

Family and peer relationships essential to Mexican-American college students' success

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Hispanics are enrolling in the higher education system at a greater rate than ever, yet they are less likely than their non-Hispanic peers to enter college or earn degrees, according to the Pew Hispanic Center. A new study by a University of Missouri researcher found that Mexican-American college students' family and peer attachments are associated with prosocial and physically aggressive behaviors that can affect their success in college.

Gustavo Carlo, Millsap Professor of Diversity in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, found that college students who maintained strong relationships with their parents and peers were more likely to report less [physical aggression](#) and higher levels of empathy, an emotion associated with more prosocial behaviors, such as assisting in emergencies or [helping others](#) without expecting a reward.

"The ability to develop secure, trusting, [intimate relationships](#) is a marker of positive development," Carlo said. "Close parent and peer attachments lead to positive outcomes such as successful social functioning, academic competence and contributions to society."

Latinos' positive development largely remains unstudied, but Carlo says understanding the importance of relationships in Mexican-American culture could help higher education administrators find ways to increase the number of [Latino students](#) who enroll in college and earn degrees. Carlo says educators and administrators should help young Latino adults adapt to college life by including parents in their children's continued

development and exposing students to positive peer environments.

"The combination of students' attachment to their parents and their peers seems to best predict their [developmental outcomes](#)," Carlo said. "Even though the students aren't living with their parents, there's clearly still a connection there, especially for Mexican-American women. Since peers tend to have a significant influence on Latino men, we need to pay attention to the nature of their [peer groups](#)."

The study, "Empathy as a mediator of the relations between parent and peer attachment and prosocial and physically aggressive behaviors in Mexican-American college students," was published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. Carlo collaborated with researchers Rachel Hayes and Miriam Martinez from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Meredith McGinley from Chatham University. The Department of Human Development and Family Studies is part of the College of Human Environmental Sciences.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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