

Reaching for the American Dream:

The Role of Parental Mobility on the Children
of Immigrants in Higher Education

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Abstract:

This study compares children of Latino immigrants whose parents have experienced upward mobility to those whose parents have not experienced upward mobility, with a focus on three stages of these students' educational experiences: their pre-college experience, their adaptation to the university, and their future prospects. Analyzing data from multiple in-depth interviews with twelve incoming freshmen at UCLA and at least one of each of their parents, this study demonstrates that even when the economic differences are narrow, there are visible differences in the way these children experience their education and adapt to mainstream institutions. First, material resources available to youth, such as safe environments, better resourced secondary programs, school supplies, and other resources significantly affected how these youths experienced their education. Second, parental optimism rooted in experiences with upward mobility lent credence to the American system of opportunities, making these parents optimistic about their own endeavors and their aspirations for their children.

LITERATURE

The last few decades have witnessed a growing concern for the prospects of the “new second generation” in the United States. The post-1965 immigration, most notably from Asia and Latin America has given rise to a record number of children. Many of the “new second generation”¹ are school-aged children who in 2001, averaged the age of 10 (López and Stanton-Salazar 2001). According to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (1999), about one of every five individuals under 18 is an immigrant or is the child of immigrants. Given the average age and size of the “new second generation,” much of the literature on this group focuses on educational attainment and patterns of assimilation into the American mainstream. Latinos, particularly Mexicans and Central Americans, are not only lagging behind their Asian counterparts in both educational attainment and upward socioeconomic mobility (López and Stanton-Salazar 2001; Ortiz 1996; López, Popkin, & Telles 1996), but they are also one of the most resistant groups to assimilation tendencies with a preference for ethnic labels (Ortiz 1996).

From the field of sociology, segmented assimilation theory is one of the dominant frameworks employed in analyzing the new second generation’s pattern of assimilation into the American mainstream (Portes & Zhou 1993; Portes & Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut & Portes 2001). Segmented assimilation theory builds on “status attainment” literature that shows that parental socioeconomic status (SES measured by education, occupation, and income, with parental education being the most significant) has the most powerful effect on child educational attainment and consequently the child’s future occupation (Kao & Tienda 1995; Portes and Rumbaut 1990; Blau & Duncan 1967). This theory argues that because the historical contingencies that facilitated the assimilation of past waves of peasant immigrants do not exist anymore, the children of peasant immigrants of today with low levels of human and financial capital are destined to a different pattern of assimilation than immigrants of the past.

Portes & Zhou (1993) cite two particularly important differences between past migration waves and the current (post-1965) wave. Namely, the descendents of European immigrants of the past, although they had cultural differences, were “uniformly white” and they entered at a time when the U.S. was an industrial power and offered manufacturing jobs with little education required and plenty opportunities for upward mobility (Portes & Zhou 1993; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Today, the new second generation consists mostly of black,

Asian, and mestizo children for whom embracing American culture is not enough to become “indistinguishable” Americans. Additionally, today, the U.S. has a bifurcated labor market that consists of a primary sector characterized by “knowledge-intensive or capital intensive” jobs that offer high wages, opportunities for upward mobility, and economic stability and a secondary sector characterized by “low-skilled labor intensive work” with low wages and little opportunity for upward mobility (Zhou & Kim 2003). Thus, Portes and colleagues argue that for the children of non-white working-class immigrants who come with low-levels of human capital, weak community ties, and face hostile government policies and societal attitudes, the traditional “straight-line assimilation” (Gans 1992) pattern simply does not apply and unless these children of immigrants are willing to take undesirable low-wage and low-status jobs, they have to access higher education. This scenario is especially applicable to working-class Latino immigrants (especially Mexicans and Central Americans) because this group tends to have low levels of education (on the average) and tends to be from working-class backgrounds (Sabagh & Bozorgmehr 2003, Ortiz 1996; Waldinger & Bozorgmehr 1996).

López and Stanton-Salazar (2001) argue alongside Portes and colleagues, that the labor market conditions that facilitated second- and third-generation mobility in the past are simply not available anymore and they note that in the 1990s Latinos tended to be involved in less mobile occupations in construction, service industries, and trade. While focusing on the Mexican case, they hold that as some adult immigrants experience greater difficulty in achieving any upward mobility and the longer they live in the U.S., they are more likely to learn about and internalize their “racialized and stigmatized” position in the United States. They cite that this parental experience can depress the educational expectations for their children (see also Gibson and Ogbu 1991) and influence their children’s identity and perceptions of discrimination. Thus López and Stanton-Salazar argue that a “special burden of the new Mexican-American second generation is that they inherit this preexisting stigma, and it is reinforced by their own experiences” (2001). Their analysis draws attention to the importance of understanding the long term effects of parental upward mobility and experiences in the United States on their children’s ethnic identity *and* their ability to participate and adapt to mainstream institutions such as high school and college. The new Latino second generation’s educational attainment is especially important, because as one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in the U.S., its fate will have a significant impact on society as a whole (Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Unfortunately, thus far most of the literature on the second generation tends to focus

on primary and secondary school experiences and access to higher education, and few studies focus on the second generation in college.

In contrast, in the field of education there is a wealth of literature that not only looks at primary, secondary school, and college experience. Unfortunately, much of the literature in Education tends to focus almost exclusively on Mexican-origin youth (e.g. Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder 2004; Valenzuela 1999; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch 1995; Stanton-Salazar 1997), does not disaggregate by generations in the United States, and tends to only employ quantitative methodology. Recent qualitative research has given more attention to the Latino experience (not only Mexican-origin) in four-year universities. These qualitative studies have been able to elaborate on the findings of quantitative research as well as offer a better understanding of Latino secondary-school preparation, college choice process, and college expectations, but most of the literature on this topic comes from a perspective that tends to conflate the “new Latino second generation” with the children of native Latinos in the United States. Consequently, there is a gap in the literature in the field of education as well. More attention needs to be given to the “new second generation” in college.

Research shows that there are many qualitative differences between the children of immigrants and the third and subsequent generations. Among these differences are migration status, language, and what many term the “immigrant drive” that many first and second generation immigrants display. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) have found that greater family economic achievement and security sometimes lead to lower aspirations among secure and acculturated children, while legal insecurity and a precarious economic situation spur their ambition for many of the children of immigrants. Similarly, Stanton-Salazar (2001) also found that immigrant parents use their migration stories and their experiences in marginal occupations to push their children to pursue an education. Additionally, he found that these exhortations had a powerful effect on youth and that they felt a powerful drive to succeed.

Stanton-Salazar’s *Manufacturing Hope and Despair* (2001) is a notable contribution to the literature, because it not only addresses the constraints that inhibit Mexican-origin adolescents from constructing the social networks necessary for educational attainment, but also sheds light on the strategies both parents and children employ to access higher education (distinguishing between native Latinos and immigrants). In this study, Stanton-Salazar outlines the strategies immigrant parents employ to convey to their children the importance of

school and the social networks some youth create with institutional agents that promote success in school.

Using mixed methods, Stanton-Salazar exposes the process by which low SES parents (citing their sacrifices of migration, the indignities of their employment, and their children's greater opportunities) and teachers (with affective relationships and teacher-student bonding) in poorly funded schools are affecting youth in their decision to pursue a college education.

Given that studies have shown that parental involvement and support with educational endeavors are strongly linked to the perceived benefits of education (in the form of stable and well paying employment/careers), it is especially important that we explore how parental experiences with upward mobility shape their perception of their children's opportunities with an education (Ceja 2004). Borrowing from the literature that explores the role that teacher-student relationship, parent-child relationships, and parental socioeconomic mobility this study explores what resources a group of twelve children of immigrants from Los Angeles's inner-city, used to access higher education and how parent's experienced mobility influence their experiences in the college setting and their future outlook. That is, do children of immigrants whose parents have had a favorable experience in the U.S. (in the form of upward mobility and a positive social reception) differ from their peers whose parents have faced discrimination and have had little (if any) upward mobility in their ethnic identity and their experience with academic institutions?

CURRENT STUDY

This study compares new Latino second generation incoming freshmen at UCLA whose parents have experienced some upward mobility to those whose parents have not experience upward mobility. **First, I will analyze how parental upward mobility influenced their children's chances for educational attainment in their pre-college experience.** I anticipate that students whose parents have experienced some upward mobility and who have seen material rewards for their education will have greater support (social, economic, and emotional) for their children's educational endeavors than those who have experienced little or no upward mobility. Additionally, I anticipate that these two sets of students differ in their relationship with their parents. I hypothesize that students whose parents have experienced some upward mobility and are more optimistic about returns on education and the American system of opportunities, rely less on individual institutional agents and not only benefit from better academic programs and neighborhoods, but also place their parents and their

attainment within the context of their migration history as their primary role models. In contrast, students whose parents have experienced less upward mobility and are thus less optimistic about the American system of opportunities and the benefits of education, have had to rely on other sources of support. For these students, I anticipate that strong teacher-student relationships replace the parent-child bond their peers have with upwardly mobile parents for support, information, and guidance in their academic endeavors and as their mentors and models of behavior. This implies that for these students, the types of high school programs in which they participated, their perception about their attainment within the U.S. context (normal or exceptional), and their future outlooks (likely occupations and self-identity within the U.S.) differ, largely depending on the parent's experienced mobility.

Second, I will explore how the children of upwardly mobile immigrant parents compare to their counterparts from less mobile parents in their adaptation to the university. I compare their actual participation in campus life (friends, clubs, and resources utilized), family life, and their primary concerns at the university (such as economic resources, class differences, saliency of ethnicity, and other responsibilities). Additionally, I explore how their relationship with their parents (those who have experienced upward mobility and those who have not) affects their trust in American institutions, as well as their ability to make new friends, and their identity. I hypothesize that this is where these two groups will differ most. I expect that children of upwardly mobile parents will have less extracurricular concerns, more self-confidence, and more freedom to form strong friendships with diverse peers than those from less mobile parents. Further, I expect the children of less upwardly mobile parents to face greater difficulty participating in campus life and the demanding educational system, which not only competes with time dedicated to family, but also tends to lack the strong support of institutional agents such as those with whom the youth bonded in high school. Furthermore, due to their lack of informational resources (rooted in being first-generation college students) and more impoverished background (economic resources and quality of high school programs), their academic and social confidence will suffer and they will experience a contradiction between their internalized expectations and external pressures (both intensified, but pulling in opposite directions).

Lastly, I will explore how the children of upwardly mobile parents compare to those of less mobile parents in terms of their perceived prospects, goals, and aspirations. I anticipate that those whose families

have experienced some upward mobility will be more informed about their foreseeable career options. I expect this outcome, largely because of their interaction with a more diverse network at home, in their neighborhood, and later at the university where they are more likely to be in more advanced courses than their counterpart from more under-resourced high school programs. Additionally, I anticipate that this group will also have more awareness of the opportunities available to them at the university and a clearer understanding of their future goals and possible career paths. By opportunities, I am referring to their anticipated involvement in university organizations, academic programs (such as college honors, or departmental honors), or employment opportunities while in school. And finally, I anticipate that their parent's optimism, rooted in their achievements, will manifest in higher aspirations than their peers whose parents have not experienced upward mobility.

METHODOLOGY

Recruitment of Participants

For the past four years, I have worked for UCLA's Academic Advancement Program (AAP) and have come to be familiar with AAP students, its administration, and its programs. The Freshmen Summer Program (FSP) is a six-week program that offers its participants an opportunity to share their first college experience with other incoming freshmen from similar socioeconomic backgrounds and educational histories. During FSP, students take two or three UCLA courses with other AAP students. FSP takes place during the last summer session of the UCLA academic year (session C). Most participants dorm on campus with other participants. Students are expected to meet with a tutor for each of their courses weekly or bi-weekly (depending on the course). Typically, classes meet at least twice a week and the expectations are set high.² The intention of this program is to prepare students for the demands of a top ranked university such as UCLA and to ease the transition from predominantly underprivileged neighborhoods and high schools.

After discussing my project with the director of the program, I gained access to a list of incoming freshmen who met specific criteria and would participate in the 2004 Freshmen Summer Program sponsored by AAP and the College of Letters and Science. The preliminary criteria were that they self-identified as Latinos, Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, Chicanos or Hispanic on their UCLA application and that they be residents of the Los Angeles County. I limited this study to residents of the Los Angeles County because the time and

economic constraints would only allow me to interview parents and visit neighborhoods and high schools within a close geographical area.

Data Collection

Data collection for this project began the first week of school (the first weeks of August 2004). I sent each of the students (165 Los Angelenos) who met these criteria a description of the study and an invitation to participate via email one week before they moved into the dorms (approximately one and a half weeks before class started). The following week, having received only a few replies, I made an announcement at one of AAP's Resource Fairs and recruited from the students who approached my table. At the fair, if students showed any interest, I verified their information on the list and made an appointment with them to discuss the study further and to conduct the interview if they consented to participate after being briefed. There, 13 students (12 females and 1 male) expressed interest to participate, but only five (all female) actually participated.

