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First-generation Latina college students' reflections of Mexican immigrant parent engagement in their college-going experiences

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines how first-generation Latina undergraduate students perceive their Mexican immigrant parents' engagement in their college experiences. Employing a community cultural wealth framework (Yosso, 2005), this study challenges deficit views on Mexican immigrant parent engagement in higher education. Through semi-structured interviews with first-generation Latina undergraduate college students at two Hispanic-Serving Institutions in South Central Texas, we analyze the *consejos* (advice) conveyed by Mexican immigrant parents to support their children's college persistence and success. Findings revealed that these *consejos* were integral to the students' persistence and resilience, as participants recognized their parents' active role in fostering educational aspirations. Our analysis underscores the aspirational, familial, and resistant capital embedded in these messages, affirming the value of parental engagement in Latina students' college journeys. We conclude with recommendations

to enhance university programs to foster an inclusive and affirming campus climate for Latina/o/x students and their families.

Keywords: Latinas; first-generation college students; Mexican immigrant parents, higher education

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The children of immigrants are the fastest growing segment of the population in the United States (The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017). Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Latina/o/x children have at least one parent who is foreign-born (Gandara & Mordechay, 2017). The majority of Latina/o/x¹ students enrolled in college are U.S.-born, with about 47% identifying as second-generation immigrants with at least one parent born in another country and 17% as first-generation immigrants (born in another country) (Feldblum et al., 2024). Latina/o/x students are also more likely to be first-generation college students (51%) (Santiago et al., 2024), meaning they are the first in their families to complete a four-year college degree. Consequently, many Latino immigrant parents may not be familiar with how to guide their children in navigating the U.S. higher education system despite reporting high educational aspirations for their children (Feliciano & Lazuna, 2017).

Given the increasing Latina/o/x enrollment in colleges and universities in the United States, concerns over Latina/o/x college completion remain critical for students' long-term educational and occupational success and that of their communities. Parental engagement in Latina/o/x students' higher education pathways has been documented as an important source of support in college student experiences (Arzuaga, 2016; Goldsmith & Robinson-Kurpius, 2018; Marum, 2020). As Latina/o/x students of immigrant origin and first-generation college status continue to increasingly enroll in colleges and universities, a better understanding of the role immigrant parents play in their successful transition and completion of higher education is necessary. Scholars have long argued that Latina/o/x immigrant parent engagement cannot be viewed through traditional white middle-class

¹ The term "Latina/o/x" is a gender-inclusive term for how we usually refer to Latina/o, Lati@, or Hispanic students from Mexican, Central, and Latin American origin or ancestry who live in the United States. In this paper, all our participants were women and identified as Latina. We use the term Latina to refer to them. We use the terms used by the studies cited in this paper (e.g., Hispanic, Latina/o, Latino, Latinx) when necessary.

norms of parental involvement but rather must be examined through culturally appropriate perspectives that focus on familial practices (Marquez Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2018). In this study, we emphasize the everyday aspects of Latina/o/x family cultural practices of sharing experiences and lessons manifested as *consejos* to support first-generation college students navigating higher education.

In this article, we examine how first-generation college Latina students perceive their immigrant parents' engagement in their higher education experience through the sharing of messages in the form of *consejos* (advice-given narratives). We utilize Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework to examine the messages that students received from immigrant parents about education, resiliency, and perseverance. Data from semi-structured interviews with twelve Latina first-generation students show how Mexican² immigrant parents conveyed *consejos* about education, resiliency, and persistence that supported students' educational journeys and college persistence.

Conceptual Framework of Community Cultural Wealth

In line with asset-based research perspectives on Latina/o/x immigrant students, families, and communities, we draw on the conceptual framework of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Community cultural wealth challenges deficit-perspectives that place value on white, middle-class practices and school-based forms of involvement that often exclude the invisible yet valuable cultural practices, experiences, and knowledge of immigrant families. The origins of the community cultural wealth framework stem from the theoretical framework of critical race theory (CRT). CRT addresses issues of race and racism in larger structures of society, practices, and discourses. In education, scholars have expanded our understanding and application of CRT in education as a way of validating and

² We use the term Mexican immigrant parents when referring to the participants' parents in this study. All of the participants' parents in this study originated from Mexico.

centering the experiences of people of color (Yosso, 2005). Traditional views and discourses of schools and teachers often frame Latina/o/x immigrant parents as less involved or disinterested in their children's education when "parent involvement has often been defined in terms of activities visible to school personnel and other parents" (Ryan et al. 2010, p. 393). Much of the emphasis on parental involvement also stems from traditional notions of cultural and social capital as necessary aspects of helping students access and advance to college. Narrow definitions and perspectives of parent involvement are problematic if they do not account for the diverse forms of parental engagement that immigrant parents enact to support their children's educational pathways.

