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The Power of Mexican Descent Families in the Successful Education of their Children

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Abstract

Mexican descent students leave school before completions at a much higher rate than other ethnic groups. Marginalization is one contributing factor. Thirty-two Mexican descent students were interviewed with two main objectives: What marginalization factors did they experience in their secondary schools? What factors allowed them to overcome marginalization and graduate? This report focuses on the influence of family members. All participants reported that family members, usually parents, played a vital role in their educational progress. Such contributions ranged from providing sufficient food and shelter so the students did not have to work to physically forcing them to attend school, to providing assistance with homework and school assignments. The analysis of the data was conducted following general guidelines for qualitative data. The interviews were considered “narrative” life stories. This report documents the need for schools to consider family influence when attempting to assist Mexican decent students. Further studies are needed to examine how successful schools are able to make this connection. Thirteen references are included in the report.

Historically speaking, the role of families in the formal education of children has been that of the outsider. Schools were created and staffed to overcome the deficiencies of the families and their communities. This was especially true for students from immigrant and minority backgrounds (Tyack, 1974). Recent efforts have refocused the view of the family in relation to education, seeing them as partners and “Funds of Knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez; 1992; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg 1992; Violand-Sanchez, Sutton & Ware 1991). Much research has identified family, community, and school as three interrelated spheres of influence effecting the education of a child (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Epstein, 1995; Garbarino, 1992). Each of these areas is also influenced by other conditions such as cultural values and socioeconomic conditions (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Griego Jones & Fuller, 2003). Consequently, the relationship between family and schooling is complex and open to multiple analyses.

This study presents another view of this complex relationship, the perceptions of successful Mexican descent students. Mexican descent students are often presented through research that attempts to explain them from the perspective of the researcher. Through the use of narrative, this report allows the voices of the participants to become part of the educational landscape needed for a full understanding.

The Study

The impact that families can have on the academic success of Mexican descent students can be seen through the responses of the 32 participants who took part in an extended interview procedure that focused on their high school experiences. This study was based on two research questions: a) Did academically successful Mexican-descent students perceive themselves being marginalized during their secondary school career? b) What assisted these students in

overcoming the perception of marginalization? The role of families, especially the parents, emerged through the analysis of the second question.

Narrative analysis.

This research project used narrative as the base for the study. Narrative is seen as one mean for understanding human experience or "to conceptualize the self" (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 135). Narratives provide for the stories of participants to be seen in relation to the development of their lives through the process of emplotment (Ricoeur, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1991).

Emplotment takes single events and places them together in a configuration that leads towards a conclusion. (Polkinghorne, 1991; Ricoeur, 1984; Freeman, 1998). It is through this process that the stories of the participants can be brought together as the means for understanding what they have perceived as leading to their current situation. Narrative analysis relies upon perception of events. Often times what occurs is not what actually happens when taken from an "outsider's" perspective. Yet, perception is what actually enters into the understanding of an individual and has a strong impact on how they see themselves in relation to others and events (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1991).

One area of weakness in the literature dealing with the preparation of teachers is the perspective of their students. Narrative analysis allows for the students' perceptions to be presented in a format that informs such development.

Participants.

The participants in the study were 32 Mexican descent college students who had graduated from a high school in the United States of America. Mexican descent was defined as someone who could trace their ancestry back to what is or was the country of Mexico. The participants were divided for comparison purposes by length of residency in what is now known

as the United States of America. At this point, it should be noted that, from the participants' perspectives, a distinction between lengths of residency emerged in the form of two dominant cultural groups. The first was those who had more recently emigrated from Mexico. They often referred to themselves as *Mejicanos* and distinguished themselves from the other group by their use of Spanish and having a "true understanding" of Mexican culture. The second group was the Chicanos. This group tended to come from families that had lived in the United States for several generations, had lost most of their use of Spanish, but considered their culture to be more "developed." The relationship between these two groups was impacted by the percentage of Mexican descent students attending a particular school; a higher percentage of Mexican descent students at a school tended to allow the two groups to remain distinct, separated, and sometimes hostile.

The participants in this study were students at several colleges and universities. They had attended high school at different locations throughout the western portion of the United States. The experiences presented are strictly those of the participants.

Data collection and analysis.

