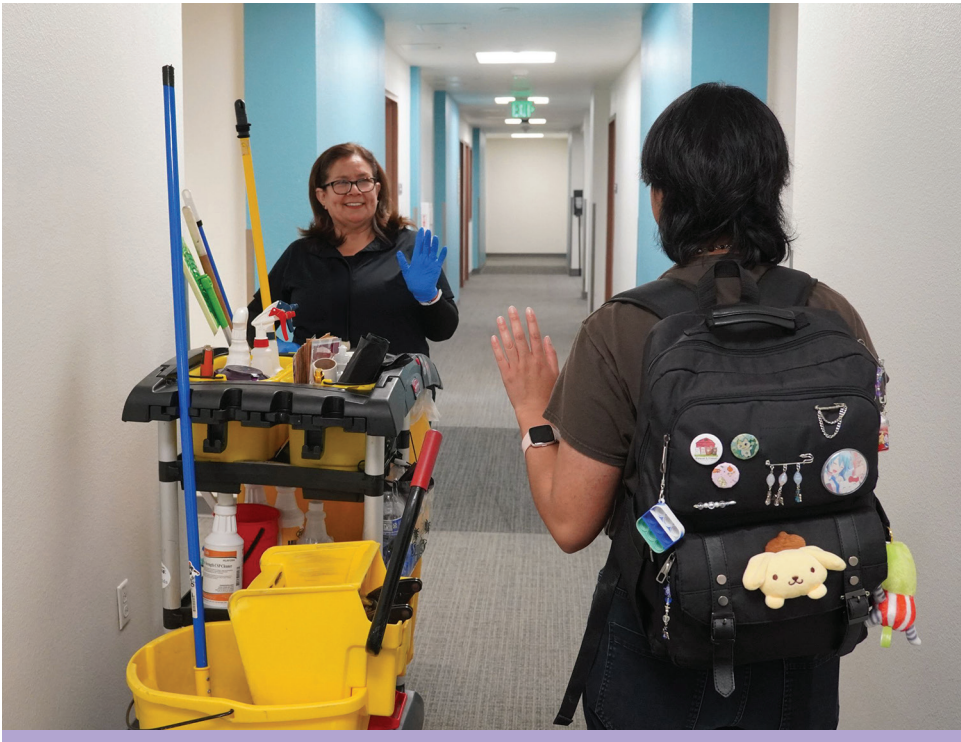




Familismo and Community Cultural Wealth: Enhancing Sense of Belonging for Latine Students Through Custodian Interactions in Residence Halls

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CUSTODIANS CAN SERVE AS IMPORTANT CONNECTIONS in fostering a sense of belonging for Latine students in residence halls by supporting them with ties to familismo and community cultural wealth. This critical qualitative study focuses on their interactions with non-academic staff, particularly custodians, whose contributions to their support are often overlooked. This study employs a *pláticas* methodology—a culturally rooted approach emphasizing informal conversations—to gather insights about the residential experiences of Latine students at a large public university in California. Key themes include the cultural value of *familismo*, which emphasizes strong familial ties and communal support, and various forms of community cultural wealth, such as linguistic, familial, and social capital. Findings reveal that custodians act as cultural connectors and surrogate family members, providing emotional and practical support that significantly impacts students' sense of belonging and academic success. This study highlights the importance of recognizing and integrating custodians into residential life programs and promoting linguistic inclusivity to enhance student experiences. Recommendations include formal recognition of custodians' contributions and a commitment to fostering environments where multiple languages are valued.

Latine students are enrolling in higher education at an increasing rate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023), but there is little research on their interactions with non-academic staff in student housing environments. Though custodians are integral members of the campus community, little is known about their influence in advancing institutional missions and residential community efforts.

