Confronting RACE in the 21st Century
Confronting Race in the 21st Century

“The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and in the islands of the sea.”

— William E. B. DuBois

This issue of *Myriad* represents an ongoing dialogue of issues related to the consequences of race, racism, and privilege in America. This dialogue must include all of us because we are responsible for finding common ground on which to neutralize racism’s continuing impact on us all.

“The problems of the color line persist, and the problem of the 21st century will be the problem of the color line.”

— John Hope Franklin

Confronting our past is necessary if we are to understand and effectively address the on-going damage left upon America. For those who reject the sometimes hidden stain on America, who wish all of us would just “get over it,” this issue of *Myriad* gives evidence that we cannot simply move on.

“The greatest challenge we face is also our greatest opportunity… Can we fulfill the promise of America by embracing all our citizens of all races?… Can we become one America in the 21st Century?”

— William J. Clinton

I hope you find your values reflected in this special edition of *Myriad*. We look forward to your comments.

Peace.

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Diversity initiatives are stuck. Many organizations are complaining that their diversity programs, required or not, are ineffective and lack enthusiasm and support. At the same time, companies are sorely aware that they are unable to retain women and minorities, especially at upper levels of management.

Unfortunately, in society in general and in the workplace in particular, diversity efforts are still viewed as women and minority issues. Although we have seen the benefits, influence, and contributions of women and minorities, on their own they have reached a stalemate. There have been some successes, but according to the Society for Human Resource Management, 89 percent of human resources professionals believe that women still face barriers for career advancement, and 74 percent say the same for minorities.

It is important that a new course of action be implemented in order to advance stalled diversity programs. Women and minorities must partner with white males to gain further benefits. White males make up over half of the workforce and hold the overwhelming majority of power positions. For women and minorities to avoid collaboration with white males and simply demand “an opportunity” is simplistic. Opportunities are granted by the power system. Thus, involvement of white males is essential for society and the workplace to move beyond traditional diversity efforts.

The following areas must be addressed:

- Additional and more sophisticated knowledge is essential. The us-against-them approach is ineffective. It is necessary to expand our knowledge and understanding of the characteristics of societies. For example, the structured commonality of most cultures in Europe, Africa, Asia, South America, and Mexico is one of male privilege and privileged class, based on race, history, or wealth. The American society has roots in these “old world” cultures, but has added the unique aspect of individual rights regardless of gender or class. Americans have no model for such a culture. Most Americans seem to pick and choose between the two worlds — wanting all the rights and prosperity of individuality, but all the comforts of identifying with group cultural customs. Many times, individuality and group customs are diametrically opposed.

- White males must become involved in a process of education and
redefinition of what it means to be white, what it means to be male. During the past 50 years, women and minorities have been redefining who they are in this unique culture. White males have not been involved in this process. They maintain a definition of manhood that is very much out-of-date in modern American culture. White males often are confused and want to update their roles; little attention is paid to them. Movements such as the Promise Keepers and Million Man March are ineffective because they offer clear but simplistic and out-of-date views of men.

• A new socioeconomic pie must be created. Currently, white males see any sharing of wealth or power with women and minorities diminishing of their position. Most white males know what they bring to the present “successful” socioeconomic pie: organizational skills, bottom-line focus, teamwork, loyalty, self-sacrifice, prosperity, national strength, and so on. If women and minorities are to be treated as true equals they must bring attributes and behaviors to the table that would function as a trade-off with the white male. These contributions would have to benefit the white male as well as women.

It is important, then, that diversity leadership be moved from the human resources department to the business management sectors! An initial step must be the involvement of executive leadership, who, no doubt, are overwhelmingly white males. Once executives understand how white males and each sector of the company benefit, the need for integration of women and minorities as a key business strategy becomes apparent. From there, an executive committee made up of key leaders and representing a diverse population begins the process of developing, implementing, and monitoring organi-

The workplace is America’s most diverse environment.

An understanding of the roots of white culture and their roles as males in the American experience would be a good place to start. White males need to take pride in their contributions to this prosperous American society. They must recognize the downside, the drawbacks, and work to change these impediments. Finally, white males must develop new and creative ways to successfully address the challenges of partnering with women and minorities in the 21st century.

• Women and minorities must examine the behaviors which collude to keep Old World ways of oppression alive and the white male dominant. Women who seek equality in the workplace continue to support societal institutions that deny them equal access to leadership positions. Religious groups are an example. Also, women and minorities unknowingly use the white male model for success in society and the workplace. Thus, they are forced to play according to his rules.

and minorities. An essential aspect of partnering is the balance of sharing and receiving.

The workplace is America’s most diverse environment. Most human beings, when allowed to choose, will select to surround themselves with people like themselves — in neighborhoods, schools, religious groups. The workplace offers little choice. Therefore, the workplace is the crucible for developing organizational strategies and individual skills for Americans living in a diverse society. Furthermore, it is this workplace that supports the freedom and prosperity Americans are privileged to experience. Diversity, then, must be seen not as a business issue, but as the business plan. Diversity is about people, time, bottom line. It is about productivity, sales, money. Employees are diverse and customers at home and abroad are diverse. The understanding and creativity that can result with a diverse workforce and a diverse customer orientation can be a competitive edge. These guidelines are intended to reaffirm and/or replace present diversity action plans in organizations. They address key issues which have contributed to “stalled” initiatives and less-than-satisfactory results both individually and corporately. A well-developed plan that addresses sensitive issues but does not promote “blaming” or “bashing” is critical. Using an external consultant, initially a white male with specific understanding and experience in this area, is highly suggested.

A successful plan will focus the organization in order for diversity issues to advance. Associates will understand the benefits of thinking and acting beyond past views of diversity in the workplace. Inclusion of each sector builds trust and commitment that enables progress. Momentum builds as the organizations and individuals recognize benefits resulting from their efforts.
Felicitas last summer was one of frustration, limits, and pain. She had been to the doctor in June; the year-long pain in her arm was unmanageable. Felicitas had a fall in summer 2006 and hurt her right arm. She knew the arm would take time to heal and refused to see a doctor. “They’re not going to do anything for me anyway,” she said, with some conviction and years of experience with Indian Health Service. She saw a medicine man several times during the year, and the natural medicine and massages helped. She would wince occasionally, but continued her normal routine: bingo games at Bender Hall just steps from her front door, meetings at the elder center, and visits with her brother at the nursing home. She paid bills and shopped for groceries in Grants when she had a ride. Every Sunday, she walked the short distance from her home to the Catholic Church. When she finally went to the doctor, Felicitas was given narcotics that wiped her out for a weekend. Kenneth, her adopted son, was alarmed and called her niece in Texas for help.

After tests and x-rays came back in July, home health care morphed into hospice care for lung cancer, in its raw and terminal stage. A potty chair, a new wheelchair, and an oxygen tank were crammed into the living room where Felicitas would spend her last days. Hospice nurses merged with her relatives, some not seen for years. In the last three weeks of Felicitas life, a 50-year-old grandniece Jeannette came into the home and administered medications to ease the pain of lung cancer. She brought nursing skills, a knowledge of death and dying, and a Texas accent to the center of Felicitas life. And it was unbalancing.

