ahead as one step in supporting the educational dreams of their children:

Number one, we come here knowing nothing about the system … we cannot understand anything, so I think that in order to help the Hispanic parents, there should be some kind of orientation in middle school. You have to know what courses your child needs to take in order to go to college.

Parents' Experiences With Schools

Staff are helpful. For many, an interpreter mediated interactions with school personnel, functioning as a gatekeeper: "When I speak during conferences, there are always interpreters. I get along very well with the interpreters from the schools of all three boys." Both groups also had some positive experiences to report with both teachers and school counselors. One parent stated, "My son's counselor, I think, has been positive. He told him which things helped him more to become what he wants to be. He said it himself that he has been a positive influence." Another parent added,

> Many have supported us. [My children] tell me that they go to the counselor, the teachers, everyone supports them, gives them [guidance]. They tell them to move forward because they have to find a future, think about the future. So we are very grateful to all of the people that support them.

Negative experiences with staff. Unfortunately, parents also had some negative experiences to report with a variety of school personnel. One example was biased or discriminatory statements, as exemplified by the following statement: "A teacher that always referred to them as Mexicans, she didn't care where they were from … she told them I don't know why you come here and don't learn, don't study, and don't pay taxes." The parent who reported that incident went on to state, "My son didn't know at that point that he wasn't born in this country but nevertheless he felt bad. I'm not saying that she influenced him badly but that's not something a teacher should say."

Another parent described going with her son to a meeting at the community college, saying,

> My son told him the truth, "I don't have a green card, but I want to study; how can I enroll as an in-state student?" and he said that he was a fraud, that it is better if he goes back to Mexico. He stood up and closed the door; he threw him out.

Even when discrimination was not as obviously present, there were still some mixed experiences in terms of communication between the schools and parents around student experiences. For example, a parent relayed,

> I had, well, my oldest son had a bad experience with a classmate in middle school … but his teacher never took care of it. I contacted his counselor, and she said she was going to talk to this kid but she never did. One day my son was fed up and got into a fight with this kid. When they got into this fight, my son was the bad guy in this movie, and he got expelled. They never listened to us. I didn't know what to do. It was a huge trauma for my son and for the family too. I wanted to talk to the principal, but every time he saw me, he hid from me. I guess because he saw that I was Hispanic, I don't know.

In that case, the parent was finally able to get an appointment with the principal because the English as a second language (ESL) director interceded on her behalf. The parent stated, "I speak very good English, my husband is a U.S. citizen, so we didn't need to have an interpreter, but if it wasn't for [the ESL director], we wouldn't have been able to schedule an appointment."

The parents also described mixed interactions with the school counselors. One parent noticed that Spanish had disappeared from her son's schedule, so she called and requested that it be changed, but the school counselor did not follow through:

> I had to go to school every time; I could say that I bothered her all the time, but I was trying to motivate her or make her understand my concerns, until one day, I don't know if I got tired or she did, but she finally agreed to fix the schedule. I don't know if the counselor was lazy or worse, but honestly she did not help my son.

Another parent described her interaction with the high school counselor who wanted to place her son in remedial courses, and she had to show that she had read the handbook and knew the appropriate course sequence to be eligible for college. "It was very difficult for the counselor to understand that he was going to college," she recounted, "because here there is a lack of credibility; schools believe that because they are Hispanics, they are not going to go to college." The parent drew the conclusion that parents can continue to motivate their children, but it will be harder because if "the school is holding them back, all our work and dedication is lost."

Of note, the parents began to offer support to each other after hearing the stories of discrimination. Another participant responded to the parent who had spoken about her son's experience, saying,

> Perhaps that will help [your son] very much to gather strength from what he felt, what he heard. Perhaps that will encourage him more to say, "I can do it; I will show them that I will succeed." I can imagine that he was hurt at the time, but maybe it will help him more than what they intended to put him down.