Community cultural wealth recognizes the resources, skills, abilities, and accumulated wealth of communities of color (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) theorized how communities of color utilized the assets and resources found in their home communities. These assets and resources include the knowledge, experience, and histories of communities of color (Yosso, 2005). The community cultural wealth model consists of six forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. Aspirational capital is "parental transmission and maintenance of dreams and goals" (Espino, 2016a, p. 77) despite "real and perceived barriers" to children's educational journeys (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Linguistic capital acknowledges the various linguistic repertoires and skills students use to communicate with friends, family, and institutions to support their immigrant families, such as language brokering for parents or relatives. Familial capital refers to "those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community, memory, and cultural intuition" (p. 79). This form of capital places a value on the commitment to community well-being and is not limited to immediate family members but also relates to extended kinship across borders. Social capital entails a network of social support made up of kinship networks or others providing information to navigate social structures.

Navigational capital gives families and children the necessary skills to navigate social institutions. Finally, resistant capital refers to the ability to persist and resist oppression and opposition, enacted from the knowledge and skills passed down from generation to generation. Latina/o/x students may develop resistant capital from their immigrant parents' history of migration, their own experiences with discrimination, and/or from their desire to challenge deficit perceptions and discourses of immigrants and Latina/o/x children of immigrants.

Literature Review

Existing Research on Parent Engagement

Latina/o/x make up 19.1% of the population in the United States (Moslimani & Noe-Bustamante, 2023). Despite continued growth, they remain disproportionately represented in higher education (Santiago et al., 2024). Latina/o/x students often face unique challenges in higher education. For example, Latina/o/x students are more likely to identify as first-generation college students, come from low-income households, and be first or second-generation immigrants (Santiago et al., 2024). Research on Latina/o/x first-generation students has found that families may lack information regarding the US postsecondary system (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Immigrant parents, in particular, may be unfamiliar with the US education system, e.g., how to access higher education, enrollment processes, testing requirements, financial aid process, etc.). For Latina/o/x immigrant parents, the college-going process may be further complicated by anti-immigrant policies, fears of deportation, and financial strains (Cuevas, 2020). While parents of Latina/o/x first-generation college students may lack formal experience with the U.S. postsecondary system, studies have underscored Latina/o/x parents' efforts to support and participate in their children's postsecondary experiences (Carmona et al., 2024; Rivera et al., 2024).

Research by Espino (2016a), Luedke (2020), and Marrun (2020) on Latina/o/x students in higher education has addressed the importance of familial support and engagement in the educational pathways of first-generation college students. For example, Cuevas (2020) documented how undocumented parents of Latina/o/x first-generation students experienced and engaged in their children's transition to college. Cuevas (2020) examined how parents perceived their children's transition into college and how parents interacted with colleges and universities by dropping children off on campus, helping children move in, feeling a sense of pride, and learning about their children's college experience with courses through phone conversations. In another study, Rivera et al. (2024) examined how families of Latina/o/x computer science students contributed forms of support and direction by sharing encouragement, offering motivation to combat isolation in the discipline, and providing guidance as students navigated higher education and their career pathways. While much of this work focuses on the role families play in Latina/o/x students' higher education experiences and persistence in the form of familial support, limited scholarship focuses on parental engagement that aligns with the cultural knowledge, household practices, and lived experiences of Latino immigrant households.

Understanding Parental Engagement

While parent involvement has received attention in the K-12 setting, an understanding of parent involvement in higher education literature is limited (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020). Much of the work on parent involvement often draws on narrowly defined conceptualizations of school-based involvement in the K-12 setting (e.g., regular and visible presence at school) while often dismissing parents' engagement in their children's education at home or in their communities. In this study, we use the term parent

engagement³ to refer to subtle forms of involvement in the home and outside of the institutional context. By focusing on familial practices from a cultural perspective, we use engagement versus involvement because involvement may imply a greater physical presence within education. We acknowledge how the term “parent involvement” has been used in the literature and continues to be used as a measure of student academic success. For example, previous literature has used parent involvement as a measure connected to “improved academic achievement and motivation” (Goldsmith & Robinson-Kurpius, 2018, p. 564) regarding improved grades, test scores, and high school graduation. Studies have found that Latina/o/x students showed improved academic outcomes (Ceballo et al., 2014; Lopez et al., 2023) and reported increased academic goals resulting from higher parental involvement (Martinez & Chavira, 2019).