Since her husbands death in the early 1970s, Felicitas had lived only with her adopted son Kenneth, and only on weekends. No one else told her what to do for years. In summer 2006, Kenneth retired at age 79 and returned home. His presence and comments on her behavior —

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especially when she couldn’t find something — were irritating. “Since he came home, he’s not even looking for a job,” Felicita complained. “He doesn’t even work. He never used to be like this.”

She did appreciate Kenneth when he dropped her off at the nursing home where she sat with her brother Phillip (93) for a few hours every other day. Their meal in the dining room would pass without a word. After lunch, she slept, slumped in a chair next to his bed, and he would watch her. When their mother had died, four children were left with a father who had few options to care for them. The two older ones, Mary and Charlie, could fend for themselves, but the little ones, Felicita and Phillip, could not. So, they lived with their aunts, who were mean and critical women, Felicita remembered, with confirmation from others. Felicita worked hard physically and sheltered her brother Phillip. They had little choice but to mimic the critical nature of their maternal aunts; and even as elders, they spoke to one another with sharp tongues. There was little warmth for the children, but what she and Phillip could offer one another.

Lawrence, a charming and loving man, brought her love. Felicita said the Paguate Church was built in 1932. She married Lawrence that year, in that church, when she was 20 years old. They met at the village store where Felicita, a young woman with a lovely face and petite frame, cleaned the floors and stole his heart. Her memories of him were tender, despite his heavy drinking. He opened their home and cherished his nieces and nephews, while Felicita tolerated them. Their lives together took them to California to work on the railroad, and to Oklahoma as a mature couple where they worked on the Turner ranch. When the Anaconda uranium mine opened in Paguate in the late 1950s, they came home. Lawrence retired when he had a heart attack and died in his early 70s. It was said that Felicita took his death hard, and she “wandered the village” for a couple of years afterward.

At 80, Felicita was a candidate for in-home services, including house repair, house cleaning, and wood chopping. Yet at 88, she was still chopping her own wood on a cold, sunny February morning, her thin sweater gaping. “Who’s going to do it for me?” she retorted when I asked if someone shouldn’t be doing it for her. Felicita was a realist and knew that some people got services and others did not. But she was stubborn, too, and refused to have people in her home and helping services stayed away. After she bought roofing paper, the tribal work program re-roofed the small porch in the back; yet, they failed to assess and repair the more menacing leak in the roof over the laundry area, even after multiple requests in summer 2006, a season of unusually heavy rains.

Felicita’s home showed the years of neglect that comes when an elder suffers waning energy and poor eyesight. Beneath the linoleum, her floor was still dirt, common in many of the rock, stuccoed homes that have never been remodeled. Field mice burrowed their way into the house motivated by the open containers in the pantry, and the food stacked on the table. The rodents left evidence of their visits amid the salt and pepper shakers, the spirit dish, the sugar bowl, and the old cushions on the kitchen chairs. And it was a trial to get her to throw things away. Felicita even refused to have the mice killed because her experience taught her that the mice would die, decay, and stink in unreachable places. Two years ago, she consented to using poison pellets to kill the mice. When she saw that they were gone overnight, while the mousetraps were left untouched, she asked for the pellets regularly. The occasional mummified mouse would be harvested in the days afterward as Felicita’s aging eyes failed to see it on the scarred, black and white linoleum.

When Felicita slipped into a troubled and drug-induced sleep, her relatives bagged old papers, vacuumed rugs, sorted through closets and cupboards, swept mouse droppings,
and scoured surfaces until the smell of Pine-Sol and bleach met visitors outside, four feet from the door. Outdated cans of food and old frozen meat were bagged and carted off to the dump. Stubborn stains in the bottom of the refrigerator were covered with aluminum foil. Occasionally, Felicita woke to the sounds of cleaning and, for a moment, shouted her opposition. Her hot plate on the wood stove was discarded, and the breathing of a new microwave could be heard, cut-short by the bell. A new fan was blowing in the living room, and Kenneth sneezed at the environmental changes.

Felicita lamented her condition. “I don’t know why I’m not getting better,” she worried. Her nurse-grandniece Jeannette told her pointedly that she was very, very ill. “Do you know what I mean?” Felicita nodded yes, but this did not mean surrender. When Felicita refused to swallow medication for her pain, Jeannette switched to a liquid medicine that Felicita tolerated with disgust. One night in this terminal illness, Felicita woke fighting. “She accused me of trying to kill her,” said Jeannette, with visible exasperation, showing the small bruises on her arms that demonstrated Felicita’s resistance. Felicita’s ten-day battle was soon over. Early on Wednesday morning, two hours after Felicita passed away, the Paguate postmistress — through whom all news travels in this small community — left me a phone message in Chicago. “Be strong,” she advised, acknowledging my years of friendship with Felicita.

Indian Health Service would release Felicita’s body on Thursday after 2:30 p.m. and four women would clean and dress the body, according to tribal custom. A rosary would be said that night in her home, the medicine man would come Friday morning to prepare her way into the next world, and a Catholic mass and burial would follow. And four days later, a food ritual was yet to come, when Felicita would be “fed” her final meal. Meanwhile, a police escort was requested to guide our ride — 20 miles back to the village. But there was only one officer on duty that day and no guarantee was made.

When Jeannette’s father opened the refrigerated capsule in the morgue, he saw nothing but a body bag. “She’s not here,” he said, and shut it promptly.

“She has to be,” responded Jeannette.

Felicita was only four feet two and, in death, she was heavy. The capsule was opened again, her weight was underestimated, and the two 80-year-old men who came to help, lifted her body unceremoniously onto the stainless steel table. The room was small and getting four women situated required moving the table with Felicita on it one way, then the other, and back again.

When Felicita was uncovered, I greeted her and muttered to myself, “I should have brought my scissors to trim her eyebrows.”

I was there to wash her hair, a gift from the family because I was Roadrunner clan, as was Felicita.

“It doesn’t matter now,” said Felicita’s niece. She seemed uncomfortable.

Jeannette took the lead. “She smells like ammonia. I don’t want my grandma to smell,” she commented, and promptly pulled Felicita’s clothes away to start the cleaning process.

I was there to wash her hair, a gift from the family because I was Roadrunner clan, as was Felicita. Felicita’s body was stiff, but her neck was less so. It was easy to hold her head above the pan of water, and gently wet her hair. The sweet smell of her hair and scalp was familiar, as if she was still here. I wanted the warming comfort of the water to sooth her, as it soothed me. And as always, when I washed her hair, I talked her through the washing. For a moment, I studied her eyelashes.
They looked darker and longer than I remembered. Weren’t her eyelashes more gray? Or was I remembering the gray of her pupils?

“Look at her smile. She’s smiling!” Jeannette said.

Sure enough, Felicita’s face, smoothed by gravity showed a petite bone structure, and her lips stretched across her teeth in what could be a smile. She smelled like soap, fresh and clean. The short white hairs framing her face seemed more white, soft, and longer. I braided the thin strands of her hair for the last time and secured her small braid with one of my hair clips, sending it with her.

The trip back to Paguate village from the hospital morgue was eventful, especially after the turn off to Highway 279, with eight miles to go. Rain sprinkled the windshield of my Jeep, welcoming her home, I thought — not to Paguate, but to the other side. People who were leaving work and going home were gathering behind our slow-moving vehicles. Respectfully, they did not pass, but supported us by following our lead. They could see that we were bringing a body home. The van carrying Felicita had a back door that lifted vertically. There would be no coffin, since most Laguna people don’t use them. Felicita was lying with her feet toward the open door, wrapped in a tan and white Pendleton shawl.

