

Spring 2018

Investing in Future Generations: Realities and Goals of Latino Immigrant Families

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Investing in Future Generations: Realities and Goals of Latino Immigrant Families

Abstract

Considering education as a gateway to opportunity and upward mobility in the United States, this study pursued a process of qualitative methodology to gain insights about the experiences, goals, and aspirations of first-generation Mexican immigrant parents, related to the education of their children, in two communities in a rural Midwestern state. Data from focus group interviews with various members of families—first-generation Mexican immigrant mothers, fathers, and their children—were analyzed through Thematic Analysis. Findings from this study contribute to the literature focused on resilience among Mexican immigrant families and suggest needs for ethnographic and longitudinal studies to monitor families' progress in securing positive futures for their children and future generations.

Keywords

Mexican immigrants, Latino immigrant families in the Midwest, Latino educational aspirations, community-based studies, thematic analysis, focus groups

Disciplines

Family, Life Course, and Society | Human Ecology | Latin American Studies | Migration Studies | Race and Ethnicity | Regional Sociology

Comments

This accepted article is published as Greder, Kimberly and Jordan A. Arellanes. "Investing in Future Generations: Realities and Goals of Latino Immigrant Families." *Diálogo*, vol. 21 no. 1, 2018, p. 89-100. doi:10.1353/dlg.2018.0008. Posted with permission.

Investing in Future Generations: Realities and Goals of Latino Immigrant Families

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Investing in Future Generations

Abstract

Education is a gateway to opportunity and upward mobility in the United States. Qualitative methodology guided this study to gain insight into the aspirations and experiences related to education of first-generation Mexican immigrant families in two communities in a Midwestern state. Data from focus group interviews with first-generation Mexican immigrant mothers, fathers, and their children were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings from this study contribute to literature focused on resilience among Mexican immigrant families, and suggest a need for ethnographic and longitudinal studies to monitor families' progress in securing positive futures for their children and future generations.

Key words: Mexican immigrants, aspirations, Midwest, education, future generations

Introduction

Approximately half of the total population growth in the United States and in the Midwest over the past decade was due to growth of the Latino population (54%, 49% respectively) (Stepler & Lopez, 2016). Latinos comprise 17.1% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates), and will make up 28.6% of the U.S. population by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Most studies that have focused on the Latino population have studied Latinos who live in states that have either long-standing or large proportion Latino populations, or both. Fewer studies have specifically focused on first-generation Latino immigrants who reside in Midwestern communities. In the Midwest, 75

percent of Latinos originate from Mexico (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates).

In the U.S., formal educational attainment is a gateway to access opportunities, achieve financial stability, and to ensure a high quality of life (Chávez, Englebrecht, López, Viramontez Anguiano, & Reyes, 2013; Achinstein, Curry, & Ogawa, 2015; Roubeni, De Haene, Keatley, Shah, & Rasmussen, 2015). Individuals who do not have a high school diploma are more likely to be poor, whereas individuals who have a college degree are more likely to be employed (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates). In 2016, almost one-third (31.6%) of Latinos age 25 and older did not have a high school diploma or GED compared to 10.9% of the U.S. population age 25 and older. Additionally, almost one-fourth (23.8%) of Latinos age 25 and older had completed a post-secondary degree compared to 43.5% of the U.S. population age 25 and older (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

Even though closing the achievement gap has remained at the core of the national educational goals, Latinos have never met the national average (Guzman, Jara, & Armet, 2011). One strategy to help make strides in closing the achievement gap is to learn from families. Understanding families' values, beliefs and priorities, especially regarding what they want for their children and educational goals they have for their children, can help inform policies and practices to better promote learning and educational attainment (Patel, Barrera, Strambler, Muñoz, & Macciomei, 2016).

Most studies have primarily relied on quantitative methodology to identify patterns and to understand generalities regarding educational attainment among Latinos (Delgado Gaitan, 1992).

However, qualitative inquiry can provide insights into the circumstances and behaviors of families, which in turn can be helpful to understanding family and community processes that enable or inhibit family prosperity and educational attainment (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995). In this study, we sought to gain insight into the educational aspirations and experiences of Mexican first generation immigrant parents and their children who reside in a Midwestern state. We specifically explored hopes and dreams of fathers, mothers, and their children regarding what they want for their children's futures. We then describe the supports and barriers they experienced in working toward their goals.