More students expressed interest in participating when they believed they would be the only respondents. When they learned that participation in the study also included one interview with a parent, most opted out. During the first week of school, I made announcements in the core classes in which FSP students were required to enroll. Just prior to making the announcement, I met with each professor and explained the purpose of the study. All four professors were very interested in the study and were supportive of me during the announcement in class. From these announcements I gained three more participants (one female and two males). Many more expressed interest, but scheduling an interview at a later time proved unsuccessful. After experiencing difficulty at recruiting males, I decided to call the males from the list of Angelenos who had not already refused to participate. This last attempt was more successful and every male I reached over the phone accepted to participate (5 males). Just before the first interview, one of these males withdrew because his parents refused to participate. My initial sample consisted of eight females and six males. I intended to interview an equal numbers of males and females, but due to the lower number of male participants in FSP (only 56 males, 24% of all participants) and their reluctance to participate, recruiting males was especially difficult.

Initially, I succeeded at recruiting six males and eight females, but after the first round of interviews, I discovered that one of the male respondents had experiences and motivations altogether too different from the rest of the respondents. He was an athlete recruited by the university since his junior year. Although I

considered excluding him from the sample because of his experiences, I decided to further explore his experience in accessing college. Unfortunately, it proved impossible to contact him and his parents and I had to exclude him from the study. Additionally, after interviewing one of the females and her mother, I decided to also exclude her from the study, because she is a 3rd generation Latina who shared little with the remaining twelve respondents who are all either 1.5 or second generation Latinos. Consequently, the final sample includes five males and seven females, as well as one or both of each of their parents (See Appendix A).

Recruiting parents was partly achieved by recruiting students. Each student was asked to inform their parents of their interest to participate in the study and to ask them if I could contact them with more information before scheduling an appointment for an interview. I decided to have students recruit parents, because I wanted to ensure that both the student and parent were willing to participate. Additionally, it has been my experience that many Latinos trust their children to provide them with accurate information and are more willing to consider participating in research (or other activities) if their children advise them to do so.

Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured. I chose to have semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to gather comparable data across participants while allowing respondents to be active contributors in the research process (Bogdan & Biklen 1998). For the most part, I encouraged interviewees to speak freely in response to the different prompts to allow them to guide the interview with their own experiences.

The first two interviews with students took place on campus, all were conducted in English and all were digitally recorded. In the first interview, students were asked questions about their family, community, and school experience before entering UCLA. Some of the questions focused on their relationship with institutional agents, their peers, and other ethnic groups in their neighborhood and schools, as well as some information regarding their family life. Questions about the family focused on their relationship with their nuclear and extended family as sources of social, informational, and emotional support.

The second interview with students took place at the end of FSP (end of August and beginning of September). This interview explored the students' relationships with their family, their academics, institutional agents at UCLA, their peers, and their goals and concerns.

The third interview with students took place at the end of the Fall quarter (their second quarter at UCLA) over the phone. Each of these interviews were digitally recorded and focused mostly on their experiences at UCLA with their peers, family, academics, ethnicity, class, and academic confidence.

The one interview with parents took place during the month of August. Each interview with parents was conducted in person and lasted between one and two hours. Seven of the parent interviews were conducted in their home, two at their workplace, and three in a public place (library, café, university). Interviews with the respondents' parents were diverse in structure. I interviewed five couples, four mothers, and three fathers. All seemed eager to share an explanation of their children's achievement, and most were especially excited to meet a person whom they could ask questions about their children's opportunities, future, and responsibilities at UCLA. It was clear that they were proud of their children's achievements, but that they were also very concerned about not knowing much about higher education. Consequently, I was welcomed as an informational resource as well as a researcher. I answered their questions to the best of my ability and I gave them my contact information in case they had further questions about UCLA or the research study. The interviews with their parents were about their family's immigration history, family composition, economic background, levels of education, their occupational experiences, expectations for their children, and their involvement with their children's education.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Sample Size

The sample of twelve was drawn from the 165 incoming Latino freshmen who participated in the Freshmen Summer Program 2004 and who reside in the Los Angeles County. There is greater participation of females than males in AAP and FSP is no exception. Of the 231 participants (of all ethnicities) in FSP, 175 were female and only 56 were male. Thus, although I intended to interview an equal numbers of males and females, my sample of more females than males reflects the overall gender distribution. Because FSP takes place in the span of seven weeks, the amount of time I had to recruit students was limited. I wanted to interview the students before or during their first week at UCLA, but AAP was unable to grant me access to the list of participants until the week they first moved in to the campus dorms. This time constraint as well as the

difficulty I experienced in recruiting male participants made it difficult for me to acquire a larger sample size. A sample of at least ten females and ten males would have been more adequate.

Students

All student respondents in my sample were incoming freshmen at UCLA (See Appendix A). Additionally, nine of the twelve respondents are first-generation college students, three have parents with post-graduate degrees, but all three parents completed these degrees in their respective countries (Peru, Columbia and Nicaragua). One student was undocumented³. And all students were fluent bilinguals.

As noted above, all of the respondents participated in the Academic Advancement Program (AAP) at UCLA because many of the students who participate in AAP are from underrepresented communities and Latinos are overrepresented (53% of the total population of AAP). AAP services non-traditional students and others whose personal, familial, and financial backgrounds may negatively impact their academic performance at UCLA. In general, students who are first-generation college students, from underprivileged neighborhoods and high schools, low-income, and/or students with SATs at the lower spectrum of acceptable scores are eligible for the program.⁴ Additionally, AAP is the only program on campus that offers a summer program that targets underrepresented minorities (class, ethnicity, and educational history).

Parents

All their parents were married and all were first-generation immigrants from Latin America. Of the families interviewed, four families had no high school, three had at most completed high school (or GED), two had at least one parent with paraprofessional training, and three had post-graduate education. This distribution is consistent with the parental educational level for students in the Academic Advancement Program where only 26% of AAP students have at least one parent who is a college graduate (in contrast, 81% of the parents of non-AAP students have four-year degrees). Additionally, eleven of the twelve families were low-income families⁵.

Ethnic Background

There was some variation in the student's national origin that is not representative of the ethnic composition of Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, most of the Latino population is Mexicans (81.5%), while a smaller portion is Central American (12%), or South American (3%) (Beveridge & Weber 2003). In my sample Mexicans are underrepresented (54%), while both Central and South Americans are overrepresented (33% and

13% respectively). Moreover, the ethnic background of the parents differed by whether they were upwardly mobile or not. Of the six sets of parents who experienced some upward mobility, four are Mexican, one is Mexican and Salvadoran, and one is Columbian. Of the six sets of parents who have had little upward mobility two are Mexican, one is Salvadoran, one is Nicaraguan, one is Guatemalan and Salvadoran, and one is Salvadoran and Peruvian.

Immigration History

All respondents in my sample are children of immigrants from Mexico, Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua) and South America (Columbia and Peru). Nine of the twelve families were economic migrants seeking better opportunities for their family. Only the Nicaraguan family and one Salvadoran family cited civil war as a contributing factor, but not the primary reason for migrating to the United States. Thirteen of twenty-four parents are US citizens, eight are US residents, and three are undocumented, and all intend to make the United States their permanent home.

All respondents in my sample are children of immigrants who entered this country between 1966 and 1988⁶. All six of the students whose parents have experienced some upward mobility are part of the second-generation in the United States. Of the six students whose parents have not experienced upward mobility two are 1.5 generation immigrants (both migrated into the U.S. by the age of two) and the remaining four are second-generation. The large majority of the respondents (10 of 12) are part of the “new second generation,” (Portes & Zhou 1993; Portes & Rumbaut 2003) and eleven of the twelve youths are American citizens and one is undocumented.

The ethnic background of the families who have experienced some upward mobility and those who have not are not surprising. Mexicans have a longer history of migration than do South and Central Americans into the United States and of the Mexican families who did experience some upward mobility, they were those who had been in the United States for the longest time. In contrast, although South American have a shorter history of immigration into the U.S., they tend to come from higher up in the national class structure and thus tend to come with more financial and human capital. Central Americans (especially Salvadorans and Guatemalans), on the other hand, have very modest levels of education and come from humble socioeconomic background. They are comparable to Mexicans in Los Angeles (López et al 1996).

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Upward Mobility

In this analysis, income, occupational status, homeownership, and entrepreneurialship are the four primary factors distinguishing upwardly mobile parents from those who are less mobile. It is important to note that although the disparities between the families who have experienced some upward mobility and those who have not are not extreme this distinction results in some meaningful difference in the students' experiences.

Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is not used in defining upward mobility because with the exception of one parent, most parents in both groups did not benefit directly from their levels of education. That is, two parents with post-graduate degrees experienced no upward mobility at all. One parent was a surgeon doctor in Nicaragua but dyes lace for a living in the U.S. and the other parent, from Peru, has a Ph.D. in Theology and is now an absent father and missionary in Mexico. In contrast, of the six upwardly mobile families, three sets of parents had less than high school education; two families had one parent with some post-high school para-professional training, and only one family had one parent with a post-graduate degree (dentist). Of the six sets of less mobile parents, one family had both parents with less than high school education; three families had at least one parent who completed high school (or GED), and one family had one parent with a post-high school para-professional training, in addition to the two families that had a parent with a post-graduate degree.

Family Income

The average income for upwardly mobile families is \$50,867 and for families with less upward mobility it is \$24,167. On average, upwardly mobile families had more per capita income (\$9,807 per person/yr) than did less mobile families (\$5,805 per person/yr). One interesting point is that upwardly mobile families have more years with a dual income than the less mobile families. Of the six families in the upwardly mobile group, two have "stay-at home" mothers, one entered the labor market only recently after her youngest child entered junior high, and three have always been employed and have comparable incomes with their husbands. Of the six families in the less mobile group, all were "stay-at home" mothers until very recently when their youngest child entered junior high. In fact, of the six families, all have entered the labor market within the two years. These variations in employment strategies explain a part of the difference in family income.

Homeownership and Entrepreneurialship

Homeownership and entrepreneurialship were two factors which distinguish these two groups. Five of the six upwardly mobile parents were homeowners and four of these six families were entrepreneurs. In contrast, only two of the less mobile families were homeowners and another two were self-employed. Additionally, of the upwardly mobile parents who were self-employed, their businesses were growing with a current average income of \$49,250 per year while the less mobile entrepreneurs had an average income of \$20,000.

Contributing Factors

Family structure and size was very similar for both groups, but year of arrival contributed to their differences. All families were intact and with the exception of one family of ten children, most families had 2-4 children. Of the six students whose families have experienced upward mobility, only two were the oldest child, while for those whose families have experienced less upward mobility, four of the six were the first born. Additionally, upwardly mobile parents have been in the United States longer (1975 as the average year arrival)⁷ than those who have not experienced upward mobility (the average year of arrival is 1983).

This distinction points to the possibility that these two groups are in two different stages of the same path, rather than consisting of two different “types” of families. That is, while upwardly mobile families may be more optimistic and have more resources available for their children at the time these enter college, there is not enough evidence to argue that in about eight to ten year (the average difference in their year of arrival) the less mobile families will not also be in the same situation. This analysis is not based on their inherent differences or their potential to experience upward mobility, but rather on their differences at a particular point in time, namely, the period surrounding their children entering college.

FINDINGS

During the interviews, respondents and their parents reflected at length about their own experiences with migration, education, living in Los Angeles, and their future plans. The findings shed light on three stages of these children of immigrant’s experiences in accessing college and adapting to the university context. In their pre-college experience, students participated in different academic programs even when they attended schools

with similar resources. Additionally, the role parents and teachers played in their access to these different programs differed for the children of upwardly mobile parent and their less mobile peers.

The Pre-College Experience

It is important to note that all the respondents in my sample succeeded at reaching their goal of being admitted and enrolling in a high ranking four-year university. In comparison to the majority of their peers, both in their neighborhoods and their schools, as well as to family members, they are among the highest achievers. Given this characteristic in my sample, the objective is not to investigate how parental mobility helps one group be more successful than the other; rather, it is to see how “successful” students are affected by their parent’s experienced mobility and how this experience affects their immediate environment—their relationship with their parents, teachers, friends and neighborhoods. In a later section I will also explore how these relationships affect their adaptation in college.

Academic Programs

All twelve of the respondents in my sample took part in honors and advanced placement courses at their respective high schools. The difference lies in that the children of upwardly mobile parents took part in honors and advanced placement courses within programs where the academic climate was strong, while the children of less mobile parents tended to be in academic settings where they were the exception. In other words, for the children of upwardly mobile parents, many of their peers within their programs were college-bound, making their experiences seem *normal*. In contrast, while the children of less mobile parents also participated in honors and advanced placement courses, they were in programs where the academic path was *exceptional*, not normal for their peers. Unlike the peers of the children of upwardly mobile parents, the majority of the youth in these less resourced high schools were not college-bound.

Most of the respondents attended public schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and only one attended a private Catholic school. Although the schools do not vary greatly in terms of their available resources, the programs within these schools do vary substantially. Participation in these more specialized programs (e.g. magnets or academies) and the consequent academic preparation differs between the two groups. Of the six children from upwardly mobile families, four attended high ranking programs within the LAUSD, one attended a high ranking Catholic private school, and one attended a high school in the Bassett

Unified School District—a slightly higher ranking district than the LAUSD⁸. These students referred to their experience in high school as very challenging and highly oriented towards college. Additionally, they commented on how most students they knew in their program were all going to college. José, the youngest of ten children, shares some observations about his high school program:

From my high school, they're all going to college. [Where are your closest friends going?] My best friend is going to Cal State Long Beach. One of my friends is going to the University of Pennsylvania and I have a few friends that are going to UCI. I also have my friends that I keep in contact from middle school that they went to Compton High and it's like completely different. Like college is not important to them, some don't know what they are going to do with the rest of their lives. They're just like done.

