

The Impact of familism and the good daughter dilemma on Hispanic female leaders in South Texas border public school districts

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ABSTRACT

This Natural Inquiry Method involved the interviewing of six Hispanic Female leaders in south Texas border districts and their perception of their experiences with the phenomenon of familism. Great emphasis was given to the impact familism and the *Good Daughter Dilemma* had as a support or as a hindrance in their lives.

The study revealed both obstacles and supporting circumstances that were encountered by Hispanic female leaders whose life were influenced by familism and the good daughter dilemma as well as the highly patriarchal culture of school systems and school boards in the southern region of the United States where this study was conducted.

The study challenged the belief that familism was a true barrier for Hispanic women. The study indicated that familism in some families has shifted and does not fit the original controlling and confining template under which it was once described. Another face of familism has evolved creating a new one that is progressive and more acculturated to the American dream. In progressive, acculturated familism many practices of old style familism have been kept yet there is blatant practice of acquiring the American culture aspects creating a blend of both cultures but still retaining aspects of both.

This study will assist educational leaders by providing them with a greater understanding of the role old style, old school familism vs. progressive, acculturated familism and the impact it can play in providing guidance and opportunities when dealing with the Hispanic population.

Keywords: Familism, Culture, Acculturation, Good daughter dilemma, Critical Race Theory

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INTRODUCTION & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is a bond of loyalty and fidelity attached to tradition that is tied in to what is described as *familism* in the Hispanic family (Segura & Pierce, 1993). *Familism* is a powerful control and determinant that often contributes to the decisions that guide and alter the lives of many Hispanic families. The family bond in many Hispanic families that exhibits familism characteristics is very powerful. Children are given a strong sense of significance within the family with responsibility for success, while not losing their strong ties to their customs and cultures (Santiago, 2011). This strong family bond plays an important part in building the self-esteem and sense of belonging for Hispanic females. Furthermore, these familism values contribute to the role females play and cultivate in their own children when building their own family unit. Armenta, Knight, Carlo, and Jacobson (2011) further emphasize that this bond coerces undisputed loyalty and obedience that searches for the good of the family over the good of the individual. These values work positively in establishing relationships within the family. This bond lowers parent-daughter conflicts which contribute to diminishing the plausibility of depression and estrangement amongst the family (Kuhlberg, Peña, & Zavas, 2010).

Familism or *familialismo* can best be understood when identified as a particular set of values, which exorbitantly emphasize the centrality and force to uphold the family unit, including to care for and help support the immediate and even the extended family (Segura & Pierce, 1993). In a study done on familism by Sabogal in 1987, three facets were identified, and the composure of familism was discussed within these three facets:

- (1) Familial Obligations – it is believed that family members have a responsibility to provide economic and emotional support to kin.
- (2) Perceived support and emotional closeness – perceptions held that emphasize that family members are dependable sources of help, should be united, and should maintain close relationships.
- (3) Familial expectations – perceptions that family expectations must be met by all family members with loyalty and respect to familial family values (German, Gonzalez, & Dumka, 2009).

Understanding the dynamics of the Hispanic family will increase the understanding of significant issues that have an impact on Hispanic females who make the intent to further their education and careers (Maldonado & Maldonado, 2012). The understanding of these dynamics will provide better preparation to implement the necessary support systems essential to fostering a strong academic environment that promotes higher success towards degree completion and career success (Espinoza, 2010). Supporting these positive factors are requirements to being able to attain leadership positions in public school leadership.

Hispanics who come from strong familism roots struggle in adapting to newer, acculturated ways in America. Acculturation is the process of acquiring a new culture and merging it into an individual's own culture (Nieri, 2011; Buriel, 1993). The struggle between the demands of modern lifestyles and the responsibility to family is expressed constantly by second-generation Hispanics confronting the dilemma of acculturation (Tienda, 2009). Chores, family obligations, taking care of family issues, and taking time for family are strong expectations Hispanic females often face (Medina & Posadas, 2012).

