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Missing Messages: The Influences of Class and Culture on Educational Achievement in
First Generation Mexican Families

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

by

Eric Jason Vega

June 2010

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Dedication

To my dad, Robert Muga Vega, for always being our "rock".

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Missing Messages: The Influences of Class and Culture on Educational Achievement in
First Generation Mexican Families

by

Eric Jason Vega

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Sociology
University of California, Riverside, June 2010
Dr. Karen D. Pyke, Co-Chairperson
Dr. Scott L. Coltrane, Co-Chairperson

In response to cultural and institutional beliefs about the necessity of an education

and the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that has increased academic

accountability on schools and teachers, research on predictors of academic achievement

has expanded over the past decade. Classically, research on achievement has noted the

significance of demographic factors and the positive relationship between socioeconomic

status (SES), parental involvement and academic achievement. As such, research on

achievement within low SES populations has taken center stage. Along these lines,

scholars have focused on how cultural and environmental factors also affect achievement

in disadvantaged minority populations. Finally, as schools reorganize to meet NCLB

mandates and as the teaching-learning-evaluation process is altered in the response to

these shifts, scholars have begun to examine how NCLB has affected teaching, learning

and achievement in the classroom. Unfortunately, less attention has been paid towards

understanding how NCLB alters the significance of parent involvement on the achievement process. This dissertation identifies relevant dimensions of parent involvement in first generation Mexican families and considers how changes to the U.S. educational system affect opportunities for relevant forms of involvement and assessments of student achievement.

Using a sample of 54 first generation Mexican families with an eighth-grade child, I examine parent involvement and student success through exploring how these parents conceptualize meanings of education and understand their utility within their child's schooling. The findings from this project highlight how academically, linguistically, economically disadvantaged parents involve themselves in their child's education and how their children perceive and are affected by these interactions. Contrary to classic understandings about the linear relationships between SES, parental involvement, and academic aspirations, I discuss the counterintuitive effects of income on children's perceptions of their parents' utility, as tempered by the cultural histories and linguistic boundaries of their parents. Following this discussion, I consider how NCLB has affected the structure of schooling and culture of learning in U.S. schools and how these shifts diminish the ways in which first generation Mexican families are able to remain involved in their child's educational success. Finally, suggestions for future research and policy development that have the potential for meeting the needs of a rapidly changing educational environment and growing Latino student population are offered.

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A wealth of research underscores the idea that a commitment to education is firmly woven into the dominant American cultural fabric. Long held as a potentially equalizing or leveling mechanism (Weber, 1946), U.S. public education is open and free to all legal U.S. residents representing a place of equal learning opportunities. Along scholastic dimensions, schools are classically understood as a place to enrich the mind, developing skill sets and appreciation of literature, mathematics, science and the arts. Along social dimensions, schools are understood as socialization contexts where children adopt societal norms and values (Brint, Contreras & Matthews, 2001). Correspondingly, educational attainment is understood as critical at both individual and societal levels. At the individual level, educational attainment is compulsory for youth under eighteen years of age and viewed as essential to the extent that schooling is linked to one's ability to secure a better quality of life (Bourdieu, 1986; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Chavez, 1992; Coleman, 1987; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). At the societal level, educational attainment functions as an essential stabilizing mechanism through the intergenerational transfer of cultural values, norms and technologies. As such, the issue of educational attainment continues to be an important topic among researchers and policy makers. Two principal factors driving this continued research are that the U.S. continues to be home to migrating populations and the fact that many of these immigrants and their families continue to struggle in school. The goals of this dissertation are 1) to assess the utility of past and present theories of academic achievement as they relate to immigrant families 2) to examine the affects of generational status and the personal biographies of immigrant

parents on the extent of cultural disparity between the parents' home country and host country with regard to understandings about the value of education, knowledge about the educational process in the United States and the educational aspirations and expectations they form for their children and that their children form for themselves 3) to assess how traditional forms of social capital including: parents' income, level of educational attainment and job status, that typically positively predict academic achievement, are enacted within immigrant families and how these forms of social capital are affected by class, culture and immigrant family environments 4) to identify the kinds of alternative strategies that immigrant families employ including: forms of parental involvement, extended family support networks and cultural brokering to assist their children's educational progress in light of their limited access to traditional forms of social capital 5) to address how the changing emphasis in public schools from student-centric learning to test-centric performance affects how immigrant families interact with their children around educational issues as well as how they relate to the current U.S. educational system 6) to highlight how institutional shifts in policy at the federal, state, district and school level that are loosely coupled with the actions of teachers in the classroom have the potential to generate conflicting course grade and standardized test score results. In turn, this may affect parent and child understandings about academic performance and affect how researchers, educators and policy makers interpret these educational outcomes and finally 7) to examine the implications of these findings for educational policy decisions that affect the achievement of children in immigrant families.

The Contemporary Context of Immigration: The Challenge of Fitting In

Understanding the extent to which immigrant families are able to navigate among or around these institutional arrangements furthers general insights, explanations and predictions about why these populations exhibit or are likely to exhibit avoidant or engaged scholastic behaviors. This issue is important due to its potential affect on their ability to garner resources, form networks, and realize varying degrees of academic involvement, achievement and educational attainment. Insight into the current structural and cultural pressures facing immigrant families also sheds light on likely patterns of institutional alignment and about the ways immigrant parents involve themselves in their child's education.

The pattern of integration that characterized immigrant groups in the United States at the turn of the 20th century was one of relatively rapid assimilation into the mainstream culture. In addition, ethnic orientations were bounded by homogenous ethnic enclaves. During this historical era, localized schools were more closely tailored to the needs of the immediate community. Central to this relationship was an alignment of schools and other institutions with parents in these communities who echoed the need for their children to adopt U.S. customs and practices. In contrast, the current wave of immigration that is occurring a century later is less likely to promote abandonment or a bounded expression of their home country's cultural heritage and more likely to encourage biculturalism and expectations of mutual accommodation between the immigrant groups and the host country. Unfortunately, the practices of the current public educational system do not reflect bicultural policies or encourage the inclusion of parents

via cultural accommodations. As a result there is clear evidence of alienation and frustration on the part of both immigrant parents and schools.

To use cultural brokering as an example, it is clear that earlier immigrant populations faced linguistic issues (Gerber, Seller, Guitar, & Fisher, 1997; Janni & McLean, 2002), although it is not clear to what degree children acted as the liaisons between their parents and social institutions outside their homes and ethnic communities. Past works on the issue of social integration note the challenges faced by either immigrant or racialized minority groups, although these findings center on the intolerance of socio-cultural adaptations by members of these groups into the host/dominant society (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918, 1919, 1920; Myrdal, 1944). Specifically, Thomas and Znaniecki (1918, 1919, 1920) note the intolerance of Polish immigrants on attempts to break from the thick solidarity of their ethnic enclave, conceptualizing such actions as generating social disorganization and the moral disintegration of that ethnic community. Similar sentiments were found in the study of black communities in the early 1900's, although, in this case, attempts at integration were viewed as a moral crisis by members of the dominant white population, manifest in their subsequent efforts to institutionally segregate and discriminate against black people and their cultural heritage. Across both studies, the preservation of the ethnic community and of white society was based on the idea of need (i.e. procurement of economic resources and/or the cultural preservation of group-specific values and attitudes). At the same time these authors argue that given the resources provided within the opposing group (e.g. economic opportunity and labor), assimilation into mainstream society was viewed as inevitable and thus causing a dissolve

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of the values and attitudes sustaining such ethnic or racial communities. In contrast, research on prevalence of cultural brokering in contemporary immigrant communities has revealed the importance this form of child-brokered communication between immigrant populations and a host country, in part, as a way of permitting self–sufficiency within immigrant communities (Zhou, 2001). For children to act as cultural brokers, parents must not only see them as a viable option for communicating with others, children must also be adept in the use of the English language. Finally, the institutions with which they interact also need to be receptive to these children as legitimate institutional actors who accept brokering as a legitimate communicative strategy. Unfortunately, the latter point has received little attention in the literature largely due to the populations from which previous samples have been drawn. Much of the research on cultural brokering has focused on samples drawn from ethnic enclaves; immigrants existing within enclaves tend to consume resources within the boundaries of that enclave (Zhou, 1992). Therefore the prior work on brokering is limited in its ability to generalize to immigrant families living outside of these enclaves (Gonzales, 2005; Zhou, 2001). However, brokering still occurs within Mexican households living outside of immigrant communities and this process still affects the ways that parents are potentially able to involve themselves in their children's lives and shape how parents and children perceive child capabilities (Buriel, Perez, DeMent, Chavez & Moran, 1998). A unique aspect of this project is that it furthers understanding about the educational experiences of immigrant families within ethnically diverse suburban neighborhoods and communities that do not possess large numbers of fellow immigrants.

Finally, exploring how an immigrant group is generally received in this country furthers our understanding about their feelings of efficacy and their involvement within various milieus. Mexican families are nested within larger communal, political and economic settings. Over the past decade, Mexicans have increasingly been viewed as a threat to political, economic and cultural stability in the United States. In response, the U.S. government has increased its military presence along the Mexican border, approved funding and begun construction of a 700 mile long wall between the U.S. and Mexico. It is now more difficult to travel across the U.S.-Mexico border and there is an increase in the number and frequency of immigration raids across the nation. In response, immigrants and those connected to immigrants have organized mass protests and at the same time retreated from involvement in "high profile" settings where they might be subject to raids, interrogation and potential deportation including, local parks, stores, and outside of churches and schools.

The demographic context of the United States in which the current wave of immigration is embedded has shifted radically over the last century. Seventy to eighty years ago the percentage of the population that was minority was 9.7% African American and 1.7% other racial minorities (U.S. Census Bureau, 1933). In contrast, according to recent Census figures (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003), the demographic picture has changed radically. In 2003, 31% of the population belonged to a racial or ethnic minority group - a threefold increase in the minority population since the 1930s. In 2000, over 30 million immigrants accounted for 11% of the total population. Mexicans represent the largest number of immigrants from any part of the world in the United States and more than half

of the Hispanic population is in the first and second generation. In 2002 the Mexican

immigrant population totaled 9.6 million or 29.7% of U.S. population. Trends suggest

that in parts of the United States some ethnic groups, such as Latinos, will be a majority

by the year 2030. This shift in demographic proportional representation will have

profound implications for how researchers, educators and policy makers think about the

structure of schooling and the socioeconomic health of the nation

Importance of Studying Educational Attainment in Immigrant Households

As policy makers grapple with raising standards and at the same time closing the

achievement gap, issues of immigration have taken center stage. The immigrant presence

is especially apparent in schools as one in five children live in immigrant households

(Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Zhou, 1999). Issues of academic achievement

are also affected by this pattern of a rising immigrant population as immigrants tend to be

less educated than their native counterparts. For instance, 11% of the foreign born adults

above the age of 25 have completed some high school, but did not graduate. Moreover,

the children of immigrant households achieve at dramatically lower rates than their native

born white counterparts. In 2003 only 7% of Latinos completed the required high school

courses with grades qualifying them for possible admission into the University of

California system (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2005). In the larger

sample upon which the current study is based, 95% of fathers had less than 7 years of

U.S. education, 30% of fathers were currently attending school in the U.S. and over half

of fathers completed 8 or more years of schooling in Mexico. Understanding these

patterns of limited achievement among children of immigrants is particularly important

given that education is a major predictor of subsequent economic outcomes, including earnings and occupational status (Blau & Duncan, 1967) and that these patterns of low achievement can persist across future generations (Borjas, 1994, 2003; Glazer & Moynihan, 1963; Hirschman & Falcon, 1985; Steinberg, 1981).

The Problem of Poverty and its Links with Academic Achievement

To fully understand the educational achievement patterns of immigrant groups, the issue of poverty needs to be examined as well. Compared to European Americans, Latinos have experienced low social mobility with relatively little change in family income across generations (Chapa & Valencia, 1993; Vega et al., 1983). Latino family income is less than 60 percent of non-Latino family income, even though Latino men have higher labor force participation rates than non-Latino men (Perez & Salazar, 1993; Zinn & Wells, 2000). Latino families thus typically fall into the category of working poor, commonly defined as having at least one employed family member, but with a household income that is below 200% of the poverty level.

Latinos also tend to be employed in the service sector and occupy jobs with low pay, limited benefits, few opportunities for advancement, and periodic instability (Ortiz, 1996; U.S. Census, 2003). Because of low wages received by their parents, over a third of Latino children under 18 live in poverty, over three times the rate for non-Latinos (U.S. Census, 2003). These patterns, coupled with the fact that Latinos have more children and larger households than non-Latinos, demonstrate that a disproportionate number of Latino children grow up in households with severely limited financial resources (Cauce & Rodriguez, 2001; Vega, 1995). In the overall sample from which the

sample for the current study was drawn, the fathers were the primary breadwinners with over 70% working full time although they averaged only $20,000 per year in income (Coltrane, Melzer, Vega & Parke, 2005).

In general, these demographic factors have been the focus of most work on predictors of parent involvement in their children's education. Researchers argue that lower income, less educated parents (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987; Lareau, 2003) are less educationally involved than their more educated, higher income counterparts. Reflecting this argument, the majority of the fathers in this sample indicated that they increased the number of hours worked to help provide for their family resulting in less time to interact with their wives and children. Additionally, the majority of Mexican fathers in this sample worked in low-skill, permanent entry physical labor occupations creating a drain on the energy that they had during these limited interaction periods.

Linked to these limited forms of parental involvement is the fact that Latino children raised in poor households are significantly less likely to graduate from high school, and Latinas at the lower end of the socioeconomic (SES) scale are over three times as likely to become teenage mothers as are high SES Latinas and which also affects educational retention, persistence and attainment (Cauce & Rodriguez, 2001). If we accept these findings about the negative affects of low levels of educational attainment, working conditions and poverty on academic achievement, we should expect relatively low levels of educational involvement by immigrant parents and low levels of academic achievement by their second generation children.

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Traditionally, this research on parental involvement and children's academic achievement conflates socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity, language proficiency, and generational status (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). More recently, researchers have underscored the need to distinguish race, class, gender, generational status and language proficiency from SES, in order to properly address how these dynamics combine to affect parental involvement and student achievement in education (Suarez –Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Zhou, 2001; Gonzalez, 2005 ; Feliciano, 2006). One of my goals is to advance this agenda as a way to better understand why some immigrant children succeed educationally in spite of these economic hardships and limitations in parental education. I argue that alternative forms of social capital affect the ways that Mexican parents engage the educational process and, in turn, help explain the unexpected levels of educational achievement among some immigrant children. I next examine this typically unrecognized variability in educational outcomes.

The Poorly Understood Variability of Latino Educational Achievement

Researchers have argued that immigrants come to America with a dream and motivation to succeed, in part formed out of the extreme economic hardship that so many Mexican immigrants experience. Further, researchers suggest that these messages are in turn instilled in their children as reflected in the parental push to excel in school. However, less has been said about how this dream affects parental levels of educational involvement beyond this initial socialization. How do these economic realities and the focus on family survival affect how parents understand ideas of success and achievement? If success is relative to the parent's current or past experiences then this

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would likely provide a much different picture of educational and economic success than is communicated within mainstream U.S. culture. Reflecting on the limited opportunities that immigrants face (Suarez –Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001), is this dream realized via formal protracted educational attainment or a more short term vocational training with an emphasis on immediate economic stability?

Language acquisition, acculturation, and school involvement are also not simple linear processes that develop in uniform ways for all parents. While commitment to education on the part of both parents and as perceived by their children, is likely to influence children's aspirations, expectations and study habits, regardless of ethnicity, research suggests that the processes may differ across ethnic groups and within ethnic groups by generational status (e.g., Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Buriel & DeMent, 1997; Cauce & Rodriguez, 2001). At the individual level, parental beliefs about their efficacy to assist their children's educational progress have been examined. Parents who believe they can "make a difference" in the educational outcomes of their children are more likely to be involved (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brissie, 1992). To the extent that a parent believes that they have a role in the teaching-learning process, they may be more likely to be involved in their child's educational experience. However, little is known about other determinants of parental educational involvement such as parents' understanding of the educational system and institutional barriers that may limit parental involvement in educational activities. These questions about how parents perceive, interpret, and involve themselves in the U.S. public educational system are only partially addressed by current research. When these issues are explored, assessments of parental involvement are

largely uninformed by cultural factors that may influence these dynamics. For example, what comprises an education, relative understandings of educational success, institutional knowledge about the educational process, or the linguistic and legal barriers that a family may experience are all issues that are conditioned by an individual's cultural background (Hill, 2010).

Finally, given the disparities in cultural and institutional knowledge about the current U.S. public educational system, how might parental understandings about the academic achievement of their children, as assessed via grades and standardized test scores, affect the aspirations and expectations for their children and subsequent parenting practices regarding academic achievement and acceptable educational pathways?

Summary of the Theoretical Goals of the Current Study

Due to the institutional belief about the necessity of an education, educators continue to be concerned about the low rates of educational achievement among Mexican and Mexican American populations. Latino youth are twice as likely to lag behind in school or drop out of school as non-minority students and they are less likely to pursue postsecondary education (Lopez, Puddefoot & Gandara, 2000; Delgado-Gaitan, 1988; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Yet surprisingly little is known about how economic resources, cultural background, generational status, language proficiency, parenting practices and school environments combine to affect Mexican and Mexican American children's academic aspirations and educational achievement.

At a general level, existing research has typically focused on understanding the effects of singular factors on academic achievement in immigrant families. Factors

including legal status, limited English language proficiency and cultural variation have all been found to negatively affect access to resources and overall mobility. Structural factors including the absence of formal networks, limited access to institutional support and educational disparities, including the lack of academic knowledge and structural language barriers inhibit institutional involvement and shape the types of involvement that these parents are able to exercise (Gandara, 1995; Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). Research on the affect of economic hardship (Parke, Coltrane, Duffy, Buriel, Powers, French & Widaman, 2004) and the hourglass shape of opportunity among immigrant populations (Suarez –Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) underscores the fact that persistent and fluctuating economic struggle both create limited opportunities for family involvement generally. Given the lack of linkage between many of these independent research strands, it is critical to understand the relationships among social, cultural and institutional factors on academic achievement in Latino families.

A number of studies have shown how immigrant, first and second generation populations experience similarly low levels of socioeconomic achievement and at the same time highlight positive relationships between SES, positive forms of parental involvement, and overall academic achievement. Few offer insight into how low SES parents successfully involve themselves in the academic lives of their children. Nor do we have a clear understanding of how these disadvantaged children perceive their circumstances or how they view the types of involvement that their parents provide them. How then do we explain academic success among low SES children? What factors distinguish a child's academic success among similarly disadvantaged parents, why do

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some student's put forth effort aimed at achieving educationally while others do not? How do parents influence these various patterns of child motivation? Beyond traditional understandings about the value and affect of parent's academic achievement or economic status; parent's generational status and linked cultural histories shape how they understand and impart meanings about achievement. In turn, these perspectives influence the ways that parents understand the role that they play in their child's education and the role that the educational process should have within the lives of their children.

Researchers argue that the primary determinants of educational differences in immigrant families are either culturally situated or structurally defined according to socioeconomic status. I argue that this is an oversimplified dichotomy and that class and culture are intertwined. Differences in educational characteristics among immigrant adults have technological components, in terms of knowledge and skills that can be made available to children, and cultural components, in terms of the motivations, expectations and aspirations passed on by the older generation to their children. At the same time, these individual characteristics are also influenced by their understanding of dynamic institutional arrangements. Existing research has focused on measures of socioeconomic status but has not adequately measured the linkage between culture and class and has only minimally begun to consider the effects of a changing educational arena (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2005).

Overview of the Current Study

Using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the aim of this study is to better understand how issues of culture and class affect parental involvement in the

educational lives of a group of Mexican immigrant families and their second-generation

Mexican American adolescents. Another aim is to explore the affect of a changing public

educational system on immigrant parents and children. Building on prior research, I

explore how individual and contextual factors shape divergent levels of educational

involvement and academic outcomes. Here, I link structural and cultural explanations to

ethnic group differences by arguing that a structural characteristic such as immigrant

status shapes cultural expectations, aspirations and expectations for the educational

success and educational attainment of their children. Specifically, I address how

culturally tempered forms of social capital intersect with technical skill sets and

institutional stocks of knowledge to affect parent-child interactions. These findings

highlight how cultural understandings about the meaning and purpose of education affect

how immigrant parents conceptualize and understand the current U.S. public educational

process, and who in turn, develop corresponding forms of educational involvement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Immigration, Intergenerational Attainment, and Educational Success

There is a large body of literature examining differences in educational attainment among immigrant generations, although this research has produced mixed reports about the effects of generational status on school performance. Some claim that first-generation students do better in school than subsequent generations (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Others find that first-generation students do worse than succeeding generations (Fligstein & Fernandez, 1985; Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Fernandez, Paulsen & Hiranko-Nakanishi, 1989; Rong & Grant, 1992; Wojtkiewicz & Donato, 1995), while still others argue that the low educational attainment of immigrant parents translates into low educational attainment for their children (Blau & Duncan, 1967) suggesting a perpetual decline in each successive generation. Consistent across all approaches is the fact that underachievement is occurring within some segment of the immigrant community; although, in which generation this consistently occurs remains unclear.

