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OBSTACLES AND ASPIRATIONS AMONGST HISPANICS
AND AFRICAN AMERICANS IN PURSUING
A COLLEGE EDUCATION

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Monica Avina
June 2008

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Approved by:



Dr. Herbert Shon, Faculty Supervisor
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6-2-08
Date



Dr. Janet C. Chang,
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ABSTRACT

This paper will present a quantitative study regarding African American and Hispanic college students. The study consisted of finding the obstacles faced by these two ethnic groups as well as their facilitating factors and motivations to attend college. Literature from previous research findings on this issue will first be described in chapter two. Chapter three will describe the methods procedures this researcher used for this quantitative study, which consisted of surveying 85 students from Hispanic and African American descent at California State University San Bernardino. Chapter four contains a statistical description of the collected data. This paper will conclude with a discussion of the results, the study's limitations, and recommendations to the social work profession, policy and research based on its findings.

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I would like to thank my whole family for their enduring support, understanding, and for believing in me throughout this project. My friends, coworkers and supervisors also made a difference with their words of encouragement and understanding. Dr. Shon, thank you so much for all your guidance, patience and support from the beginning to the end of this project. What would I have done without all your help? I would also like to thank those friends who helped me by participating in the study and to my classmates for their additional contributions to this project. I am also indebted with the organization leaders who gave their permission to conduct the study in their meetings, as well as the members for their willingness to participate. I really do not have enough words to thank all of you for all the different pieces you contributed to the realization of this project.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

African Americans and Hispanics often face obstacles throughout their lives that make their access to higher education more difficult than for other groups.

Motivations for attending college may vary from one culture to another, and there are obstacles that many Hispanics and African Americans have strived and managed to overcome with time. They have set educational and career goals for themselves to succeed in life, and many of them have been capable of being productive members of society. African American and Hispanic students that have entered college have in a sense demonstrated that their motivations were stronger than the obstacles they encountered.

Throughout history, ethnic minorities have been challenged with obstacles and barriers when they have tried to thrive in American society. This applies especially to African Americans because of the cruel treatment they had to endure many years ago (Schiele, 2005) such as slavery and segregation. However, Schiele

also points out that even though they have managed to survive with resiliency and have been motivated to free themselves, they continue to be oppressed (Schiele, 2005). According to Schiele (2000), cultural oppression involves the regulation of others' cultural values, beliefs and worldviews. That is, the dominant culture is seen as the norm, and thus making the other groups' cultural values less worthy.

Even though Hispanics' history of oppression and discrimination in the United States are not on the same level as the type of inhumane treatments of African Americans' descendents, their racial status nonetheless puts them at a greater disadvantage than their white counterparts when seeking a brighter future. It was found in a qualitative study that the obstacles Hispanic students face to attend college were, financial difficulties, the lack of sufficient guidance from their parents when making decisions about college, and misinformation about the different types of student aid (Zalaquett, 2006). Perhaps not surprisingly, according to Cole and Omari (2003), an obstacle amongst African Americans was perceived discrimination during their adolescent years.

The importance of studying this problem to social work is to increase its awareness about the needs of other cultures in the US. By learning about the difficulties African American and Hispanic college students had to face to go to college, as social workers we will be more prepared to help the upcoming generations overcome those obstacles effectively or to even try to eliminate them. It is important for social workers to learn how these two ethnic groups are being challenged in their attempts to become educated, productive members of society and achieve what we have come to know as the "American Dream."

This problem also fits the macro practice context because it involves minority groups that are still being affected by the lack of policies that serve some of their needs. For example, these policies may include incorporating programs for minority students and their families that will teach them more about the value of education and at the same time teach parents about how to guide their children in the college decision-making process, and policies that ease college access to undocumented students. Children and parents also need to be reminded that education is a right for everybody

regardless of their race, ethnic background or immigration status, and that barriers that restrict their access to that right are unjust and require reform.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the obstacles faced by African American and Hispanic students as well as the motivations that help them thrive in today's society through a college education. This is important for social workers who work with ethnic minorities because by learning about ways in which these two groups are still being oppressed, they can find ways of empowering them to overcome barriers to accessing higher education. Therefore, by studying this problem, as social workers we will gain a better understanding of our profession's challenges, which include understanding the needs of African American and Hispanic students, while at the same time helping them meet these needs in a culturally competent manner.

One of the problems African American and Hispanic students have encountered is racial discrimination and this tells us that despite the country's attempts to eradicate this problem, unfortunately it continues to be

a significant challenge and problem. It is reported that even though racial segregation no longer exists, African American and Hispanic students are still facing discrimination in certain schools (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004).

For this study, the quantitative survey method of research will be the most appropriate to find the information needed. The study will be conducted at California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB), involving Hispanic and African American students, who will be surveyed through self-administered questionnaires. This method will be used because it is the most convenient method in terms of time constraints. It is also the least costly method, one of the easiest, and most feasible.

Significance of the Project to Social Work Practice

By studying what obstacles are encountered by African American and Hispanic students throughout their lives to get to college, and what motivated them to pursue a higher education, social workers will increase their knowledge and understanding of the needs and strengths of these two ethnic groups. They will learn

what takes for these youth to accomplish the American dream. Moreover, by having a better understanding of their needs they will be more prepared to help meet the needs of those that have not entered college for one reason or another. While students and parents are receiving education and guidance on how to access financial resources, the classes that emphasize the value of education, and self-esteem classes for youth that are being affected by discrimination, social workers at the same time will be able to assess for other obstacles they are having trouble overcoming and that are not allowing these children to pursue their dreams. Therefore, if we want less problematic youth on the streets and decrease the levels of poverty, there is a lot the social work profession can do to help them find their pathway to a successful future. It is also necessary to free them from the stereotypes that have been held about them as "less intelligent," which they themselves may have internalized.