The good daughter dilemma is discussed as part of the phenomenon of familism. It emphasizes the obligations that familism places on females from Hispanic families. Hispanic females persistently carry the obligation of being caregivers to younger siblings and the elderly.

When they work outside the home or attend school, they often have conflicts between meeting family responsibilities and jobs or education responsibilities (Espinoza, 2010). Tienda (2009) discusses how familism cradles a strong family unit and is strongly emphasized and even idolized as a high priority within the Hispanic family. Familism becomes particularly important when students who try to attain a higher education must quit working to dedicate time to their studies. When Hispanic students quit their jobs, they often decrease their contributions to their family's financial support system. This is a primary defiance to the values and expectations they have had ingrained in their original family values (Medina & Posadas, 2012). This conflict is referred to as the good daughter dilemma and is a dominant factor in many Hispanic females whose education is interrupted or even ceased. Their deep sense of obligation to placing the family first is paramount to any other commitment or endeavor (Espinoza, 2010). Hispanic females coming from the old, traditional families who still struggle with acculturation are acting contrary to the value of familism if they prioritize their personal wishes and goals (Medina & Posadas, 2012). Their role as family caregivers and financial contributors is seen as a principal role in the well-being and maintenance of security in the family structure. These Mexican-American females who are career-oriented are often seen as selfish and greedy to the rest of the family who do not share the female's same career aspirations or value of educational attainment (Espinoza, 2010; Tienda, 2009).

The Hispanic family is now finding itself with two different segments: those living in the old traditional family and those exhibiting a new family decline. The traditional Hispanic family is now found with old-fashioned beliefs that are loyal to familism or familismo values. Familism harbors a strong sense of old values and close family connections and control; this has a very strong hold on Hispanic females trying to attain higher education or become career bound (Espinoza, 2010). By contrast, the nontraditional Hispanic family who has begun to be assimilated and is acculturated in many ways appears to have taken great comfort in the newly found culture. These nontraditional families may retain some customs and traditions, yet they have embraced many of the new values of the new culture including educational goals (Gomez-Cervantes, 2010). Changes in their ways make these families too "Mexican" to be "white" and yet, act too "white" to be "Mexican." Sometimes, these modern Hispanic families are labeled as exhibiting "family decline" or losing many aspects of the Mexican culture (Tienda & Mitchell, 2006).

Hispanics are the fastest growing minority in the United States today. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the Hispanic population would reach 30% of the total population in the country by the year 2050 (Rotherham, 2011; Lynch & Engle, 2010). Unfortunately, so much is still needed to attain the desirable living, economical and employable circumstances at the present time for the Hispanic minority (Valle & Rodriguez, 2012). With the national trends of the Hispanic minority lagging seriously behind in educational attainment, the need exists for increased Hispanic educational leadership to offset the Hispanic population increases (Fernandez, 2002; Blackmore, 2006).

The Hispanic female is significantly lagging behind in educational attainment as compared to all other minorities. As behind as the Hispanic female is in education, the Hispanic male is still more behind than the Hispanic female (Kerby, 2012). With the Hispanic female being more educated than the Hispanic male, she is the key to help solve the problem her minority group is facing in illiteracy, high school completion, skills training for employability and working to close the serious gap that presently exists in this group compared to all other ethnic groups in America today.

Critical Race theory analyzed significant factors that affect minority groups and their success. It further studied a multitude of items that draw concern for the negative impact they bring. Its primary goal has focused greatly on the social justice policies and components and how they play a part in helping achieve racial emancipation to ultimately eliminate oppression (Maldonado & Maldonado, 2012).

