

The Impact of Family Obligations on Young Women's Decisions During the Transition to College: A Comparison of Latina, European American, and Asian American Students

Susan R. Sy · Aerika Brittian

Published online: 16 January 2008
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Abstract In this study, we hypothesized that (1) Latina and Asian American undergraduate women would report more frequently fulfilling family obligations than would European Americans, and (2) fulfillment of family obligations would predict students' residential and working plans for their first semester of college. Results of an online survey completed by 296 American first-year students showed that Latinas more frequently fulfilled family obligations than did Asian Americans and European Americans, although fulfilling family obligations did not influence Latinas' residential or working plans. European American students who more frequently fulfilled family obligations were more likely to plan to live at home, and Asian American students who more frequently fulfilled family obligations planned to work fewer hours during their first semester at college.

Keywords Family obligations · College transition · Ethnicity

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which fulfilling family obligations predicts two important decisions many young women make when transitioning into college: where to live and how much to work. Using an ecological systems perspective (Bronfenbrenner and Morris

2006), we postulate that the family microsystem continues to influence undergraduate women, particularly those of Asian and Latino descent, as they transition into college. We use closed-ended surveys to examine the relationship between fulfilling family obligations and students' residential and working plans for their first semester in college. By conducting our analyses separately for three different ethnic groups, we explore whether or not students of ethnic minority status, specifically Asian American and Latina students, experience certain aspects of the college transition similarly to students of the dominant group. Although our study is conducted in the United States, the results potentially could be useful for understanding the experiences of ethnic minority students in many different countries.

The typical expectation from dominant society in the USA and from most institutions of higher education is that entering college students should begin to separate from family and become self-reliant and independent. However, these demands are not always consistent with the expectations many parents place on their children to prioritize family needs over individual needs (Ginorio et al. 1995). Particularly in Latino and Asian American groups, both of which tend to be characterized by family interdependence (Marín and Marín 1991; Markus and Kitayama 1991), the extent to which adolescents have to fulfill obligations to their family may impact their decisions during the transition to college, including where to live and how much to work. For example, students who have had to fulfill family obligations on a regular basis in the past may be more likely to plan to stay at home or work less during college so they can continue their contributory role in the family. Although existing research has examined the impact of family obligations on emotional well-being and academic outcomes among adolescents and young adults (Fuligni and Pedersen 2002; Sy 2006; Tseng 2004), the extent to which

S. R. Sy (✉)
Psychology Department, California State University,
Fullerton, CA, USA
e-mail: susansy@fullerton.edu

A. Brittian
Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development,
Tufts University,
Medford, MA, USA

family obligations influence adolescents' transition-related decisions has received little attention.

Furthermore, in combination with the high value placed on close family connections, adolescent daughters from certain ethnic groups may face additional pressure stemming from gendered expectations to take on the role as family caretaker (Cammarota 2004). For example, the Latino cultural value *marianismo* emphasizes the self-sacrificing role of women and highlights the woman's role as family caretaker. Although the expectation that young women should balance their professional and family responsibilities is reflected in dominant US society, *marianismo* suggests that women are to be submissive, pursue the traditional gender roles of "girlfriend, wife and mother" over professional roles, and ultimately become *mujeres de hogar* (women of the home) (Cammarota 2004). The underlying assumption stemming from this cultural value is that adolescent girls will go directly from one family to the next. In other words, they will leave their family of origin only when they get married to begin caring for their own family, thus emphasizing their primary role as caretaker. This expectation may present a challenge for daughters who want to focus on their education and career in young adulthood. Parents that continue to view their daughter as family-oriented caretakers while she makes the transition to college may place additional pressure on her to continue to fulfill her family obligations. By "family obligations," we mean that daughters continue to contribute to the daily workings of the family, including contributing to family finances, doing household chores, taking care of siblings and elders, translating for parents (when relevant), and spending time together. More specifically related to the current study, women's prior experiences having to fulfill family obligations may influence their decisions regarding where to live (e.g., should they stay with their family in order to more easily continue fulfilling their obligations?) or how much to work (e.g., should they work less to make time for their family obligations?) as they make the transition into college.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological systems theory, the main framework upon which the study is designed, suggests that multiple settings influence an individual's development, and that these settings interact and change over time (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006). Individuals are influenced by their immediate settings (e.g., family, school), which in turn are nested in social, economic, political and cultural settings. Ecological theory assumes that individual development cannot fully be understood outside the settings in which individuals are embedded. Furthermore, these settings interact such that experiences in one microsystem (e.g., family) will influence an individual's experiences in other