Parents' Self-Expectations

Encourage, support, and motivate. Parents identified common and divergent themes, perhaps tied to the particulars of the sites, related to expectations about their roles in supporting their children. Parents in both focus groups spoke often of the importance of motivating their children, encouraging them in any way possible. One parent said, "I think this is very important for our children—to give them always that enthusiasm." They also seemed aware of limits to their encouragement, as reflected in the statement, "We support them; we help them financially and morally, but there are things that we cannot give them, which is legal status, and that is when they get stuck." Another parent echoed the importance of motivation, saying,

> I don't understand why kids don't finish school [so] I told [my son], "I hope this will not be your case, don't even think about it, because in any case you are going to finish high school and you are going to finish college, because, nowadays, you are nothing if you

don't have your diploma in your hands; you will end up collecting garbage or something like that and that is not good."

Model perseverance. The parents used their difficult life stories to model persistence and perseverance to their children and provide lessons to encourage and instruct:

We come from poor families; I come from a family where my mom completed only fifth grade, my father only finished fourth grade of elementary school, but despite our poverty, I completed my degree, with a lot of sacrifice and everything, so we have always focused on telling our children that we come from generations to be better, they have to be better.

The parents at the church also emphasized the importance of hard work and effort in creating a good future despite adversity, summarized by one parent as, "If we don't give our last effort, we are not going to move forward." Another parent said,

I also set an example by studying English and showing her how to try hard, because it is hard for me to work since I have three daughters, my house, my job, going to classes, going to meetings…. Sometimes we [parents] have to sacrifice our own things to show them that we know they are going to be big. Since they are small, we have taught them that "no" doesn't work, we have to keep going.

Monitor child's behavior. The participants in both groups also were diligent about monitoring their children's activities, even when that meant working around language barriers or transportation difficulties, as in the following example:

When they go to class, I always go to meet all the new teachers. Then, I don't have the opportunity to go to school because I can't drive, but I call. I ask them about how their grades are [and] if they have missed school; if they are behind, I am aware, too.

The parents also reflected on monitoring as an ongoing expression of care:

Even [for] my daughter [who] is already in college, I still ask her, "How are you doing in school? Do you have a lot of work to do? Do you need anything, do you need help?" and sometimes she says, "Yes, I'm reading a book, and I need to write a paper about the book; I would like you to listen." Those are the moments when a father helps [his] children, even if they are already in college.

Recognize options and advise. A theme that was unique to the church group was recognizing opportunities that might be available to their families, even in unfamiliar contexts. One parent realized how magnet schools could be beneficial:

When my daughter completed elementary school, her English had improved a lot; she was doing pretty good; I used to get a lot of information from magnet schools, and I didn't pay attention because I didn't know what it was about. When my daughter was in seventh grade, I started to understand everything, and I said, "No, something is going on here."

Another parent learned about the legal requirements to start a new business, as exemplified in the following statement:

> OK, so this is something we can do [regardless of legal status]; our children can get a degree and establish their own business. Just have the ITIN number … so we have to know how to approach our children, help them find what they want to study, help them create their own company, not depend on being an employee.

Keep cultural identity. The parents at the church discussed how to model their heritage culture in the family while also adjusting to U.S. culture:

> It's very important we respect the rules, the lifestyles, the traditions of the place where we are right now, but we are never going to lose our roots and everything we have with us; we present it to [the children]; they are going to see that "I want to go to school to get my GED, but I have to work for you guys."

Wish I could do more. The parents in the community center offered a slightly contrasting view. Perhaps because they had lower levels of formal education in their own countries, they expressed some hesitation about how they could contribute to their children's educational success here. For example, one person shared, "I can't say that I've done much right, because of the language that, honestly, sometimes prevents one from being more involved than one should with our children." One parent reflected, "The question they [children] ask us is 'and what is going to happen tomorrow?' We [as parents] don't even know what to answer, and that is a big barrier that Latinos have here."

When asked how they were helping their children reach their goals, another parent diminished her own contributions when she said, "The first step, baby steps, we found him a school thanks to some friends. Those were the baby steps we started taking, but most of it he has done himself." Another parent shared an insight:

> I am also new to all of this. I thought that working was only to give them money for school, but I realized that my daughter needs me to be next to her, supporting her and helping her look for institutions.