Existing literature on parental engagement emphasizes the significance of Latina/o/x parents and families in students’ education. Marrun (2020) notes that “parental engagement needs to be understood through family dynamics within Latino cultures, household practices, and values (p.169). For example, Marrun (2020) examined how first-generation Latina/o/x students reflected on their families’ engagement in shaping students’ educational aspirations and college persistence. Family engagement was highlighted in the study through the cultural practices of storytelling, advice-giving (*consejos*), and proverbs (*dichos*) that helped support students (Marrun, 2020). Other work addressing Latina/o/x parental engagement has focused on the use of cultural capital found within families and communities that support student academic engagement and persistence (Matos, 2015). For instance, Matos’s (2015) study documented the forms of capital most prevalent in Latina/o/x college

³ We use the term parent engagement to refer to the dynamic and cultural forms of participation and support in their children’s education. However, we acknowledge the use of the term “parent involvement” and how it is often used interchangeably in the literature. In this paper, we use the term parent involvement when it is used in the literature.

engagement transmitted from their families, namely their parents and family members such as grandparents and siblings. The work of Matos (2015) highlights how Latina/o/x parental engagement “takes shape through cultural assets within Latina/o families” (p. 449).

Other studies have documented how mothers and grandmothers engaged with and supported students’ education by participating in familial ways of knowing manifested as *dichos*, *consejos*, and family stories (Quezada Barrera et al., 2024). These studies help understand the role of families, including parents and extended family members, in students’ educational pathways through specific cultural practices. However, the extent to which household cultural practices support students in their transition to college and throughout students’ higher education trajectories remains limited for first-generation college students with immigrant parents. The experiences of these students are often challenged within broader socio-political contexts surrounding immigration policies and status. Taking the cultural assets and practices that students bring to higher education contexts helps us better understand parental engagement and shift away from deficit-oriented views toward immigrant families (Quiñones & Kiyama, 2014).

Parent Engagement in Higher Education: A Cultural Practice

Assumptions rooted in deficit thinking have historically perpetuated and marginalized Latina/o/x parents’ role in their children’s schooling, especially the roles played by immigrant families from Mexico and Central America (Valencia, 2011). However, over the years, researchers have documented how Latina/o/x parents show interest and support in their children’s education through the transmission of values for education. Emerging research has also documented how Latino parents actively engage in their children’s educational pursuits and support their children’s higher education aspirations and pursuits (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2018). Previous researchers have found that Latina/o/x families place great emphasis on providing a good *educación* (education) that includes the teaching of morals,

values, respect, and educational aspirations (Auerback, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Espino, 2016b; Godinez, 2006). Asset-based approaches emphasize the transmission of cultural values and practices as a form of parental involvement that exists beyond the confines of the school setting and takes shape within the home and the community (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). One cultural practice highlighted in previous studies of parental engagement is that of *consejos* (advice-giving narratives), which are rooted in knowledge and lived experiences.

Consejos

Delgado Gaitan (1994) defined *consejos* as “a cultural dimension of communication sparked with emotional empathy and compassion” (p. 300). Godinez (2006) noted that the participants in her study “defined *consejos* as the telling about values, symbols, and ways of thinking and knowing” (p. 31). *Consejos* are embedded in casual remarks or direct comments or suggestions versus engaging with educational institutions. *Consejos* have been well documented as a critical cultural practice and source of support for Latina/o/x students. *Consejos* motivate, guide, and instill educational and moral values in students from an early age (Auerbach, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Godinez, 2006). For example, Goldsmith and Robinson-Kurpius (2018) found that for Mexican immigrant parents of college-going students, providing support by sharing cultural narratives and *consejos* (advice) is perceived as part of their roles and responsibilities in their children’s education. Goldsmith and Robinson-Kurpius’s (2018) study provide examples of cultural narratives, including stories of hardship, overcoming barriers, confronting negative experiences, and other experiences drawing on cultural strengths transmitted through *consejos* (Goldsmith & Robinson-Kurpius, 2018). Aragon (2017) found Latina students enrolling in college perceived familial support and their parents’ involvement through the sharing of *consejos* or messages “about their [the parents’ own] conditions, occupations, and experiences providing resiliency and powerful sources of educational motivation” (p. 1). Similarly, scholars have

examined how parents and grandparents shared *consejos* to motivate students to pursue higher education (Marrun, 2020) and to support students in their persistence in higher education (Matos, 2015; Quezada Barrera et al., 2024). Studies on Latina/o/x immigrant parents suggest that parents often use their stories of migration to shape their children's educational aspirations and motivate children to pursue higher education, often grounded on notions of economic and social mobility (Baum & Flores, 2012; Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