microsystems (e.g., school, work). The current study examines the influence of young women's fulfillment of family obligations (family setting) on their decisions regarding residence and employment during their transition to college (school and work settings). We also recognize the role of other background characteristics at the individual level (prior academic achievement, generation attending college) and the family level (family income, parent education) in explaining these decisions. The majority of research examining influences on young women's college transition has focused on better understanding the school setting, but has not examined in much detail the extent to which they are embedded in their family setting, and the impact this may have on their transition to college.

Transition to College

One hallmark of emerging adulthood in contemporary American society is the attempt to gain autonomy and financial independence from one's family of origin. According to Arnett (2001), college students believe the transition to adulthood involves accepting greater personal responsibility, making more independent choices, and becoming self-sufficient. They also often equate adulthood with living away from home for the first time and beginning to take on more financial responsibilities (Watts and Pickering 2000). In addition to increased responsibility, young adults are afforded opportunities to establish an identity. Young women today are offered more choices to pursue personal fulfillment than in the past (Cote 2000). For example, they are able to choose to pursue education before establishing a family or prolong marriage to establish a career. For many adolescents, the increase in personal responsibilities and independent decisions associated with emerging adulthood comes as they make the transition to college. While not all college students choose to move away from home or work while attending college, decisions about residence and working are issues that all students must consider when making the transition to college.

Researchers examining the effects of college students' decisions regarding residence have shown that students who live away from home demonstrate greater academic success (Pascarella et al. 1998), have better coping strategies (Jordyn and Byrd 2003), are more likely to establish an adult identity (Jordyn and Byrd 2003), and experience an easier adjustment to college (Mooney et al. 1991). Of particular interest for the current study, Mooney et al. (1991) focused specifically on young women. The authors found that women attending college demonstrated better college adjustment when they perceived their distance from home to be "just right." However, Mooney et al. (1991) did not find any relationship between actual distance from home and adjustment to college. Thus, the existing literature

on residential decisions, especially among ethnic minority women, is very limited. Furthermore, despite the connections between living away from home and college students' academic, social, and personal outcomes, we could find no studies that examined factors predicting young women's decisions about their residence during the first year of college.

Researchers examining the effects of college students' decisions regarding employment have found both negative and positive influences on students' adjustment and educational outcomes. More specifically, students who work while attending college have more difficulty adjusting socially to the new environment, but graduate at the same rate as do unemployed students (Woosley 2003). Oftentimes students who work face a double-edged sword. Working allows them the opportunity to attend college by providing necessary financial support, but the number of hours they work negatively impacts academic performance (Watts 2002). Furthermore, Pascarella et al. (1998) found that full-time employment, defined as more than 20 h per week, had negative long-term effects on several aspects of college students' cognitive development, including reading comprehension and critical thinking. These studies suggest that students' transition-related decisions are key factors in their development and adjustment to the college environment. Less well understood, however, are the factors that shape these key decisions prior to the transition. Why do some students plan to live at home and others do not? Why do some students intend to work long hours during college while others intend to work less? There are a few seemingly obvious answers to these questions, such as the family's socioeconomic status, but the purpose of the present study is to examine another family factor that may shape these important decisions among college-bound students.

Family Obligations

One aspect of the family setting is an individual's obligation (or lack of obligation) to help and support her family, which includes both the individual's perceptions of how much she should support her family, as well as the actual fulfillment of behavioral demands from her family (Fuligni and Pedersen 2002; Tseng 2004). Family obligations, either as perceived obligations or behavioral demands, may be particularly important for women from ethnic minority backgrounds. For example, the cultural value of *familism*, which emphasizes family interdependence, has been identified as a value characteristic of many Latino and Asian American populations (Chao and Tseng 2002; Vega 1990), and may explain the greater relevance of family obligations for children and adolescents from these ethnic groups. In contrast to the values of individuality and independence emphasized in dominant US culture, *familism* requires an individual family member to put the needs of

the family first, even if it means making personal sacrifices. Latino young adults, in particular, tend to experience a greater sense of family obligation when compared with young adults from other ethnic backgrounds (Fuligni and Pedersen 2002). Furthermore, family obligations tend to fall more often and more heavily on women than on men (Raffaelli and Ontai 2004; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001); thus, as previously mentioned, daughters who have had to fulfill such obligations during adolescence may feel additional pressure during the transition to college because of the need to balance the new demands of college and their continuing role as a family caretaker. Those who more often fulfilled family obligations in adolescence may decide to stay at home or work fewer hours, if possible, while attending college. These decisions would allow them to continue fulfilling their behavioral demands to their family more easily.