Background

Latinos in the Midwest

The faces of many Midwestern communities have changed over the past several years as immigrant populations moved not only to cities, but also to small towns in the Midwest. Latinos initially moved to the Midwest at the turn of the twentieth century and again in the early 1990s following implementation of the Immigration Reform and Citizenship Act of 1986 (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.) and as corporations traveled to Mexico and other Latin American countries to recruit workers. During and following the Great Recession, Latinos left cities in search of better employment and lower cost of living (Parson, Palacios, Guzman, & Reyes, 2011; Chávez, López, Englebrecht, & Viramontez Anguiano, 2012). Up to 42% of newly immigrated families after the Great Recession in the Midwest had less than a high school diploma (Reyes & Guzmán, 2011). Additionally, the political landscape made it increasingly difficult for Latino immigrant families to adapt to their new communities (Chávez, et al., 2012; Tobe, Ames, & Carolan, 2016). Increased national security created more hardships for Latinos as

they, regardless of citizenship or legal residence status, faced increased subjection to discrimination and hostile rhetoric within the Midwest and across the country (Chávez & Provine, 2009; Lee & Ahn, 2012; Viramontez Anguiano, Reyes, & Chávez, 2013).

As a result, engaging first-generation Latino immigrants in research studies can be difficult due to lack of trust of government, immigration concerns, and lack of English proficiency (Guttmannova, 2016). Studies show that many Latino immigrant families view education as a primary means by which they can reconstruct their lives for a better future (Achinstein, Curry & Ogawa, 2015; Vesely, Goodman, Ewaida, & Kearney, 2015), as education can help to change financial and social constructs that hold them back (Alfaro, & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Patel et al., 2016). However, while Latino parents desire for their children to be educationally successful, many parents are unable or unaware of how to best serve their children due to economic, legal, and educational barriers, as many have not participated in formal schooling themselves (Behnke, Taylor, & Parra-Cardona, 2008; Delgado Gaitan, 1992). Youth of immigrant parents who have low levels of educational attainment commonly face difficulties in the educational system as their parents may not know how or whom to ask for help (Free, Križ, & Konecnik. 2014; Patel, et al., 2016).

Implications of Immigration for Future Generations

When children are born in a country different from their parents, there is more variance in the primary language spoken at home, which in turn, usually leads to children behaving differently from their parents (Perez-Brena, Updegraff, & Umaña-Taylor, 2014). This difference may cause conflict between parents and youth. Emphasizing cultural values, while at the same time recognizing mainstream values, and focusing on positive family relationships can help

immigrant families become resilient as they adapt to life in their new communities. In turn, this adaptation can lead to better educational outcomes for youth (Taylor & Behnke, 2005; Chávez, et al., 2012; Roubeni et al., 2015). Thus, transitioning and acculturating to a new country can be difficult and may take multiple generations to fully integrate within the society (Ivlevs & King, 2012; Ruiz & Roosa, 2002).

Influence of Mothers and Fathers on Children's Education

Latino immigrant parents care a great deal about their children's education (Delgado Gaitan, 1992). Children who have positive relationships with their immigrant parents experience stronger cultural identities. Both of these factors are related to positive child adjustment and educational outcomes (Rodriguez, Umaña-Taylor, Smith, & Johnson, 2009; Perez-Brena, Updegraff, & Umaña-Taylor, 2014). Coley and Schinder (2008) found that the more support Latino immigrant fathers gave to mothers, the more mothers were able to be involved in their children's education. Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley, and Roggman (2014) found that Latino immigrant parents complemented each other's actions and stated flexibility was key for successful parenting of their children. While both fathers and mothers report similar interactions pertaining to the educational development of their children (Alfaro, & Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Vesely, et al., 2015), there are aspects of parenting practices related to education that remain gender dependent.

Mothers. Latina immigrant mothers commonly view their caregiving role as a source of strength and power that can influence their children's education. However, socioeconomic status and literacy levels of Latina immigrant mothers, which are largely influenced by documentation status and educational attainment (Vesely, et al., 2015), along with family supports, influence

mothers' abilities to contribute to their children's education. The ability to read and understand a child's homework helps parents support their children's learning, and promotes personal development and health of parents. When Latina mothers are able to understand and help children with their homework, they experience lower levels of stress, depression, and anxiety (Umaña -Taylor & Updegraff, 2007).