And then, there were the flashing lights of a police car. I ignored these, thinking the escort had finally arrived. But no, the officer continued flashing and sounded the short siren right behind me. I pulled to the side and he pushed past, flashing the car following Felicita’s van. Soon we were all sitting by the side of the road.

The white police officer demanded to know why we were traveling so slow.

“We’re bringing a body home!” responded one driver with irritation.

“Oh, I didn’t see the body,” he said, looking up, seeing Felicita for the first time.

“If you can’t see the body, maybe you shouldn’t be driving,” Jeannette said. “Can you at least give us an escort, since you’re here?”

Then, he pretended that he stopped us to let the vehicles behind us pass, and officiously waved them on. A second police officer — native and female, off duty and returning home — stopped to investigate. She shrugged her shoulders and rolled her eyes in frustration at the scene, and didn’t have to say a word. When our procession started again, Felicita had a police car in front and a police van bringing up the rear. She had two flashing, police car escorts all the way to the Paguate turn-off, the sign of an important woman.

After the funeral mass, I exited the church behind the family. Outside, I stood behind a small man from the Jemez Pueblo and his son. The man carried Felicita’s white cross. She was born on August 19, 1912. She died on August 22, 2007. Felicita was 95. The sun was high and bright. The family members got into air-conditioned vehicles to avoid the heat. Kenneth drove his truck carrying Felicita’s body, right behind me. We were all on our way to the graveyard.

In the summers, I walked Felicita to mass and back home. I walked with her after the “grab days.”* On All Souls Day in November, we “fed” her father at the graveyard for what she said would be the last time. For years, after the da-da-uy-a** at Christmas time, my husband walked Felicita home from Bender Hall in the chill of the winter night. As she aged, she used my arm to steady herself and we walked slowly; because of our love, we walked closely.

Now, I walked Felicita to her graveside, as far as I could go. She would continue the journey with her husband Lawrence. In the hours before she died, Felicita spoke of a man coming to get her, Jeannette said. Felicita said that he would come and get her, and they would fly away.

* The distribution of goods to honor Catholic saints one is named for.

** Male/Female partnered dances accompanied by drum and songs in the Keresan language.
Gender and Ethnic Socialization

Families are important socialization agents in children’s lives. However, little is known about the parenting practices of Hmong Americans, a group of Southeast Asian families living in the United States. This study focused on Hmong American families’ ethnic socialization practices, or “the developmental processes by which children acquire the behaviors, perceptions, values, and attitudes of an ethnic group, and come to see themselves and others as members of such group” (Rotheram & Phinney, 1987, p. 11).

Few investigations of ethnic socialization evaluate whether there are gender differences in what parents teach their children about their ethnic background, and they tend to suggest mixed results. For example, one study determined that patterns of race-related messages seem to be similar for girls and boys (Caughy et al., 2002). However, the study’s sample included preschool children, which allows for the possibility that gender differences may become more apparent or emerge during the adolescent years. In a study that focused on adolescents, boys were more likely than girls to be socialized about discrimination awareness and coping with prejudice. In contrast, ethnic pride was more likely to be emphasized for girls (Stevenson et al., 2005). The available studies that examined gender patterns in ethnic socialization practices remain too few to make any conclusive generalizations.

In the Hmong culture, strict gender roles and expectations linked with the patriarchal characteristic of the culture may impact socialization patterns. For example, when a boy marries, he is expected to continue to stay with his family of origin. As Koltyk (1998) explains, “the Hmong conceive of the links to their ancestors as their origins or roots; sons are considered the roots of the family, especially as families branch off into separate lineages within the patrilineal clan line” (p. 39). In contrast, when a Hmong girl marries, she leaves her family of origin to live with and become part of the husband’s family. According to Koltyk (1998), “Daughters, on the other hand, do not carry the weight of the past. They will marry out and bear children for other patrilineal clans” (p. 39). Different expectations, such as this one, may influence how Hmong American parents socialize boys and girls about their ethnic background.

In Hmong American families, parents may choose to socialize boys more about family history because they are viewed as the primary link between the current generation and future generations. On the other hand, parents may choose to socialize daughters about how to care for her new family because they will eventually leave their family of origin. However, women in some cultures are perceived to be the “carriers” of cultural traditions (Phinney, 1990); thus, girls may be socialized to learn the family’s traditions and customs. The differences in gender roles and expectations within Hmong American families call for an exploration of whether boys and girls perceive differences in the ethnic socialization strategies that are used by their parents.

Ethnic socialization has not been examined consistently as a separate construct. Rather, most studies have evaluated ethnic socialization as an embedded component of racial socialization. This study focuses only on ethnic socialization, or cultural messages, with the intent of breaking the broad category into further subcomponents. In addition, there is little available research that examines ethnic socialization within Hmong American families who are recent...
immigrants to the United States. It is possible that what has been found within the ethnic socialization literature is not applicable or reflective of Hmong American families. Thus, adjustments to current models may be needed to understand how Hmong American families socialize their adolescents about culture. These issues were addressed with a specific emphasis on gender patterns in adolescents’ perceptions of ethnic socialization practices.

Background Information About the Hmong in the United States

Hmong Americans are a group of Southeast Asians who were originally from Laos and Thailand. According to the 2000 Census, most of the Hmong Americans (nearly 88%) arrived in the United States between 1975 and 1994. They also tend to have a larger family size (6.27 people, in contrast to 2.59 people for the entire United States population) (Hmong National Development, Inc. & Hmong Cultural and Resource Center, 2004). The larger family size may reflect higher fertility rates (McLoyd et al., 2000) and the inclusion of extended family members. Additionally, in 1999, the median family income for the United States population was about $50,000, compared to $32,000 for the Hmong American population. The median family income for Hmong Americans was $24,000 in California, about $36,000 in Minnesota, and about $37,000 in Wisconsin (Hmong National Development, Inc. & Hmong Cultural and Resource Center, 2004).

Each ethnic group has a specific history that may impact parenting practices. Thus, it is important to discuss the history of the Hmong Americans who are the focus of this paper. The history of the Hmong can be traced back to China. After conflicts over domination, some of the Hmong migrated to the mountains of Southeast Asia where they faced less competition for land to farm, raise livestock, and establish villages. Because they were isolated from ethnic Laotians, who tended to live in the lowlands, they were also able to maintain their language and culture (Quincy, 1995). The villages often included a number of families that were organized into different clans, identified by their last names.

During the Vietnam War, the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States recruited the Hmong of Laos to monitor and control the supply trail located in Laos and used by the North Vietnamese army to deploy troops and supplies. Because of their familiarity with the different regions of Laos, the Hmong were able to navigate the jungles of Laos that were unknown to the foreign American troops. Subsequently, the United States pulled out of Southeast Asia and the Hmong, who were allies with the United States, were suddenly left without financial or military support. They became targets of political persecution by the new Communist government (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993; Koltyk, 1998). Although a few of the higher-ranking soldiers were flown into foreign countries, thousands of Hmong were left to save their own lives.

To escape persecution, many of the Hmong migrated to the neighboring country of Thailand. On their journey to Thailand, they faced additional challenges such as crossing the Mekong River that bordered Thailand and Laos. The few that reached Thailand were put into refugee camps, which were often characterized as overcrowded, engendering hopelessness, and lacking in food supplies (Koltyk, 1998). The Hmong refugees lived in Thailand until they were sponsored to migrate to other countries. Many of the Hmong refugees were sponsored by the United States. The 2000 U.S. Census reported that there were over 160,000 Hmong Americans living in the United States, and over 33,000 Hmong living in Wisconsin.