Meanwhile, of the six children of the less mobile parents, only two participated in magnet schools, and one was an “honorary magnet student” (out of his own initiative and favored relationship with the program coordinator, he took some magnet courses, but was not officially enrolled in the magnet program). Of the remaining three, two attended non-magnet high schools within the LAUSD, and one attended a non-magnet program in the Inglewood Unified School District—a slightly lower ranking district than the LAUSD⁹.

When interviewed, the students shared how they got into the different programs. For the children of upwardly mobile families, parents tended to play a more active role in getting these students into these better resourced programs. Of these six students, three parents actively sought good programs for their children (as early as elementary school) and two were indirectly involved by interacting closely with their child’s teacher through volunteer work, thus promoting teacher-student bonding. Ernesto’s parents are a perfect example of the level of involvement some of the upwardly mobile parents had in their children’s education. Ernesto’s parents, both have a high school education they acquired in Mexico.

“... empecé a pedir información con las maestras... They would give me positive feedback about him. Based on his grades and their good references, I would speak to a counselor who was very supportive. When he was in elementary school, his teachers told me he qualified for good programs, so we would place him where we thought he would be better off. We would ask that he be placed with the good teachers the following year. His teachers loved him... He qualified for the highest program, “Excel,” because he would come to us and we helped him with everything. “Look son, this is how you do this problem, I’m going to show you a trick so you can do this faster.” We gave them some education, the best we could. I taught them the basics and he (husband) taught him past algebra. We showed him the way we learned in Mexico.”

In contrast, all six of the children of less mobile families reported having teachers who took more active roles than their parents in pushing these youths into special curricula (e.g. honors courses, Advanced Placement,

as well as academies and magnet programs). Of the six students from less mobile families, three were tested for “gifted” at a very early age, two were regularly recognized as “student of the month” and one was tested twice for gifted with no avail. On the other hand, of the six children of upwardly mobile parents, only one was tested and identified as gifted at an early age (Gabriela). Given that most of the children of less mobile parents attended schools where the academic climate was weak, the recognition of their “exceptionality” tracked them for college and gave them the psychosocial boost they carried through high school.

In their case, parents were loving and supportive, but mostly trusted their children’s resourcefulness to achieve academically. Mercedes’ mother is a homemaker who has recently returned to work in unskilled manufacturing.

Ever since she was a little girl I have helped her, ‘moralmente’ (with emotional support). I would speak with her to show her support. I always saw that since she was a little girl, that she was very intelligent. She would find out what ever she needed. When they admitted her into UCLA, I was surprised, but not too much, because I always knew she was going to make it. “Ella siempre estaba luchando para sobresalir” [She was always fighting to succeed]. Even though I did not know much about that school, now I know that it’s very important, so I feel very happy. (Original quote was entirely in Spanish.)

Just as Mercedes’s mother refers to her daughter’s educational endeavors as “fighting to succeed,” many of the other less upwardly mobile parents also employed this language of “us” versus “them.” Vanessa’s father not only referred to his daughter as a person who “fights” for her education, but also made reference to a time when he had to go to school to fight for his daughter:

En la junior high, there was one time when I had to go to school and find out what was going on. Vanessa told me that she was getting a bad grade in her class and she didn’t know why. I asked her, “are you doing all your homework?” and she said yes, so there I go. I talked to the teacher, the best I could, and he explained what happened... I tell you, if she needs me, I’m here.

When I asked him how frequently he interacted with Vanessa’s teachers, he explained that he did not like to interact with her teachers, because they see him as “less” than them. In this instance, as we can see from his comments below, it appears he is referring to class, but always refers to “them” as “Americanos.”

Well, when she was younger, her mom would go with her to the meetings, but when she got older, she (referring to his wife) did not want to go anymore, supposedly because I almost finished high school, I was supposed to go with her... I went to the meetings every semester, but if I told you (sighs)... We would meet the teachers in the gym and we all had to stand in line to talk to the teacher. The lines were long and we waited a long time and sometimes the teachers would be chatting with the other dads, “Oh, so you bought a new Mercedes? Oh, so you bought a new house?” Meanwhile we are all just standing there waiting. And then, when it’s my turn to go up, the teacher is just like, “she’s doing fine, don’t

worry.” *And that’s it. I stood there in line for hours and then in less than five minutes he’s done with me. I tell you, it feels ugly.*

Victoria’s father also conjures up this same language and added to it a criticism of what he considers to be classist America.

When I had to go to school for conferences or something I would go. If she doesn’t have me to stand up for her, then who? (sighs) But, I didn’t like going. “Los de aquí tratan a la gente con la punta del pie” [Americans treat people with the tip of their foot]. They act like being poor is an illness or something. I hated going, but like I said, I had to be there for her.

It is important to note, that the difference in parental involvement cannot be attributed to hectic work schedules, because all six of the less upwardly mobile parents had stay-at-home mothers throughout most of their child’s pre-college education (as opposed to 3 of 6 upwardly mobile parents). In these cases (as illustrated by Vanessa’s parents’ account), it was clearly a fear of class discrimination that kept some of them from being more involved with institutional agents.

In sum, less mobile parents tended to have an antagonistic relationship with school agents, tending to feel discriminated against and tending to view their children’s education as a struggle. Thus, they tended to trust their children’s determination and judgments about school. In contrast upwardly mobile parents, tended to have a more positive interpretation of teachers and their relationships with their children. In turn, they tended feel more welcome to interact with school agents and take an active role in directing their children into better resourced academic programs.

Supports

Strong Teacher-Student Relationships

According to the children of the less mobile parents, teachers played an important role in tracking them for college. Unlike the children of more mobile parents whom did not attribute their academic achievements to strong relationships with institutional agents, five of the six children of the less mobile parents cited the strong bonds with institutional agents as their primary reason for accessing higher education. Many of these students benefited from a phone call from a school counselor on their behalf, a letter of recommendation from a teacher or the initiative of a caring teacher to ensure the child was admitted into a particular program. For many of these youths, it was a teacher or a recommendation that radically changed their trajectory. For these youths, parents were sources of support, but it was teachers who helped direct them onto the academic route. Victoria’s

experience illustrates the impact some institutional agents had in the lives of these youths. Victoria is the daughter of a father who was trained as an electrician in Guatemala but has now worked at a dry cleaner store for 20 years and a mother from El Salvador who now works as a custodian.

“I had a really good teacher, I had her for biology in the 9th grade, but I stayed in contact with her throughout the four years... Thanks to her, thanks to her being a teacher in the program, I became a part of, the “Smarts” program here at UCLA. That really helped me a lot, because I got information, contacts, and even though I am this really, really shy girl, I came to “Smarts” and I came to all these other outreach programs from UCLA... Like there was this one [conference] about law and that’s when I heard about a “Youth Internship Program” and that’s how I participated in that. Basically, that had a lot of influence on me... And well my family, they have always, always been there for me. My dad, he received the most education, he graduated high school. So he would understand me more. My mom, she received less, I don’t think she graduated from primary school, so she was not so supportive... They always say I should keep working hard at it. They, well, mostly my dad, let me get home and just do my work. My mom, she wants me to clean and stuff and to spend time with my family when they come to visit, but that’s because she doesn’t really understand how much work I have to do.”

Additionally, all reported having more than just a teacher-student relationship. Many referred to more than one teacher as a “friend,” “mentor,” or parent-like figure and many continue to maintain their relationships with these teachers. Joshua, speaking in reference to his strong relationship with his high school chemistry teacher and coach illustrates the extent to which teachers were not only an academic resource, but also sources of emotional and psychosocial support. Joshua is the son of two Salvadoran parents. He is an overachiever from a family whose parents are a construction worker and a domestic worker who have experienced little upward mobility.

“I would say junior year, I started to talk to my chemistry teacher. He was somebody I could look to for advice, although he was young... He started teaching at 23 and he was really cool, he was half Mexican and half white so he could really relate to us. I don’t know, he somehow really got my attention, he was someone I could talk to, ask questions about, not just chemistry, but everything and I was shocked when he wrote me a recommendation letter, he said that when he had his children, like he does now, especially a boy, he said that he wanted him to have the potential and diligence that I had. I was like WOW someone really said something really positive about me, from that point I really learned to appreciate him much more... He was not only my coach and chemistry teacher, he was a nice guy, an advisor, my friend. But other than those two people [referring to another teacher from the sixth grade], I would say nobody else helped me.

When Mercedes, a 1.5 generation undocumented youth from Mexico, was unable to pay her tuition, because her father refused to sign off on her student loans, her high school teacher donated the \$1,800 to enroll her into the Fall quarter at UCLA. He and his wife not only gave Mercedes the money she needed, but they also kept in close contact with her, giving her the emotional support they would give their own daughter for her academic endeavors. Mercedes’s migration status is a special case in that although she and her mother have

been in the United States since Mercedes was 2 years old (16 years), they (due to a mistake in her father's application 10 years ago) have been unable to establish legal residency. Her father and her two younger siblings (both born in the U.S.), on the other hand, are all U.S. citizens. Unfortunately, Mercedes's father, for fear of accruing debt and other unclear reasons, refuses to sign off on her college loans.

Fully knowing that her immigration status would not change anytime soon, Mercedes dedicated herself to high academic achievement in high school. She was the fifth in her class, was in the academic decathlon, the Key Club, and passed so many Advanced Placement courses; she entered UCLA with sophomore standing. Mercedes, knowing that her father "is not really supportive of all that [school]," expressed that in the past, when she grappled with the fear that she was not going to have the economic resources to pay for school, it was her teachers who gave her the necessary support to go on. She recounts:

At one point, I actually wanted to drop all my AP courses and not apply to college because I got really stressed about money. I was like "oh my god, who is going to help me? What am I going to do?" And then I spoke to my teacher... I had really personal relationships with all my teachers so I could just walk in and talk to them. So she was like, "you know it would kill you if you did not finish your AP classes. Even if you don't go to college, it would kill you if you don't continue with your work" and I stayed. She was right.

When Mercedes was first admitted into UCLA, she had hoped that her small scholarship (\$2,000 a year) and eventual parental support (in the form of signing loan papers) would give her the economic support she needed to attend college. With a little economic support, she knew she could complete her undergraduate education and excel in doing so. Unfortunately, when her father refused to sign for her student loans for the second time in the Spring quarter, and her small scholarship did not cover the \$2,300 tuition fee, she had to withdraw. Consequently, after a very difficult Fall quarter of long commutes (over one hour each way), fights with parents, and extreme frustration, she withdrew from UCLA and is now waiting to resolve her migration status.

For *most* of the respondents whose parents had not experienced upward mobility, parents were sources of emotional support and guidance, but few expressed having relied on their parents as resources for their academic endeavors (information or guidance). As Victoria explains, "school was my responsibility. They just made sure I was staying out of trouble." With the exception of Mercedes's case (where the father is not supportive of her education), all parents expressed much support for their children's educational endeavors, but

given their own low levels of education and lack of familiarity with the American educational system, they did not explicitly set any goals or expectations for their children. Instead, they preferred to allow their children to decide their own educational plans and their future.

All of the parents I interviewed believed that education is their children's best hope for upward mobility, but the parents who had experienced less economic mobility were more uninformed about the options their children have and would have once they received their degrees. For these parents (who seemed to be familiar with very few career options: teacher, doctor, nurse, or lawyer), getting an education did not have to be at a school as expensive as UCLA. They did not understand why their child should be attending UCLA when there are junior colleges or Cal States that are more affordable, but they trust their children to make the right decisions when it comes to education. As one mother explained,

I don't know the difference between UCLA and a Cal State, but I hope she will find out what she needs to do to get a good job. I don't know what her options are, honestly, but so long as she's there, I hope she'll find out. Right now, as long as she continues being good in school, I'm happy. (Vanessa's mother is a "stay-at home" mother of four. Quote originally in Spanish.)

Vanessa's father, an assembler in a factory, trusts his daughter's decision, but he does not know how to justify to his friends why he is paying so much for school.

Pues a mi... yo no sé... hay muchos colegios hay muchas Cal States... Many people say that it's the same to study at a junior college than at a USC or UCLA. So, I don't know... For example, at work, a person asked me, why pay \$23,500 at UCLA when you can pay less than half at Dominguez Hills... I don't know, could you help me with that?

For Vanessa's parents, as well as for many of my respondents, not knowing what their children's options are to be able to help their children make a decision was their primary concern. For the most part, they trust their children's understanding of the American educational system to decide what is best for them, but they see their decision to go to UCLA as somewhat of a privileged option. From their perspective, if their children decided to work and attend a junior college rather than attend UCLA, they would be equally proud. Another parent explained, when I asked "What if tomorrow, Victoria decides she no longer wants to go to school?"