Data collection was accomplished through interviews with the participants. The interviews were organized around what Denzin (1989) defined as Nonschedule Standardized Interview protocol. This type of protocol has a predetermined list of required information but the interview allows for the dynamics of the interaction to determine when and how each question will be addressed. The interviews took place at a location determined by the participant.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. After the transcription, the data were analyzed using a system similar to the process proposed by Spradley (1980). This began with the data being coded into sets of categories using some that were predetermined and others that

appeared through the transcription and coding processes. Next, the coded data were organized into meaningful hierarchal units. The final portion of the analysis was organizing the coded units into a structure that demonstrated the appearance of certain traits within and between the different subgroups.

Family Influences

One item that appeared repeatedly in the interviews was that families had a strong influence on the progress of Mexican descent students. When asked who or what had the single largest impact on their decisions regarding school, almost every participant stated that it was their family. The participant in Dialogue Box 1 noted several areas of support and concern. First, successful participants noted that they felt a part of a strong family unit. A strong family unit increases the likelihood that children would be exposed to family values, as well as the expectations and discipline that would accompany those values. Second, students who did not have the necessary physical and financial support had to leave school in order to work. Third, they saw that less successful students came from home where the American Dream concept was not held by family members, that is, education was not emphasized as it was in other families.

Dialogue Box 1

<p>C: At your school, you lost a lot of the Mexican kids to dropping out. What would you say was the biggest difference between those of you who did graduate and those who dropped out?</p> <p>S: I would say that it is family. I think definitely. I think most to the students that don't graduate are the students coming from broken homes where they either have to work just to help the mother get along. Or where education isn't pushed. I mean some families; they just fully don't understand the importance of education. (3rd Generation Male)</p>
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Development of Values

The participants tended to reflect the values that were developed in the family setting. These positive values often contributed to the successful progression of the students through the school system. Included in the values that were passed through the family was the value of

education, seen through the examples of the parents and older siblings, and the development of pride in their native culture.

Examples of the value of education.

Many of the participants, particularly those who were second and third generation, found their parents to be examples of the importance of education. Several participants had parents who had completed high school, gone on to college, and some even completed advanced degrees. These parents tended to have better paying jobs with higher social status than the stereotypical Mexican. The parents of the participant in Dialogue Box 2 had advanced college degrees. He saw how this made a difference in what his parents were able to do, as compared to others in the community.

Dialogue Box 2

S: I was born and raised to see the advantages of having a good education. I traveled. See, my parents had the money to travel. I saw Disney World. I saw good hotels, good food, and nice restaurants. Chances are they (other students) didn't. So, there was another incentive. Whereas in them, there is that absence of incentive, because of them, you know, "Well, I would never go to that nice, rich restaurant. I would never travel to Europe anyway. It's no big deal." They didn't travel before, what makes you think they're going to travel when they grow up? Whereas, with me, I've seen the good things in life. I've been to Disneyland several times. Traveled. And then to Mexico and I realized that it takes money. It takes an education to have those things. So, that was my incentive. (3rd Generation Male)

The other parents who became examples for their children were those who were advancing their own education at the same time. For many immigrants, this was something as simple as preparing for and taking the General Educational Development (GED) examinations. The participant in Dialogue Box 3 spoke about how parents could academically support their children.

Dialogue Box 3

S: The parents, a couple of times, they went to adult ed. Like, they got advice from my parents. They went to adult ed. And they got their GED. And the kids were proud. "My parents got their GED. And they had like a third grade reading level. And now they have a GED. And they work a lot more." And that gave them like..., it's an incentive. (2nd Generation Male)

Parents who were willing to let their children see them as they attempted to better their education became strong examples. Students would be more open to their own education. The participant in [Dialogue Box 4](#) had seen his parents achieve advanced degrees in different areas. He saw the results of a higher education, in the sense that his parents were able to take him to places many of his friends had never gone. From this, he decided that he also needed to finish high school and go to college.

Dialogue Box 4

S: When I was little, you see my mom, went into English, the arts, history, literature. My dad went into math and sciences. He's a math teacher now. So I got the best of both worlds there. Most people are either in math and science. Other people are, they go into major in Chicano studies, sociologist, psychologist but, they, you mentioned the word math or the college of engineering and that's like trauma. That's, "Oh, that's terrible" You know, they want to faint when they hear math. Anything about math. I kind of got the best of both worlds. So, that kind of really helped me out. I didn't have just an A in math and maybe a C in English, I was competitive in both. (3rd Generation Male)

Supervision and discipline.