Although prior research has not examined the influence of family obligations on students' decisions regarding residence and employment during the college transition, there are a number of other outcome variables that have been associated with family obligations among college students. For example, Fuligni and his colleagues identified college persistence as an important outcome associated with family obligations (Fuligni and Pedersen 2002; Fuligni et al. 2005). More specifically, they found that young adults who did poorly in high school were more likely to persist in their post-secondary education if they had a stronger sense of family obligation, although they were more likely to do so at 2-year rather than 4-year colleges. These studies also showed that young adults, regardless of ethnic background, demonstrated healthier psychological outcomes if they strongly emphasized their role in the family to support, respect, and assist their family members. However, students' *perception* or *value* of close family ties is not necessarily the same as the obligations they actually have to fulfill. Tseng (2004) found that the behavioral demands to fulfill family obligations had a negative impact on achievement among an ethnically diverse sample of late adolescents and young adults. This statistical relationship was particularly pronounced for youth from immigrant families, most of whom were Latino or Asian American, who experienced greater behavioral demands than did youth from US-born families. However, in a study focusing specifically on women attending college, Sy (2006) found that Latina first- and second-year college students who spent more time with their family (one form of family obligation) while attending college had higher achievement and lower school-related stress. Taken together, these results suggest that both perceived family obligations and behavioral demands can influence students' college achievement and psychological adjustment, yet it is not clear how the demand to fulfill family obligations influences the decisions adolescents must make as they enter college.

Study Goals

The purpose of this study is to examine how young women's fulfillment of family obligations during their senior year in high school influences their decisions about where they plan to reside and how many hours they plan to work during their first semester of college. Our study examines the following hypotheses:

1. Compared to European American students, Asian American and Latina students will report having fulfilled family obligations more frequently when they were seniors in high school.
2. The fulfillment of family obligations during their senior year in high school will significantly predict students' decisions about work and where to live during their first semester of college for Asian American, Latina, and European American women.
 - a. Students' fulfillment of family obligations during their senior year of high school will negatively predict the number of hours they plan to work, such that those who more often fulfilled family obligations will plan to work fewer hours.
 - b. Students who report having more often fulfilled family obligations will be more likely to plan to live at home with their family in their first semester of college.

Method

Participants

Participants included 296 Latina, European American, and Asian American young women enrolled for their first semester at a large public university in Southern California. One month prior to beginning their first semester at college, all first-time first-year undergraduate women (i.e., non-transfer and non-returning students) were sent an email invitation to participate in an online survey. As an incentive to participate, all students who filled out the survey were entered into a raffle for three prizes (an Apple iPod and two \$100 Visa gift cards). Of the original 1,234 students who were invited to participate in the study, 355 filled out the survey (29% response rate). Comparisons between respondents and non-respondents showed no differences in measures of family income and parent education. However, average high school GPA was slightly higher for respondents ($M=3.33$, $SD=.38$) than for non-respondents ($M=3.27$, $SD=.40$), $t_{(1,232)}=2.31$, $p<.05$.

For the current study, we included only those participants who identified as Latina (30%), Asian American

(20%), or European American (41%). European American students were slightly over-represented in the sample relative to their overall population at the university, while our sample of Asian American and Latina students accurately reflected the university's enrollment of Asian American and Latina first-time first-year students. One-third of the sample reported was among the first generation in their family to attend college (i.e., neither parents nor grandparents attended any college). Among first generation college attendees, 52% identified as Latina, 22% identified as Asian American, and 26% identified as European American. With respect to their generation in the USA, the majority of Asian American and Latina women were either themselves foreign-born (first generation) or had at least one parent who was foreign-born (second generation), while the majority of European American women had parents who both were born in the USA (third generation or higher).