At a general level, youth from non-English language backgrounds are 1.5 times more likely to leave school before high school graduation than those from English language backgrounds (Driscoll, 1999; Secada,Chavez-Chavez, Garcia, Munoz, Oakes, Santiago-Santiago & Slavin, 1998). Central to the current study is the fact that Latino dropout rates have continued to rise (Fernandez et al., 1989). In 1992, roughly 50% of Latinos ages 16 to 24 dropped out of high schools. In 1998, this number rose to 60% (Vaznaugh, 1995; Secada et al., 1998). Given that the differences between the

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characteristics of immigrant and native-born adults in the labor force could impact the

academic success of their respective children, and that educational attainment is linked to

economic outcomes (Schultz, 1961; Bowles & Gintis, 1976, Collins, 1979, Oakes, 1985;

Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Rosenbaum, Kariya & Maier, 1990; Meyer & Rowan, 1992;

Kerckhoff, Raudenbush & Glennie, 2001), it is critical to explore the dynamics involved

in the educational attainment process within immigrant families. To date, researchers

have attempted to identify the educational needs of children in immigrant families largely

through assessing both the impact of social capital on achievement, and through

understanding the relationships between theories of integration and mobility. At the

same time, there has been less focus on understanding how specific cultural dimensions

(e.g. structural constraints, individual factors, minority status, immigrant status, family

background) affect the generation of relevant forms of social capital. Moreover, there

has been little consideration given to the ways in which theories of integration (e.g.

straight-line assimilation, segmented assimilation, acculturation) are impacted by current

policy changes in U.S. public schools. This project addresses these deficiencies through

detailing how previous scholars have conceptualized social capital, followed by a review

and discussion of how theories of integration link to the community, the school, and

ultimately to issues of academic achievement and mobility.

Unpacking Social Capital

While it is possible to abstract a general understanding of social capital as a set of

processes and practices integral to the acquisition of other forms of capital (Morrow,

1999), specific definitions of social capital vary. Within studies of academic

achievement, James Coleman (1988) offers a multidimensional notion of social capital where, on the one hand, social capital is referred to as a form of social control where dense community networks create collective monitoring and shared expectations concerning the behavior and decisions of those in the community, thereby promoting academic achievement (Coleman, 1990; Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Portes, 1998). On the other hand, social capital is operationalized as socioeconomic status which, in turn, is positively associated with academic achievement (Coleman, 1987; Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990).

Findings examining potential effects of social capital on academic achievement are mixed. Regarding research on social capital as related to the specific resources individuals provide, the effects of parental support emphasizes its benefits in buffering the child from the impacts of environmental stressors. At the same time, this research points to the stress on an individual within a particular network as they struggle to satisfy obligations that compete for time and energy (Mathieson, 2003). For example, single parents may have fewer social ties (relative to a two-parent household) and limited time to maintain them. As such, even the maintenance of essential network relationships limits the time available to help and guide their children.

Social Capital and Culture

Bourdieu (1986) highlights persistence as a dominant aspect of social capital. At an abstract level this persistence facilitates the accumulation of resources, and the distribution of those accumulations over a population represents the "structure of the social world" (Bourdieu, 1986). The impetus for Bourdieu's analysis of social capital

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was the observation that children from families with higher socioeconomic status (SES) performed better in school than their low SES counterparts. While this association was well known, it was also undertheorized. Bourdieu's theoretical exploration dealt with how educational outcomes were connected to financial forms of capital which were converted into educationally relevant forms of cultural capital and transmitted from parents to children. Here children with "more" cultural capital were better able to extract educational resources from their environment. For Bourdieu, benefits to children accrue on the basis of their acquisition of cultural capital from parents. From this research he further defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its own members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (Bourdieu, 1986: 248). While this theoretical perspective forwards our understanding about the relationship of "capital" to access, opportunity, and achievement, it also represents a narrow conceptualization of the various forms that social capital can assume. For Bourdieu, "capital" is formal and in this formalization, credentialing, exchange, and recognition becomes possible across a given population. As such, his focus on financial forms of social capital comes as no surprise. The "value" of money is both widely recognized and generally accepted; thus, it would be expected and has been repeatedly found that there would be an independent effect of income on educational attainment. At the same time, the theory does not account for anomalous findings

including populations with limited forms of income who, in spite of their financial

limitations, still exhibit high levels of academic achievement. As is too often the case,

these instances are explained away as chance or happenstance or as the result of some

individual feat of strength, dedication, or resilience. In doing so, theorizing about the

phenomenon in ways that might forward our understanding of alternative, relevant forms

of capital becomes unnecessary. In turn, this short-circuits any effort to explain the

anomaly that some children achieve academically in spite of limited financial capital. In

addition, this line of thinking not only limits the recognition of alternative and potentially

beneficial forms of capital; but it also justifies individual and structural behavior which

limits access and opportunity based on the culturally based characteristics and skills (e.g.

verbal accent and language skills) that an individual or ethnic group displays. This

critique underscores the need to understand academic achievement from a cultural

perspective. Although Bourdieu's theory helps us understand how standardized forms of

social capital facilitates and makes possible exchanges that afford opportunities, it does

not address issues of effective, culture-specific alternative forms of social capital.

As an example, current research finds that immigrant children are more likely to

be placed and retained in low academic tracks on the basis of language skills (Stewart,

1993) which affect their levels of educational attainment and rates of high school

completion. Statistics from the Condition of Education Report (2003) shows that in 1999

14% of all students enrolled in grades K-12 were Latino students. Fifty seven percent of

Latino students spoke mostly English at home, 25% spoke mostly Spanish, and 17%

spoke English and Spanish equally. While 83% of Latino students who spoke mostly

English at home had parents with a high school education, this was true of only 49% of Latino students who spoke mostly Spanish at home (Wirt, 2003). Following Bourdieu's framework, language acquisition is both a measurable and recognizable form of social capital and is often cited as a significant predictor of academic achievement. However, several findings are difficult to explain by Bourdieu's theory. First, English proficient Latino students often fail to achieve in spite of their linguistic prowess. Second, first-generation immigrants are often more successful than their second and third generation counterparts whose dominate/exclusive language is English. These findings bring into question the assumption that English proficiency is the major determinant of academic success among immigrant groups. It is important recognize that there is a difference between learning the English language and learning about the cultural context of native English speakers (Bennici & Strang, 1995). Not only do native English speakers learn a language but, they also learn cultural institutional norms as well as insights into the schooling process and how to effectively navigate the educational system. This distinction may help explain, in part, the lack of direct correspondence between language proficiency and school achievement among immigrant children.

Social Capital and Status Attainment

Past research examining intergenerational status attainment of immigrant parents and their children has focused on either differences in wages and earnings or on levels of educational attainment. Research investigating the linkage between earnings and status attainment notes the improvement from first to second generation family members although a stagnation or regression of those in the third generation has been found as well

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(Chiswick, 1977; Carliner, 1980). While this research aids in our understanding of how immigrant cohorts differ from one another, cohort analyses of census data does not provide insight into how changes in intergenerational status attainment are transmitted across generations, nor does it specify the role of parent-child interaction and communication in this process.

I expand on the ideas developed within this body of research and frame my analyses around the intergenerational status attainment in single family units (in contrast to the aggregate level of analysis permitted by census data) in order to understand not only what happens over time with immigrants, but also how status is transferred from immigrant parent to child. Gonzalez (2005) expands on previous research by considering a wider range of economic contexts as well as gender within this income equation. In addition, she extends our understanding of status attainment by recognizing the potential effects of occupational types and their related status positions on educational attainment. Some types of occupations, regardless of variations in income, could be positively related to the expectations of educational attainment for children of immigrant families. For example, health practitioners who work on sliding pay scales and pro bono immigration lawyers both provide help and support for many immigrant communities, often for very little income, yet earn high amounts of respect and admiration from the parents and children they serve. In turn, these types of workers provide positive role models that promote the virtues of educational achievement in spite of their limited financial earnings. However these types of high status /low wage occupations are the exception. In order to develop a more generalizable theory of culturally relevant occupational types, I

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expand this argument to include a discussion of the more usual case, namely low status occupations and how they too generate positive motivations on the part of their children by witnessing their parents' suffering as a result of having to work in these low status and often physically demanding occupations. In this case parental models of hardship serve as a motivator for the children to avoid their parents' plight and to succeed educationally in order to find more financially rewarding and less physically taxing forms of work.

Social Capital and Structure

According to Coleman (1987) social capital "inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons…the function identified by the concept 'social capital' is the value of those aspects of social structure to actors, as resources that can be used by the actors to realize their interests". The essence of social capital rests in the dense associations within a social group promoting cooperative behavior that is advantageous to group members. As such, social capital is both a source of social control and a source of benefits through extra-familial networks and emerging from the close ties of family members with other community members (Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Portes, 1998). Social mobility is derived from these familial and extra familial networks which provide information, access, and opportunity to academic and economic success (Portes, 1998; Granovetter, 1974).

Theoretical understanding of the role of social capital in academic achievement largely draws on the work of Coleman who understood social capital as manifested in one's socioeconomic status and in the norm-reinforcing links between the parent and child (Coleman, 1987; Coleman, 1990). In the latter case, ties increase in density and

frequency, providing a saturated form of norm-enforcement, what Coleman referred to as "closure". Coleman attributed parochial schools' higher levels of closure to their students' families' attendance at church which, in turn, created ties that reinforced specific systems of value and expectations. For Coleman, this closure is not simply generated by participation in some social setting but through one's degree of cultural and structural alignment. This is of particular importance given that proper alignment between one's cultural framework and a particular structure is at least partially dependent on one's understanding of the institution that one's is attempting to engage and how one pursues such an alignment. Where this is not accomplished, opportunities for misalignment increase, negatively impacting ones efforts and the ways that such efforts are perceived on the part of the organizing body.

For example, students may have difficulty balancing the values of their native culture present in the home, with those of the dominant culture present elsewhere (Ghasarian, 1995). This is of particular interest as immigrants continue to reside within immigrant population enclaves (heterogeneous or homogeneous) whose insulating effects could contribute to the retention of specific beliefs that run counter to those of the dominant culture as well as to a failure to understand differences and distinctions between immigrants and non immigrants generally. Regarding parental involvement, in many countries the roles of parents and school teachers are sharply divided (Inger, 1992). In these cultures, many parents are not accustomed to the parent-teacher interaction approach that many U.S. schools systems foster which, in turn, leads to mutual misunderstanding between teachers and parents. On the one hand, parents may believe

that a teacher asking for their assistance at home with a child means that the teacher is incompetent. On the other hand, the teacher assumes that the lack of enthusiasm to interact with the school on the part of the parents is due to a lack of interest in the child's schooling (Lareau, 2003).

Unfortunately, school officials and policy makers primarily hear the voices of teachers and administrators reinforcing negative assumptions about the behavior of immigrant parents and legitimating institutional prescriptions for success. I argue instead that since the importance of educational attainment transcends borders and is endorsed by immigrant as well as native families; scholars, educators, and policy makers need to reexamine their understanding of immigrant parents who have traveled hundreds of miles in order to improve the welfare of their children including better educational opportunities. In recent research on transnational families, we have found that a majority of the Mexican parents who migrated to the U.S. did so in order to provide their children with enhanced educational opportunities (Avila, Vega, Coltrane & Parke, 2008). Thus, I argue that their limited involvement in schools as institutions is less about their lack of interest and instead more accurately the result of divergent cultural constructions about the appropriate roles of parents and teachers. Nevertheless, in light of their recognition of the importance of education, when a child is failing in school the overriding obligation in the minds of immigrant parents is to try and provide some form of help, even if their own educational background limits the degree of assistance that they can provide.

Immigrant parents, many of whom *lack* extensive schooling, may not be familiar with the demands of formal education including the importance of educational continuity

such as staying in the same school. Thus, they move their children to follow jobs or move back and forth between their country of origin and the United States. Many parents retain expectations for work and educational attainment derived from their home cultures and so may not understand the need for high school graduation in the U.S. labor market (McDonnell & Hill, 1993; Petit & McLanahan, 2003; Ream, 2003). I argue that this *lack* of schooling on the part of parents only partially explains the levels of involvement or kinds of aspirations and expectations that immigrant parents hold. I argue that instead scholars need to distinguish between immigrants' thoughts from what they may have to do when confronted by economic realities or school related problems that their child may face.

Here again the effects of culture are highlighted and reflected in the notion of a need to work to support family (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Part of this is tied to the former point about competing obligations. Immigrant parents tend to be poorer, although I argue that this work necessity also provides a backdrop/context in which to more clearly distinguish between short-term and long-term ends as well as understanding the importance of school. I argue that children learn that their parents need to work at difficult and often undesirable jobs to help provide for their family. At the same time, the children recognize the limited job opportunities resulting from a lack of formal education. At an abstracted level, educational attainment can be understood as a reciprocal exchange where high degrees of coordination and efficiency are the result of each respective party understanding the structural and culture dynamics that shape the behavior and decisions of each party. Toward this end it is helpful to not only understand

the tools by which one forges a path of achievement, but specific to immigrants, how one orients them self to the host environment. This is critical since how one engages their host culture conditions the ways that children are oriented to the norms and expectations that U.S. schools have for their students.

Getting from here to there: Theories of Assimilation

Past research attempts to explain student performance in both school and in the labor market through incorporating theories of assimilation. In a broad sense, theories of assimilation refer to a process where immigrants replace the values and behaviors of their home country with those of their host country. Self selecting theories of assimilation argue that as immigrants positively self-select out of a home country they are predisposed to adaptation and achieving in their host country (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Chiswick, 1986; Borjas, 1990; Gonzales, 2005). Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder's (2006) work on understanding the adaptive patterns of immigrant youth finds that while these immigrants may initially exist at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, the desire to leave their home country creates an integration profile that has the best psychological and sociocultural adaptation outcomes resulting in expectations and aspiration towards upward mobility via themselves or their children. Gibson and Ogbu (1991) further argues that these aspirations and expectations are fueled by a relative frame of reference between the negative environment of the home country and their initial and potentially temporary state in their host country. To the extent that this new socioeconomic position is seen as attainable, they work to actively develop pragmatic solutions to overcome their current situation and improve their future prospects of economic advancement.

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Subsequent generations are seen as becoming disillusioned with the prospects of upward mobility because of their experiences with discrimination (Waters, 1999). However, this assumes considerable unobserved dynamics and which contain largely unaddressed theoretical difficulties. Specifically, if first-generation immigrants do, in fact, experience upward mobility fueled by expectations of this success (for them or for their children) and encouraged by the potential for opportunity within their host country (relative to the negative experiences in their home country) what is the motivation for not cultivating that framework within their children? Further, how are these children unaware of the struggles and histories of their parents? A focus on discrimination, which is assumed to impair agency and self efficacy, is too narrow and other issues such as ethnic identity or familism may serve as a counterweight to the impact of discrimination and account for the maintenance of upwardly mobile expectations among Mexican and Mexican American families.

Straight-line assimilation theory suggests that over time ethnic and racial minorities will blend into mainstream culture and become indistinguishable from native populations (Park, 1914; Gordon, 1964). Here integration results in mobility and language acquisition is viewed as a primary marker of the integrative process. Matute-Bianchi's 1986 study of a California High School supports this theory as she found that the most successful students not only spoke English exclusively in school but also participated in mainstream clubs rather than those geared towards Mexican students.

Straight-line assimilation theory also predicts a single trajectory of upward mobility over time and across generations (Gordon, 1964; Park, 1928). Less well

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understood are the relative differences in mobility across time and at various waves of immigration. In fact, particular ethnic groups may experience rapid, slow, or stalled progress, although this variability across immigrant groups is not often recognized by this theory. Despite the considerable research supporting straight-line assimilation theory, it fails to explain the rapid economic advancement of immigrants within a strong ethnic community by using ethnic group membership as a source of beneficial social capital even though these groups have not assimilated as the theory suggests would be necessary for advancement (Coleman, 1988; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). At the same time it also fails to shed light on the lack of intergenerational and social mobility that Mexican Americans experience; despite their rapid attitudinal assimilation (Zhou & Portes, 1993).

In contrast to the assumptions of straight-line assimilation, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995) suggest that this drive towards integration and assimilation on the part of Mexican Americans has been the major reason for their inability to succeed. While initial research focused on Puerto Rican immigrants (Suarez-Orozco, 1987) they later argued that given the cultural similarities across Hispanic cultures (e.g. familism), the findings on Puerto Ricans are generalizable to other Hispanics groups including Mexican Americans (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). This line of research argues that the retention of tight connections to the values of their immigrant parents promotes their high levels of performance and attainment. Here, strong co-ethnic communities that possess social and economic resources to reinforce the parental culture are argued as positively affecting student success (Suarez-Orozco, 1987). The most

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academically successful students are those that remain most closely allied with the culture of their parents because of group resources and supportive attitudes. Here immigrants enter into a process of accommodation without assimilation. This argument is consistent with the notion of social capital as related to context offered by Borjas (1992, 1993, 1994) who found that the rate of intergenerational mobility between immigrant parents and their children is influenced not only by parental background, but also by the social, cultural and economic "quality" of the ethnic environment where the children grow up including the presence of educated and skilled community role models within homogenous ethnic enclaves.

An alternative position that recognizes the non-linear nature of assimilation is segmented assimilation theory which suggests that immigrant generations experience success by securing needed resources to sustain themselves within their community and aligning with others in their ethnic group. These forms of success within their ethnic communities do not necessarily require social or economic changes nor do they involve shifts to higher or lower degrees of mobility. Instead, their success is a function of the geographic and socio-cultural context in which immigrants find themselves. Segmented assimilation argues that the type of community in which an immigrant group lives determines the social and economic assimilation patterns of the individuals and the group as a whole (Rumbaut, 1995). Here an immigrant's intergenerational mobility is shaped by the individual's form of assimilation and adaptation (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). The poor academic performance of immigrant groups from Mexico is due to the realistic appraisals of the relatively lower return on educational investment in

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the U.S. for their ethnic group (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Kao & Tienda, 1995).

This communal mindset creates an adversarial stance common among impoverished groups confined to the bottom of the economic hourglass (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). While these theories provide a strong foundation upon which to understand the basis of academic achievement for children in immigrant households, less well understood is how impoverished new immigrants within economically and socially depressed areas do, in fact, succeed. In each integrative theory, success is understood as generating either positive or negative subsequent outcomes for subsequent generations. In contrast, the lack of success, achievement, or mobility among one group does not produce or foster success in subsequent generations.

Even for Gibson and Ogbu (1991) who holds that negative conditions in one country produce positive motivations and mobility in another, these effects are based on one's own lived experiences and are not intergenerational. Instead, Gibson and Ogbu (1991) provide a framework, which predicts initially positive outcomes derived from negative circumstance in the country of origin, although subsequent negative experiences tend to generate only negative outcomes across each succeeding generation. And while straight-line assimilation models chart success following relative failure, this is predicated on the degree of alignment with the host country and a rejection of the cultural histories, practices, and values of one's home country. Success is not garnered through recognizing the struggles of the predecessors without also rejecting the practices and beliefs of these individuals. As such, this theory fails to account for those that succeed as

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a result of learning from their parents and embracing and maintaining the cultural values of the home country.

The organization of education: The consequence of playing by the rules

As societies grow in size they become more differentiated and complex; as a society increases in complexity, so to does the pressure for members to become specialists (Spencer, 1882; Durkheim, 1933; Weber, 1946). Given that one function of schools is to produce contributing members of a society, these external social pressures have impacted both the design and intent of the U.S. educational system. Structurally educational organizations have adopted rational organizational forms designed in alignment with mandates to produce specialists in efficient, consistent, and reliable ways. At the same time, sweeping new reforms have had significant impacts on the ways students understand and legitimate this process and affect the opportunities and paths by which parents are able to engage this system and involve themselves in their child's education.

