

The “Problem” of Familism in New Latino Diaspora Schools: *Building Bridges to Create a Hybrid Culture of Academic Success*

Jessica Sierk, Ph.D.

Cambio de Colores Conference

June 8-10, 2016

*Eddie moved to Nebraska from Guatemala when he was eleven years old. He is the first in his entire extended family to go to college. His mom (one of twelve kids) wanted to go to college, but couldn't. He feels blessed to be able to go to college, but his family has mixed feelings. His grandparents who raised him for six years before he moved to the U.S. are very proud of him, but his aunt and other family members say he should be working already. They tell him to **“drop the books and become a man.”** He senses some jealousy and says they expect him to be a billionaire.*

(interview notes, November 9, 2015)

Introduction

- Newcomer parents faced with dichotomized choices – “the U.S. way or the Mexico way, English or Spanish, mainstream or deficit, even ‘school is an opportunity’ versus ‘school is a problem’” (Villenas, 2002, p. 31).
 - **Familism**
 - Valdés (1996) study of ten Mexican immigrant families
 - **Individualism**
 - “... asserts the ethical primacy of the human being against the pressures of social collectivism” (Castagno, 2014, p. 139).

Literature

- Liberal versus critical multiculturalism (Vavrus, 2015)
 - “providing newcomers with the opportunity to engage in current practices instead of redefining those practices to reflect changing demographics” (Lowenhaupt, 2014, p. 541)
- college administrators cite strong ties to family and community that pull students back home as a reason why first-generation, Hispanic students do not persist in the university environment (Kelly, Schneider, & Carey, 2010)

Methodology

- Larger ethnography:
 - Data collection (Spradley, 1979, 1980)
 - Participant observations (27 days, ~102 hours)
 - Ethnographic interviews (52 initial, 13 follow-up)
 - Data analysis (Fasching-Varner, 2014)
- This paper:
 - How do school personnel at two “New Latino Diaspora” (Murillo and Villenas, 1997) high schools in Nebraska understand the K-12 academic success and post-secondary aspirations of students from immigrant and refugee backgrounds?
 - Deixis (Gee, 2011)

Us vs. Them vs. Them

- “**The ones that have been here longer** don’t really think about [taking two-week vacations in the middle of the school year]” (Mrs. Falk, interview, May 11, 2015).
- You can really tell the students who are **third generation**. They’re pretty acclimated and know the language well and understand the process....
- ...Where **first timers**, their parents definitely don’t understand the importance that our culture puts on education... It’s work and support the family, which is important. They don’t understand the concept that the education can provide a better way sometimes. So language barrier’s huge with some of those parents...
- ...The **third generation** get the process sooner... Things we take for granted, like applying for college. ... I tell the students to tell their parents, if they don’t come to my financial aid meetings and they’re all invited to that, they can talk 100% in Spanish and get all the answers. So a little disconnect there as to the importance of furthering your education (Mrs. Langley, interview, May 11, 2015).

Assimilation: From **Their** to **Our**

- “We dipped because of a lot of **first-generation folks** weren’t able to do things because they just didn’t know, and parents didn’t know... Now, we’re in the **second and third generation** of families and they understand the importance of education. Our scores this year jumped up. We finally went from they’re just glad to have education to they want to achieve. We had students go through, graduate, and then they went right to work. Now our families are understanding the importance of the education... that it can open the doors for them, and the things that they can achieve by going to school”
(Mr. Lester, interview, May 15, 2015).

Dichotomized Choices: School vs. Work

- “We have the [meatpacking] plant where a lot of their parents work. I tell them that if you want something different, you have the chance to make that change... they get an opportunity to be here at school and that they get to break that chain, they get to go on further. They are setting the pace for the future generations” (Mr. Mercer, interview, May 13, 2015).
- “I’ve got a junior that scored 26 on the ACT. He doesn’t care because mom and dad said, ‘You’re going to [the meatpacking plant] to work. It pays good.’ We’ve got to get the kids out of that mentality” (Mrs. Anderson, interview, May 1, 2015).

Dichotomized Choices: **School** vs. **Family**

- I've got a girl crying today because she's a senior, and she's intelligent and her **dad won't let her go to school**. That used to be a lot more. It's been a long time since we had one of those. But yesterday when she was signing out and we were asking them the question of where you're going, she just broke down because she can't. Her dad won't let her go. **The only way she can go is if she leaves the family and just takes off and does it on her own** (Mr. Lester, interview, May 15, 2015).

Dichotomized Choices: **University** vs. **Community College**

- Their idea of what's best for their students sometimes is different than what we in school think is best for their students when I think of life after high school. In Mexico, if you got the ninth grade certificate, you've done well. And so here, their students graduating from high school, they've won the lottery. It's a totally different mindset. **I've seen too many students pass up scholarships and opportunities because their parents have discouraged them,** and that seems so crazy. I think of one student in particular who had a great **scholarship** to go to [a four-year university] and her parents would not let her go. She is at the [local community college] here in [Stockbridge], which is great. **She's pursuing an education,** but I feel like she **passed up a pretty big opportunity** or she didn't have the choice (Mr. Johnston, interview, May 15, 2015).

Blame Game: Culture

- “I wish that our parents and our students were more educationally driven... I think that because of the culture, there’s a lot of parents who don’t realize how much more **successful** their kids could be if they finish high school, went to college. That’s a **culture thing** that takes several generations” (Mrs. Barton, interview, May 1, 2015).

Blame Game: SES

- My wife teaches at [a school in a neighboring community], but that is a completely different situation... a lot more money in the school... So I think they really try to push those kids. There's a lot more kids there that are striving for that A-plus. They have to have 100% in a class; whereas here, it's more of a get by (Mr. Sheridan, interview, May 1, 2015).

Conclusion

- Us vs. Them vs. Them
 - When do school personnel stop thinking of their students as “other people’s children” (Delpit, 1995)? How does this influence their perceptions of who and what is deemed academically successful?
- Dichotomized Choices
 - How are the dichotomized choices available to students (school vs. work, school vs. family, university vs. community college) racialized? How are White, middle-class students held, or not held, to the same standards for success?
- Blame
 - How do we shift the “blame” to institutional and societal barriers rather than individuals and demographic scapegoats? How do we redefine success as something available to all students?

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