"A Different Way": The Experiences of Latinx Parents with School Counselors

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Abstract

This phenomenological study aimed to identify the essence of the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they relate to school counselors. A Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) Framework was used to explore the experiences of Latinx parents with school counselors. Twelve Latinx parents were interviewed from three counties in a Southeastern state to share their experiences with school counselors to provide recommendations for practice to the school counseling specialty and school counselors in training. The five overarching themes identified were: (1) Disconnections Between Educational and Cultural Systems; (2) Growth Fostering Relationships Between Latino/a Parents and School Counselors; (3) Sense of Worth Based on Quality of Experiences with School Counselors; (4) Desired Connections Based on Experiences with School Counselors; and (5) Knowledge of the School Counselor Role Built on Mutuality. These findings provided insight as to how the parents experienced their interactions with school counselors to support a social justice call to action.

Keywords: School Counselors, Latinx Parents, Relational Cultural Theory, Advocacy, Social Justice

Introduction

Latinx parents are becoming more and more central to the educational environment in the United States. Currently, Latinx students make up one student in five within the school setting, making Latinx (i.e., a gender-neutral non-binary alternative to Latino and Latina) as the largest and fastest-growing minority group (Marx & Larson, 2012). Between the years of 2000-2010, Latinx student enrollment in public schools rose from 7.7 million to 11.4 million and the percentage rate of Latinx students attending public schools "increased from 16 to 23 percent" (Aud et al., 2013, p. 52). These significant increases put Latinx parents at the center of changing educational demographics. In turn, public schools are shifting programming and educational experiences to include culturally responsive practices and procedures to ensure inclusivity of Latinx cultural norms, traditions, and language.

However, Latinx parents also continue to experience language barriers, financial stressors, and immigration difficulties, which influence how they engage within the school community and with school officials (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005). While school counselors are often viewed as the ideal resource to address these concerns in K-12 educational settings, limited research is available that pointedly examines how Latinx parents experience school counselors and how they view the school counselor's role as it relates to their children's education. In addition, current school counselor research pertaining to Latinx students and family may not include culturally responsive frameworks to understand the complexity and cultural context of the Latinx experience. Therefore, this research study examined the experiences of Latinx parents with school counselors to gain insight and seek opportunities to best serve Latinx students in a collaborative effort. Previous literature highlights challenges faced by Latinx students (Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, Delgado-Romero, & Zapata, 2014; Gaitan, 2004; Reyes & Elias, 2011), therefore, understanding the parental experience may inform the school counseling specialty as how to partner with parents.

Latinx Student and Family Challenges

Challenges Latinx students experience has a significant impact on how the parents engage with the school administration, staff, and teachers (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005; Orozco, 2008). For example, academic challenges of Latinx children and adolescents (e.g., higher dropout rates, lower test scores) (Chowela & West-Olatunji, 2008; Fry & Taylor, 2013; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Indelicato, 2006) and social emotional challenges (Andes et al., 2012; Arredondo, et al., 2014; Gaitan, 2004; Reyes & Elias, 2011). Pointedly, social emotional challenges such as having a higher rate of attempted suicide, cocaine use, unprotected sex than their Black and White counterparts (Reyes & Elias, 2011), and higher rates of depression (Andes et al., 2012) create a challenge for students and parents alike. Latinx communities also face additional risk factors such as tobacco use and gang involvement (Arredondo, et al., 2014). Furthermore, Latinx families who reside in homes that are affected by factors such as overcrowding, alcoholism, poverty, lack of safety, and limited support by others, indicate that they often see school as a safe place away from their home environments (Gaitan, 2004).

Latinx Parents and Community School Expectations

While some students experience various challenges that may influence their educational experiences, Latinx parents may not be aware of the educational system expectations or school resources and may not adjust to the different U.S. cultural norms and social expectations (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005). However, Orozco (2008) indicated that low-income immigrant Latinx parents express interest in their children's education, want to know more about taking care of their children and acquiring skills to assist their children in school, but are uninformed regarding who can help their children in being successful academically.

Culturally responsiveness of schools is a primary challenge for parents (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005). For example, Latinx parents indicate that the lack of communication often creates frustration (Villalba, Akos, Keeter, & Ames, 2007). Further, Latinx parents report that their cultural values (e.g., relational, collectivism) are often misunderstood or overlooked (Orozco, 2008). Moreover, Latinx parents may face several barriers, including lack of English language proficiency and work flexibility, which prevents them from attending school events, causing low parental involvement (Olivos & Mendoza, 2010). These difficulties can lead to disconnections and continued lack of understanding amongst parents and school personnel (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Ruiz, 2005).