Fathers. Latino fathers' roles and identities stem from cultural ideologies, experiences of immigration, and intergenerational relationships (Terriquez, 2013). Latino culture identifies fathers as generous, courageous, respectful, and protectors (Ruiz & Roosa, 2002). Fathers are seen as the tree of the family and expected to produce healthy children and provide for them (Behnke, Taylor, & Parra-Cardona, 2008). Earlier research contradicted this message and instead created a narrative that portrayed Latino fathers as uninvolved in their children's education due to machismo and its attendant identity (Leavell, Tamis-LeMonda, Ruble, Zosuls, & Cabrera, 2012; Ruiz & Roosa, 2002). Recent studies dispell this notion and demonstrate a need to reject this deficit narrative (Cruz, King, Widaman, Leu, Cauce, Conger, et al., 2011; Parke, 2004).

Issues of work availability, immigration, and gender bias may limit the involvement of Latino fathers in their children's education (Perez-Brena, Cookston, Fabricius, & Saenz, 2012). The more fathers view their role as important and beneficial to their children, the more likely they are to participate in their children's education (Cruz, et al. 2011). Additionally, mothers may restrict fathers' involvement if they believe fathers are not competent in educational child rearing practices (Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, & Sokolowski, 2008). Roles and morals of fathers passed on through the generations are influenced by different nuanced relationships between genders (Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Roggman, 2014). Taylor and

Behnke (2005) found that Mexican immigrant fathers in the U.S. view themselves as more involved with their children's education than fathers in Mexico. This may be due in part to the progressive fathering emphasis in the U.S. that influences the values and behaviors of immigrant fathers. An additional explanation may be that fathers who are more progressively involved with their children may be more likely to immigrate to the U.S.

Educational Outcomes of Latino Youth

Quirk, Nylund-Gibson, & Furlong (2013) reported that 67 percent of Latino children in the U.S. are in the bottom three levels for school readiness, with 28 percent of Latino children at the lowest level. However, there have been recent gains in educational attainment among Latinos. The percentage of Latinos age 25 years and older who had a GED or high school diploma increased between 2010 (24.5%) and 2016 (27.3%), as well as those who had a post-secondary degree (2010- 18.52%; 2016- 23.8%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Despite these gains, Latinos continue to experience barriers when seeking assistance in the U.S. educational system (Free, Križ, & Konecnik, 2014) which can result in lowered educational aspirations (Rivera, 2014). Undocumented Latino immigrants experience even greater barriers in accessing educational resources and financial assistance due to lack of social connections and concerns regarding their documentation status (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). Latino youth may be hesitant to pursue their educational aspirations due to financial instability and lack of understanding what college entails and how to get there (Rivera, 2014). However, family and community support can help Latino youth excel academically and pursue higher education (Behnke, Taylor, & Parra-Cardona, 2008).

Foundational Framework

The groundbreaking work of Concha Delgado Gaitan, which described the importance of education in the Mexican-American home, informed this study. Delgado Gaitan (1992) described how the physical environment (e.g., school buildings, neighborhood), school climate (e.g., bullying, gang violence), and interactions Latino families experienced with school staff lead to a communal networking identity among Latinos within the educational system. Illuminating the importance of family interactions and social networks, Delgado Gaitan (1994, 2014) applied a strengths-based perspective to explain family processes and outcomes in relation to education. In this study, we explored the educational aspirations and experiences of Latino immigrant parents and their children who reside in a Midwestern state. We sought to gain understanding of the supports and barriers they experienced as they worked to secure education for their family and future generations.

Methods

Study Design

Qualitative methodology assists researchers in exploring phenomena and capturing the meaning of an experience through an interpretation of the rich, textual data provided by participants (deMarrais, 2004; Matthews, 2005). This study employed focus group interviews, a methodology that is well suited for exploratory research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morgan & Krueger, 1998) that involves personal and social constructs (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Through conducting focus group interviews, we explored the aspirations and experiences of first-generation Mexican immigrant parents regarding their hopes and dreams for their children's futures. We also explored what youth desired for their futures. Furthermore, we explored

supports and barriers that the families experienced as they pursued their goals. A guidebook that contained information regarding the purpose of the study, recruitment procedures and a script, consent forms, interview protocols, and tips for successful focus group facilitation was developed and shared with individuals who assisted with implementing the focus group interviews. This study was approved by the associated university Institutional Review Board, and written informed consent was secured from all participants prior to conducting the interviews. In 2016, six focus group interviews were conducted in two communities in a Midwestern state separately with mothers (N = 10), fathers (N= 5) and their children (N = 13). In one of the study communities, Latinos represented 12.43% (25,864) of the population (208,020), and in the other study community, Latinos represented 38.37% (4,149) of the population (10,814) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates).