The understanding that schools are rational in form is not new (Weber, 1946; Bidwell, 1965; Barr & Dreeben, 1983; Lareau, 2003; Brint, 1998; Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Weber (1946) centered his discussion of education on the issue of the rationalization and bureaucratization of the educational system. Weber (1946) argued that the rise of education as large-scale bureaucratic organizations stemmed from the increasing demands to produce specialists characterized by reliable expectations of their technical qualifications. As the demand for specialists increased so did pressures to increase coordination, control and capacity of this educational system. Weber (1946)

argued that educational institutions are dominated and influenced by the "need for the kind of 'education' that produces a system of special examinations and the trained expertness that is increasingly indispensable for modern bureaucracy" (Weber, 1946: 240).

Aligning with rational approaches to school organizations, Bidwell (1965) argued that organizations are guided by three principal assumptions: 1) school systems are client serving organizations, 2) a fundamental dichotomy exists between student and staff roles (division of labor), and 3) school systems are bureaucratic structures. With regard to schools as client serving organizations, their function in this case is the moral and technical socialization of children. Aligning with Weber's (1946) conception of school function, Bidwell (1965) states that the "central goal of any school system is to prepare its students for adult status, training them in knowledge and skills, indoctrinating them in the moral orientations, which adult roles require" (Bidwell, 1965: 973). Bidwell based these characterizations on the assumption that school organizations are necessarily rational and argues that rationalization is necessary given the demands on a school system for the "uniform product of a certain quality", and for fulfilling the task of socializing children over a long period of time. In light of this increasing complexity and with apparent aims to create tightly coupled structures, the coordination of educational activities increasingly coalesce at the center of school-system administration.

At the same time, Weber notes the effects of an increased importance on schools to produce qualified individuals. As premiums are placed on technical qualifications, symbolized and assured by the receipt of a particular educational certificate, these

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certificates acquire social prestige while market pressures endow their owners with economic advantage. "The development of the diploma from universities, and businesses and engineering colleges, and the universal clamor for the creation of educational certificates in all fields make for the formation of a privileged stratum in bureaus and in offices" (Weber, 1946: 241). These allow for "claims to monopolize socially and economically advantageous positions" (Weber, 1946: 241). Bureaucracies, Weber argues, help to minimize this exploitive potential outcome, while rational educational systems help to ensure that those occupying particular occupational positions have reached them irregardless of previous socioeconomic position.

While this line of thinking does well in explaining the development of professionals, it gives less attention to the fact that these rational organizations are also responsive to environmental pressures to supply low skilled, undereducated individuals to operate at the low end of the socioeconomic ladder. As these bureaucratic organizations institute examinations to assess and certify professional specialists, effects of social capital come into play. As Collins (1979) argues, these practices are reflective of the fact that schools are designed as stratifying systems, sorting individuals into particular occupational paths. In this respect, Collins extends the argument that credentials not only possess economic value to the individual and instrumental value to the organization, as a result of technical training (Weber, 1946), but that this value is regulated by market forces responsive to workplace demands. As Barr & Dreeben (1983) argue, schools are designed to move with increasing efficiency and, in turn, businesses rely on school-based stratifying cues and signals to guide their hiring practices. Indeed, if schools reduce the

risk and uncertainty in choosing the best suited candidates for some specialized tasks, this is more likely to result in increased efficiency and productivity for employers.

This does not mean that schools are not rational in their organizational design, but rather that as schooling has become more tightly coupled with the demands of business and an overarching capitalist framework, the U.S. educational system has pursued a type of "rugged rationality" where performance increasingly requires pre-screening and tracking so as to produce immediate and more predictable results (Collins, 1979). As such, the connection between popular conceptions of education as a leveling institution and as a place of nurturing and learning is becoming increasingly misaligned with organizational ideologies and practices that stress memorization as a means by which to help generate high marks on state and federally mandated standardized tests. As such families that hold traditional and static conceptions about the purpose and practice of schools are likely to experience the effects of this misalignment.

Background on the Nature of Standardized Testing

Several states including California have had a long involvement with educational testing programs and while the concept of standardized testing is far from new, the shift from pure assessment to a sanction/reward system is more recent. In 1997, California adopted the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program. STAR required every California public school to use a single (English-Only) test, the results of which determined money allocations at the district, school and teacher level. The STAR program differed from the merit or pure assessment programs that existed in California, prior to the 2001 Act. This new accountability system expects all schools to make

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measurable progress every year (Bell, 2002). Teachers and schools that improve their test scores stand to gain substantial rewards in state and federal funding. Schools that do not consistently improve, face crippling sanctions (Bell, 2002). In sum, the allocation of monies, exercise of local control, options for parents and the push for proven teaching methods now all rest on a quantitative assessment of whether the student, the teacher, or the school has "fallen behind" or below "acceptable" levels of progress.

Given the economic weight of these mandates, public schools have increasingly adopted test-preparation strategies designed to reach the required goals and thus achieve necessary economic goals. Again, this is not new. Public schools have long incorporated standardized testing into the curricula although this rarely required major alterations to content or content delivery. Central to this change is the fact that the survival of each school now depends upon the quality of their test scores. These economic strings have pressured schools to reallocate funding and restructure academic goals and curricula towards achieving high test scores across a set of "accountability measures". These measures stress "fundamentals" to public school students at every grade level and are covered in large part by daily classroom "drill" exercises in reading, writing, and arithmetic (Shepard, 2002). Conversations with teachers reveal that these exercises disproportionately consume classroom time and many times dominate daily lessons. Several California school districts mandate that these exercises are given on a daily basis and are to take no less than 15 minutes. Given the five minutes for classroom set-up and clean-up, many teachers report having less than 20 minutes for lecture and instruction (Vega 2003). As a result, many teachers highlight their tendency to forfeit extra-

curricular activities, group projects, and other high-order thinking exercises in efforts to address minimum standards that are incongruent with popular understandings about the function and design of public schools. Indeed, the implementation of standardized tests has transformed academic enrichment into basic learning.

Since the incorporation of these tests, teachers, administrators and public school districts have also reported the increased pressure towards adopting scripted teaching practices that target test-type materials and test centric skills. In these scripted lessons, much of the material focuses on short or "burst" activities. This is not to say that the scripts do not suggest projects or critical thinking exercises but the lack of time that result from mandatory testing drills, strips many teachers of these options. Following this "trim the fat" framework, elective courses (vocational courses, music, and fine arts) are increasingly being phased out of schools, in accordance with state and federal pressure to "get back to basics".

These policies have also had differential effects on rich and poor schools. Within the more affluent areas of Riverside, California, schools have reduced emphasis on high-status knowledge including composition, literature, and the arts; instead they have increased their attention on vocabulary review and memory recall (framed as reading comprehension). In the impoverished areas of Riverside and San Bernardino City Unified School Districts including Casablanca, East Side, Beaumont, and Rialto, cultural and vocational programs have been increasingly phased out due to both the reallocation of already limited resources and poor testing results (Dataquest, 2009). Economically crippled due to poor test scores, these schools have regressed into test-teaching facilities

as they face potential closure/or restructuring. It is important to note that within these same school districts, other schools have received rewards for their success in raising test scores. As teachers and administrators report, this is a calculated reward accomplished by achieving incremental gains every year rather than by "setting the bar too high" at a single point in time. Unfortunately, as minimally acceptable scores rise in value every year, this strategy merely delays the pressures felt by well performing schools. As a result, the long term negative impact on even well performing schools may be misleading and obscured by short-term initial evaluations.

At a general level, these shifts challenge institutional assumptions about public education. Long held as a potentially equalizing or leveling mechanism (Weber, 1946), public education, in contrast to private schools, represents a place of equal learning opportunities. While students may differentially retain or understand core curricula, they are all at least exposed to the same material. However some of the experiences traditionally associated with public education are no longer present. Historically, schools were conceived of as a place to enrich the mind and develop appreciation for music, literature, science and the arts, bolstered by the cooperative interrelationships among schools, families, and their community. Moreover, although schools have long been understood as socialization contexts where children adopt the social norms and values that will be expected of them during their adult lives, this function is less prominent. These policy shifts in both the curriculum content and the expected role of teachers as test preparers and families as relatively uninvolved and possibly unwelcome partners have come as an affront to these assumptions and have not gone unnoticed.

Currently, parents who are aware of these shifts in both upper and lower social classes are demanding better educational opportunities for their children. Parents in the more affluent communities' voice concerns over reductions in the quality of course content, fearing that their children will potentially lose their competitive advantage. While many families in these affluent communities have the financial resources and social networks to exercise options outside of public education including the enrollment of their children in private schools and tutoring programs which aid in the acquisition of high-quality education, lower and working class communities do not. These less affluent and predominately minority communities fear that the elimination of honors courses (e.g., Advanced Placement [AP], Gifted and Talented Education [GATE], Advancement via Individual Determination [AVID]), cultural/fine arts courses (e.g., dance, music, ceramics, jewelry), and vocational programs (e.g., wood and metal shop, ROP, and typing) in addition to further reductions in the quality of the curriculum (i.e., reduced focus on critical thinking, independent and creative thought) will increase levels of local instability, poverty, and occupational inequities. These fears are further fueled by the trend toward the academic disengagement of parents and students. As teachers increasingly incorporate learning devices in response to standardized tests and as counselors increasingly evaluate the academic success and potential of a student according to performance on yearly standardized tests, parents and students are likely to experience distance from the traditional intent of schooling. Additionally, this shift from learning to performing is also likely to result in a diminished capacity to understand student academic performance. For example, a report card which indicated that a student

earned a letter grade of "B" (above average) in math while at the same time was identified as performing "below average" in math on a standardized test obscures any overall assessment of how the student is performing in math and less about how parents can involve themselves in their child's education or how a child can work to close this achievement gap. Finally, the fact that parents are not able to view the content of these standardized tests further limits their ability to understand and evaluate the merit of these test scores, relative to the student's in class performance. In short, the shift from a pedagogy that encouraged and actively fostered linkages among parents, community and schools, towards a model that emphasizes test centered knowledge and teaching reduces the level of parental involvement and ties with the larger community. This results in increases in institutional and structural separation between parents, children, teachers, and schools.

Implications and guiding questions

For Weber the idea of schools as rational, bureaucratic organizations aligns with the societal need for increasingly specialized and standardized professions. Functioning in the capacity of labor producers, schools resemble factories producing specialized goods that satisfy a specific niche. Towards this end, individuals are assessed according to their technical qualifications. However, less is known about the impacts of the current rationale that is used to pre-select certain populations for enriched opportunities or grant access to select networks.

Test centric policies have changed the nature of schooling over the past decade, profoundly influencing how teachers engage parent and students. Accepting the notion

that divisions of labor exist for the benefit of maximizing efficiency, production, and consistency in each bounded arena allows for recognition of how system-wide mandates significantly alter the ways in which educators function. Within classrooms, teachers preside, direct, and assess learning. Similar to Weber's (1946) concept of jurisdictional areas, Barr and Dreeben (1983) state that district offices, schools, classes, and instructional groups are separate, yet loosely linked, jurisdictions and that the strength and success of schools to produce students of consistent reliable quality lies in its ability to place power in the hands of its separate components.

In the past, this loose coupling provided a way by which schools were able to adhere to national and state established standards and encouraged opportunistic adaptation to local circumstances even when state and federal regulations were misaligned with the realities and capacities of the local schools. Specific to teachers, this looseness provided them with some measure of flexibility allowing space for student considerations, recognitions, and enrichment. As such, coupling acts as an adaptive mechanism, particularly in diverse segmented environments, including those urban areas differentiated by race and class. Bidwell (1965) argues that one fundamental attribute of teachers is their capacity to deal with daily classroom fluctuations. Here, teachers work alone, schools are often autonomous from the constraints of the district, particularly during daily activities, and the business conducted at the district level may never be realized within a particular teacher's classroom activities or even enforced by school site administrators.

Despite this flexibility, teachers were often able to meet societal pressures to efficiently produce professionals of consistent quality. Bidwell (1965) explains, "Even if activities within the classroom and school units of the system are not routinized, the movement of students from one unit to the next must be" (Bidwell, 1965: 977). Here bureaucratic control is achieved through the incorporation of professional norms and school policies, hiring like-minded professionals, establishing exit examinations, and the bureaucratization of school and classroom activities by rules of conduct, limiting the discretionary power of classroom teachers and school site staff. The struggle for schools has been the accommodation of looseness in organizational form so as to accommodate the nature of the teaching task while developing rational strategies for uniformity in student outcomes.

Prior to the inception of NCLB, this loose coupling between school administrators who focused on subject uniformity in similarly labeled courses and teachers who focused on fostering the greatest degree of learning in each student created opportunities for reform. In these instances, reform came from the alteration of the work patterns of school site actors. Here teachers, students, parents and administrators enacted negotiated goals that were reflected in the changes to local school settings. Examples of these negotiated forms included: joint decision making among teachers and administrators, team teaching, flexible scheduling, multiage groups, and core planning in individual schools. The success of these reform attempts supported the argument that loose coupling could be highly adaptive for the system as a whole. In line with this thought, Anyon (1997) argues that the reality for many urban schools is that teachers do maintain

low expectations and reflect feelings of apathy. On the other hand, the loose coupling between how they are supposed to teach and act, allows for freedom to move outside those boundaries and rules.

As the climate of schooling has shifted, the strain placed on this loose coupling has increased as teachers attempt to mediate between state and federal mandates that measure accountability via tests that encourage memorization over understanding. At the same time, families continue to demand an educational experience that encourages absorption and enrichment. While this coupling is tightening, the opportunities of teachers to enact these mediations are lessening. In line with this argument, Anyon (1997) views schools as rational bureaucratic structures but argues that they impede academic success. In his research about the effects of political isolation on urban schools, the rational bureaucratic structure of public schools is seen as ineffective and detrimental to minority and impoverished populations, resulting in increased dropouts and their exclusion from middle-class occupations. In reference to the efficiency of hierarchical structures, many of the levels of the educational system experience contradictory incentives including school level mandates to have students memorize testing materials irregardless of its impact on individual learning which are contrary to teachers' perceived mission to enrich their students. This results in low student expectations, teacher isolation, ideologies that explain away failure, and more state and federal regulations.

In this way, Anyon argues that environmental influences also impact and influence the success or failure of rational organizations. Anyon specifically argues that

socio-cultural distances between reformers, parents, and schools impair communication, interaction and trust, impeding student's academic progress and preclude reform success. In such cases bureaucratic aspects actually work against its goal of efficiency and success. Abstracting his argument, Anyon (1997) develops the concept of the "productivity paradox" that details the problematic nature of rational educational organizations. This view of schools runs contrary to rational theories that assume that conflicts must be resolved so as to eliminate any impendence on performance and goal attainment. Central to his argument is the idea that the failure of schools derives from the creation of differences between interests of different groups.

As student performance on standardized tests becomes increasingly important in a teachers ability to secure and retain employment and as administrators increasingly evaluate teacher effectiveness on their ability to prepare students for these nationwide tests, teachers are likely to modify strategies that leave little room for achieving excellence through gradual improvement. As a result, teaching becomes less about learning and more about objective impersonal preparation. This potentially has significant impact on parents and students who understand teachers as educators, guardians, and nurturers. Specifically, movement away from their traditional roles as teachers is then likely to create feelings of alienation, separation, and disinvestments in the schooling process on the part of teachers which, in turn, are felt by students and parents.

Summing Up

This review of the literature helps to highlight how general theories of academic achievement fail to adequately address the educational attainment process and academic outcomes of students in immigrant families. At an abstract level, these theories create relationships positively linking resources (e.g. social capital) with opportunity (e.g. increased access to supportive and enriched learning environments) and educational outcomes (e.g. academic achievement and educational attainment). Problematic is the fact that definitions of resource, opportunity, and outcomes potentially vary by the generational status, background (e.g. parents' education), culture and class position of individuals, families and communities.

Regarding generational status and background, I argue that political climate, parents' educational experiences, linguistic barriers, and informational disparities regarding the process of U.S. education have the potential to generate different notions of success as reflected in the aspirations and expectations held by mom, dad and child. In addition, these factors affect the form and extent to which parents are involved in their child's education.

From a cultural perspective, I argue that effective alignment between one's cultural framework and a particular organizational structure is at least partially dependent on one's understanding of the institution that one's is attempting to engage and one's knowledge of the strategies that will be most effective in pursuing such an alignment. Where this is not accomplished, there will be more misalignments which, in turn, will reduce the effectiveness of ones efforts and the ways that such efforts are perceived by

schools. At the same time, cultural dimensions including familism impact how parents and children interact and which may serve as a counterweight to the impact of this misalignment by fostering feelings of efficacy on the part of parents and children. This family based sense of efficacy can potentially lead to the development of alternative strategies for academic success.

From a class perspective, I argue that while theories on the effects of social capital further our understanding about the relationship of "capital" to access, opportunity, and achievement these theories have been only partially successful in accounting for variations in educational achievement. Evaluations of these theories have yielded mixed results which suggest that traditional conceptualizations of social capital (e.g. socioeconomic status) are too narrow and fail to recognize the value of non-traditional forms of capital among educationally and economically disadvantaged families. Indeed, viewing families from a class perspective suggests that the absence of traditional forms of capital does not imply that these families are without resources. Instead, the hardships faced by disadvantaged families potentially provide an impetus for parents to become involved in their child's schooling and help to create an understanding about the importance of school in the minds of the students.

Regarding educational outcomes, I argue that the sweeping reforms of the No Child Left Behind Act have altered the relative importance accorded to traditional performance indicators such as classroom grades in comparison with standardized test scores. In turn, this shift has changed how individuals and families understand student performance and also their capacity to assist their children's school related progress.

Finally, I argue that the shift from a pedagogy that generated linkages among parents, community and schools, towards a model that emphasizes test centered knowledge has the potential to lead to an increased cultural and structural separation among parents, children, teachers, and schools.

Chapter 3: Methods

Sample

This research utilizes a within-group subset of data from a longitudinal study

examining the effects of economic stress on Southern Californian Mexican American and

European-American families, entitled "Ethnicity, Economic Stress and Adaptation in

Families" and funded by the National Institute of Mental Health. Principal Investigator

(P.I.) on the project was Ross Parke from the Department of Sociology. The total sample

consists of 278 two-parent families (167 Mexican American, 111 European American)

living in the Riverside/San Bernardino metropolitan area, with at least one child in the

fifth-grade in 1998 (Parke, et al., 2004). Families were originally recruited through local

elementary schools, drawn from four school districts in the region, and including students

attending public and parochial schools. Across the first three waves, data were collected

via face-to-face, closed ended, survey based interviews; classroom based teacher

assessments; and videotaped observations of parent-adolescent interactions. The final

phase of the project (wave 4) focused exclusively on the Mexican American portion of

the sample and included a modified set of closed-ended survey questionnaires and face-

to-face qualitative interviews.

All Mexican American families were contacted approximately one year after their

last interview visit. The mother, father and adolescent came to the university campus for

their qualitative interviews and to complete a set of questionnaires. During the 2-3 hour

visit, the mother, father and adolescent individually completed paper and pencil

questionnaires followed by an open-ended interview led by qualitatively trained research

assistants and directed by pre-constructed interview guides. In this final phase, we

collected data on 65 eighth grade Mexican American students, their mothers (n=65) and

fathers (n=48) who had participated in the longitudinal study for the previous three waves

of data collection. The total number of participants (mothers, fathers, adolescents) who

completed surveys and interviews was 178. During all family visits, the adolescent was

always accompanied by at least one parent and thus discrepancies in the total number of

interviews are reflective of various combinations of acceptance and rejection to be

interviewed among the parents[1].

As is common in research with low-income populations, we experienced

difficulty completing data collection for some families who repeatedly cancelled

appointments or did not show up at the scheduled time. Most of these families had a

history of being hard to schedule during the first three waves of data collection despite

having the intention to participate. Many of these families attributed their inability to

interview to the lack of control over their work schedules, access to transportation, or pre-

arranged activities with their children.

Demographics

Despite the family label of Mexican American, the majority of parents

interviewed during this wave were born in Mexico (45 fathers and 40 mothers), and over

half immigrated to the United States after age 15. At the time of the interview, most of

these parents had been living in the United States for over 10 years. Culturally, about 58

percent of parents in this subset scored on the "very Mexican oriented" range on the

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[1] The Linguistic Minority Research Institute (LMRI) provided supplemental funding for this phase of data collection.

Acculturative Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans – II (ARSMA) (Cuellar, Arnold & Maldonado, 1995), with 30 percent in the "Bicultural" range, and 12 percent in the "Anglo" range.