Tendria que trabajar. [Would you or your wife be disappointed?] No, that (UCLA) is an option. Whatever she decides to do with her life does not affect me... It's her future she would be risking. Besides, there is more than one way to reach a goal. Probably she could go to college (referring to a community college), either way we are giving her all the tools she needs... good morals, all within our possibilities. Para su mamá, ella ya logró todo lo que tenia que lograr, salir de la high school. [For her mom, she has already achieved all she needed to achieve, graduate high school.]

Interestingly, these ambivalent expectations on behalf of the parents had little effect on their children. They tended to make such comments as, “I know, that for my parents I already did all I had to and that now, even if I dropped out they would still be proud of me.” These youths were very driven and their drive seems to be rooted in all the praise and high expectations their teachers placed on them throughout their educational career. Mercedes, for example, remembers how her teachers always had high expectations for her, “I remember my teacher, he actually brought us on a tour of UCLA, and when we passed the Law School, he said, ‘that’s where you belong.’ That’s when I started thinking about it.” Additionally, although many of the children of less mobile parents cited their parent’s painful experience with unskilled labor as a motivation to pursue a different route to economic survival, they saw their parents’ lives as examples of lives they did not want to live. The children of mobile parents differed in this respect. They saw their parents as high achievers (given their means) and were very explicit about their wishes to surpass the standards set by their parents.

Parent-Child Relationships

Just as teachers were sources of information and emotional support for the academic endeavors of the children of less mobile parents, upwardly mobile parents served as role models for their children. The children of upwardly mobile parents cited their parent’s achievements and their expectations as their primary motivation and the standard to surpass. Gabriela, identifies her parents and their achievements as her primary role models and motivation to get an education.

[What are your expectations of yourself?] *“Not to let my parents down. It’s always not to let my parents down. I don’t know, it’s just that—they work so hard for me that—if it weren’t because of them, I wouldn’t be here [referring to UCLA]. I appreciate that, so I think that’s how I could pay them back—by me getting ahead. That’s what they want me to do, so that’s what I’m going to do... To get educated so, I won’t have to work from 4 a.m. to 8 p.m., like they did. Or how they started with like five bucks, with like nothing. They would sleep at the factory, you know? They started with nothing and now they each have their own factory. I know they want me to have more than that. If I go into the fashion industry, I have to be designer or something, not doing what they do.”* (Gabriela’s parents each own a garment factory.)

In her discussion of the choices she made regarding school and her relationship with her parents, she explained that she sought information from institutional agents and avoided tenuous friendships because she needed to make her parents proud. She explained that if they could achieve as much as they did given their level of education, she had to achieve more than they did. In other words, her primary goal is to take advantages of the academic opportunities afforded her by her parent’s sacrifice of migrating to the U.S. and their ability to

create wealth from very little. Wanting to surpass parent-set standards was a common response among the children of the upwardly mobile. Ernesto echoes this sentiment in the following statement:

I'm the first generation to go to college, so it's like a lot for me. They expect a lot from me. They expect me to come out with a—well, my dad wants so much for me--like, to get from college—like, “OK, you're in college now, and you have to take advantage of that and become really successful.” ... Especially because of my dad, I feel more pressure because of how far he's come. [Do you feel you have to climb a whole lot more?] YEAH, I have to climb a LOT more. (Ernesto is the oldest son of undocumented parents. Ernesto's father is a private contractor and his mother is a homemaker.)

Hindrances

While all twelve youths benefited from loving families, supportive teachers, and adequate academic programs, they faced an almost daily battle with their immediate context. For the most part, the youths lived in areas where the streets are not safe and where their peers are more likely to be temptations into deviance than sources of support. All described their homes as safe havens from the outside and their parents made it their priority to insulate the youth in any way possible. The dangers and temptations in their immediate surroundings were most frequently cited as the reasons why many families forfeited a second income and had one parent “stay-at home”. As Vanessa's father notes (in Spanish):

Many parents come to this country and dedicate themselves to work. They want to be able to give their children all they didn't have, but they don't realize that they are losing their kids. Many go to work really early and come home very late and they don't even know what time their kids went to school or when they came back. And then they wonder, “How could they do this to me?” When their daughter ends up pregnant or their son is in a gang. This is why she (Vanessa's mother) stayed with them. There's a lot of bad kids out there. If it wasn't because she was always after them, making sure they were straight, I don't know what would have happened. Frequently, we hear about places around here being tapped off by the police because they shot someone or there was a crime. It's dangerous out there. That's why she walks them to and from school or to the school bus stop and after school, it's straight home again. (unskilled manufacturing worker, US citizen since 1994)

Even for those whose neighborhoods were not as dangerous as Vanessa's neighborhood, the outside is frequently conceptualized as a place of temptation and a place where their children should not be.

Neighborhoods

Of the six families who experienced some upward mobility, five live in areas and attended schools where the majority is Latino and a mix of upper-working class and working class homeowners. Only one (David) lives in an area where the majority is white and middle class. In contrast, all six of the less mobile families live and attend schools in areas with a high concentration of lower-working class Black and Latino renters. Yet, given this variation in composition, the differences in eleven of the neighborhoods are subtle

(David's neighborhood is the exception.). Eleven of the twelve respondents described their neighborhoods as hostile spaces. None of the respondents hung out nor interacted with their peers in their neighborhood. In fact, most of the respondents shared that their friends were mostly classmates and that their peers in their neighborhoods tended to be people they avoided. For the most part, many of these neighborhoods were in highly industrial areas or places where there is a high incidence of crime.

Friends

Many of the youths reported that they were mocked by their peers for being studious, often being labeled "school-boy" or "nerd". For the children of upwardly mobile parents, this was less common. Only two of the six reported being taunted this way by some of their friends outside their academic program and the remaining four stated that they did not have any negative experiences simply because they did not have interaction with students outside their respective programs. In contrast, because the children of less mobile parents are in programs which are less disconnected from the regular population at their schools, they frequently had to deal with taunts as well as balance and choose between their academics and their friends. After the summer program, for example, Susana expressed how relieved she was to be able to use her glasses, because in high school, something like a pair of glasses was a reason to be taunted or called a nerd. Similarly, Victoria's retelling of her decision to cut ties with some of her friends captures the difficult choice she had to make between school and friends:

I grew up with a lot of the common factors in Latino communities, like the young girls always getting pregnant and bad friends... So, there was a time when I became a bit of a 'bad girl,' well, not really 'bad,' but I was a little boy crazy... Then one of my good friends, she left and that's when she got pregnant and it was like, no! Luckily, I didn't let that get to me that much and I still stayed focused on my studies. I knew I had to do this [go on to college]. And then in high school, I basically stopped talking to them, 'cause I knew they were a bad influence. Sometimes, I would have to hide so they wouldn't see me. I thought all they wanted to do was have fun and I was trying to focus on my studies, so I was like, "that's it, no more."(Shortly after the first interview, Victoria's family moved from Inglewood to a housing development in San Pedro.)

Ethnicity

During the first interview with the students and the interview with their parents, the topic of the 'American Dream' and being 'American' came up frequently. At this time, all twelve of the students were very optimistic about their future prospects and were, for the most part, positive about American culture. Although there was no difference between the children of upwardly mobile parents and their counterparts with respect to

the American dream, in that they all believed to be living it in the flesh, there was a hint of pessimism when it came to adopting an American identity. This was especially true for the children of the less mobile parents (5 of 6). The children of less mobile parents tended to respond in the following way to the question, ‘How do you identify?’

Hmm, Mexican-American. [Why?] Well, I was born in Mexico, but I never lived there. So technically, I'm kind of like Americanized, so... Liberal Mexican-American – I guess. I guess that's basically what I come down to, although I feel detached from the Mexican part. [Do you feel more American?] Hmm, no, I don't –that's the weird thing. I don't feel more American in the sense that, well look at me (pointing at her face), I don't look like what an American is supposed to look like – or whatever that is, but I feel detached from my Mexican roots because I'm not there, I haven't been there. If there was one word that could mix Mexican and American that would be me. Not hyphenated. (Mercedes, undocumented teen)

In contrast, the children of upwardly mobile parents tended to respond in line with Ernesto, the oldest son of an independent contractor and a homemaker—both parents are undocumented.

I wouldn't classify myself as a Mexican, I'm an American. I identify as an American. [Why?] I guess what an American means. It's all about being able to, like- being able to reach the American Dream, that's pretty much why I am an American. All the hard work ... being successful and rising up to become what you want in life – that's what being an American is all about. I mean, to me, that's what being an America is all about –not about the color of your skin. I mean, anybody can be an American – it's about what their ideals are. (2nd generation)

Phenotype tended to be the primary reason why some of the children of the less mobile parents preferred the “Mexican-American,” “Hispanic,” or “Latino” label. In fact, while many recognized that they were “Americanized,” they believed that when they met people their ethnicity took a front seat. In contrast, although the children of upwardly mobile parents were not phenotypically different from their less mobile counterparts, they did not talk about their physical appearance and instead focused on the fact that they were living the American dream and were thus also American.

The same pattern held for parents. Upwardly mobile parents, not surprisingly, were very positive about adopting an American identity and felt strongly about the American dream. Interestingly, as this parent illustrates, identifying as American did not imply giving up their national identity or their culture, instead being American was conceptualized as compliment to their cultural identity. In fact, for most upwardly mobile parents, as it is for David's mother, a dentist in this country since 1980, being both is very important for their family.

A nosotros, gracias a Dios, this country has given everything. Although we continue to be Columbian, we can now say that we are also American, them (her children), more than us... We (as a family) follow an American way of life. We (her husband and herself) try to make life in the home very Columbian, but outside very American, this is so we don't bother or interrupt anyone. So, we don't have any problems. (original quote in Spanish)

In contrast, less mobile parents were less supportive of identifying as American and felt that the American dream was not accessible to them. For the most part, their interpretation of what it meant to be American meant no longer being Mexican, Guatemalan, Salvadoran or what ever their cultural identity was. For these parents, their children's achievements were not illustrative of the American dream's accessibility; instead, they were interpreted as true triumphs in the face of strong adversity and discrimination. Victoria's father was an electrician and instructor in Guatemala, but has been employed at a dry cleaner store for 20 years in the United States.

I don't know how far discrimination goes at your level, once people become professionals, because for us, there is a lot of discrimination... I was reading about this woman who did not want her son to learn the language of dishwashers (shakes his head with frustration)... If we would have gone to school, we would also be doctors and lawyers; it isn't because of the language we speak. Yeah, I want her to learn the language of doctors and lawyers—English... but, I don't know, this country degrades you. It seems like it gives you everything, but the day comes when you realize that it has not given you anything. The only thing it does is use you. All you have to do is look at me. It has been more than 20 years at it and nothing. You will come to realize that the day you are no longer productive, you'll lose everything... For me it's a dream come true to see her going to UCLA. In my country I used to hear about that school and its prestige. My daughter made it. The school she went to, I don't want to say it was the worst, but it was lacking in resources. Palos Verdes has better teachers and more assistance for its students, there is just no comparison to... (Victoria's school). SHE made it. (Quote originally in Spanish.)

While the children of upwardly mobile parents and their counterparts whose parents have experienced less upward mobility differ in the process by which each made it into the university, they have many more things in common. Eleven of the twelve respondents attended non-white majority schools and neighborhoods. All grew up very aware of their parent's migration experience and seeing their parents adapt to life in the United States. Additionally, all learned Spanish as their first language and all but one grew up in a working-class environment. Additionally, although three had parents who had advanced degrees, none had parents with any knowledge or experience with the American educational system.

In their pre-college experience, these youths differed in terms of their high school experiences (academic programs) and their relationships with parents and with institutional agents, but their ethnicity, class, and participation in the family fell into the background. Their peers, for the most part, were in similar

circumstances (at least those in their academic programs). Upon entering UCLA, a lot of what had previously been in the background, came to the fore.

As students at UCLA, it quickly became evident to them that their experiences were different from the mainstream at UCLA. The quality of their education was quickly questioned and their ethnicity and class became more important than ever before. Now, the very resources they had tapped into while they were in high school are either gone (e.g. their affective relationships with institutional agents) or have become an aspect of their life that competes for their time with their academics (family). For the first time, their status as first-generation college student has become less of an accomplishment and has become more of a source of stress and confusion. For the first time, they are not the smartest in the class and rather than taking the highest classes available, many began their first quarter at UCLA in some of the lowest courses in the summer program. The following section will be an analysis of how these youths adapt to the university by focusing on the factors these youths reported were their most salient in everyday interaction: family, access to information, economic resources, class, ethnicity, and academics.

Adapting to College

“Wow, now I’m a part of something big!” -Ernesto

During the summer, UCLA hosts many outreach programs that bring inner-city youth to campus as well many camps (sports, leadership, etc) that bring youth of all ages to the campus, thus the population present in the summer is not representative of the population during the academic year. It was in this context that the Freshmen Summer Program first introduces its participants to UCLA. Participating in the Freshmen Summer Program allows students to experience the university alongside a few students (231 in 2004) from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. The small group, the ethnic composition, and class background of the participants helped make students feel comfortable. Vanessa explains how participating in the program helped her experience UCLA: “they were all like me,” she explained, “we were all lost—like, ‘Now, what are we supposed to do?’ I think if I hadn’t been in FSP, I would have felt really intimidated in the fall.”

