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**"La Excelencia Son Los Valores": Using the Lotería Game to Understand the Foundations of Latina/o/x Excellence Cultivated at Home**

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**Abstract**

This article examines the foundations of Latina/o/x excellence as a culturally-embedded practice born, taught, and cultivated in the home by the family members of Latina/o/x high school students. The research team conducted a phenomenological study on excellence in the home, school and community of Latina/o/x youth in Southern California. In this study, we examined the definition and source of excellence in the homes of Latina/o/x high school students through a Lotería Card Project inspired by artist, teacher, and professor, Dr. Luis-Genaro Garcia. Findings demonstrate that excellence involves meeting and excelling expectations in the home, is learned through intergenerational knowledge and lived experience, and is grounded in reciprocity. We offer suggestions to educators on how to learn about excellence in the lives of Latina/o/x students and their families.

*Keywords: Excellence, K-12, Latina/o/x, Funds of Knowledge, Lotería, Familismo*

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Since at least the year 2000, there has been significant attention on the demographic revolution among Latina/o/xs in the United States (Krogstad, 2020; Trueba, 1999; Garcia, 2001). Emphasis has been placed on their rising (potential) political power, the social and economic needs and contributions of the population, and the rising presence of Latina/o/xs within educational institutions across the pipeline (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021). For example, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), Latinas/os/xs comprised of 6 million K-12 students in 1995 but grew to 13.6 million by 2017. In other words, Latinas/os/xs went from 13.5% of the total public school population to 26.8% by 2017, and are expected to reach nearly 30% of the total public school enrollment by 2030 (NCES, 2020). However, a rise in numbers has not necessarily brought comparable evidence of educational success (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021). In fact, research suggests that there are growing gaps by race/ethnicity and gender in academic achievement and attainment within the Latina/o/x population (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021). According to The Campaign for College Opportunity (2021), Latinos are attending and completing college at lower rates than Latinas. Racism, mismatched policy, deficit thinking, and other structural inequalities have resulted in low academic achievement and attainment, the school-to-prison pipeline, high dropout/pushout rates, and disparities in high school and college completion, to name a few (Rios & Galicia, 2013; Rodriguez, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2005). This context requires scholars, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners concerned with the Latina/o/x<sup>1</sup> population to not only recognize the inequalities and injustices facing this population, but intentionally respond with additive research, policy, and practice.

In an attempt to draw attention to the needs, challenges, and possibilities of Latina/o/xs in education, it is vital that we not only recognize the injustices facing the various groups of Latina/o/xs but also highlight the strengths, possibilities, and examples of excellence. That is, in spite of historical and pervasive social injustices and inequalities in education, Latina/o/xs have demonstrated a level of resistance, persistence, and existence (Conchas & Acevedo, 2020; Gutiérrez, 2022; San Miguel Jr., 2003). The East Los Angeles Walkouts of 1968 are examples of resistance by Chicana/o/x students who organized and walked-out in protest of an inferior

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<sup>1</sup> We are conscious of the evolving debate and definitions of “Latino”, “Latina”, “Latin@” and “Latinx”. These terms are often used in ways that treat Latinxs as a monolithic group, ignoring the rich, intersectional diversity of national origin, race, ethnicity, language, and culture of people. We use the term “Latina/o/x” in this study to be inclusive of the diverse intersectional identities of our student participants and their families.

quality of education and educational inequalities faced in their East Los Angeles high schools. Students demanded a change in the curriculum, to hire Mexican-American educators, and access to bilingual education (Library of Congress, 2022). Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) identify the resistance and action of Chicana/o/x students in the East LA Walkouts as Transformational Resistance, student behavior that reflects a critical awareness of oppressive conditions and a motivation or desire for social justice. The transformational resistance that took place at the East LA Walkouts is Latina/o/x excellence. Latina/o/x migrant and seasonal farmworker youth pursuing a General Education Development degree (GED) in a High School Equivalency Program as a means of survivance from the inequitable conditions of high schools is another example of youth resistance and existence (Gutiérrez, 2022). The fight for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)<sup>2</sup> and the California DREAM Act<sup>3</sup> are contemporary examples of the constant resistance and persistence of undocumented Latina/o/xs. Although undocumented students who have DACA have access to employment authorization and greater protections against deportation and students who qualify for the California DREAM act can apply for financial aid, the fight to sustain such policies especially DACA is ongoing. One way to counter injustice is to intentionally focus on examples of excellence, particularly in education (Rodriguez, 2015).

For approximately 30 years, scholars in education have conceptualized more additive frameworks that help reframe understandings of the Latina/o/x condition in education. Funds of Knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), Pedagogies of the Home (Delgado Bernal, 2001), Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), the Third Space (Gutierrez, 2008) and Sentipensante Pedagogy (Rendon, 2011) have been among the most influential perspectives to move from a deficit framing of Latinas/os/xs in education to more additive perspectives. One aspect of this framing has been Latina/o/x excellence in education (Rodriguez, 2015). That is, rather than focusing on the gaps plaguing Latina/o/x education, an excellence lens repositions

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<sup>2</sup> Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is a policy that was signed into effect June 15, 2012. DACA is a federal policy that provides undocumented youth who immigrated as children who meet eligibility requirements the opportunity to apply for deferred action, to defer removal against an individual, and for employment authorization ([U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2022](#)).

<sup>3</sup> The California DREAM Act allows students who live in California and who cannot receive financial aid from the federal government along with other requirements (related to AB 540 eligibility) to apply for state financial aid in order to attend colleges and universities in California. The California DREAM Act was signed into law in 2011 and makes it possible for undocumented students who meet eligibility requirements, especially youth who immigrated to the U.S. as children, to receive state financial aid to attend college (California Student Aid Commission, 2022).

the conceptual, pedagogical, and methodological framing to more additive framing by asking: In what ways are Latinas/os/xs thriving in education? How? Why? What are the policy, practice, and pedagogical conditions that produce Latina/o/x excellence in education? What is Latina/o/x excellence in comparison to standard ways of framing excellence as academic achievement and high test scores? And what is the source of Latina/o/x excellence? In other words, from whom are Latinas/os/xs learning about excellence? Excellence, therefore, becomes a tool that reimagines, reframes, and redefines what excellence is and can be, particularly for the purposes of improving the schooling, community, and societal conditions Latinas/os/xs in US schools. To help answer these questions, family strengths are centered in this research.

