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Developing a College-Going Habitus: How First-Generation Latina/o/x Students Bi-directionally Exchange Familial Funds of Knowledge and Capital within Their Familias

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ABSTRACT
This qualitative study analyzes interviews with 17 first-generation Latina/o/x students. This study bridges funds of knowledge and social reproduction theory to examine the bi-directional exchange of familial funds of knowledge and capital relevant to higher education in Latina/o/x families. Students’ familial funds of knowledge assisted them as they accessed and persisted through higher education. Students bridged fields between their home communities and higher education when they shared capital and transformed it into funds of knowledge to assist family members in accessing college. In doing so, students encouraged the pursuit of higher education, contributing to the college-bound habitus of their familias. Implications for practice center on cultural shifts that must occur at the institutional level to develop policies and practices around developing relationships and partnerships early on with Latina/o/x communities.

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Latina/o/x; Latinx; funds of knowledge; social reproduction theory; higher education

Latina/o/xs are the fastest growing population in the United States; in 2016, they comprised 18% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Moreover, in 2017, 36% of Latina/o/xs age 18–24 enrolled in a 2 or 4-year college or university, up from 22% in 1997 and 18% in 1987 (NCES, 2018). With a rapidly growing younger population, our colleges and universities will continue to experience larger percentages of Latina/o/xs enrolling in college. While a growth in this population may warrant additional attention for college administrators, a moral imperative may motivate some to address ways to develop and nurture the college-going aspirations of Latina/o/xs. Schools and families are often viewed as primary influencers of educational aspirations of youth (Liou, Antrop-González, & Cooper, 2009; Sáenz, García-Louis, De Las Mercédez, & Rodriguez, 2018). Yet, an examination of current literature on the role of family for Latina/o/x students is complex (Allen, 2016; Kiyama, 2018; Sáenz et al., 2018). Some researchers suggest the need to sever ties with family, to an extent, to successfully transition to college (Tinto, 1993); others advocate the
importance of maintaining ties with family for Students of Color in higher education (Allen, 2016; Espino, 2016; Kiyama, 2010; Yosso, 2005). For Latina/o/x students, the role of family may play an increasingly nuanced role. A commitment to family can create internal or external pressures that students grapple with (Enriquez, 2011). A better understanding of Latina/o/x students and the influence of familial relationships on college access is warranted.

Through an analysis of in-depth interviews with Latina/o/x students, this study takes an asset-based perspective to explore students’ relationships with their familias as they considered accessing and accessed college. This study sheds light on the ways these relationships contribute to students’ educational pursuits and potentially to those of their familias. The purpose of this study is to explore the bi-directional exchange of familial funds of knowledge and capital that contributed to participants’ college access and also reveal the ways participants sought to promote college-going within their familias, disrupting long-term historical exclusion from higher education.

Literature review

Researchers, primary and secondary schools, and society often approach families and Students’ of Color educational experiences from a deficit perspective (García & Guerra, 2004; Yosso, 2005). In doing so, they make overgeneralizations about People of Color and fail to acknowledge the sociocultural experiences that shape individuals’ lives. As a result, they ignore the assets that Students of Color bring to their educational journeys (García & Guerra, 2004; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2017; Yosso, 2005).

While prior literature has suggested that Latina/o/x families may have limited knowledge and place less value on higher education, several scholars have debunked these myths by demonstrating the myriad of ways that Latina/o/x families have historically fought for educational opportunities (Enriquez, 2011; García & Guerra, 2004; Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2018). Because many scholars have approached the educational experiences of Latina/o/x youth from a deficit perspective, they have ignored the ways that Latina/o/x families are involved and committed to educational access (Quiñones & Kiyama, 2014; Sáenz et al., 2018). In the following sections, I review existing literature on asset-based scholarship which recognizes shifts in the literature on familial involvement in higher education, scholarship on instilling educational aspirations for Latina/o/x students, and acquiring capital to access college.

Recognizing familial involvement in higher education

The involvement of Latina/o/x families in the educational trajectories of youth often go unrecognized because of the perceived lack of visibility in their involvement (Ramos, Kiyama, & Harper, 2017; Sáenz et al., 2018).
However, parents are increasingly recognized in the educational pursuits of their children (Ceja, 2006; Quiñones & Kiyama, 2014). Ramos et al. (2017) studied the institutional representation of families of Color in the collegiate experiences of students and found that families are often represented in one of three ways: “the ever-absent family,” as both absent and lacking college knowledge; the “malleable family,” as involved within the guidelines set by an institution; and the “cornerstone family,” which is inclusive of diverse ways in which families are engaged in a students’ collegiate experience (p. 140). The controlling images of family involvement perpetuate negative stereotypes and further marginalize the involvement of families of Color in higher education (Ramos et al., 2017). Scholars have called for the need for researchers to acknowledge a more robust view of involvement beyond family-school engagement to include the nurturing of educational aspirations (Quiñones & Kiyama, 2014; Ramos et al., 2017). The following sections on instilling educational aspirations and acquiring capital to access college review the scholarship that does recognize familial influence and involvement in higher education.

**Instilling educational aspirations**

Family members of Latina/o/x students often encourage the pursuit of higher education (Espino, 2016; Gámez, Lopez, & Overton, 2017; Kiyama, 2010; Sáenz et al., 2018). Maintaining strong familial relationships has been connected to students’ commitment to education (Allen, 2016; Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Gonzalez, 2012). Even in families where the parents have not attended college, parents instill the importance of pursuing higher education (Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Gonzalez, 2012; Kiyama, 2018; Yosso, 2005). Many scholars have asserted the important role of parents (Gonzalez, 2012; Quiñones & Kiyama, 2014; Sáenz et al., 2018) in the educational experiences of their children. For example, Latina/o/x parents often instill motivational messages about hard work and the importance of success in school for Latina/o/x youth from a young age (Espino, 2016; Gonzalez, 2012; Sáenz et al., 2018). Oftentimes, these messages are passed on through *dichos*, intergenerational values and ideals (Espinoza-Herold, 2007), or *consejos*, “a cultural dimension of communication sparked with emotional empathy and compassion, as well as familial expectation and inspiration” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994, p. 300).

