

Latino/a Students in Higher Education:

Using Cultural Social Networks to Improve Academic Success and Retention

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Introduction

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This study aims to bring awareness to the inequities that Latina/o students experience at a predominately white institution (PWI). The current research argues that latino students in higher education do not receive the appropriate academic support (Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2015).

We have identified the Comadre Relationship (CR) as a critical peer connection for college students. The CR should be recognized as an important protective factor for the academic success of Latina/o students.

Research Question

This study documents and identifies the purpose and value of the Comadre Relationship as developed by Latina/o college students in order to succeed in a PWI.

Research Question: How do culturally significant social networks amongst Latina/o students attending predominantly white institutions affect their academic and social resilience?

Methods

Participants were First Generation college students born in the U.S. and Mexico; age ranged from 18-23 years ($\bar{X}=20$). Participants ($n=41$) identified as Latina, Hispanic, or Mexican (95%) or White (5%) and attended a Northern California public university. Twenty face-to-face, hour-long, audio recorded interviews were conducted. We fully transcribed, coded and analyzed all of the interviews using qualitative methods.

Results

When Latinas start college, they lack a sense of belonging which leads them to struggle socially and academically.

As a consequence, Latina students establish these peer relationships that help them navigate the world of higher education.

The establishment of the CR facilitates academic benefits such as:

Promoting Academic Value:

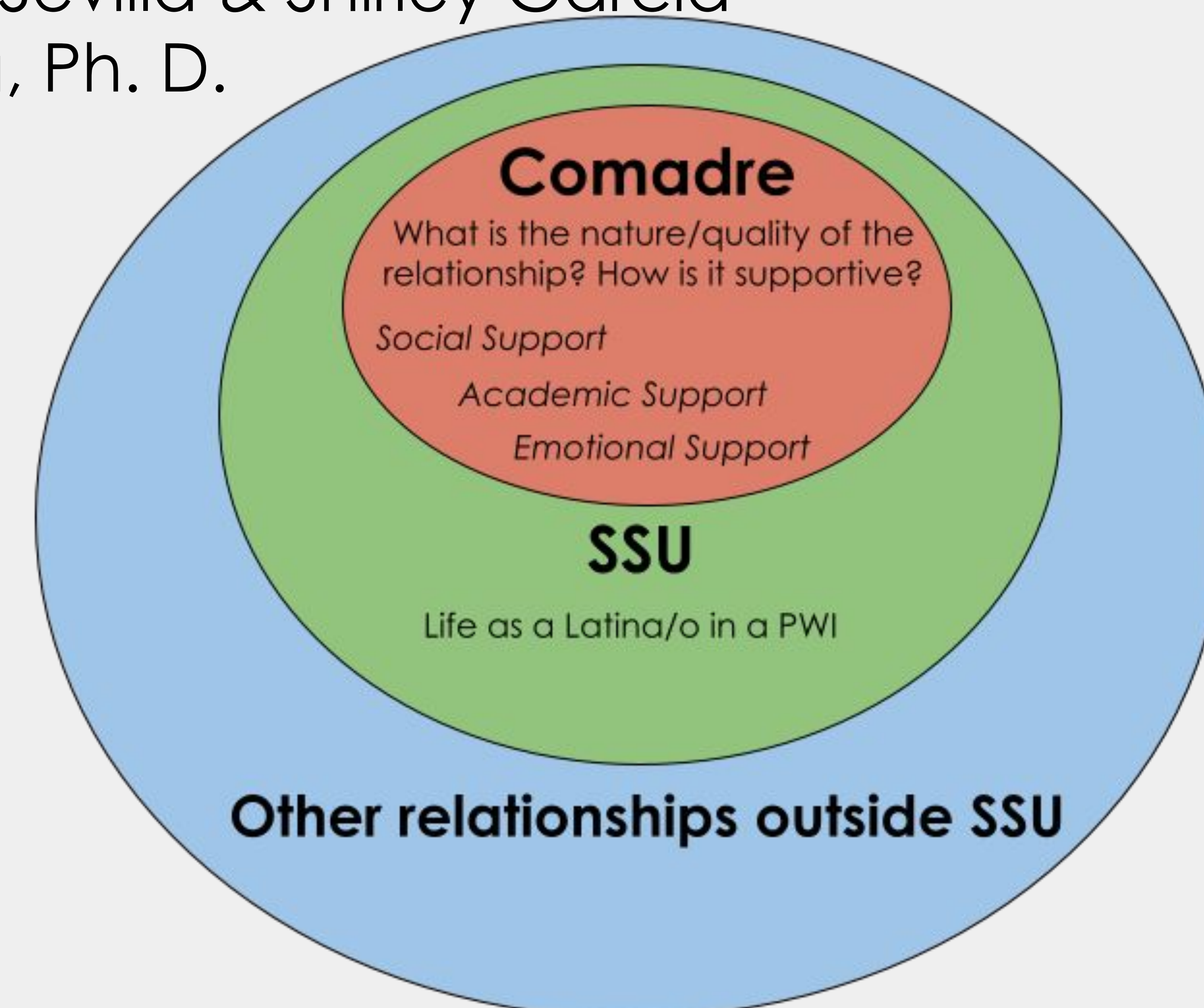
"I feel like having her there and...she knows my schedule better than I do. She always- I always tell her what I have to get done so she can remind me. We're always supporting each other, making sure we get everything done or like turning it in"

Advising:

"I think because she's an Early Childhood major and I want to work with children, we kind of compliment each other in that. So I asked her, 'Oh do you think if I take this class it'll help me in the future'..."

Sharing Resources:

"...for our English class, there was like a book we had to buy for like thirty-two dollars and our teacher was like 'okay, well you can split it with another person' so then we just split it, so we shared that book..."



Discussion

- Latina college students form this relationship, based on mutual trust and unconditional acceptance and solidifies their Comadre relationships in a profound and culturally significant way.
- Our findings strongly suggest that institutions must facilitate the creation of culturally inclusive spaces and provide cultural resources to promote academic and social resilience.
- Based on our interview results, we recommend the intentional hire of faculty and staff of Latina/o background.

References

Robertson, R. V., Bravo, A., & Chaney, C. (2014). Racism and the Experiences of Latina/o College Students at a PWI (Predominantly White Institution). *Critical Sociology*, 1-21.