One area of value development that appeared consistently with the participants was that their families had developed certain rules and expectations of behavior that were monitored, with discipline when needed. As opposed to their friends they went to school with, the parents of many of the participants expected their children to act appropriately at school. They expected their children to try hard and not cause problems. The participants felt that any problems they created at school would only create problems at home (See [Dialogue Box 5](#)).

Dialogue Box 5

S: I guess, like they said, it was parent involvement. Because my mom and dad weren't very involved in my school, but it wasn't a thing where they didn't care about it. If I got in trouble at school, they were there and then I would be in trouble at home. If I didn't want to go to school, they would drag me out, you know literally drag me out of bed to go to school. So, it wasn't that they were always there, going, encouraging me, what ever. But, it was a point that I had to finish. (2nd Generation Female)

Some of these efforts by the parents created feelings of social marginality. Yet, while these efforts were often met with anger at the time, the participants now express their thankfulness at such efforts made by their parents. The participant in [Dialogue Box 6](#) exemplifies these feelings. She expresses her feeling about how she felt her father was too strict, did not provide her with the freedom she wanted at that time. A strong bitterness developed, which she was not able to overcome until later, when she saw the results of the restrictions.

Dialogue Box 6

C: Okay. What did your dad do to convince you to stay in school.
S: Oh he didn't convince me. He made me. He was very, very strict with me. He just, at first he kind of instilled a fear in me. Which at that time, when I was in 7th grade I despised my father. I would even tell him that I hated him, which I regret now. And so, it was a must that I must finish school. Finish school. There was no option of dropping out. I don't know why. But with my father there was no option. (2nd Generation Female)

Several participants noted that the parents of their friends attempted to create similar home environments, but with only limited success. They had a difficult time explaining why such differences existed. [Dialogue Box 15](#) contains the explanation that best expresses the feelings of how such differences developed. The key item included was that it needed to start at an early age in order for it to be successful.

Dialogue Box 7

C: So, when, it you talked about your parents disciplining you and, what type of rules did they have? Or how did they discipline you that kept you from turning into a super partier?
S: I don't know how to, I think it's kind of like the elephant. When the elephant is young you put on a chain that it can't break. And then he grows and could snap it in one second. But it's so trained. That chain there is to keep them from escaping. So my parents, I'm thankful that when I was little for the way they treated me. Or the way they disciplined me. That's what kept me from rebelling when I was older. Just because they always put me to work. They always took their children to their jobs all the time. Always keep me busy. I mean, household chores. Things like that. And I didn't want to shame them or anything like that. So, they had high expectations, so that made me have to work harder to achieve them. (2nd Generation Male)

Family Support

The support that Mexican descent students received from their families encouraging them to continue their education came in many forms. One of the keys to the support issues was that the students felt that their families were there to support them in their educational endeavors.

Dialogue Box 8 documents the feelings of support felt by one participant.

Dialogue Box 8

S: Well, I think, I think, for instance, that just my family was there. And I knew I was there too. So, one thing that I know is that they made me feel, my family made me feel that they're there to help. (1st Generation Male)

Emotional support.

Emotional support was one form of support given to the students. Parents' willingness to listen, as well as helping the students whenever possible, were two means for this emotional support to be perceived. The participant in Dialogue Box 9 speaks about how her mother supported her by doing such simple things as listening and making cups of tea. Even such little actions demonstrated the importance of academic success.

Dialogue Box 9

S: With my mom, there was always, you know, I always talked to her about everything, you know. Even, when I was studying for finals, you know And mid-terms and stuff. When we had to take tests, I was like, "Mom, I really have to do this." And she would make me some tea and stuff like that. She was always just very, very supportive. (2nd Generation Female)

Another participant expressed his perception of the emotional support he received from older siblings. He had two older sisters who had gone to school and graduated before him, and he would talk to them about what they had experienced. As he noted in Dialogue Box 10, he used this interaction to help him understand what was happening, as well as what he could expect.

Dialogue Box 10

C: And did you feel like your sisters gave you support also? In going through high school?
S: Well, I think when you have someone that's already gone through the steps that you're gonna go or anytime. The key is to have a better idea. Because it's your sister. Cause you don't know what's gonna happen. But, you can ask them questions. You say, "How can I do this? What do I need to do?" And just basically realizing that there's someone in front of you from your family, I think, just makes you feel different. You understand something that seems from a different world. Something they have dealt with. (1st Generation Male)

There were cases where the family became the only source of emotional support for the students. One participant lived in a community where the only Spanish speaking people were her immediate family. They could not find a church or any other activity in the community in which they could participate, due to their lack of English. Consequently, the family spent all of their free time together, becoming a support group (See Dialogue Box 11). Without this type of family support, this participant would have felt completely alone.