This paper situates Latina/o/x excellence as identified by high school youth, as a culturally-embedded practice born, taught, and cultivated through the eyes of family members in students' homes. First, we provide an overview of Latinas/os/xs in education and review the literature on funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). This literature highlights the assets of Latina/o/x families and communities. Then we describe a project aimed at understanding the power of excellence in the lives of Latina/o/x students using the Loteria card game. Key findings are discussed followed by an exploration of implications for policy and practice.

### **Literature Review**

Latinas/os/xs in the U.S. are one of the fastest growing populations, growing by 23% and encompassing 51% of total U.S. population growth between 2010 and 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Latinas/os/xs account for 27% of the student population in K-12 public schools in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a). While status dropout rates, the percentage of students 16 to 24 years old who are not enrolled in high school and who do not have a high school credential, for Latina/o/x students have decreased in recent years, they still continue to lag behind white students (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b). In 2020, the status dropout rate for Hispanic students was 7.4% while the rate for white students was significantly lower at 4.8% (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b). Given the rapid growth and presence of Latina/o/x students in K-12 schools and the need to support them along the K-12 education pipeline, it is necessary that educators find ways to best support students. Focusing on student assets, what students bring with them to classrooms, has been shown to be effective in K-12 schools (Irizarry & Raible, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and higher education (Araujo, 2012; Rendon, 2011). Assets may include but are not limited to linguistic, literate, and cultural

practices (Paris & Alim, 2014). Values that are assets in education include the importance of respeto and educación (Valenzuela, 1999).

Asset based research on Latina/o/x students and families highlight the cultural assets, practices, values, and beliefs cultivated in the homes of Latina/o/x families (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2017; Moll et al., 1992; Rodriguez, 2015; Yosso, 2005). Moll et al. (1992) identified *funds of knowledge*, the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household activities or individual functioning and well-being” in the households of working-class, Mexican families in Tucson, Arizona (p. 133). Funds of knowledge include the productive activities of the household, including its involvement in the formal and informal economies, as well as its domestic labor, and the maintenance of social networks that tie the household to other households (and other settings) in the community and facilitate the exchange of resources (especially labor and knowledge) (Moll et al., 1992). Examples of funds of knowledge in the home include learning about household management by observing parents cook or take care of children, while knowledge about science could be learned via construction, carpentry, and painting of the home. This knowledge may be derived from parents and elders, and the values and beliefs learned through one’s role and responsibilities in the home and everyday life. Understanding students’ funds of knowledge helps educators capitalize on the wealth of knowledge and resources students bring from home to organize classroom instruction, curriculum, and enhance learning (Moll et al., 1992).

Hogg (2011) suggests that a key component of funds of knowledge that makes it unique in comparison to other asset-based theories is its emphasis on involving teachers “...in conducting and applying research, to link theory and practice” (p. 667). Moll et al. (1992) trained teachers in qualitative research methods and had them conduct observations and interviews with parents in the homes of the students they serve. This resulted in teachers assuming the role of the learner, learning to see beyond stereotypes, and establishing symmetrical relationships with the family of the student. Upon identifying the funds of knowledge of students and their families, teachers can incorporate and build on student funds of knowledge to engage students in learning (Moll et al., 1992). Although funds of knowledge make it possible to name the household activities communities of color engage in, researchers have sought to bridge a connection between funds of knowledge and theories of capital because funds of knowledge and cultural capital are often fused together or assumed to be synonymous

of each other, and a discussion about social class is needed to understand the school and home dynamics that impact their relationship to each other and the production of knowledge (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011).

Researchers have built upon funds of knowledge to focus on specific types of funds of knowledge such as *dark funds of knowledge* (Zipin, 2009) and *funds of gang knowledge* (Huerta & Rios Aguilar, 2021). Zipin (2009) extended upon funds of knowledge to include the “dark” funds of knowledge that people experience such as racism, poverty, abuse and other negative experiences. While dark funds of knowledge may be negative in nature, such experiences can still be assets (Zipin, 2009). Huerta & Rios-Aguilar (2021) account for the specific knowledge and information gang members have relied on to survive as funds of gang knowledge. Funds of knowledge has also inspired what Esteban-Guitart & Moll (2014) identify as *funds of identity*, artifacts (i.e. visuals, music, etc.) that people use to define themselves from their household funds of knowledge. Funds of identity are funds of knowledge with a focus on one’s identity, voice and individuality (Franquiz et al., 2021).

Although asset-based research and pedagogies have been on the rise in efforts to support Latina/o/x students, few studies have focused on Latina/o/x excellence from the eye of the beholder, students, and their families. Our study is an exploration of excellence through the perspective of Latina/o/x youth and their families. The purpose of this study is to highlight who Latina/o/x students consider to be examples of excellence and how excellence is defined in the home.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This article highlights excellence as a culturally-embedded practice in the lives and homes of Latinas/os/xs by drawing from Funds of Knowledge (Moll, et al., 1992) and familismo (Calzada et al., 2012; Valenzuela, 1999). Funds of Knowledge acknowledges the wealth of knowledge and experiences in the homes of students of color, specifically in Latina/o/x families. The forms of/types of knowledge learned in the home are often associated with particular roles in the family (i.e. parental, siblings) and types of labor (i.e. gardening, cooking, care taking). In this study, funds of knowledge not only makes it possible to explore the richness of excellence that is learned in the home, but it also allows us to delve into the ways excellence is connected to household activities and roles in the home. In conjunction with funds of knowledge, we

needed a way to identify the characteristics, values, and beliefs that are the fabric of the funds of knowledge. Familismo is that fabric.