Education is our legacy. The community center parents emphasized the following: "That is the best inheritance that our kids can have, what we didn't have. That they have the opportunity with their status, that it's not an impediment. That by making an effort they can get ahead." Several parents agreed with the idea that education would be one of the few things under their children's control, and thus would be a way to ensure their movement forward in the future. Another parent stated, "It doesn't matter what it is they study, only that it's good. Something that in the future—by studying and working—will allow them to go as far as they want. That's what is important to me."

Feelings About Their Children

Child as self-advocate. The parent participants in both groups were hopeful about their children's futures; they felt that their children had great potential as individuals and that the opportunity presented by being in the United States was key. Parents were also realistic that their children were not going to have their futures handed to them but would need to do their part to make it happen. The participants felt that their children would need to be resilient and motivated, seek their own information, and be their own advocates. For example, one parent indicated, "If they work hard, I think they give them their scholarship. But they have to look for it, and we have to support them in their studies more than anything." Another parent noted, "I have always told my children to look for the resources; if they look and if they do their own research, they are going to be good professionals; those are the keys." This ethic of finding one's own way was rooted in the parents' own life stories, reflecting typical themes in immigrant families:

> My parents never went to school; both of them lived always in the countryside; I was born in the countryside, but, at some point, all of the sudden, I realized that there is something I needed to do to change this situation. I say that we have to cut the chains from generation to generation; we cannot say that "because my parents didn't study, I'm not going to study"—"You are different and this world needs you to be well educated"— I mean, this is how I personally encourage [my children], and the other part has to do with the students' effort, right? And we have to be there too.

Worry about children. The participants also acknowledged some concern about what could happen to their children if they did leave home to go to college. They worried about negative influences that could sway a young adult or about bad choices the children might make because of youth and naiveté. This concern was especially poignant because of the differences between the context in which the participants had grown up and the cultural setting in which their children were currently living. For example, it is more customary for youth in Latin America to live with their parents well into their adulthood, whereas participants noted that "here, when [children] just start high school and look forward to turning 18 and living without their parents. For us, we want to see [them] and check on [them]."

Discussion

The position of Latino immigrant parents is a challenging one; they aspire to high educational goals and self-actualization for their children and are key influences in their lives, but they may have little access to the social structures needed to facilitate those aspirations (Gonzalez et al., 2013). In terms of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, legal status or the acculturation process and confronting daily needs constrained these parents, but they hoped that their children could live up to their fullest potential, finding belonging and self-actualization through education. The findings presented in this study reinforce the framework of critical humanism as relevant (Nemiroff, 1992). All of the barriers to college planning that were described by the parents could be understood as structural barriers, yet simultaneously, the parents described expectations about their individual roles in encouraging, motivating, advising, and demonstrating through hard work how their children could create a more fulfilling future. Critical humanism gives counselors the language to describe and address both types of barriers experienced by immigrant families.

The list of the parents' expectations of themselves provides a window into their approach to the challenge of educational access and "the American Dream." The parents fully acknowledged that both they and their children needed to "find their own way" and be highly motivated, responsible, and resilient in pursuit of their aspirations. This parallels the Rogerian idea of self-determination, whereby individuals would draw on their inner resources and authentic selves to start to transcend external limitations (Nemiroff, 1992). The participants were resilient; however, their lack of familiarity with the U.S. educational system created doubts and fears as they considered how best to help their children. In this way, a critical consciousness of the structural barriers that were impeding their progress could perhaps lessen their sense of powerlessness or frustration and help them generate a more effective strategy for self-determination (Freire, 1970). The supports mentioned by the parents (e.g., helpful mentors, bilingual programs in the community) were not widely or systematically available, but rather were encountered through happenstance. Consequently, their desire for linguistically and culturally relevant resources was palpable, underscoring the lack of structural supports in an emerging immigrant locale and the need for counselors to function as advocates.