Moreover, older siblings (Sáenz et al., 2018) and other family members (George Mwangi, 2015; Kiyama, 2018, 2010) have pertinent roles in encouraging the pursuit of higher education. Older siblings, cousins, or other family members who attended college often serve as mentors and role models to Latina/o/x students (Gámez et al., 2017; Kiyama, 2018).
Acquiring capital to access college

Several scholars have found that Latina/o/x students gain cultural affirmation from their families (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Gonzalez, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Family members mentor others by sharing information related to the college selection and application process (George Mwangi, 2015; Kiyama, 2018). Acevedo-Gil (2017) developed college conocimiento, a college-going framework for Latina/o/ox students, and within the framework highlights that “siblings, extended family members and peers serve as primary information sources” (p. 9). Ceja (2006) found that siblings often served as the sharers of information that supported younger siblings in their college access process. In some cases, beyond sharing information, family members would take students to campus to introduce them to faculty to support their transitions to college (Sáenz et al., 2018). Students of Color often return to their home communities to promote college-going and share capital valued in accessing college (Luedke, in Press).

Student’s benefit from collective support provided by families and research suggests that actively maintaining these connections is important to Latina/o/x students’ persistence in higher education (Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Gonzalez, 2012; Luedke, 2019; Sáenz et al., 2018). However, scholars have seldom thoroughly examined the ways that currently enrolled students are receiving and intentionally sharing capital with family members in efforts to promote college-going. Much of the existing scholarship examines the role of older family members, particularly parents, contributing to the educational experiences of students enrolled in college. This study will explore the bi-directional exchange of funds of knowledge and capital where Latina/o/x students are both receivers and distributers of knowledge valued in higher education particularly within, and perhaps even between, generations in their families.

Theoretical framework

I blend together two bodies of work in forming the theoretical framework for this study. I incorporate funds of knowledge, which encompasses knowledge and skills held by families, often exchanged through routine practices (Vélez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992). I also adapt Bourdieu’s (1979/1984) social reproduction theory, which examines how inequality is perpetuated or disrupted and transformed, generationally.

Funds of knowledge, knowledge and skills held by families, was developed through an anthropological study with working-class Mexican families in the southwestern United States (Vélez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992). Funds of knowledge recognizes experiential knowledge and the accumulation of knowledge over time (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Funds of knowledge can be activated to enhance economic opportunity and mobility within families (both
nuclear and extended) (Vélez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992). It is an asset-based approach to recognizing knowledge that students bring with them to educational settings and an orientation within educational settings to build upon these assets (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2017). Within the funds of knowledge framework, scholars address the role of “dichos—‘sayings or proverbs’”—(Espinoza-Herold, 2007, p. 261), also known as intergenerational values and ideals, often embedded in the discourse within families. The framework was established and has primarily been adopted, by scholars who study K-12 schooling experiences of low-income children (González et al., 2005). However, recently Kiyama and Rios-Aguilar (2018) compiled an edited volume which examines how funds of knowledge has been incorporated into research conducted with Students of Color in higher education. Scholars have called for the need to better understand how funds of knowledge are negotiated and activated amongst college students (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2018). I respond to this call by examining the educational pipeline more broadly, first understanding how students acquire funds of knowledge through their families while growing up, with a particular focus on how this contributes to their accessing higher education. Next, I illuminate the ways students return to their families to share cultural capital valued in higher education and shed light on how this capital may be transformed into funds of knowledge within their families. Prior scholarship on Funds of Knowledge recognizes it as experiential knowledge accumulated over time (González et al., 2005) and I explore whether accumulated cultural capital may be converted into funds of knowledge within the family.

Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory (1979/1984) consists of four tenets: social capital, cultural capital, habitus, and the field. Social capital is based on social obligations and includes social connections and relationships—students can tap into their social capital as a form of currency that can be utilized toward accessing opportunities or rewards in a particular setting or field. Cultural capital includes skills, knowledge, and tastes—students can utilize their cultural capital to gain access to resources that may aid them in navigating higher education. Habitus is the set of dispositions that allow one to see opportunities as available or unavailable—habitus contributes to whether one sees an opportunity, such as accessing higher education, as available—or not—based on their life experiences. The field is the place, or setting, in which particular forms of capital are valued and is arguably the most pertinent yet overlooked tenet. The field sets the tone for the value capital is given in particular settings; in this study, I focus on the field of higher education. Social reproduction theory critiques the reproduction of class inequality due to disparate access to capital valued in particular fields, limiting access to upward mobility. Here, I examine how the exchange of capital valued and provided currency in higher education is shared across fields, both within one’s family and in higher education.

Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama (2017) suggest the need to better understand how funds of knowledge can be bridged with complementary frameworks,
such as social reproduction theory. Prior scholarship has theorized bridging the concepts of social and cultural capital with funds of knowledge (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2018; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). Kiyama suggests that “funds of knowledge can be converted (if valued and recognized) into social and cultural capital” (Kiyama, 2018, p. 90). Bridging the full social reproduction theory with funds of knowledge, empirically, is warranted and may advance our understanding of the ways that knowledge and capital are shared within and perhaps even between generations in ways that contribute to educational access and potential upward mobility. Kiyama (2018) recommends further research exploring whether familial aspirations “are transferred and develop into college aspirations for their youth” (Kiyama, 2018, p. 102). Findings from the present study explore within generation sharing of knowledge and capital between siblings and cousins and between generation sharing with parents, aunts and uncles, and nieces and nephews. I work toward responding to Kiyama’s recommendations by building this bridge empirically here. While Kiyama (2018) suggests that funds of knowledge may be converted to cultural capital, I propose we consider whether cultural capital may also be transformed into funds of knowledge over generations (remembering that funds of knowledge are developed experientially over time in families). I utilize funds of knowledge to examine the transition of the rich knowledge, motivational messages, dichos, and consejos that students receive from families that propels students accessing and persisting in college. I explore the utility in bridging this theory with social reproduction theory by examining how students proactively return to their families to distribute and translate their acquired social and cultural capital relative to higher education. While funds of knowledge and capital are not synonymous, I explore how cultural capital may be transformed into funds of knowledge within families over time.

The sharing of funds of knowledge and capital occurred bi-directionally as students received it from family members and subsequently also shared both funds of knowledge and cultural capital with their families in efforts to disrupt the reproduction of inequality. The findings from this study are represented in Figure 1.

The sharing of funds of knowledge and capital may contribute to increasing the number of individuals within a generation (and potentially between generations) who pursue higher education. This sharing has the potential to make gains in disrupting inequality—although, we must consider the scale at which this sharing occurs within the context of a larger system that discounts the values students acquire from their families and bring to their educational experiences. By bridging the full social reproduction theory with funds of knowledge, I hope to build upon recent scholarship that captures a broader, more inclusive, portrayal of the ways students activate their capital and
nurture familial funds of knowledge to disrupt inequality and enhance the opportunity for upward mobility of their families.

**Method**

Data for this project stem from a larger critical qualitative research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The theoretical framework informing the larger study was social reproduction theory. I explored relationships important to accessing and persisting in higher education for Students of Color. Here, I focus on the Latina/o/x students to not only uncover the integral role of family in college aspiration and access but also to examine how participants...
shared their accumulated cultural capital and knowledge specific to higher education with their families. The research question that guided analysis was how do first-generation Latina/o/x students describe the generational accumulation and dissemination of funds of knowledge and capital within their families as it relates to higher education?

I conducted interviews at two Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the Midwest: one large research-intensive university (Midwestern University) and one mid-size comprehensive university (Midstate University). At the time of data collection, there were no federally recognized Hispanic Serving Institutions in the state where data were collected. Research sites were chosen due to rising racial/ethnic diversity in the student populations at the institutions, proximity in location, and access to gatekeepers. All participants self-identified as first-generation college students (neither parent earned a bachelor’s degree). Data collection resulted in in-person, semi-structured, in-depth interviews that lasted approximately one to two hours (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with 28 Students of Color. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. For the purposes of this analysis, I focus on the 15 Latina/o and 2 Bi-Racial Latina and White participants. See Table 1 for additional information on participants including institution attended, gender, class standing and major. To recruit participants, I incorporated purposeful chain sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method allowed me to contact individuals (undergraduate students and staff) at two institutions who connected me with eligible participants. Participants also recommended peers to participate, and, finally, I contacted participants directly. Sampling criteria for the larger study included

### Table 1. Student demographic information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Class Standing</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Midstate</td>
<td>Latina/White</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergio</td>
<td>Midstate</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javier</td>
<td>Midstate</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Midstate</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mario</td>
<td>Midstate</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>First-Year</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>Midstate</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td>Midstate</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>First-Year</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esteban</td>
<td>Midwestern</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Public Relations (Business)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marisol</td>
<td>Midstate</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Public Policy and Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maricela</td>
<td>Midwestern</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>First-Year</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert</td>
<td>Midstate</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfonso</td>
<td>Midwestern</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
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<td>Latino</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>Midwestern</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Communication/Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
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<td>Latina</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maribel</td>
<td>Midwestern</td>
<td>Latina/White</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Biology/Chinese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Students provided specific ethnicity categories (i.e., Mexican, Puerto Rican, etc.) but this is not linked to each student in order to maintain confidentiality. Of the 17 participants, 13 identified as Mexican or Mexican American, two as Puerto Rican, one as Cuban, and one as Paraguayan.
that the participant identifies as a Student of Color, first-generation college student, and was in their second semester, or beyond, in college.

Interview questions focused on meaningful relationships that contributed to students’ experiences and how students learned to access and navigate higher education. For this analysis, questions focused on who influenced students’ decisions to pursue college and college preparation. There were also targeted questions around relationships with family, including ways students’ families helped them in college as well as how students helped their families while enrolled. All of these topics were part of the initial interview protocol. In this analysis, I focus on the Latina/o participants, because of the depth of the ways in which they described the bi-directional sharing of funds of knowledge and capital that was specific to this student population. I have the unique opportunity to explore and connect how students received funds of knowledge that encouraged, and supported, their college-going and connect this with their desire to share the cultural capital they were acquiring on campus back with their families to promote college-going of siblings in particular, but also with cousins, parents and other familia.

Data analysis

I adapted the constant comparative method for data analysis, derived from grounded theory, which includes a simultaneous data collection and analysis process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The constant comparative method of analysis is rigorous, flexible, and systematic. The constant comparative method includes open, axial, and selected coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the open coding phase of analysis, I compared and contrasted data as it was being collected and through preliminary analysis. This analysis occurred early while conducting interviews, transcribing audio files, initial review of transcripts, and developing analytic memos. At this stage, I was developing a sense of the key relationships important to students accessing and persisting through higher education. In this inductive approach, the key relationships that emerged included those with Staff of Color, peers, and family. In this analysis, I focus on the familial relationships. Next, I combined themes within the preliminary codes. For example, I combined in vivo codes (in participants own words) like “my mom was the one who’s telling me I should go to school” and, “my sister didn’t like—she just wanted me to get a good education,” to create new codes including family, with sub-codes of “receiving support” and “returning support.” This occurred with multiple rounds of initial coding; at this stage, I developed and refined the codebook and subsequently coded the data in NVivo (an electronic qualitative coding software) (axial coding). Finally, I narrowed down the codes from the original list of categories and focused only on codes related to this analysis (for example, focusing on data coded
under family and education—aspirations and applying to college). At this stage, I reanalyzed the data with funds of knowledge (Vélez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992) and social reproduction theory (Bourdieu, 1979/1984) and indicated relationships between previously coded data and theory (selected coding). This coding process resulted in themes that uncover the bi-directional exchange of funds of knowledge and capital between participants and their families.