The findings from this study will contribute to social work research by building our knowledge of the different needs and strengths of African American and Hispanic students. There may be many aspects of these two

cultures about which we may not be aware. The study will contribute to social work practice by teaching social workers about the areas in which African American and Hispanic students need help in order to succeed in today's society. Lastly, the findings may contribute to educational and social policies by informing legislators about the problems these two minority groups are facing, and what new policies or programs can be generated to make reduce and ideally clear the barriers their stand in their way to higher education, and quality of life.

The phase of the generalist intervention process that informed this study was assessment, because the study is about assessing the needs and/or problems encountered by African American and Hispanic students. The research questions for the study were what motivates Hispanics and African Americans to go to college and what are the obstacles they face to reaching this goal?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter covers a summary of previous research findings regarding the problems African American and Hispanic students face to go to college and the motivations that help them reach this goal. It will also cover theoretical perspectives that have guided past research and that will also guide this study. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how this study will build on, and differ from, past research.

Obstacles to Attend College

According to a qualitative study (Zalaquett, 2006) that consisted of 12 Latino college students, the obstacles they faced to enter college were: 1) low levels of guidance when making college-related decisions, especially guidance from their parents, 2) misinformation about the college application process and resources, and 3) financial problems. It was found that the lack of guidance in making decisions about their education and having been misinformed about the application process and resources led students to delay their college entrance

because they did not submit the proper paperwork by the colleges' deadlines (Zalaquett, 2006). It was reported that when students come from more economically stable families, they receive guidance from their parents when applying for college, compared to low-income students whose parents did not attend college themselves and therefore lacked knowledge about the application process or available resources (Zalaquett, 2006).

Another qualitative study of ten Hispanic students at Yale University that had come from poor neighborhoods found similar results with regard to the obstacles they faced. For instance, participants reported that a lack of parental guidance due to language barriers was at times hard for them. Their parents did not have the knowledge of the class curriculum, application process, college choices, nor helped them with homework due to their lack of English skills and inexperience in higher education. A student from the sample recalled feeling unsupported when her parents could not orient her to her educational path. Another student acknowledged that she would have liked to have had more of her parents' input in her college decisions, but due to their lack of experience she was on her own with the process (Ceballo, 2004).

On the other hand, it is reported that even though higher education institutions and upper class secondary schools are more accessible to African American students, studies have found that that these students continue to be burdened with cultural and class oppression (Cole & Omari, 2003). For example, an ethnographic study of African American students was conducted at an all girls' elite high school and found that they had experienced physical alienation in classrooms. This type of discrimination resulted in students' sense of marginalization and exclusion from "school culture" by their schools (Cole & Omari, 2003). By being excluded from the rest of their classmates, they felt trapped in-between two different worlds: the world of Whites and their own. Nevertheless, they admitted that they were voluntarily paying the price for social status mobility, since they had the perception that education was the means to that end. As a result, these students had no other option than to form peer groups in which they felt a sense of racial identity and could look up to each other (Cole & Omari, 2003).

A study conducted at two different high schools focus groups found that regardless of Black students'

high achievement, they were still challenged with environmental obstacles (Griffin, 2006). The study consisted of nine students at an affluent school and eight at a low resourced school, both of which were located in Southern California. The challenges identified by the sample from the well-resourced-school were related to a hostile racial environment, such as stereotypes and/or discrimination. Due to the fact that they were part of a school wherein most of its population was Caucasian, they were more prone to stereotypes and/or discrimination. This was illustrated when a participant from the study made a connection between his difficulty accessing AP courses and stereotypes that were held about him. He said that he was seen as an athlete rather than somebody with the ability of achieving to his fullest potential. Respondents also stated that once they had finally gained access to AP courses, where there were very few minorities, their sense of otherness was immediately established by their White classmates.

On the other hand, the sample at the less affluent school reported that even though they were enrolled at a low resourced school, their experiences were favorable because they tried to make the best out of their

available resources and had a well established sense of belonging with their peers because most of their classmates were from their same ethnic background (Griffin, 2006). They, however, nonetheless experienced racism and stereotypes outside the school setting and outside their community. Students reported being judged as less intelligent by residents from other communities (Griffin, 2006).

Based on interviews with Hispanic and African American students regarding perceived racism in schools, these students described their relationships with their teachers as unfavorable (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Students perceived that their teachers had lower expectations of them than of White and Asian students, as well as being stereotyped as troublemakers no matter how well they behaved. They stated that a teacher who cared for her students was supposed to have high expectations for everybody by being strict, but at the same time encouraging them to work hard. Moreover, they said that she must be willing to help her students when they needed extra help understanding the subject (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004).

Another study that involved participant observation found that certain teachers appeared to show a lack of concern for their Hispanic and African American students' academic performance or their personal well-being (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). These students observed that a teacher lacked receptiveness to the different cultures that existed in her classroom by disrespecting one of her African American students for her braids. When this student told the teacher that she would leave them for several months, the teacher insisted that she wash her head. The teacher showed disrespect by judging her as being dirty for not washing her hair at an interval with which she is accustomed (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004).

Motivations That Help Overcame Obstacles

Hispanics and African Americans are driven by aspirations to succeed in today's society. According to Zalaquett's (2006) qualitative study, the motivations that helped Hispanic students want to pursue a college education and therefore overcoming the obstacles that got on their way were family support, education as a value, sense of responsibility to family such as setting the example for younger siblings, sense of achievement,

friend support, support from their communities as in scholarship availability, and moral support from their teachers or other school staff (Zalaquett, 2006). These motivations proved to be stronger than the obstacles they encountered because they managed to attend college.

A study of 606 African American high school juniors and seniors examined the relationship between racial identity and educational attainment and found that these students were motivated by their sense of connection to their culture, pride and their awareness that everyone must hold equal rights regardless of their cultural background. Another motivation was a positive connection to their culture that allowed them to ignore negative stimuli such as stereotypes from Whites. Throughout their history they have also been motivated by their value for learning and education (Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman, 2003).