Although scholars have noted the power of *consejos* in motivating students, it is also important to note the challenges of some messages imbued with sexism, patriarchy, and gendered expectations (Espino, 2016 a/b; Villenas, 2006). For example, Espino's (2016a) study on first-generation Mexican American PhDs explored the *consejos* shared by parents that shaped students' educational aspirations while navigating tensions between getting an education and having *educación*. In another study, Espino (2016b) found that Latinas encountered messages of support that "were framed within a belief that education was liberation" (p. 191). However, findings from Espino's (2016b) study also highlighted how Latinas encountered and negotiated messages about raced-gendered and familial expectations. It is important to complicate the *consejos* shared by parents and families and acknowledge the historical oppression of Women of Color and the challenges they experience accessing and moving through higher education. Although parents' *consejos* may transmit support for education, these *consejos* may also include embedded messages related to womanhood, sexuality, and caretaking that can create tensions for Latina students pursuing higher education. Nonetheless, studies of parental *consejos* offer a framework to counter deficit-oriented views imposed on Latina/o/x students and their families that often frame parents as uninterested or unsupportive in their children's educational trajectories.

Methods

This qualitative study examines Latina first-generation students' perceptions of their Mexican immigrant parents' support, guidance, and engagement in their higher education experience. The following research questions guided the analysis:

1. How do Latina students perceive their Mexican immigrant parents' engagement in their higher education experience?
2. What role do Mexican immigrant parents' messages and consejos about education play in Latina students' persistence in higher education?

Setting and Participants

This article is part of a larger study on the role immigrant parents play in first-generation college students' experiences in higher education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve undergraduate first-generation college students whose parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Participants were recruited and selected through a purposeful and snowball sampling technique (Hesse-Biber, 2017), including classroom visits, emails to student organizations, flyer postings, and attendance at campus events at two Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) in South Central Texas—one large public research institution and one private Catholic institution. The South-Central Texas area has a high concentration of Hispanic/Latino population, with almost 84% of the population identifying as Hispanic. The larger public HSI enrolls over 36,000 undergraduates, with about 58.6% identifying as Hispanic/Latino and 45% identifying as first-generation college students. The private HSI in this study enrolls about 3,000 undergraduate students, with about 54% identifying as Hispanic/Latino. About 90% of first-year students at the private institution receive some form of financial aid.

Twelve Latina students were recruited from these institutions to participate in this study. All participants were the first in their families to attend a four-year college and were

on track to complete a bachelor's degree. Six out of the twelve participants identified as second-generation immigrants – U.S.-born children of immigrants, and the remaining six identified as 1.5 immigrant generation – those born in a different country but brought to the United States at a young age (See Table 1). Parents' level of education, for both mothers and fathers, was reported as ranging from less than high school to some college. Most participants came from working-class households. All the participants were given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Pseudonym	Age	Classification	Generation of Immigration	Institution
Patricia	19	Freshman	1.5 Generation	Private HSI
Gaby	19	Freshman	1.5 Generation	Private HSI
Carolina	19	Junior	2 nd Generation	Public HSI
Itzel	20	Sophomore	2 nd Generation	Public HSI
Christina	20	Sophomore	1.5 Generation	Public HSI
Julieta	20	Junior	1.5 Generation	Public HSI
Sofia	20	Senior	2 nd Generation	Public HSI
Andrea	22	Junior	2 nd Generation	Public HSI
Maritza	22	Senior	2 nd Generation	Public HSI
Penelope	23	Senior	2 nd Generation	Public HSI
Alicia	24	Senior	1.5 Generation	Public HSI
Victoria	26	Junior	1.5 Generation	Public HSI

Data Collection and Analysis

The first author of this article conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews with participants. Participants were provided an Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent form and agreed to participate in one audio-recorded semi-structured interview. Participants were interviewed individually using an interview protocol. Each interview lasted 30 to 90 minutes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview protocol encompassed questions regarding their family immigrant history, parental involvement in students' education, the students' and parents' educational expectations, and the students' experiences in higher education. Participants were also asked directly about any messages regarding education. Each semi-structured interview was transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic

analysis to identify themes to address the research questions. Transcribed interviews were uploaded to NVIVO software for coding and analysis. Thematic analysis involves an iterative and reflective process of identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Our coding process involved reading the transcripts carefully and conducting initial (open) coding (Charmaz, 2014). Open coding consisted of a line-by-line coding scheme to identify descriptive and initial codes in the data to pinpoint specific examples provided by the participants about their immigrant parents' engagement in their education and persistence. This was followed by focused coding to categorize the most frequent codes related to parental involvement, messages, and educational aspirations in the interviews (Saldaña, 2015). These codes were then organized into three categories that focused on the types of support and consejos received: 1) emotional and financial support, 2) aspirations for education, and 3) perseverance and resiliency. After reviewing these categories, overarching themes were identified. We identified themes that exemplify the consejos received and the cultural assets (Yosso, 2005) that helped students persist.