STUDENT INTERACTIONS WITH RESIDENTIAL STAFF

Custodians as Cultural Connectors

Custodians can act as cultural connectors in the residence halls, playing crucial roles in shaping the campus community. Although their primary duties involve maintaining clean spaces to protect the health and well-being of residents, their interactions with students often extend beyond these tasks. Through their daily presence and consistent interactions, custodians create welcoming spaces that foster a sense of belonging for students (Aranda Cervantes, 2024). They often engage in informal mentorship, providing support and guidance that can significantly influence students' collegiate experiences (Aranda Cervantes, 2024; Wiggins, 2022). By acknowledging custodians as cultural connectors, higher education institutions can better appreciate and leverage their roles in enhancing students' sense of belonging.

Student-Staff Interactions

Researchers have highlighted the positive impact of interactions with non-academic staff on students' sense of belonging and overall college experience (Aranda Cervantes, 2024; Hoffman et al., 2002; Means & Pyne, 2017). These interactions often include custodians offering emotional support, advice, and practical help—associations that are particularly valuable for first-generation and underrepresented students (Aranda Cervantes, 2024; Wiggins, 2022). The presence of custodians in residence halls provides students with a sense of familiarity and comfort, aiding in their adjustment to university life and enhancing their overall sense of belonging (Aranda Cervantes, 2024).

The following research questions guided the study:

- *How do familismo (González, 2019) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) influence the sense of belonging for Latine students in residence halls, as reflected through their interactions with custodians?*
- *How can residential life programs recognize the contributions made by the custodial members of their department?*

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, through pláticas methodology, how familismo and community cultural wealth contribute to the sense of belonging for Latine students in residence halls. This study focuses on understanding the influence of these cultural assets on students' interactions with custodians in a residence hall environment and offers recommendations for how residential life programs can recognize the contributions made by their custodial team.

This study uses pláticas—a culturally relevant form of storytelling and dialogue in Latine communities—to capture the nuanced lived experiences of Latine students (Carmona et al., 2021; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Morales et al., 2023) and create a space for knowledge-sharing that honors the students' voices and cultural identities. Another core concept in understanding Latine cultural dynamics is the concept of familismo. While community cultural wealth and sense of belonging are well-established frameworks in educational research, this study includes familismo as an essential lens for understanding Latine students' interactions and support systems, offering culturally centered insights that may otherwise be overlooked.

Familismo, or familism, is a cultural value deeply rooted in the Latine community, and it is characterized by strong feelings of attachment, loyalty, and responsibility among family members, including extended family (González, 2019). This cultural value often means that Latine students tend to place the needs of the family above their own, making decisions collectively rather than individually (González, 2019) and ensuring material and emotional support (Smith-Morris et al., 2012). Familismo transcends generations, maintaining its influence despite experiences that might otherwise dilute cultural values, such as language loss, acculturation, and migration (González, 2019; Smith-Morris et al., 2012).

Familismo can be categorized into two descriptors: attitudinal familismo, which emphasizes the prioritization of family needs over individual ones, and behavioral familismo, which includes actions reflecting these beliefs, such as helping with child-

care or working to support the family (González, 2019). The concept of familismo has evolved from early research on Mexican American communities in South Texas, where family was identified as the most important aspect of life (Moore, 1970). Though familismo involves obligations and emotional and economic support to some extent, it also operates as a critical value system prioritizing family and extended family support (Sabogal et al., 1987).

FAMILISMO IN LATINE COMMUNITIES

Familismo in Latine Students' Lives

When applied to the lives of Latine students, familismo highlights diversity and variation within the Latine community (Smith-Morris et al., 2012). This value system offers a culturally nuanced understanding of how family values manifest among Latines; for students in particular, familismo may influence decisions about selecting a major or seeking job opportunities, which often involve family consultation and collective decision making (Smith-Morris et al., 2012). Familismo also serves as a critical source of support and motivation, driving students to pursue opportunities their families may not have had (González, 2019). All students lean on their families for emotional support, particularly during transitional phases in college (Smith-Morris et al., 2012), and this reinforcement is crucial in fostering educational outcomes for Latine students.