Goal of Current Study

The current study is an exploratory examination of ethnic socialization strategies among Hmong American families as perceived by Hmong American adolescents. We examined whether there are specific ethnic socialization strategies that are more salient to Hmong American girls versus boys.

Sample

The sample consisted of 23 fourteen to eighteen-year-old Hmong American adolescents. There were 15 (65.2%) girls and 8 (34.8%) boys. Most of the adolescents (19 or 82.7%) lived with both of their parents. Of this group of

Figure 1. Gender breakdown of sample
adolescents living with two parents, three of them (15.7%) also lived with at least one grandparent. A little over half (52.2%) of the students were born in the United States, whereas other (47.8%) students were born in Southeast Asia. However, all of the parents were born in Southeast Asia, except for one parent who was born in the United States.

Methods

Data were collected from individual interviews with the adolescents. Parents were informed of the goal of the study and that participation was voluntary. Consent forms and goal of the study were audio-taped in the Hmong language and were made available for parents who requested them. The interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to an hour long. Individual interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data that would allow us to examine the adolescents’ perspective of different socialization strategies. Two female researchers conducted the interviews at the high school. One of the interviewers did not speak Hmong, but had a lot of interviewing experience. The other interviewer spoke Hmong fluently.

At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer asked for demographic information. Then, the interviewer asked the participant to describe a selected female caregiver. Following the description about the caregiver, the interviewer asked the adolescent to indicate his or her ethnic background. Open-ended responses were given to the following question: How does your mother or caregiver help you to understand your own cultural background? The first six answers provided by the student were recorded on a scoring sheet. The interviewer then asked the student to provide specific examples for each response.

The categories used to code the responses were adapted from previous research (Lamborn & Felbab, 2003; Lamborn & Moua, in press). The initial coding scheme was revised by combining existing categories into a single category and adding new categories derived from the interviews. This resulted in 10 categories: (1) cultural events; (2) sharing history; (3) cooking and food; (4) language; (5) clothes and dress; (6) family ties; (7) preparation for marriage; (8) religion; (9) ethnic pride; and (10) high expectation. Eight (34.8%) of the interviews were coded independently by two researchers at 90% agreement. Discrepancies were resolved by the authors. The six responses from the interview scoring sheet were coded accordingly into the 10 categories.

Results

Information regarding six of the 10 categories will be described in this section. First, the two most commonly mentioned categories will be discussed. Girls and boys were represented similarly in these two categories of cultural events and history. Next, the four categories where boys and girls differed by at least 20 percent will be discussed. These categories are food, language, family ties, and preparation for marriage.

CULTURAL EVENTS. Fifteen participants (65.2%, 66.7% of girls and 62.5% of boys) mentioned cultural events. Respondents indicated that their mothers encouraged them to participate in cultural events — such as the annual New Year celebration, funeral rituals, wedding ceremonies, traditional dances — and to play traditional instruments. Most of the participants mentioned their attendance at the annual New Year celebration and involvement in a ball tossing game, which is often used as means of courtship. A fifteen-year-old girl shared what the ball tossing event entails: “When people do the ball tossing, it’s like you’re trying to find a mate or soul mate, or something like that. That’s what my mom told me, and that’s how my mom and my dad started dating each other.”

Other individuals shared that participating in cultural events also involved observing cultural rituals at funerals, such as Hmong elders perform traditional songs and Hmong community members play instruments such as the queej, a flute-like instrument made from bamboo. One fifteen-year-old boy reported that his mother encouraged him to practice and perform the queej. “She wants me to practice cultural instruments, for example, instruments played at funerals. In our culture, we play a

Figure 2. Most common ethnic socialization practices: No gender differences

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Category</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
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<td>63%</td>
</tr>
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![Figure 2](image-url)
variety of instruments so she wants me to practice playing instruments.” This teenager reported that he cannot play the queej at funerals yet, but has aspirations to perform at funerals in the future.

HISTORY. Thirteen participants (56.5%, 60% of girls and 50% of boys) discussed how their mothers used ethnic socialization strategies related to cultural history by sharing stories about their experiences in the war or their journey to the United States. One sixteen-year-old girl responded that her father was involved in the war: “My dad was a soldier in the Vietnam War. As far as I could remember, all my uncles and my first cousins’ fathers were in the war also. They struggled to keep their family alive to come to America.” The parents’ experiences during the war have become a main aspect of their history.

One fifteen-year-old girl indicated that her mother talked about her life in Thailand: “She talked to me a lot about her life back in Thailand, and how there was a war and stuff like that. How she’d wake up every morning to garden, how it was hard for her, and how we’re so lucky living in the United States.” Most of the conversations about history were related to their involvement in the Vietnam War, their struggles migrating to Thailand, their continued hardships as refugees, and how they finally came to the United States.

The following four categories of ethnic socialization differed by gender. Girls and boys differed by at least 20 percent for each of these categories.

COOKING AND FOOD. Overall, 12 (52.2%, 40% of girls and 75% of boys) of the participants revealed that their parents emphasized cooking and food. A larger percentage of the boys than girls mentioned food and cooking. The preparation of food can occur as a daily family activity or at special occasions that extended families are invited to attend. One boy, aged 15, explained his role when attending a large family gathering: “In our culture, when we have a ceremony or a celebration, we have an eating thing, like where we kill pigs and chicken and stuff like that. She wants me to help chop pigs or the meat.” The men generally clean and prepare the meat, whereas the women wash the vegetables, serve the food, and clean afterwards.

Some of the participants indicated that their mothers taught them to cook Hmong food. One sixteen-year-old girl described this as follows: “We have to cook Hmong food because you know, my parents don’t like to eat American food, and so it has that part in me that makes me Hmong, because that’s [the] traditional way. They like to eat traditional food like rice and some kind of meat mixed with vegetables, and they like, oh, I don’t know what we call it, but you put vegetables in water and boil it. It’s a vegetable soup that they like to have at every meal.”

In this quote, the girl mentioned a plain vegetable soup that many parents prefer having at meal time.

In some instances, the students reported that their parents taught them how to grow vegetables by taking them to the family garden. One fifteen-year-old girl shared how she helped her family: “(So how does your mom help you to learn about your cultural background?) “Ah, how to plant gardens and work in it.” (Why do you think she teaches you that?) “So when she’s not there, we can do it on our own.” A few of the participants mentioned working in the garden during the summer and selling the vegetables at a local farmers’ market.

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LANGUAGE. Twelve participants (52.2%, 60% of girls and 37.5% of boys) mentioned language as an important aspect of ethnic socialization. Language was mentioned by a larger percentage of girls than boys. One fifteen-year-old respondent indicated that she communicated with her mother in both English and Hmong, but their communication was mostly in Hmong:

I talk to her in English and in Hmong, because she does sort of understand those two languages. Well, she’s not really fluent in English, but can understand it, though. It just depends, like sometimes, if I don’t know a word in Hmong, then I’ll tell her in English, but other than that, we communicate mostly in Hmong.