An analysis is done with the CRT methods and framework which can identify underlying racism in school systems by assessing the curriculum, discipline procedures, tracking and ability grouping, testing practices, and the unspoken hidden curriculum. In 1998, Solorzano outlined five tenets to be reviewed when analyzing the Critical Race Theory. He described them as follows:

- (1) The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism
- (2) The challenge to dominant ideology
- (3) The commitment to social justice
- (4) The centrality of experiential knowledge
- (5) The interdisciplinary perspective (as cited in Fernandez, 2002, p. 47)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) highlights important issues such as alienation, rejection, inequality and a culture of prejudice. These are obstacles in the CRT that contribute to and impacts the life and success of the Mexican-American, Hispanic female in her strive to capture the American dream. Elements identified in the Critical Race Theory contribute to the culture established in the educational settings that help prepare all students for success in higher education and careers. Studies done by Desmond and Turley (2009) attributed the Hispanic minority's low educational level of attainment to parent low-level of education, low socio-economic status, schools that are inadequate for these children and negative experiences related to being Hispanic or immigrants. CRT particularly examines the legal system and its subtle establishment to disempower people of color (Bennett, 2012). CRT recognizes the intersection of factors such as ethnicity, race and sexual orientation in individuals (Zuberi, 2011). The Critical Race Theory further analyzes the classroom as it contributes to establishing social and racial systems (Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999). This theory allows for the examination of various elements to be questioned and explored for significance in studying emerging Hispanic females in southern Texas border public school leadership roles.

Some of the Critical Race Theory tenets were echoed in the interviews done during the study. Negative elements observed from the Critical Race Theory discussed by interviewees were largely based on ethnicity, low socio-economic status, and gender. The interviewees voiced experiences of struggles and obstacles stemming often more from gender than from economic status and ethnicity. Also mentioned was the tracking in the elementary schools where all Mexican American children were placed in a room in the back of the school making up a class group that was slower. This lower level class was all composed of the Mexican American children and the expectations from the teachers for these students were very minimal. The high group was located within the school building and composed of all white students. Several comments were reflective of language, ethnicity, and socio economic status. The use of the Critical Race Theory to assess negative elements in school systems for people of color, gender and socio economic status could provide a powerful tool to promote equity and opportunities to all students in American schools.

From the Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged what is called the Latino/a Critical Race theory or LatCrit. This extension of the CRT has a greater focus on the unique experiences of the

challenges and obstacles facing the Latino/ community. The primary issues include immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture while targeting perplexed and oppressive structures and practice that are common towards the Latin community. While the LatCrit theory is much more customized to Hispanic issues, it is still in its beginning stages but may become a beacon in restoring oppressive practices and structures.

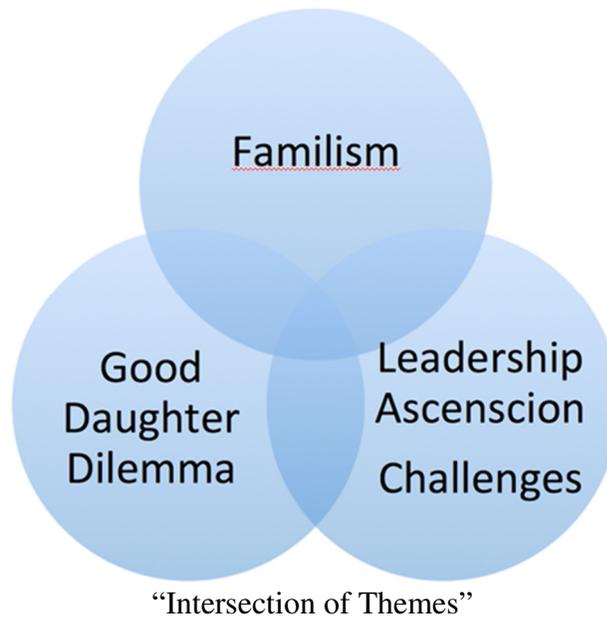
PURPOSE

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of familism through personal experiences of practicing female educational leaders in order to better understand whether the construct of familism served as a support or a hindrance from the perspective of successful Hispanic female administrators who held leadership roles in public school districts along the border of south Texas. It is vital that the leadership for the Hispanic group, especially Hispanic females, be cultivated to provide stronger possibilities and improvement in the educational, health and well-being of the Hispanic population as it emerges (Tienda, 2009). In order to better understand impactful factors that may influence the Hispanic female either positively or negatively, the phenomenon of familism must be studied for its significance in the lives of Hispanic female Leaders in South Texas border public school districts.