School Counselors and Latinx Communities
The school counseling specialty and school counselors in training who understand the challenges Latinx youth face are in the position to provide services such as partnering with parents and outside community agencies. A research study conducted by Villalba, Brunelli, Lewis, and Orfanedes (2007) contained implications for advocating for Latinx students through school counseling services. However, researchers indicate that Latinx students' experience various challenges with school counselors (Cavazos, Cavazos, Hinojosa, & Silva, 2009; Eckenrod-Green & Culbreth, 2008; Vela-Gude et al., 2009). Pointedly, Latinx students specified that their school counselors were not available and did not respond quickly to their needs (Eckenrod-Green & Culbreth, 2008). Therefore, did not provide information on higher education (Vela-Gude et al., 2009) and had low expectations of students' abilities (Cavazos et al., 2009). In addition, Latinx high school students who dropped out of high school did not seek school counseling services due to the assumption that the school counselor would not be able to help them (Eckenrod-Green & Culbreth, 2008).

While Latinx students have experienced challenges with school counselors, school counselors are ideally positioned to provide academic assistance, career planning, and social and emotional support as part of their curriculum for K-12 grade levels (Erford, 2011; Ivers, Milsom, & Newsome, 2012). Specifically addressing relational explicit needs, navigating social barriers, and examining career options and pathways (Ivers, Milsom, & Newsome, 2012). This knowledge would allow school counselors to provide opportunities through career exposure and exploration (Zalquett & Baez, 2012).

It is imperative that school counselors use more culturally responsive processes to identify the needs and create programs and interventions to assist Latinx parents and their children attain their desired academic success (Bemak & Chung, 2008). Therefore, a Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) Framework (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1986) was applied in this study to explore the experiences of Latinx parents with school counselors. Consequently, the research question, *"What is the meaning of the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they relate to school counselors?",* served to illuminate these experiences and identify relational and culturally responsive implications to support Latinx students and families.

Relational Cultural Theory as a Theoretical Framework
In the 1970s scholars developed RCT to understand the relational interactions of women (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1986) and highlight how caretakers and cultural contexts influence these interactions (Miller, 1986). RCT scholars recognized seven fundamental concepts (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1986) that encompass relational characteristics and growth-fostering interactions. The first relational characteristic concept specifies that people grow through and toward relationships over their lifespan. Mature functioning, the second concept is characterized as a movement toward mutual empathy rather than separation. The next fundamental concept is described as individuals' openness to exploring past relational experiences (e.g., previous interactions, past relationship expectations) and relationships with new patterns or those that produce different expectations. The fourth concept of mutual empathy and

mutual empowerment, fosters emotional and relational growth and serve as the core of growth-fostering engagement. The fifth concept states that individuals must feel as if they can be authentically themselves. The sixth concept denotes that all individuals included in a relationship experience positive outcomes by being in the relationship. Lastly, overtime individuals improve their ability to be productive in life and their relationship (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

RCT in this research study was utilized as an *a priori* lens and social justice call to the field for advocating in support of Latinx students and parents (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons, & Salazar, 2008; Mertens, 2007; Ratts, 2009; Ratts, D'Andrea, & Arredondo, 2004; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Ruiz, 2005). RCT provided a particularly appropriate lens through which to examine the questions of interest due to the theory's focus on improving human development and counseling to fully incorporate the experiences of women, as well as other marginalized groups, in order to promote healing through supportive relationships (Comstock et al., 2008; Ruiz, 2005). Most of the participants in this study were women, and all the participants were considered to be from a marginalized community. Therefore, the intersectionality of school counselor relationships with and advocacy for Latinx parents and students resonated with the purpose of this phenomenological study (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Comstock et al., 2008; Creswell, 2013; Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; Hays & Singh, 2012; Ruiz, 2005).