Another seventeen-year-old girl shared how she maintained her native language: “Sometimes she wants me to talk in Hmong. She really wants me not to lose my own background. That’s why I joined the church choir because they sing in Hmong.”

In this category of language, some of the participants talked about how their mothers wanted them to learn how to write in Hmong as well. One sixteen-year-old girl shared:

(So, are you fluent? Do you understand the Hmong language?) Well, yeah, I understand, but I can’t speak it, you know. I’ll understand if an older person speaks to me and asks me to do something, or tells me about the past. I’ll understand it, but I can’t read or write any of it. I want to, but it’s kind of hard and confusing. (So, what does your mom think of that?) Well, my mom’s okay with it because she knows some American words, but then she really wants us to speak more fluent in Hmong, and at least know how to read and write in Hmong ‘cause it will help her out a lot, you know.

Hmong American parents encourage their adolescents to become proficient in speaking, reading, and writing the Hmong language.

FAMILY TIES. Eleven (47.8%, 40% of girls and 62.4% of boys) of the participants mentioned family ties. A larger percentage of boys than girls talked about family ties as a form of ethnic socialization. The category of family ties included helping extended families, providing for the family, and having family responsibilities such as taking care of younger siblings. Most of the participants talked about the value of helping family members, especially during the large family gatherings. A fifteen-year-old boy said: “When our cousins are hosting the eating party, she wants us to go over and, you know, help out so that when we have ours, they could come and help out, too.” A girl, aged 15, mentioned that she had to attend the large family gatherings to help with the food preparation: “There are these little parties where everyone gathers to cook and everything, and it’s a girl’s responsibility to cook. I always have to go to them, and there is no excuse about it. It’s like learning about my own tradition when I go. I actually do it without my mom being there.”

PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE. Nine (39.1%, 53.4% of girls and 12.5% of boys) of the respondents reported that their mothers prepared them for marriage. Girls were more likely to discuss preparation for marriage as compared to boys. The girls indicated that it was important for their mothers to teach and train them to become good wives. One boy said his mother taught him traditions related to marriage, such as showing respect to the girlfriend’s parents. One of the girls, aged 17, shared that her mother “teaches us to cook and clean, and do what we need to do to become a wife; and tells us how to cook rice, chicken, and pig.” Another fifteen-year-old participant stated that her training to become a wife started at an early age: “She started teaching us at a very young age because, back in Thailand, at my age around seventeen, that’s when you will get married and start your own family. So basically, she taught me how to cook at a very young age, like around ten.”

Discussion

Past research suggests that ethnic socialization is part of the normative parenting practices of ethnic minority families. In a study with Southeast Asian American adolescents and their parents, one of the main characteristics of a “good” adolescent was to understand their cultural background (Xiong et al., 2005). However, little is known about Hmong American parents’ transmission of cultural knowledge and values to their adolescents. In the current study, Hmong American adolescents reflected on ethnic socialization strategies that were most salient to them. The most salient categories identified by Hmong American adolescents in this study were participating in cultural events and sharing history.

In addition, the literature on ethnic socialization has presented inconsistent results regarding the socialization messages received by boys and girls. In this study, there were gender patterns in four different categories, including preparation for marriage, language, family ties, and food. More specifically, a larger percentage of Hmong American girls mentioned preparation for marriage and language when compared to the boys. Hmong American girls are taught explicitly about the process of preparing meals and cleaning the house, and how these skills will prepare them for becoming a successful wife. The skills that daughters bring with them when they marry may reflect on their parents. Therefore, girls are motivated to learn these skills to bring respect for their family. Additionally, parents expected more girls to speak and write Hmong fluently. This may reflect the tendency for parents to expect girls to translate for them, or to be more involved with communication across generations.

In contrast, a larger percentage of boys mentioned food and family ties as components of ethnic socialization when compared to the girls. Family ties, characterized as understanding the importance of family or offering assistance to extended family members,
were more salient to boys. Parents may choose to emphasize family ties more with boys because of the importance of the boys’ role in connecting with other extended male family members. In addition, parents emphasized the importance of preparing Hmong dishes more with boys than girls. It may be that fewer girls are represented in this category because most of their discussions about food were more related to how their mothers prepared them for marriage. In other words, the boys’ perceptions of food included preferring Hmong food and understanding how to make Hmong food. In comparison, the girls’ perceptions of learning how to cook Hmong food was associated more with preparation for marriage. The inclusion of a larger sample size in future studies would allow the authors to assess whether the differences remain and, therefore, provide more confidence in these gender differences.

The categories of family ties and preparation for marriage have not received much attention within previous ethnic socialization models. The evidence from this study suggests that preparation for marriage and family ties are categories of culture that should be added to ethnic socialization models when applied to Hmong American families. In addition, these two categories have also been mentioned by other ethnic groups, suggesting that they are important components of ethnic socialization.

This study only examined the adolescents’ perceptions of their female caregivers’ socialization practices rather than their male caregivers’ practices. Even though the adolescents were instructed to focus on their female caregivers’ socialization practices, they frequently mentioned their fathers’ role in ethnic socialization. The inclusion of data about their fathers might provide a different perspective on gender patterns. For example, the percentages of boys in preparation for marriage might increase if such data were included. Although current data provided categories of ethnic socialization that were salient to the adolescents, they did not include explanations as to why specific categories are more salient than others. Future studies are encouraged to also explore parents’ perceptions of their ethnic socialization practices.

This study enriches our understanding of ethnic socialization by including information on the ethnic socialization practices of Hmong American families. Hmong American adolescents perceive parents as focusing on cultural practices and history as mechanisms for learning about culture. Gender differences emerged in adolescents’ perceptions. Boys were more likely to talk about Hmong food and family ties, whereas girls focused more on preparation for marriage and learning the Hmong language. This study reveals rich information about the nature of ethnic socialization in Hmong American families.

References


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I suppose everyone can think of at least one day in their young lives that they consider the day that set the direction to their future. I can think of several but, for the sake of brevity, I will choose one.

On this particular day, a very hot day in June, I was earning money by mowing Ms. Irwin’s two-acre yard. It was a job handed down through three older brothers; two went off to the military and the other was the first in the family to go to college.

It just so happened that as I finished the yard and was putting the mower back in storage, Ms. Irwin walked onto her back porch and asked me if I was hungry. Of course I was, so she brought me a very good chicken sandwich and a lemonade. As we sat there on the porch, we talked about a few things here and there. The conversation finally got around to the fact that I was graduating from high school next spring. She asked me what I wanted to do when I graduated and I told her, “I want to be an architect.”

This surprised her and I could see her thinking: what poor black boy from the State of Louisiana could ever hope to aspire to such heights? I did my best to explain it to her. She thought about it for a while. She then told me to go get some magazines from the storage. I went in, brought them back, and began to flip through them. To my utter amazement, she had kept a collection of House and Garden magazines that had, over the years, chronicled Frank Lloyd Wright’s works.

I had seen nothing like this before. I fell in love with this architecture. My heart pounded with joy when she said I could take the magazines home if I wanted to. I did and, to this day, I still remember the great flood of emotions that poured over me as I sat day-in-and-day-out during the rest of my high school days studying those magazines.

Then I went off to college and began my major in architecture. I learned how to look at architecture and analyze it so that I could use what I learned to create my own designs. But alas, the day I entered architecture school was the absolute last day that I would experience architecture in its fullest. I could no longer walk down the street and simply enjoy the architecture before me. I had to analyze it; take it apart.