**Researcher positionality**

As a mixed-race Latina scholar who entered college as a first-generation student, I shared identities with participants. As a way to build rapport, I took time prior to the start of the interview to share my own identity and educational experiences and discussed my commitment to the research. Regarding my own educational trajectory, I grew up in a household where neither parent had graduated from high school, both later went on to earn their GEDs and my mother a degree in cosmetology. While I was enrolled in high school, my mother enrolled in a four-year university seeking to open up the educational pathways for her younger children (several of my older siblings had dropped out of high school). From that point, all of her younger children pursued higher education and two of the four earned bachelor’s degrees. I consistently speak with my nieces and nephews about higher education in “when” and not, “if” terms. When I was enrolled in college and graduate school, I would bring them with me to student involvement events so they too could see themselves in college. My own daughter often spends time on campus.

I believe that sharing myself with participants, prior to the interview, invited them to share their experiences more fully with me. I sought to address my own researcher bias by intentionally incorporating several techniques to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

**Trustworthiness**

I employed multiple trustworthiness techniques throughout the research process. I engaged in two stages of member checks (Luedke, 2017). Initially, I emailed participants their transcripts for review; then, I emailed the larger themes and created opportunities for participants to provide feedback (Carspecken, 1996; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I conducted negative case analysis (Carspecken, 1996) where I identified data that did not fit with the primary themes and reexamined this data to uncover areas of contrast. I conducted peer debriefing (Carspecken, 1996; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) where I coded my data independently and reviewed my analysis with colleagues for interpretation, focusing on conflicting data and interpretations until consensus was reached. I also engaged in conversation with colleagues with
intersecting research interests as I worked through the analysis and writing to process my thoughts during the research process.

**Limitations**

This study focused on the role of family in the college-going process. This is not to suggest that non-familial relationships are not influential in this process. Findings are limited to 17 one-on-one in-depth interviews with students across two institutions in the Midwest. Findings provide us with their experiences, which give us pause to consider the integral role of *familia* for many Latina/o/x students in college, but they are not, nor were they suggested to be, generalizable to all Latina/o/x students in higher education. My sample of Latina/o participants was largely Mexican/Mexican American (13 of 17); this is not representative of the diversity inherent within the Latina/o/x population in the United States. Finally, I only spoke with the students as opposed to students and their families. Speaking with family members that students described in their narratives would have provided a more robust understanding of the role and exchange of funds of knowledge and capital within families. Moreover, interviewing students (and their *familia*) longitudinally to examine the bi-directional sharing of knowledge throughout students’ educational experiences would be ideal.

**Findings**

All participants in this study emphasized a strong sense of *familia*. Participants highlighted the multifaceted ways that their families supported them in their academic journeys, and participants shared the ways they strove to give back to their families. Funds of knowledge and capital were shared bi-directionally within, and potentially between, generations in their families. The findings are represented through two themes: receiving *dichos, consejos*, and capital about college-going (where students described looking up to and being influenced by older siblings who attended college—13 of the 17 participants had older siblings, and eight of the 13 older siblings had attended at least some college—all eight of these older siblings nurtured the educational aspirations and shared funds of knowledge or capital with their younger siblings); and transforming cultural capital into funds of knowledge within *familias*, where students described serving as role models to family members, sharing cultural capital that may be transformed into funds of knowledge within their families. These two themes culminate in the bi-directional sharing of knowledge between families and students.
Receiving *dichos, consejos*, and capital about college-going

Although all participants are first-generation college students, eight of the students had older siblings who enrolled in, or graduated from, college. Maricela tied attending college to the encouragement and role modeling that her older sister provided.

Growing up I didn’t really think about college, but being a sophomore and junior, my older sister began getting more politically active in the community and she started to become a voice for Latinos in our community. She always went to talk with people, encouraging them to go vote, that we do have a future beyond what we know, and that fast food restaurants are not our future and we can do better. She also would always tell me, “Maricela, you’re smart you know you can do it, this is not the impossible, everything is possible, as long as you set your mind to it.” She gave me a lot of encouragement and a lot of push to do better in school. She always helped me with trying to pick out which school I wanted to go to and finding out information about what kind of programs are at these schools.

When Maricela was a senior, her sister made checklists of tasks for Maricela to complete during the application process to ensure she followed the necessary steps. Maricela tied her decision to attend college to her sister’s encouragement, shared through *dichos*, that she and her community could achieve greater goals despite societal messages to the contrary. She also shared familial funds of knowledge around the values of hard work and determination as she told Maricela that, “everything is possible, as long as you set your mind to it.” The funds of knowledge were coupled with cultural capital, as her sister shared strategies for identifying particular information about programs and schools she considered applying to. Perhaps the cultural capital Maricela’s sister shared with her is being transformed into funds of knowledge that will continue to be passed down for generations within her family. Maricela’s sister, as with many other college-going family members in this study, served as a valuable source of social capital to Maricela during her collegiate journey, transforming cultural capital into funds of knowledge within their *familia*.