In addition, RCT illuminates the centrality of cultivating and using relationships in one's community and family system through growth-fostering relationships as well as the significant impact they have on how individuals experience the world (Miller & Stiver, 1997). This RCT aligns with many Latinx family's values and beliefs about "collectivism, simpatia (smooth, pleasant relationships), personalismo (individualized self-worth), respeto (respect), and familismo (familialism or familism)" (Ruiz, 2005, p. 37). Specifically, several RCT tenets embodied these collectivist characteristics: (a) respecting other's experiences and perceptions to initiate change, (b) working alongside others' while recognizing power differences, (c) respecting differences, (d) demonstrating resilience, and (e) working towards making a change through the process (Frey, 2013). Consequently, these tenets were used to frame the research questions, interview questions, and the data analysis process.

Method
The phenomenological research tradition was used to examine the experiences of Latinx parents with school counselors. Phenomenological inquiry seeks to provide a rich understanding of the meaning of everyday experiences (Eagleton, 1983; Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). In addition, phenomenological methods explore experiences as participants live them, rather than asserting a theory (Moustakas 1994; Van Manen, 1997). Pairing phenomenology with a RCT framework was useful to understand the meanings of the experiences Latinx parents had with school counselors through their interactions. This was done while examining how context and relational characteristics influenced the outcomes and relationships of these experiences (Comstock et al., 2008; Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012; Ruiz, 2005). Furthermore, phenomenology and RCT together provided a social justice approach for the parents to have a platform to voice their stories. The stories of the parents provided recommendations for school counselors while collaboratively working for systemic change. Pointedly, this social justice approach highlighted parents' perspectives on equity and access issues related to their interactions with and knowledge about school counselors.

Participants
Twelve participants were selected through criterion sampling based upon the specific eligibility criteria which consisted of Latinx parents born in a Spanish speaking country, attended school in their country of

origin, and had children who attended school in the U.S. (Creswell, 2014; Hays & Singh; 2012). Convenience sampling was used as well due to access to the noted population and locals. Parents were selected for this study based on meeting the criteria and their availability. Furthermore, the participants self-selected whether they met the criteria by identifying themselves as Latinx, though during the semi-structured interviews, some participants referred to themselves as Hispanic (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The participants included one female from Brazil, one female from Colombia, one female from the Dominican Republic, and seven women and two men from Mexico. Most of the participants' country of origin was Mexico.

The participants' ages ranged from 30 to 57 years old, with a median age of 39 years old. One participant identified himself as of Indian/Indigenous descent from Mexico. Six of the participants disclosed they were married. One participant was a foster mother, which did not exclude her from the study since biological relationships were not listed as a qualifying criterion. Five participants identified as bilingual, one participant spoke three languages. However, only one participant preferred to be interviewed in English. Additionally, one participant identified as a college graduate. The participants had one in four children who attended schools in the K-12 school setting and had experiences with school counselors. The participants resided within three counties in a Southeastern state.

Site Information
The semi-structured interviews were conducted at local churches in three different counties within a Southeastern state. The churches were selected as the interview sites to ensure a trustworthy location and increase the participants' comfort level. The Latinx parents who participated in this research study were solicited through their community churches or individuals who recommended participation by word-of-mouth to the participants. Before data collection, the primary researcher emailed the recruitment flyer to a contact person from each of the churches. The contact person for County #1 was a church attendee who forwarded the flyer to the minister. The contact person for County #2 was the minister who then reached out to his congregation to recruit participants. Lastly, the contact person for County #3 was the priest's administrative assistant who copied and passed out the recruitment flyers to the entire congregation during mass.

Data Collection Procedures
The research team consisted of three females, including the first author of this study. Before the commencement of the study, the researchers engaged in the Epoche process and bracketing to acknowledge their own biases and assumptions to conscientiously identify their viewpoints (Hays & Singh, 2012; Vagle, 2014). For example, the researchers discussed values and interactions they had with Latinx parents and students. Specifically, the authors explored challenges (e.g., language barriers, parent participation) they experienced as school counselors and as counselor educators and how these challenges influence their work with the Latinx community. This allowed them to focus on the voices of the participants as they shared their own experiences and openly viewed the perspectives through the eyes of the participants instead of the researchers' personal experiences (Finlay, 2008; Hays & Wood, 2011).

The semi-structured interviews conducted by the primary researcher were digitally recorded on a Mac Computer through the QuickTime Player software. The first author ensured strict confidentiality was maintained by requesting participants to create pseudonyms for themselves (Hays & Singh, 2012). Furthermore, this study was approved by the university's Internal Review Board, which ensured that the study met all ethical and federal research standards. The researchers utilized two forms of data collection for this study: (a) screening survey to collect demographic data as well as experiences and (b)

a semi-structured interview to obtain the participants' accounts of their experiences with school counselors (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012; Seidman, 2013).