It was not until a few years later that I realized what had happened. In learning to become a good architect, I had robbed myself of my emotional enjoyment of architecture. And the more I learned to critique, the less emotional I became. My critical thinking faculties had been honed to a red-hot point.

Today, as I look back over my life, I realize that architecture school was far from unique in this respect. There never was a group, a place, or an institution where emotions were welcomed and nurtured. In fact every institution, formal or informal, from
K-12 and onward, seems to have made a concerted effort to force most emotions below the surface, if not kill them altogether. And thus, by elimination, the responsibility of growing and nurturing emotions falls on the family. But does it live up to this awesome responsibility?

No, it does not. It appears that the more we are taught how to think critically and reason logically through our institutions, the more we tend to apply emotionless critical thinking to our everyday lives. “Critical Thinking is my life, it’s my philosophy of life. It’s how I define myself...,” states John Chaffee, one of the major proponents of critical thinking. And like Chaffee, most of us apply this emotionless logic to everything within the family. Today’s family does its best to avoid most strong emotions in the home setting. When they do show up, out comes the Prozac. And thus, today’s family is as ill-equipped to deal with nurturing and growing emotions as are most other institutions.

What happened to those emotions? Do they piggyback onto the growth of our critical mind? Or, do they remain as they were when we last truly engaged them? There is little evidence that they do the former; it is most likely that they do the latter. If indeed we began to sublimate most emotions as early as our entry into the family, then that was likely the last time we ever fully used them. Our emotions at that stage in our lives were very powerful and, most importantly, very immature.

Psychologists, sociologists, neurologists, and a host of other scientists have concluded that strong emotions were mostly essential for our survival throughout evolution. They became a defense mechanism that first warned us of danger. From this warning, adrenaline began pumping and got the muscles moving so that we could get ourselves out of danger. Given the nature of the hostile world throughout evolution, it is no wonder that emotions captured such an early part of the brain and remained dominant until modern men learned to think critically.

Daniel Goleman, the popular author of Social Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence, believes that emotions have not been killed off altogether and gives evidence in what he calls the emotional hijacking. This happens when we encounter situations that demand an emotional response. If the situation is overpowering, the elicited emotion simply shortcuts the ability to think and may cause unwanted actions to follow. In one extreme case, he describes how one stable fellow was caught robbing the apartment of two young women. When discovered he panicked and, with sudden and unpremeditated effort, killed them. This was a case where unresolved or immature emotions simply hijacked his ability to think.

Is it only in extreme cases like this where our emotions actually hijack our well-developed ability to critically think? From personal experience, I can definitely say no. Since childhood, I have always held that all humans are equal — a product of critical thinking. But when I meet some unfortunate soul, e.g., when I visit New York City and I am constantly bombarded by panhandlers asking for handouts, my first reaction is generally one of dislike and I quickly conclude that “it is his own fault!” — a product of emotional hijacking. Luckily, as a trained critical thinker, I am able to assuage such emotions and usually wind up handing over all the change I have in my pockets.

But, there are other times when an emotion appears so strongly and so suddenly that no matter how much I try to mediate it quickly through critical thinking, alas, I cannot. The Reverend Jesse Jackson once lamented over the fact that he could not help but feel threatened when he walked down a street alone and notices a brother walking behind him. Like him, I too experienced similar negative emotions toward people I met during my first months in the Peace Corps. Although I had been well trained in college and had gone through extensive multicultural training during my first months in the Corps, it took some doing to rationalize away those negative emotions.

And so, one of the hardest things I have had to deal with throughout my life is that, in spite of my self-proclaimed liberal — almost radical — beliefs, I may still be a racist. But, I believe that this is a dilemma we all live with every day of our lives. Racism is a by-product of the negative emotion called hate. Hatred is a very primitive emotion that manifests itself even in the lower species of animals. And although I have anthropomorphized animal behavior, what seems like hate in animals is an instinct that drives them toward species-preference. When we witness genus-specific animals — a dog — engaging in behavior against animals from another species — a cat — we are not witnessing hatred; it is natural un-reasoned behavior. It is only hatred when humans engage in this very primitive form of emotional behavior. And with our human ability to think, we have promoted our own species-preference to a very high level of racism.

Racism is an old, strong, and assiduous emotion; one that we can almost never train ourselves out of. And it is always on the surface and ready to hijack our wonderful abilities to think critically at the drop of a hat. It remains vigilant.

However, over the last 20,000 years or so since we have held the claim to being called humans, we have taught ourselves to deal with racism, though not in the way we would all like it to be dealt with. Instead, we have sublimated and rearranged the emotion so well that we get the impression that it does not exist.

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One of my colleagues recently noted my propensity to jump in at paragraph 12 without filling in paragraphs 1 through 11. This brief article feels very much like that to me. My fear about doing so with such extremely loaded and complicated issues as white privilege and silencing dialogue is that the readers will either misunderstand, get defensive, or dismiss the notions as not applying to them personally. In order to ease my own concerns, I am listing the following as the givens on which I base my thoughts.

1. All of us who are white by race are not only individuals but are part of a racial group. Some call the group “Caucasians,” some “European American,” and some “white.”

2. In the United States, that group is in charge of all of the major institutions (medicine, judicial system, government, military, education, etc.), and holds the power to make decisions that affect everyone’s lives.

3. As individual members of that group, we benefit from our group’s position of power whether we want to or not. In other words, we have “privileges” based on race because our race is used as the norm against which everything else is measured. Privilege, particularly white or male or heterosexual privilege, is hard to see for those of us who were born into those groups and who, subsequently, have access to power and resources. It is very visible for those to whom privilege was not granted. Furthermore, the subject is extremely difficult to talk about because many white people don’t feel powerful or as if they have privileges that others do not. The Random House Dictionary (1993) defines privilege as “a right, immunity, or benefit enjoyed only by a person beyond the advantages of most” (emphasis mine).

4. White privilege has absolutely nothing to do with whether or not we are “good” people. We who are white can be absolute jerks and still have white privileges; people of color can be the most wonderful individuals in the world and not have them. Privileges are bestowed on us by the institutions with which we interact solely because of our skin color, not because we are deserving as individuals.

One of the by-products of being white is our sense, however conscious, of being central to all processes and interactions — of being in the center. Often, without being aware, we speak or act in ways that let everyone around us know who is in charge. We frame every conversation in our context, from our group’s frame of reference, and then ask people of color to interact within those parameters.

I was asked to address a meeting of white women and women of color who had been called together to create strategies for addressing social justice issues. Each of the women had been working for years in her own community on a range of issues, from health care to school reform. As I spoke about the work that is required for white women and women of color to work together authentically, the white women became nervous and then resistant.

Why is race always such an issue for women of color? What did I mean when I said it was essential for white women to be conscious of how being white affects every hour of our lives, just as it does for women of color? They were all professionals, some said. Why did it matter what color they were? The silencing of dialogue here occurred because the white women didn’t see the race of all the women in the room as an issue. It did not occur...
to them that their daily experience was particularly different from that of their colleagues who were African Americans, Latinas, and Asian Americans. Had I not been asked to raise the issue, the responsibility of doing so would have been left to the women of color, as it is far too frequently.