José was encouraged by his older sister to consider the impact that college would have on their family. In his words:

> When I saw her, and her being able to succeed, and actually go to a big university, I was like, why can’t I? ... . Because in my city, in my family, there’s never been a Hispanic male who’s done something. So I never had someone to look up to like that. So my sister was probably the catalyst for me to want to go to college. ... . What she would say is, “you can do it, it’s a lot of work, anywhere you go you’ll be fine. Just remember, you have to try your hardest, don’t give up.” She’s like, “it’s not where you start, [or] how you start, it’s how you finish.”

José’s sister shared *consejos* with him, instilling the importance of persistence and a hard work ethic. His sister placed their familial *consejos* and *dichos*...
around hard work into the context of higher education; in doing so, she may be turning familial funds of knowledge into cultural capital that will support José in his success in college as he applies the funds of knowledge. José shared that part of what he hoped to accomplish in attending college was building a tradition of college-going in his family and community. His sister encouraged him to attend, and together they sought to expand their families’ educational opportunities:

I was worried since throughout middle school, and a lot of when I was younger, I didn’t do good in school. I got influenced by gangs and stuff like that. She [his sister] just said, “leave these all behind and do what you gotta do to get here, to get to college.” I worked my butt off! She pretty much pushed me by just saying, you can do it. ‘It’s not like you’re just doing it for yourself, you’re doing it for our family. You’re doing it for everybody who has some relation to us.” Because there’s not much of us who go to college. Especially from my town. Especially from our town in Mexico.

Part of José’s motivation to pursue higher education was to serve as a role model to his family (including extended family and community), encouraging college-going. His older sister empowered him, as she shared consejos (a form of funds of knowledge) that inspired him to pursue higher education for himself and for his family. Being enrolled in college and present in his family allowed José to serve as a visible source of college-going, one which has the possibility to influence the habitus of other family members, just as his sister’s enrollment served as a catalyst for José’s enrollment.

While Maricela and José’s sisters provided encouragement and support and highlighted the role of persistence and a strong work ethic, Jesus described the assistance he received in the completion of college applications and procedures, such as how to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Jesus relied on his sister to comprehend college forms:

One of the obstacles was that when I started applying to college I didn’t really know many of the things, but my sister already went through this process before me, maybe a year before so I rely on her as, “Did you already fill out the FAFSA, how do you fill out the FAFSA?” She has helped me a lot.

Jesus’ sister was instrumental in helping him complete the college application process. Learning how to apply to college and complete the necessary components of the application, such as the essays and completing the FAFSA, were often difficult milestones that students in the study encountered. Jesus and Maricela (among others) benefited from the embodied cultural capital of their older siblings who shared tips on how to complete forms and how to make their applications stand out. Their older siblings served as sources of social capital, providing access to cultural capital necessary to accessing higher education. It is possible that this cultural capital may be transformed into familial funds of knowledge over time as it exchanged back and forth as members of Jesus’ family attend college.
Transforming cultural capital into funds of knowledge within familias

In participants’ narratives, it was evident that they, too, served as role models in their families. Students reflected on the ways they shared information about the college-going process and built upon the funds of knowledge present within their families regarding the value of education. Claudia’s parents enrolled her in a pre-college program that provided a full-tuition scholarship to those admitted to the institution. Job opportunities introduced the possibility of a cross-country move, but before doing so, her parents confirmed that Claudia could remain in the pre-college program. Each summer throughout high school, Claudia’s parents continued to send her across the country to Midwestern University, a significant demonstration of the value placed on education. Claudia was admitted to Midwestern University, and as a student, she shared her experiences with her younger siblings:

I feel like one of my biggest motivations to stay in school is to be an example to my siblings. They are the ones who tell me, “Oh, when I go to college can I do this?” Or my sister, she’s 12, she turned 12 today. She said, “When I’m in college, can I be in your sorority?” And I’m like yeah; you just have to go to college. And I feel like they already think they have to go.

Claudia’s motivation to persist in college partially stemmed from her desire to serve as a role model to her siblings. Being in college and returning home to share her experiences helped ensure that Claudia’s siblings knew what college was like; in this sharing, she was building upon the funds of knowledge around college already present within her family. Claudia shared so regularly about her collegiate experiences that her siblings spoke in “when terms,” emphasizing that they will pursue college. Claudia told them that they “have to go [to college]” and encouraged them to think about what their experiences might be like; in doing so, she is building a bridge between her home community field and the field of higher education. Claudia is influencing the college-bound habitus of her younger siblings, emphasizing their college-bound thoughts and aspirations. The questions her siblings asked demonstrate the intricate knowledge, or cultural capital, they possess. It is also a demonstration of how the cultural capital Claudia brought back from college is being transformed into funds of knowledge within their family over time.

Elizabeth also shared a commitment to developing funds of knowledge generationally, reinforcing the value of education within her family.

I think that being a good role model for my brother is something that helped me out a lot … I think that that relationship is really pushing me to go forward and to be successful because now I want my brother to go to college and do the things that I’m doing … I tell him everything that I can about what I’m doing. He’ll always ask, “how’s college like” you know things like that … “what class did you have today?” Cuz he hates school right [laughs] right now. I’m working on getting
him to like school like I do, but he is so fascinated with the fact that I don’t have the same seven classes that I come home from every day.

For Elizabeth, being successful in college is connected to her commitment to being a role model to her younger brother. She sought to influence his habitus to include the possibility of college. In sharing her own experiences, she bridged fields and exposed her brother to the realities of college through sharing cultural capital and demystifying misconceptions (for example: the nature of college courses and the flexibility in one’s schedule). Elizabeth is serving as a bridge and the capital she is sharing, and exposing her brother to, may be transformed into funds of knowledge within her family over time as it becomes everyday knowledge in their household. Her brother now has intricate knowledge about college classes that he can share with others. While serving as a role model instilled a sense of pride and motivation for Elizabeth, it simultaneously created stressors; she served as a role model to her larger familia in addition to her brother.