FSP homogenizes its participants. The students live in the same dorms, are required to attend tutoring, meet with counselors and professors, and all have an equal workload. Which English and Mathematics course each student takes; however, depends on their academic preparation. Students were placed in English 2, English

3, or English 100 as well as Math 1, 2 or a Chemistry/Calculus course. These courses are clearly stratified, but because they were all also taking other courses (Political Science and Comparative Literature) with their peers from higher Math or English courses, this difference in academic preparation was not reported to be an issue.

During this time, their academics, economic resources, access to information, and ethnicity fell into the background. Most were aware of the fact that UCLA is unlike their high schools, where the majority was non-white and non-Asian, but during this time ethnicity was more a badge of honor, than a source of insecurity.

Many felt, as Victoria explains,

In a way it makes me feel like... oh you know I'm here where the population is predominantly white and Asian, and I'm here to represent my people, so yeah, in a way it makes me feel proud that I'm here, and I hopefully stand out as a role model for those that come after me, to let them know that it's possible.

Similarly, because most students were participating in FSP on an AAP scholarship or with financial aid covering all expenses, expendable income was not an issue. Most students even felt that their participating in FSP was a source of economic relief for their parents whom now had one mouth less to feed. Additionally, because FSP is such a comprehensive program, most students were not preoccupied with feeling lost or feeling compelled to find information. For the most part, issues that would later become salient in their everyday life simply were not factors during the summer program (the role of family excluded).

Salient Issues in Adapting to the College Setting

As the Fall quarter began and the students moved back home (if they would be commuting to school) or moved into the dorms (where they would be living for the rest of the year) these youths reported that family, access to information, economic resources, class, and ethnicity became very important issues in their everyday life and the saliency of these issues varied between the children of upwardly mobile parents and the children of less mobile parents.

Family

Family played a salient role for all of the respondents, but did so in different ways. Ten of the twelve respondents reported that they only intended to attend universities near their home (in southern California) and that being close to family was a high priority for themselves as well as their parents. For some, family was very understanding and supportive of their schoolwork, while for others, spending social time with family was a priority and a competing factor for time dedicated to school. In fact, family demands for the students' time

became an issue for some since the moment they enrolled at UCLA. Five of the six children of the less upwardly mobile parents, were pressured to come home every weekend and one was not even allowed to live on campus. This was especially difficult for students during the summer, because the workload was very intense and being home often meant not being able to get their work done. For these youths, coming home meant leaving schoolwork at school and spending time with the family. In contrast, of the six children of upwardly mobile parents, only two were required to come home on the weekends during the summer, two commuted to school (one chose to commute for the year and the other missed the deadline to secure a room during the summer), and two did not have these demands at all. Additionally, the two children of upwardly mobile parents who commuted during FSP reported that they have their own room and that school is a priority in their home so being home did not preclude them from doing schoolwork.

For the children of the less upwardly mobile parents, family demands for their time persisted through the summer and the Fall quarter. These students were expected to come home every weekend and to engage with the family when they were home. Aileen, half Peruvian and half Salvadoran, is the daughter of a notary public and a Pentecostal pastor. She explains how she manages her time so that she will be able to get her work done and still spend time with family:

I call my mom everyday or she calls me... I go home most weekends, cause when I don't come home, they're like 'why didn't you come home? You don't want to come home anymore or what?' So I'm like, "OK"... So now what I do is I try [finish] my work on Friday, because I don't have class on Friday, and a part of Saturday, so I can spend time with them in the evening and on the weekend. [What if the people in your dorm invite you to go on a weekend trip?] Well, I don't go. That happened already, but they don't understand. Besides, those trips cost money and its money we don't have.

It is important to note that these students do not blame their parents for their demands and instead explain that it is because they “don’t understand” or that they do it because they “love and miss” them. Consequently, when they have to absent themselves from the home because they have an exam or a paper due, many of these youths reported feeling guilty.

Some of the respondents, four of the six children of less mobile parents and one of the children of upwardly mobile parents had a particularly difficult time justifying their time away from home. Many of the less mobile parents explained that they wanted their children to be clear that their participation in UCLA was not a free pass for certain “liberties.” Susana, was not allowed to live on campus because her parents consider

American culture and especially American youth culture, to be too liberal. Susana explains her situation in the following way:

Like, since high school everyone knew I had the weird parents. They are so overprotective. They are like, 'You want to be liberated and that's not going to happen as long as I'm living and you're living under my roof.' Even coming here, that's the reason I'm not dorming. One thing that ... bothers them is how liberal the campus is... They are very, very, conservative [in their] beliefs. I think they are kind of scared of how liberal people here can be. That's why they prefer to drive here all the way from Hawthorne everyday to drop me off and pick me up.

Vanessa had a similar situation with her parents. She too was expected to come home every weekend and when she chose to come home on a Saturday morning, rather than a Friday evening so that she could watch a movie, there was a problems. Her mother shared with me why she had gotten so upset about the incident.

I tell my daughter, you are a good person, a good student, and good all around, but there are people who sometimes invite you to do something and then they induce you into other things. I tell her, you have to take care of yourself.

This style of reminding the children that they trust them, but do not trust other people around them, in this case their peers, was very common among these parents. Of the children of upwardly mobile parents, one had a similarly difficult time spending time away from home. Angel, the son of a nurse's assistant and a sanitation technician, had a similar problem when he asked if he could stay on campus on a Saturday so that he could join a group of friends for an outing in Westwood. In this instance, his mother explained that those kids, who don't have parents who look out for them are just out looking to tempt good kids, like Angel and she added, "Yo, sé que la cultura Americana es muy liberal, pero él tiende que entender, que no se manda sólo." [I know American culture is very liberal, but he needs to understand that he's not his own boss.]

With the exception of Angel, the children of upwardly mobile parents, when I asked them how they managed family life with school, tended to respond inline with Ernesto's response.

Last quarter I used to go home every weekend because everyone on my floor would leave and the place was empty.... Now, I'm not doing that anymore. I need a little time away from the family. I know they have to understand that, and they do. They're cool. My Dad's like, 'Don't worry about it. Do what you have to do and if you have time, then come home, but if you can't then stay.'

Notice how Ernesto chose to go home only because there was no incentive for him to stay on campus, "everyone on my floor would leave," he says. Additionally, his parents do not insist that he come home and trust that he has things to do. David, the youngest son of a dentist and a machinist, is a committed and active member in his church. When I asked him the same question, he responded in the following way:

Family is not an issue at all. I sometimes see them on the weekend. We all have our own responsibilities to take care of, they understand.

Thus these examples highlight the different experiences the children of upwardly mobile parents have in comparison to their peers whose parents experienced less mobility. It seemed from interviewing their parents, that the upwardly mobile parents had, as David explained, their “own responsibilities.” When I asked these parents what plans they had for the next five to ten years, these parents replied with answers that ranged from “completing my training as an orthodontist and expanding my practice” to “in five buy my own factory (the building) to stop renting and make more profit and in ten, stop working so hard and sell my property to retire.”

The less upwardly mobile parents, on the other hand, tended to respond “our future is them, it’s just that... *uno vive para ellos*” [one lives for them] to “hopefully they’ve all graduated and then maybe, take care of our grandchildren.” Their responses highlight the nature of these parent-child relationships and the amount of pressure these youths have to achieve in order to make their parent’s sacrifice worthwhile. Ironically, this pressure to achieve also intensifies the stress these youths have to deal with when they are away, making their academic endeavors more difficult. It is important to note, that by the middle of Winter quarter, the youth (four of the five that were still enrolled) reported that parents were beginning to understand their academic demands and that although they were not consenting of their extra time on campus being dedicated to socializing, they did support their “sacrifice” for educational attainment. That is, so long as parents perceived their children’s time away from home as time dedicated to schoolwork and a sign of their dedication to academic achievement, they tended to be more understanding.

Access to Information

Most of the respondents in both groups expressed feeling that a big concern was “not knowing what to do next.” As first-generation college students in the U.S., all twelve expressed feeling a sense of urgency to find out what they needed in order to plan out their college career. They all feared missing a deadline, misfiling an application or not planning their schedules correctly. Gabriela, a child of two very resourceful parents who each started up his and her own factory with less than a high school education, explains that unlike high school, where students were always kept informed of their responsibilities by the staff, in college she feels the pressure to find out about everything on her own.

I guess the pressure is... keeping track of everything that's due, everything that I have to do, because I really don't have... guidance- you know – that tells me “Do this, and do this.” Well, I never really had one [referring to family], but in high school it was much easier to deal with all this [referring to staff facilitating the information]. And now, you're like more independent so you really, really have to... it's just, like knowing what you have to do. For example, yesterday I went online and I figured out, I had a whole bunch of things that I didn't know I had to do. Like, um, the loans, I have to fill out some papers for that... and then file some papers for SHIP, the insurance– I didn't know, like, no one ever told me – so now I have to find it all out myself.

Vanessa, a child of less mobile parents, is a very resourceful student who not only attached herself to a family whose children had all gone to college since she was in elementary school in order to learn from their experiences, but also carefully planned out her entire four years in high school to ensure her admittance into UCLA. She explains her most salient concern:

What's the biggest pressure as a student right now? [yes] That I don't know how the system works. Like, what classes I should be taking? What should I not be taking? What should I focus on? Should I take this class this quarter or this quarter? Or should I take – you know, stuff like that. [How do you intend to find out?] I dunno, I hope- like, I was going to make an appointment with one of the AAP counselors, but the front desk—the front desk is always closed when I come. (Vanessa)

Gabriela and Vanessa is each representative of their respective groups. When asked, “how do you intend to find out?” the children of the upwardly mobile parents tended to respond by saying “I’m going to have to find out myself” (4 of 6), while the children of the less mobile parents either told me they would resort to AAP’s services or asked me whom I would suggest they should ask at AAP (5 of 6). From our conversations, I got the impression that the children of upwardly mobile parents intended to avoid relying on AAP and intended to seek help from mainstream sources such as their Resident Advisor or using the UCLA webpage (my.ucla.edu). The children of the less mobile parents, on the other hand, expressed seeing AAP as their primary source of information. In fact, for many of these youths, AAP has provided invaluable services.

Since I maintained contact with the respondents throughout the summer, Fall, and Winter quarters, I know that five of the six children of the less mobile parents regularly took advantage of the services offered by AAP (tutoring, mentoring, peer counseling, and professional counseling). Of the six children of the upwardly mobile parents, only two (those who were in advanced math courses) regularly utilized one of AAP’s services, tutorials, and one is a work-study student there. This is an interesting finding, because it reflects their experiences with academic institutions. The children of upwardly mobile parents, who had attended academic programs in high school where the majority of their peers were college-bound, tended to rely again on the

institution's ability to provide them with the necessary information to achieve their goals. On the other hand, the children of less mobile parents who had attended programs where the academic climate was weak and had to rely on their resourcefulness and a handful of teachers to reach their academic goals, tended to rely on AAP and its staff to provide them with the information they needed to achieve their goals. In their case, AAP replaced the significant role their high school teacher and counselors had played in their education.

Economic Resources and Class

Another salient issue for most of the children of less mobile parents was feeling the pressure to get a job in order to help their family. While eight of the twelve respondents worked during the Fall and Winter quarters, four of the six children of the less mobile parents expressed an extreme need to do so. In contrast, only one of the children of the upwardly mobile parents expressed this same need to work and three children of upwardly mobile parents, who were also employed, took the job because it was part of their work-study or as David explained, so they could "learn how to manage my time and handle money."

When speaking to Vanessa about her reasons for getting a job she explained that she felt terrible being a burden on her family and that it was bad enough her dad was still paying for her computer. She wanted to be able to pay for books, buy herself a snack or pay for printing without having to bother her dad. Additionally, she was hoping to save enough money to buy herself a printer, because her dad had promised that after he paid off her computer, he would save to buy her one and she knew this would be an additional economic burden on him. In contrast, for the children of upwardly mobile parents, such items as computers, printers, digital cameras, recorders, and other accessories have always been at their disposal for school ever since they were in high school. Below, David explains how he felt uncomfortable around his classmates with fewer resources during FSP when he brought to school some equipment for a class project:

I felt kinda weird cuz I brought this camera I got for graduation, really high tech and too much for me... I used it for our video project and I have a laptop (shaking his head as he remembers the awkwardness of it all). So I brought a camcorder and I brought a digital camera, one of the little cheaper models... that my sister got for me. [I felt bad]... I didn't take them for granted or try to flaunt them... but I am at an advantage when I can use all those things for my studies.

Although not all the children of upwardly mobile parents had the economic resources that were at David's disposal, they all had their own computer and printer. In contrast, of the six children of the less mobile parents, two acquired a computer when they entered UCLA (Joshua with a scholarship and Vanessa, whose

father is still paying for it), one has an old computer recycled from her mother's office (Aileen), and the other three do not have a computer at all. Not having a computer to access the internet or type homework assignments leaves these students dependent on computer availability on campus and delimits their ability to do their work. Additionally, lacking these essential resources accentuates the differences between themselves and the mainstream at UCLA.