*Familismo* is a multi-faceted cultural value and collectivist expression of family (Calzada et al., 2012; López et al., 2019; Valenzuela, 1999). Familismo emerged from the concept of familism - a reciprocal in-group connectedness that emphasizes the goals of the family (Calzada et al., 2012; López et al., 2019; Valenzuela, 1999). Loyalty, reciprocity, responsibility, and solidarity to the family are key characteristics of familismo (Marin & Marin, 1991; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). Familismo has been found to be one of the most salient cultural values in Latina/o/x communities (Sanchez et al., 2019; Villareal et al., 2005) that is fluid and in constant negotiation (López et al., 2019). It is a collectivist expression among Latina/o/x communities that prioritizes family, including one's immediate family as well as chosen family, close confidants, networks, and kin (Ayón, Marsiglia, & Bermudez-Parsai, 2010; López et al., 2019). Friends, neighbors, teachers, coaches, mentors, and community members are a few examples of people who could be a part of one's family. One's beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, outlook on life, and academic success can be influenced and impacted by familismo (Posada Rodriguez, 2019; Valdivieso-Mora, 2016).

Familismo is multifaceted and can manifest itself as attitudinal and behavioral (Keefe, 1984; Calzada et al., 2012). Attitudinal familismo refers to the feelings that individuals feel relating to loyalty and reciprocity between family members (i.e. the belief that family comes before the individual, familial interconnectedness, etc.) (Calzada et al., 2012; Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003). Behavioral familismo includes the behaviors, or actions taken, that reflect the beliefs of attitudinal familismo (i.e. financially contributing to support the family, living near or with kin, childrearing, etc.) (Calzada et al., 2012). Understanding attitudinal and behavioral familismo as educators is important because it differentiates between the feelings and priorities our students have to their families and the behaviors and actions that students engage in both in and out of school contexts- all of which impact their relationship to schools and their academic achievement. In schools, the shared aspirations and understandings of success between students and their families are reflective of attitudinal familismo. The ways that families encourage students in the home and the importance of education passed down from generation to generation is also familismo (Garriott et al., 2016).

In education, familismo has been found to promote the persistence, resilience, and overall academic success and well-being of Latina/o/x college students (Lopez et al., 2019;

Witkowsky et al., 2020). Familismo has been incorporated as a guiding value of higher education programming, such as Spanish language parent and family member orientation programs (PFMO) to promote parent involvement (Witkowsky et al., 2020). Witkowsky et al. (2020) researched the impact of a PFMO program that is offered in Spanish as a bridge between students' families and the institution and found that the use of Spanish generated trust in the institution among families. Additionally, families developed an understanding of their students' strengths and motivations to pursue higher education for the improvement of the family (Witkowsky et al., 2020). Familismo has also been the foundation of what Yemin Sanchez designed and conceptualized as *Familismo Teaching*, "an asset based pedagogy that fully embraces the attitudinal and behavioral attributes of familismo" (Sanchez et al., 2019, p. 111). While strides have been made to foster familismo in higher education, Latinx undergraduates experience a lack of familismo in science and engineering due to the culture of hyper-competition and individualism in large courses and professor interactions with students (Lopez et al., 2019). When researching Latinx students' sense of familismo in undergraduate science and engineering, Lopez et al. (2019) found that Latinx students found familismo in spaces outside of their respective departments. Such spaces affirmed students' life experiences and cultural practices, fostered reciprocity, care, community, and a sense of value. Latinx undergraduates in science and engineering felt a sense of belonging and ease at being themselves in those spaces.

However, researchers have also identified ways that familismo can produce tensions and negative outcomes for Latinas/os/xs (Hernández, 2015; Patron, 2021). Familismo may cause challenges such as also placing a financial burden on family members when children may be expected to contribute their own income, even in adulthood, causing a strain on their finances and elevating levels of stress and depression (Calzada et al., 2012), or influencing college choice among high school students trying to navigate their family obligations and personal pursuits (Hernández, 2015).

Interestingly, the way in which familismo affects individuals differs by gender (Piña-Watson et al., 2013; Posada Rodriguez; 2019; Valenzuela Jr., 1999), immigrant generation (Azpeitia & Bacio, 2022), and by sexual identities that do not align with family values or cultural expectations in Latina/o/x families (Patron, 2021). Valenzuela Jr. (1999) found that Latinas were disproportionately asked to partake in familial tasks such as translating during medical visits and

school conferences, and even more so around home-related activities such as caring for siblings. Piña-Watson et al. (2013) studied how familismo and ethnic identity worked as a protective factor against bicultural stress and found that females who reported having a deeper connection with these two concepts were better equipped to process bicultural stress. Females in that study were likely to have stronger ties to familismo and ethnic identity because of the Latina/o/x gender role of marianismo, the Latina gender role that “traditionally assumes women the responsibility of cultural bearers” (Piña-Watson et al., 2013, p. 212). Not only can familismo be experienced differently across gender, but also by sexual orientation. Patron (2021) studied *precarious familismo*, “the instances of uncertainty queer Latinos do not know if values of familismo will persist”, among queer Latino men in college and found they encountered adverse, disparate, and supportive experiences with their families when identifying as gay and queer.

In this study, we specifically draw upon attitudinal familismo to understand the reciprocity, family interconnectedness, and beliefs about putting the family first in the homes and lives of students and the family members they chose to interview. Understanding interview responses through an attitudinal familismo perspective allows us to ground the definitions of excellence in the home in the values and beliefs of the participants who were interviewed. Also, familismo helps us frame the environment and relationship(s) between the interviewee (family member) and interviewer (student).

## **Methodology**

### **Background of Study**

This study uses data from the Collaborative Research for Equity and Excellence in Our Schools (CREER) research project. The CREER research project was a participatory action research project where students, their teacher, and researchers worked collaboratively and in tandem to collect and analyze data. This research project was launched in Fall 2017. At the time of data collection, the research team was composed of a faculty member who was the primary investigator, a postdoctoral scholar, three graduate students, and three undergraduate students. Three major student projects compose the CREER data set, including educational journeys, photovoice projects, and the Loteria card project. The student projects of approximately 30 students were discussed and shared with the larger class. In this paper, we use the Loteria Project as our primary data.