Researcher Positionality

The first author is a Latina second-generation immigrant and a first-generation college student. As a Latina graduate student, the first author shared experiences similar to those of the study's participants. Drawing on her cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Sanchez & Ek, 2013), the first author drew on her epistemological positionality to build rapport with the participants and analyze the interview data. The second author is also a first-generation college student but has worked as a sociology professor for over 30 years. Her previous research projects focused on educational mobility of Latino and Latina immigrant children and high school students.

Findings

This study aimed to answer the following questions: How do Latina first-generation college students perceive their Mexican immigrant parents' engagement in their higher education experience? 2) What roles do Mexican immigrant parents' messages and *consejos* about education play in Latina first-generation college students' persistence in higher education? Three themes emerged from the data analysis: 1) Forms of parental engagement in navigating college; (2) Consejos from parents regarding educational and occupational success in the United States; and (3) Consejos of perseverance and persistence. We present the themes from an asset-based approach that counters deficit-based perspectives of Mexican immigrant parent engagement and Latina first-generation college student persistence.

Forms of Parental Engagement in Navigating College

Latina students in this study described familial capital as a source of motivation, support, and guidance as they navigated higher education coming from their immigrant parents' engagement in their college experience. Participants discussed in-depth the role their immigrant parents' experiences and *consejos* played in their schooling experiences and their decisions from an early age to attend college. Several students noted that their families and parents were their primary source of motivation to continue their education after high school, as all were the first in their families to attend college. As first-generation college students, many participants noted having to figure things out independently or with the support of older siblings who had previously attended college. Many Latina students recalled walking their parents through the college application process and sharing information with parents as the students learned it themselves. Students described how their parents displayed engagement in their college experience by asking questions about the college application process, providing required documentation (e.g., tax forms) to apply for financial

aid, offering encouraging words, and communicating with students regularly over the phone to encourage and stay informed.

The following quote exemplifies parents' role in their daughter's pursuit of higher education despite a limited understanding of the higher education process and, at times, linguistic barriers. For example, Sofia, a senior (20 years old) shared, "My parents they didn't know, sadly, they didn't have the experience so they really couldn't say, 'Look I'll help you with your scholarship applications.' Or 'I'll help you with this or that.' It was more of a, 'Tell me what I have to do to help you.'" Immigrant parents provided their support by being available to students to provide information and allowing students to take the lead. Mexican immigrant parents played an active role in helping their daughters through the transition to college by communicating and sharing in the experience despite Latinas often feeling like they were on their own as first-generation college students.

Financial and Emotional Support

In many cases, parent engagement included providing emotional and financial support for students once attending the university. For example, Andrea (22, junior) noted, "I talk to my mom every other day. I tell her what's going on, and she's always saying that's she proud of me and all the uplifting stuff, that I'm almost done." Another student, Julieta (20, junior), noted how her parents provided her financial support despite hating to ask her parents for money:

...I don't like to ask my parents for money. I really don't. I hate it with a passion, [...] but my mom, she calls me and asks, "How much money do you have?" And I'm like, "I have money." She's like, "How much?" And I tell her, and she's like, "Why didn't you call me earlier!" I had ten dollars in my account. "How are you eating? How are you traveling? How are you getting by?" And I'm like, "I'm getting by, don't worry about it." And she's like, "No, you are going to get money." I just don't like to ask my parents.

Though Julieta expressed discomfort with asking her parents for money, she shared how supportive they were and how much they cared for her success and well-being in college,

even if that meant asking for help financially at times to help her get through. Asking parents for money can be challenging for first-generation students of working-class backgrounds as they know their parents' limited financial situation at home and do not want to burden their parents. Penelope (23 years old), a junior in college, shared how her parents were involved when she attended her college orientation and how she felt supported through daily reminders over phone conversations. Penelope explained:

My parents came with me to orientation because they wanted to see where I would be staying, and now they continue to be involved in my education by calling me every day to remind me that I got this. And I will get through it. Also, that I'm not alone, and they are there for me whenever I need them. Also, they ask me questions about how college is going and how my classes are.