Interview and screening survey question development. The RCT framework and phenomenological research tradition guided the interview and screening survey question construction (Comstock et al., 2008; Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Ruiz, 2005). The questions from both the screening survey and the semi-structured interview contained questions derived from the RCT framework (Comstock et al., 2008; Frey, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012; Ruiz, 2005). The first author incorporated questions to reflect the RCT framework and phenomenological research tradition based on the premise of school counselor and Latinx parent connections and interactions (Comstock et al., 2008; Creswell, 2013: Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Ruiz, 2005). Two RCT related questions asked during the interview include: (1) "*How connected do you feel to the school counselor?*" and (2) "*How connected do you feel the school counselor is to you and your family?*"

Screening survey session. The first author met face to face with potential participants at churches in the community to determine their suitability for the study. Using a screening survey developed by the researchers, the primary researcher administered the paper survey and collected information about the experiences of the Latinx parents with school counselors, demographic data, and willingness to be interviewed for additional data collection through the semi-structured interview process. Additionally, the survey provided the researcher an opportunity to ask the participant specific questions (e.g. *"In my overall experience, the school counselor wanted to work with my family and me towards creating change."*) based on his/her responses and build rapport before the semi-structured interview (Hays & Singh, 2012). The survey questions provided the participants the opportunity to respond by selecting strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, and strongly agree.

Semi-structured interviews. Using the information gleaned in the screening survey, the first author scheduled and conducted face to face semi-structured interviews at the local churches in a private a meeting room or office. The semi-structured interviews contained approximately ten questions, and the interviews lasted for 30- 45 minutes. The first author conducted the semi-structured interviews in Spanish and English depending on the language preference of the participant. Two interview questions are provided as examples: (1) "*What experience have you had with your child's school counselor?*"and (2) "*Based on your experience with the school counselor, what do you think is the job of a school counselor?*" Additionally, all interview questions are included in Table 1. Three interviews were conducted in English and the remaining in Spanish. Consequently, to maintain authenticity and accuracy of the data collected, the researchers hired a Spanish-speaking transcriptionist to translate and transcribe the interview. By utilizing the services of a professional transcriptionist and translator, the data was accurately portrayed since the transcripts needed to note any pauses and/or voice inflections (Hays & Singh, 2012). The data was maintained in a password protected excel file.

Table 1 Research Questions

1. What experience have you had with your child's school counselor?
2. In your experience, what information have you received from your school counselor and
3. his/her function in the school?
4. Based on your experience with the school counselor, what do you think is the job of a school counselor?
5. What do you think school counselors are needed for in the school setting?
6. What has your child shared with you about his/her experiences of school counselor's activities at the school?
7. Describe to me about a time when it was difficult for you to make contact with the school counselor. Also, tell me about a time when it was helpful for you to make contact with the school counselor.
8. How connected do you feel to the school counselor?
9. How connected do you feel the school counselor is to you and your family?
10. In your experience with the school counselor, did you feel the school counselor valued or did not value what you had to say? What gave you that idea?
11. How interested do you think the school counselor is in what you have to say about yourself and your family?
12. Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences with the school counselor?

Note: Research questions constructed based on the RCT framework and phenomenological research tradition

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved several steps, utilizing Moustakas' (1994) approach to analyzing phenomenological data. Epoche or bracketing occurred first, where the team discussed their biases and assumptions (Hays & Singh, 2012). During this process, they also facilitated bracketing by consistently recognizing their biases and assumptions throughout the study to maintain the integrity of the research study. Specifically, the team discussed their beliefs, values, and experiences with Latinx parents when they were in the role of school counselors and currently as counselor educators. For example, the authors conversed about the challenges (e.g., language barriers, parent engagement, and involvement) they experienced with Latinx parents and how these experiences influenced their relationships with Latinx parents. The authors also discussed possible findings based on recent literature (e.g., communication challenges, culturally responsiveness, collectivism) and their past interactions with Latinx parents.