Measures

Family Obligations

Items measuring the frequency with which participants fulfilled family obligations were adapted from a scale originally developed to measure young adults' expectations for how much they feel they should support their families (see Fuligni et al. 1999). The original scale asked participants how often they feel they should engage in each of 11 different behaviors. This question was adapted to assess respondents' actual behaviors rather than their expectations by asking, "How often in the past year have you done each of the following?" The phrase *in the past year* was added to focus participants' responses on the degree to which they fulfilled family obligations during their senior year in high school. Sample items include "helping out around the house," "taking care of siblings," and "spending time at home with family." Participants responded using a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*daily*). Responses for all items were averaged to create a single score for family obligations (Cronbach's $\alpha=.77$).

Work Hours and Residential Plans

Participants were asked to indicate the number of hours they planned to work during their first semester in college. Response options included 0 (0 h), 1 (1–5 h), 2 (6–10 h), 3 (11–15 h), 4 (16–20 h), 5 (21–25 h), 6 (26–30 h), and 7 (30+ h). Participants also indicated where they plan to live during the Fall semester. For purposes of the present study, responses were collapsed into two categories: plan to live at home (1) and plan to live away from home (0).

Demographics

Family income and parents' highest level of education were obtained from the university's academic records for enrolled students. Family income ranged from 1 (*Less than \$24,000 per year*) to 6 (*\$72,000 or more per year*). Parent education ranged from 1 (*no high school*) to 7 (*postgraduate*) for each parent. Parent education for mother and father were averaged to create a single item representing parent education. Ethnic group was determined by a closed-ended single item asking participants with which ethnic group they most strongly identified.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Because it is possible that ethnic group differences in key variables could be a function of generation in the USA rather than ethnicity, we first conducted mean-level comparisons by generation. We conducted these analyses with Asian American and Latina samples only, because there were not enough first or second generation European American students to compare means across generation status within this group ($N=15$, combined). Furthermore, the Latina sample did not include enough first generation participants ($N=4$) and the Asian American sample did not include enough third or higher generation participants ($N=3$) to include in the comparisons. Results revealed only two significant differences. Parent education was higher among third generation Latina students ($M=4.42$, $SD=1.04$) than second generation Latina students ($M=2.95$, $SD=1.66$), $t(76)=4.05$, $p<.001$. Family income was higher among second generation Asian American students ($M=4.15$, $SD=1.78$) than first generation Asian American students ($M=2.15$, $SD=1.63$), $t(45)=3.52$, $p<.01$. Because no other comparisons of key study variables differed by generation status for these two ethnic groups, we did not include generation in the USA as a variable in any further analyses.

Although not included in our hypotheses, we compared all key study variables other than family obligations (see below) across ethnic groups using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The omnibus test indicated significant group differences ($F(8, 496)=11.73$, $p<.001$). We therefore followed up with individual ANOVAs testing specific group differences on each variable (Field 2005) with Bonferroni adjustments to account for multiple comparisons. Results indicated that European American students had higher family income, parent education, and high school GPA than did both Asian American and Latina students, and Asian American students had higher parent education than did Latina students (see Table 1).

Because residential status was measured as a dichotomous variable, we examined ethnic group differences using chi-square analyses. Results showed that the percentage of students who planned to live at home during their first semester of college did not significantly differ between Asian American students (68%) and Latina (76%) or European American (56%) students. However, a higher percentage of Latina students planned to live at home than did European American students, $\chi^2(1)=8.76$, $p<.01$.

Hypothesis 1: Ethnic Group Comparison of Family Obligations

We used one-way analysis of variance to compare ethnic groups on the fulfillment of family obligations (see Table 1). Based on Hypothesis 1, planned contrasts were conducted to test for differences between Latina and European American students and between Asian American and European American students. Results indicated that Latina students more frequently fulfilled family obligations during their senior year in high school than did European American students, but Asian American and European American students did not differ. Examination of a post-hoc contrast with an adjusted alpha level of .01 revealed that Latina students more frequently fulfilled family obligations than did Asian American students.