[Having the weight of being the first person in my family to go to college, like out of everyone … I have all these people pressuring me to do well … “Oh Elizabeth went to college, so now we have to go to college.” I just think that that’s a lot of pressure to have … I have to be the advocate like, “well, I went to school so now all you guys, all of you 12, 15 cousins have to go to school too.”]

Serving as a role model was complex for Elizabeth. In some parts of the interview, she described it as a point of pride and motivation; during other times, she described the pressure placed on her by family. Her aunts and uncles placed her on a pedestal where Elizabeth served as a symbol of college access in her family, potentially influencing the college-bound habitus of other family members. Her family shared consejos, encouraging other family members to pursue college, and they referenced Elizabeth and her experience while doing so. They continued to build upon their funds of knowledge around the importance of hard work and the possibilities that continuing one’s education could provide younger generations of their familia.

Another student, Maribel, described ways she explicitly instilled college-bound expectations by teaching her brother to prepare for college throughout high school. When Maribel was deciding which college to attend, location was an important factor; staying close to home allowed her to help her brother prepare for college.

I give him a lot of advice in that way. How to apply. What to do. … I kind of gave him [a] breakdown of year per year, what he should be doing. But I never had that from my guidance counselor … . I definitely feel proud that he’s doing well. I feel at ease that he’s on the right track. I don’t have to worry so much anymore. ‘Cause he knows, he knows the drill kind of. He understands how to get into college and what it is. And he’ll shadow me every once in a while. … I’ve taken him to all of my classes. I introduce him to everybody I know. And I tell [him] about different, my professors in chemistry or physics. And he follows me through a whole day...
from 8:00 until 8:00. And he sees how busy things can get. But I’m really happy that he has these opportunities and he’s interested and he’s on the right path.

Maribel’s commitment to knowledge and education was established as a child when her parents read to her every night before bed. Now, Maribel serves as a role model to her younger brother, continuing to build upon the funds of knowledge around learning and education already established in her family. She spent time ensuring her brother was familiar with what college would be like so he would be better prepared. As a source of social capital (something she described as limited in her college access journey), Maribel sought to bridge the fields of home and campus, physically, by bringing her brother to campus to shadow her. Maribel’s commitment to helping her brother prepare for college early on encouraged him to make decisions that would strengthen his college applications. For example, she suggested that he get involved in organizations early on so that he would be prepared to hold leadership positions as an upper-classman. In sharing the value of leadership prior to college, Maribel was sharing cultural capital that would be valued in the application process. She was transforming the cultural capital she acquired in college into funds of knowledge within her familia, providing her brother with the knowledge he too can pass on to others. Beyond verbally sharing knowledge, she also allowed him to experience it himself, potentially contributing to this capital acquired becoming more embedded within her family and potentially being transformed into funds of knowledge. Maribel illuminated these experiences as simultaneous points of pride and stressors. She shared that she now felt, “at ease” and that she does not have to “worry so much anymore.” She feels that he is set with a college-going habitus and the funds of knowledge and cultural capital to support his way through college.

While Javier was one of two students who did not initially have the full support of family in pursuing higher education, his family (including his son) was his motivation to persist in college.

I started thinking about my son and how his future would be if I quit … and it wouldn’t be too good, I would be working a crappy job. I wouldn’t do so well. He would be the only reason I’m in school and I’m working hard … I can’t do all my work. Even if I have to write a paper and I have to wait until my son goes to sleep, I’ll do it … I’ll catch up on my sleep later. I always find a way to survive you know to try to do all my work.

Javier proceeded to share how he served as a role model to his younger brothers. He discussed how he worked to promote education more generally:

I talk to my brothers about it [college], they visit sometimes and they want to go. I recently started calling them more often and checking up on them making sure they’re good, you know making sure that they’re staying out of trouble.
Javier saw opportunities that a college degree provided and worked to emphasize the value of education, developing and nurturing aspirations around opportunities associated with higher education within his family. Javier did not describe his role in sharing the value of higher education as a pressure placed upon him; instead, he described it as a motivating force. He worked to broaden the thoughts, or habitus, of his younger brothers to consider attending college. Javier also sought to bridge the fields of home and campus by sharing his experiences and bringing his brothers to visit campus to acquire experiential knowledge themselves. His brothers would have the opportunity to share the cultural capital valued in the field of higher education with future generations of family, as Javier did for them, potentially transforming this cultural capital into familial funds of knowledge.

Alfonso was the other student that did not initially have the full support of his family in pursuing college. Alfonso asserted that he would not consider himself successful in college until other family members “follow[ed] suit” and also pursued higher education:

I feel like I need to get as many opportunities as I can with internships and research and whatever it may be so I can prove to my family that this is worthwhile. If I graduate with a degree and I’m having a perfectly fine life and my family still thinks it wasn’t worthwhile, than to me that is not success. I not only want to get my degree but I want to encourage my family as well to pursue a degree or pursue higher education. To me success is not only getting the degree but making sure I encourage others to follow suit and even if they don’t follow suit at least acknowledge the importance of it so they can help their children see it as an option. That would be success in college for me.