Dialogue Box 11

C: So while you were at the school in Florida your family was very important then?
S: Yes. Basically we didn't go out with anybody. On the weekends we only stayed with my parents. And we didn't go out anywhere because they didn't know the language. We didn't know places. So, we didn't know anything. So we never went even to the park. Nothing. Basically just home and the family. (1st Generation Female)

Another means that parents used in demonstrating emotional support for their children was through involvement with friends. It should be noted that parents often played a strong influence in helping their children maintain positive friendships. One mother, who was divorced

and attending college, found time to do little things in order to assure that her sons had strong relationships with others who would not be a negative influence.

Dialogue Box 12

S: And that's why I think I feel so Chicano now is because I was always growing up with it. All of my friends from like day one were brown. Even though I was lighter complected, it was like they just accepted me. My mom was really cool with all of the brown kids. She used to invite them over to make brownies and stuff. Something like their parents would never do for them. And that's why I kind of call her like an honorary Chicana. Just in the sense that our neighbor, our next-door neighbor's, we used to like have sleep-overs. She would cook them dinner. And the stuff like that. She would buy them small Christmas presents and stuff. And they were just like, you know, overwhelmed that this white woman was just so nice. That just blew their minds. I think that in that sense, we always had a lot of friends. (3rd Generation Male)

Encourage success.

Another common characteristic that many parents had when it came to supporting their children in school was encouraging them to be successful. They demonstrated various ways to accomplish this, including such things as transferring their students from one school to another, encouraging them to take part in school activities, and being there to provide help whenever possible.

Several of the participants, particularly those whose families had been in the same city for many years, were transferred to schools outside of their normal attendance areas. The parents of others moved to new neighborhoods. The thing both of these groups had in common was the desire for their children to get a better education with less probability of gangs, drugs, or violence. The participant in Dialogue Box 13 explained this to be the reason why her parents moved to a new neighborhood.

Dialogue Box 13

C: Back to the bad neighborhood. How old were you when you guys moved?
 S: Oh, they moved there before I was actually born. Cause they had lived on the east side. My mom lived there. My dad lived a couple blocks away from my mother's house. And they went to high school together. And so they knew what that neighborhood was like. And as soon as they got married, they got a new place. A little farther and then they moved all the way out. (3rd Generation Female)

Certain schools had developed a reputation that worried the participants' parents, which led them to transfer their students to a different school. The schools with the bad reputations tended to have high concentrations of minority students, which also were the homes of many gang members. The parents hoped that transferring their children to other school would lessen the risk their children would face

The second means used by parents to encourage their students to be successful in school was encouraging them to be involved in school. This could be seen in events such as athletics, academic clubs, and music. The participant in Dialogue Box 14 spoke of how her mother encouraged her to be involved, which required her to maintain good grades.

Dialogue Box 14

S: My mom, pretty much, was always encouraging me in different parts of high school. And just getting involved with the school. Like being in cheerleading and tennis. You have to have good grades to be in that. Otherwise you can't play or do anything. So that kept me going to. Because, "I have to keep going. I love cheerleading." And "I have to get good grades." (1st Generation Female)

Parents used their influence as parents to help students understand the importance of school. As was noted earlier, many parents maintained their version of the American Dream, and schools were seen as an important part of that dream. Because of this, parents felt the need to encourage and push education. One participant spoke of her father physically removing her from her bed and sending her to school. The one in Dialogue Box 15 did not experience such dramatic

encouragement, but constantly felt her fathers push. He let his children know of his feelings about education.

Dialogue Box 15

C: Did your parents help influence you in your liking school?
S: Uhm (pause) Yea. My dad always pushed me. Pushed education.
C: And how did he do that?
S: He just always said that it was important to go to college. And this and that. And tried to get us all to go to college. My brothers and sisters. (3rd Generation Female)

This encouragement was not restricted to those whose families had been in America for several generations. Recent immigrants felt their parents' encouragement as well. The one in Dialogue Box 16 speaks of her parents' efforts, which extended back to their time in Mexico. There, as opposed to many Mexican immigrant families, the children were encouraged to attend school. The parents pushed the rewards of having an education. Combined, this participant felt that her parents had provided the first strong motivation to complete school, no matter where they were living.