A great part of the Mexican-American Hispanic is his/her identity and tie to his/her family and even the demographics of where he/she was raised. The tie to the family is so powerful that the needs of the family will always supersede the needs of the individual (John, Resendiz & De Vargas, 1997). Families value spending time together and often reside within close proximity of each other. Many Mexican-American Hispanics are often surrounded by family members and remain very close, even in lieu of preferring to spend time with family and their extended family rather than friends or acquaintances (Armenta et al., 2011). Holidays and celebrations are seen as ideal times to unite the “family,” often including the extended family and even more distant cousins. Mexican-American families revere celebrations as opportunities for reconnection and quality time among the multi-generations, including the very elderly down to the new-born. Common practice often includes family extending beyond the third and fourth degrees of kinship (Tienda & Mitchell, 2006).

This study was also meant to examine and understand any major difficulty that presented itself in reference to the responsibility Hispanic females feel to their families and how this responsibility may be a major deterrent from succeeding in their goals and career attainment (Espinoza, 2010). The greatest obstacles Hispanic females face are their efforts in working to maintain a balance between their world and the new world in which they have emerged. Struggles are followed by efforts to adjust to a culture often different from their own (Tienda, 2009). This cultural dissonance can be challenging. Likewise, this balance is important in allowing the successful transitioning of the female role. Successful transitions and acculturation promote higher success rates in Hispanic females who have followed traditional family values and have moved in a direction to live more closely to middle-class America (Lozano-Rodriguez, Guildo-DiBritto, Torres & Talbot, 2000).

The following is a diagram illustrating the “Intersection of Themes” as reflected in this study.



RESEARCH DESIGN

The research used naturalistic inquiry (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993) for the case study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with open-ended, semi-structured interview questions (Bernard, 2002) as the basis for the study. The study sought to examine the experiences of practicing Hispanic female educational leaders and the impact of familism in order to better understand whether the construct of familism was a support or a hindrance in attaining higher education and leadership roles in public school districts along the border of southern Texas.

Six south Texas border school districts were contacted and agreed to recommend Hispanic female educational leaders that the superintendent or the superintendent designee deemed as possible prospects for the research. Informants were selected through purposeful samples (Erlandson, et al., 1993) and having the required criterion, as specified by the study. Description and instructions of the study were provided via a formal proposal letter that further emphasized the study procedures, purpose of the study, benefits and activities to be conducted (Erlandson, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were informed that participation was completely volunteer and that participants had the right to pull out of the study at any time. Participants were each interviewed responding to specific research questions. Interviews were converted into Word documents and verified for accuracy by participants. Data collected was transcribed and coded according to the emerging categories facilitating themes that could be developed. This open coding allowed the researcher to compare data gathered while contributing information and categorizing it into emergent themes that can contribute to develop a grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Saldana, 2016).

Activities were held within the context of the study including member checking and follow-up interview to verify accuracy in responses posted and perceptions held by the participants. The purpose of verification of the interview data collected was to ensure trustworthiness and credibility (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researcher bias was held in check throughout the process.