Consequently, many of the youth who have fewer resources feel intimidated and do not befriend people with greater economic resources. Illustrative of this point is Aileen's response when I asked her how she felt she fit in at UCLA. Her response echoes the sentiment shared by many of the other children of less upwardly mobile parents. She explained that she was a "regular student," but that she didn't really like to hang out.

I have friends here, but I just go to school and go home, I guess... I don't like to hang out with some people, those people who just take it for granted. I am here to get an education and it bothers me when I see white people just flaunting their money. I just stay away from people like that, so yeah, I just go to class and go with my friends [people from AAP] or I go home.

In the above quote, when Aileen says "white people just flaunting their money," she is not only referring to students using cell phones, expensive laptops, and other gadgets, but she is making a connection between race and class. The disparity of economic resources between the children of the less mobile parents and the mainstream at UCLA (mostly white and Asian) has the effect of not only highlighting their economic shortcomings, but also their ethnic differences. As a result, five of these six youth all reported finding themselves at home only when they were around the friends they made during FSP—mostly other working-class Latinos.

In contrast, five of the six children of upwardly mobile parents not only did not report economic shortcomings as a significant issue, but they also reported making many new friends outside of FSP and the Academic Advancement Program. For these students, participating in UCLA's mainstream was one of their primary goals. For the children of less upwardly mobile parents, ethnicity tended to be more salient than class, even when they were citing class based criticisms.

When I asked where they live on campus, four of the children of less mobile parents said they live in Sunset Village, higher end dorms, and two students commuted (Mercedes and Susana). In contrast, of the children of upwardly mobile parents who live on campus, only two live in Sunset Village and three live in high

rise buildings that are more affordable. When I asked how they could afford such expensive dorms, many explained that the only reason why they are living in Sunset village is because they got several scholarships. Interestingly, although the children of upwardly mobile parents also had scholarships, they explained that they live in the high rise dorms because those were the best their parents could afford.

Additionally, of the six youth, who lived in these more expensive dorms, five complained about not fitting in with their neighbors and peers. Only David, the youth from upwardly mobile parents whose family lives in a middle-class neighborhood, expressed feeling comfortable. Most others made comments such as: "I'm more like the outcast in that dorm" and "I know that most of the kids there, if not all, are probably wealthier than my family." They also commented that they felt more comfortable with their peers who lived in the high rise buildings, explaining that "The kids in the high rises are more willing to accept you. They are more social and friendlier." From these observations, these youths cited the role that class played on their interaction with their peers and the type of relationships they preferred.

What is particularly interesting is that most respondents, although they alluded to class differences, they never really cited any particular instances when class was the explicit reason why they felt uncomfortable. The closest most of these students got to discussing class, was when they criticized the way certain ethnic groups displayed their class by having expensive equipment, talking about large sums of money, and expensive attire and accessories. Thus, these youths tended to confuse class with ethnicity and vice versa.

Ethnicity

"I've lived in Los Angeles all my life and I never felt like a minority until I got to UCLA."-Aileen

While both groups believed they were experiencing the "American dream" during the first interview, they differed in the way they each conceptualized what is an "American." For both groups, at the time, living the American dream tended to be graduating high school, excelling in school, and participating in such prestigious American institutions as UCLA. Interestingly, the children of upwardly mobile parents tended to equate living the American dream with being "American" (5 of 6). As Ernesto explained in his first interview, "being able to reach the American dream [is] ... why I am an American". In contrast, the children of less upwardly mobile parents tended to equate being "American" with being white and thus tended to identify as

anything other than “American” (5 of 6). For these youths, the American dream was independent of their ethnic identity.

After the third interview, both groups modified their perception of the American dream and some even changed how they conceptualized “American.” They no longer spoke of the American dream as something they had achieved; instead, most of the children of upwardly mobile parents spoke of it as something that existed somewhere in the future. The children of less mobile parents, on the other hand, no longer spoke of the American dream at all, now they tended to frame their participation at UCLA as nothing more than a means to an end (completing their education and pursuing a career). The children of upwardly mobile parents, on the other hand, tended to frame their participation at UCLA as a means to achieving the American dream. Thus, they spoke of how they were structurally assimilating into UCLA’s mainstream and criticized their peers who did not actively participate as they did (see Joshua’s comment below).

Both groups reported that their ethnicity became more salient than ever before and all strongly agreed with Aileen’s comment that she had “never felt like a minority until [she] got to UCLA.” They differ in that most of the children of less mobile parents felt excluded and increasingly more ethnically distinct than ever before, while their counterparts framed their ethnicity as part of nothing more than an aspect of who they are. The children of upwardly mobile parents (5 of 6), although they were now identifying as “Chicano,” “Hispanic,” “Mexican-American” or “Latino,” they did not feel excluded and still believed that they (as non-whites) were still capable of one day living the American dream. Interestingly, while the children of less mobile parents maintained their conceptualization of an “American” as one who is white, the children of upwardly mobile parents stopped equating “American” with the American dream and subscribed to their counterparts definition of “American”—in racial terms.

For some of the children of less mobile parents, being at UCLA was very stressful. For these youths, the most salient perceived difference between themselves and the mainstream was their ethnicity, not their class, nor their academic preparation, or any other factor. They felt ethnically distinct and sought friendships with other people from similar backgrounds. At the beginning of the Fall quarter, when I asked Victoria, what types of pressures she felt as a student at UCLA, she replied:

As a minority, at times I feel like I don't belong. [Because of your ethnicity?] Yeah, because there's mainly whites and Asians. [Do you feel excluded?] Yeah.

Additionally, when I asked her what was her worst experience at UCLA, she responded:

I guess being in the dorms, because they are mostly whites and Asians. They're really loud. [Are there other Latinos on your floor?] Yeah, we're friends. It's funny how we find each other. [If they weren't there, would you feel more uncomfortable?] Yeah! [Would you consider moving out?] Probably.

When I probed further, Victoria explained that her roommate is very loud when she speaks on the phone and she explained that she's always talking about "stupid stuff, like 'oh, I'm so mad, 'cause my dad won't buy me this \$200 purse or shoes or something." Similarly, Aileen cites an example of why she does not like to be in her room with her roommates who are all white and prefers to hang out with her friends from FSP—mostly Latinas.

I don't feel comfortable with sorority or fraternity-type people, I feel like they are not taking advantage of everything... like not everybody has the opportunity to study and they are taking it for granted like it means nothing, so I don't feel comfortable with white people I guess... sometimes I have heard my roommate talk back to her mom on the phone, like really, really bad, like the other day she told her mom to look for something and then she was like "Oh, mom, you're so retarded and stupid mom, how can you not find that? You know, that \$150 sweater is just wasting away because you're so stupid you cannot find it."

In the above examples, these respondents are citing examples of their peers who are "loud" about their economic resources, but rather than stating that they feel uncomfortable because of class, they cite ethnicity as the root of their difference. From these examples, it shows that for these youths, class and ethnicity seems as interchangeable as being American and being white or living the American dream. Additionally, in Aileen's account of why she does not like being around her roommate, she also notes cultural differences between herself in her roommate when she adds, "First, I would never talk to my mom like that... and second, I can't afford stuff like that, we're just different, so I'd rather go with my friends in the high rises."

Although Vanessa, Aileen, Susana, and Mercedes did not share the sense of exclusion Victoria expressed in the earlier quote, they tended to say that they felt most comfortable with other Latinos as well as other AAP students and they sought opportunities to find co-ethnics. Vanessa recounts how she felt the first day of Fall quarter.

Just like walking around and stuff, I was really shocked 'cause everyone was mostly white and Asian. There was a few Latinos and blacks, but they were in the crowd somewhere... except in my Chicano Studies class, it was mainly Latinos there (laughs). So it was like "oh, I like this class." They were

people who if you saw them on campus they were like in the middle of everyone else... The class was like 300 people and they were mostly Latino. It was really cool.

During the Fall quarter at UCLA, Victoria sought refuge at a student-run program that targets “at-risk” undergraduate Latinos at UCLA and outreaches to inner-city high schools. She described her joining this program as her “best experience at UCLA.” Although Victoria’s GPA is a “B” average, she had the most difficulty adjusting to UCLA’s social environment. Later, during the Winter quarter, Victoria joined a Christian club, seeking to find some emotional and psychological support. She explained, “being a part of the... [Christian club], has helped me a lot. I don’t feel weird anymore... I have made a lot of new friends.”

Only Joshua, the son of a domestic worker and construction worker, did not experience UCLA as his peers from less mobile parents. Joshua is a high achiever who has been very proactive with his education and even though he was not in the magnet program at his high school, he took classes within the program as an “honorary magnet student.” When I asked Joshua about where he fits in at UCLA, he answered in the following way:

I would be like in the middle. Most of the kids in FSP were Latinos, but I didn’t talk to all of them. Like most of the kids I grew close to in FSP were black, white, or Asian. I’m not saying... like there is a couple of Hispanic girls that I am close to now, ‘cause they’re pretty cool... but then I hang out with my good friend who is white, so I guess that I’m more of an in between. Like I guess ethnicity does play a little bit of a role, but with these people that I have come to grow a little closer, it doesn’t matter... [Do you keep in touch with people from FSP?] That’s the problem, like I see a lot of the kids from FSP and they hang out with each other... they are limited to those people only. I am like, “get to know more people.” I’m not saying, don’t talk to them, but there is a lot of people they could get to know out there. [Why do you think they stick to FSP students?] I guess ‘cause they feel comfortable... they don’t wanna overcome that fear... Like, most of my friends are Asian and white, just because of my classes... Like I walked into my math class and I did not see one Hispanic kid... and the people I’m closest to are the people I met in Math or Chem and most of these kids are white and Asian. Like many of my friends, the Hispanic ones, they started taking math and science, but they started at a lower level than I did...”

Joshua’s response is in line with five of the six children of upwardly mobile parents. Most of the children of upwardly mobile parents shared with Joshua the need to meet “other” people. In fact, for these youths, telling me about their diverse sets of friends was presented as an accomplishment. Ernesto retells his experience as he goes out of his way to meet new people.

When you go into the dining halls, it’s like people of one race all sitting together and so it’s kind of intimidating to go sit with them, but if... [one of them is my friend] I don’t mind going to sit with them. I usually sit with people from my floor and it’s weird, ‘cause this floor is really diverse like we have all kinds of races... mostly Asian, Indian and white, so we all sit together. Most of the people I hang out with are people that I met in Fall... there’s pretty much no one from FSP that I hang out with anymore. I see them once in a while and we say hi, but it’s not like we hang out. Most people I hang out with are

people from my floor and their friends and then people from my classes; mostly Indian and white... but most of my friends are Indian.

Gabriela also expressed this proactive attitude toward interacting with people from other ethnicities. She explains,

I'm very involved with... [an environmental group] right now. I talk to a lot of Indian and Asian, some Latinas, and some whites... At... [this environmental group], I stand out, cause I'm like the only Latina in the room. And I'm not going to lie; it bothers me, because it makes me feel like they are looking at me like "what is she doing here?" But I don't care, I feel like it's my responsibility to be there and to let them see that not all stereotypes are true.

Walking around on campus and seeing that I'm like one of very few Latinos, it makes me feel like I have to do more. I feel pressured, like, I can't disappoint my parents, I can't disappoint my people, I can't disappoint my family. I feel like they are all looking at me and they are like, "when are you going to be a lawyer? be a doctor, be this and be that"... and like a lot of people at my high school, they still look up to me and they might be like, well, if she can't do it, then maybe I can't do it... Sometimes it get a little lonely.

[Do you feel the need to seek other Latinos?] *Yeah, I do but, right now I am just like- I don't know, I am always just trying to get stuff together on my own, I don't know, I'm a weirdo.*

For Gabriela, it is especially important that she interact with other people, not just because it makes her feel like she belongs at UCLA, but also because she feel a social responsibility as a Latina, to be as visible as possible. Similarly, the other four of the six youth whose parents had experienced upwardly mobility conceptualized their daily interaction with diverse people and active participation at UCLA (structurally assimilating into UCLA's mainstream) as their way of reaching for the American dream.

One of the six was less optimistic and although she wanted to integrate herself fully into the Asian and white majority, she found that ethnicity played an important role on social relations at UCLA. Adriana, the daughter of a cook and a domestic worker, explains her frustration in the following way:

[So the people you hang out with and the people you made friends with, even your acquaintances are predominantly Latino?] *"Yeah. I just... I don't think I feel more comfortable with them, I just feel they are more friendly or more open to a new friendship... [How does that make you feel?] (with frustration in her voice) I think I am a regular student, but like at my high school, there was a lot of Asians and there they were cool people and they were really friendly and wanted to be your friend, but here it's kind of like 'stick to your own' and it's sad. I mean, sometimes, sometimes, I try, but it doesn't seem they want to talk to me."*

Notice how Adriana, unlike the children of less mobile parents, tries to make friends with members of the mainstream at UCLA. She cites her experience from high school as evidence of her willingness to interact with other ethnic groups and she is very open about her frustration. In this instance, she does not make reference to

class or any particular group, but she does note that she tends to be surrounded by co-ethnics. Angel, made a similar observation, but in his response, he was not as self-conscious. Although he did not try to seek out co-ethnics and he had many non-Latino friends, he explained that the majority of his friends were Latinos and added, “I never noticed, but maybe I subconsciously feel more comfortable, I guess.”