Second, the first author conducted the interviews, while simultaneously working with the team to manually code the transcripts and conduct the horizontalization. This process included reviewing and coding the transcripts as well as recognizing non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements to identifying quotes, which described the meaning of these experiences (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Wood, 2011; Hays & Singh, 2012). Furthermore, quotes which repeated and overlapped were deleted, resulting in horizons also known as the textural meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Third, inductive coding was conducted since the codes were developed while each line of the data was examined. Fourth, the research team participated in reduction and elimination, where the primary researcher and research team met and frequently emailed to discuss the transcripts and codes to ensure consistency and agreement. Through consensus coding, which involved three members of the research team, they conducted clustering and generated codes where the team clustered the content into central themes (Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Fifth, the team identified and discussed inconsistencies in themes. Although this did not take place often when an inconsistency did arise the research team went back to the transcripts again and consulted with the team until a consensus was reached. Sixth, the researchers identified exemplifications (i.e., content that exemplified the identified themes) that vividly illustrated the five themes (Moustakas, 1994). Seventh, an auditor was used to review the coded data and identified themes. The external auditor was a practicing school counselor who had experience

working with Latinx parents and had experience with phenomenological research. The role of the external auditor involved examining the transcripts, themes, and implications.

Trustworthiness
This study included several measures of trustworthiness to maintain authenticity of the data, reflexive journaling, member checking, triangulation, and an external auditor. Reflexive journaling occurred after each semi-structured individual interview, where the primary researcher documented observations and thoughts to reflect upon the data collection (Hays & Singh, 2012). Furthermore, member checking occurred by asking questions during the semi-structured individual interviews to clarify the participants' responses and later by sharing the transcripts and themes to ensure the data collected was deemed authentic (Hays & Singh, 2012). Additionally, triangulation was utilized to maintain trustworthiness of the study. The methods of triangulation involved the use of the research team, the external auditor who analyzed the work of the research team to ensure data analysis was conducted appropriately, and peer debriefing by a supportive colleague (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012).

Findings
The five overarching themes that were developed were: (1) Disconnections Between Educational and Cultural Systems, (2) Growth Fostering Relationships Between Latino/a Parents and School Counselors, (3) Sense of Worth Based on Quality of Experiences with School Counselors, (4) Desired Connections Based on Experiences with School Counselors, and (5) Knowledge of the School Counselor Role Built on Mutuality.

Disconnections between Educational and Cultural Systems
The participants voiced the cultural shift they experienced while acclimating to their new lives in the United States. Ana, a 31-year-old Mexican mother who immigrated to the United States in 2005 and has four children (ages four, seven, nine, and 13 years old,) described the educational system in the United States in comparison to the educational system in Mexico. She indicated she did not believe the school counseling profession existed in Mexico:

> *For me it's different...In Mexico you learn, they give advice, it's fine. Here what*
> *you have in the school – they give you support. If you can't guide your kids well,*
> *at school they tell you...there's a counselor here that can guide you and your children.*
> *That's what they have; there's more support here.*

Leticia, a 37-year-old Mexican mother of an 11-year-old son left her husband due to domestic violence for a better life, recounted the difficulty her son experienced transitioning to school in the United States as *"he heard remarks about his home country of Mexico"* made by other students in the school setting. Leticia discussed not only the impact of change and its effects that she and her son faced but also "the challenge of learning a new language and culture" in the United States while navigating school culture. Lili, a 40-year-old mother also from Mexico had been in the United States for 20 years. Her sons were 15 and 20 years old. She also experienced the United States educational and cultural systems as quite different. She indicated the *"English taught in Mexican schools did not prepare students who move to the U.S. to speak English fluently."* Thus, her transition to the United States had been difficult due to language barriers, she shared, *"The English is very hard because in Mexico we no speak English and the height in the middle school they teach us English not too much for come and live here."* Patricia, a 43-year-old Brazilian mother also spoke about her family's assimilation process as a *"necessary way to transition"* and *"function in the U.S."* in order to navigate their new environment. She shared:

> *We come from Brazil, we also love our country but we no longer desire to live there (no nos atrae). Our daughters were raised here, they are used to it - us as well. We get along very well with the culture, the food, the clothing, the way that people live...it is easier for us when we learn to interact with the country's culture.*

Growth Fostering Relationships Between Latino/a Parents and School Counselors

One common theme identified was that Latinx parents desired a sense of community and relationships. Marta, a 39-year-old mother who was college educated and a mother of four boys, frequently voiced the importance of *"closeness in relationships"* and positive connections. The recurring message she conveyed regarding school counselors pertained to the need to *"have a relationship to share personal information"* or to "seek a school *counselor's assistance."* Marta had "very close connections to [her] elementary school counselor", while her experience with the middle and high school counselor varied, she stated, "*the other counselors like I don't see them or at least I don't see a space where I can just go and say "Hey! Hi, I'm, you know, my child's in school, it's nice meeting you."*