### **Inspiration for the Loteria Card Project**

The Loteria card game is often known as “Mexican bingo.” It was first introduced by Don Clemente Gallo in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Villegas, 2018). The objective of the game is to complete a game board using markers (i.e., beans, coins) when that specific card is called out, much like the traditional bingo played in the United States. The cards that are used in the game depict people, places or things that are prominent in Latina/o/x culture. For example, there is a card that depicts *la dama* (a woman of high esteem), *el catrín* (the gentleman), and *el músico* (the musician). Loteria is often played as a pastime among family and friends at gatherings and celebrations. Families typically play for fun or for prizes including money. An underlying outcome of playing Loteria is the strengthening of familismo as it brings family together and can be played intergenerationally. Additionally, Loteria can be passed down from generation to generation even as new generations create new versions of Loteria that best reflect their reality.

The concept of using Loteria as a project was inspired by the work that Dr. Luis-Genaro Garcia engaged in with his own students in South Central Los Angeles. Dr. Garcia is an artist, teacher, and professor that has used Loteria to depict his high school students' lived experiences (Garcia, 2017). He encourages them to tell their family's story through a Loteria card that they themselves create. Some of his students have used the Loteria card project as a way to pay homage to the type of work that their parents do or have done, while others use iconic symbols of Latina/o/x culture as a way to stay connected to their culture and traditions. Either way, using something as simple as Loteria has increased the engagement levels of his students. We wanted to try something similar with our students, being that they would be able to relate to the game of Loteria. Thus, the CREER research team used the Loteria card game as a strategy to identify the source of excellence in the lives of Latina/o/x youth.

### **School Site**

Data was collected at a Southern California public high school we call El Bosque High School (EBHS).<sup>4</sup> EBHS is located in one of the most populated counties in California and is part of a school district that encompasses 23 schools, five of which are high schools or institutions that provide a high school equivalency program. Out of the 2.4 million residents in this county, about 49% of those residents are Latina/o/x. Though the numbers are lower for the district, in

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<sup>4</sup> All names in this study are pseudonyms. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of our participants and the school site.

comparison to numbers in other districts, EBHS mirrors its district's demographics. The school district served 79% Hispanic/Latino during the 2017-2018 school year when the data was collected. EBHS served 2,189 students of which 94% were students of color and 90% of those students identified as "Hispanic/Latino".

EBHS has various academies, specialized groups where students receive specific instruction in a field or topic in a more personalized setting (Leithwood, 2003), within the school including the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, Green Construction Academy, and Agriculture Academy to name a few. Programs such as Advancement Via Academic Determination (AVID) and Upward Bound are offered at EBHS. AVID prepares students for college eligibility and success while Upward Bound seeks to increase the rate at which high school students from low-income families and whose parents do not have a bachelor's degree complete secondary education to pursue higher education.

### **Participants**

Upon meeting with the principal at EBHS and explaining to her that our study intended to explore excellence in the Latina/o/x community, she introduced us to four teachers who she believed would be interested in working with our team. Although all four teachers were interested in working with us, we chose to partner with Ms. Lopez because she expressed a desire to receive feedback on her teaching and to continue to develop her pedagogical skills as an educator. Ms. Lopez self-identifies as a Latina who had been teaching for eight years and taught English and AVID. Although Ms. Lopez is not originally from the city where the school is located, she considers it home and contributes greatly to the community in and out of her role as a teacher. Ms. Lopez's classroom was colorful and had student work displayed around the room including Instagram profiles that each student created and an affirmation of the week on the whiteboard. Flags of different colleges and universities that her students had been accepted to were displayed on the walls of the classroom. Throughout her room she had various pieces of Chicana/o/x art and colorful papel picado hung across the classroom walls. She had a bulletin board titled "the Chisme Corner" where she posted all community happenings for students to stay informed and involved. Participants in our study included Ms. Lopez's thirty 9th grade AVID students, who were predominantly Latina/o/x and children of immigrants from Mexico and Central America. Of the thirty students, one student is white, one is Asian American, and the rest are Latina/o/x. All student participants were fluent in English while most Latina/o/x

students were bilingual in Spanish and English. Ms. Lopez was instrumental in bringing us into the classroom and making the research team feel welcomed among the students.

### **Data and Data Collection**

Data collection in Ms. Lopez's classroom took place over a 6-month period during the 2017-2018 school year. Ms. Lopez gave us full permission to lead brief class lectures and assign specific assignments to students designed by our research team. Student assignments became our data, including the Loteria Project that was collected towards the latter half of the school year in 2017.

Loteria projects are composed of four parts: 1) Latina/o/x students identifying a person who reflects excellence in the home, 2) students interviewed the person who they identified as reflecting excellence, 3) students created a Loteria card of the person who was interviewed, and 4) students presented their Loteria card to fellow classmates and researchers. First, we gave students a post-it note and had them write down the name of someone who they believed reflected excellence in their home. Students were then instructed to interview the person they believed reflected excellence in their home using an interview worksheet. The interview worksheet included four pre-selected questions developed by our research team including: 1) How do you define excellence? Where did you learn it? 2) How do you define excellence in the home? 3) How do you define excellence in education? 4) How do you define excellence in the community? Students also had the opportunity to develop two additional questions of their own for a total of six interview questions. Students then conducted semi-structured interviews with the person they identified as an example of excellence in the home and captured their responses in writing in the interview worksheet. The majority of people who were interviewed for the Loteria project were family members. Student-conducted interviews included 17 parents (9 fathers and 8 mothers) while the rest were extended family members such as siblings, uncles or cousins. Some students took the initiative to translate the interview questions into the interviewee's preferred language while others translated the interviewees responses to English onto the worksheet. All data is presented in the form in which students provided it. After interviewing the people who they believed reflected excellence in the home, students were introduced to the Loteria card game and asked to create a Loteria card representing the person they interviewed. Students were encouraged to get creative and have fun with the Loteria card. The majority of students were familiar with the Loteria card game, especially

Latina/o/x students. Some students drew their person whereas others drew symbols to reflect that person's excellence. Lastly, students presented their Loteria cards to their teacher, classmates, and our research team during class. Each student introduced the person who they chose to interview and shared the significance of the colors, images, and text in the Loteria card they created.