Familismo and Educational Attainment

Familismo is linked to positive educational outcomes because it provides emotional support for Latine students, which in turn fosters their academic motivation (Azpeitia & Bacio, 2022; González, 2019). Familismo bridges educational practices with familial cultural practices and helps cultivate a sense of community, promoting a sense of belonging in higher education contexts (González, 2019; Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013; Smith-Morris et al., 2012). Strong family ties can also pose challenges, as family obligations may sometimes interfere with academic commitments and the acculturative process that occurs with transition to higher education settings (González, 2019).

Familismo in Residence Halls

Familismo plays a significant role in influencing how Latine students living in residence halls interact with their peers and staff. Interactions with custodians, in particular, can provide students with additional emotional and material support (Aranda Cervantes, 2024). Custodians, often seen as extended family members, can help create a supportive and inclusive environment, reinforcing students' sense of belonging, which can enhance their academic and social experiences and contribute to their overall success and well-being (Aranda Cervantes, 2024).

Custodians can act as cultural connectors in the residence halls, playing crucial roles in shaping the campus community.

COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH

Definition and Components

Community cultural wealth, as conceptualized by Yosso (2005), includes six forms of capital that students of color bring to educational settings:

1. **Aspirational capital:** The resilience and hope that families maintain despite challenges, which inspires students to achieve their goals.
2. **Linguistic capital:** The skills gained from being bilingual or multilingual which enhance communication and cultural understanding.
3. **Familial capital:** The sense of community and cultural knowledge cultivated through family and close relationships.
4. **Social capital:** The networks of social connections and resources from the larger community that students can draw upon.
5. **Navigational capital:** The ability to navigate and succeed in institutions that may be unwelcoming or challenging.
6. **Resistant capital:** The skills and knowledge developed through challenging and resisting inequality.

Application in Educational Contexts

Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework has been instrumental in highlighting the strengths and assets that students from marginalized communities bring to academic settings (Pérez Huber, 2009). This asset-based model contrasts with deficit perspectives by recognizing the rich cultural backgrounds and resources these students contribute. Research using this framework has demonstrated how students of color use their cultural capital to navigate educational environments, succeed academically, and challenge systemic barriers; for example, aspirational and familial capital provide students with motivation and support, while navigational and resistant capital help them overcome institutional challenges (Yosso, 2005).

Relevance to Residence Halls

In residence halls, community cultural wealth can significantly enhance Latine students' sense of connection and academic success. Leveraging familial and social capital, residence hall programs create supportive environments that acknowledge and celebrate students' unique cultural backgrounds (González, 2019; Yosso, 2005). Social and navigational capital are fostered through informal mentorship and relationships developed between peers and staff who share or respect their cultural experiences (Aranda Cervantes, 2024). By recognizing and valuing these assets, residence halls become spaces that empower students to voice their experiences and to feel valued and supported, which leads to improved academic and personal outcomes (Aranda Cervantes, 2024).

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SENSE OF BELONGING

Theoretical Perspectives

Sense of belonging is a fundamental human motivation that involves feelings of connection, social support, and being valued within the community (Strayhorn, 2019). As Hurtado and Carter (1997) suggest, belonging can be defined as both cognitive (an evaluation of one's role in a group) and affective (an emotional response). It is also a fundamental need; in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, the need to belong comes before the need for esteem and self-actualization.

Factors Influencing Belonging

Positive interactions with faculty, staff, and peers are crucial for fostering a sense of belonging, and a supportive community depends upon faculty acknowledgment and approachability, peer interactions that evolve into friendships, and involvement in campus clubs and organizations (Hoffman et al., 2002; Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2019). Campus support services like counseling and academic advising also enhance students' well-being and feelings of being cared for by the institution (Kitchen, 2023; Stebleton & Soria, 2012), as do the shared experiences that come from participating in university events and traditions that foster a collective identity (Musoba & Placide, 2013) and from interactions with roommates and resident advisors (Garvey et al., 2020; Samura, 2018).

