

My Family Paper

Arizbey Reyes

Mental Health Counseling, New York Institute of Technology

MHCO 715 F01 Marital and Family Counseling

Professor N.Kim

06/24/2025

Abstract

All families have a unique story based on their cultural roots, beliefs, and experiences. Being a member of a first-generation Mexican family, my story is connected to the struggles and opportunities that come with immigration, my family's view on education, views on mental health, and sources of strength and resilience that make us united.

My Family Paper

My Family's Immigration Story

My family's immigration story begins with my Uncle Giovanni, who emigrated from Mexico to the United States in the 1990s. He left behind his family, which was my aunt Maria and my oldest cousin Emirey. A year later, my aunt Maria and Emirey were going to reunite in the States, and because my aunt Maria had such a close relationship with my mother and aunt Gisela, they decided to follow. They leave behind their surroundings, family, and primary language in search of better work opportunities. My father emigrated from Mexico to the United States in the 1990s by himself when he was still a teenager. He came to the States in search of better employment opportunities. Both sides of my family's immigration journey to the States was not easy; they encountered multiple challenges, such as language barriers, cultural adjustments, and, more impactful, the challenge of building a life from nothing.

My Family's Attitude toward Education

MY cousins and I agree that we were raised with the belief that "knowledge is power." Education has always been valued in my family. We were always told that education is very important, and it was also the key to success. My mother, Rome, would always say to me, "Estudia para que no sufras como yo," which translates to "Study so you don't suffer like me." Although my cousins' parents and my parents had limited schooling, they instilled in us that academic achievement could open doors for us. A parent's aspiration for their children is rooted in their own educational experience and their comprehension of how the education system works, and how they view the school environment and their child's academic abilities. Even when parents did not attend or complete college, many parents hold high expectations that their child will graduate from higher education and accomplish more than the parents did (Espino,

2016). Neither of my parents received higher education in Mexico; however, they still expected me to pursue higher education. My mother often reminded me that education was a path out of struggle, and pursuing a higher education would help with financial freedom, respect, and a voice for others. Growing up, my mother could not always help me with assignments due to language barriers; however, she would support me in other ways, such as attending school meetings, celebrating my milestones, and reminding me to dream of achieving more than what they had achieved. However, my family doesn't just limit education to just schooling; it goes way beyond that; they view opportunities in learning also through experience, work, or even just listening to someone's advice. Although my cousins were raised with the same beliefs, only Emirey received a higher education and is currently a teacher, Amayrani is currently earning her associate's degree, and Desteny and Valeria only completed high school. Hispanics have attempted to obtain a college degree but have been unsuccessful. Only one in ten Hispanic individuals ages 18 to 24 has been able to obtain a bachelor's degree (Chang,2024)

My Family's Attitudes towards Counseling

My family's view on counseling has changed through the years. For many years, mental health was a taboo topic in my family. While interviewing Valeria, she stated that our family had an opposition towards counseling, as our family was under the impression that counseling was something for "crazy" people. In many Latino communities, there is a belief that mental health is the result of a person's weakness or associated to religious beliefs, meaning that the person suffering from mental health issues is being punished, does not have enough faith, or unholy practices (Forcén et al., 2023) In Mexican culture, mental health issues are often stigmatized as being crazy or lazy. Financial issues, limited education, immigration, being a first-generation child, and medical history have been associated with the cause of anxiety (Camacho et al., 2015)

As Valeria mentioned in the interview, I was the first person in our family to receive therapy. Although there are still some misunderstandings about counseling, my family is willing to learn. I was prescribed an SSRI, and at first, everyone thought I would become addicted. Hispanics view psychotherapy as a more acceptable form to treat depression compared to antidepressant medications (Fierros & Smith, 2006). Over time, my family now believes that counseling is a resource that can help people.

My Family's Source of Strength and Resilience

As Valeria mentioned in the interview, my family finds strength and resilience through communication. Being able to communicate with one another allows us to express our emotions, ask for help, and show up for one another. We all try to communicate how we expect to see ourselves and each other in a month, in a year, in a decade, etc. We have a family group chat where we check in with each other. Another source of strength and resilience in my family is religion. My family, for many years, has followed the Roman Catholic church in difficult times, and we have often sought support or comfort in religion. For many communities, religion is a source of strength and resilience, especially for communities that have had challenges and that have faced issues with inequality. Many of these community members also find a support system in their church (Nguyen, A., 2020).