Although we had 30 student participants, only 26 students interviewed someone who they believe reflects excellence in the home and submitted the interview worksheet (with responses from the interviewee). Of the 26 students who submitted their interview worksheet, only 17 of those students completed all four components of the Loteria projects. The data for this paper includes 26 student-conducted interview worksheets and 17 complete Loteria projects which include the interview worksheet, Loteria card, and the student presentation of their Loteria card. Students submitted their interview worksheet and Loteria card to their teacher for course credit and she passed them on to our research team for data analysis. Our research team wrote notes about individual student presentations. These notes and observations of student participation in class were used to add context to our understanding of the Loteria projects. In this paper we examine the definition and source of excellence in the homes of Latina/o/x high school youth via the Loteria projects.

### **Data Analysis**

Our research team engaged in collaborative data analysis to analyze the data in this study. Collaborative data analysis is the process by which multiple researchers analyze data through dialogue and joint efforts to produce a consensus of interpretation (Cornish et al., 2013). Through the collaborative data analysis each member of the research team was given the opportunity to review the data, contribute to data analysis, and collectively discuss the findings during weekly team meetings. As a group, each member of the research team received copies of Loteria Project components including the completed interview protocol, Loteria card, and notes taken during student presentations. Collaborative data analysis made it possible to include the diverse perspectives and interpretations of all researchers, improved inter-coder reliability, and allowed us to engage in critical reflexivity (Cornish et al., 2013). Ms. Lopez, the teacher, and student participants were not a part of the collaborative data analysis because the end of their academic year conflicted with the time when we analyze data. However, the feedback,

questions, and analysis of data provided throughout the overall CREER project was taken into account in tandem with data collection and written into fieldnotes and analyzed by our team.

To triangulate the data each Loteria Project was analyzed as a standalone data source, followed by a within and cross-case data analysis method to explore thematic patterns across participants (Yin, 2014). Each member of our research team individually reviewed the Loteria Projects and identified codes and themes through line-by-line coding. Next, the research team collectively discussed their findings and jointly identified themes that were organized in Bloomberg and Volpe's (2018) thematic chart. Organizing the themes in Bloomberg and Volpe's (2018) thematic chart allowed us to enumerate and identify the most salient themes across all participants. The main themes were supported by participant data (the semi-structured interviews students conducted and images of each Loteria card they created) and analyzed in reference to the research question. Once the themes were compiled, they were compared and contrasted to build a larger narrative of excellence from the perspective of someone at the students' home. Fieldnotes taken during student presentations of their Loteria Project were used to corroborate the codes and themes that the team developed. Additionally, we took into consideration the student participant, their experience and participation in the classroom and other data sources from previous class projects that were collected prior to the Loteria Project for our larger research project<sup>5</sup> to contextualize the findings in this study.

### Findings

To understand the source of excellence in the homes of Latina/o/x youth we must first understand how they defined excellence leading up to the Loteria Project. As a part of the larger research project that we engaged with participants, our team had Latina/o/x youth define excellence through a photovoice project prior to the Loteria Project. In the photovoice project, participants defined excellence across three different spaces: home, school, and community<sup>6</sup>. In the home, Latina/o/x youth defined excellence as a family affirmation, unity and

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<sup>5</sup> Data sources include Educational Journeys and Photovoice Projects. Details about the Photovoice Project we conducted can be found in [Insert Citation].

<sup>6</sup> Our research team has published an article, "...You'll Still Make it to the Top": Using Photovoice to Explore Latina/o/x Excellence from the Perspectives of Latina/o/x Youth, regarding the ways Latina/o/x youth in this study define excellence in their homes, school, and community. See the following reference for this article: Rodriguez, L.F., Espinoza, E., Gutierrez, L., Calderon, Y., Chang, E., & macias, cindy (2021). "...You'll Still Make it to the Top": Using Photovoice to Explore Latina/o/x Excellence from the Perspectives of Latina/o/x Youth. *The High School Journal* 104(2), 104-124. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/803608>.

support. While excellence in the community was defined as being of service to the community and excellence in school was defined as academic performance and earning good grades. To identify the source of excellence in the homes of Latina/o/x youth, we developed the Loteria Projects where upon in-depth data analysis we found that: 1) excellence is learned and passed down intergenerationally, 2) excellence in the home is exhibited by meeting or exceeding expectations associated with one's role in the family, and 3) excellence in the home is grounded in reciprocity. These findings emerged from the Loteria cards and the semi-structured interviews participants carried out with a person whom they identified as a reflection of excellence in the home, of which the majority of participants chose to interview a parent. In the sections that follow, we describe the three aforementioned findings and provide examples from the data to support each theme.

### **Meeting and Exceeding Expectations**

During semi-structured interviews participants asked the people they believe reflect excellence in their home about their definition of excellence. Interviewees defined excellence as meeting or exceeding expectations, specifically in their roles as family members (i.e. mother, father, son, daughter, etc.). Keywords that interviewees used to define excellence include: overachieving, exceeding expectations, setting and accomplishing goals, doing your best, and working hard and/or engaging in hard work. A common theme across these keywords is that excellence is grounded in effort, action, and hard work. Excellence is not something that just is, it is enacted. Interviewees mentioned having expectations of themselves or their family members in the home such as: contributing to the home by way of completing chores, pursuing an education, and being a good role model for others. Though we did not set out to explore gendered definitions of excellence or gendered expectations in the home, the way interviewees describe excellence and what it looks like in the home as it relates to one's role in the home is gendered in nature. This is not surprising given that research on familismo, the interconnectedness and importance of the family in Latina/o/x culture, has been found to impact one's values and beliefs and affects individuals differently by gender (Piña-Watson et al., 2013; Posada Rodriguez, 2019).