The word comfortable was consistently mentioned as the participants spoke about their experiences with school counselors. The participants valued the school counselor's role when information about their child(ren) was shared or initiated with them. Lili fondly mentioned her son's school counselor, explaining, *"I feel more comfortable because...when I ask is everything is okay? He tells me no, you need talk to your son because he's...skipping the school, he's skipping the class."* Similarly, Ana echoed the sentiment, stating, *"My son said 'this is what the counselor told me.'...He tells me about it when he goes to the counselor. I think maybe he talks more to the counselor than to me."*

Marta's response to her children's positive experiences with the school counselor also impacted her relationship and connection with the school counselor:

> *I think the biggest impact has been, for my children, well for me has been to have somebody that I can talk to and completely trust. I feel like I can trust, um, when my children have had an issue but for them, um, they have felt like important, like somebody cares.*

Leticia additionally echoed the sentiment of being valued by the school counselor. She stated while the *"school counselor provided suggestions",* the school counselor still created an atmosphere of collaboration to allow for the parent to have autonomy in decision making. Moreover, the participants' connection with school counselors were influenced by their child(ren)'s value and awareness of the school counselor's role. Lili shared that she eventually "*figured out" who to contact when she needed help at school from her son,* she noted, *"Because my son has told me that from the counsel help people and one day I say today is the day I'm not waiting for tomorrow and I say and I go and ask I need help and they send me to the counsel".* Additionally, Ana advises her son to see the school counselor based on her experience with the school counselor and the outcomes that arose from the school counseling services that were provided, *"And I tell him, 'Whenever you feel sad or you want to talk to someone, ask to speak to the counselor'."*

Sense of Worth Based on Quality of Experiences with School Counselors

Some parents experienced the school counselor as an ally and an advocate and some did not, and felt angry and frustrated with the school counselor. The sense of worth emerged as the parents interacted with the child(ren)'s school counselors and based on the outcomes of these experiences. The quality of the experiences determined if the parents felt the school counselor valued their concerns and time. Additionally, Patricia spoke about responsiveness and intentional proactivity. She noted, *"They made*

themselves available." Patricia also shared that, there were other counselors that did not seem to value her or her children, stating, *"The counselor didn't give me any information, and we didn't have anything. It was a bad experience."*

Similarly, Sabrina's and Maria's experiences with their children's school counselors further echoed the importance of being valued, Sabrina shared, *"the school counselor valued what I had to say, and she gave it importance, maybe more importance than what it really had. I liked that."* Maria, explained that when she was having challenges with her child, *"The school counselor gave us an appointment and she showed us how to look at things in a different way."* The participants who voiced positive experiences with school counselors identified the school counselor as someone who made them feel valued by listening and responding to them in a timely and proactive manner.

Desired Recommendations Based on Experiences with School Counselors
Throughout the interview process, participants provided recommendations. Ana advocated for other Latinx parents *"to meet with the school counselor"* based upon the support school counselors provided to students and parents. She shared*, "I'd tell many mothers that they should go see a counselor whenever they have problems with their kids...They do help."* Daniel, a 48-year-old Mexican male of Indian/Indigenous descent came to the United States in 1985 and had three children who were three, nine, and 13 years old, stated he met with his child's school counselor to seek help in academics. He specifically sought help for math and wanted school counselors to speak to students and parents about getting ready for college. Additionally, during the interview, Daniel indicated he would like "more contact" to be initiated by the school counselor, saying, *"I would like for the counselor to contact me if there's a problem. The counselor should set up a meeting or something. . . .I would like to talk to them more, to check how the kids are doing."* Leticia, requested that, *"school counselors advertise more programs for children and families that provide more support."* In addition, Sabrina, a 32-year-old Mexican mother with two daughters, recognized language as a *"barrier"* for Latinx families and students. She stated there were many events at her child's school that were *"conducted solely in English",* expounding on this statement she explained:

> *I feel that maybe if there would have been a little more information for the Hispanics, because many don't know that the school has that service for when their children are having problems or going through certain situations. Many Hispanic parents don't know what to do or how to handle it (the situation) because they don't have adequate information, like me, for example, when I wanted to speak with the principal, but I didn't know that the counselor could fix those kinds of problems. So, maybe a little more information or guidance for people that don't speak English.*