Dialogue Box 16

C: What do you think made the difference you and your sister graduating and so many of them not graduating?
S: I don't know. I really think it's with the family. To family values. And there's some advantage too because my parents always encouraged us to go to school. Even when we were in Mexico. They always encouraged us to go to school. To do our homework. To study. Those little things. So we always, my mother, for instance, she kept telling us that education was important. That we needed to go to school. Since they didn't have education, they did not have so many opportunities. And so they kept telling us, "If you don't go to school, you're not going to have opportunities like we don't." I think that was our first motivation. (1st Generation Female)

Other family members also encouraged academic success. This included extended family members such as uncles, aunts, and grandparents, as well as siblings. Their support varied, but it was normally related to letting the participants know that education was important, and needed for future success. Several family members made their support of the participants more direct,

such as the sister mentioned in Dialogue Box 17. In this example, the older sister refused to accept the academic placement of the participant, and went to the counselor in order to assure that the correct placement would happen.

Dialogue Box 17

S: One of my sisters would always like she would go and talk to my counselor and, like yell at her if she was like trying to put me in some easy class. Like shop or what ever. And also like my junior year, my sister took me to all of these different campuses. And showed the colleges and stuff.

C: So she, she actually became your adviser type person

S: Yes

C: How did you feel about that at that time?

S: Well, it was good. (2nd Generation Female)

Financial support.

Another area of support mentioned was financial support. He had seen that many of the Mexican descent students had left school because of their families' need of additional money. He, as well as other participants, felt that without the financial support of their parents, they, too, would have needed to leave school early.

The participant in Dialogue Box 18 expressed the impact of such support. He noted that this allowed him to worry about things that were normal for students at that age.

Dialogue Box 18

S: If you don't have any economical problems, it's like, I didn't have any car. It's just at the time students want to have their own car. But, I didn't have to work to have any, like eating. I had food. I had a place to live. Basically the support and taken care of. So I didn't have anything in reality to worry about. The only things I had to worry about were just like students concerns. You know like general people concerns. Like girlfriends. Those kinds of things. That are just secondary to what's important. So that helped me to get very, very confident. Because I had the support. I had the family. (1st Generation Male)

This financial support extended further than just to the necessities. Participation in school sports and activities usually came at a cost to the students and their families, which kept some Mexican descent students from being able to participate. Several participants realized that it was

because of their parents' efforts that they were able to pay the required sums. The participant in Dialogue Box 19 noted that her parents supported her when she needed to purchase something that demonstrated her being a part of the school.

Dialogue Box 19

S: They (my parents) always helped me. If I had problems with homework or financially, if I needed something for school like a yearbook or if I wanted to buy a school shirt, you know, just to be in school spirit. They bought me my senior invitations. My senior pictures. Just little things like that they did to show. It meant a lot. (3rd Generation Female)

Child care.

A final means that certain parents used to demonstrate their support for their children's education was becoming child care providers. Two of the female participants became mothers during their high school careers. They faced the issue of not being able to complete school in order to provide care for their children. Their parents, particularly their mothers, assisted them in this area, allowing them to return to and complete school.

Not all high school mothers had this support from their parents. The participant in Dialogue Box 20 noted that several of her friends had become pregnant during high school. Some had mothers that helped with the children and others did not. As a result, those with less-supportive parents were more likely to leave school.

Dialogue Box 20

S: If you got pregnant or something, probably your mother will help you to take care of your child while you finish high school. At least high school. Or something. And sometimes they don't. And they just kick you out of your house. Or you can't go to school anymore. (1st Generation Female)

Cultural Pride

The final area to be explored in regards to the role that families played in assuring that Mexican descent students could overcome being marginalized and still be successful in school

was in helping develop cultural pride. As previously mentioned, students who had a pride in their culture were more likely to take control of their learning. Therefore, the development of such pride is important. The majority of the participants demonstrated an understanding of the history and value of their cultures, leading to the development of cultural pride. While the family was not the only institution to contribute to the development of this pride, it was the place where such pride was introduced and consistently encouraged.

Extended families, by American standards, play a strong role in developing such pride. Cultural pride was often introduced by grandparents. They did this by telling stories and teaching traditional customs and crafts. The two participants in Dialogue Box 21 spoke of how learning these things from their grandparents helped them take pride in their people and in being of Mexican descent.