Hypothesis 2a: Family Obligations and Intended Work Hours

Before conducting the regression analyses to predict intended work hours, our examination of the normality of the variable showed a bimodal distribution and, hence, a high degree of kurtosis ($-.89$, standard error $=.28$). Upon further examination, we discovered that the primary cause of the non-normality was the number of students who did not plan to work at all (21%). However, if these students were removed from the analysis, the intended work hours variable was normally distributed (kurtosis $=-.22$, standard error $=.32$). As a result we included in the regression analyses only those students who planned to work in order to determine if fulfillment of family obligations significantly predicted the number of hours students planned to work, as stated in Hypothesis 2a. Before conducting this analysis, we first compared those who planned to work with those who did not plan to work in terms of fulfilling family obligations. There were no significant differences.

Because all variables in the analysis are continuous, we conducted ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses to identify significant predictors of the number of hours students intended to work during their first semester of college (see Table 2). We conducted all analyses separately by ethnic group in order to determine whether or not these

Table 1 Mean comparisons of key study variables by ethnic group.

	European American	Asian American	Latina	ANOVA results		
				F	p<	Group comparisons
Family Income	5.08 (1.43)	3.59 (1.96)	3.42 (1.91)	28.33	.001	E>L,A
Parent Education	5.02 (1.31)	4.11 (1.55)	3.36 (1.70)	35.85	.001	E>A>L
High School GPA	3.42 (.40)	3.20 (.36)	3.26 (.33)	10.74	.001	E>L,A
Family Obligations	2.55 (.53)	2.54 (.56)	2.84 (.51)	9.83	.001	L>E,A
Intended Work Hours	5.04 (1.41)	4.60 (1.51)	4.91 (1.21)	1.74	ns	

Means are presented first, with standard deviations in parentheses. Family income ranged from 1 (*Less than \$24,000 per year*) to 6 (*\$72,000 or more per year*). Parent education ranged from 1 (*no high school*) to 7 (*postgraduate*). High School GPA ranged from 2.44 to 4.35. Family obligations ranged from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*daily*). Intended work hours ranged from 1 (1–5 h) to 7 (30+ h).

E European American, L Latina, A Asian American

statistical relationships vary by ethnic group. Using a hierarchical model, we included four explanatory variables in the first step and then added fulfillment of family obligations in the second step. Consistent with Hypothesis 2a, this approach allowed us to determine whether or not the key predictor variable of interest, fulfillment of family obligations, explained significant variance in the dependent variable above and beyond other demographic variables that we expected to be related to students' intended work hours. The demographic variables included family income, parent education, generation in college, and high school GPA. The first step did not significantly explain variance in intended work hours for any of the ethnic groups. However, adding fulfillment of family obligations in the second step did result in a significant *R* squared change among Asian American students (change in $R^2=.17$, $p<.05$), with the final model explaining 29% of variance in intended work hours. Although the overall model did not reach significance, we ran a more parsimonious model including only those explanatory variables that reached significance (family income, parent education, and family obligations). This trimmed model significantly explained variance in intended work hours among Asian Americans, $F(3, 43)=$

3.60, $p<.05$, $R^2=.20$, with fulfillment of family obligations again emerging as the strongest explanatory variable ($\beta=-.35$, $p<.05$). Adjusting for all other variables in the model, Asian American women who reported more often fulfilling family obligations when they were seniors in high school planned to work fewer hours than did Asian American women who reported less often fulfilling family obligations.

Hypothesis 2b: Family Obligations and Residential Plans

Because the dependent variable of residential plans was dichotomous (plan to live at home vs. plan to live away from home), we used exact multivariate logistic regression analyses (Stevens 1996) to predict students' residential plans for their first semester at college. We again used a hierarchical approach to isolate the degree to which fulfillment of family obligations explains variation in the dependent variable. We included the same four background variables in the first step (parent education, family income, college generation, high school GPA), which did not reach significance for any ethnic group. Adding the fulfillment of family obligations variable in the second step resulted in a significantly better model fit for European American

Table 2 Hierarchical multi-variate linear regression analyses predicting intended number of work hours by ethnic group.