Recruitment. Focus group participants were recruited using purposeful and homogeneous strategies (Crabtree & Miller, 1999) to ensure that they shared characteristics in order to facilitate exchange of information and to enhance discussions related to the research questions. Mexican immigrant families who resided in a Midwestern state, and who had participated in a community-based program to learn about the U.S. education system and how to access higher education, were recruited into the study. Local Spanish speaking professionals (e.g., Extension educators, private non-profit organization staff) who were connected to the Latino population in the community recruited participants in person or via phone for the focus group interviews. The professionals sought to identify individuals who had participated in the community-based program whom they believed would be willing to share their desires, perspectives and experiences during the focus group interviews.

The focus group interviews were 90 – 120 minutes in duration and held in locations that were familiar and accessible to participants (i.e., family and community resource centers). Faculty, graduate students, and community partners who were trained in focus group facilitation, conducted the interviews. Participants were offered a \$25 gift card to compensate them for their time and expertise. Focus group interviews with parents were conducted in Spanish, audiotaped, and transcribed verbatim in Spanish. The interviews were then translated to English by Spanish-speaking professionals trained and experienced in transcription and translation. Focus group interviews with youth were conducted in English, audiotaped, and transcribed verbatim by a commercial transcription company.

Instrumentation.

Guiding questions with structured probes for the focus group interviews were developed by two members of the research team and further refined based on feedback from facilitators after the first set of interviews in one community. Participants were also asked to complete a short demographic survey. Examples of interview questions posed to parents included: (1) Think back to when you were a child. What was it like growing up? Probe: Describe your experiences with school. (2) What do you want for your children's future? Probes: What can help your children have that future? What can get in the way? (3) What changes could help your children have the future you desire for them? Examples of questions posed to youth included: (1) What is something you want to achieve this year? Probes: What will help you do this? What might make it difficult? (2) What is a goal you have for yourself after high school? (3) Think about a person that has influenced you the most. This may be someone who has influenced decisions you made or someone you admire. How has this person influenced you?

Data Analysis

Transcripts from the focus group interviews were uploaded into MAXQDA 11 (VERBI Software, 2014), a professional software program that assists with qualitative data administration and analysis. Thematic analysis, a process used to systematically identify and describe features of qualitative data in context across many participants (Joffe & Yardley, 2004), was used to analyze the data. First, two researchers independently read each transcript in its entirety to become familiar with the text and to get a sense of the whole interview. The researchers placed brackets around segments of the data (e.g., text) that represented participants' perspectives or experiences and recorded reflective memos to begin to organize the data. The researchers then met to review and discuss the meanings associated with the reflective memos to inform the development of codes. As the researchers independently coded additional text, they compared the text to similarly coded text. Comparing the codes throughout the process enhanced consistency and expanded the dimensions and comprehensiveness of the codes. The researchers met again to compare how they coded the data and discussed any coding discrepancies until they agreed upon common codes for the data. The coded data were compared and contrasted to inform the development of categories. The categories were then reviewed and combined to develop overarching themes to represent participants' perspectives and experiences in relation to the phenomena that were being studied. To assist in establishing credibility of the findings, the researchers shared the preliminary findings including the overarching themes with three of the facilitators who conducted the focus group interviews, and who had strong, trusting relations with Latino immigrant families in the communities. The researchers reflected on feedback provided by the facilitators to further inform the development of the themes.

Findings

In order to help provide context to the findings, information regarding characteristics of the participants are provided in Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the demographic data was conducted using the software SPSS vs.23. Youth were on average 13.8 years of age (5 males, 8 females), and fathers ($M = 44.4$) were slightly older than mothers ($M = 39.7$). All but one of the youth were born in the U.S. All of the parents were born in Mexico. Fathers on average had resided in the U.S. longer than mothers ($M = 23.0$ years, $M = 19.2$ years respectively). Almost all of the parents primarily spoke Spanish in and outside of the home (mothers - 100%, 90.0%; fathers- 100%, 80.0%). While a little over half (53.9%) of the youth primarily spoke Spanish at home, only one (7.7%) did so outside of their home. Less than half of the parents (41.7%) had a high school diploma or its equivalent. Two of the parents (16.7%) had an eighth grade education or less. A quarter (25.0%) had participated in some form of post-secondary education (e.g., technical training, some college). The median annual household income among the families was \$35,000, and each household had on average 5.4 members (Range: 3-9 members).