In sum, while the children of upwardly mobile parents perceived their ethnicity as just one aspect of their identity, the children of less mobile parents perceived it as a source of insecurity and sought the companionship of co-ethnics as a strategy to help them cope with the new context. Interestingly, while both groups came to conceptualize an “American” as one who is white, they differed in their perceived ability to live the American dream. For the most part, the children of upwardly mobile parents spoke of the American dream as existing in their future and tended to speak of their experience thus far at UCLA with excitement and such comments as, “it’s great.” In contrast, after one quarter at UCLA, the children of less mobile parents no longer made any mention of this idealized future and instead tended to refer to their experience at UCLA with such observations as, “it’s getting better.”

Academics

In the end, although these youths are experiencing many of the same difficulties first-generation Latinos have historically experienced during their first year of college. Somewhat surprisingly, given the high rate of Latino drop out in the first year of college, they are all (including Mercedes who has informed me of her return for Spring quarter) very optimistic and determined to complete and excel in their education. Eleven of the twelve respondents are doing fine academically (average GPA is 3.24) and six of the twelve are involved in internships on campus. Although Mercedes was not enrolled during the Winter quarter, her GPA is in good standing (above a “B” average) and she intends to return in the Spring quarter. Only Susana has had some academic difficulty, but even her situation has been resolved.

Susana is the younger of two daughters of self-employed Nicaraguan parents who dye lace for the garment industry. Her father was a medical surgeon in Nicaragua, but when they migrated to this country he was unable to translate his training in order to practice in the United States. He cites discrimination and his loyalty to his family as the two primary reasons for his inability to reenter the medical field. Susana’s older sister received her undergraduate degree (summa cum laude) in Biological Sciences from UCLA in 1998, but is

now working with her mother and father, also dying lace in a small cubicle in Gardena. Susana, as her sister did six years ago, is trying to make her parents' dream come true of having a child who follows after their father's footsteps. During her first quarter at UCLA, Susana took a heavy load of math and science courses, which proved to be more difficult than she anticipated and by the end of her first quarter at UCLA, she was "subject to dismissal." In the Winter quarter, following the advice of her AAP counselor, Susana repeated one math course and took less difficult courses. Since the end of Winter quarter, she is again in good standing.

In terms of their academics, there was little difference between the children of upwardly mobile and the children of less mobile parents. With the exception of Mercedes, who had to withdraw for one quarter, all are doing fine. For the most part, they have managed to deal with being first-generation college students, the saliency of their ethnicity and class, and their extracurricular demands (such as family and employment) very well.

In sum, family, access to info, economic resources, class, and ethnicity were factors that were very salient for these youths during their first two quarters at UCLA. In general, the children from less upwardly mobile parents experienced a more difficult time when it came to managing time for school and time for family. Similarly, lacking the economic resources to own some of the most essential items, such as computers and printers, accentuated their class difference with some of their peers who came from more affluent families. For most of the youth, ethnicity proved to be one of their most salient issues. The children of upwardly mobile parents tended to conceptualized ethnicity as an aspect of their identity which they had to manage within a majority white and Asian context, while the children of less mobile parents tended to view ethnicity as a dividing factor that they found too difficult to overcome. These youths preferred to seek shelter in the company of co-ethnics.

Future Prospects

Interestingly, although the children of upwardly mobile parent did not differ from the children of less mobile parents in terms of their future prospects, they did differ in their plans for their immediate future. Moreover, they also differed in the way each group spoke about their immediate plans. That is, while the youth in both groups tended to have plans for post graduate education, *how* they intended to reach those goals varied (networking, getting to know professors, participating in internships, etc...). Some students had a clear plan,

outlining what they intended to do each year at UCLA and others simply said they would focus on getting good grades and then figure out what to do next as they were faced with having to make decisions.

Of the children of upwardly mobile parents, four were absolutely positive they wanted to go on to post-graduate education and only two expressed being ambivalent about graduate school. Of those who were determined to go on to graduate school, only one knew what program he wanted to go into (Ernesto, who wants to be doctor). In contrast, of the children of less upwardly mobile parents, all six knew what type of post-graduate education they intended to pursue. Interestingly, these youths were the ones who were much clearer about *how* they intended to achieve their goals. Their plans included getting good grades, studying abroad, participating in internships and post-graduate/professional outreach programs, and networking with other more advanced students. These programs and internships were frequently identified by name.

The children of upwardly mobile parents, on the other hand, had less outlined responses, but were more likely to express planning to get to know professors well so that they may write them letters of recommendation when necessary and tended to be more familiar with entrance exams for different post-graduate programs. It seemed from speaking to the youth that the children of less mobile parents tended to have paid close attention to the presentation organized by AAP staff during orientation. Many spoke of particular speakers and presented me with questions about the information they had received. The children of upwardly mobile parents mostly tended to speak of their understanding of the process involved in reaching their goals as if it was older knowledge. David, for example, said that he tried to always be on time and sit where the professor can see him so that the professor can see that he's interested and understands the material. He explained, "I know it's important that teachers get to know you." In contrast, Victoria explained her reasons for networking in the following way: *"I want to make sure I talk to people who are in graduate school, 'cause, they said that this way they can give me the heads up about what they have experienced."* When Victoria says "they said," she is referring to advice a presenters gave the FSP group during orientation.

Interestingly, with the exception of one respondent who wants to be a music video director, all the respondents expressed wanting to enter a helping profession. For the most part, they tended to furnish explanations such as, "I want to help people," "I want to give back to my community," and "I feel it's my responsibility to stand up for people, who like me, didn't have good resources." For the most part, the

professions both sets of respondents cited as their possible future tended to have a lot to do with the different role models and experiences each had. For example, Mercedes wants to be lawyer, so that she can help people who are in similar circumstances as she, undocumented. She explains she wants to do *pro bono* work because “people should not have to endure what... [she’s] going through.” Similarly, Joshua wants to be a hematologist because he has had deal with a blood deficiency that inhibits his ability to participate in sports. David is also considering a career in medicine largely because some family members in Colombia are doctors. He explains, “I’ve always wanted to go into medicine, but I have to find out if it’s because I want to or because so many people in my family are doctors.”

All in all, respondents in both groups were very optimistic about their future prospects. Most intended to pursue a post-graduate education and while their awareness of possible career options were limited for both groups, they were all high status careers. Only a few of the less upwardly mobile parents tended to have less realistic aspirations for their children. Illustrative of this mismatch is Susana’s parents’ dream of her becoming a doctor and Victoria’s parents’ hope that she will become a lawyer (when she hopes to become a teacher). With respect to the respondents’ aspirations, parental optimism or pessimism seem to have little effect on the respondents. Most seemed to be self-motivated and driven to achieve their goals, almost irrespective of their parents. This self-motivation was especially strong for the children of less mobile parents than their peers from upwardly mobile families.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study compared new second generation Latino incoming freshmen at UCLA whose parents have experienced some upward mobility to those whose parents have not experienced upward mobility, with a focus on three stages of these students’ educational experiences: their pre-college experience, their adaptation to the university, and their future prospects. Interestingly, even when the economic differences are so narrow, there are visible differences in the way the children of upwardly mobile parents experience their education and how they adapt when compared to their peers from less mobile parents. Specifically, they differed in terms of their strategies for educational achievement and in term of their self-identification, with the children of upwardly mobile parents being more likely to identify as American (or a variant e.g. Mexican-American).

During the interviews, parents and students reflected on their experiences with immigration, education, and their future plans. Not surprisingly, given that I was interviewing them in the midst of the youth's admittance into UCLA, their recent high school graduation, and other forms of commendation for their academic achievement (e.g. scholarships and awards), both groups were very optimistic about their future (especially during the first interview). As it relates to parents, their perceptions of American society and their role in their children's education varied based on their experienced mobility, but parental expectations of their children did not differ significantly. Both upwardly mobile parents and less mobile parents had high expectations for their children. Similarly, the youth (who tended to mirror their parents' attitudes and perceptions about American society) also had high aspirations and although they differed in their experience of campus life as it relates to their self-identity and perception of their class position, both groups maintained high grades in their academics.

Interviewing parents was especially beneficial because these interviews revealed certain attitudes that traditional measures of SES (education, occupation, and income) simply do not capture. To date, most studies rely almost exclusively on child-reported data about parents (Stanton-Salazar 2001 is a notable exception) and although research shows that these are reliable sources of information, they do not capture the more subjective qualities of the parents' experiences. As we have seen from the comments made by some of the respondents, parents who had experienced some degree of upward mobility tended to use language that was optimistic and had a favorable perspective of American society and their children's future prospects. The parents who had not experienced upward mobility, on the other hand, tended to express resentment, disillusionment, and pessimism about the American system of opportunities, often citing injustice, prejudice, and discrimination as an explanation for their low socioeconomic attainment. Interviewing the youth alone, did not capture the optimism or the disillusionment these parents expressed when interviewed.

For the less mobile parents, their experiences were consistent with findings within the segmented assimilation literature that finds that Mexican immigrant adults who have not experienced upward mobility and have been in the U.S. for a long time have an opportunity to learn about their "racialized and stigmatized" position in the United States (Lopez & Stanton-Salazar 2001, Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Interestingly; counter to what may be expected, while these parents were aware of their stigmatized position within the U.S., they tended

to remain optimistic about their children's future prospects. Their optimism; however, was not rooted in a trust of the American system of opportunities, instead, it was based on their perception of their children's exceptionalism. They tended to attribute their children's achievement in school to their children's determination and perseverance, rather than the American system of opportunities. In these cases, parental experience did not depress the educational expectations for their children, as Gibson and Ogbu (1991) find, but it did influence their own conceptualization of their achievement and their children's identity and perceptions of discrimination (Lopez & Stanton-Salazar 2001, Portes & Rumbaut 2001).

In contrast, although most of the upwardly mobile parents have many commonalities with their less mobile counterparts—immigrants, two-parent households, low levels of education, inner-city residents—they tended to have higher incomes and have higher status jobs than their co-ethnics in their predominantly working-class environment. Consistently they were more optimistic than their less mobile counterparts. Thus their experiences are more consistent with the status-attainment literature that argues that parental SES has a very powerful effect on educational attainment of children (Alba et al. 1999; Blau & Duncan 1967). These more cohesive, optimistic, and stable environment contributed to children's ability to focus on higher achievement (Alba et al. 1999). Additionally, because their children saw their parents struggle to place them in these settings, they tended to see their parents and their achievements as their primary models of behavior (Kao & Tienda 1998, 1995; Matute-Bianchi 1986).

Interviews with parents revealed that almost regardless of their levels of education and familiarity with the American educational system, parents who had experienced some upward mobility tended to feel more comfortable participating in their child's education (getting to know teachers, finding out about academic programs, applying, school resources, etc...) than parents who had not. Less upwardly mobile parents often cited fear of discrimination and opted out of interacting with institutional agents and instead relied on their children's resourcefulness to find out what they needed know to succeed in school. As a result, the children of upwardly mobile parents tended to be in better resourced secondary programs than their peers from less mobile parents who relied almost exclusively on teacher recognition of their children's abilities. Thus, for the children of upwardly mobile parents, participating in programs with strong academic climates where academic support

tends to be available for everyone, strong teacher-student relationships were less necessary, especially because in these settings peers, counselors, and other staff are more likely to be sources of support (Crosnoe et al. 2004).

In their pre-college experience, while parents and institutional agents were the two most important sources of support, neighborhoods and friends tended to be hindrances for the youths' goals of educational attainment (e.g. Stanton-Salazar 2001; Gibson & Ogbu 1991; Matute-Bianchi 1986). Although both groups avoided youth in their local environment, the children of upwardly mobile parents tended to be further disconnected. Many of the children of less mobile parents were forced to make a choice between their friends (who tended to have different goals, a high incidence of teenage pregnancy, and gang activity) and their academic pursuits. In Matute-Bianchi's words, this "forced choice dilemma," is a common finding in much of the literature that explores Latino adaptation patterns and school attainment (Matute-Bianchi 1986; Portes & Rumbaut 2001).

Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder (2004) found that high achieving Hispanic American adolescents, especially those from immigrant parents who had little familiarity with the American educational system, tended to form strong affective bonds with teachers who became their primary sources of information. They explained that this "substitution" was an especially consistent pattern for Hispanic American girls and less applicable where this substitution was less necessary. This study supports this finding. In this sample, five of the six children of less mobile parents and one of the children of upwardly mobile parents were female and all reported strong teacher-student relationships. For these youths their parents' hardships and struggle were their primary motivation to achieve, but their teachers and counselors tended to be their primary sources of informational and emotional support in their academic endeavors and they (not the parents) were their primary role models within the American context.

Although some research shows that public schools serving minority students are deeply invested in assimilationist ideologies that denigrate home culture (see Valenzuela 1999, for the Mexican case), "subtractive schooling," borrowing Valenzuela's words, did not appear to be a salient issue for these youth, because they tended to conceptualize school and home as being separate rather than conflicting worlds and they had authentic

affective bonds with their teachers (also see Stanton-Salazar 2001). The strong bond is best exemplified by Mercedes's teacher's willingness to donate her tuition fees for her father would not pay them.