Linguistically, over 70 percent of these Mexican parents elected to be interviewed and to fill out surveys in Spanish (70% mothers and 73% fathers), whereas only about 5 percent of their adolescent children elected to do so. Three-quarters of these children (75%) had documentation of Limited English Proficient (LEP) classes in their school records, over half (51%) had previously been in bilingual classes but were now rated Full English Proficient (FEP), and another one in six (17%) were in bilingual classes and/or considered English Language Learners (ELL) upon entering middle school. Half of these students stated that they used English and Spanish equally. Forty-five percent of the students said they spoke "more Spanish than English" and only 30 percent of the students interviewed reported using English as a primary language at home.

As these immigrant families were drawn from a larger project comprised of European American and Mexican American parents and children, it is important to detail the differences between the overall sample of Mexican American families and this immigrant family subset. Culturally, approximately half of the parents from both samples were identified as "very Mexican oriented". Linguistically, both this immigrant family subset and the overall sample population displayed similar levels of English fluency and language preference. In both samples, approximately 70% of parents elected to be interviewed in Spanish and children from both samples disproportionately completed their interviews in English. At the same time, across the overall sample,

children used English less than Spanish and Spanish was more widely spoken during their interviews in interactions with interviewers and with their families at home than among friends .

Economically, the majority of two-parent families from both samples can be characterized as "working poor" since at least one adult was employed full time but the family was still experiencing some financial difficulties. Median annual family income at wave 4 was just under $25,000 for this immigrant family subset and while slightly lower than the median income of $28,000 for the overall sample, these figures are not significantly different from each other or that of other Latino families in the R-SB MSA (U.S. Census, Current Population Survey, 1997-98; U.S. Census, 2000).

Regarding poverty, about a third of the families from both samples had incomes below the Federal Poverty Level. In contrast, almost three-fourths (73%) of the families in this immigrant family subset had incomes below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level in comparison to 64% of the overall sample who fell into the same category. Regarding occupation and work status, almost three-fourths of fathers from both samples were employed full time (over 35 hours per week), mostly as laborers, operatives, or craftsmen and approximately one-third of mothers from both samples were employed, primarily in minimum wage jobs. In short, this immigrant family subsample and the larger Mexican American sample from which the subsample was drawn were largely comparable.

Setting

The Riverside-San Bernardino Metropolitan Statistical Area (R-SB MSA), the location of the study, remains one of the fastest growing large MSA's in the nation with a Latino population of over one million and a total population of over three million. Per capita income is among the lowest in the country. In the 1990s, the MSA ranked 250th out of the nation's 311 MSA's in per capita income, with incomes that have remained low for the last two decades (U.S. Census, 2006).

Data Collection Procedures

The characteristics of this sample provided unique opportunities to understand the effects of immigrant status, education, economics, culture, and language on parent involvement in their adolescent child's schooling and the adolescent's disposition towards school and their levels of academic achievement. Many related studies stress the value of within-group designs that include sensitive measures of ethnically relevant variables (e.g., Phinney & Landlin, 1998). Others highlight the need to recognize linguistic effects as bounded, pointing to the fact that Latino students are often required to read, write, and speak English in formal school settings while simultaneously maintaining their ethnic identity and family/community connections using Spanish outside of the classroom, in their neighborhoods and at home (Buriel, 1994; Rumbaut, 1995).

In recognition of this prior research, all 178 participants (mothers, fathers and adolescents) in this phase of the project were asked to fill out a subset of fixed response questions on ethnic identity, discrimination, parent academic involvement and

educational aspirations and expectations. These items were derived from the larger

longitudinal study (Parke, et al., 2004 - see appendix for a list of these questions). In

addition, parents and children were asked to discuss a number of open-ended issues

focusing on the target child's education. Interviews were conducted in either English or

Spanish and all questionnaire batteries and interview guides were available in English

and Spanish formats. To help ensure the accuracy of information provided by each

respondent all interviewers were fluent in both English and Spanish. All surveys and

interview guides originated in English, were translated into Spanish, and then back-

translated into English by third parties to ensure the quality and accuracy of the translated

statements. To ensure confidentiality, mom, dad, and adolescent were interviewed during

a single session, in separate rooms, and answers provided by each respondent were not

shared with any other member of the family.

The qualitative, open-ended interviews were issue-focused and parallel interview

guides were created for parents and children. These interview guides centered on issues

of bounded language usage, parent's educational involvement with their children and

schools, meanings of education, parental understandings about how their child is

achieving academically, parental knowledge of how their children approach the

educational process and perceive their educational climate, and parents' respective

academic aspirations and expectations for the target child. These issues allowed for an

evaluation of past findings on Latinos and education generally while making distinct

these intersections between SES, ethnicity, culture, generational status, and academic

achievement. The length of the qualitative interviews ranged from thirty to sixty minutes

and all interviews were tape recorded after obtaining the written and verbal consent and/or assent of each interviewee (see appendix for a copy of the interview topic guide).

Qualitative Data Reduction Process

Tape recordings were first transcribed by a team of research assistants who were fluent in both English and Spanish. After transcription, each interview was reassigned to another transcriber who compared the transcription with the original recording. Finally, the transcript was reviewed by a lead research assistant for accuracy. After each interview was checked for accuracy, a team of translators translated all Spanish interviews into English. As a final quality check, Spanish interviews were back-translated and compared to their original interviews.

Consistent with Strauss (1987), early analysis began as soon as data were collected, transcribed and translated which aided in the development of initial insights and frameworks. The analysis was issue-focused describing what was learned from all respondents about specific issues, events, and/or processes in the area of the child's educational experience. Initial coding schemes were developed from our theoretical assumptions and interests in the interplay between family and school dynamics and assumed the form of represented abstractions of relevance to the guiding theoretical assumptions based on the respondents' statements. Evolving coding schemes were generated out of specific instances or examples of relevant issues. From these coding schemes, excerpt files were created consisting of collections of excerpts from many interviews dealing with the same issue.

Finally, coding categories were developed, defined and refined through multiple passes through the clusters of data relevant to each topic. Coding was concluded when responses fit into established codes and did not significantly extend, deepen, or qualify existing codes. Sorting into excerpt files was initially done by lead researchers and later, for this project, specific codes were selected and replicated using a 5 person team of coding assistants whereby interviews were re-read and sorted into the pre-established files. This process was used as an objective assessment about the reliability and validity of sorting on specific issues and sorting was only done after our coding/sorting assistants reached an 80% level of agreement about meaning of a specific passage while coding the same interview. Below is a table (Table 2.1) detailing each coding category including how they were operationalized and a sample quote for that category.

Table 2.1. Qualitative Coding Categories

Category	Criteria	Example
Parental Expectations	Statements noting the highest level of schooling they *likely* think their child will complete	"My daughter has really got it together. I think she will definitely graduate college."
Parental Aspirations	Statements noting the highest level of schooling they *want* their child to achieve	"I just pray my son finishes high school."
Parental Involvement	Statements about the kinds of educational activities they *do* with their child and/or the extent to which parents *engage* in educational activities.	"Everyday I ask my son to see his homework." "I tell all my kids, I say 'study, study, study!'"
Parent Attitudes Towards School	Statements about the parent's *likes*, *dislikes* and *judgments* about: classes, subjects, teachers or school	"I think the schools here teach them more things but they aren't disciplined like in Mexico."
Parent Educational Experience	Statements about their own education or educational experience	"I hope she finishes high school. I only went up to the 10th grade so her finishing is big for me."
Teacher Influences: Parent & Child	Statements about how teachers influence learning and the role of teachers	"Teacher's do a lot and need to give them (students) all they can but still can't be responsible for everything." – Parent

Peer Influences: Parent & Child	Statements about the influence of friends, neighbors and/or community members on the target child's academic performance and attitude	"I don't look up to any of my friends. Their just getting messed up with smoke (marijuana) and stuff. I'm like 'I gotta go…'" – Child
Perception of Academic Achievement: Parent & Child	Statements about how a parent or the child *thinks* the target child is performing and/or has performed in school.	"I'm doing good. I do all my work…I have B's in most of my classes." – Child
Thoughts on Academic Achievement: Parent & Child	Statements about what they think is the *difference* between who do and who do not do well in school	"A child has to put in effort and they will when they see his parent is behind him pushing" – Parent
Child Perceptions of Parent Expectations	Statements noting the highest level of schooling their parents think they are *likely* to complete	"My parents totally support me. They get my sister to tell me what I need to do to get into college because she already goes. So I'm gonna do the same thing."
Child Perceptions of Aspirations	Statements noting the highest level of schooling their parents *want* them to achieve	"They want me to finish high school for sure because they didn't have one (education) when they were young."
Child Perceptions of Parental Involvement	Statements about the kinds of educational activities their parent(s) *do* with them and/or the extent to which their parents *engage* in educational activities.	"My dad does everything to help me. He takes me to school and wherever, like to the library or waits outside if I need help after school"
Child Attitudes Towards School	Statements about the child's *likes*, *dislikes* and *judgments* about: classes, subjects, teachers or school	"In elementary, teachers cared about us. Teachers now don't care about teaching us stuff. They just want to get it (class) over with"

Constructs and Variables

<u>Parent and Child Background Influences</u>

Several measures related to how the parents and children engage the educational

arena were collected in both quantitative and qualitative formats.

Quantitative assessments: Fixed-response surveys documented measures of

parent educational attainment, assessed according to their highest level of schooling

completed and the total number of years each parent completed. Given that the parent's

mean and modal age of migration to the U.S. was 15 and in response to current research

on the influences of pre-migration education on the development of social capital and its

utility in a child's schooling (Gonzalez, 2005), these questions about educational

attainment were asked about schooling in both Mexico and the United States.

Past research has discussed the relative differences between educational

attainment in Mexico and the U.S. with assertions about the comparability of secondary

schooling in Mexico and the United States. Consistent within this literature is the fact

that while Mexicans, on average, attend less years of schooling than their U.S.

counterparts (Buriel, 1984, 1993; Padilla & Gonzales, 2001) those years of education in

Mexico are positively linked to immigrant academic outcomes in the United States

(Portes 1979; Buriel, 1984; Chavez & Buriel, 1986; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001). These

scholars assert that the receipt of a secondary education in Mexico instills academic skill

sets that, once learned, are easily transferred from a first to second language, thus

enabling first-generation Mexican students to excel in US public schools. As such, the

completion of a secondary education in Mexico is viewed as roughly equivalent to a

United States – 12th grade public education. On the one hand, this position has led

researchers to develop equivalency formulas aligning educational attainment across

borders. On the other hand, I argue that this approach requires closer consideration on

what is meant by equivalence. In the majority of cases, an understanding about one's

education in Mexico is limited to a single question of how many years a person attended

(Chavez & Buriel, 1986, Buriel, 1993; Padilla & Gonzales, 2001). Given that Mexico's

public school system is compulsory through the 8th grade (*secundaria*), the importance of

finishing or graduating from the 8th grade aligns with the importance and value assigned

to U.S. students that complete a high school education. However, this assumed surface equivalence leaves unanswered the equivalence of the specific content that is delivered through the 8th grade in Mexico as compared to the content that is delivered through the 12th grade in U.S. public schools. Because discussions about the impact of schooling received prior to coming to the U.S. rest on assumptions about knowledge presented and/or acquired in an immigrant's home country, researchers need to be clearer about the degree of difference in content between the 8th and 12th grade completion in the two countries (respectively).

Qualitative assessments: While fixed-response questions covering issues of academic content were not asked of the parents in the sample, the qualitative interview guides included questions about the parent's ability to help in their child's schooling and about any differences experienced as a result of being educated in Mexico as opposed to receiving an education in the United States. Moving beyond closed-ended measures of educational attainment, these open-ended qualitative questions allowed parents to expand on the type and depth of schooling that they received in Mexico and/or the United States and the extent to which their own educational experience was equivalent to the educational experiences of their children. As noted below, this provided a richer understanding of how parent's education related to the formation of social capital and the extent to which parents involve themselves in their child's schooling.

School Attitudes and Behaviors

In an effort to more fully understand issues of involvement and investment in the child's educational process, parents and children were asked both quantitative and

qualitative questions concerning the academic aspirations and expectations that they held

for their child or for themselves (respectively).

(A) Educational aspirations

Quantitative assessments: Single-item, fixed-response questions specifically

asked parents and students about the highest level of schooling they *wanted* their child to

achieve followed by indications about the *likelihood* of the same child reaching those

goals. Perceptions related to the child's education were assessed along three dimensions:

their educational goals; their attitude toward school; and the value they place on

education. Here "value" was operationalized as the level of "importance" and

"likelihood" assigned to different aspects of scholastic preparedness (Eccles, Lord, &

Buchanan, 1996). Response sets to questions measuring "importance" ranged between 1

(very important) and 4 (not important). Response sets to questions measuring

"likelihood" ranged from 1 (very likely) to 4 (not likely).

Qualitative assessments: Qualitative questions, asked of mom, dad, and child,

included asking about what the child thinks of school, whether or not they feel it is

important for the child to do well in school, what level of education would they like the

child to attain and why, what level of education do they think the child is likely to attain

and why.

(B) Parental involvement in educational issues

Quantitative assessments: Questions regarding parental involvement in the child's

learning and education included questions assessing the frequency of parent involvement

in child's school and time spent in helping their children in educational activities at

home. In this phase of the project a modified 41-item version of the *Rochester Assessment Package for Schools* (RAPS: Connell, 1994) was used to assess academic engagement on the part of the parents and school involvement on the part of the children. The original scale included various subscales that measured: their parent's engagement in school; feelings of security and support from teachers; feelings about peers while the child is at school; and about their child's coping skills related to experiences at school. In this modified scale questions pertaining to feelings about peers while in school were not included. Coping with school experiences was comprised of six items (Cronbach's α = .54). Representative items included questions asking about the student's reaction and explanation about "bad" academic performances. Examples included: the teacher didn't cover things on the test, telling themselves that they'll (the student) do better next time, thinking it was the teacher's fault, and trying to see what they (the student) did wrong. Response sets for coping ranged from 1 (not true at all) to 4 (very true). Support from teachers was made up of positive and negative dimensions. A positive feeling of security and support was made up of six items (Cronbach's α = .82) that assessed an overall school experience as students indicated the number of classes that teachers exhibited a particular form of behavior including teachers: being "fair", having plenty of time for them, and feeling that what a student says is important. Negative feelings of security and support were made up of ten-items (Cronbach's α = .72). Response sets for security and support ranged from 1 (none) to 4 (all). Parent's emotional engagement was a fifteen-item scale made up of positive and negative dimensions. Positive parental engagement was comprised of seven items (Cronbach's α = .71). Representative items included

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parent's enjoying spending time with the child, knowing how their child is doing in school, and liking to talk to their child about school. Negative parental engagement was made up of eight items (Cronbach's α = .84) including parent's never having enough time to talk about what happens to their child in school, not explaining why school is important, and not being clear about what they expect out of their child's school performance. Response sets for parental engagement ranged from 1 (not true at all) to 4 (very true).

Qualitative assessments: Qualitative questions were designed to map onto these same dimensions and also included questions about the child's feelings about peers. The qualitative questions for mom, dad, and child included asking about what kind of student the child is, what kinds of things parents could do to help their child to do well in school, and about how teacher treats the child.

Contextual Factors

In this section, assessments of the social contexts such as the school environment, ethnic group identity and experiences of discrimination are outlined.

(A) Student perceptions of the school environment

Quantitative assessments: To assess the student's perception of their school environment, the child completed the 42-item Classroom Environment Scale (CES: Trickett & Moos, 1973). This instrument measured students' perception of the schools' respect for cultural diversity, student involvement, affiliation, support, task orientation, competition, order and organization, rule clarity, teacher control, and innovation. More generally, these perceptions were subdivided along perceptions about the students in their

school and the teachers in their school. The child's views of the other students was assessed by nineteen-items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .65$) and included perceptions of students getting along together, liking to meet one another, enjoying working on projects together, and being mean to one another. The child's view of the teachers at school consisted of seventeen-items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$) including perceptions that the teachers help students to organize their work, encourage students to try unusual projects, explore different ways of teaching, and who set strict rules. Responses for all items referred to the proportion of students or teachers exhibiting a particular action or mindset and ranged from 1 (none) to 3 (most/all).

Qualitative assessments: Because academic achievement is partially effected by students' attitudes toward their school, children's attitudes about the level of investment that their schools and teachers have in them is likely to be a determining factor in subsequent student achievement. In the qualitative portion of our study we asked parents and students about the student's attitude toward their current or most recently attended school, their classroom experiences and impressions, and about the role and performance of their teachers.

(B) Perceptions of Identity

Given that acts of racism and discrimination affect perceptions of camaraderie, feelings of inclusion, and a sense that one is being treated in an equitable manner, it is critical to understand both the extent to which families have experienced discrimination as well as one's consciousness about discriminatory practices. As identity is an important facet of adolescence (Erikson, 1964) and because the sample population is comprised of

Mexican immigrant parents and second generation Mexican-American children, it is critical to understand how mom, dad, and child ethnically identify.

Quantitative assessments: Ethnicity was assessed for parent and children using the Multi Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). This twenty-item scale covered issues including racial/ethnic alienation, integration with different racial/ethnic groups, and ethnic consciousness. Racial/ethnic alienation was a two-item subscale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .54$). Racial/ethnic integration was a four-item subscale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$) and included items that indicated involvement with other ethnic/racial groups. Ethnic consciousness was a twelve-item scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$) that assessed the to extent to which children not only identified with their racial/ethnic group but also were actively engaged in learning about that same group. Response sets for ethnic identity ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Qualitative assessments: Complementing this identity assessment were qualitative questions that asked mom, dad, and child to ethnically self identify and to explore the strengths, weaknesses, obstacles, and benefits of being a self identified ethnic minority.

(C) Perceptions of Discrimination

Quantitative assessments: Discrimination was assessed using multiple measures including the Adolescent Discrimination Index administered to the children in the study (Fisher, Wallace & Fenton, 2000). This fifteen item scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$) examines perceived institutional, educational, and peer discrimination. This scale was constructed to measure occurrence and thus the original response sets were dichotomized as 1 (yes) and 2 (no). These variables were recoded and computed to create a total score based on

the child's responses. Higher scores indicated a higher frequency of experienced discrimination.

Finally, parents were asked to report on the extent to which they engaged in conversations with their children regarding racism and in attempts to equip them with understandings that might better allow one to recognize, address, and remedy acts of racism. This 29-item Preparation for Racial Bias scale (Cronbach's α = .93 for mothers, .90 for fathers) included items that emphasized issues of awareness about acts of racism and messages that stressed equality across ethnic and racial lines. Representative statements include: our ethnic group is capable of succeeding in anything, racism and discrimination will affect every aspect of your life, American society is fair to all ethnic groups and races, and you may have hard times being accepted in society because of your ethnic group/race. Responses indicated how often parents conveyed the sentiments reflected in specific messages to their children. These responses sets ranged from 1 (never) to 3 (a lot).

Qualitative assessments: As discrimination can manifest in multiple ways and take more overt or subtle forms, qualitative questions pertaining to discriminatory or racist acts were asked of mom, dad, and child. These included whether there has ever been a time that they felt that being Mexican has hurt their child's school performance, or their ability to help their child in school and whether they have ever noticed differences in the way White students were treated as compared to their child or other Mexican children.

Scholastic Outcomes

Quantitative assessments: Achievement test scores (SAT-9 and CAT-6) for participating students were obtained from participating school districts following appropriate human subjects procedures and obtaining informed consent from parents and assent from adolescents. Both of these standardized achievement tests measure a student's level of mastery across a number of academic subjects including math, science, reading comprehension, spelling, and language arts. Additionally, the raw data that was obtained from the school districts were converted into standardized scores (Z-scores and Stanines). Given this standardization, these scores were thus are able to be compared across grade level, within and across schools, districts and in relation to national averages (Dataquest, 2009).

School Archival Records (SARS: Walker, Block-Pedago, Todis & Severson, 1991) were used to monitor students' risk of: failure in social behavioral adjustment; failure in academic achievement; and school dropout. The SARS provided a systematic archival review of a child's behavioral and academic achievement over time. SARS domain scores (Disruption, Needs Assistance, and Low Achievement) obtained in secondary school have been found to be of great value in the longitudinal prediction of school related outcomes (Walker, et al., 1991). SARS data was collected annually beginning when the child was in the 5th grade and recorded student information about grade retention, disciplinary actions, special education placement, receipt of title 1 services, and a section for open ended negative narrative comments.