Knowledge of the School Counselor Role Built on Mutuality
Several of the participants "*did not have school counselors"* in their countries of origin. Therefore, some of the participants were new to understanding the role of the school counselor in the United States as well as the services provided. Judy Elizabeth, a 57-year-old mother and foster parent from the Dominican Republic, shared how she viewed a school counselor's role, stating*, "I think it needs to be a person with passion for the future of the nation."* Marta relayed that her understanding developed overtime:
> *I didn't understand what their role in the school was. But now, I understand what their, what their job is...I think [school counselor] give students, tools on how to handle things in society. School counselors especially now that I noticed that more and more parents are are doing less of the parenting. So, I think that a lot of children are missing skills that, that are being worked on*

> *by the counselors like, um, it make the school and the future of the children better*
> *...implementing different techniques and guiding students through their issues.*

Leticia expounded on the role of the school counselor, noting, *"they support the teachers"* by "relieving some of the burden" that prevent the teacher from *"achieving her duties and tasks."*

Discussion
This phenomenological research study aimed to discover and understand the essence of the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they related to school counselors (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012). The research question *"What is the meaning of the lived experiences of Latinx parents as they related to school counselors?"* guided this study every step of the way. Several connections to the literature reviewed emerged such as all the participants were diverse based on country of origin, educational level, socio economic status, English language acquisition, as well as being from indigenous heritage (Arredondo et al., 2014). The participants indicated difficulty navigating the school culture based on language barriers. This correlated with previous research showing obstacless and challenges for parents to be involved in their children's school and possible low student educational achievement (Aud, Wilkinson-Flicker, Kristapovich, Rathbun, Wang, & Zhang, 2013; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010).

The findings further connected with previous literature based on the role of the school counselor (Liberman, 2004). The parents' experiences underscored the crucial role of the school counselor which appeared to be unclear to some of the participants. It was apparent some of the participants perceived the school counselor as the person who assisted in interpreting. Often, even with voice inflections, it appeared they were guessing what the role was while stating what they believed it to be, which connected to Liberman's study in 2004. Liberman's (2004) discussed the role of the school counselor as unclear and confusing to others which was due to school counselors being tasked with non-counselor duties (e.g., record keeping, discipline, and working as administrative assistants).

One of the participants stated her daughter felt that the school counselors in the school did not seem to care because they were swamped because of having too many students. This sentiment connected to Eckenrod-Green and Culbreth's study (2008) where Latinx students stated their school counselors were not available and school counselors did not respond quickly to their needs. Furthermore, Ecknerod-Green and Culberth's (2008) research revealed Latinx high school students who dropped out of high school did not seek school counseling services and did not think the school counselor would know how to help them since the students had seen the school counselors working in other roles, such as scheduling. Therefore, school counselors can combat these issues by heeding the advice from the participants. The participants recommended school counselors should provide parents with resources to better assist their children with school and post-secondary resources which linked to school counselors in the role as change agents and proactive school counseling (ASCA, 2012; Bemak & Chung, 2008; Chen-Hayes, Ockerman, & Mason, 2014).

Implications for School Counselors
School counselors as social justice change agents should intentionally practice through an RCT lens by forging connections with Latinx parents with the premise of building trust (Comstock et al., 2008; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Ruiz, 2005). School counselors who are cognizant that the language, culture, people, and school are different compared to what the families are accustomed and, therefore, can assist families with navigating the school culture and expectations. Strategic school counseling supports could be put in place by intentionally providing an opportunity for Latinx parents to discuss their experiences and perceptions of the cultural transition. RCT would play a significant role as school counselors reach out to

allies by providing mutual empathy and empowerment while also working with Latinx parents (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Ruiz, 2005). Specific steps for school counselors to build relationships with Latinx parents include recognizing power differentials, creating a trusting and safe environment, demonstrating active listening and concern, partnering with the parent to support the student, and creating opportunities for future school counseling and Latinx parent connections.

The school counseling specialty should also consider addressing the participants' requests for needing supports provided in Spanish. Specific programs and interventions that address the academic, career and social-emotional domains should be conducted in Spanish such as Career Nights, Senior Nights, and PTSA Meetings which correlate with suggestions previously provided by Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, and Henderson (2013). Additionally, Latinx parents consistently voiced their desire to be valued, listened to, and assisted. Therefore school counselors who recognize these needs may utilize their approach through the RCT lens by building relationships on the five good things, mutual empathy, and empowerment, and continuous growth-fostering relationships (Comstock et al., 2008; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Ruiz, 2005).