**Figure 1**

"El Ojo"



When asked to identify a family member who demonstrated excellence in her home, Lupita, a 9th grade daughter of Guatemalan parents, did not think twice about her choice to interview her mother, Sandra. Lupita always remarked about how much her mother had sacrificed and worked hard for her and her family to have a better future. Figure 1 is the Loteria card, *El Ojo* (The Eye), that Lupita drew of her mother's eye. During the presentation of her Loteria Card, Lupita spoke about how much she liked her mother's eye because the color was unique to the rest of the family. Lupita chose to draw her mother's eye and specifically chose the colors green and brown to reflect

her hazel eyes. For the interview assignment we had the opportunity to hear directly from her mother about her definition of excellence. When asked about her definition of excellence, Sandra explained that *"Excellence in the family is exceeding your goal"* (Sandra, Lupita's mother, Interview). For Sandra, excellence at home, in the family, is not simply meeting your goal. She expects family to exceed their goals. This sentiment was felt across most responses, particularly when parents were the ones being interviewed. Many parents attributed excellence to fulfilling their role as provider. One father stated that to him, excellence in the home meant *"giving [their] kid [their] all"*. Another parent stated: *"yo defino excelencia como nos esforzamos y trabajamos duro con sacrificios para alcanzar nuestras metas"*. Both examples reflect the funds of knowledge in the home that are associated with specific roles in the family and the labor and economy of the home. The parents in the aforementioned examples describe what excellence looks like as a fund of knowledge where they engage in a productive activity of the household. Similarly, students interpreted their parents' definitions of excellence in the home as excelling or exceeding expectations by *"helping around even though nobody tells you to"* (Lola, student). Rather than wait for someone to instruct a person to do something, Lola, a 9th grade AVID student interpreted her father's definition of excellence in the home as helping or being of service in the home. Her definition of excellence is in line with a value often found in Latina/o/x homes, to *acomedirse*, to be of help or service. Part of being helpful around the home

without anybody instructing you to do so involves knowing your role in the home and valuing being of service to others. This type of excellence often goes unnoticed by teachers and administrators because it is part of the *educación* that occurs in the home (Moreno & Valencia, 2011). *Educación* “refers to the family’s role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation of all other learning” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 23). Moreover, *educación* is about developing competence in the world as well as respect and dignity (Valenzuela, 1999). Values such as *acomodir*, *respeto*, and *dignidad* are a part of the *educación* that occurs in the home that educators are often unaware of. To *acomodirse* encourages a culture of reciprocity in the homes of these families. Because all family members see the mutual benefit of these actions, they are more inclined to act. This fully encapsulates the principles of familismo where all members of the family are striving towards a common goal, that being the best for the family unit.

When it came to the roles that each family member played in the home, we began to understand how these families were seeing excellence in their own homes through the things they do for each other. Those interviewed understood excellence to be everyone working together for the good of the collective. Essentially, what this meant was that each person had to do their part in order for the home to function as the “safe” and “peaceful” place that parents aimed for it to be. In doing so, they created and maintained the funds of knowledge that are necessary for the functioning and well-being of the home. There was special emphasis on the role of parents as the “providers” of the home. Rosita, a 9th grade AVID student, interviewed her father, Juan. In Figure 2, Rosita drew a Loteria card of her father as *El Conductor* (The Driver/Conductor). Rosita drew the truck Juan drives on a daily basis because he gets to travel and see new places as a driver. When asked to describe what excellence in the home meant to him, Juan stated the following: “*Un hogar tranquilo y especial por mi familia y por mis niños que son todo en la vida*” (Juan, Rosita’s Father, Interview). Here, Juan, speaks from his role as a father and as a provider. He believes excellence in the home happens when his home is peaceful for his family, especially his children, who mean everything to him.

### **Intergenerational Knowledge of Excellence**

When asked who and where they learned excellence from, family members who were interviewed identified having learned it through knowledge and lessons collected intergenerationally and through personal experience. The collection of influences from their

**Figure 2**

"El Conductor"



family members, relationships, past and present experiences helped them learn important themes/lessons such as excellence through lived experience, hard work, having a positive outlook on life, and believing in and/or knowing oneself.

The majority of interviewees learned about excellence through their parents and family members. This finding is in line with Harro's (2000) argument that parents, relatives, teachers and other people we trust are our first sources of socialization that shape our norms, values, beliefs, expectations, and dreams. Similarly, excellence was taught by parents to their children through the sharing of past lived experiences. The legacy of intergenerational knowledge being passed down from parents to their children is visible in Rosita's father, Juan. When

asked where he learned about excellence, Juan stated the following:

*"La excelencia son los valores que aprendí de mis papas de luchar y obtener lo que uno quiere."*

"Excellence are the values that I learned from my parents, to fight for and obtain what one wants."

Juan explicitly identifies his parents as the source of his own ideas about excellence. He learned about excellence from his parents and passed it on to Rosita. Other students explicitly mentioned that their interviewee had learned about excellence through experiences involving their parents both directly and indirectly. Excellence was something they learned from the people and environment they grew up in.

Cynthia, a 9th grade AVID student who interviewed her mother, recapped how her mother, Maria, learned about excellence by stating that she *"Learned from people in her life and put their stories together to make one positive definition"*. This quote exemplifies the ways the people who surrounded Maria influenced the way she thinks about and embodies excellence. The people who she surrounded herself with shared stories and experiences with her to piece

together her own “positive” definition of excellence. In this instance, we learn about excellence as a trait or practice that has been passed down through people in their lives- including people of diverse backgrounds, generations, values, and beliefs. Cynthia’s mother learned about excellence through people in her life. While participants in this study define excellence as meeting or exceeding expectations, excellence is learned from the people they surround themselves with. Furthermore, lived experience is also a source of excellence.

### **Lived Experience**

According to family members who were interviewed, they also learned about excellence through lived experience. Lived experience includes first-hand, day-to-day, past and current trials and triumphs in life in general, specifically in spaces such as home, place of employment, and country of origin. After his interview with his father Arturo, Andrew, a 9th grade soccer player, states “*Excellence is . . . learning through experience, doing what needs to be done - everyone’s life is one’s teacher*” (Andrew, Interview). Here, Andrew notes how excellence is learned through experience and “doing what needs to be done.” Andrew’s father, Arturo, reminds us that “*life is one’s teacher.*”

Similarly, as the protagonist and leading force in one’s life, oneself in conjunction with life can be a source of excellence. Jane, a 9th grade AVID student, interviewed her older sister, Stephanie. Stephanie defines herself as excellent. When asked about where her sister learned about excellence, Jane states: “*Excellence was learned from herself, her success and failure, doing it to help the family.*” Stephanie centers herself as not only being excellent, but also being the source of excellence in her life. Ultimately, the self and lived experience are inextricable from one another.