Table 1. Characteristics of focus group participants.

Participant	Age (<i>M</i>)	Born U.S. (<i>N</i>)	Years U.S./Midwest (<i>M</i>)	Language primarily spoken at home			Language primarily spoken outside of home		
				Spanish	English	Both	Spanish	English	both
Youth	13.8	12	12.9/11.2	7	0	6	1	10	2
N=13	Range: 9-18		Range: 6-18	53.9%	0.0%	46.1%	7.7%	76.9%	15.4%
Mothers	39.7	0	19.2/14.6	10	0	0	9	0	1
N=10	Range: 33-48		Range: 5-25	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	90.0%	0%	10.0%

Fathers	44.4	0	23.0/14.4	5	0	0	4	0	1
N=5	Range: 39-50		Range: 6-31	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	80.0%	0.0%	20.0%

Three overarching themes illustrate key findings from the data: 1) Dedicating a Life for Future Generations, 2) Caregiving and Moral Development of Children, and 3) Education as a Catalyst for a Better Life. Descriptive statements and quotes support the identified themes, and pseudonyms replace the real names of participants.

Dedicating a Life for Future Generations.

Mothers and fathers immigrated to the U.S. in search of a better life for their families. Parents recalled inspirational moments in which they demonstrated a commitment to changing their life trajectories. Almost all of the parents experienced adverse conditions in their home countries. Many stated that they grew up poor, in rural communities, where resources such as education were very restricted. Higher education was unavailable due to family financial constraints and lack of a *secundaria* (middle school) or *preparatoria* (high school) within their communities. Parents wished these opportunities had been available. Instead, they learned trades from their parents as a means to future employment. Parents conscientiously made the choice to break this cycle in order to try and provide more for their families. Rodrigo stated,

[This choice] doesn't only affect our generation but the next generation. Well, that barrier will always exist from generation to generation. If I had not come here, I would have ended up being a carpenter because my father was a carpenter. I had few other opportunities than the trade he taught me. Well, I wasn't going to end up like that, like I am here.

Rodrigo continued by stating, *“Most of my coworkers have their 15-year-old kids working in restaurants. I mean, what I'm getting at is, don't place that barrier. It's a cycle as*

they say.” Parents feared that their children’s efforts might be in vain as economic and legal issues have created a system of inequality for immigrant families. Parents were afraid to seek assistance from community resources, or sometimes to participate in community events, due to heightened fear regarding renewed federal conversations regarding immigration policies and deportation. The uncertainty of what would happen if immigration officials arrested someone in their family plagued many parents and their children. Despite these challenges, families remained optimistic about securing a better life. Parents stated that future change is possible through hard work and motivation. Each difficult day brings them one day closer to success. Manuel stated, *“It’s true, Mexico was more difficult for us...In the U.S., if you want it, you can have it. You do everything for your kids but we have limitations, so the only thing you can give your kids is education and education and education.”*

Parents were dedicated to making a difference in their children’s lives and saw their sacrifices as a way to benefit their children. Servando stated, *“For me, it’s better to eat beans or whatever as long as they study. What good is it for us to eat nice steaks now, if tomorrow they are the ones who will have to eat beans?”* Instead, parents found their efforts were creating opportunities for their children to be successful. Success was measured by the belief that children will achieve more than their parents. Josephina stated, *“Maybe our generation won’t achieve a lot but the next generation will be different. I think that is the barrier that we have to eliminate. We, as the first-generation who arrived here, were unable to get educated because we came here to work.”*

Parents’ lack of educational attainment and legal status made it difficult to find employment, as well as jobs in which they could advance and feel fulfilled. Many parents

worked in meat packing factories. They described their work as harsh and melancholy. However, they found meaning in their lives through focusing on their children's futures. Patricia shared,

What I want for my son is that he gets a good career, so he can be somebody, so that he is not like me and because I'm always working; whether in Tyson or other companies that well, are not jobs for them. That's why they are studying and why they need to give the effort. That is what you expect, that they help you move forward and that they get a good career so they can progress.