Belonging and Latine Students

Cultural, familial, and societal factors shape Latine students' sense of belonging. Family plays a central role, and Latine students often struggle to balance academic work and family obligations, striving to maintain connections with both (González, 2019; Perna & Titus, 2005). Their sense of being part of an accepting and inclusive community can be strengthened by faculty and staff who make an effort to understand a student's cultural background (Aranda Cervantes, 2024; Taylor et al., 2010) and allow Latine students to speak their primary language (Aranda Cervantes, 2024; Nuñez, 2014).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study highlights several aspects of community cultural wealth—shared values and traditions, support networks, and educational attainment—to illustrate how custodians contribute to Latine students' sense of belonging (González, 2019; Strayhorn, 2019; Yosso, 2005). Grounded in critical theory, this framework moves beyond deficit models to highlight the asset-based contributions of

Latine students to their educational experiences (Boettcher et al., 2019). This conceptual framework guides the study through a critical and culturally comprehensive lens and is based on the understanding that students from marginalized communities, particularly Latine students, bring a wealth of cultural resources and social capital to their academic environments.

METHODOLOGY

Pláticas as a Methodology

To explore how custodians contribute to Latine students' sense of belonging, we used a qualitative and critical approach. We aimed to amplify the voices of historically marginalized students by understanding their experiences, examining the support they received from custodians, and evaluating how familismo and community cultural wealth influence a sense of belonging.

We utilized pláticas, a culturally rooted methodology, to capture the lived experiences of Latine students. Pláticas, meaning “informal conversations” in Spanish, fostered a two-way exchange of knowledge and understanding, emphasizing relationships, empowerment, cultural context, and embodied knowledge (Carmona et al., 2021; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Morales et al., 2023). This method challenges the power dynamics of traditional research and promotes a co-construction of knowledge, allowing participants to be seen as contributors rather than subjects (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016).

Relationships in pláticas are reciprocal, ensuring a mutual exchange of stories and perspectives (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). This approach empowers the Latine community by highlighting their experiences and creating a bridge between researchers and practitioners. Pláticas also underscore the cultural significance of storytelling within the Latine community, where sharing stories is foundational to maintaining relationships and cultural identity (Carmona et al., 2021).

The methodology chosen was intentional in addressing the power dynamics and privilege inherent in the experiences of Latine students and custodians. By using a critical approach, we aimed to recognize and honor the contributions of custodians, particularly in terms of how familismo and aspects of community cultural wealth influence a sense of belonging. This approach advanced the voices of both Latine students and custodians, providing a comprehensive understanding of their interactions and the support systems they have in place.

Recruitment and Selection of Contributors

We used purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to identify contributors according to specific criteria: The students self-identified as Latine, were at least 18 years old, had lived in on-campus housing for at least one academic year at the research site, were able to share how interactions with custodians contributed to their sense of community, and were current students at the research site.

Purposeful sampling identified contributors who could best address the research questions. Two outreach methods were developed: flyers and email. Flyers outlining participation criteria, study information, and contact details were posted around campus in high-traffic areas and also distributed to custodians to pass along to qualifying students. An email outreach targeted students who lived on campus during the 2022-23 academic year and were still enrolled. Interested participants were contacted via email to confirm eligibility.

Research Site

The research site is a large public university located in a major city in California. Established in the late 19th century, it is the oldest and largest university in its region and ranks among the top universities in the state. The institution serves a diverse student body of more than 34,000 students with a Hispanic-Serving Institution designation. The university's residential program, which began in the late 20th century, has grown to accommodate more than 8,800 students, enhancing academic success and engagement through a robust, research-based curriculum and housing options that include traditional residence halls, suites, and apartments. The residence halls are supported by a group of custodians who are diverse in both gender and race/ethnicity.