In this example, casual remarks and comments that remind students, such as, "I got this," "I will get through this," and "I'm not alone" illustrate the power of messages. In the above examples, messages of encouragement, support, and pride illustrate the familial capital that exists within immigrant families. Students relied heavily on familial capital in the form of emotional and financial support to pursue and persist in higher education. Segments of the data coded as "offering encouragement" and "providing parent support" highlight the key attributes of familial capital. Parents were involved in their students' lives through the sharing of motivational and encouraging words, staying informed, and offering both emotional and financial support. Students perceived their parents form of engagement in their college experience through the messages and support received in helping them transition to college and in helping them persist. Students noted the challenges of being a first-generation college student and their immigrant parents' limited understanding of higher education and the demands of college-level work. However, like other studies (e.g., Matos, 2015; Rivera et al., 2024), we found that Latina students perceived parents' support as shared through messages and words of encouragement that helped them navigate and persist on their educational journey.

***Consejos* about educational and occupational success in the United States**

Students' aspirations for higher education were deeply shaped by their immigrant parents' lived experiences. Aspirational capital refers to "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). For many students in this study, the *consejos* received from their Mexican immigrant parents on education and occupational opportunities were based on their parents' aspirations and their parents' desire for their families' financial and social stability in the United States. Students recalled messages about the importance of getting an education as a means of achieving financial stability and obtaining success in the United States. When asked about their educational aspirations, students connected their aspirations to their immigrant parents' sacrifice and their parents' decisions to immigrate to the United States.

Stories of economic struggles, poverty, and lack of opportunity for education in their home country of Mexico were common across participants' reflections. One message shared explicitly by parents was their aspirations for their children to have better futures without the economic and social hardships the parents had endured. For example, Andrea (22, junior) recalled the following:

Since they are both from Mexico and they came here at a young age, they were young adults when they came. They have always expressed to me and my brothers that having a higher education is very important because of what they've experienced and their past as far as, you know, hard labor and working in the fields, and not having enough money at times to support your family, and so it's always been in me that you have to, you have to have a higher education if you want a better life.

Students drew upon this aspirational capital imparted by their parents through the sharing of *consejos* about the importance of education and having access to education. Penelope (23, senior) recalled how she was motivated to continue her education after learning about her mother's aspirations to become a teacher and why her mother was unable to fulfil that aspiration.

I guess their stories and the way they grew up, you know. My mom always told me that she wanted to be a teacher...I asked her, this was before I knew she had only gotten to second grade. I asked her what she wanted to be when she was younger, if she had a dream or anything. And she always told me she wanted to be a teacher and I asked her why she wasn't a teacher. That's when she told me that they didn't have a school.

Penelope continued by explaining her understanding of her parents' struggles and how their experiences inspired her, because if they had not come to the United States, she would not have had access to the same opportunities she was experiencing. She noted, "I guess if you know how much your parents struggled just for you to get a better life, that's one of the things my parents tell me if we would have never come here, life would have been different." In the interviews, students described those aspirations for their futures as including completing college and securing employment after graduation. In line with their aspirations, they often shared their parents' aspirations focused on educational success and achieving occupational stability. Students shared how their parents helped shape their aspirations by sharing their experiences as Mexican immigrants. As highlighted below, the students built on their parents' aspirations for their families' future in the United States.

Financial and Social Stability

Participants in this study recalled the various consejos (advice) and stories of sacrifice that their parents offered them to instill the value of education for achieving financial and social stability. Similar to other studies of parent engagement, immigrant parents used consejos to encourage their children to succeed academically (Aragon, 2017; Espino, 2016; Goldsmith & Kurpius, 2018). Parents used examples of their current occupations that demanded hard physical labor to motivate students to do well in school and finish college so that they would not endure such hard and strenuous working conditions. For example, Gaby (19, freshman) described the following messages shared by her mother, who was a custodian:

My mom always said that here in the U.S., it's all about your position and your economic status. And, so, she was always, always, pushed me into earning a lot of money and being this more elegant kind of person because that's the people who don't get judged. So, my mom has temporary work where she cleans offices, so she is always talking about how sometimes the people that are living or in the office they give her dirty looks. So she always says I want to see you in these fancy clothing and in your office with a nice desk. So she has always talked about that. And I feel like I have embodied that a lot now. I kind of only want that lifestyle of being in a nice office and wearing these nice clothes and not having to worry about money financially, and so I feel like that idea really, really has translated to me, and I have adopted it so much that that's why I feel I want to be successful too.

In this example, notions of success are intertwined with notions about social class and socioeconomic status in the United States and perceptions of one's position in society the United States as a means of financial and social stability. Participants perceived their parents' hopes and dreams for their future through these messages that motivated them to continue their education. These messages, in turn, inspired the students to aspire to better occupational opportunities than their immigrant parents had access to.