While many respondents made reference to the American dream and some expressed a strong alliance with American culture, the youth tended to mirror parental perceptions of American society and its system of opportunities. In general, this tendency to mirror parental attitudes and opinions holds true for many immigrant groups (Portes & Rumbaut 2001; Waters 1996; Matute-Bianchi 1986). According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001), parents' social class background and social networks, family structure, and the type of school the child attended are the main factors that, in interaction with the way race is defined in the U.S., shape the type of identity developed by youths. That is, the positive perceptions of American institutions by upwardly mobile parents not only facilitated their involvement in getting their children into academic programs with strong academic climates, but they also shaped the way the youth view the system of opportunities. In line with their parents, the children of the upwardly mobile saw their achievement as a culmination of their efforts and many couched their experience in terms of the *normality* of their achievement. Following a similar pattern, the children of less mobile parents also mirrored their parents and (as did their parents) tended to frame their achievement as *exceptional*; especially because the majority of their high school peers were unable to reach the same goal.

Moreover, although the different pre-college experiences for both groups gave way to similar outcomes (admittance into UCLA), these different experiences proved to continue to manifest in the youth's adaptation to the university. Once at the university their experiences differed for the children of upwardly mobile parents and their peers from less mobile parents. As hypothesized, the children of less mobile parents had more extracurricular concerns than did the children of upwardly mobile parents. That is, while the latter did not have the pressure of having to work or having to spend a lot of time with family, the children of less mobile parents did (at least for the first few quarters in school).

There is a preponderance of literature that frames "familialism¹⁰" as a hindrance among working-class minority groups for educational attainment, but there is little concrete evidence that actually supports this claim (Valenzuela & Dornbusch 1994). Familialism, even if it impedes geographic mobility (as it did for ten of the respondents), it may still have a positive effect on academic achievement in school when the family is

supportive of the youth's academic endeavors. From a social capital perspective, having high levels of parental human capital is not enough if the connection between parent and child is weak (Farkas 1996; Coleman 1988). Similarly, sacrificing for the sake of their children's future and having high expectation for them is not enough if there is no strong reciprocal relationship between the youth and the parent. More research needs to focus on the effect reciprocity between parent and child has on educational attainment, when pursuing an education is valued by the parents. In these cases, their sense of obligation to reciprocate their parent's sacrifice was frequently cited by the youth as a motivation for their educational attainment and it was never discussed as a hindrance to their achievements. Thus, for these youth, familialism (for the most) tended to be a source of strength rather than a hindrance.

Additionally, while both groups, as first-generation college students, expressed the stress of not having the basic knowledge about postsecondary education (deadline, applications, and general information), they differed in the strategies they employed to acquire information (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini 2004). While the children of upwardly mobile parents tended to seek mainstream sources of information, the children of less upwardly mobile parents tended to rely almost exclusively on the resources available at the Academic Advancement Program (AAP). This decision to seek help from a program that serves a population of predominantly working-class Latinos and other underrepresented minorities reflects a preference that the children of less mobile parents expressed in other aspects of their life on campus.

That is, while the children of upwardly mobile parents tended to conceptualize their ethnicity as just another aspect of their identity, the children of less mobile parents tended to feel ethnically distinct and too different from the mainstream at UCLA. Interestingly, most of the youth in both groups reported that their ethnicity is a signifier of their socioeconomic class at the university, but the children of upwardly mobile parents tended to say that this was true "for people who do not know better" and felt it was their responsibility to correct that stereotype. In contrast, many of the children of less mobile parents tended to subscribe to the stereotype themselves and often confused class and ethnicity, citing ethnic labels as descriptors of people's class. For this reason, they tended to spend most of their time with co-ethnics and frequently cited differences between themselves and the mainstream in ethnic terms.

For these youth, it appears that ethnicity “emerged” as the most salient aspect of their everyday interaction at the university (Conzen 1992). Yet, it would be problematic to argue that their emergent ethnicity was “reactive” or “oppositional” in nature, because in fact none of the respondents took an adversarial stance against the mainstream institutions on campus. We must remember that these youth have already overcome what Portes and Rumbaut (2001) term the “downward effects of social capital” in their neighborhood and that now, even the lowest stratum at UCLA is still likely to be academically inclined. These youths have, instead, opted to seek “ethnic role models” among their peers and institutional agents on campus. Perhaps, that is precisely what they are finding in AAP. In AAP the majority of tutors, peer counselors, and staff are from traditionally underrepresented communities.

Being economically disadvantaged made interaction with the mainstream at UCLA very difficult for some of the children of less mobile parents who became unwilling to interact with peers whom they perceived to have greater economic resources. This finding is consistent with Cabrera et al. (1992) who found that for low-income students inadequate financial aid can interfere with students’ academic and social integration and has been shown to be related to persistence decisions. For these youth, it is too soon to tell what consequences, if any, their choice to isolate themselves from the mainstream may have. The scholarly work on first-generation college students, points to the fact that first-generation college students stand to benefit from high levels of engagement with the institution’s social and peer networks even more so than traditional students (Pascarella et al. 2004). Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini (2004) found that the level of engagement with the institution’s social and peer networks, such as extracurricular involvement, had a very strong positive effect on “critical thinking, degree plans, sense of control over their own academic success, and preference for higher-order cognitive tasks” for first-generation college students who previously might not have had access to these activities or networks. Hence, as the children of less mobile parents opt out of this type of engagement with the majority of their peers on campus, they may also reduce the benefits they derive from attending a highly selective institution such as UCLA and the networks this institution may provide.

On the other hand, Hurtado & Carter (1997) have found that since a “sense of belonging” is crucial to persistence and completion (Tinto 1993), minority youths stand to benefit from participation in ethnic student organizations and community service. This form of participation, they argue is especially important on college

campuses where there is racial tension or during a period when race/ethnicity is very salient (Hurtado 1992). From this perspective, it may be that the children of less mobile parents have found the best strategy for them to succeed on campus, given the strong anti-immigrant sentiment that persists in California since the early nineties.

Additionally, the dormitories these youths lived in on campus proved to be an important factor. For some, cost-stratified dormitories either accentuated the class difference between them and the mainstream or allowed these differences to fade. As noted above, the children of upwardly mobile parents tended to live in affordable housing on campus (4 of 6) and the children of less mobile parents who lived on campus (4 of 6), all lived in some of the most expensive dormitories. Thus, while the children of less mobile parents felt alienated by their higher status context, the children of upwardly mobile parents rarely had to deal with class in the dorms and consequently felt more comfortable crossing ethnic lines. Consequently the children of upwardly mobile parents tended to describe new friendships, especially those outside their ethnic group as one of the benefits of being a student at UCLA. Accordingly, they tended to describe their experiences at UCLA as “great,” whereas their peers from less mobile parents remained optimistic, but were more likely to say that things are getting better, especially after they join co-ethnic student-run organizations.

Overall, although these two groups differed in their perception of the mainstream, their social confidence, and their information seeking strategies, they did not differ in terms of their academic confidence. Both groups performed above a “B” average. And even those who had to take low-level math and English courses remained academically confident.

Their future outlooks; interestingly, seemed to be irrelevant of their self-identity or their parent’s experiences with socioeconomic mobility. For these youth, their own experience in reaching their set goals had a more significant effect on their aspirations than their parents’ successes or frustrations. They did differ; however, in terms of their concrete plans for their future. The children of less mobile parents tended to have more concrete plans to reach their goals, while the children of upwardly mobile parents tended to be less clear about the steps they would have to take to achieve their goals. This careful planning of their future and attention to detail may be illustrative of a learned strategy that the children of less mobile parents acquired as students at under-resourced high schools where they may have had to pay close attention to get the information being disseminated in order to access higher education. In this sense, it may an indication of their “resiliency,” which

Alva (1995) defines as the academic invulnerability of students who “sustain high levels of achievement, motivation, and performance, despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly in schools” (also see Stanton-Salazar & Spina 2000) or it may be that the precarious economic situations in which they have developed may “spur their ambition” inline with what is commonly known as the “immigrant drive” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

In sum, although this was not a comparison between upper-class (or even middle-class) and working-class children of immigrant this study shows that the subtle difference within the working-class category have a significant effect on how these youths experience college. From these narratives it is evident that parental experience with mobility has a powerful effect on the socialization of the children of immigrants. First, the material resources available to youth, such as safe neighborhoods, better resourced schools, computers, and other resources had a powerful effect on the how these youths experienced their education. Second, having experienced upward mobility contributed to the positive attitude many immigrant parents adopted in reference to the American system of opportunities, making them optimistic about their own endeavors and their aspirations for their children. In turn, parental optimism influenced how their children felt in relation to American society and the American system of opportunities. Thus, these youths had a greater tendency than their less mobile peer to adopt an “American” identity (or a variant of American, as in Mexican-American).

Future research should explore the effects that cost-stratified dormitories have on students from diverse economic and ethnic backgrounds in academic settings and how these class-stratified settings may contribute to the reproduction of the American class structure within the university. Perhaps, a longitudinal study that explores into which segment of the university community these youth incorporate themselves into would shed light on the long term effects of ethnic identity and class position on the children of immigrants who are accessing higher education and the costs and benefit of ethnic-based organizations.

Notes

¹ The “new second generation” refers to the children of post-1965 immigrants (Portes and Zhou 1993).

² They have a heavier workload than most summer courses at UCLA.

³ She entered the university as an AB-540 student. AB-540 is a bill passed in 2001 that allows students with undocumented status to enroll in universities and pay in-state tuition.

⁴ The criteria for admission into this program is very comprehensive and contingent on various combination of factors, these are only a few of the most common characteristics of AAP freshmen.

⁵ Established by their eligibility for free lunches in high school.

⁶ These years refer to individuals, not families. Some of the families were formed in the sending country, were separated and then reunited, while others were formed in the U.S. and the year of migration has little to do with the year of the family’s formation.

⁷ between 1966 and 1984—these years refer to individuals, not families.

⁸ <http://www.greatschools.net>

⁹ <http://www.greatschools.net>

¹⁰ As defined by Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994; 1996) familialism is a concept containing three dimensions that operate within a family system. These dimensions involve the expressed identification with the interests and welfare of the family; different degrees of affinity and attachment during contact with family members; and marks the spatial and social boundaries within which behavior occurs and attitudes acquire meaning.

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APPENDIX A

Pseudonyms	Sex	Place of Birth	High School	Program	Sibling Ages	Parent YR of Arrival*	Parent Mig. Status*	Country of Origin*	Parent's Education*	Parent's Occupation*	Homeowner/Entrepreneur	Neighborhood
Adriana	F	LA	LAUSD Medical Magnet	Mag	26, 24, 17	1979	citizens	Mexico	less than HS/Elementary	Bus Boy & Cook, Domestic Worker	yes/no	Silverlake
Angel	M	LA	Bassett Unified	Reg	16, 12	1972/79	residents	Mexico/ El Salvador	Para-professional/ less than HS	Sanitation Technician/ Nurse's Assitant	no/no	El Monte
Gabriela	F	LA	LAUSD Business Magnet	Mag	24, 22	1973/82	citizen/resident	Mexico	Elementary	Garment Industry Owner/Garment Industry Owner	yes/yes	Los Angeles
Ernesto	M	LA	LAUSD Polytechnic	Mag	16, 6	1984	undocumented	Mexico	Para-professionals	Independent Contractor (Construction), Homemaker	yes/yes	Long Beach
David	M	LA	Catholic High	Private	21	1980	citizens	Colombia	DMD/ Some College	Machinist/ Dentist	yes/yes	Glendale
Jose	M	LA	LAUSD Academy	Mag	45, 43, 41, 39, 37, 35, 33, 31, 29	1966/70	residents	Mexico	Elementary	Delivery Service & Manufacturing Factory Owner/ Homemaker	yes/yes	Compton
Aileen	F	LA	LAUSD Business Magnet	Mag	—	1979/72	citizens	Peru/ El Salvador	Para-professional/ PHD	Pastor/ Notary Public	no/yes	South Central/South LA
Joshua	M	LA	LAUSD High	Honorary Magnet	21, 16, 13, 9	1981	resident/citizen	El Salvador	some HS/HS	Construction Worker/Domestic Worker	no/no	Pico-Union
Mercedes ^o	F	Jalisco	LAUSD High	Reg	17, 6	1985/88	citizen/ undocumented	Mexico	GED	Photographer/ Homemaker	no/no	South Gate
Vanessa	F	LA	LAUSD Magnet	Mag	12, 8	1978/85	citizen/ resident	Mexico	less than HS	Assembler & Bus Boy/ Manufacturing unskilled	yes/no	South Gate
Susana	F	Nicaragua	LAUSD High	Reg	28	1985/87	citizens	Nicaragua	MD/ less than HS	Fabric Dying-- Private Contractors	no/yes	Hawthorne
Victoria	F	LA	Inglewood Unified	Reg	—	1980	citizen/resident	Guatemala/ El Salvador	HS/ Elementary	Dry Cleaner Store/ Custodian	no/no	Inglewood

* Father/Mother ^o Undocumented