Contributors

Pláticas challenge traditional research power dynamics (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Morales et al., 2023), and one way to shift the perspective and honor the co-creation of knowledge was to refer to participants in the study as contributors. The study includes six Latine contributors who lived on campus for at least one academic year, were currently enrolled in school, and were at least 18 years old at the time. All contributors were first-generation college students who speak both Spanish and English. For the purpose of this study, each contributor was given a pseudonym. The group comprised three who identified as men (Guillermo, Esteban, and Eduardo) and three who identified as women (Vanessa, Karina, and Dolores), aged 19 to 21. The academic standing of each contributor varies: Three were sophomores (Guillermo, Karina, Eduardo), two were juniors (Vanessa and Dolores), and one was a senior (Esteban). They had different majors, except for Guillermo and Esteban, who were both studying business. Four contributors lived on campus and worked for on-campus student housing, one was a tutor (Vanessa), and one was not working at the time (Eduardo). Geographically, three were from Caléxico, California, and Mexicali, Baja California, México, identifying as transborder students who grew up on both sides of the border. Guillermo is from the California Central Valley, and Vanessa and Eduardo are from San Diego County. All contributors have parents working in blue-collar industries such as construction, retail, and manual labor.

Data Collection

Each contributor participated in a plática to help answer the first research question. Guiding questions were developed for the pláticas to facilitate conversation, with follow-up probes for clarification if needed (Bhattacharya, 2017). Each one-hour, one-on-one plática, either in person or over Zoom, was audio-recorded and transcribed, using 12 questions to explore how the familismo and community cultural wealth fostered by custodians influence Latine students' sense of belonging.

Data Analysis

The shortest pláticas were 36 minutes, and the longest 92 minutes, totaling 338 minutes. All pláticas were recorded via Zoom for transcription, reviewed by the contributors, and facilitated in environments that mirrored familiar cultural practices, enhancing comfort and connection regardless of whether or not the meeting was in person or virtual.

The role of the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework guiding this analysis highlights aspects of community cultural wealth, focusing on how familial, social, and linguistic capitals and familismo contribute to a sense of belonging. This framework informed the coding process, analysis, and identification of key concepts, which are reflected in the study's findings.

First- and second-cycle coding. In the first cycle of coding, an inductive method and in vivo coding were used (Saldaña, 2021) to identify unique codes from the contributors' own words and phrases, honoring their voices and resulting in themes like "feel like family" and "I owe it to them." During the second round of first-cycle coding, we applied values coding with a hybrid deductive and inductive approach to capture contributors' views and beliefs. For the second cycle, we used focus coding to identify concepts from the conceptual framework and new elements that emerged, grouping codes into nine predefined concepts and an additional concept of "embodied knowledge." This process resulted in 17 themes from 66 codes associated with multiple concepts, providing a comprehensive understanding of the data.

Trustworthiness

Interpreting data is a crucial aspect of research, and Schwandt and colleagues (2007) recommended employing trustworthiness criteria to justify interpretations. Trustworthiness includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2022, p. 24). The following sections detail how we ensured that the research is credible, intentional, and applicable to other contexts.

To ensure authenticity and credibility, we engaged intensively with contributors through pláticas, maintained subjectivity to recognize multiple truths, and conducted member checks by sending transcripts to contributors for review and revisions. Intentional in its design, this study used pláticas to ensure healing, inclusion, and a safe space for co-creating knowledge, with a conceptual framework capturing culturally nuanced ways that custodians support Latine students and sampling criteria ensuring

Though familismo involves obligations and emotional and economic support to some extent, it also operates as a critical value system prioritizing family and extended family support.

that contributors were able to share their experiences meaningfully. To ensure intentionality, we grounded the findings in the conceptual framework, understood contributors' culturally influenced realities, maintained a decision-tracking journal, and produced culturally sensitive research that honors contributors' voices and experiences. To determine the applicability of this research in other contexts, we provided detailed descriptions of contributor qualifications.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

Before we present the findings, we want to acknowledge our positionality as it relates to this study. Jacobson and Mustafa (2019) highlight the importance of researchers' motivations, and we recognize the importance of sharing ours.