Perceptions about excellence varied among parents and family members who were interviewed because of different life experiences, values, beliefs, and intergenerational knowledge. The benefit of having students present their Loteria card, was that after hearing from each student individually, we compared how their definition of excellence matched up to that of the person they interviewed. This provided insight as to where they were learning these definitions of excellence. We were able to see how these definitions were being passed down through generations as valuable knowledge. For example, after observing and working with Lupita we noticed that for her, generational and familial knowledge played an important role. Through work she presented in class we saw how sports, like soccer, was an intergenerational

tradition in her family. The discipline she learned while playing soccer could be translated to her academics.

### **Reciprocity and Collective Good**

Latina/o/x families function on a system of interdependence as opposed to the independent and individualistic nature that is most common in American society (Leyendecker et al., 1998). Because of this, it is important to acknowledge the close relationships that these families showed through the interviews. We were able to see how their relationships with family cultivate this practice of reciprocity. After close analysis we conclude that excellence in the home is founded on the principles of reciprocity and the collective good.

Reciprocity is a mutual respect and exchange within families, collectives, or groups. This is most apparent in the daily interactions between family and extended family members. The collective good refers to the status of the family as a whole, including ensuring the well-being of family members and creating harmony in the home. For most of these families, the reasons they work so hard and go above and beyond for each other is because they understand the importance of giving back to their families as a way to keep them united and functioning. Reciprocity looked different among the student-conducted interviews, but ultimately the overarching theme was the importance of the dependence on each other through the things they do for each other on a daily basis. For Mary, a consistent participant in the classroom discussion, reciprocity is represented through mutual care for family members. She stated: *"in our home, excellence is to make sure each family member is well taken care of"* (Mary, Interview). Mary interviewed her mother where we learned about the importance of looking after one another in the home. Throughout her interview, Mary's mother mentioned the value of reciprocity multiple times. Both Mary and her mother convey the importance of family and after losing one of their family members to an illness, they hold each other closer than ever. They know that excellence to them is maintaining a strong family that is always there for one another.

For some of the family members interviewed, reciprocity also presents itself in the form of giving back to the community. Interviewees spoke on the importance of giving back to those that surround you and being grateful for all the work being done. For example, Martha, recounts her mother Maria, telling her that being excellent in the home meant to *"have a good profession to help people (community)"*. Similarly, Martha shared the same definition of excellence

as her mother in a previous course assignment that asked students where they saw excellence in their home, school, and community.

In the Latina/o/x community, family often extends beyond those that are living in the home to include community members. Familism, as a value in Latina/o/x families, “addresses multigenerational households or extended family systems” (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002, p. 13). Even though the community is not part of their immediate family, to interviewees, reciprocating love, and hard work is also visible in the community as it is in their home. Using data from the other questions asked in this study, we see that involvement and close ties to the community is vital for these families. We see more of this in Laura’s interview. Being considerate neighbors in her community is a way in which her family sees excellence reciprocated. Laura’s mother, Grecia, described excellence as “*son buenos vecinos, ayudan cuando los necesitan, somos muy respetuosos hacia lo ajeno*” (Laura’s Interview). According to Grecia, excellence involves being good neighbors, helping others when needed, and being respectful towards other people and material items that are not your own. Here we see a similar collective effort extend into the community that the student has experienced in their home environment. Being kind to one another and the willingness to lend a helping hand was Laura’s mother’s example of excellence in the community.

The idea of reciprocity being the driving force behind the practice of excellence in a Latina/o/x home makes sense. When we fully understand the dynamic of a home that depends on the collective to thrive, we understand how reciprocity becomes their form of daily interaction. This daily interaction was visible in Ms. Lopez’s classroom. Ms. Lopez understood the importance of reciprocity and familia in the lives of her students and intentionally created a learning environment grounded in these essential elements. During an activity about *Community Cultural Wealth* (Yosso, 2005), students were asked to identify examples of familial capital and they quickly identified Ms. Lopez’s classroom as family- with all confidence and certainty. Furthermore, students treat each other with respect and support one another in daily interactions, including during presentations- which can be intimidating and difficult for some students. Ultimately, reciprocity and familia is cultivated in the home and harvested in the classroom.

## Discussion

Findings from this study provide insight to the definitions, sources, and foundations of excellence in the home from the voices of family members who exemplify excellence in the home of Latina/o/x youth in Southern California. The parents, siblings and relatives that Latina/o/x youth identified as excellent not only talk about excellence, they live it in their everyday lives according to the youth. This is key in the social and political context we live in today where racist and deficit messages about Latina/o/x youth and their families are repeatedly conveyed in educational policies, practice, and the media.

To a large extent, the students' interviewees attributed the lessons learned about excellence to experiences acquired through life and/or acquired by observing people, such as family members and loved ones. This adds another dimension to the definition of "excellence" because their parents and family members place significant value on their experiences, family, and past challenges to inform their conceptualizations of excellence, which in turn influences the students. While this paper explored general understandings of excellence, it gleaned important insight about the *source* of excellence and how excellence is largely observed *from* and *through* the lives, actions, and perhaps missteps of others, especially family members.

The majority of students interviewed their parents as a form of excellence and described them as being "hard working" and "dedicated" to their work and families. While students quickly identified their parents with these characteristics, students saw their parents as being excellent only within the realm of the home prior to engaging in the interview assignment. By asking parents and relatives about their definition of excellence and where they learned it from, students create new definitions of excellence, hard work, and success that are fundamentally different from what schools define, promote, and expect excellence in education to be which helps realize and affirm their funds of knowledge. Parents who were interviewed defined excellence as "excelling in your goal." This definition of excellence is not limited to education. Rather, their definition is applicable across all walks of life. Moreover, as excellence is defined by parents and relatives, students can consider their parents, relatives, and themselves as excellent beyond the home and in the community and school. Not only do the findings inform our understanding of *what* is excellence, they also challenge us to consider *who* can be a source of excellence. The findings of this study position families as excellence in the lives of Latina/o/x high school youth. This decenters traditional forms of excellence in schools that are measured individually with letter grades, high grade point averages, passing test scores,

high school graduation, and college degrees. These forms of school approved and expected forms of excellence reflect Bourdieu's (1986) perspective of cultural capital that inherently values the capital of the dominant culture which in turn marginalizes the excellence, funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth of historically marginalized communities of color. Contrary to school expectations, Latina/o/x youth and their families are excellence.