Being white enables me to decide whether I am going to listen or hear or neither. As one of those in what Lisa Delpit calls “the culture of power,” I also silence others without intending to or even being aware of it. For example, during a visit with an out-of-town friend, another white woman, we began to plan a conference on racism. We talked and talked, and I made notes of good exercises to include, videos to use, materials that might prove helpful. It was absolutely clear that we needed a diverse committee to work with me, the facilitator, and we were very intentional as we created one that would include all voices: two white women (one Jewish), a Latina, a Chinese American woman, straight women and lesbians, and several African American women. By the end of our conversation, I was extremely excited, and couldn’t wait to contact the women on the “planning committee.”

During introductions at the first meeting with these women, I talked about my 25-year history of working on issues of racism, and particularly about my own work on what it means to be white and Southern. I then presented what my friend and I had thought up as the plan for the conference, and we talked about the particulars. A couple of weeks later, at our second meeting, the women of color pointed out that I had fallen into the classic trap of white women: the come-and-be-part-of-what-we’re-doing syndrome.

“If you want us to work with you to truly create a conference, we will. But it means starting over, and building a plan together. If you want us to enter the planning process in the middle and add our ideas to yours, we’re not interested.”

In her article, “The Silenced Dialogue — Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children” (Harvard Education Review, Vol. 58, No. 3, August 1998), Delpit includes the profoundly disturbing comments of an African American teacher that illustrate whom we silence without being aware of doing it or meaning to.

“When you’re talking to white people they still want it to be their way. You can try to talk to them and give them examples, but they’re so headstrong, they think they know what’s best for everybody, for everybody’s children. They won’t listen. White folks are going to do what they want to do anyway.

“It’s really hard. They just don’t listen well. No, they listen, but they don’t hear — you know, how your mama used to say you listen to the radio, but you hear your mother? Well, they don’t hear me.”

As Delpit says, these are not the sentiments of one isolated person who teaches at a particularly racist school. The feelings are representative of a vast number of people of color as they interact with white people on a daily basis.

“The saddest element is that the individuals that the Black and Native American educators speak of...are seldom aware that the dialogue has been silenced. Most likely the white educators believe that their colleagues of color did, in the end, agree with their logic. After all, they stopped disagreeing, didn’t they?” (pp. 280-281).

For those of us who are white and also women, have AIDS, work with people who do, and/or are gay or lesbian, our experience of being excluded from the mainstream blinds us to the fact that we still benefit from our skin color. We emotionally and psychologically remove ourselves from the “white” group, which we see as composed either of demonically racist people who spout epithets and wear white robes, or of white, straight, healthy males. By seeing ourselves as removed from the privileged group, we are all the more oblivious to our silencing people of color.

So, what can those of us who are white do to ensure that we do not, inadvertently, silence someone with whom we are working?

First, begin (or continue) to examine how our whiteness affects our perceptions, experiences, and behaviors.

Second, make a contract with those with whom we work, both white and of color, to give honest feedback about our communication.

Third, design intentional ongoing opportunities to examine the intricacies of institutional racism and its effects on our behaviors and relationships. Also, explore the interactions of privilege based on our race, gender, Christianity, heterosexuality, and socioeconomic class to better understand our interactions both with people who are like us and people who are different.

Fourth, listening and inquiry are vital. As white people, what we need to do more often is ask appropriate questions at the right time and then really listen to the answers rather than making assumptions as people are talking.

Finally, remember that this is a lifelong process.

All of us will make mistakes as we work to better communicate across differences. The important thing is to acknowledge and learn from our mistakes, and to stay in dialogue about race even when we are uncomfortable. The motivation for “staying at the table,” as Cornel West has said, is the opportunity for authentic relationships with all people — those whose skin color is different from ours and those who are of the same race.
Toward a Comprehensive Model of the School Leaving Process Among Latinos

By William Velez

The educational achievement of Latinos is well below that of the overall population. In 1994, 40 percent of the Latino population ages 25 to 29 did not have a high school diploma, compared to nine percent of whites in the same age range. At the root of the low educational levels of Latinos is the problem of high school attrition. In many large metropolitan areas, 40 to 50 percent of Latino students fail to graduate from high school. The problem of high school dropouts among the Latino population has important policy implications, since dropouts experience lifelong economic disadvantages because they do not attain the levels of education and training that are essential in today’s labor market.

Correlates of School Leaving

Although there is no single cause of dropping out, the extensive literature on dropping out of school identifies various factors associated with the decision to leave school. Poverty, pregnancy, poor academic achievement, parents’ educational attainment, lack of motivation or low aspirations, disengagement from learning, and single-parent families are among the most commonly cited factors. By focusing on the social and economic characteristics of individuals or their families, much of this work serves to reinforce the view that students who drop out are deficient, deviant, and inadequate. However, there is a growing body of evidence that points to school-related or institutional factors as crucial in modeling the dropout process. To better understand how previous researchers have studied high school attrition, I have identified a cluster of factors that are organized below into seven general categories.

1. Oppositional Behaviors/Confrontation

Students engage in active or passive confrontational practices, behaviors that oppose or violate specific rules of school. Truancy, or excessive number of absences, has been found to be negatively correlated to school persistence. Cutting classes also results in a higher likelihood of dropping out. Disorderly behavior, such as fighting and talking back to teachers, can lead to sanctions, such as being suspended, which has also been found to be linked to school leaving.

2. Sociopsychological Factors

Student orientations toward the future and parental expectations for college are often cited in the literature as being related to school persistence. Students who plan to attend college tend to finish high school at higher rates than those who did not plan to go on to college. Students whose parents expect them to go to college usually experience lower attrition rates than those whose parents did not expect them to do so. However, most Latino parents are consistently found to hold high educational expectations for their children.

3. Accelerated Role Taking

Teen pregnancy and teen motherhood are also mentioned by researchers as correlates of dropping out of high school. By engaging in behavior, such as parenthood, that is more appropriate for an adult, the youth takes on roles that conflict with that of a student and thus increases his or her chances of dropping out. The United States has the highest school-age birthrate of the industrialized nations. One in 10 young women aged 15 to 19 becomes pregnant each year. While childbearing rates among teenagers have been declining for African Americans and Whites, Hispanic girls have shown increases in

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rates of teenage childbearing in the past 15 years. This is because, although less likely to engage in sex than other girls, Hispanic girls are also less likely to use birth control or to abort once pregnant. This fact coupled with higher poverty rates places Latina students at a higher risk of dropping out.

Population Survey calculated a school retention rate of 15 percent among Latinos, compared to a 12 percent rate among white students (respondents ages 16 to 24). The 1995 CPS data confirm earlier findings that students who are retained are at higher risk of dropping out of school.

Of the 13.3 percent of 16 through 24-year-olds who repeated one or more grades by 1995, approximately one-quarter had dropped out by 1995, compared to only about 10 percent of the young adults who were never held back in school. This factor is frequently operationalized as being “overage,” or when the student is older than his/her grade cohort.

5. Family Structure
Previous studies have concluded that students with two parents at home are more likely to continue their schooling than are those from single-parent homes. Having only one parent can result in inadequate parental supervision, increased family demands, or both. However, in the context of some high schools where most parents are poor or female-headed households are very common, coming from a two-parent household might not have much of an impact on finishing school. Having a more educated parent or having access to other kin or an extended family can soften or neutralize some of the problems associated with female-headed households.