Consejos Promoting Perseverance and Persistence

Participants described being aware of the hardships, discrimination, and systemic cycle of oppression that their immigrant parents endured, both as documented and undocumented immigrant workers in the United States. Students demonstrated resistant capital as they navigated, survived, and persisted in higher education. According to Yosso (2005), this form of capital is defined as the "knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80). In this study, Latina students described how their immigrant parents' perseverance as immigrants and their consejos on having the ability to overcome and challenge inequalities shaped their resistant capital. They used their parents as examples of what it means to persevere and persist in a new country as an immigrant (both undocumented and documented).

“Echale ganas” (Give it all you got)

Students recalled the struggles and obstacles their parents encountered crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and navigating linguistic, cultural, and economic borders while living in the United States. They described how their parents used these stories to encourage their children and demonstrate what it means to be persistent and resilient as a lived example. Participants recalled hearing the notion of “*echale ganas*,” (give it all you got) common phrase used to motivate students to keep going and assert themselves in the face of obstacles. Julieta (20, junior) shared learning a valuable lesson about perseverance and resiliency when faced with difficult moments.

...they [parents] tried their hardest, they worked, I never saw my parents work so much for something that they wanted for me and my sister...And so, ...how that influenced me with college, it's like never give up because you will always get somewhere if you never give up. And, it can be hard at times, because I remember the hardships through those times, but something good will come out of it.

Participants perceived how their parents' demonstrated strength and devotion to their families through their hard work and efforts to provide for their children. Students were aware of the sacrifices parents made to help support them, including working extra shifts to help cover graduation costs. Maritza (22, senior) shared how her father worked extra shifts so that he could pay for her class ring and her cap and gown. Her father's action motivated her to do her best as she neared completing her degree.

“Keep your head up”

Parents of the Latinas in this study were aware of the racial discrimination that their children may experience as the children of Mexican immigrants. Patricia, a freshman, recalled the following consejo from her father the day before the family dropped her off at college:

My parents gave me advice the day before coming to the university...and they just told me that, never, this is my dad's exact words, “Never look down, always keep your head...Keep your head up because you are equal as anyone else and you're going to encounter mean people. You're going to encounter a lot of people that just

because of their social status or social economic status or their race, they think they are better than you. But just remember that you are human too, and you can do anything you want just by being you.”

This message resonated with Patricia throughout her college experience as she navigated being a first-generation college student at a private institution. Her father’s message, “Keep your head up,” contributed to her resilient capital to overcome challenges and face difficult encounters with others based on social class status. Another student, Gaby (19, freshman) recalled the racial struggles and discrimination her parents experienced living in Arizona as immigrants:

...not only are they Mexican but they’re immigrants also. They did have a lot of struggles trying to find a job and such. And so just going through those struggles I think really changes you...In Arizona there’s a lot of racism against Mexicans and so that racism and that struggle economically, and, you know, sometimes not having the things that your other friends did—all of that kind of makes you realize there’s a better life out there for me and I’m able to do it if I work hard for it. If my parents worked hard enough to cross the border and get a job here. I can go to college and get a good job...I feel there’s a lot of things immigrants go through just because of the obstacles they have to go through and it really, I feel it really does push some people...

As noted by Gaby, her parents’ experiences with discrimination as undocumented immigrants living in Arizona fuelled her desire to excel in school. Participants noted wanting to prove people wrong and to show that Latina students can excel in college. For example, Itzel, a sophomore, stated, “...it influences me to prove people wrong that not all Mexican daughters get pregnant and not finish school. I’m one of the few that want to continue pursuing their education from my family and my friends.” These examples illustrate the resistant capital that enabled students to counter negative societal messages devaluing Mexican students and women, in particular. Students in this study felt empowered by their parents’ engagement in their academic success. Parents’ consejos inspired these students to continue with higher education, to complete the bachelor’s degree, and for some, to continue beyond the 4-year degree.

Discussion

The student interviews in this study revealed how Latina students perceive their Mexican immigrant parents' engagement in their higher education experience and how the sharing of *consejos* played a supportive role in helping Latina students navigate and persist in higher education. The findings illustrate the importance of familial, aspirational, and resistant capital in helping students navigate and persist in higher education. Latinas' descriptions of their parents' engagement in their college experience included regular phone conversations, parents' questions about college, and offerings of emotional and financial support. These examples illustrate how parents provided familial capital through active engagement in their children's college experience by providing encouraging messages and offering financial support when needed. These examples of engagement challenge and disrupt notions of parent involvement and expand our understanding of the role of parent engagement at the college-level within Latina/o/x immigrant families.