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research
Even though this study was conducted in a conscientious and ethical manner, limitations to the study still emerged (Hays & Singh, 2012; Mertens, 2010). All participants in the study were selected through criterion and convenience sampling from three churches located in three diverse counties (Creswell, 2014; Hays & Singh, 2012). The participants were connected to a familial organization such as church, which was recognized as part of the family unit (Arredondo, et al., 20142014; Smith-Morris, Morales-Campos, Alvarez, & Turner, 2012). Perhaps the findings would have reflected differently had the data collection occurred within the county outside of the church setting since the number of parents who had experiences with school counselors was despairingly small. Therefore, larger sample size may have been available through another means of participant recruitment. Majority of the participants in this study consisted of mothers. The gender of the participants may have also contributed to the experiences, perceptions, and expectations the participants had with their child(ren)'s school counselors (Zalquett & Baez, 2012). Additional research involving fathers, grandparents, and guardians raising children in the school setting would provide another lens for identifying experiences with school counselors and types of feedback shared by future participants.

The participants' experiences with school counselors resulted in recommendations to the school counseling specialty to provide best practices in working with Latinx parents to support student success. RCT applied in this study might be as a significant component for building relationships through positive connections with Latinx parents and providing school counseling services (Comstock et al., 2008; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Ruiz, 2005). Therefore, further research would be beneficial in examining relationships involving collaboration and communication between the school counselor and Latinx parents.
Most of the participants interacted with school counselors who solely spoke English. This study did not investigate the experiences regarding bilingual school counselors, which may be beneficial to the school counseling specialty. Furthermore, the participants did not indicate frustration with not having a bilingual school counselor available, but further studies may provide findings to better support interventions and practices in partnering with Latinx parents.

Additionally, this phenomenological research study included experiences with K-12 school counselors. All the participants shared their experiences across grade levels, which described these experiences. The findings indicated most of the participants experienced positive experiences with elementary level school counselors. This study did not focus on specific grade level experiences. Therefore additional

research studies pertaining to specific grade levels would be insightful to the school counseling specialty. School counselors for each level would benefit from understanding types of supports needed by Latinx parents. Such supports would include factors which contribute to positive and negative experiences leading to connections and/or disconnections, and how to proactively build relationships with Latinx parents to collaboratively support student success through academic, career, and social-emotional interventions and programs (ASCA, 2012; Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Navigating school climate and expectations proved to be daunting for the participants in this study. Whether the disconnect or lack of understanding pertained to language, accessibility, experiences, awareness of support and role of specific school personnel, or navigating post-secondary opportunities, future research could be conducted in these areas. Perhaps further research may provide potential findings to understand additional factors, which inhibit Latinx parents from feeling comfortable in the school settings. Furthermore, research studies on the topic of awareness of the school counseling role may provide further implications for the school counseling specialty and preparation for school counselors in training to better inform Latinx parents on the school counseling role, services, and programs.

Though the research sample was criterion based and a diverse sample was not the intent, the participants in this study were from various countries of origin - Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico (Creswell, 2014; Hays & Singh, 2012). Further factors contributing to diversity were based on differing levels of education, socio-economic status, occupations, and English language skills. Future research studies could be conducted focusing on Latinx from particular countries, educational attainment, and/or socio-economic status (Aud et al., 2013). Even though the participants matched the criterion for this study, each participant was uniquely diverse (Aud et al., 2013; Arredondo et al., 2014).

Conclusion

School counselors are advocates and change agents in K-12 school settings for all students and parents. As the Latinx population continues to increase, it is imperative school counselors provide more intentional and culturally responsive support for Latinx parents and students. Therefore, school counselors may leverage the concept of familismo in order to build trust with Latinx families, students, and parents. Therefore, school counselors are in the position to provide academic, career planning, and social-emotional supports as social justice advocates (ASCA, 2012; Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, Delgado-Romero, & Zapata, 2014; Smith-Morris, Morales-Campos, Alvarez, & Turner, 2012). Additionally, school counselors who are aware of the challenges and struggles faced by Latinx students and parents will be better prepared as practitioners by understanding their experiences, perceptions, and worldview (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015).

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