Furthermore, the study of Yale student participants mentioned in the preceding section found that regardless of their parents' lack of input, they were motivated to pursue a college education through different types of support: parents' emphasis on the value of education, parental facilitation of children's independence,

parental nonverbal support for educational accomplishments and faculty's roles as mentors and role models. This entails that even though the students' parents were not able to orient their children with college decisions or even help them with the application process, they never stopped instilling in their children a strong value for education, nor limited their trust in them to make their own educational decisions. They also supported them through their nonverbal behavior, such as by lowering their expectations of helping with household chores. Additionally, the students' teachers as role models and mentors was a valuable source of motivation that helped them overcome their many obstacles, such as discrimination and poverty (Ceballo, 2004).

Existing literature about the obstacles Hispanics and African Americans face to go to college is limited. Moreover, most of the studies were qualitative, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings of those two populations. Therefore to have a better understanding of the problem, it is necessary to conduct more quantitative studies.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

A theoretical perspective that will guide this study on the aspirations of minority youth to succeed in society is the status attainment model (Kao & Tienda, 1998). The status attainment framework has guided the study of academic and social attainment since the late 1950's. Its goal is to find the different motivations that drive people to succeed academically and professionally.

Academic motivations were originally treated as a cognitive condition that was shaped by parents', teachers', and peers' expectations. Parental expectations are especially important to their children's academic achievement because they are their source of financial and psychological resources, and primary sources of socialization. Peers and teachers also shape aspirations because the amount of time spent in school settings, teachers act as role models (Kao & Tienda, 1998). The theory will guide this study because literature has shown that parents play a strong role in their children's motivations to succeed academically. The study will now aim to find the degree of influence parents had on their children attending college.

Another theory that has guided previous research on the obstacles encountered to achieve upward mobility through a college education is the racial/class stratification theory (Charles, Roscigno, & Torres, 2006). The theory examines the implications of racial and socioeconomic status on educational attainment and achievement. It addresses the fact that current inequalities minorities face are rooted in past and current dynamics related to subordination, alienation and racism (Charles, Roscigno, & Torres, 2006). The theory will also guide this study because literature shows that the obstacle faced by African Americans and Hispanics deal mainly with discrimination and/or racial oppression. In other words, based on existing literature it appears that racial discrimination is an obstacle Hispanics and African Americans face in common when striving for educational attainment. Therefore before conducting the study, the researcher will already have an idea of the obstacle these two ethnic groups face in common when striving for their right to a higher education.

Since research on the obstacles faced by African Americans and Hispanics is limited, and the literature found is mostly based on qualitative studies, it is

essential to acknowledge that more research needs to be performed with larger samples. By conducting a quantitative study we will have a wider understanding of the needs of Hispanics and African Americans students who want to thrive in today's society through a college education. Once we learn more about their specific needs, we will gain a better insight of how to empower them. This is how this quantitative study will build on and differ from previous studies.

Summary

This chapter focused on the findings of the challenges faced by African American and Hispanic students as they make their way to attend college, and the motivations that drive them to pursue that goal. Even though there was limited literature on their obstacles, it was found that the two groups are challenged by discrimination by their teachers. Other obstacles Hispanic students encounter when they are getting ready to enter college are: their lack of guidance in college-decision making, the family's economic situation, and being misinformed about available resources. Moreover, even though there are many theories that can

guide research on the problems faced by minorities, it is unfortunate that there has not been enough research to help these populations reach an equal playing field with Whites.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter covers a summary of the research methods that were used to conduct the study. These methods included: the study's design, sampling techniques, data collection process, the instruments that were used, and the protection of human subjects in terms of confidentiality, informed consent, etc. The chapter will conclude with a detailed data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of the proposed study was to discover and compare the obstacles African Americans and Hispanics encounter throughout their lives to enter college as well as their facilitating factors and motivations to pursue this dream. The goal was to first explore each group's obstacles, facilitating factors and motivations and then compare responses between the two groups to determine whether these three variables were influenced by their culture. The most appropriate research method was the quantitative survey design because the literature showed that more qualitative studies had been conducted on the

issue, and thus a quantitative study allowed the researcher the opportunity to generalize the results to the larger Hispanic and African American student populations.

Self-administered surveys were used since it was the least costly and most convenient method. Yet, there were three limitations to this survey design. The first one involved the inaccuracy of responses by uninterested participants. In other words, participants may have responded to the surveys without thoroughly reading the questions or answers. The other two limitations were due to time constraints. For example, participants were selected based on convenience and the sample sizes were small. Bigger samples would have allowed the researcher to make generalizations to a wider spectrum of populations. Therefore, these limitations may have created biases in the results.

The research question for this study was, what motivates Hispanics and African Americans to go to college, what are the obstacles they face to reach this goal, as well as the facilitating factors?

Sampling

The sample consisted of current African American and Hispanic students from CSUSB. The sample size comprised 44 African American students and 41 Hispanic students, who were selected on a non-random basis. While the Hispanic sample was drawn from Teatro Universitario de Espanol, Sigma Pi Alpha, Delta Sigma Chi and through acquaintances, the African American sample was drawn from the Afrikan Student Alliance organization and from acquaintances. Non-random sampling was used because a list of all African American and Hispanic college students was not available to conduct a random sample study. Non-random sampling implied that the sample was drawn based on availability and/or convenience. The selection criteria were based on subjects' ethnicity (African American or Hispanic) and their current enrollment at the university.

This particular sample was chosen because current African American and Hispanic college students were representative of the two ethnic groups' obstacles and facilitating factors, and motivations to go to college. Moreover, these groups demonstrated how their motivations

and facilitating factors helped them overcome their obstacles to pursue a higher education.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data that were collected in the self-administered surveys (Appendix A) included demographic data (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, and student status such as freshman, sophomore, junior, senior or grad student) and information that was relevant to the problem being studied. The latter information consisted of the obstacles they encountered to attend college, factors that eased their college attendance and their motivations to pursue a higher education. The Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, et al., 1992) was used to measure the participants' motivations to attend college.