Dialogue Box 21

S: Well, my grandma, my grandma always told me these things about the family. My grandpa died. I never knew my grandpa. She showed me where he was buried in Mexico. I learned many things when I was a child about my family. And I'm proud of it now. (2nd Generation Female)

S: I have a strong cultural background. We do things the old way. We make tamales the old way. Everything. I know how to knit. I know how to crochet and everything like my grandma used to do. You know, I can't say that for anyone else, because they don't have that cultural background. They don't actually go back; they can't say actually, "We've been doing this for generations." And I can. (3rd Generation Female)

Other participants spoke of family members who took part in historical efforts to make changes. Several spoke of grandparents who witnessed and participated in the Mexican Revolution. Others spoke of family members actively involved in the Chicano civil rights movements. Either way, they knew of this history and it provided them with additional pride of their ethnicity.

Several of the participants were biracial, their fathers were of Mexican descent and their mothers were White. Other participants came from families that crossed generations, one parent a recent immigrant and the other coming from a third generation Chicano background. In both of these cases, developing and maintaining cultural pride required the participants to understand the implications of their situation, and have parents making an effort to educate them about the different cultures that made up their families. Dialogue Box 22 demonstrates how the mother of one biracial participant made sure her son was aware of his Mexican culture, and that he developed a pride in that culture.

Dialogue Box 22

S: She married my father who's Mexican national. I'm bi-racial, even though I'm bi-racial, that people are going to perceive me as Mexican and that's why it's important for me to be very secure in that identity. To always know who I am overall. But, to realize that there's going to be more emphasis placed on the color of my skin. She educated me really well. (2nd Generation Male)

In a similar manner, the participants with parents of different generations were taught the traditions needed to develop their cultural pride. In some cases certain societal prejudices would lead to one side of the family rejecting the marriage, as well as the children from that marriage. Yet, due to the support from the other side, the participants were able to develop a pride in their heritage. This can be seen in Dialogue Box 23, where a participant was accepted by his family members in Mexico.

Dialogue Box 23

S: My father didn't speak Spanish at all when he met my mother. And then my mother, she is from Mexico. She still holds on to her Mexican traditions. The language and everything. As far as on my dad's side, I didn't get any support at all. But from my mother's side, I got the most support from them.

C: So did you have much contact with your mother's family?

S: All of the time. All the time. Every, when school got out, in elementary school, the first thing that we did, like the day after school got out, we would head to Mexico and spend the whole summer down there. With my cousins, my aunts, my uncles And about a day or two before classes started again, we'd head back to the U.S. and we'd go to school. (3rd Generation Male)

The final area that families helped in developing cultural pride was in providing support and encouragement for their children to acculturate in America without losing their cultural identity or pride. As was noted earlier, most of the participants and their families still held on to the American Dream. Yet, many of the parents also recognized that American society was not always open to those who came from an ethnic minority background. This possible conflict required them to prepare their children by encouraging them to adapt to the new social and cultural environment while maintaining a strong understanding of their personal history. This combination would allow their children the opportunity to face difficulties without feeling the need to totally reject one culture or the other.

While this was very similar to what those coming from biracial and mixed generation families, it was first and second generation immigrants who most felt this effort from their parents. These parents still felt the value of their native culture, but also realized that their children needed a strong grasp of the new culture in order to be successful. Dialogue Box 24 documents how the parents of one participant encouraged him to become bicultural.

Dialogue Box 24

S: They constantly told me, "Yea, you're in America. And you are Americanized. But you've got to remember that you have family in Mexico. You remember where you came from. Because you were born in Chihuahua, Mexico. And you listen to that culture. You were little in a little town. And you celebrate all the holidays. You spoke Spanish. You are Mexican. And you've got to remember who you are. And if you don't remember who you are, where you're coming from, what's the point of going into the future? Because you don't know where you've been. (2nd Generation Male)

Conclusions

Family, in general, and parents, in particular, played an important role in Mexican descent students overcoming marginalization factors and being successful students. They supported their children in a variety of ways, including being there to listen, helping however possible, providing financial and emotional support, and developing a strong sense of values. As the result of such actions, these participants had developed their version of the American Dream, which strongly encouraged them to finish school. They progressed without feeling like they had rejected their culture. The true power of such families was expressed well by one participant, when asked what the difference was between those who were successful in school and those who were not, "Probably the way we were raised. The obvious!" (3rd Generation Male)

The next step that is needed is to explore how certain schools are able to create supportive relationships with the parents of Mexican descent students. The information provided by such schools could assist other schools in making progress in retaining Mexican descent students. In addition, it would provide greater information as to how communication can and should take place between schools and family members, helping to overcome the traditional stereotype that "Mexican parents just don't care about their kids' education."

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