Predictors	European American		Asian American		Latina	
	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Step 1						
Family income	-.08	-.62	.03	.17	-.19	-1.31
Parent education	-.33*	-2.09	.27	.32	-.06	-.33
College generation	-.23	-1.64	.13	.65	.06	.31
High school GPA	.01	.12	.27	1.64	-.07	-.56
Step 2						
Family income	-.08	-.66	-.08	-.47	-.19	-1.29
Parent education	-.31	-1.92	.32	1.76	-.07	-.40
College generation	-.22	-1.51	.21	1.22	.05	.26
High school GPA	.01	.10	.23	1.61	-.06	-.46
Family obligations	-.06	-.53	-.41**	-2.87	-.11	-.87

* $p<.05$

** $p<.01$.

Table 3 Hierarchical exact multivariate logistic regression analyses predicting residential plans by ethnic group.

Predictors	European American			Asian American			Latina		
	Parameter estimate	Wald χ^2	OR	Parameter estimate	Wald χ^2	OR	Parameter estimate	Wald χ^2	OR
Step 1									
Family income	.23	1.92	1.26	.09	.19	1.09	.03	.03	1.03
Parent education	-.42	3.94*	.66	.03	.01	1.03	.07	.10	1.07
College generation	-.05	.01	.96	-.41	.25	.66	1.05	1.96	2.85
High school GPA	.21	.16	1.24	-.90	1.01	.40	1.78	3.46	5.93
Step 2									
Family income	.39	3.98*	1.47	.07	.13	1.08	.01	.01	1.01
Parent education	-.74	8.13**	.48	.08	.07	1.08	.09	.15	1.09
College generation	-.78	1.20	.46	-.36	.18	.70	1.08	2.04	2.94
High school GPA	.14	.05	1.15	-.90	.99	.41	1.78	3.43	5.92
Family obligations	1.88	13.05***	6.52	-.61	1.10	.54	.30	.33	1.34

OR Odds ratio

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

students, $\chi^2(5) = 22.80$, $p < .001$, with a decrease in the -2 log likelihood of 16.66, $p < .001$ (see Table 3). Adjusting for all other variables in the model, European American women who more often fulfilled family obligations were more likely to live at home than were European American women who less often fulfilled family obligations. The final models for Asian American women and Latinas were not significant.

Discussion

There are many factors that influence the decisions young women must make as they transition into college and young adulthood. The purpose of this study was to further examine one aspect of the family setting, the fulfillment of family obligations, as a predictor of young women's decisions regarding where to live and how many hours to work during their first semester at college. Furthermore, our analyses provide insight into the ways in which these relationships vary by ethnicity.

We found partial support for Hypothesis 1, which stated that Latina and Asian American students would more often fulfill family obligations than would European American students. Although Latina students reported more often fulfilling family obligations than did European American students, we found no differences between Asian American and European American students. Fulfillment of family obligations did not differ by generation status, and there were very few first generation Latina students in our sample. These results suggest that the fulfillment of family obligations is not just a function of being from a family that recently immigrated (Ginorio et al. 1995). Third or higher

generation Latinas fulfilled family obligations just as often as did second generation Latinas, and these behavioral demands were greater than for the Asian American women, whose families more recently immigrated. If a daughter's fulfillment of family obligations can be seen as one indicator of Latino families' emphasis on interdependence (Fuligni et al. 1999; Vázquez García et al. 2000), it is apparent that this value does not diminish the longer the family has lived in the USA.

We also found partial support for Hypotheses 2a and 2b. Hypothesis 2a stated that the fulfillment of family obligations would negatively predict the number of hours students plan to work in their first college semester. Our results supported this hypothesis, but only for Asian American students. Hypothesis 2b stated that students who more frequently fulfilled family obligations would be more likely to plan to live at home during their first college semester. Again, our results supported this hypothesis, but only for European American students.

Taken together, these results show that in comparison to Asian American and European American students, Latina students reported more often fulfilling family obligations when they were seniors in high school; however, the fulfillment of family obligations predicted students' transition-related decisions only among Asian American and European American students. These results highlight the role of ethnicity in the relationship between the fulfillment of family obligations and the decisions adolescents make when transitioning into college. Below we provide several possible explanations for our findings.

It may be that fulfilling family obligations is considered "the norm" among daughters from Latino families; there-

fore, engaging in these behaviors does not have as much of an impact on their transition-related decisions. Similarly, if European American or Asian American adolescents do not often fulfill family obligations, then engaging in these behaviors may have a greater impact on their decisions. However, it remains unclear as to why this would impact one type of decision for European American women (where to live) and a different type of decision for Asian American women (how much to work). One possible explanation is that the fulfillment of family obligations, as an indicator of the underlying cultural value of interdependence, serves as a protective factor for Asian American women and as a risk factor for European American women.