The study did not have any independent or dependent variables. Therefore, a descriptive analysis was used to summarize the results of this study. The level of measurement for motivations was ordinal and the level of measurement for obstacles and facilitating factors was nominal. Two subscales of the Academic Motivation Scale (Appendix B) were used to collect information on

participants' motivations to attend college. The scale is comprised of seven subscales: three types of intrinsic motivation, three types of extrinsic motivation and one subscale for amotivation. However, only one type of intrinsic motivation and one type of extrinsic motivation were measured for this study's research purposes. That is, the intrinsic motivation subscale was used because it measures the factors that motivate people to accomplish goals and the extrinsic motivation subscale that was used measures how people are motivated by external factors. Internal reliability of the Academic Motivation Scale was proved through the consistency of findings from a study and Cronbach's coefficient range scores of .70 and .86 (Cokley, Bernard, Cunningham, & Motoike, 2001). The survey, which was created by the researcher, was pre-tested for validity to ensure that it measured what it was intended to measure.

The limitations of the data collection method dealt with validity. For example, there was a possibility that surveys may have been answered by some uninterested participants, and therefore could have led to the inaccuracy of these specific responses. Consequently, their answers may not have portrayed the real motivations

or obstacles these participants faced to go to college. Another limitation of the research method was that since the sample was selected based on convenience instead of random selection, the findings may be biased.

One of the strengths, however, was that since the sample size was larger than that of the aforementioned qualitative studies, the findings may have better generalizability to larger Hispanic and African American populations that are currently in college. This is called external validity. In other words, a clearer perspective can be drawn from a larger sample than from a smaller one. Another strength is that participants had the opportunity to get clarification on a particular question that was unclear to them because the researcher was present during their participation in the study. Lastly, yet another strength was that the survey was pre-tested to ensure that it measured what it was intended to measure.

Data Collection Procedures

The first step in conducting this study was to pretest the surveys to ensure content validity of the research. The surveys were distributed to six African

American and Hispanic participants. After it was discovered that questions were being interpreted differently from the researcher's original intent, changes were made to the survey questions that enhanced clarity.

The next step in conducting the study was to contact the Student Leadership and Development office at CSUSB to obtain information about the locations, times and dates of Latino and African American organization meetings. Once a list of all the existing organizations with all their contact information was obtained, the researcher contacted the organizations' leaders through email. After their permission had been granted, the researcher attended their meetings. Upon arriving to the meetings the researcher was given the opportunity to start conducting the study. She introduced herself and gave a brief description about the study. Participants were informed that the completion of the questionnaires was going to take no more than 15 minutes and were reminded that their participation was completely voluntary. Then, they were given an informed consent (Appendix C) to provide them with more information about the study and to ensure in writing that they were willingly participating.

All student members at the meetings were asked to participate since these were specifically African American and Hispanic organizations. The sample size is 44 African American and 41 Hispanic undergraduate and graduate students. After participants were informed about the study and had filled out the consent forms, they were handed the surveys. Once participants completed the surveys they were given a debriefing statement (which is included in Appendix D), and candy as a token of the researcher's appreciation for their participation.

Protection of Human Subjects

Participants were protected by the researcher maintaining their information strictly confidential and by ensuring that the study did not involve any types of risks to the participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by not requesting identifying information (e.g. name, phone number and/or address) on the surveys or consent forms. Another way in which the confidentiality of participants was kept safe was by keeping all completed surveys in a place that was only accessible by the researcher along with the hardware that contained the saved information. After all the data were

analyzed completely, the surveys and consent forms were shredded and information was deleted from the hardware.

Data Analysis

Findings were analyzed by using quantitative data analysis techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic data (e.g. ethnicity, gender and age) and findings on the obstacles, facilitating factors and motivations between the two ethnic groups. In other words, frequencies, and percentages were used to summarize ethnicity, gender and age. Then each group's significant obstacles, facilitating factors and motivations were summarized based on which of these had the highest percentages under the "experienced a significant amount" category.

Summary

This chapter covered the methods and process that were followed to find how African American and Hispanic college students were influenced to attend college while at the same time they were confronted with obstacles that made it harder for them to pursue this dream. This data was collected through self-administered surveys at Cal State San Bernardino. The sample consisted of 85 total

students, who were selected on a non-random basis due to the fact that a list of all Hispanic and African college students was not available to the researcher. While students participated in this study, the researcher ensured that participants' confidentiality and anonymity was protected. Lastly, the relationships between ethnicity and obstacles and ethnicity and motivations were analyzed through the use of cross-tabulation tables since these three variables were nominal.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter provides a statistical description of the results from the study conducted. First, a description of the entire sample will be presented as well as the overall frequencies of the most prevalent obstacle faced by the two ethnic groups. Next, will be a more comprehensive description of each group's most common obstacles encountered. Lastly, the most prevalent facilitating factors and motivations that led these participants to pursue a college education will be presented. Even though the survey included various obstacles, facilitating factors and motivations for the participants to rate them based on their significance, only the most significant ones will be presented in this chapter and further discussed in chapter 5. For example, the survey included a list of the following obstacles: racial discrimination; gender discrimination; lacked family's emotional support; family lacked knowledge about the college process; did not receive adequate guidance from school counselor/teacher; personal and/or family

financial problems; and immigrant status made it more difficult to attend college." However, although racial discrimination did not appear to be a major obstacle for either ethnic group, this obstacle's statistical findings will be discussed for the purpose of comparing them to previous research results. The next obstacles that will be presented in this chapter are, personal and/or family financial problems, family lacked knowledge about the college application process, and unawareness of the financial resources available. Similarly, eight facilitating factors were listed on the survey but only the most prevalent ones will be presented and discussed. These eight facilitating factors were: encouragement of family/relatives to attend college; encouragement of friends to attend college; encouragement of a junior high or high school teacher; family/relatives provided financial support to attend college; friends provided financial support to attend college; encouraged by a significant person or mentor to attend college; parents helped to complete homework while growing up; and parents attended parent-teacher conferences while growing up. The facilitating factors that will be presented based on their significance are: encouragement of family/relatives

to attend college, parents helped to complete homework while growing up, and encouragement of friends to attend college. The motivational scale included six items but due to their degree of significance experienced by each ethnic group, only two motivations will be described. The six items in the scale were: "education is strongly valued in my family; in order to have a better salary later on; in order to obtain a more prestigious life later on; because I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies; to have the good life later on; and to make my family happy." The motivations that will be presented and discussed are "to show myself that I can succeed in my studies and to have a better salary later on." Evidence of these statistical descriptions will be provided through cross tabulation tables for chi-squares used.