I (Dr. Aranda Cervantes) approach this research as someone who identifies with the challenges and experiences of Latine students, both as a Latina, granddaughter, and daughter of Mexican immigrants and as a former student who lived in student housing at a large public institution. Raised in a predominantly White area, I learned the value of hard work and education from my family, which drove my pursuit of higher education, career, and passion as a student housing administrator. As a researcher deeply invested in this work, I acknowledge my role as a first-generation Latina scholar, which shapes my understanding of the importance of community and familismo in the lives of Latine students.

As a daughter of Mexican immigrant parents, I (Dr. Hernández) always understood the value of labor and recognized the contributions of workers that others often ignored. Drawing upon asset-based and critical perspectives enables us to recognize how notions of family can be found within institutions of learning. As a site of inquiry, university spaces facilitate points of connection, which enabled our own pláticas as advisor-advisee and co-researchers to make meaning and explore how custodians influence Latine students.

FINDINGS

Community: Creating a Community Away from Home

Themes of welcoming and validation emerged during pláticas with contributors and were supported by codes such as "sense of community," "we're connected," "culture," "validating," "immigrant," and "religion." Custodians foster a welcoming and validating environment by connecting with Latine students over shared immigrant backgrounds and cultural or religious values, a commonality that strengthens students' sense of belonging. These themes underscore how custodians help foster a feeling of community for Latine students, making them feel at home and supported.

Dolores, Eduardo, Karina, and Guillermo shared stories highlighting how food often became a central theme in their interactions with custodians and reflected a strong cultural bond. Dolores, for instance, described how a custodian named Margarita, who lives in Tijuana, would bring her Mexican candies and other items found in her hometown in México, saying, “Oh, so you won’t miss Mexicali.”

Karina spoke about finding community outside her home for the first time and emphasized the welcoming nature of the custodians (“I felt that sense of community . . . someone here that I can at least talk to”), while Eduardo acknowledged that he needed to re-create the sense of family and neighborly connections he had at home within his residential community. Vanessa described how custodians’ small gestures, like greeting her with “Hey, mija,” reinforced a sense of community. “Things like that make you feel like oh yeah.”

Dolores recalled how she connected with custodians over lunch, bonding over their shared backgrounds from border cities like Tijuana and Mexicali. “We would always talk . . . we started building a bond. We would talk every day, basically.” Eduardo described how daily interactions with custodians, even brief ones, reminded him of home. “It’s just those little interactions, those small conversations that remind me of being at home.” Esteban echoed this sentiment, saying that custodians helped him manage university life, offering motivation and a sense of connection. “They really helped me navigate . . . giving me a sense of community, giving me a sense of like you belong here.”

Shared cultural nuances, such as religion and immigration status, provided contributors with a sense of validation within the community that went beyond daily interactions. Interestingly, this connection wasn’t limited to Latine custodians. Esteban remembered an encounter with Milagros, a Filipino custodian, who validated his practice of sending money home, something his non-Latine coworker struggled to understand. Milagros reflected cultural insight in acknowledging his sense of responsibility while also encouraging him to take care of himself.

Linguistic Capital: Affirming and Facilitating Connections

Themes of connection and language emerged from the data with codes such as “language,” “Spanish is what I speak,” and “good at communicating.” Eduardo highlighted how speaking Spanish significantly contributed to his bond with custodians. “Being able to speak Spanish allowed me to understand them and even hop into conversation . . . It was the reason that they were able to have an impact on me.” His ability to participate in conversations in Spanish enabled him to feel included and share his experiences and opinions, fostering deeper connections that mirrored those he has within his family.

Karina shared a similar experience, recalling how speaking Spanish with custodians created a connection and an opportunity to practice. “It was refreshing when she started speaking Spanish . . . I need to practice up on my Spanish, so you know, like, keep the conversation going.” This exchange not only strengthened her language skills but also reinforced her cultural identity. Vanessa also found that Spanish served

as a connecting point with custodians, who offered her unwavering support once they realized that she spoke the language. “Even if it’s just a couple of words, it means something . . . they would figure out that I could speak Spanish, and they were automatically like, ‘Oh, what can I do for you?’” This immediate connection, based on shared language, facilitated a sense of belonging and mutual respect.