Finally, course letter grades were also collected. These letter grades consisted of a range of "A-B-C-D-F" and where "A" was considered a mark of excellence and a "F" was considered failing across both districts. These grades were also assigned a corresponding numerical value by each respective district where "A" = 4, "B" = 3, "C" = 2, "D" = 1, and "F" = 0. Using these numeric values overall grade point averages (GPA) were calculated for each student over a given school year and up until their graduation, receipt of a General Education Degree (GED), or until they left the school system. Student's K-12th grade educational attainment was also collected and recorded indicating whether a student graduated, earned their GED, or left school.

Qualitative assessments: Extending the utility of these fixed answer responses for academic achievement, qualitative questions centering on perceptions of how they (or their child) are doing in school and what classes the adolescent does and does not enjoy, supplements test scores and grades which tend to measure content mastery rather than how invested the student and parents are in the adolescent's education or their general disposition towards the schooling process.

Threats to Validity

Sample Size

Unlike many of the large scale studies of academic outcomes, this specific sub-sample contained only 55 families. While the sample size is a limitation of the study, it can be argued that this study contains more detailed data than many of the larger sample studies. As is also common to most studies with a small number of participants, caution should be exercised when attempting to generalize findings to larger populations. In

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addition, all of the families in this study resided in suburban areas of California. That

being said, the western United States is home to 55% of the population of Mexican origin

Latinos (U.S. Census, 2003). Additionally, of all Latinos, approximately 67% are of

Mexican descent. Thus, while this study only collects data from Mexican families from

California, raising issues about how generalizable the findings are, they still reference a

large portion of the U.S. Latino population.

<u>CAT-6 - SAT-9: Compatibility Issues</u>

The Stanford 9 (SAT-9) is a national norm-referenced achievement test. The test

questions and scoring are the same from year-to-year allowing for historical and cross-

sectional analysis. The California Achievement Test (CAT-6), implemented in 2003, is

also a national norm-referenced achievement test (NRT) which now serves as the new

baseline for California's norm-referenced data. Unfortunately, until an equating study is

done between the SAT-9 and CAT- 6, comparisons across districts are limited to only a

few dimensions and on select substantive testing areas.

For the purposes of both general understanding and as information that may prove

useful in future applications, I have attempted to detail this non-comparability issue in the

paragraphs that follow. The CAT-6 and the SAT-9 are two nationally normed tests that

are very different from each other. The CAT-6 has a different structure, content

emphasis, and difficulty level than the Stanford 9. Problems with equating CAT-6 and

SAT-9 scores include the fact that Harcourt Brace, publisher of the SAT-9, uses one-

parameter Rasch model IRT whereas ETS and McGraw-Hill, publisher of the CAT-6, use

the 3-parameter method. Additionally, the CAT-6 and the SAT-9 also use different

national groups of students as the comparison groups, compounding the problem of comparability.

Specific differences include the fact that the CAT-6 and the SAT-9 sample different skills, their questions "look" different, they have a different number of questions, and the percentile ranks refer to very different norm groups (a national sample of students at each grade level). The CAT-6 is a shortened version of the Terra Nova Second Edition which provides a snapshot but not a complete picture of *grade level skills*. The SAT-9 was designed to measure skills *below, at and above grade level* and has at least twice as many items as the CAT-6. As such it is difficult to predict from SAT-9 performance what a student would do on the CAT-6 and visa-versa. The table below (Table 2.2) helps to further distinguish differences between the CAT-6 and the SAT-9.

Table 2.2. Standardized Test Differences

Dimension	CAT-6	SAT-9
Format	Survey form (shorter than a complete battery)	Complete battery
NRT questions	Fewer NRT questions	More NRT questions
Language Arts	Reading and English language combined	Reading and English language separate
Mathematics	Single math test, grades 2-8	Math procedures and math problems separate, grades 2-8
Social Science	No grade 9-11 social science	Grade 9-11 social science

With these differences, the scores can be misleading. The interpretation requires more than a surface review of the information. As a result of these differences, the California Department of Education is preparing a Conversion Table between these two tests which will assist us in understanding the corresponding National Percentile Rank (NPR) scores between the CAT/6 and SAT/9 (not yet completed and with no estimated time of

completion). Given this information, it is generally understood by educational

researchers, schools, districts, and state education departments, that the NPR scores for

the CAT-6 should not be compared with NPR scores for the SAT-9.

Still researchers are not without options. The most meaningful comparison

between the CAT-6 and the SAT-9 is gained through the use of standardized scores. This

standardization is important because it provides the data needed to accurately determine

the average performance of students compared to the rest of the county. In this way, I am

still able to make comparisons across districts where specific subject matter is

substantively aligned. I used this approach in the current study.

Chapter 4: Aiming High? – Relative Understandings of Educational Aspirations, Expectations and their Effects on Motivation and Mobility

Research on the immigrant experience has continued to reaffirm the finding that chief among a person's motivation to migrate is the possibility of a "better life". Following this motivation to enter into and function as a part of a new culture, previous theories of mobility (Park, 1914; Gordon, 1964; Chiswick, 1986; Suarez-Orozco, 1987; Coleman, 1988; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Portes & Zhou, 1993) start from considerations of how an individual, entering a host country changes, evolves or adapts to the prescriptions of the host's cultural systems and structural arrangements. In doing so, scholars have paid less attention to the idea that, within immigrant families, the benefits of aligning with the opportunities present within a host country is primarily awarded to the children. Even in research where time, energy and resources are concentrated on children (Ogbu, 1991), findings still center on evaluations of the parents' social and economic promotion. In line with this argument, the contradictory findings about the positive and negative experiences of immigrants, based primarily on their socioeconomic status, may be partially explained by the idea that the parent's personal outcomes were not the main focus or goal of their migration. Instead, the goal of many immigrant parents is to improve the lives of their children, not necessarily themselves. Since the children are often the focus in immigrant families, frameworks that fail to capture a broad range of motivations to migrate on the part of the parents are inadequate. Moreover, it is difficult to understand parental attitudes and beliefs about their child's educational opportunities and how they can and do promote their children's achievement unless the

parent's motives for migrating in the first place are recognized. As such, understandings

about immigrant attitudes, perspectives and behaviors remain underdeveloped.

In our recent study where immigrant parents were asked about their motivations

for coming to the United States, ninety-four percent of the respondents indicated that the

opportunity to succeed (i.e. the attainment of a well-paying, prestigious job) was one of

their primary motivations. Reflecting on the previous discussion about migrant

motivations, many of these immigrant parents did not see themselves as the main

beneficiaries of this opportunity but identified their children as the major benefactors.

Through their efforts, parents hoped that their children would achieve a higher standard

of living over the long term as a result of their decision to migrate and their hard work in

the host country. In support of this argument, thirty-two percent of dads and thirty-five

percent of moms interviewed indicated that they came to the U.S. to improve their

children's educational opportunities (Avila, Vega, Parke & Coltrane, 2008).

Efforts to better understand the intent(s) of migrating individuals or populations

help develop a clearer understanding about the type of adaptive model(s) immigrants are

likely to adopt. The parents in this project underscored the importance of their children

being able to secure a "good "job in the future and understood that these jobs were best

realized through educational attainment. According to the voices of these immigrant

parents, academic success was viewed as the primary vehicle for the potential job success

of their children. One father captures the sentiment expressed by several parents about

the linkage between an education and a better life. "They gotta have their minds set that

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they're gonna get a higher education because you know a higher education means they

can go into a field or career of their choosing." Similarly, another father states:

> After he is done with high school, he's going to have to figure out a way
> to go to college…I explain things to him. I tell him if he doesn't go to
> school, doesn't go to college, he's going to be at a disadvantage to other
> people. He needs to have more skills to succeed. It's very competitive out
> there.

Aims of the Chapter

In this chapter, I discuss how thoughts on academic achievement are reflected in

the voices of Mexican immigrant parents and their second-generation children. Further, I

argue that while educational attainment is often a priority for immigrant parents, their

aspirations, expectations and guidance provided to their children are shaped by their

educational biographies, occupational experiences and cultural conceptions of education.

Finally, I examine how the parents' socioeconomic position shapes aspirations and

expectations while also contributing to the overall parent-child relationship and the

child's subsequent school attitude and motivations.

Educational Attainment and Mobility

The general emphasis on the value of educational attainment for later

occupational success is central to a variety of theoretical positions. Research on human

capital theory, signaling theory, and credential theory all address the tight coupling

between education and employment opportunities, earnings, and labor conditions.

Human capital theory views educational attainment and skills as equally important in

determining earnings (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Coleman, 1987) while signaling theory

holds that as employers have limited information about a perspective employee's skills,

social traits are used as an index of skill (Kerckhoff, Raudenbush & Glennie, 2001). Finally, credential theory views educational attainment as an indicator of skill that functions as a filtering mechanism for skilled, yet non-credentialed workers (Collins, 1979).

Across each perspective is the central notion that while skill should rationally be the main determinant of labor force outcomes (earnings and occupational status) educational attainment tends to be the primary method by which employers evaluate perspective employees. Kerckhoff, Raudenbush and Glennie (2001) underscore this point in their argument that educational attainment is related to labor force outcomes, over and above actual skills necessary to perform one's job duties. Others present similar arguments (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Collins, 1979; Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 1992) that conceptualize educational credentials as having significant influences on differential job placement.

To the extent that educational credentials afford job market opportunities, schools are also seen as a conduit moving children from student to employee. Rosenbaum and Binder (1997) found that employers obtain their employees through the development of network systems. Here, employers create linkages with schools, funneling sponsored students into occupational positions. At the collegiate level, job fairs and internships reflect this networking. In high schools, the Resource Occupational Program (ROP) and job fairs broadcast the idea that children must achieve academically in order to realize well paying jobs.

The makings of a "good" job: Beyond the ability to secure a well paying position, the type and conditions of a job are highlighted as important indicators of success among Latino populations (Chavez, 1992). The majority of Mexican parents in this sample did not graduate high school (or its high school equivalent in Mexico) and most of the fathers worked in low-skill, permanent entry level, physical labor occupations. This reality arguably served as a reminder to their children of the importance of an education in securing a job that is both lucrative and not physically taxing. Indeed, while the immigrant families in this sample ranged in their annual earnings, their hourly wage did not vary significantly. Instead, income variation was generated by the number of hours worked and the number of jobs held. As a result, all of these parents regardless of income understood that earnings do not necessarily indicate a "good" job.

Socioeconomic Status and Academic Motivation

The low SES Mexican parents in this sample saw a link between their stressed financial situation and a lack of education. Among these immigrant parents, their limited ability to read, write, and speak English was perceived as negatively affecting their ability to secure adequate employment as well as their ability to directly assist in their child's schooling. Educational attainment was understood as a way by which one could gain more access to better jobs and increased mobility within occupational spheres. Therefore, schooling, which facilitated the acquisition of the English language, the attainment of necessary institutional knowledge and technical skill sets (capital) was viewed by parents as invaluable for their children's success.

The second-generation children in these low SES families also gained understanding about the importance of education and family commitment as they witnessed and understood their parent's dedication to working for the benefit of their families. While these children may not have been directly involved with managing the family's financial stress, they often times witnessed the negative and undesirable effects of a lack of education.

In contrast to the low SES families in the study whose economic and occupational struggles provided teachable moments about the importance of schooling and reminders of the consequences of a lack of education, children who grew up in more affluent households looked to emulate their parents' culturally and institutionally recognized accomplishments. In addition, these higher SES parents were committed to assisting their children achieve in school, a task that was easier for them than their lower SES peers due to their better understanding of the school culture. Central to both of these scenarios was that the parents' degree of institutional knowledge and culturally recognized social capital are influences on the parents' ability to motivate their children to adopt institutionally endorsed prescriptions for success; although, the mechanisms vary across levels of SES.

The motivational power of poor circumstances: In addition to understanding how educationally disadvantaged parents are able to generate positive messages about the relevance of education, the narrative responses from these 8th graders suggest more nuanced ways that the socioeconomic status and work experiences of their parents have shaped their child's personal outlooks and academic motivations. Academic success or

failure on the part of parents helped frame the importance of children's academic hopes and successes. Responses suggest that in many cases, students' perceptions of the realities of their parents' lack of education and difficult working conditions provided an impetus for academic motivation. Some children in this study continue to perform at or above grade level motivated, in part, as a reaction to the depressed socioeconomic position of their parents. In other cases, the progress that some parents had made towards bettering their socioeconomic positions served as a motivator for academic and overall success as well as reminding children of a sense of their own potential success.

For example, many students expressed their motivation to achieve in school as a result of observing their own parents' hard work. One 8th grade male student noted that his father was currently a student and that his mother worked very hard at her job to contribute to the family income: "I always see him [father] studying, always writing, memorizing, reviewing notes. That's what sometimes keeps me going." Later he added, "I see my mom and she wakes up at like four in the morning to go to work. She comes back with cramps and stuff and I'm like, damn, I got to push a little bit harder. Four more years and I'm off to a better school."

Student Strategies: Work as the Skeleton Key to Success

Reflecting the types of sacrifice and dedication exhibited earlier by their parents, the children in this study overwhelmingly cited hard work and perseverance as critical determinants for becoming successful. Specifically, finishing school, getting good grades, and going to college were largely cited alongside the importance of family. In a quantitative assessment of factors influencing student success (You and Your Future –

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YYF), 87% of the children interviewed indicated that coming from a rich family was not an important factor influencing their success. In contrast to financially generated opportunities, 97% of the children interviewed indicated that working hard in school was an important factor to their success.

These insights underscore the argument that disadvantaged children are able to gain strength through varying points of reference. For some of these children, the relative success of their parents provide valuable reference points and modeling for their children. In these cases, their children are able to not simply listen to messages about the importance of success but are able to observe and benefit from the fruits of their parents efforts. In turn, these experiences lend both a sense of legitimacy to the messages that their parents attempt to instill in them and also foster a sense of efficacy in themselves and in the worth of their own abilities. For other children whose parents work hard and struggle to provide a life for them, their efforts provide a clear example of how a lack of education affects their lives and the lives of those around them.

These current findings challenge much of the status attainment literature (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988), which suggests that student underachievement, and subsequent low levels of mobility in social contexts are due to limited forms of social capital or cultural conditions including close-knit family systems that impede and suppress behaviors and cognitive advancements. In fact, growing up in a context where children witness and understand struggle within the families and surrounding community serves as a legitimizing dynamic that promotes the internalization of the importance an education and the possibility of academic achievement through hard work.

The voices of the adolescents reflect these experiences and link these realities with how they understand the importance of educational attainment and set academic goals for themselves. Specifically, their academic behaviors are less the product of language acquisition or adoption of hegemonic cultural messages and instead more heavily affected by the conditions of the economically stressed communities in which they live and the supportive messages of their loved ones including parents and extended family. Contrary to the literature which argues that low SES families cultivate children with lowered expectations, 80% of these children quantitatively reported "high confidence" that they would be able to reach their academic and occupational goals on a survey that helped measure their aspirations and expectations. Only 5% of the children reported that they felt that they would "probably not" have the kind of job they aspire towards. With regard to their occupational choices, lawyers, medical professionals, and celebrity status careers, and academic positions evenly comprised the top four choices. In only 13% of the cases were lower status or working class occupations endorsed as desirable careers.

In contrast to previous research that often suggests the primacy of SES in accounting for scholastic success, my research suggests that student perceptions of social location and attributions about parental economic efforts to improve can be very important to the students, albeit in more subtle or nuanced ways than previous SES models might predict. According to these interviews, parental economic standing impacted the child's academic motivation in ways that helped to highlight the importance of schooling. The occupational positions that their parents held, and the harsh working

conditions that often accompanied these positions, served as a reference point for their children that appeared to act, at least for some adolescents, as a motivator for academic achievement.

These lived experiences come with a great deal of theoretical and empirical support. Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that education functions as an integrative mechanism for the capitalist economy. Here schools socialize successive generations of students into aligning economic structures. Research by Oakes (1985) focuses on how this alignment occurs through an examination of the effects of tracking and its impacts on students' economic outcomes. Aligning with human capital theory, Oakes (1985) argues that the distribution of knowledge is channeled through evaluations of students' socioeconomic positions, and ethnicity. As a result, students who are exposed to different materials as a result of tracking decisions are subsequently restricted from particular learning experiences which, in turn, results in reduced access to more prestigious and well paid occupational opportunities (Oakes, 1985; Rosenbaum, Kariya & Maier, 1990; Schultz, 1961).

Consistent with the dichotomies between high status and low status jobs emphasized in educational and economic theory, the main goals within high-track classes emphasize independence, critical thinking, self-direction and creativity whereas low-track classes emphasize conformity, punctuality, conforming to rules, passive compliance, and working quickly (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Brint 1998; Brint Contreras & Matthews, 2001; Kohn, 1969; Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Oakes, 1985; Rosenbaum, Kariya & Maier, 1990). In line with this argument, segmented labor market theory utilizes credentials and social

backgrounds as ways by which power and position remains in the hands of like individuals. This approach aligns with the Bowles and Gintis (1976) argument that differential hiring practices are based upon traits that are differentially socialized within schools. Specifically, college graduates are hired based on their ability to self-direct, while non-college youth are hired based upon their rule-following behaviors, passive compliance, punctuality, and attendance.

The impact of acculturation on opportunity and mobility: Given that economic opportunities are potentially based on one's skill sets and the particular traits one exhibits, models of acculturation which stress the selection, retention and/or rejection of cultural values, beliefs and technologies (social and material), provide opportunities to understand the process of mobility within immigrant families. This approach to mobility is particularly relevant to the immigrant family experience as parents and children tend to acculturate in different ways based on the socio-cultural arrangements of the institutions they are immersed in and at different rates due to the demands of those environments. Children who spend the majority of their day in English speaking domains tend to learn English at a faster rate than their fathers and mothers whose level of English competency varies as a function of the type of occupational environment in which they exist. Parents who stay at home or who work in ethnically and linguistically homogeneous groups (e.g., hotel maids; garment workers; construction workers; gardeners) acculturate more slowly than those who are exposed to a wider range of ethnicities and languages in the workplace (e.g., schools, banks, and other white-collar occupations).

From a cultural perspective this acquisition process varies across generations. On the one hand, second-generation school children are immersed in an environment that facilitates language acquisition; although, as English language learners, these children are also at an increased risk of being channeled into low-track classes that provide less understanding about the types of cultural traits necessary to qualify for high status jobs (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Oakes, 1985). On the other hand, parents who work among other limited-English speaking individuals experience less of an opportunity to learn English. However, these working class parents are often a part of a social context where both high status and low status occupations exist and therefore they are afforded the opportunity to understand and identify the kinds of attitudes and behaviors expected of those occupying high status jobs and living good lives. Unfortunately, language limited interactions are often also limited to only observing the kinds of surface traits upwardly mobile individuals possess (e.g. business wear, lab coats, uniforms) rather than being exposed to opportunities to learn by interacting closely with these individuals in a cooperative problem solving situations. As such, while there may be efforts to share and coordinate views between parents and children about how to attain a better life, their experiences may be so different that these efforts are likely to generate possibly divergent or inconsistent views about the kinds of expectations and how to fulfill these expectations of a better future.

Relative Expectations: High School vs. College as a Goal

There is a division in this sample in terms of how parents and children talk about educational achievement based the parent's own level of educational attainment and the

extent of their understanding about the educational attainment process in the United States. On the one hand, there were parents who focused on graduation from high school as the primary educational goal. This hope was often accompanied by the desire that their child go to college, but plans for college were rarely specific. On the other hand, the other major group in this sample focused on preparing for entrance to college, with a loftier and sometimes more specific goal of attaining a college degree.

Finishing high school as a goal: Regarding the parent's academic accomplishments and the expectations for their children, several parents stressed that they want their children to go further in the educational system than they had. For some, this means graduating from high school. The goal of finishing high school loomed large among those who did not complete high school themselves, indicating that they did not take such an achievement for granted. For example, one mother stressed that she wants her daughter to finish high school, and then go to college. However, she placed most emphasis on her daughter's completion of high school "because I don't want her to be like me, [I] didn't finish high school. I went up to the twelfth grade and then I dropped out."

Several other parents also stressed the importance of finishing high school, accompanied by a vague hope rather than a firm expectation that their child would also go to college. As one mother noted,

> I wish he graduates from, from high school. I want him to graduate from high school umm… we, we, we've had that talk before and he always says, you push me, you know, you're always behind my back, I said I'll, I'll be behind your back until you graduate from high school because that's what I want for you to graduate from high school.