We also found that the *consejos* shared by parents offered aspirational and resistant capital that contributed to students' persistence in higher education. The types of *consejos* offered by parents included motivational and uplifting messages, sharing of lived experiences as immigrants in the United States, desire for financial and social stability, and messages about perseverance and resiliency (e.g., “*echale ganas*” and “keep your head up”). Our findings reveal that the messages of these parents are influenced by the parents' own experiences with racism, classism, and linguistic discrimination as immigrants living in the United States. Parents' experiences as immigrants with these systems of oppression as immigrants in the United States are transmitted across generations through the messages they share about education, occupation, and success. In line with previous research, these types of *consejos* challenge deficit assumptions that Latina/o/x immigrant parents are not involved in their children's education (Espino, 2016a; Marrun, 2020; Peralta, 2013). This

study illustrates the importance of parent engagement by sharing consejos of encouragement, perseverance, and resiliency with Latina first-generation college students, shaping students' experiences and decisions to attend college and persist in college. The consejos conveyed by Mexican immigrant parents illustrate the presence of community cultural wealth in the college experiences of Latina first-generation college students.

Implications For Future Research

The findings from this study are consistent with and extend previous research on parent engagement (Aragon, 2017; Espino, 2016). These interviews show that the explicit and implicit messages about education that parents share with daughters are important components of parents' involvement in their children's collegiate experience. The findings highlight the positive impact of parent engagement in helping students navigate and persist in higher education. This study offers insights into how first-generation Latina college students rely on their immigrant parents for emotional support and guidance in navigating college despite their parents' limited knowledge of the U.S. postsecondary experience. Efforts to understand how immigrant parents engage with their children and how they prepare them for discrimination and racism in higher education should be supported. Although most parents of the students in this study could not offer unique guidance on the college process and college life, parents could offer their own lived experiences and consejos as sources of support and examples of persistence and empowerment in the face of obstacles.

This study was based on a sample of Latina undergraduate students who identified as Mexican origin and part of the Mexican American ethnic groups within the Latina/o/x category. The experiences of these Latina college students offer insights into indirect ways parents can influence college success. It is important to recognize the racialized experiences and historical marginalization that Mexican Americans have faced in the southern region of

Texas as this context has had an impact on educational outcomes and how members of this ethnic group are classified and positioned in society (Abrica, 2019; Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

In this study, we examined the reflections of a group of Latina first-generation college students on their Mexican immigrant parents' engagement in their education. Future research that includes the voices of immigrant parents would help us understand parents' perceptions of their role in their children's educational pathways to college completion. Latina students also received messages from the broader society that included patriarchy and gendered expectations (e.g., expectations for daughters to return home after graduation and expectations for young women to go into a particular field). Further analysis of this type of message and how gender influences Latina and Latino students' decisions to enroll in and complete college would add to our understanding of factors influencing student college success.

Findings from this study provide valuable implications about the community cultural wealth found within Latinas' interpretation of their parents' influence regarding their college experience. Like other studies, the Latina students in this study valued the messages their parents shared and the wealth of experience, knowledge, and wisdom their parents imparted through everyday advice-giving practices (Espino, 2016a; Marrun, 2020; Matos, 2015). This work provides a lens into immigrant parents' role in supporting and guiding their children's higher education experiences through their active engagement via the sharing of consejos that instilled aspirations, encouraged students to persist in the face of obstacles, and built their confidence to overcome and challenge inequalities. This work adds to the literature on parent engagement as it builds on asset-based approaches that validate and lift up the work and practices immigrant families engage in to support their first-generation college students' success. The cultivation and passing down of consejos in this study

exemplify the cultural practices that immigrant families draw upon to build their cultural wealth and positively shape Latina student experiences.

Finally, it is important to refute the deficit perspectives of Mexican immigrant parents as not valuing education or not participating in their children's education. We must train and prepare educators to recognize the values and cultural wealth of students and their parents in order to transform educational spaces into settings in which Latina/o/x parents are valued and engaged in the educational pathways of their children. This is particularly important within spaces of higher education. Too often, immigrant parents are made to feel as if they do not belong in educational settings because of limited education, their English-proficiency, or their legal status. Too often deficit thinking regarding Latina/o/x students' ability to attend college or to achieve at high levels pervades school settings and influences the expectations of educators (Delgado Bernal & Aleman, 2017). Learning from the voices of Latina/o/x students who participate in college can help educators support the next generation of Latina/o/x in higher education.

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