These interactions between Latine students and Spanish-speaking custodians illustrate how linguistic capital affirms cultural identity and fosters community. By leveraging their native language, students and custodians create a welcoming environment where language diversity is seen as a strength. This practice not only reinforces cultural heritage but also cultivates meaningful relationships that enhance students’ sense of belonging.

Embodied Knowledge and Familial Capital: Custodians Creating a Sense of Belonging

The concept of embodied knowledge, rooted in cultural intuition and familial capital and characterized by the role of custodians as surrogate family members, is central to understanding how custodians contribute to a sense of belonging for Latine students.

Vanessa confirmed the theme of consideration, a core value in her upbringing, by describing how she would clean up after herself in the community restroom out of respect for custodians. “If you’re already there, like just do it. It’s not that hard. It’s gonna take you 5 seconds of your life. I think you know all of us as a minority just get it. I think we understand.” This behavior exemplifies how embodied knowledge and respect are integral to fostering a supportive environment. Dolores recounted seeking help from custodians for medical advice, highlighting the unspoken rule within the Latine community for helping one another. “I needed to go to the doctor . . . since they’re from here, they were able to help me out . . . I’ve been able to ask them, or they’ve been able to share stories that keep my nerves down.” This support extends beyond academic life, demonstrating how custodians serve in important roles as caregivers and surrogate family members.

Eduardo observed the shared value of hard work between him and the custodians. “We both value hard work. We both believe that your success is determined by how much effort you put in . . . I’m here because I want to lift my family up.” These interactions reminded him of his family’s sacrifices and motivated him to succeed in his studies. Esteban reflected on the humility and hard work of custodians, emphasizing the importance of treating everyone with respect regardless of their position.

La manera que voy a tratar la gente va ser bien importante si es un CEO or custodian los saludo igual [The way I am going to treat people is going to be very important; if it’s a CEO or custodian, I will greet them in the same manner]. I see past the power dynamics and the hierarchical level.

This respect underscores the interconnectedness and familial bonds fostered by custodians.

DISCUSSION

Creating a Community Away from Home

Custodians play a crucial role in creating a community away from home for Latine students. Their interactions embody acts of familismo (González, 2019) and promote a sense of belonging and validation, helping students feel supported and connected in their campus and residential environments. This community-building effort underscores the importance of inclusive practices in higher education. Recognizing familiar cultural nuances such as types of food and other reminders of home countries enabled students to feel recognized and valued. In short, the idea of creating a “home away from home” is rooted in the concept of community, which involves shared interests, values, or environments (González, 2019; Strayhorn, 2019; Yosso, 2005).

Affirming and Facilitating Connections

Linguistic capital is the value derived from the ability to communicate in one’s native language, and it plays a crucial role in the values and connections that Latine students and custodians share. For many Latine students, especially those whose first language is Spanish, interactions with Spanish-speaking custodians empower them by affirming their cultural heritage and facilitating meaningful connections (Yosso, 2005). The ability to communicate in Spanish empowers these students and validates their cultural background.

Creating a Sense of Belonging

Embodied knowledge encompasses vulnerability, resilience, consideration, and love within the Latine community, often expressed through language and pláticas (Morales et al., 2023). Familial capital can be generated by custodians who then serve as an important support network for residents (Yosso, 2005). The contributors’ narratives reveal that custodians can create a network of support that fosters a sense of interconnectedness for Latine students (González, 2019). Their actions and shared values not only reinforce cultural identity but also cultivate a space where these students feel supported, respected, and motivated.