Presentation of the Findings

Hispanic participants represented 48.2% of the entire sample and African Americans represented 51.8%. That is, the sample of this quantitative study was composed of 41 Hispanic and 44 African American CSUSB students. Within the Hispanic sample, there were 30

Hispanic females and 11 Hispanic males, and the African American sample was composed of 32 African American females and 12 African American males (see Table 1).

Table 1. Gender and Ethnic Composition

	Ethnicity		Total
	Hispanic	African American	
Gender Female Count	30	32	62
% within ethnicity	73.2%	72.7%	72.9%
Male Count	11	12	23
% within ethnicity	26.8%	27.3%	27.1%
Total Count	41	44	85
% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The following table shows that the majority of the participants were between the ages of 18-24. For example, 70.7% of Hispanics and 56.8% of African Americans were within this age range.

Table 2. Age Composition by Ethnicity

		Hispanic	African American	Total
Age 18-24	Count	29	25	54
	% within ethnicity	70.7%	56.8%	63.5%
Age 25-34	Count	8	8	16
	% within ethnicity	19.5%	18.2%	18.8%
Age 35-44	Count	3	3	6
	% within ethnicity	7.3%	6.8%	7.1%
Age 45-54	Count	0	7	7
	% within ethnicity	.0%	15.9%	8.2%
Age 55 and above	Count	1	1	2
	% within ethnicity	2.4%	2.3%	2.4%
Total	Count	41	44	85
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

We can see in Table 3 that English was the first language for 97.7% of African Americans and was a second language for 2.3% of this group, whereas it was the first language 26.8% of Hispanics and a second language for 73.2%.

Table 3. English as a First and Second Language

English is my		Hispanic	African American	Total
First language	count	11	43	54
	% within ethnicity	26.8%	97.7%	63.5%
Second language	count	30	1	31
	% within ethnicity	73.2%	2.3%	36.5%
Total	count	41	44	85
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4 shows that a higher proportion (43.9%) of Hispanic participants were seniors and the majority (36.4%) of African American participants were graduate students.

Table 4. Student Standing

Student Standing		Hispanic	African American	Total
Freshman	count	1	1	2
	% within ethnicity	2.4%	2.3%	2.4%
Sophomore	count	4	4	8
	% within ethnicity	9.8%	9.1%	9.4%
Junior	count	7	12	19
	% within ethnicity	17.1%	27.3%	22.4%
Senior	count	18	11	29
	% within ethnicity	43.9%	25.0%	34.1%
Grad student	count	11	16	27
	% within ethnicity	26.8%	36.4%	31.8%
Total	count	41	44	85
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Following, will be a statistical description of the obstacle encountered by the entire sample. It is shown in the following table that the obstacle encountered by the majority of the participants was "personal and/or family financial problems." That is, only 19 out of 85 participants reported to not have experienced this problem at all, while the rest experienced this obstacle from a small amount to a significant degree (see Table 5).

Table 5. Personal and/or Family Financial Problems

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid not at all	19	22.4	22.4	22.4
A little bit	33	38.8	38.8	61.2
A fair amount	14	16.5	16.5	77.6
A significant amt	18	21.1	21.1	98.8
5.00	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Bivariate Findings

Hispanics and African American students have had similar experiences regarding racial and gender discrimination. For example, it was found that half of the Hispanic participants experienced at least a small amount of racial discrimination, while the other half did not experience any. These results were comparable to African Americans since 50% of the participants also responded to not have experienced any racial discrimination at all, while the other half was exposed from a small amount to a significant amount of discrimination (see Table 6).

Table 6. Racial Discrimination by Ethnicity

I was subject to racial discrimination		Hispanic	African American	Total
Not at all	count	20	22	42
	% within ethnicity	50.0%	50.0%	50.0%
A little bit	count	17	11	28
	% within ethnicity	42.5%	25.0%	33.3%
A fair amount	count	0	10	10
	% within ethnicity	0%	22.7%	11.9%
A significant amount	count	3	1	4
	% within ethnicity	7.5%	2.3%	4.8%
Total	count	40	44	84
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

It was found that a significant obstacle for Hispanics was that their families lacked knowledge about what they needed to do in order to attend college. Only four participants from this ethnic group reported to not have experienced this obstacle at all, while the rest of the participants experienced it from a small amount to a significant degree. On the other hand, this was not a significant obstacle for African Americans since 54.5% of this sample did not experience this problem at all, while the next highest percentage (27.3%) experienced it only to a small degree (see Table 7).

Table 7. My Family Lacked Knowledge About What I Needed

To Do

My family lacked knowledge about what I needed to do		Hispanic	African American	Total
Not at all	Count	4	24	28
	% within ethnicity	9.8%	54.5%	32.9%
A little bit	Count	13	12	25
	% within ethnicity	31.7%	27.3%	29.4%
A fair amount	Count	8	1	9
	% within ethnicity	19.5%	2.3%	10.6%
A significant amount	Count	16	7	23
	% within ethnicity	39.0%	15.9%	27.1%
Total	Count	41	44	85
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The study showed that another significant obstacle for Hispanics was a lack of awareness about the financial resources available for attending college since only twelve respondents did not experience the problem at all, whereas almost half of the African American students did not experience it at all (see table 8).