Alfonso is attempting to alter the habitus of family members who may not have considered college due to immediate financial constraints that served as deterrents. Alfonso placed pressures on himself to serve as a role model to his family. Alfonso is sharing cultural capital in describing engagement opportunities, such as research and internships, that have the potential to elevate one’s collegiate experience. He is serving as a source of social capital as he shares his own experiences with his family. Through these actions, Alfonso has the opportunity to turn his acquired cultural capital valued in college into funds of knowledge within his family that may be shared within, and between, generations. During the interview, Alfonso noted that since his enrollment in college, his mother has also enrolled:

My transition to college was really tough so with my mom just seeing the opportunities it has, she actually went back to college and is still getting her degree … For her to go back [in her] upper 40s I found extremely important. She’s been very successful and she’s going through a lot of the same stuff I’m going through. It’s really, really nice for me to have that relationship with my mom. Now she understands the importance of college and how it can help. … I don’t think she would have gone if it wasn’t for me. She wasn’t even considering it but because I went to college it opened her eyes to it and encouraged her to do it.
Alfonso and others were critically conscious of the ways their college-going experiences could influence the college-going aspirations, habitus, of *familia*. Participants intentionally sought to bring back cultural capital valued in higher education to their families; findings reveal that this cultural capital has the possibility of being transformed into familial fund of knowledge over time and may be shared generationally.

**Discussion**

Initially, students shared how the *dichos* and *consejos* (around the value of hard work, persistence, and the pursuit of higher education) they were told while growing up contributed to their determination in accessing college. Students also acquired cultural capital (selecting a college, completing the FAFSA, etc.) that may be transformed into funds of knowledge in their families from older siblings who attended college. Students described earning their degrees as ways to open doors for family members, using their college experiences to serve as examples, encouraging *familia* to see college as viable, potentially altering their college-going habitus. Students sought to share college-specific cultural capital (such as strategies to develop their college essays, develop leadership skills, and make the most of opportunities available in college) to assist family with accessing and persisting in college. They shared their own *consejos*, or wisdom, with family members; alongside cultural capital valued in higher education, and in doing so, participants may be planting seeds to transform cultural capital valued in higher education into funds of knowledge within their families over time.

Students served as sources of social capital within their families. Several students shared having limited access to social capital that would facilitate access to higher education. As a result, participants intentionally sought opportunities to serve as sharers of social capital and accumulated cultural capital with family. Students engaged in these actions in attempts to contribute to their college-bound habitus consistent with their familial funds of knowledge, which placed a high value on education.

Participants created opportunities to bridge the fields of home and campus as they exchanged information bi-directionally (both receiving and distributing funds of knowledge and capital). Students internalized the *dichos* and *consejos*, or funds of knowledge, that propelled them to pursue higher education and returned to their families to share newly acquired cultural capital that may be transformed into funds of knowledge within their families over time. The capital and funds of knowledge were largely shared with the same generation of family members (siblings and cousins), but there were also examples of students passing capital and funds of knowledge to other generations (parents, aunts and uncles, and nieces and nephews as seen more explicitly in Elizabeth and Alfonso’s narratives), suggesting that funds of knowledge and capital may be shared bi-directionally within and potentially between generations.
Theoretical implications

Applying the funds of knowledge framework to higher education and collegiate student populations is a growing area of research (see Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2018). Some scholars have worked to bridge the expansion of funds of knowledge in higher education research alongside other theoretical frameworks. For example, Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) merged social and cultural capital with funds of knowledge, bridging relevant concepts. However, these scholars did not employ Bourdieu’s full social reproduction theory when bridging with funds of knowledge. By only employing two of the four main concepts in social reproduction theory, the analysis may be missing critical ties to the field and to the role of habitus. In this study, I sought to utilize the full social reproduction theory framework to demonstrate the role that capital had in the disruption and potential transformation of social mobility. Students served as sources of social capital within their families as related to the field of higher education. They returned to their families and shared cultural capital that would support family members in accessing college, potentially transforming this cultural capital into funds of knowledge which could influence the college-bound habitus of future generations.

I began the findings section by demonstrating the ways students accumulated funds of knowledge in their families. Typically, scholarship on dichos and consejos has examined their transmission within families between parents and their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Espinoza-Herold, 2007); however, findings from this study suggest that dichos and consejos were shared within generations (between siblings and cousins) and also between generations (parents, aunts and uncles, and nieces and nephews). These findings suggest we take a broader understanding of the ways dichos, consejos, and funds of knowledge more broadly are shared within families.

Participants highlighted ways they served as cultural bridges (Lopez & Stack, 2001) intentionally bringing cultural capital garnered in college back to their families to facilitate college-going. As students shared cultural capital relevant to higher education, they may be transforming this capital into funds of knowledge within their families, as older siblings had done for them. For example, students shared cultural capital relevant to accessing higher education, such as the college application process (what is valued in college essays), what to expect in college (class structure), and opportunities available in college (internships). Students were intentional and conscious of the ways they consumed cultural capital; they sought to transform capital into funds of knowledge to be passed to those they shared it with. They also hoped it would be transferred and extended across generations. As this cultural capital becomes more common knowledge within their families it may become transformed into funds of knowledge, knowledge acquired through every day and routine practices. This appeared evident as students described
seeking to change narratives around college-going and wanting to influence siblings to encourage nieces and nephews to attend college (and also evident in the ways aunts and uncles used the students’ experiences to inspire and encourage their own children to pursue higher education). As this is done generationally, it is possible that the cultural capital they acquire in college is being transformed into funds of knowledge in their families. A cycle of bi-directional sharing of funds of knowledge and cultural capital may be evolving generationally as depicted in Figure 1.

Participants took this sharing of cultural capital a step further by sharing experiential knowledge. For example, students served as social capital within their families when they worked to minimize the barriers between the fields of home and campus, which participants engaged in often through physically bridging the fields by bringing family to campus for shadowing experiences. The bridging of fields can narrow the cultural capital gaps specific to higher education. The sharing of capital and funds of knowledge through role modeling, discussions, and physically bringing family members to campus has the potential to contribute to the development of a college-going habitus, a habitus that considers pursuing higher education and contains knowledge of cultural and social capital and funds of knowledge that family members can tap into to access and persist in higher education. The sharing of capital and funds of knowledge has the potential to disrupt inequality as increasing numbers of family members pursue higher education, leading to greater stability.