Sense of belonging is enhanced by interactions with custodians that are based upon a shared language and cultural intuition. Linguistic inclusivity in this case is demonstrated through the ability to communicate in Spanish with custodians, which empowers Latine students and affirms their cultural heritage. Custodians serve as cultural connectors in their unique role as surrogate family members who, through

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shared language and cultural nuances, provide consistent support that goes beyond their professional duties. Everyday interactions and cultural intuition emphasize how casual daily interactions with custodians help Latine students feel seen and understood, using shared cultural symbols like language and family-oriented gestures to affirm their identity within the campus community.

LIMITATIONS

Although this study aims to provide representation for Latine students in on-campus housing, limitations and considerations must be acknowledged. First, the research is focused on a single research site, which may limit generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study's participant pool is restricted to Latine students who lived on campus at this particular institution, potentially narrowing the diversity of perspectives and experiences within the broader Latine community.

IMPLICATIONS

Integrating Custodians into the Residential Community

It is important to evaluate how custodians are viewed as contributing to the mission of the unit and are incorporated as members of the unit. Including them in meetings or connecting them to processes or practices that involve students can create opportunities for custodians to be more fully integrated into the work community. Inviting them to share their perspectives on how they contribute to the mission and operation of the residential community can offer meaningful insights. Housing professionals can provide opportunities for custodians to interact with students through community events, informal gatherings, or programming that can build a stronger sense of community and promote the longevity of custodial staff.

Providing Recognition and Support for Custodians

Considering that custodians play such a pivotal role in Latine students' lives, residential staff may want to evaluate how their practices and policies recognize these contributions. Examining operational practices that overlook custodians' labor as part of the organizational culture can create barriers to the recognition of custodians as integral, contributing members of the residential and campus community.

Promoting Linguistic Inclusivity

Given the importance of linguistic capital for students who speak multiple languages, on-campus housing within institutions serving linguistically diverse students must promote an environment where multiple languages are valued and supported. This can involve hiring multilingual staff and ensuring that an environment of cultural pluralism is cultivated. As the findings suggest, linguistic inclusivity can lead to affirming interactions that facilitate connection and build community.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the profound impact custodians have on creating a sense of belonging among Latine students in residence halls. Through their roles as surrogate family members, custodians embody the values of familismo, creating support networks that extend beyond academic life. The themes of familial capital, embodied knowledge, and linguistic capital illustrate how custodians' actions, rooted in shared cultural intuition and language, provide emotional support, practical assistance, and motivation for Latine students. The stories of students like Vanessa, Dolores, Eduardo, Esteban, Karina, and Guillermo demonstrate how custodians' care and empathy resonate deeply, reminding students of their family's sacrifices and encouraging their academic pursuits. The integration of first- and second-cycle coding revealed the intricate ways that custodians influence students' experiences; by acknowledging the custodians' significant roles in creating a sense of belonging, institutions can better support the Latine student community, fostering an environment where all students feel connected and valued. This study calls for higher education institutions to embrace and promote the critical yet often overlooked contributions of custodians, ensuring that their efforts in creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere are acknowledged and celebrated. ■

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does a sense of belonging affect a student's college experience? Who plays a role in this? Think about the various administrators, faculty, staff, and support services on a campus.
2. Besides residential halls (or for students who may not live in on-campus housing), what other spaces are there on campus where Latine students can find communal support?
3. Think about other members of a campus who may not fall under the traditional faculty and staff category. How can these employees act as cultural connectors for students and provide them with support? Who can you identify as a cultural connector on your campus?
4. For one student featured, the custodian he connected with did not directly share his Latine heritage yet still affirmed and validated his reality. How can residential staff affirm and support students' lived experiences when they do not share identities?
5. Within your own residential communities, how are custodial staff interacting with students? How can we support custodial staff better? How can we increase interactions between students, residential staff, and custodial staff?
6. This study used *pláticas* as a foundation for gathering information, but how might other methodologies collect different data on this topic?

Discussion questions were developed by Kylie Gottlieb and Janmariz Deguia, Binghamton University in New York.