In a subtle way, such parents may communicate a worry and lack of confidence that their child will complete high school while at the same time describing a high school diploma as a major accomplishment in and of itself. Other parents whose children were struggling academically were also more focused on high school graduation than college attendance as the primary goal. For example, one respondent whose son disliked school and was attending an alternative school after being expelled from his junior high focused almost exclusively on his graduation from high school. She said she tells him, "I hope you go to college but I will be glad if you graduate from high school first." Her hopes for his future are rather vague, "I just pray that he succeeds and becomes something he wants to become. Be a good man, follow his dream, and succeed. I really pray that he just takes life seriously. He doesn't take life seriously… I wish he graduates from high school." Asked what his parent's expectations are of him, her son replied, [to have a job] "where I can stay inside an office in the air conditioning. They don't want me like doing outside [hard] work."

When parents emphasize high school graduation as a major accomplishment, they likewise seem to communicate a sense that they do not expect that their child will actually attend college. Generally when parents regarded a high school diploma as an important achievement and a college education as optional, children were more likely to focus on their high school graduation as their major goal and less likely to talk about attending college. Several children interviewed expressed thoughts reflecting high school as their last academic stop. As one student commented, "I'll be good once I graduate. My parents really want me to graduate and that would be cool to give to them." Given

the importance parents placed on graduating from high school, many of these children correspondingly understood high school completion as a significant feat and deserving of "time off". I don't know exactly what I'm gonna do later (after high school). Probably kick it (relax) for a minute then get a good job. While it is beyond the scope of this project to assign a definitive causal role to the parents' academic expectations for their children in these cases; the analysis of both child and parent narratives reveals a general correspondence between adolescents and their parents in their focus on attaining a level of education just beyond the reach of the older generation.

College as only an educational hope: Barriers to fulfilling educational aspirations beyond high school: Several factors were found to be linked with high school graduation rather than college attendance as a primary expectation. First, limitations in parental knowledge of specific educational options available to their children after high school. Second, several parental sentiments were revealed in these interviews that may be important factors in the educational achievement of their children: namely, a focus on children's happiness and the concept of child choice in educational and occupational domains.

Parental lack of knowledge: Among parents who wanted their children to go to college, some had vague expectations due, in part to their lack of familiarity with advanced education. Rarely did these parents discuss the specifics of what resources were available or necessary for their child to attend college. The discussions with these parents revealed that they had little understanding about, educational resource programs,

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advanced courses, college test preparation courses, and differences between 2-year and 4-year colleges.

They did not often discuss a specific college or university that they felt was an appropriate target school for their children, except when it is a local community college. Nor did they discuss the status ranking of various universities and the fact that attendance at a community college is not as prestigious or as promising in terms of future occupational status and earnings as is attendance at a four-year university. Instead, several parents focused on the profession that they envisioned or that their child envisioned, skipping past the educational steps necessary to achieve such careers. In this example a father rests on the assumption that his son has the needed information to achieve his goals.

> I think that he will be a good lawyer. He is one of those people that naturally likes helping the people. He doesn't like injustice. So I see a lot going for him in that aspect. And he has a firm goal. He knows perfectly what it is that he wants, where he wants to get to and how to get it. So that is very important.

In a similar example one mother voices her want for her daughter to have a career in lieu of discussing specific post-high school educational plans.

> But that's what I would like her to see, have her career, what she wants to be. If she wants to be that doctor, be that doctor; if she wants to be that lawyer, be that lawyer; if she wants to be that artist, be that artist it's up to her. But do something,

In only a few cases were parents specific about college preference. In these cases parents typically also indicated that they had some schooling in the U.S. (e.g. adult education, vocational training, college). Here parents tended to prefer a 4-year-univeristy over a

community college, and in contrast to the previous examples, stressed their linkage to high status careers such as becoming an attorney. For example, one mother wanted her daughter to go to a 4-year college but at the same time she claimed her daughter wanted to attend a community college. Here she notes, "I'm the kind of mom that demands a lot. And my husband demands more. For my husband he thinks that it's never sufficient what they do because they are very intelligent that they can do it more, more, more." And another mother dissuaded all her children from community college stating, "I tell they don't think college (as in community college) from high school, think here (as to the university where they were interviewed)" and emphasized the need for her son to attend a four year university and eventually obtain a doctoral degree. In view of the fact that most parents were poorly informed about the types of post high school educational options, these results underscore the importance of increasing parental awareness of post-secondary educational opportunities for their children.

Finally, it should be noted that this lack of knowledge about the educational system does not imply that parents do not have hopes and expectations for their children's educational achievement. When provided with a scale that permitted them to indicate their agreement with low to high levels of education, parents often noted the desire for their children to attain high levels of education. Statistically, the quantitative responses of these immigrant parents map onto their generalized statements about wanting the "very best" for their children. Seventy-six percent of the fathers and 84% of the mothers interviewed indicated that they wanted their child to attain at least a four year college-bachelor's degree. Fifty-two percent of these fathers and 58% of these mothers

wanted their child to obtain a Ph.D., M.D., or other professional degree. Regarding

alignment with the larger population, these responses mirror the answers given by parents

in the larger sample of Mexican, Mexican American, and European American families

(Parke et. al., 2004).

     Child choice as a determinant of educational attainment: In the absence of clear

information about post high school educational options on the part of parents, child

choice was often the default position in response to this lack of information. On the one

hand, the notion of choice overlaps with the idea of child empowerment and theories that

stress the value of autonomy (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski & Apostoleris, 1997).

According to this theoretical perspective this type of child empowerment is likely to lead

to self-motivation and self generated expectations to succeed educationally.

     With regard to motivation and parental involvement, Grolnick et al., (1997)

differentiates along three dimensions of parental involvement/motivation: autonomy

support, positive involvement, and structure. In the first dimension, autonomy support is

defined as the degree to which parents encourage children to initiate and make their own

choices rather than apply pressure and inducements to control the children's behavior.

This autonomy has been positively linked to school grades, intrinsic motivation, and self-

esteem (Steinberg et al., 1989; Eccles, 1993; Eccles, Buchanan, Flanagan, Fuligni,

Midgley & Yee, 1991). Positive involvement includes parents' interest in the child's

activities, spending time with children, and showing love and affection and is closely

related to variables such as acceptance and warmth, which have been associated with

positive child outcomes (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Finally, structure is defined as the

extent to which parents provide clear and consistent guidelines, expectations, and rules for child behaviors (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). This variable is closely related to monitoring, which has been found to be negatively associated with internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Steinberg et al., 1989; Kerr & Stattin, 2000).

Issues surrounding motivational resources also extend to child perceptions. Three motivational resources are thought to mediate the relationship between parental involvement and school success. First, to act, children need to know how their actions are connected to success and failure outcomes or have a sense of *control understanding* (Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990). Second, children must have a sense that they can carry out the behaviors necessary to achieve success, or a sense of *perceived competence* (Harter, 1985). Finally, children can have a sense of control and competence but might still feel coerced or pressured into behaving. Thus, a third resource is a sense of autonomy or *self-regulation* in which action is experienced as self-initiated (Connell & Ryan, 1987). Previous studies have shown that these motivational resources make significant and independent contributions to children's school success (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991). On the other hand, these strategies do less to capture the unintended effects of pursuing a strategy of autonomy and choice among partially informed parents and children within these immigrant households.

For example, some parents' framed it as their child's choice to attend college. The following mother stressed the importance of getting a high school diploma as an end in itself when she said: "We try to teach our kids" 'Go to school, get your education, get

your diploma, and then you can go to either a 4-year college or a 2-year college but that's up to you guys."

At the same time, for many of these parents, choice tends to also suggest a disconnect from parenting the child. Here, this same mother describes another son who wants to join the Marines:

> I'm like, "I don't want you to go the Marines." But that's going to be his choice… It's going to be what he wants to do, his career. I want them to have a career that they're going to enjoy and love and be happy with what they're doing, not something where they have to be forced to do it, because I want them to enjoy life.

As these findings demonstrate, this child empowerment is not without risk. Several parents interviewed emphasized the idea that it is ultimately their child's future and that they will have to live with the consequences. Cost and rewards principles were often invoked here as parents told their children that they have to "face their problems" and that when they do poorly in school they will "have to pay for it." As one father said,

> I tell him to face his problems, that's his future. I don't do his homework. I don't push him. I don't hit him. It's his future, the one he's playing with and he's gonna have to realize that sooner or later. I just let him know what the reality is. And I let him know that if he doesn't do well, sorry…it's his decision to ruin his life.

Given the challenges associated with the nature of choice stemming from differential levels of institutional knowledge and relative understandings of what constitutes achievement; linking second-generation children in immigrant households to upwardly mobile occupational structures requires parent-child collaboration. Parents need to share their understandings of what is required of individuals in search of high status jobs and their children need to share their understandings of what structural steps need to be taken

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in order to meet these requirements. Unfortunately, in reality this parent child collaboration and mutual understanding is often difficult to achieve.

Happiness as a parental goal for their children: Parents who viewed college as optional and indicated satisfaction with the completion of high school only tended to focus on their children's future happiness as their primary goal. Several parents who hoped their child would attend college also stated that they just wanted their child to be happy, and to do whatever would make him/her happy. They implied that if attending college makes their child unhappy, then they should not pursue such a course. For example, one father said, "What I want is for them to graduate…For them to go to college." And speaking specifically about his daughter, he added, "Whatever makes her happy will make me happy. Just whatever she wants to do. As long as my daughter's happy, I'm happy."

This focus on happiness reflects the more general notions of the "immigrant dream" where the immigrant dream is for a "better life" (Chavez, 1992). Here immigrants understand America in ways similar to the "American dream". Generically these include the idea that the U.S. is the land of opportunity, and where hard work and sacrifice results in upward mobility for them and their children. The distinction between this immigrant goal of happiness and the American dream is in the details. Native-born Americans have greater understanding about how to pursue this dream and often have greater access to resources that help them and their families along the way. Immigrants on the other hand, often lack this institutional knowledge as well as the social capital to acquire such information.

Summing Up

In light of these findings, several conclusions can be drawn about the impact of generational status on issues of achievement within immigrant families. First, contrary to previous literature on immigrant outcomes, which primarily focuses on the socioeconomic status of migrating individuals, this research suggests an expanded consideration of their potentially multiple motivations to migrate. In doing so, deeper understandings are afforded to researchers, teachers and policy makers about the behaviors of immigrant parents and the outcomes of immigrant families. Regarding educational attainment, these reasons directly impact attitudes towards schooling and the kinds of aspirations and expectations that immigrant parents have for their second-generation children. Indeed, in cases where individuals migrate to ensure their own quality of life, parental aspirations and expectations for their children differ from those who migrate in search of enhanced educational opportunities for their children. The findings from this chapter overwhelmingly suggest that education is understood by parents as central to achieving a "better life" for their children. Accordingly, these parents maintained expectations for the children that were high; although, relative to both their own experiences and their levels of cultural and institutional knowledge. Regarding the impact of economic standing on academic achievement, these findings illustrate the counterintuitive effects of economic hardship as many of these economically stressed parents not only expressed feelings of efficacy in the teaching-learning process, their children also noted how witnessing their parents struggle helped create an impetus to succeed in school.

Finally, following these findings that highlight the educational disparities between immigrant parents and their second-generation children, support is provided for the call to increase efforts on the part of educational institutions to educate immigrant parents about the structure of education in the United States. This knowledge would allow parents to better guide their children's choice of courses in high school and permit more informed decisions about educational options at the post high school level. In the next chapter, I focus on examining factors impacting this guidance process and how these socio-cultural influences on academic outlook and attitudes translate into educationally relevant forms of parental involvement and student behavior.

Chapter 5: Social Capital and the Effects of Class and Culture on Understanding the "Worth" of Parental Involvement

In this section I outline the results of how parents reflect on their abilities to involve themselves in the academic lives of their children and how this parenting is shaped by their socioeconomic status, cultural beliefs and gender. Children's perceptions of this involvement are also discussed as well as the links between children's and parents' perceptions and children's academic motivations, school attitude and scholastic behavior. Finally, factors beyond the home including extended family relations, environment, peers and teachers are considered and their impact on parenting and children's academic progress are outlined.

Aims of the Chapter

Central to this research is an understanding of how positive motivations develop in immigrant parents who, in many cases, may pursue alternative strategies such as self-sacrifice and the provision of clear messages of encouragement to their children even though they do not possess the technical skill sets or institutional knowledge to involve themselves in the traditional ways employed by middle class families. This chapter focuses on how Mexican parents are involved in their child's education through first examining how parental demographics affect parental forms of involvement. Second, I explore how variations in parental understanding about educational institutions including course requirements and opportunities for post high school education alters children's motivation and eventual achievement. Finally, I discuss how these meanings and understandings operate within and across social and scholastic educational contexts including their home, neighborhood, peer group and extended family as well as within

the child's school and classroom to affect school centered parental engagement with their children and their children's school.

The Relevance of Parents

Central to research on children's achievement is an understanding of how parental involvement is linked to the academic success of their children. This chapter focuses on how these parents verbally and physically engaged their children's academic lives as well as the extent to which these forms of involvement are successful in the eyes and actions of their children. Parents operate within family networks to create context, establish rules, provide resources and open up access to opportunities for their children; viewed this way, parental involvement functions as an inclusive form of social control. The study of the effects of parental involvement in children's education on academic achievement is not new. The general finding that parental involvement is linked with positive child achievement outcomes is relatively uncontroversial, yet questions regarding the identification of the specific dimensions of parental involvement and the mechanisms through which they affect children are still only partially addressed by current research.

Parents' involvement in their children's schooling is associated with children's school success; the positive effects of parent involvement have been demonstrated across a wide range of age levels and populations (Epstein, 1983; Fehrmann, Keith & Reimers, 1987; Reynolds, 1989; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Researchers know less, however, about the factors that determine the extent to which parents become involved in various aspects of their children's education. The focus of much past work on predictors of

parent involvement centered on demographic factors. For example, lower income, less educated (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brissie, 1987; Lareau, 2003), and single parents (Epstein, 1991) are found to be less involved than their more educated, higher income, or married counterparts.

More recently, researchers have noted the positive effects of a type of parental involvement that stresses the autonomy of students. In contrast to the kinds of direct, daily forms of parental involvement found in primary or elementary school, indirect forms of "academic socialization" are practiced by parents during the child's middle school and the adolescent years (Smetana, 2000; Smetana, Campione-Barr & Dadds, 2004; Grolnick, Price, Beiswenger & Sauck, 2007; Hill, 2010). Hill (2010) argues that while "academic socialization" includes aspects that suggest direct forms of parental involvement such as communicating messages about the value of education; the utility of educational attainment; the practical relevance of schoolwork; fostering educational and occupational aspirations, discussing learning styles and strategies; and making plans and preparations for the future, this involvement "scaffolds" rather than directly influences their child's attitudes and behaviors (Hill, 2010). This type of removed involvement is thought to allow parents to maintain influence in their child's lives while at the same time affirming their adolescent's sense of independence and advancing cognition (Keating, 2004; Halpern-Felsher & Cauffman, 2001; Byrnes, Miller & Reynolds, 1999; Wigfield, Byrnes, & Eccles, 2006). The success of this indirect involvement is largely attributed to its alignment with the child's entry into adolescence and the parents' diminished capacity to physically involve themselves in the classroom lives of their children or substantively

help them with increasingly unfamiliar and difficult coursework. In contrast to this indirect involvement, and despite parents' access to typical educational resources that are recognized as aiding in the promotion of a student's academic success, the disadvantaged immigrant parents in this study played an active role in the daily academic lives of their children. For example, sample parents indicated that they employ parenting practices such as monitoring routine academic tasks (e.g. homework assignments, papers, projects) and common bench marks (e.g. progress reports, notification of disciplinary action, and completion of assigned coursework) which are perceived by these parents as relevant tools to assess and promote the academic progress of their children.

In addition to these qualitative statements, parents were also asked to fill out the Parental Involvement in Child's Education Questionnaire (PICEQ) providing fixed-responses to closed-ended questions on the extent of parental knowledge and actions in the academic lives of their children. Here, both the mothers and fathers indicated high levels of direct involvement in the academic lives of their children. Specifically, 88% of both the mothers and fathers indicated that they know a lot about what happens to their child in school on a day-to-day basis. This level of understanding is supported in their reporting about how they involve themselves in the academic lives of their children as 96% of fathers' and 94% of mothers' reported that they know what their child is learning in school. This knowledge is likely facilitated by both the active dialogue that they maintain with their child and the forms of monitoring that they tend to employ. With regard to dialogue, 96% of both mothers and fathers report that they each ask their child about how things are going in school. With regard to the frequency of this dialogue, 88%

of fathers and mothers report that they talk to their child about the importance of school on at least a weekly basis. Among those parents, 54% of fathers and 76% of mothers report that they talk to their child about the importance of school on a daily basis.

In contrast to research documenting the prevalence and effectiveness of more autonomous forms of parental involvement in European American families, these immigrant families stressed strategies that ensure their children are actively working and focusing on their studies (e.g. homework and class projects). Ninety percent of fathers and mothers indicated that they keep close track of how well their child is doing in school. However as others have found, parents did note their diminished ability to substantively help their child with schoolwork as children enter the secondary school (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hill, 2010). Despite this involvement, the majority of immigrant parents in our sample reported that they did not feel that they knew how to help their child with their schoolwork. Nevertheless, 88% of fathers and 86% of mothers reported that they made time to help their child with homework. How they help and how their children respond are important for understanding the value of particular parenting strategies in the academic lives of their children. Seventy-eight percent of fathers and 88% of mothers indicated that they help their child plan time for their homework. Mothers (94%) and fathers (86%) indicated that they check to see that their child had done his or her homework. Of these percentages, 80% of mothers and 62% of fathers indicated that they perform homework checks on a daily basis.

These commitments to monitor and help ensure that their child completes assigned coursework, despite their inability to understand the work being done are not

only illustrative of how immigrant families align with U.S. ideals about the primacy of schooling but help provide a corrective to research on familism within Latino populations which suggests the primacy of meeting the needs of the family unit over and above one's individual demands (Blair, Blair & Madamba, 2003). These forms of involvement are time intensive and as such are not easy for these parents given that the majority of the immigrant parents reported annual incomes that were at or below federal poverty levels and who overwhelmingly reported feeling high levels of economic stress. Nevertheless, these parents highlighted the importance of being dedicated to and supportive of their child's education. They accomplished these tasks in large part through maintaining a consistent physical presence in their children's lives. These parents understood that face-to-face interaction and time spent between parents and children are essential to their child's academic growth. For example, being available is an essential first step in being able to monitor, on a regular basis, the day to day assignments and homework tasks that children need to complete in order to succeed academically.

Much of the research on predictors of parenting falls under the concept of context which includes family circumstances such as levels of stress, support, and family resources (Belsky, 1984). Parenting is not a purely dyadic relationship. Competing obligations including: family circumstances (e.g. responsibility for extended family members), resource allocation (e.g. financial and time resources that are shared across a variety of individuals within and outside the family), and non parent-child relationships (e.g. marital relationships) influence parenting and compete for parents' time and energy. As such, these competing demands may interfere with and undermine parenting. Several

studies, for example, have linked economic pressure with inconsistent and non-nurturing child rearing (Elder, Van Nguyen & Caspi, 1985; Parke et al., 2004) and stressful family circumstances are linked with lower marital satisfaction and higher levels of conflict, which, in turn, disrupt parenting and negatively affect the parent-child relationship (Fauber et al., 1990; Patterson et al., 1989; Parke et al., 2004).

At the same time, research has also linked economic hardship to a perceived sense of efficacy on the part of parents, which is likely to impact their behavior (Bandura, 1986). Parents who believe they can "make a difference" in their children's lives are more likely to be involved (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brissie, 1992; Vega, 2003). For the parents in this study, economically rooted struggles have a two-pronged effect. First, parents understand the necessity of their children earning an education. Second, while they understand that their ability to provide support for their children's education is limited by a variety of obstacles, some still believe they have a role in the teaching-learning process, and can alter their children's academic progress. They have "educational self efficacy "on behalf of their children. Rather than feeling defeated, these parents are more likely to pursue a variety of alternative strategies, which create opportunities for involvement in their child's academic lives. This mindset is in sharp contrast to the conventional forms of social capital where perceptions of agency are assumed to flow from an emphasis on material consumption as marking status and prestige. Instead, the majority of these immigrant parents survived on a single income making personal sacrifices to minimize the negative effects of these financial disparities on their child. At the same time, these sacrifices also created opportunities to maintain

high levels of daily face to face involvement with their child often through the provision of a stay at home parent or the coordination of their work schedules to increase the overall time spent parenting their children.