Personal Reflection

Throughout this paper, I have learned how my identity as a first-generation child has shaped my perception and how I navigate experiences. While creating my family genogram, I learned a lot about myself and my family, as it was a moment to reflect. I learned that diabetes runs in my family. This was crucial information because I can make adjustments to my lifestyle to prevent getting diabetes. I also learned that all of my mother's siblings have lost a child. On

the other hand, from my dad's side, I learned that pretty much everyone has passed away, and my dad only has his sister. Visually looking at my family genogram, I also noticed that there seem to be more females in my family. My paternal last name ends with me. My family's cultural background has a heavy influence on various aspects of my life. Education to me seems to be a pathway to better opportunities. Due to my parents not having the same opportunities, it resulted in me feeling responsible to succeed so that their sacrifices of leaving their home country would be worth it. This reminded me of the multiple times where I would be proud to share that I received a 90, and my mother would say something along the lines of " Why couldn't it be a 100? " Another thing I learned while completing this project was that although my cousins' parents raised them with similar beliefs in regards to education, only Emirey received further education, and Amaryani has a year left to complete her associate's degree. My younger cousins do not believe that college is needed to succeed.

As for dating and marriage, I have mixed opinions. Viewing my family genogram, many have gotten married, and others have separated or had difficult relationships. However, I believe having someone who respects my culture and beliefs and is family-oriented is very important to me. Religion, specifically Catholic, has played a significant role in shaping my values and those whom I consider a support system. In Mexican culture, females are often expected to be nurturing, obedient, family-oriented, and modest. However, my parents did not raise me this way they taught me to challenge the gender roles expected of a female to adhere to. In Mexican culture, many females at my age are already married or have kids; however, I believe I should be using these years to study higher education to receive financial freedom and better employment opportunities. My parents have taught me it is important for me to challenge gender roles expected of females, but still respect those who adhere to cultural roots.

In my family, close alliances start with siblings. As I explained in my family immigration story, my mother and her siblings were close and shared similar beliefs and obstacles when adjusting to life in the States. In my family, many have taken low-earning jobs out of necessity as opposed to choice. This experience has consistently reminded me that we can break this cycle through schooling. Mental and physical illness in my family are often not given the priority they should have. Mainly because of the lack of affordable doctors or resources. This paper has made me reflect on multiple factors that shaped me and influence my identity. Given the wake of the new political realities for immigrants in the country, I can say with pride that I am the daughter of hard-working immigrants. This project also gave me a better understanding of the challenges I have faced and will continue to face based on my background.

References

- Camacho, Á., Gonzalez, P., Buelna, C., Emory, K. T., Talavera, G. A., Castañeda, S. F., ... & Roesch, S. C. (2015). Anxious-depression among Hispanic/Latinos from different backgrounds: results from the Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos (HCHS/SOL). *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, *50*, 1669-1677.
- Chang, Y. (Yvonne). (2024). A Cultural Communication Perspective on Hispanic Students' College Experiences. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *23*(3), 1075–1088.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2023.2248251>
- Espino, M. M. (2016). The Value of Education and *Educación*: Nurturing Mexican American Children's Educational Aspirations to the Doctorate. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *15*(2), 73–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2015.1066250>
- Fierros, M., & Smith, C. (2006). The Relevance of Hispanic Culture to the Treatment of a Patient with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). *Psychiatry (Edgmont (Pa.: Township))*, *3*(10), 49–56.
- Forcén, F. E., Vélez Flórez, M. C., Bido Medina, R., Zambrano, J., Pérez, J. H., Rodríguez, A. M., & Santos, L. H. (2023). Deconstructing Cultural Aspects of Mental Health Care in Hispanic/Latinx People. *Psychiatric annals*, *53*(3), 127–132.
<https://doi.org/10.3928/00485713-20230215-02>
- Nguyen, A. W. (2020). Religion and mental health in racial and ethnic minority populations: A review of the literature. *Innovation in Aging*, *4*(5), igaa035.

Appendix I

Interview Notes: Valeria cousin

1) What is your family immigration story

A- Both my parents were in their early twenties while my eldest sister was just a toddler when my father came to the United States first for better work opportunities, leaving my mother and eldest sister behind in their home country. It wasn't until a year later that my father, mother, and sister reunited in the States, and because my mother was very close to her sisters, Arizbey's mother, Rome, and my aunt Gisela, decided to come to the States as well.

2) What is your family's attitude towards education

A- My family and I have the belief that "knowledge is power," so education is very important to us. However, we don't limit education to just schooling, although that is still very important; we also find value in educating ourselves through world experience during our time in school, work, and life in general.

3) What are your family's attitudes towards counseling

A- I think the view of counseling has definitely changed through the course of the years. In the beginning, my family had an opposition towards it as they were under the impression counseling was something for "crazy" people, then it developed into a resource that can help people. In fact Arizbey was the first person in our family to receive therapy. Now I can say with certainty that my family views counseling as a helpful resource one can decide to use rather than something shameful.

4) What are your family sources of strength and resilience

A- My family finds strength and resilience through communication. Communicating allows us to express our emotions, ask for help, and show up for one another. We all try to communicate how we expect to see ourselves and each other in a month, in a year, in a decade, etc.

I consider my family to be adaptable and flexible. I have noticed that my family can adjust to roles in a time of crisis.

Appendix II

Three-Generational Family Genogram