Caregiving and Moral Development of Children

While roles of mothers and fathers in raising their children varied from one another, children acknowledged and respected their parent's efforts, saw their parents as role models and as the primary individuals who pushed them toward a better future. Jose shared, "*Although my mom and dad didn't have much education they still put a roof over my siblings' and my head.*"

Mothers tended to the daily tasks of caring for children (e.g., preparing food, playing with children, getting children ready for bed and school). They tried to attend school events and become aware of information from the school or in the community that might affect their children. Several youth stated that their mothers asked them about their homework and helped them if they could. Mothers also focused on helping children make decisions to have a good life. Julissa stated, "*I tell my children that they first have to have a goal and when you have achieved your goal, you have to find a purpose. Continue that multiple times, over and over, to find happiness.*"

Fathers focused on developing the moral character of children. They wanted their children to become good persons and to hold Latino values. When youth felt disrespected or mistreated at school, fathers made sure that their children understood how to overcome obstacles. Mario stated, "*I tell my son, you have to earn that teacher's respect.*" Additionally, fathers

served as role models and mentors and demonstrated their love for their children through stories or by giving advice to their children. Manuel stated, “*My son asked me, ‘If I have a family, how am I going to do it if I don’t know anything about being a dad?’ Don’t worry, your kids are going to be the most beautiful and most important thing in your life and you are going to put in the effort.*” When asked who influenced them the most, Blaza shared,

“My dad because he always gives me pep talks. I like when we get to go to the lake and then we start a conversation and he always says something like ‘Look at your brother, he is in college. And you could be that! You could go to college too, but you could be even more intelligent.’ That’s why I always look up to my dad, cause he gives me pep talks.”

Education as a Catalyst for a Better Life

When describing how to create change for their families, parents stated that education was a catalyst for a better life. Parents wanted their children to do well in school and to go to college to receive training for careers that could help them avoid financial struggles. When asked why education was a priority, Yrene stated, “*Do you want them to be like you, cleaning bathrooms or cooking, working 16 hours a day? If they don’t study, they could end up working with me.*” Eva also shared,

There are many mirrors she can’t see. I tell my daughter, ‘look, I don’t want this mirror for you. Look at yourself and then look at me. If you want this meager life, this is who you will become. I used to be like you, and I don’t want this life for you.’ I then show her other types of people who have done better.

Despite intentions to help their children succeed educationally, some parents experienced barriers such as lack of English proficiency, low literacy levels, and fears regarding their documentation status that made it difficult for them to understand what their children were learning in school or to assist them with homework. Denisse shared, “*I don’t know how to read. I*

don't know how to write. I learned on the street. I write my name, I write things like that but... I read, by sounding out words."

Furthermore, there were many questions parents had about college and what their children needed to do to attend college, including the costs. Parents wanted school staff or community organizations to help them learn what they needed to do in order to help their children do well in school and to access college. Maria stated, *"I think that we need help with this type of thing; especially when it comes to the application and financial part of college. Staff could really help if we had any question or wanted to see how much college would cost. Latinos need more information about education. The majority of Latinos are focused on work or can't understand the language."*

Youth also had dreams of going to college to pursue careers. Keivy stated, *"Being a doctor really stands out to me. My oldest brother goes to college. I've gone many times and seen buildings and saw somebody coming out and they were wearing the doctor's coat and I was like 'Oh I want to come here one day and be a doctor.'" However, youth lacked understanding of what they needed to do to prepare for and to be admitted to a college, or the costs of college.*

Discussion

Despite the difficulties the parents in this study experienced, they realized that their struggles were for a larger purpose. Parents acknowledged that the limitations they experienced in their homelands led to a cycle that lacked promise for a bright future for their children and future generations. They realized that immigrating to the U.S. was an opportunity to create a better future for their families. Thus, findings from this study, as well as previous studies

reinforce the importance of understanding families' motivations for immigration (Behnke, Taylor, & Parra-Cardona, 2008; Ivlevs & King, 2012).

The theme *Dedicating a Life for Future Generations* described how parents immigrated not so much for personal gain, but rather to ensure a better future for their children and future generations. Multiple parents stated that living in their homeland led to many difficulties and lack of opportunities. Instead of subjecting their children to the same experiences, parents immigrated to the U.S. and to the Midwest to pave a path for a better life. Parents found strength in the hope that their children would not live the same lives and would have the opportunity to go to college and "be somebody". This theme stresses the importance of a strengths based approach when working with Latino immigrant families. It is important to emphasize the change in narrative of the Latino parent as one of dedication and optimism, and to assist families in securing education for their children.