Table 8. Unawareness of the Financial Resources Available by Ethnicity

I was unaware of the financial resources available		Hispanic	African American	Total
Not at all	Count	12	21	33
	% within ethnicity	29.3%	47.7%	38.8%
A little bit	Count	10	12	22
	% within ethnicity	24.4%	27.3%	25.9%
A fair amount	Count	13	5	18
	% within ethnicity	31.7%	11.4%	21.2%
A significant amount	Count	6	6	12
	% within ethnicity	14.6%	13.6%	14.1%
Total	Count	41	44	85
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

On the other hand, it was found that a significant obstacle for African Americans was "personal and/or family financial problems" while attempting to go to college. That is, 38.6% (which was the majority) of African American students experienced personal and/or family financial problems at least to a small degree. Although the frequency of this obstacle was similarly experienced by Hispanic participants (39.0%), we can see that the previously mentioned obstacles were more significant to them. The following table summarizes the statistical findings with regard to this obstacle.

Table 9. Personal and/or Family Financial Problems by Ethnicity

I had personal and/or family financial problems		Hispanic	African American	Total
Not at all	count	6	13	19
	% within ethnicity	14.6%	29.5%	22.4%
A little bit	count	16	17	33
	% within ethnicity	39.0%	38.6%	38.8%
A fair amount	count	4	10	14
	% within ethnicity	9.8%	22.7%	16.5%
A significant amount	count	14	4	18
	% within ethnicity	34.1%	9.1%	21.2%
5.0	Count	1	0	1
	% within ethnicity	2.4%	.0%	1.2%
Total	count	41	44	85
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

With regard to facilitating factors, 63.4% of Hispanics and 68.2% of African Americans reported to have been strongly encouraged by family and/or relatives to attend college (see Table 10).

Table 10. Encouraged by Family and/or Relatives by
Ethnicity

My family/relatives encouraged me to attend college		Hispanic	African American	Total
Not at all	count	4	3	7
	% within ethnicity	9.8%	6.8%	8.2%
A little bit	count	3	4	7
	% within ethnicity	7.3%	9.1%	8.2%
A fair amount	count	8	7	15
	% within ethnicity	19.5%	15.9%	17.6%
A significant amount	count	26	30	56
	% within ethnicity	63.4%	68.2%	65.9%
Total	count	41	44	85
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Interestingly, African Americans were more likely to have been encouraged by their friends than Hispanics. That is, 52.3% of African Americans were significantly encouraged by their friends, compared to only 26% of the Hispanic group (see Table 9). The interesting and alternate contrast is found in the "not at all" answer option. That is, 24.4% of Hispanics chose this answer, while only 4.5% of African American students chose it, indicating that Hispanic college students in this sample were about five times more likely than African American

students to not receive any encouragement to attend college from their friends (Table 11).

Table 11. Encouragement of Friends by Ethnicity

My friends encouraged me to attend college		Hispanic	African American	Total
Not at all	count	10	2	12
	% within ethnicity	24.4%	4.5%	14.1%
A little bit	count	6	7	13
	% within ethnicity	14.6%	15.9%	15.3%
A fair amount	count	14	12	26
	% within ethnicity	34.1%	27.3%	30.6%
A significant amount	count	11	23	34
	% within ethnicity	26.8%	52.3%	40.0%
Total	count	41	44	85
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Lastly, African Americans were more likely to have received help with homework by their parents, than Hispanics. For instance, 52.5% (n = 21) of the Hispanic participants responded that they did not receive any homework help from their parents, while only 25% (n = 11) of the African American sample responded to the same answer (see Table 12). And, alternately, about two and one-half times more African American students reportedly

"a significant amount" of help received from their parents in completing their homework while growing up.

Table 12. Homework Help Received from Parents

My parents helped me complete my homework while I was growing up		Hispanic	African American	Total
Not at all	count	21	11	32
	% within ethnicity	52.5%	25.0%	38.1%
A little bit	count	10	14	24
	% within ethnicity	25.0%	31.8%	28.6%
A fair amount	count	5	7	12
	% within ethnicity	12.5%	15.9%	14.3%
A significant amount	count	4	12	16
	% within ethnicity	10.0%	27.3%	19.0%
Total	count	40	44	84
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As it was previously mentioned, the Academic Motivational Scale was used to find what motivated the participants to go to college. It was found that the highest motivation for African American students was, "to have a better salary later on" since 77.3% of the participants corresponded exactly to this motivation and none of the participants said that it was not a motivation for them (see Table 13).

Table 13. Most Significant Motivation among African Americans

In order to have a better salary later on	Hispanic	African American	Total
Does not correspond at all count % within ethnicity	1 2.4%	0 .0%	1 1.2%
Corresponds very little count % within ethnicity	1 2.4%	1 2.3%	2 2.4%
Corresponds moderately Count % within ethnicity	0 .0%	2 4.5%	2 2.4%
Corresponds above moderate Count % within ethnicity	8 19.5%	1 2.3%	9 10.6%
Corresponds a lot count % within ethnicity	5 12.2%	6 13.6%	11 12.9%
Corresponds exactly count % within ethnicity	26 63.4%	34 77.3%	60 70.6%
Total count % within ethnicity	41 100.0%	44 100.0%	85 100.0%

On the other hand, the motivation for Hispanics was "to show themselves that they can succeed in their studies." More specifically, this was the motivation in which the majority of the Hispanic participants (65.9%) checked the "corresponds exactly" category, while only

one student did not consider this to have been a motivation for him (see Table 14).