RESULTS

This study sought to explore the phenomenon of familism in the lives of Hispanic females that currently serve in leadership positions in southern Texas border public schools. Results of the information data of this study revealed contradictions and problematic social complexity within the construct of familism. Data in the study revealed that while the Hispanic culture supports and promotes familism, cultural dissonance exists and Hispanic females and daughters, and sometimes even sons, while trying to live in the cocoon of the “good daughter” persona, as an extension of familism, are oppressed within the socially acceptable construct of *familism*. Additionally, data in the study revealed that within the structure of familism is a very real patriarchal and often machismo component that is embedded not only within Hispanic families but also the very culture of south Texas and those overlapping oppressive structural forces work to essentially keep Hispanic females “in their place.”

There were several mentions of the school boards as political machines showing more loyalty to supporting their “political group” than in serving on the school board to serve for the betterment of the children attending their schools. These political machines were the core of the same oppressive structural forces that worked against the ascending in their careers in several of the participants interviewed.

Of the participants interviewed, three had worked in central office administration for more than 10 years and one as much as 34 years. One participant had worked in central office administration for 10 years, and two had worked five years or less. Years of experience in education ranged in the following order: 42, 39, 39, 29, 26 and 21. All participants held a mid-management certificate and a Master of Education degree. One of the participants had a PhD, which she had obtained after becoming an administrator. All the interviewees were highly recommended and were selected randomly from a list provided by the school districts. In all cases, the names given were from the superintendent of schools or his/her designee. One of the interviewees was the superintendent, herself, who wished to participate and know more about the results of the study.

During interviews, the participants were very vocal about their experiences in leadership as well as their experiences stemming from the phenomenon of familism. Carolyn was very candid in expressing, “I was born here in the valley and raised here in the valley. I was raised here, and I never left. I really don’t know what it’s like to live or work outside of the valley.” Participants shared volumes of personal experiences regarding the impact of familism including exploitation of females. One informant revealed a cultural norm suggesting she had overheard “when they get educated, then they will be the ones supporting the men, *Para que? Para mantener un arrastrado?* (What for, to support a lazy man?). She further mentioned, “And from my father’s brothers one afternoon during a family gathering where all the males sat together and discussed the future of their daughters (I heard – sic) the same idea.” Comments by these females were typical such as “There is a limitation to how far you can get in this area. I don’t think the position of superintendent will ever be open. I think that even if it is open, there are a lot of men in line, and I will not be in line. I may have the capability, but there is still the mentality that men can do a better job at it because women are the nurturers, and they need to tend to the children, not the budget.”

The “good daughter dilemma” has been described as a powerful boundary that creates expectations and obligations to females growing up in families which exhibit strong familism values (Espinoza, 2010.) While the interviews provided candid conversation on the “good

daughter dilemma,” all of the participants were aware of these practices, yet many had never heard it used as a term. Their responses acknowledged many of the practices, especially during their childhood; however, the strain of strict confinement of familism was not consistently evident. Several consistent themes were evident including revisiting the notion of family responsibility now layered both under the good daughter construct within the larger overarching notion of familism.

CONCLUSIONS

While a number of the Hispanic female participants in the study shared the positive impact of familism, overwhelmingly the data in the study reveals that multiple oppressive forces are at work within the social structure in the southern area of Texas, close to the Mexico border. The results of this study indicated that the interviewed Hispanic females of the study possessed many customs of familism; however, modifications in the limitations of the old country, traditional familism has shifted towards more progressive, acculturated familism. The familism in the lives of some participants interviewed was embraced and seen much more as a support and network of belonging than as an obstruction. However, when analyzing the data overall, patriarchy was still very dominant in familism, more specifically encumbered into the “good daughter dilemma.” The data also revealed a strong male-dominated school culture which impacted or hindered the ascension of the informants into leadership roles in public school districts on the border of southern Texas. The prevalence of promoting a mentality of male dominance seemed much more mentioned by the interviewees living in the districts that were the furthest south points of the region covered during the study. The courage of these six Hispanic females who were willing to speak up contributes to the research literature heretofore fairly silent on the topic. With the emergence of a likely majority Hispanic population in Texas in particular, it is critical that both males and female leadership emerges to lead this demographic into the 21st century.

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