Not only are parents and family members sources of excellence in students' homes, they are also sources of intergenerational knowledge. Findings reveal that excellence was often passed down and learned from parents and family members in the home, specifically through lived experience. Learning through lived experience is important to highlight when considering the ways K-12 schools do or do not provide students with opportunities to learn through real life experiences and welcome the real-life experiences of youth and their families as vital sources of education. While students identified family members as examples of excellence and through interviews we learned that excellence is passed down from generation to generation, they too reflect excellence as recipients and benefactors of the intergenerational knowledge in their families. Nava (2017) encourages educators to use interviews as a means for students to explore the intergenerational knowledge, histories, struggles, and successes in their families and communities. Furthermore, he affirms that an understanding of one's familial histories and intergenerational knowledge can impact aspirations for higher education and life trajectories (Nava, 2017). As we consider the positive impact that intergenerational knowledge can have on the aspirations and life trajectories of students, we must consider how we can transform attitudinal familismo, the values, beliefs and perceptions related to the collective good of the family, that is reflected in this study into behavioral familismo, the behavior and actions taken for the collective good of the family. While most scholarship on familismo in education tends to focus on the student perspective and takes place in institutions of higher education, our study contributes to literature on familismo and excellence from the perspective of students and family members within K-12 schools.

### **Implications for Practice**

Findings from this study challenge educators to consider the ways we can engage the rich sources of excellence students bring from their homes for learning in the classroom. Upon conducting the Loteria Project, specifically asking students to identify and interview someone in their home that reflected excellence, it became clear that youth are rarely asked about

excellence in the home, let alone to engage in inquiry and art-based work, and they have few opportunities to ask their parents deeply important questions about the cultural and historical legacy of their family and life experiences. Thus, we suggest ways that educators can use to draw upon our students' intergenerational legacy of excellence in the classroom.

First and foremost, educators must be intentional about engaging students with their home and community in ways that decenter normalized examples and definitions of excellence. Normalized forms of excellence include a focus on academics, specifically grades, grade point averages, as well as material and socio-economic wealth. Rather, educators can design and implement age-appropriate curriculum and activities that provide students with opportunities to understand how their experiences and background contribute to the conversation of excellence. The Loteria Card project is a practical way for students to portray some of those forms of excellence that have been instilled in them through their home life. Conducting interviews with family members and drawing their findings as a Loteria Card allows students to develop ownership of their learning, affirms their funds of knowledge, and provides students an opportunity to engage in qualitative research inquiry. Furthermore, conducting a Loteria Card Project provides students the opportunity to identify and learn about the organic intellectuals in their homes and in turn, inform teachers about the role models their students have at home. However, it is important to note that interviewees did not perceive their role in the lives of Latina/o/x students as excellence. It was not until Latina/o/x youth engaged in the interview component of the Loteria project that someone identified them as excellent.

To start, teachers can ask students and their families to talk about what makes them excellent. Students can be asked to reflect on what makes them excellent individually or in pairs and to consider how they practice excellence in their daily lives. Parents could be asked to identify what makes their child excellent during parent-teacher conferences as a way for teachers to learn about the funds of knowledge of their students. Consequently, this allows for parent-teacher conferences to focus on student assets rather than deficits and failures. In this study, many students pointed out that the work and responsibilities assumed by their parents are examples of excellence. However, excellence has become so normalized that when these parents were told that they exemplified excellence, they denied it and claimed they were simply meeting and doing their "duty". This project encourages families to see simple gestures like having dinner as a family, providing for the family, or excelling the expectations in the home as

forms of excellence. This will affirm a culture of excellence among communities that are often excluded from these definitions (Rodriguez, 2015).

Bringing conversations about excellence into the classroom can help teachers at any grade level begin to cultivate a sense of excellence in their classrooms by encouraging a family-centered relationship dynamic among their students. In other words, teachers can begin to foster excellence in their classroom by developing a sense of familismo in the classroom. In Ms. Lopez's classroom, students often expressed that they felt like they were a part of a family. They showed support for each other when it came to classroom assignments, they looked out for each other when necessary, and trusted each other enough to share their dreams for the future and their present struggles. For example, during our time working with EBHS students, we witnessed numerous student presentations in the classroom. At these times, we saw how respectful and conscious students were of one another. This was something we later learned had been fostered and expected of them by their teacher. Ms. Lopez helped her students understand the importance of a supportive classroom environment and ensured that her classroom was a safe and welcoming space for all. She also encouraged students to share their lived experiences and to apply academic content to the real world. As the findings of this study have shown, lived experiences are sources of excellence that can be passed on intergenerationally and that all can learn from. Teachers can help build a classroom environment where students feel *en familia* and where excellence is an expectation by creating community guidelines and expectations as a class. This is a simple yet uniform way of establishing guidelines and expectations that all students help create and hold each other accountable.

When we first met Ms. Lopez she was excited to work with us because she expressed the need for feedback on her teaching. Even though we were not there to evaluate her teaching we gave her feedback in the spirit of reciprocity. The feedback consisted of praise for the family-oriented environment she created in the classroom and ideas for assignments focused on excellence that she could adapt for her AVID students. Her use of the Loteria Card Project generated excitement on behalf of students that spread across campus. One of her colleagues asked if he could do the Loteria Card Project with his students too without the interview component and organized a gallery walk of his students' loteria cards at an end of the year family night. The Loteria Card Project also culminated in five of Ms. Lopez's students planning

and leading a Loteria Card workshop to youth and families at the University of California Riverside's Chicano Youth Conference.

### **Final Thoughts**

It is important to note that the definition and practices of excellence will vary by individuals, families, communities, and overall context. Understanding how youth, their families and communities define excellence and how it is learned and cultivated within and beyond the home takes time, confianza, and an open mind. If we are genuinely interested in understanding the excellence that fuels them to thrive, as educators we must be willing to invest the time and be open to learning with students, their families, and communities.

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