Table 14. Most Significant Motivation among Hispanics

I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies	Hispanic	African American	Total
Does not correspond at all count	1	2	3
% within ethnicity	2.4%	4.5%	3.5%
Corresponds very little count	0	2	2
% within ethnicity	.0%	4.5%	2.4%
Corresponds moderately Count	1	2	3
% within ethnicity	2.4%	4.5%	3.5%
Corresponds above moderate Count	6	3	9
% within ethnicity	14.6%	6.8%	10.6%
Corresponds a lot count	6	6	12
% within ethnicity	14.6%	13.6%	14.1%
Corresponds exactly count	27	29	56
% within ethnicity	65.9%	65.9%	65.9%
Total count	41	44	85
% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Summary

This chapter presented demographic information about the sample and the findings about the obstacles faced by African American and Hispanic students in their attempt

to attend college. Following this presentation, was a different statistical description of obstacles and facilitating factors between the two ethnic groups. It was found that Hispanics lacked knowledge about the financial resources available, and their parents' insufficient guidance on the application process (including college choices), while African American students experienced personal and/or family financial problems. Regarding the facilitating factors both groups had their families' emotional support but African Americans had additional support from their friends. This chapter concluded with the findings on the most common motivations that led each group to attend college. It was found that Hispanics were motivated by their drive to show themselves that they can succeed in their studies, whereas African Americans were motivated by the potential for higher incomes.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter covers a discussion about the significant obstacles, facilitating factors and motivations that were presented in Chapter 4. Following will be a presentation of the limitations of the study. Next, recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with a final discussion about the issue studied, and the results of this study in relation to previous studies.

Discussion

Interestingly, there were more female participants than male participants on both groups even though it was not intended to recruit more females. The majority of the participants were in the 18-24 age range, with seniors making up the majority of the Hispanic sample and grad students the majority of the African American sample. Moreover, based on findings from the study presented, Hispanics and African Americans experience similar obstacles in their attempts to go to college. For example, racial and gender discrimination appeared to

have been experienced to similar degrees by the two ethnic groups. That is, similar percentages (50%) of participants reported that these types of discrimination were not obstacles for them. Another obstacle in which the two groups coincided was, "personal and/or family financial problems." This was the reported obstacle for the majority of African American participants. Although African Americans and Hispanics experienced this obstacle to similar degrees, Hispanics experienced other more significant obstacles. For instance, they reported that they had to overcome obstacles related to their unawareness about financial resources, and their parents' lack of knowledge about the college process. Regarding facilitating factors, while African Americans were encouraged by family and/or relatives and friends to attend college, Hispanics only had this type of support from their family and/or relatives. African American students were also more likely to count on their family's financial support than Hispanics. Interestingly, African American and Hispanic participants were led by different motivations to attend college. For example, African American students decided to go to college "to have a better salary later on," while Hispanics wanted to "show

themselves that they could succeed in their studies.” Again, even though the survey listed seven obstacles, eight facilitating factors and six motivations, only the most significant ones were discussed to meet the purpose of this study.

Limitations

The first limitation of the study presented is that due to time constraints, the sample sizes were moderately small. A bigger sample would have increased the generalization of the results to the wider population of African American and Hispanic students desiring to go to college. Therefore the sample size was selected based on time availability. Another limitation is that participants were selected based on convenience rather than having used the random selection method.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Based on what was found about the obstacles encountered by Hispanics and African Americans the researcher will make some recommendations to social work practice, policy and research. The first recommendation to social work is to be more receptive to the needs of

people who wish to build more promising futures for themselves and for their children regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. This researcher recommends finding ways of helping these individuals make their professional dream come true when they are confronted with obstacles that may take years to overcome. Social workers can also provide counseling to individuals who are affected by any type of discrimination to help them rebuild their self-confidence. Other sources of help may be workshops that can provide families, especially lower income families, with information about higher education, this way parents will be able to guide their children about the college application process, college choices, and information about financial resources. Through counseling, social workers may also assist students that are struggling with personal problems that are not letting these students achieve their professional goals.

Although the recommendations to policy are at a higher level of power, they are equally important in easing college attendance for ethnic minorities. The first recommendation is that high schools and perhaps junior high schools hold college workshops that will require parents to attend. Even though these workshops

already exist in high schools, it would be helpful if all junior high schools also started holding these workshops and to require parents of graduating students to attend. This will provide them with all the needed information in order to be able to guide their children on the requirements to attend college.

It is also recommended that Policy require schools to hold some workshops in Spanish, since this may be one of the reasons why Hispanic parents are not guiding their children with the college process. Another recommendation for Policy is to create a law that requires several schools per district to offer English classes, especially in schools where the student population is predominantly Hispanic. We all know that language barriers may be the main reasons as to why Hispanic parents are not able to help their children with homework while growing up. Language barriers keep parents less involved in their children's education and may be discouraging for the students.

Since another major obstacle for Hispanics was a lack of awareness about the financial resources available, it should also be required (rather than optional) that all students attend financial aid

workshops in their junior and senior years of high school. Another recommendation to policy is to make financial aid more widely known to people who did not go to college right after high school and now would like to pursue a college degree. Financial aid resources need to become more widely known through all media sources.

The recommendations for research will now be discussed in this section. Apparently, the issue at hand has been devoted much research attention. This may be due to the fact that the Hispanic and perhaps the African American populations have undergone great increases over the years. However, it is now recommended that research change its focus to high school students who will not be attending college.

This research will help to determine the needs of youth that will be settling for a high school diploma and minimum wages. We would not only have a more clear understanding of why Hispanic and African American high school students do not pursue a higher education, but research would also aid in developing ways of increasing college enrollment among those who do desire to thrive in American society through a college education. In fact, if findings show that a higher percentage of students simply

do not want continue their education, it will be necessary to find ways of educating these students on the importance of education and thereby increasing their motivation to set higher goals for themselves.