6. Immigrant/Language Status
Previous analyses have found consistently higher dropout rates for foreign-born Latino youths and students with limited English proficiency. In 1995, the dropout rate of 46 percent for Latino immigrants was two and one-half times the dropout rate of 18 percent for Latino young adults born in the U.S. Experience and anecdotal evidence both suggest that some of these Latino “dropouts” never enrolled in U.S. schools. When one looks at the dropout rates of students ever enrolled in U.S. schools, the dropout rate from U.S. schools for...
Hispanic youths born in the U.S. and the rate for foreign-born Latino youths are much closer (17.9 percent for U.S.-born and 23.7 percent for foreign-born in 1995).

Some studies suggest that, under special circumstances, recent immigrants actually do better in school than U.S.-born Latinos. In a study of a Milwaukee high school, for example, I found that students who had been in this country longer and who had higher English proficiency reported lower academic performance than did their immigrant counterparts. In another study with a national data set, I found that while U.S.-born Chicanos and Puerto Ricans had lower dropout rates than their immigrant counterparts, recently arrived Cuban students actually had lower dropout rates than those who were U.S. born.

Speaking Spanish at home is not a correlate of dropping out of school. However, among the Latino students who spoke Spanish at home, English-speaking ability was frequently related to their success in school. For example, the 1995 CPS data show that one-third of Latino young adults who reported limited English-speaking ability and who attended U.S. schools dropped out, which is much higher than the 17.4 percent dropout rate reported for enrolled Latino students who reported speaking English “very well.” There is ample evidence supporting the assumption that enrollment in bilingual education and English as a Second Language programs can neutralize the negative effects of limited English proficiency on the educational attainment of immigrant children.

7. Home Resources and Family Support

Low socioeconomic status is one of the most frequently mentioned causes of dropping out: economic constraints can force some students to drop out because they or their families need their earnings immediately. Socioeconomic status also includes the human capital (parents’ education) that may provide a favorable cognitive environment that supports the student’s learning.

Parents are also highly involved in exposing the child to a series of experiences and activities that are conducive to developing visual and auditory discrimination at an early age. Teachers frequently mention this readiness to learn, which can sometimes be boiled down to whether the child can understand verbal instructions and can identify visual symbols in the classroom. Children who come from homes in which standard middle-class English is not spoken are at a disadvantage.

The family’s economic position can also have an impact on the neighborhood of residence, with consequences for the quality of life and the quality of the schools Latino students attend. Living in a neighborhood characterized by concentrated poverty is associated with inadequate housing, high crime rates, high unemployment rates, and higher exposure to health hazards, all of which have direct or indirect effects on the educational chances of children.

As a result of an unstable economic situation, many Latino families tend to move frequently within the United States. The concomitant transfer to new schools creates difficulties for their children, who have to adapt to new sets of teachers, classmates, rules, programs, and so on. Thus, changing schools because of family moves is often found to increase a student’s probability of dropping out.

Comparisons between middle-class and working-class schools often reveal quantitative and qualitative differences in the ways parents oversee their children’s educational careers and interact with school staff. In general, middle-class parents are found to provide more guidance and supervision in school matters than working-class parents. Middle-class parents tend to see teachers as partners in the educational process, while working-class parents tend to defer more to teachers in school matters. This usually results in an advantage for children from more affluent backgrounds, as their parents are more effective “managers” of their educational careers.

Discussions of the effects of socioeconomic status sometimes involve attention to cultural capital, frequently characterized as a cluster of dispositions and “tastes.” More affluent parents tend to socialize children so that they are interested or attracted by intellectual pursuits. In addition, children of affluent parents frequently develop a taste for music and other artistic practices associated with upper-class culture.

The family also impacts the social capital available to the student, that is, the degree and quality of middle-class forms of social support present in a young person’s interpersonal network. This is usually conceptualized to affect students from two perspectives. In the first, high levels of parental social
capital are associated with the ability of adults to control the student’s behavior by way of shared norms and expectations that can readily be enforced. Discussion of the beneficial effects of Catholic schools on minority students are usually couched in these terms, which emphasize the presence of a strong community or partnership between the parents and the school.

The second conceptualization of social capital focuses on the presence or lack of opportunities for generalized exchange between adults and youths. To succeed in school, students must acquire a set of skills known as “funds of knowledge.” These funds of knowledge allow the student to decode the school’s institutional culture. By knowing and displaying institutionally sanctioned discourses, and by their ability to solve school-related problems, students are identified as insiders; that is, they receive the school’s approval or sponsorship.

**Policy Implications**

Given what we know about the factors associated with the decision of so many Latino students to leave school before graduation, what can be done? Since there is ample evidence that holding students back has negative consequences, schools should strive to provide alternatives to the grade retention of students who are achieving substantially below grade level. Some possible options include tutoring, summer school, pullout or within-class individualized instruction, and accelerated learning.

Although schools have a responsibility to maintain a safe and orderly environment, they must also monitor their suspension and expulsion rates to prevent placing excessive attention on “getting tough” strategies. The potential exists for expulsion to be used needlessly and in a discriminatory pattern against children in some communities. Some alternatives to expulsion are: (a) in-school suspension; (b) school service projects; (c) community service projects; (d) home instruction; (e) evening and weekend academics; and (f) counseling programs.

Schools must address the impact of curriculum, classroom, and school organizational practices on the availability of opportunities to learn for all students. Curriculum tracking practices that favor some students over others, as well as class content and class delivery styles that are insensitive to the needs of minority and limited-English-proficiency students, ultimately derail the creation of a positive school climate. Cooperative learning methods allow heterogeneous groups to create roles of high status and responsibilities for every student in the class, and establish a positive peer climate for learning.

We have to find ways to strengthen the ties between the school, the family, and the community to maximize student success in school. Positive programs of school-family-community partnerships that encourage all families to make new and important social connections have been supported by the Goals 2000 federal legislation. There are systemic structures of inequality present in the larger society that frequently block economic opportunities for poor families. More attention to economic development, to the availability of low- and moderate-income housing, and to training opportunities for residents of poor minority neighborhoods can also go a long way in improving the schooling experiences of minority children.

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**Racism or Emotional Immaturity?**

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anymore. In fact, racism has been pushed to such a high level of sophistication that it is no longer recognizable.

What’s more, we now have economic reasons for not doing something we ought to do. (I am always baffled by those who claim that they are fiscally conservative, while being socially liberal. What does that mean, really?) I cannot help but laugh whenever I hear my peers declare that the minorities they would hire just do not have enough education. Or we hear: we would hire more minorities; only problem being they are just not out there! Or that they are out there, but do not want to come to the university because they are making big bucks working in the corporate world. I could fill this magazine with other examples of racism.

Perhaps the most insidious thing about all this is that, in academia, we have learned to critically think our most undesirable emotions like hatred. Supposedly, during critical thinking, we take in all the facts, analyze and evaluate them, and then make our decisions. The catch here is the term, all the facts. Regardless of what we believe, we never know all the facts. All the facts are those facts that we allow ourselves to believe are all the facts. Somehow, even when we do our best to gather all the facts, it is often those subjugated emotions that rule the day.

I suppose my greatest fear is that before we learn how to live with all our emotions, as well as with our emerging ability to critically think, we are more likely to learn how to disguise our most unwanted emotions through our ability to critically think.
Mission
To utilize a culturally sensitive racial and ethnic lens to create, organize, assess, and disseminate scholarly knowledge designed to impact policy and quality of life issues in the greater Milwaukee area.