Family obligations may be a protective factor for Asian American women, leading them to work fewer hours. As previously mentioned, prior studies have linked more work hours to several negative outcomes among college students (e.g., Watts 2002; Woosley 2003). It is possible that Asian American women's fulfillment of behavioral demands protects them from these negative outcomes by limiting the amount of hours they plan to work. This explanation suggests a mediating relationship that could not be examined in the current study, but that deserves further attention in the literature. While family obligations may serve as a protective factor for Asian American women, our results suggest they may have the opposite effect for European American women. The degree to which European American women fulfilled family obligations during their senior year seemed to keep them from planning to live away from home. As with the explanation above, another possible mediating relationship may be at work here. Since prior studies link living at home to more negative outcomes (Jordyn and Byrd 2003; Mooney et al. 1991), fulfillment of family obligations may place European American women at risk for more negative outcomes. Researchers have suggested that most European American students in the USA come from families that more highly value independence and individuality over interdependence and connectedness (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Thus, it seems reasonable that those European American women who fulfill more family obligations (an indicator of interdependence) do not experience the benefits of this family connectedness that Asian Americans do.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

It is likely that the type of school students plan to attend played a role in the kinds of transition-related decisions that we examined in this study. All participants in our study were from a large public university with a high percentage of commuting students. Because on-campus living options are somewhat limited, it may be that living at home is a more realistic option. Thus, it is not clear how family

obligations would affect (a) students' decision to attend a residential or commuter college and (b) residential students' decision regarding how many hours to work.

A second limitation of our study is that the sample included only first-time (i.e., non-transfer, non-returning) freshmen. Students who already have had experience at another college or university may be better prepared to balance the multiple demands of family, work, and school, and their prior behavioral demands may not have as much of an impact on their decisions.

Our examination of young women's *plans* to work did not allow us to assess the degree to which fulfillment of family obligations influences their actual work hours once they enter college. However, the purpose of the current study was to examine young women's transition-related decisions, and not their actual behaviors, regarding work and residence. While we recognize that students' plans to work may not be an accurate reflection of their actual work hours, prior studies have shown that adolescents' plans for working show equal or stronger connections to academic outcomes as do their actual work hours (Bachman et al. 2003). Thus, we believe this to be an important and interesting construct to examine, particularly since much of the existing literature on college students' employment has focused exclusively on their actual work hours and has neglected their plans for working.

While the present study provides greater insight into factors affecting young women's decision to live at home or away from home, we recognize that there is great variation in students' living situations during college. Future work should examine factors influencing students' residential decisions among those not living at home (e.g., on campus vs. apartment living). Furthermore, while it is possible that family obligations would have no impact on those students who chose to live away from home due to geographical considerations (i.e., they live too far to commute), we do not have data to assess the distance between students' home and the university. However, data that we collected separately from a comparable sample attending the same university showed that among those students who lived away from home, over 80% had family that lived in the same county or metro area as they did.

The purpose of our study was to better understand the college experience of women, and we therefore did not include comparative analyses by gender. Feminist theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the "variety of real life stories women provide about themselves" (Lugones and Spelman 1990, p.21), particularly among those women who have been neglected in traditional psychological and sociological research, including underrepresented women in higher education (Rodriguez et al. 2000). Because feminist theories "put women at the center" (Marshall and Rossman 1999), our study did not seek to compare the experiences of

men and women, but to more fully understand the lives of young women in a holistic fashion.

Finally, a major strength of our study was the ethnically diverse sample, which allowed us to better understand the ways in which structural relationships between variables differ across ethnic groups. Although it is inaccurate to assume that all members of a given ethnic group will have the same experiences, our study does begin to shed light on the factors that potentially could highlight within-group variation. While we recognize that other factors, such as acculturation of recently immigrated families, may influence family obligations as well as decisions during the college transition, we do not examine these constructs in the current paper. Future studies should include a wider array of such factors that may further explain the ways in which family obligations influence young women during the college transition. More specifically, additional qualitative work and longitudinal studies may provide insight into the reasons why transition-related decisions among Asian American and European American young women are influenced by their prior fulfillment of family obligations.

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