In general, feelings of efficacy were most closely tied to the parent's lived experiences and how these histories contributed to their determination to support their children's education in the face of hardship. On the one hand, the majority of these parents indicated feeling high levels of economic stress. On the other hand, these parents also discussed how their past economic experiences moderated how their present hardships shaped their behaviors. Parents who previously endured levels of economic hardship that exceeded their present economic state were undeterred by these obstacles and instead actively worked to find solutions that would aid in moving their children's progress forward. As one mother noted about the decision to stay at home, "Not working makes it hard to cover the bills but I've gone with less money my whole life. I have what I need…that gives me more (time and money) for my kids." In contrast, parents who noted a decline in their standards of living and/or increased levels of hardship levels made statements that suggested that their level of "educational self efficacy" was lower, which, in turn, led to less involvement with their children's academic pursuits. To illustrate, the statements of these low efficacy parents ranged from general but not very effective sentiments about best wishes for their children and the decisions the children make, to blunt comments about the need for their child to "get their act together" and to take responsibility for their own lives. As one father noted about his son, "it's his decision to be successful or to waste his life...I can't be there to hold his hand". Gibson

and Ogbu (1991) argued that motivations to succeed would be based, in part, on the extent to which one's home country was perceived as undesirable in relation to one's host country. These current findings sharpen this position at the individual level and extend his argument to better understand how hardship can both impede and contribute to parent's sense of efficacy.

In addition to the efforts of these immigrant parents to sacrifice certain aspects of their life (e.g. decreases in personal time, less consumption of material goods and more hours worked) in order to maintain higher levels of direct involvement with their child, several specific features of Latino culture need to be considered as well. These include their endorsement of familism and their participation in extended family networks that can generate increases in social capital and aid in their ability to involve themselves in their children's educational lives. These features provided opportunities for parents to search outside of their immediate family for academic advice or assistance as well as assistance with household and childcare tasks that permit the parents to spend more time with target children. Additionally, these familial values influenced the generation of dense control-oriented, social capital networks in the lives of their children, which fostered cultural pressures to succeed in school.

Finally, beyond generalized forms of parenting and their links with a child's schooling, this literature also distinguishes between specific types of scholastic involvement: behavior, cognitive-intellectual, and personal (Grolnick, 1997). Behavioral engagement includes parental participation in activities at school (e.g., attending parent teacher conferences, and school activities) and at home (e.g., helping with homework,

asking about school). Cognitive-intellectual involvement includes exposing the child to

intellectually stimulating activities such as going to the library and talking about current

events and personal involvement is conceptualized more loosely as general parental

knowledge about school and "keeping abreast of what's going on with the child in

school" (Grolnick, 1997: 538). Moderate and high SES parents are often characterized

within the literature as employing global parental strategies of autonomy, positive

involvement, and monitoring as well as specific types of school involvement, namely

behavioral, cognitive-intellectual and personal (Grolnick, 1997). Less is known about

how and whether these types of parental involvement are evident in lower SES Mexican

immigrant families. As culture potentially influences how parents, students, and teachers

perceive their respective roles, it is critical to understand how an individual's actions and

attitudes towards educational issues vary across different cultural groups such as Mexican

American families.

*Findings: The Profile of Involvement of Mexican Parents in Their Children's
Educational Lives*

  An overview: Ethnic, linguistic, monetary, and education disadvantages can

adversely influence the ways that immigrant parents are academically involved with their

children. However, contrary to past literature, which suggests that these disadvantages

will be associated with a decrease in their level of involvement, in the current sample of

Mexican parents, these factors did not diminish the level of parental investment in their

children's education. These disadvantages also did not result in a reduction of effort or

time spent with their children or in dealing with academic issues their children faced. At

an individual level, parents tended to be involved to the extent of their abilities and their

institutional knowledge. Beyond this, parents tended to either rely on parenting that encouraged child autonomy or on the tapping of extra-familial networks to supplement their own knowledge and skills.

Parental and child views concerning the importance of parental involvement for children's school success: Responses from the families interviewed consistently supported notions about the importance of parental involvement in school as a critical factor in children's academic achievement. In their interviews, parents and children displayed very similar views concerning factors that they believe contribute to the academic success of children. Repeatedly, both parents and children suggested that parental involvement influences children's school performance. Teachers, peers, and other role models including extended family, friends and even media icons (e.g. actors, athletes and musicians) were generally accorded less importance. Specifically, parents and children pointed to activities such as parents helping with homework, enforcing rules about doing homework, and stressing the importance of good grades for ensuring future opportunities to attend college and develop a career. When students failed in some way at school, parents and children both traced the problem back to a lack of parental involvement. Respondents rarely suggested that poor academic performance was due to a student's level of intelligence and in only a few cases was laziness cited as the source of the problem. Instead, parents were often blamed for their lack of involvement in their children's school-related activities.

The comment of one male student was typical of the data that we collected from both parents and children. He said, "Some get good grades because maybe their parents

push them a lot…by making sure they do their homework, pushing them harder, checking

up on them. Before it's too late. And others maybe their parents don't care." Another

male student similarly attributed failure to parents, "Their parents aren't there to help

them and they don't care what they get on their grades. And like they probably won't

study and they don't care if they get a bad grade."

Parents likewise tended to attribute student failure to parental shortcomings. As

one father said:

> I think it has a lot to do with the parent… Me and my wife were involved
> with the kids constantly, all the time. If they have a problem [school],
> we'd go there. A lot of their kids, their parents aren't there [in their
> child's live generally]. The parents are so-called "doing their thing" and
> they're not there pushing them, you know, saying, "Hey school time first,
> play time later." You know, that's us. That's the way I have to push them
> for school.

Similarly a mother explained, "A parent sometimes is at fault. Most times we are

at fault. Because the teachers cannot do everything. But as a parent, one has to push

them at home, like sometimes bugging them, 'homework, homework! Study! Start doing

this!" She added that she pushes her son and is able to motivate him to do well.

In addition to specific forms of parental involvement in school such as homework

monitoring, several parents stressed the importance of a positive parent child relationship

as important for educational success as well. For instance, in the last example that we

discussed above her son agreed that his parents were important in motivating his success

at school but this scholastic motivation was based less on school-specific forms of

parental involvement including behavioral, cognitive-intellectual and personal strategies

and more on positive involvement – to use Grolnick's term.   In spite of school-related

obstacles such as parents' limited comprehension of class material, school conduct and academic performance issues, this child was affected by dynamics that were most closely tied to familial frameworks. As such, he appeared to be motivated by overall forms of parental involvement including shows of love and affection that are captured by Grolnick's (1997) "positive involvement" strategy.

> Other people are like "I'm going to go with another girl and I'm going to have a party, drink. I'm gonna get laid… And what I see in my family is love. My dad loves my mom. He hugs her; he kisses her in front of us. That kind of gets me to the mood too they don't. So that counts for me because I'm like, yeah, I got love in the family and I see other people that don't, so that's what makes my parents different from other people. Because my friend, his dad hits his wife and my friend's like, "Oh man." He starts crying in front of me, "Damn dude, it's so sad, I wish I could go away. Sometimes I feel like running away." And that's what makes them different. That we got love and they don't. So that counts for me.

This child's focus on the impact of his family's religious beliefs and their display of a stable, loving family environment on his motivation to succeed in school also extends Maccoby and Martin's (1983) findings that positively link "positive" parental involvement with general child behaviors to include their culturally tempered impact on school-related outcomes. These findings also increase understanding of the real impact of the immigrant parents in our sample who all acknowledged their academic limitations [regardless of whether they did or did not receive a formal education in Mexico] but yet still understood that they could have an effect on their child's academic success by maintaining positive parent involvement with their child.

Sources of Variation in Parental Involvement

What factors help account for the variations in type and degree of parental involvement? Several sources were noted in our interviews including: their own linguistic

and educational limitations, their limited understanding of the school system and the American culture.

Impact of the educational disparity between immigrant fathers and their children: A consequence of the differential educational opportunities available to immigrant parents and children is the resulting inability of many immigrant parents to speak English or possess the academic knowledge to serve as educational tutors and guides for their children.

Structurally, these parents face difficult linguistic challenges. In California, children of parents whose primary language is not English are tested for English proficiency and referred to mandatory English instruction. Following the goals of the "English-only" proposition (CA Prop. 227) children are either placed in "immersion" (English only) classrooms where only English is spoken or in a bilingual program (upon parent request and where the child has a limited English proficiency), with the goal of full immersion within a year (California Educational Code 300-340). Reflecting these policies, the faculty and administration in U.S. schools are often English-only speakers thus limiting the ways in which non-English speaking parents are able to communicate with school officials. Previous research has found that language is significantly related to social competence (Damico & Damico, 1993). For individuals who possess less pronounced accents and who are more comfortable with the English language, social activity increases. In contrast, those with limited English language abilities tend to feel more comfortable interacting within ethnic enclaves thereby becoming disempowered within mainstream institutional arenas.

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From this work with Mexican families I find that immigrant fathers are painfully aware of how linguistic challenges interfere with their ability to help their children with their homework:

> I wouldn't change much. Actually I would try to help more in her school work because I really have not been able to help them in that because of the English barrier and because I'm not good at school.

Or consider this father who despite his ability to communicate with him, still recognizes that his child has advanced beyond his own level of educational achievement:

> My oldest entered, got to eighth grade, high school. I tried to explain some equations from first grade, second grade and I felt very good when she assimilated them even though I had to go through all of the bibliography and all of the textbooks that she used. I remember, I tried to explain and she understood, and she has gotten very good grades in mathematics, and now well, now it's like she speaks to me in Chinese because she is taking analytic trigonometry, analytic geometry that I don't understand, but she's advancing.

When asked how they have handled problems that their child had at school two fathers again underscore how linguistic challenges diminished their capacity to act as their child's advocate at school.

> Well to plan all the time to try to be, if we go to school that there is someone that talks to me in Spanish. Yes, yes because…I normally understand a little, a little English but not a lot. No his…to speak it I don't know how to speak it, darn. Like sometimes he…sometimes I tell him, I mean that they are talking to me in English I tell him to tell me what he is saying, I mean he doesn't know how to tell me, like I know…how do you say…he gets, he gets embarrassed and at the end he doesn't know how to say what it is that they are saying in English.

> I would say, try to help on her homework when she says she doesn't understand. I do all I can although sometimes its' difficult because of the language. She will help me understand what it says in English.

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Not only does this impede the eventual academic attainment of their children, but may be a further source of intergenerational conflict and cause of heightened emotional distance between parents and their children. It may also lessen the child's respect for their parents due to the children's increased awareness of their parents' educational limitations. Children even take advantage of parents' linguistic limitations and their lack of knowledge about the educational system. For example, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) reported "a thirteen-year-old Mexican boy admitted to us that he had told his parents that the F on his report card stood for 'fabulous' " (p. 74). Still, these parents are not without options. Children who are able to bridge this linguistic and cultural gap function as cultural brokers providing a way for their limited English speaking parents to effectively communicate, coordinate and negotiate interactions within English dominant school environments.

Cultural brokering and child empowerment: Recent work on children who serve as "brokers" between parents and the wider culture illustrates the richness of this cultural variation for understanding not only family dynamics in immigrant groups but also the dynamic and bi-directional nature of the parent-child relationship. From previous work (Parke et. al., 2004) with Mexican American families, the child's heightened degree of acculturation (relative to their parents) produced linguistic, cultural and institutional competencies that empowered the child within particular institutional arenas. Specific to this study, the negative impacts of language on the immigrant parents in our sample also serve as opportunities for the children in the sample to develop heightened levels of self-efficacy and motivation to endure and persist in their educational pursuits.

These findings suggest that contrary to pervious literature equating child empowerment with autonomy, the child's knowledge and ability to serve as an intermediary between parents and school administration, did not lead to greater levels of autonomy for the child and was not solely a way that parental/family power was maintained. Instead, many of the second-generation children noted how these empowerments led to increased levels of coordination between their parents, themselves and outside institutions. For example, children formed partnerships with their parents where information was provided via the child, decided on by either the parents or by the family and finally enacted via the child. In this sense, brokering motivated children through the creation of a greater role in decision-making within the family and a heightened feeling of efficacy.

Finally, some immigrant fathers may simply be unaware of the rules and routes through the educational system such as the courses that are needed to enter college, the potential sources of financial aid, or the availability of career counseling services. This lack of information may limit their ability to offer guidance and help to their children as they traverse the education maze and can result in the child's premature departure from the school system. When asked whether they thought it was harder for kids whose parents did not go to school in the U.S. as opposed to the kids whose parents did go to school here, they coupled their linguistic challenges with their lack of educational attainment.

> I think it is. Because she sometimes wants us to help and sincerely we can't. We can't even help in the language. Unfortunately, we can't even explain it to her in our language, no we can't. Well sometimes one does feel bad. That wants to help but can't.

Well I think so. Well for example the guys at least speak the language and they have studied. For example that I am still doing high school here like it is, I cannot give an explanation to her. There are homework's that they get now and I see that she is complaining. If I could well I would help her but unfortunately I don't have an idea to help her. Yes, that is the hardest.

These comments illustrate the problems that Mexican immigrant parents face as they seek to support their children's educational progress. These findings further our understanding of alternative forms of social capital as reflected in the academic involvement of parents, families and communities, and aid in illuminating how these families reframe traditionally negative social cues as motivators in their child's educational achievement. However, careful attention must also be paid to how these families conceptualize academic success. As discussed in chapter four, a focus on academic aspirations and expectations becomes critical to the overall discussion of achievement and helps to shed light on how these conceptions influence and affect the ways that parents and children negotiate educational obstacles. Indeed, understanding how a parent is involved in their child's education aids in explaining and even predicting academic achievement although, in isolation, parental involvement provides less understanding about differential levels of overall academic attainment.

Gender of Parent Based Cultural Influences:

These interviews also revealed subtle gender differences between parents in terms of how they respond to the challenge of facing culture-related educational stressors and challenges. In the case of both immigrant mothers and fathers, their goals were to help their children succeed in school tasks; however their strategies for achieving success varied. Fathers, as breadwinners, were more focused on work contexts and the

importance of gaining an education to achieve better jobs while mothers were focused on fostering a sense of self-sufficiency that may flow from a better education. Fathers, especially, indicated that they treated sons and daughters differently, encouraging independence in boys while providing protection for their girls.

Fathers as partners and protectors: Research suggests that father involvement is linked to children's positive cognitive, social, and emotional development. When fathers provide financial resources, their children benefit, and when they also provide guidance and love, children tend to flourish (Lamb, 2003; Parke, 1996). While historically this research has focused on white middle-class fathers (Marsigilio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000), more recent studies have included and considered roles and influences of ethnic minority fathers (Buriel & DeMent, 1997; Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth & Lamb, 2000). Sullivan, Coltrane, McAnnally and Altintas (2009) note that men within the Western world are increasingly contributing to childcare. Indeed, parenting and fatherhood are integral components of the notion of *machismo* where notions of strength, independence and confidence manifest in efforts to provide their children with educational, economic and/or career opportunities through their parenting efforts. As Gutmann (1996) explains, Latino men tend to increase their participation in the child rearing process as their child enters into adolescence when they have specific, but distinctive parenting goals for their sons and daughters. I address each of these issues next.

Fathers in this study were more likely to focus on acculturative stress-related factors such as language barriers and racial discrimination, which have been negatively

linked with children's academic self-concept. However, our qualitative analyses revealed that explicit recognition of cultural barriers on the part of fathers could serve as a motivator for their children to overcome these problems. Fathers viewed these problems as surmountable by hard work on the part of their children. Drawing on personal experience, one father told of a friend from Mexico who was initially limited by his inability to speak English. He explained:

> He did not know one word of Spanish. I mean excuse me, English. Nothing. Nobody wanted to talk to him. Nobody. The teacher did not know how to talk to this boy. She put me with him. I spoke Spanish. That man right now talks better English than me put together. He is very educated. Why? Because he wanted it. He studied… I was there to help him. And to this day I still talk to him, and he's very educated… very… but he wanted it bad.

Similar to other fathers in this study, he tended to see cultural barriers as situations resolved by efforts on the part of the student. He added, "Some feel there ain't no help. It's there. You just got to find it. Keep plucking at it. Don't stop. Don't give up. Keep going. Keep going. That's my motto."

Facing cultural, economic, linguistic, and legal barriers these immigrant dads understand this breadwinner role in the larger context of parenting where economic provisioning makes up a component towards the long-term goal of survival and stability.

> I can't work. It is my job to take care of my children. We are poor now, but when our children grow maybe I'll be lucky and they can give me something better than what I have now that I am poor.

> I think he is going to be better than me. He is not going to have the kind of work like I have. It is difficult. I think he is going to be better that I. I imagine him working at a company or if he decides to go with electricity [electrician], I imagine him in a company better than the one I am at, earning more than I. Being in a better economical position than I.

> I have heard from families that say that when they turn 18 that they have to leave the house. I don't agree with that. Like my daughter wants to study here and go to the university and I tell her, well it's cheaper like that. You have a roof and food to eat. That must be the most expensive part.

Consequently, the immigrant fathers in our sample indicate high levels of involvement and investment in their child's life and consistently expressed a desire for a better quality of life for all of their children, yet how this was envisioned as being secured differed for boys and girls.

Protecting the girl: On the one hand, fathers advocated and exercised strict control and close monitoring of their daughters in order to keep them "on task" in school. Here their overarching concerns centered on ideas about purity and innocence as manifest issues of sex, pregnancy, and marriage.

> I worry how she is. You see she has a very, very tight shirt right? I told her no. I told her, you are young right and I am the adult right. I don't like her to dress like that. I told her put on something moderate.

> [Driving her to school] I take her and bring her. And she tells me don't go for me, I will walk, but I tell her I don't want you flirting, right. She is old now, and with any little thing that you do they are going to steal you. I tell her that if you don't want any problems with any one don't go with anyone if they ask you if you want a friendship or a ride or whatever. Tell them, my dad is coming and he brings me and takes me so I don't need anything from no one.

> She is a very good teenager, but she has her character you know. She has a very strong character and wants to do her own things but I sometimes prohibit her from doing things because I see that it's not good. Whenever she is old enough I won't tell her anything.

Standing by your son: On the other hand, fathers employed a very "hands-off" approach to the decisions that their sons made. Here their behaviors were akin to peer relationships where the trust and mutual support of their sons were of primary

importance. In many instances, their son's academic performance and school conduct were seen as opportunities to gently steer them into culturally appropriate masculine roles.

> Her brother [his son] was hanging out with friends that are very disrespectful and I stopped him. I talked to him and told him 'I am your father and at the same time your friend. And I am not your friend just like the ones that are there with you on the street. I am your true friend really. If you have a problem I can help you solve it.

> [Regarding school progress] I think he's doing regular right now. We haven't spoken with him but he says that he tries on everything and I don't think we should put pressure on him…we've never put pressure on him since he was in grade school.

These comments made by the fathers in our study highlight their deep dedication to their children and their efforts to help secure their child's future. At the same time these findings are consistent with prior research on how ethnicity and culture contribute to differential forms of fathering for sons and daughters. Specifically, this study illustrates that both the nature of the father-child relationship and the form of his involvement in his child's academic life are affected by ethnic/cultural as well as gender of child considerations. Finally, the findings underscore the high level of involvement of Mexican American fathers in the academic and social lives of their children and serve as a corrective to older stereotypes about aloof and indifferent father figures.

Mom's focus on self-sufficiency

Similar to the fathers in our sample, Mexican immigrant mothers view parenting as a fundamental part of their identity, sacrificing time and money for the betterment of their children. In contrast to the Mexican immigrant fathers who tended to focus their energy on supporting the physical and mental strength of their sons while also shielding

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the minds and bodies of their daughters, the Mexican mothers in our sample underscored the central importance of academic success in all of their children's lives as it relates to their increased level of self sufficiency and upward mobility. This is not surprising since our Mexican parents cited this opportunity and mobility as a major reason for coming to the United States. Contrary to a large body of literature that notes the maintenance of traditional gender roles between husband and wife and its transmission to their sons and daughters, these Mexican women offer tempered understandings about these traditional gender roles. In contrast, mothers seemed to acknowledge cultural barriers in more generalized ways, stemming from the cultural expectations of Mexican women. Here, the focus was on their own lack of educational opportunities and limited educational options. As such, discussions about racial discrimination or ethnic barriers were tabled in favor of the idea that parental support was crucial to their child's potential for success. As one mother explained, "I didn't have the kind of support that I think I give our children. We didn't have that. I used to lock myself in the closet… just to study."