The frequent mention of structural barriers was another important theme in the findings. Structural barriers included documentation and English fluency for some participants, and low levels of money and information for all participants. In addition, the negative experiences these participants described when attempting to interact with the school system were painful and discouraging. Discrimination increases the risk of depressive symptoms, isolation from needed services, and lowered esteem and future aspirations (Edwards & Romero, 2008; Huynh & Fuligni, 2010; Stone & Han, 2005; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). In language similar to parents in previous studies, participants described feeling excluded, silenced, alienated, and powerless in their interactions with school personnel, with particular mention of unsupportive teachers and counselors as "gatekeepers" who would not help low socioeconomic status Latino students and families with college preparation (Auerbach, 2002; Martinez, Cortez, & Saenz, 2013). In particular, discrimination resonates with Freire's (1970) critique of individual humanism that some individuals do not have access, choice, and autonomy to be self-determining within an unequal social power structure. Thus, counselors can take on advocacy with immigrant families, helping to identify individual and structural barriers, while also building a critical consciousness to surmount these barriers (Holcomb-McCoy & Bryan, 2010).

This study supports critical humanism as a framework for counselors. It juxtaposes critical or liberation pedagogies, which emphasize sociopolitical structures, with individual humanism, which notes the barriers but focuses on self-determination and the authentic self. In other words, both individual empowerment and social advocacy could be useful (Brady-Amoon, 2011). Sosa (1997) indicated that one key way to support Latino parents as capable educational advocates is to equip them with what they are missing, thus providing immigrant Latino parents with needed tools so that they can be both inspirational and informational in their interactions with their children.

Implications

There are several specific suggestions for practice and research that emerge from these findings, which will help counselors consider how to support immigrant families as they strive toward

their goals. Critical humanism is useful for understanding immigrant families as they strive to address inequalities in the social power structure while also maintaining their aspirations to move beyond those barriers. In supporting immigrant families at the individual level, counselors and mental health specialists can provide resources and support for acculturation as a long-term process of adaptation, and thus minimize distress (Chung et al., 2008). Participants in this study described moments of discouragement and frustration because of language barriers, financial stressors, cultural isolation, and discrimination. However, these parents also described providing individual support in the form of encouragement, advice, motivation, and sustained cultural legacy for their children. These supports can be reframed as strategies by counselors and then implemented within mental health services for the immigrant community. For example, practitioners could convene an immigrant parent support group or identify mentors and role models who could provide guidance and empowerment within the community, just as the parents in this study started to do at the end of the focus groups. Following this process has the additional benefit of allowing service providers to hear the concerns that are present in the community and consider the manner in which immigrant families may be experiencing social inequities or discrimination.

At the structural level, counselors and other practitioners can provide consultation to parents that informs and empowers them individually and collectively, and can work to remove structural barriers through advocacy initiatives (Holcomb-McCoy & Bryan, 2010). For example, within a K–12 school setting, counselors could continue to work with teachers and administrators to minimize the presence of bias and discrimination in the services provided. In addition, by recognizing immigrant students' and families' barriers to access, counselors can organize bilingual social and educational outreach programs for them. Counselors working in community agencies could seek to identify and partner with local organizations that are providing native language services to immigrant families (e.g., the community center program director) to learn about cultural values and barriers to accessing services. Regardless of the clinical setting, the support services provided to clients from immigrant communities should respect the capabilities already present and be offered in a way that is respectful and culturally congruent (Gonzalez et al., 2013).

Limitations of the current study include the possibility of researcher influence in facilitating the focus groups, even though due diligence was given to try to limit that bias. In addition, the program administrators identified focus group participants who would be likely to attend, which influenced the sample; it is possible that experiences of other Spanish-speaking parents would be different. The current findings could promote further research related to building critical consciousness within immigrant parent communities in support of their children's postsecondary options. Research questions could address both individual and structural barriers, particularly within an emerging immigrant community.

The current study provides a starting place for understanding the educational involvement concerns of immigrant parents and for framing a response using critical humanism. Using a both–and mind-set, counselors can identify systemic barriers to address via advocacy (e.g., digital divide, monolingual communication practices, laws regarding educational access and documentation) and individual strengths to promote in empowering immigrant families (e.g., family loyalty, hard work and perseverance, optimism, cultural legacy).

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