The theme *Caregiving and Moral Development of Children* illustrated gendered roles of mothers and fathers as they seek to secure positive futures for their children. Mothers tended to daily caregiving tasks and sought information to help their children. Fathers ensured the moral development of their children and encouraged their children to do well in school (Behnke, Taylor, & Parra-Cardona, 2008; Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Roggman, 2014). The theme *Education as a Catalyst for a Better Life* described how parents desired for their children to go to college in order to lessen or avoid financial struggles and to have careers that would result in personal fulfillment. As supported by previous research, parents viewed education as a means to break the cycle of poverty they experienced and to create upward mobility (Achinstein, Curry & Ogawa, 2015; Patel et al., 2016; Vesely, et al. 2015). Parents acted as role models and shared

their life events as motivation for children to become educationally successful. Parents believed that education could provide opportunity for their children to avoid the harsh lives that they experienced. However, parents were thirsty for, but did not have easy access to, information regarding what they and their children needed to do in order to for their children to go to college.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this study is its methodology, designed to explore the perspectives and experiences of multiple members of Latino immigrant families, as most studies only include data from one individual within a family. Additionally, the qualitative approach was a good fit for the study's objectives and was implemented in a systematic and comprehensive way. Furthermore, the focus group interviews created opportunities for Latino immigrant families to share their beliefs, values, priorities and experiences with researchers, as well as with each other. The process of reflecting upon and sharing one's perspectives and experiences with others may serve as a catalyst for change among participants, as well as assisted the researchers in better understanding the lived experiences of the participants in the study.

A limitation of this study is that it only captured voices of first-generation Mexican immigrant parents who had limited formal education and their children in two communities in one Midwestern state. Thus, the transferability of the findings is limited to similar populations and contexts. Additionally, the adults and youth in this study had participated in a community-based program that brought families together to learn about the education system in their state and how to access higher education. Thus, participation in the program may have influenced participants' responses. Furthermore, since all of the individuals who participated in this study

originated from Mexico, the findings may not fully represent the perspectives and experiences of first-generation immigrant families who originated from other Latin American countries, lived in other communities in the state or in another Midwestern state, or who were not connected to educational programs and resources in their communities. We tried to lessen the limitation of only including data from two communities in one Midwestern state by implementing the focus groups in both a larger community (208,020 population) and smaller community (10,814 population) in the state, as the availability of resources for immigrant families may vary by size of the community.

Conclusions and Implications

This study helps to illustrate the aspirations, strengths, sacrifices, and intentionality of Mexican immigrant families in two communities in a Midwestern state as they pursued paths to secure education and a positive future for their children and future generations of children. However, additional research, including ethnographic and longitudinal studies, are needed to monitor families' progress in securing positive futures for their children and future generations and the barriers they experience. Additionally, information and support from government and private non-profit organizations, schools, and faith communities are needed to assist Latino immigrant families in securing education for their children, which, in turn, can lead to strong communities.

Community and family-based programs, as well as public policies to support rather than punish immigrant families, continue to be needed to help equip Latino immigrant families with information and access to supports to navigate the U.S. educational system and higher education opportunities for their children. Latino immigrant families may not understand what they need to

do in order to access higher education. Furthermore, educational programs should recognize the different, but equally important roles that fathers and mothers play in helping to secure positive futures for their children. Specific strategies are needed to increase effective communication between school staff and parents, especially for parents who have low literacy skills and lack English proficiency.

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Table 1. Characteristics of focus group participants.

	Age (<i>M</i>)	Born U.S. (<i>N</i>)	Years U.S./Midwest (<i>M</i>)	Language primarily spoken at home			Language primarily spoken outside of home		
				<u>Spanish</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Spanish</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>both</u>
Youth N=13	13.77 Range: 9-18	12	12.92/11.15	7 53.85%	0 0.0%	6 46.15%	1 7.69%	10 76.92%	2 15.38%
Mothers N=10	39.70 Range: 33-48	0	17.60/14.60 Range: 5-25	12 100.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	8 88.90%	0 0.0%	1 11.10%
Fathers N=5	44.40 Range: 39-50	0	23.00/14.40 Range: 6-31	5 100.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	4 80.0%	0 0.0%	1 20.0%