However, we must recognize that this disruption of inequality is occurring at a smaller scale, within families, and continued efforts at mitigating the barriers between fields and between access to social and cultural capital valued in higher education on a more systemic scale, is vital. We must work toward the eradication of systems that continually advantage those already advantaged in educational pipelines in ways that provide access to capital to communities who are underserved by systems of oppression.

**Implications for research**

Future research should further explore the bi-directional sharing of funds of knowledge and capital, as prior scholarship has overwhelmingly focused on information passed on from parents to children. Research has seldom explored the ways students develop and contribute to the funds of knowledge in their families, including further examining how cultural capital may be transformed into funds of knowledge within a family. Gathering this data from both students and their families is warranted.

Moreover, findings also complicate the notion of what it means to be a first-generation college student. Within the literature, the first-generation status is often defined by whether students’ parents have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher (Yee, 2016); however, only recently have scholars begun to interrogate and
complicate this definition (see Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Findings from this study shed light on how older siblings who have gone to college supported participants in accessing and persisting through college and how participants did this for family members. Future research should continue to complicate the first-generation student term and incorporate more nuance in the complexity of experiences and funds of knowledge and cultural capital that the “first generation” students bring to college.

This study also demonstrates how the role of family is much more nuanced than currently discussed in existing research. The literature reveals competing ideas around the role of family for students enrolled in higher education (see Allen, 2016; Espino, 2016; Tinto, 1993). Maintaining ties was critical to participants in this study; students maintained strong and regular communication with family during college. Serving as role models to their families was central to many students’ desire to access and persist through college. However, we must not lose sight of the pressures that students may simultaneously experience to serve as role models. This pressure may cause stress or anxiety that may affect students’ educational experiences. In some cases, this pressure came from family, while in other instances, it seemed to be internally imposed. Regardless of where the pressure stems from, it affects students. These are important considerations as we reflect on the role of family for Latina/o/xs.

**Practical implications**

Findings provide several practical implications. Campuses must seek to ensure they are nurturing students’ collectivist nature by creating environments that are welcoming and supportive of students’ core values—and they must work to demonstrate this to families and communities as they engage with them in the recruitment process. Staff and administrators must work diligently to nurture the knowledge that Latina/o/x families embody (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2018; Luedke, 2017; Ramos et al., 2017) and bring with them as they prepare to access college. Campus administrators must validate and promote the nurturing of relationships between Latina/o/x students and their families. Institutions can work toward accomplishing this by making their initial contact with families more engaging. Campuses must develop practices that include having a presence in local communities and schools where they seek to develop relationships and partnerships with families and communities earlier on. Campuses must incorporate policies and practices that signal their commitment to Latina/o/x students and their families such as: culturally engaging family visit days/weekends, bilingual college visit days, campus websites (and materials) available in Spanish (and other languages reflective of student bodies), recruiting and retaining culturally knowledgeable (and bilingual) staff who celebrate and nurture the role of family, and offering Latina/o/x-centered programming. These cultural shifts will demonstrate
the institution’s valuing of family, lessening the burden on students and holding institutions to a higher commitment to recruiting and enrolling Latina/o/x students and supporting their persistence. Without the aforementioned suggestions and additional policy changes, institutional cultures will not change and colleges will continue to rely on students to engage in a large share of the bridging of fields between home communities and campuses. This will likely encourage Latina/o/x students to seek attendance elsewhere, at institutions that are more welcoming to them and their values. If institutions seek to recruit, admit (and retain) shares of the growing Latina/o/x populations across the United States, colleges and universities must hold all staff, administrators, and faculty accountable for their interactions with, and accountability toward, Latina/o/x students (Luedke, 2017). While this study focused on two PWIs, growth in the Latina/o/x population (US Census Bureau, 2018) advances the need for all institutions types to begin (or continue expanding) the ways they work to measure their servingness toward Latina/o/x students. Garcia (2018) challenges Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and emerging HSIs, to do so by reflecting on the ways they explicitly serve, and not just enroll Latina/o/x students. Findings from this study provide insight into ways that Latina/o/x students nurture collectivist orientations, familial relationships, and promote college-going. Institutions can learn from students’ experiences to better nurture, validate, and support the ways students engage bi-directionally to promote college-going.

**Conclusion**

Families are often the first individuals to highlight, promote, and instill the importance of learning and education within Latina/o/x students. Within the home, Latina/o/x families share their aspirational and experiential knowledge around higher education. When students enrolled in college, they continued to build, expand, and bridge their families’ funds of knowledge with cultural capital that they gained from their own experiences in higher education. Students shared this cultural capital and transformed it into familial funds of knowledge; they also contributed to the college-going habitus development of family, particularly younger siblings and cousins, as it relates to college access and their ability to succeed. Students received and shared familial funds of knowledge within and potentially between generations in their families. Institutions that provide environments that nurture familial connections and a collectivist orientation can facilitate students’ abilities to remain connected to their familias while enrolled in college. Establishing these environments is important for students who live full lives, with complex identities, beyond their roles on campus.
Note

1. Scholars who study students with origins in Latin America often use the terms Latino, Latina/o and Latin@ to describe these populations. However, these terms imply a gender binary. The term “Latina/o/x” seeks to move beyond the gender binary by actively acknowledging individuals who do not identify within the binary. Salinas and Lozano (2019) provide an analysis of the evolution and use of the term Latinx and provide recommendations for usage in research, emphasizing students’ self-identification. I have chosen to use the term Latina/o/x, when referring to a broad group of students as a way to avoid reinforcing the gender binary. Latina and Latino are used when identifying students’ particular self-identification.

Disclosure statement

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