Conclusions

There were some similarities between previous research results and results from the presented study. For example, it has been confirmed that Hispanics' difficulty in attending college is due to a lack of guidance by their parents, and financial problems. However, there was a difference in findings regarding the obstacles encountered by African Americans. For instance, based on previous research, African Americans experience racial discrimination, while the presented study found that they are rather faced with personal and/or family financial problems. Although 50% of the participants experienced from a small amount of racial discrimination to a significant amount, the other half did not experience this problem at all. Nevertheless, even though this study shows that racial discrimination is not a major obstacle for either one of the two ethnic groups, we were able to see on the tables that the problem does

still exist and therefore it needs to be tackled completely. As it was mentioned earlier, we all have the right to strive for a better future, and being from a different ethnic background does not justify anybody setting any barriers in our pursuit of a higher education. It was also interesting to find that even though Hispanics face more obstacles and have less support than African Americans, they have still managed to make their way to college. It has been determined through this study's results that the immigrant status of Hispanics puts students at a greater disadvantage, whether these students are immigrants as well or not. All their obstacles are related to their parents' or their own lack of acculturation to this society. For example, even though language difficulty did not appear to be an obstacle for the majority of the students themselves, they still paid the consequences of their parents lacking English language skills.

Recommendations that will help to reduce the prevalence of barriers and/or obstacles were already provided. However, parents also play a very important role in whether their children's obstacles are turned

into facilitating factors because this issue not only depends on policy, research and social workers.

Therefore, if social workers, policy makers, researchers and parents contribute their different efforts (and expertise) toward achieving our goal of increasing college attendance among ethnic minorities, we will be able to see a society that is capable of offering promising futures to its youth.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY

Obstacles and Facilitating Factors to Higher Education Survey

Please check the boxes to the following questions as they apply to you.

1.) Gender (please circle)

1. Female 2. Male

2.) Age (please check the box that represents your age category)

18-24 yrs ; 25-34 yrs ; 35-44 yrs ; 45-54 yrs ; 55 and above yrs

3.) Ethnicity (please circle)

1. Hispanic 2. African American 3. Other (please specify): _____

4.) English is my (please circle):

a. first language; b. second language; c. third language

5.) Student standing (please circle)

a. Freshman b. Sophomore c. Junior d. Senior e. Grad student
f. Other (please specify) _____

- 6.) The following is a list of obstacles that may have made attending college more difficult for you. Please rate each of the following as either “Not at all,” “A little bit,” “A moderate amount,” or “A great deal” by placing an “X” in the appropriate box below.

Factors that made attending college more difficult for you	Not at all	A little bit	A fair amount	A significant amount
a. I was subjected to racial discrimination				
b. I was subjected to gender discrimination or sexism				
c. I lacked my family’s emotional support to attend college				
d. My family lacked knowledge about what I needed to do to attend college				
e. I did not receive adequate guidance from my school counselor or teacher about attending college.				
f. I was unaware of the financial resources available to me for attending college				
g. I had personal and/or family financial problems				
h. My immigrant status made it more difficult for me to attend college.				
i. I had/have some difficulty with English.				
j. Other (please specify):				

- 7.) The following is a list of factors that may have made attending college easier for you. Please rate each of the following as either “Not at all,” “A little bit,” “A moderate amount,” or “A great deal” by placing an “X” in the appropriate box below.

Factors that made attending college <u>easier</u> for you	Not at all	A little bit	A fair amount	A significant amount
a. My family/relatives encouraged me to attend college				
b. My friends encouraged me to attend college				
c. My junior high or senior high school teacher and/or counselor encouraged me to attend college				
d. My family/relatives helped me financially to attend college				
e. My friends provided me financial support to attend college				
f. A significant person or mentor (non-family member) in my life encouraged me to attend college				
g. My parents helped me complete my homework when I was growing up.				
h. My parents attended my parent-teacher conferences when I was growing up.				
i. Other (please specify):				

APPENDIX B
MOTIVATIONAL SCALE

Motivational Scale

WHY DO YOU GO TO COLLEGE?

Using the scale below, indicate to what extent each of the following items presently corresponds to one of the reasons why you go to college.

Does not correspond at all	2	Corresponds a little	3	Corresponds moderately	4	5	Corresponds a lot	6	7	Corresponds exactly		
1												
1. Because education is strongly valued in my family						1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. In order to obtain a more prestigious job later on.						1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Because I want to have "the good life" later on.						1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. In order to have a better salary later on.						1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Because I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies.						1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. To make my family happy						1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

This study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the obstacles encountered by African Americans and Hispanics to go to college and their motivations to pursue a higher education. This study is being conducted by Monica Avina under the supervision of Dr. Shon, Assistant Professor of social work. This study has been approved by the Department of Social Work Institutional Review Board Committee.

In this study you will be asked to answer a brief survey regarding your goal to pursue a higher education. The survey should take no more than 20 minutes to complete. All of your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researchers. Your name will not be reported with your responses and all completed surveys will be kept in a locked drawer. All data will be reported in-group form only. You may receive the group results of this study upon completion on September 2008 at the following location: California State University San Bernardino, Pfau Library.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary. You are free to not answer any questions and withdraw at any time during this study without penalty. When you have completed the survey, you will receive a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail. This study will help the social work profession by increasing their awareness about the needs of African Americans and Hispanics that are trying to succeed in today's society through a college education. The only foreseeable risk in this study is minor psychological discomfort experienced when answering some of the questions. There may be long term benefits to other African Americans and Hispanics who are still facing obstacles to attend college, because they will be assisted by the social work profession to overcome these challenges more effectively.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Shon at (909)537-5532.

By placing a check mark in the box below and initialing, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Place a check mark here

Today's date _____

APPENDIX D
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

**Study of Obstacles and Aspirations Amongst Hispanics and
African Americans in Pursuing a College Education
Debriefing Statement**

The study you have just participated in was designed to investigate the obstacles African Americans and Hispanics have to overcome to go to college, and their motivations to pursue a college education. Obstacles have been assessed as an area in which social workers can help African Americans and Hispanics that are trying to attend college. Social workers are interested in assessing for the needs of these two ethnic groups that are trying to achieve upward mobility through an education to help them prevent these obstacles from turning into barriers.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the survey with other students. If you have additional questions about the study, please feel free to contact the Assistant Professor Herbert Shon at (909) 537-5532. If you would like to see the results of this study, a copy of the study and the results will be available at the Pfau Library at the end of Spring quarter of 2008.

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