The educational aspirations these mothers held for their children reflected their view of the importance of parental support for ensuring their children's educational success. For many mothers in this sample, a central goal was to ensure that their daughters had opportunities that had been denied to them as adolescents. As one mother said, "I hope she does what she wants to do. I hope she's not influenced. One thing I advise is when you marry, don't back down from what you believe in. Do what you want to do." Another mother echoed this idea, while also indicating the idea that her daughter needs to achieve self-sufficiency: "I always tell her I want her to do for herself and not

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depend on someone else." When her daughter was asked about her parents' expectations she indicated that her parents, "just want [me] to be what [I] want to be and like be who [I] want to be. They want me to go to college and everything but they don't force it on me."

Here mothers push the message that their daughters above all else need to reach a point of self- sufficiency that is similar to their male counterparts. In contrast to the tendency of the fathers to shield their daughters, this empowerment on the part of mothers more closely aligned with the more traditional independence-oriented gender roles stressed by fathers for their sons. These aspirations include: the generalized hope for a better life and more specifically, the enhanced possibility of sustaining one's self in the event of abandonment/divorce and an ability to avoid dependence on an abusive partner. These dynamics are reflected in this mother's aspirations for her daughter's future.

> Well, hopefully she'll be going to college after her high school years, have a part time job or…be home with me, just as long as she goes to school. That's what I want her to do and get her degree and get a career in case other things (marriage) don't work out she can still support herself and her kids.

Similarly, this mother views her daughter's continued education as a buffer to marital pressures to submit to her spouse.

> Well, first of all I hope she continues her education after high school and I hope she is successful. That way when she marries she can still have her own life too. If she's successful she can do what she wants.

Finally, this mother directly addresses the importance of education as linked to the avoidance of violence.

> I don't like to say this but she is still young in dating and she doesn't, I hope she doesn't know that men can be, I mean, sometimes they mistreat you and if you don't know how to do anything except be at home, that man can always put you down and run all over you. If she gets an education she'll say 'I don't need this!" and leave. Of course she can always depend on us (parents and siblings) but that's different.

Similar to the fathers in this study, these mothers also maintained strong commitments to ensure a "good" life for their children. However, in contrast to fathers whose parenting commitment mapped onto the sex of their child (i.e. protectionists for their daughters and partners for their sons), these mothers attempted to foster independence and self-sufficiency in both their sons and daughters through parallel strategies. Finally, while these mothers encouraged their sons and daughters to realize success along similar paths, the mothers in this sample were much more vocal about the necessity of this attainment for their daughter's welfare and survival.

Concluding thoughts on gender differences in parenting: These findings support past research that has called attention to how the gender of the parents impact both the kinds of aspirations and expectations they hold for their children and the form of involvement in their child's life. In general, both parents emphasize the link between the academic success of their children and their future independence. However, the kinds of resources provided to their sons and daughters by their mothers and fathers reflected different ideas about the purpose of schooling and the purpose of their being self-sufficient for sons and daughters. For sons, parent involvement was focused on building self-sufficiency and schooling was generally seen as a vehicle by which boys could more fully realize traditional masculine ideals of strength, and provisioning through achieving economic and occupational success. For daughters, parent involvement was focused on

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protection, especially for fathers, and attending schooling was seen as way by which girls could be monitored by their fathers and as a way to increase their ability to protect themselves as they got older and moved beyond their parents' watchful eyes. For mothers the goal for girls was to achieve a level of self-sufficiency as a way to protect them from later family instability (divorce, single motherhood) and reduce their reliance on men for their support.

 Beyond parents - The role of siblings and extended family members in educational achievement: Motivation to stay and excel in school is not limited to parental involvement. In addition to siblings, extended family members including, aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, and neighbors also encourage their children to stay in school and provide motivation and resources to succeed. One teen commented, "My cousins and my mom tells me that I should go to school, and to not get out of school…They tell me because they care". Another teen talked about how she looks up to her sisters who have "always been there for [her]". These siblings function as role models as they progressed in their education and career. In the case of the one sister who was attending a local university the interviewed teen "just likes to be around her…she knows what she's gonna do in life…my sister, she's political, we marched in the Ceasar Chavez Day [rallies]. She helps people, the people who pick the food in Monterey. She helps them and motivates them and she works at a school so she can help the kids and stuff". For another teen, her goal is to become a pediatrician, a decision influenced by her sister's family involvement. "My older sister is my role model. She goes to UC Irvine and she's always helped me because my little brother has a heart murmur, so when my mom would have to take care

of my little brother she'd help me out a lot because she's a lot older than me. So I've always followed her in a lot of things she's done". In still other cases parents use extended family as examples of how not to be. As one teen commented about his uncle, "one story that my mom told me, I have an uncle, her brother, that he was a good boy like me, that is why she is scared, [she tells him] try not to dress up in baggy pants, try not to hang out with that many Mexicans that are gangsters and everything, because my uncle is nice but when he came over here [from Mexico] he got into a gang and started smoking weed and stuff. So my mom said that 'no you better stay away from him, you can talk to him, just don't do what he did. Don't follow in his footsteps'. Yeah she said not to end up like him. He's in jail right now. When I met him he was my greatest uncle but I mean I'm not following his life".

Beyond parental involvements that motivate and monitor their children's academic performance, siblings and extended family also function as academic resources that many of the parents acknowledged that they could not provide. For example, one teen in our study commented about how her other sister helps her in math, "when I don't know math, she like, shows me until I know how to do it… when my sisters are home they help me". In another family, the mom tells of how her sister-in-law helps tutor the mom's children. "My sister-in-law is not from here [U.S.], she came when she was little, she studied here and all of that and she knows how to help her children… she even helps my children. If there is something [my children] don't understand she starts teaching until they understand everything. She helps with everything, with homework and all of that". Finally, one mom also noted how she asked a neighbor for help with her child's

schooling. "Well in the beginning I did feel bad. I don't know English and I could not help them [her children]. I was frustrated because I couldn't help her…and sometimes she would tell me 'mommy help me' and I said 'OK but how'? I got a dictionary and I started to try but then I asked for help from a woman that lives in front of my house. I asked her to help me because I didn't know how to help my daughter. She did and it was a little difficult for me but later she [child] began to learn". The mom went on to note that now that same child helps her younger brother with his schooling. For the parents, this inability to help is "painful" and "embarrassing" but as many parents note, seeking out help and drawing on these networks is more important than how they might feel. "Sometimes one feels uncomfortable, one feels, embarrassed, but everything is about moving forward. They [parents] need move past the shyness and move forward to help their children because that is more important than how [we] appear". Clearly, broadening the framework of educational achievement beyond parents to include siblings and extended family members especially among immigrant families is an important lesson from this phase of our study.

Cultural variations in family values and links with parental involvement:

Recognition of the cultural differences between Mexican and American values aids in understanding the ways in which immigrant parents involve themselves in their children's academic lives. One Mexican mother understood the lack of parental involvement on the part of American parents as rooted in U.S. cultural frameworks surrounding issues of consumption and materialism. She noted, "In this country one needs a lot of time [involvement]. And there is no time. A lot of people don't have time.

Why? Because they go to work. The dad works, the mom works so that their kids can have the best things. And in my way of thinking, I think that the kids don't need luxury. The kids need time from us. If I give my child more time he is going to thank me tomorrow and the day after tomorrow more than if I take him the most delicious plate to the table". In the case of one family whose son was getting blisters on their feet from the long walk to school, the mom talks about how she and her husband sacrifice so as to be able to provide transportation to take their child to and from school. "He [teen] has a blister on his foot and he couldn't come [walk from school] on foot and so I had to take my car which is not in good working condition. I worry…I tell him that now I am going to be more attentive [now taking the child to school in her husbands car] and now my husband, he goes in [to work] on foot". These findings support the fact that, in contrast to research that identifies parents who possess limited educational resources as disadvantaged and who, in turn, negatively impact the overall promotion of their children's academic success, these parents maintained cultural and historically relative understandings of what constituted disadvantage. As such, they enacted acts of sacrifice and deprivation in order to transfer and more fully realize the potential of their existing resources which acted as a counter to this lack of traditional resource and which served to increase levels of parental involvement and promote the academic progress of their children.

     The strengths and challenges of mutual reciprocity: While these parents largely understand sacrifice as a part of their parental roles, this notion of sacrifice is not limited to mothers and fathers. Extending the work on familism and its effects on child

behaviors and academic outcomes, the children we interviewed recognized their parent's economic struggles and looked to actively reciprocate that parental support. As one daughter told her mother, "I want to pass these classes so I won't have to go when I am in the twelfth [grade]. I want to do all of my work and get out of school early and go to work also to help". Responding to a question and the future, one son noted that they looked forward to graduating from college, getting a nice car and buying a house for his family in a better neighborhood. These two examples provide evidence of both the intended strengths of mutual reciprocity emphasized in Mexican culture and the unintended weaknesses impacting educational outcomes.

On the one hand, commitments to helping one's family on the part of both parents and children have the potential to moderate hardships that negatively impact the family system. Juggling transportation, assisting with childcare, taking early retirement, budgeting to exist as a single wage earning family and working night shifts have all been cited in these interviews as strategies to help one another. On the other hand, these kinds of sacrifices have the potential to unintentionally contribute to hardship in both short and long term ways. For example, in one family the father sacrifices his body by working in a hard labor job that pays a decent wage. In doing so, he helps to create an opportunity for one parent to stay at home for the betterment of their children but at a cost to himself and to his children due to later health problems and to his limited energy for interacting with his children. In exploring the idea of "success", the mother of this family stated that she hopes that their child will be able to get a good education and get a good job. At the same time, that child recognizes this sacrifice, and as illustrated in the earlier quote from

their daughter, she rationalized the decisions to not attend the twelfth grade which would impair her ability to gain needed educational experience to excel in college in order to pursue a paying job to alleviate the father's stress.

Influences on Academic Success from Outside the Home

While parental actions shaped by their socioeconomic realities motivated the academic efforts of their children, the daily living condition of their peers and those in their community had effects on the importance or lack of importance of academic achievement. As one male student noted:

> School is so important to me that I compare myself to them… like the homies. I know some homies they be like, "Yeah, man, stay in school. Look at me man. Stay in school." I'm like, "Whoa, I don't want to be like you so I'm going to hit the books harder." To tell you the truth, man, I feel better than them because I'm going to get somewhere and they're not. I know they're going to end up dead or in prison and I'm going to end up somewhere, in a good place. I'm going to end up in a decent school, a good house, a good car. They're going to end up in prison, dead. Yeah, I don't look up to any of my friends.

Peers- harmful or helpful: As earlier research has shown, attitudes of peers play an important role in children's academic outcomes (Ogbu, 1994; Patchen, Hofmann & Brown, 1980; Steinberg, 1996). Most students in our study pointed to the company of their friends as main motivators in attending and "sticking with school," or in some cases, avoiding peers who were not focused on academics. In one instance, the child's focus on shaping his own academic success facilitated a self-removal from his friends and ethnic group. When asked about his school performance, this student acknowledged that he was doing "alright," but only because of his own specific actions:

> Mexicans, all they talk about is girls and girl stuff. That's all they talk about. Talk about guys and girls, you know, movies, sexual movies, you

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know. Sometimes it gets in my way, but like, I ignore that. I listen to it but I'm like, "forget this." I'm gonna go somewhere else. I'm gonna kick it with white boys. Cause all they do is study. So I'm like "this is my place, right here and now. This is my chance right here…"

Others discussed "strategies" that they employ in order to both achieve academically and preserve their "image" as an underachiever:

Usually I get all my work done during detention. I just play like I got busted again but really the teacher knows that this is the best way to get my work done

During lunch I hide out in the library because you know, the library is where the nerds kick it. My friends don't go there because you have to be all quiet and stuff…

While most of the respondents did not indicate a need to separate from peers within their own ethnic group, those students who valued personal academic responsibility, were not only aware of the importance of their immediate scholastic actions on achievement, but also of the long term consequences of that achievement. The following student's comments show how tensions surrounding school success generalize to career aspirations:

School depends on how I do. Like the outcome of my life. I'll probably be working overtime if I don't finish high school. I'd probably be working overtime like at Burger King and everything and get a messed up car and probably wouldn't even get like nice house and everything and live in a neighborhood where only gangsters are there and everything. So I just want to be like, if I do finish school, I'll get a career, get a nice car… and get a nice house and probably a nice girl and from there don't worry about the money.

These statements reflect the complex influences of peers on a student's attitude towards school and behaviors related to the demands of school and underscore both the positive and negative effects of peers on academic achievement.

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The Role of Teachers: In considering how teachers impact the intergenerational transmission of culture between parents and children and how they affect paths toward mobility, it is helpful to provide a brief discussion of the institutional conceptions of the teaching profession. This is particularly relevant in that the general theories of mobility are all built upon understandings of one's host culture. Within the school system, teachers are expected to dedicate themselves to their students and to advocate on behalf of them. As such, the decisions teachers make should be based on how the outcomes will affect students. As educators, the role of teacher is that of facilitator. Good teachers are typically depicted as ones who encourage initiative and who emphasize the idea that students are responsible for their own learning. Here, teachers set goals together with their students and then facilitate the attainment of those goals. Virtually all schools acknowledge the challenge of teaching, often referencing social, economic and gendered inequalities, but being a teacher means being part of the solution. Accordingly, professional teachers stress their adaptability and flexibility that allow them to effectively move within structural constraints and better maintain effective relationships with students, parents, staff, colleagues and their community (Apple, 1986; Brint, 1998; Collins, 1979; Varano & Apesoa-Varano, 2002; Vega, 2003).

Externally, teachers are parents' primary contacts with the school and thus practices in the classroom potentially impact how teachers and immigrant parents connect. There are wide variations in whether teachers believe involving parents is an effective strategy for enhancing children's education (Epstein & Becker, 1982; Johnson & Pugach, 1990). Some teachers believe that parents are interested and willing to help

and that it is time-effective to involve parents in their children's education. Others feel teacher-parent contact will be a source of conflict between parent and child as well as possibly between themselves and parents. Some teachers view parents as either uninterested or unreliable and that either do not wish to be involved with the school system or to be unable to carry through on their commitments if they do have contact (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Unfortunately, without consideration of how these immigrant parents conceive of a teacher's role these assumptions about parental attitudes toward teachers may be misleading or perhaps simply incorrect. Regardless of whether a teacher chooses to involve or discourage parents from being involved in the educational process, parental understandings about the cultural role of teachers affect parental perceptions of "educational efficacy" and general dispositions towards the educational system. When teachers make parental involvement part of their regular teaching practice, parents are able to become more involved and feel more positive about their abilities to help both the teacher and their children (Ames, 1993; Epstein, 1991).

Most of the parents and children in our study voiced the value of a "good" teacher. This had very little to do with the teacher's level of academic preparedness but rather spoke to their personality (i.e. openness, willingness to listen to parental concerns) and their dedication, and investment in the well being of their students. At the same time, the children also attributed a student's failure to teachers who they characterized as "uninterested" and "uncaring". One female student explained that some students "play around" and teachers often ignore them when they ask questions. "And that's probably why they're really not trying because they're like, 'Teachers don't care, why should I?"

Another student reflecting the same idea used his elementary school as a basis for comparison.

> All the teachers there like, they had no enthusiasm like the elementary teachers have. They really cared about their students, but the Junior High, they don't really care about guys like us. Like have no enthusiasm in teaching, they just want to get it over with.

In this way many students see teachers as necessary motivators and a last line of defense in the fight against feelings of failure, particularly where their parents are not able to provide academic support. As one respondent said,

> Like some kids who… they don't really have support at home and if they don't normally have support at home…normally they'll try to get support from the teacher. But if they can't get that, it [school achievement] is kinda hard.

In short, the approachable teachers that "cared" were the same teachers that students tended to listen to. This affords teachers unique positions of influence whereby teachers operate as a source of information, inspiration, and support that links parents, children and schools.

Summing Up

These findings suggest several conclusions. First, contrary to past literature that offers a narrow conceptualization of educationally relevant capital, this study identified the effective use of alternative and existing forms of capital at work in immigrant families. Indeed, in the majority of families interviewed, immigrant parents utilized existing family based forms of social capital such as personally and culturally reinforced self-sacrifice .In addition they made use of alternative resources including children as cultural brokers, extended family networks, peers and teachers which were all found to be

important sources of educational support for children in the sample. These findings support the call to recognize broader forms of social capital and re-evaluate the "worth" of capital relative to class and culture. Second, these findings also highlight the fact that an assessment of meaningful educational involvement requires a consideration of how meaning is shaped by cultural frameworks. While this research supports arguments about the positive effects of school-specific forms of parental involvement, the fact that many of these children obtained school-specific forms of involvement from people other than their parents, underscores the need to include the impact of extended family, peers and teachers on academic achievement. This is particularly evident in cases where these individuals who are part of extended support networks are actively involved in the schooling process and thus potentially more attuned to what is necessary to succeed. At a more abstract level, these findings on involvement also support the need to reconsider context related cleavages between types of parental involvement in populations where familism is a cultural value and where gender roles are in flux due to acculturation and which, in turn, have differential impacts on how men and women parent and how their child approaches school and their future. Moreover, as we have seen, these factors influence the nature of parental involvement in educational systems.

Finally, both parental involvement and the availability and use of culture specific resources aid in the promotion of academic success of their children and are dependant on how relevant those resources are to schools. In turn, this necessitates a consideration of how these schools work. In the next chapter I examine family-school interactions from the perspective of the educational institution and its impact on that relationship.

Chapter 6: Canaries in the Classroom: The Consequence of a Testing Culture

In the preceding chapters, the voices of parents and their children provided more nuanced ways of understanding the complexities of academic achievement through an examination of cultural alignment beyond traditional theories of assimilation and about the relative worth of traditional and alternative forms of social capital within immigrant families. Specifically, the initial academic success of second-generation students has been attributed to two central dynamics: 1) the value placed on formal education by immigrant families as well as their degree of understanding of the prescriptions for academic achievement stressed by teachers and schools, and 2) the possession of relevant forms of social capital that permitted the families to have access and opportunities within educational institutions. Central to both dynamics is the degree of alignment between immigrant families and schools. Understanding that families and school mutually influence one another, this chapter examines how recent changes in the U.S. public education system affect the ways in which parents, students and schools are linked as well as how researchers identify and evaluate the academic outcomes of these linkages.

Aims of Chapter

In this section, I first detail the history of standardized testing in California so as to facilitate a deeper understanding about how this current testing climate differs from previous iterations. Specifically, I highlight how recent federal mandates have tied the teaching-learning process to economic costs and benefits for schools that have reshaped both the mission of teaching and the meaning of education in the United States. Second, I argue that these shifts create new forms of pressure on teachers that impact quality of

information delivered to students, the strategies by which students are taught, and generate a change in emphasis from a learning environment where students gain understanding and realize personal growth to a performing environment where students are conditioned to produce results for benefit of the school system. Following this discussion, I argue that, taken together, these shifts in policy and pressures on teachers alter the cultural and functional alignment among parents, children and schools.

Regarding parents and schools, I argue that the institutional development of a test-centric culture runs the risk of not only undermining traditional assumptions about the purpose of schooling but impacts the extent to which parents are able to meaningfully involve themselves in their child's education. Regarding children and schools, I argue that students are aware of their school environment and in recognition of an environment that is increasingly structured to extract performance rather than instill knowledge, their attitudes towards school and academic performance are impacted. In chapter five, I documented that both parents and children endorsed the important role that teachers play in children's education. This role is demonstrated in the quality of their instruction and their ability to inspire and motivate their students. Given this new testing focus for teachers, their students are less engaged in the schooling process and even lack the motivation to do well in regular school activities (class work, homework) since the only relevant predictor of future academic success has shifted to standardized test scores. Finally, with regards to performance, although researchers typically use student outcomes including grades as well as standardized test scores to assess the impact of academic predictors on educational achievement, the failure of families to fully understand this new

test focus may make it more difficult to predict how family involvement will impact children's academic outcomes. Currently families are basing their involvement upon the assumption that classroom performance and grades are important markers of student progress but the schools are using test scores as their marker of success – a clear discrepancy between families and schools. In sum, I argue that given recent policy shifts in U.S. public education, any evaluation of student achievement outcomes, requires an understanding of how familial conceptions of education, student outcomes in the classroom, and student performance on state and federal-level standardized tests are linked.

Standardized Tests put on Weight

Standardized testing in California is not new. In 1993-1994 the California Learning Assessment System (CLAS) was administered to schoolchildren statewide and designed to assess a student's ability to think critically using essay questions and short answers but not multiple choice formats. As such, emphasis was placed on the implementation of classroom enrichment exercises and the creation of classroom specific teaching that would address learning across dynamic student populations (Lucas, George & Yumi, 1995). Governor Wilson eliminated the CLAS in 1994 but remained focused on the implementation of a standardized testing system (Mendel, 1997). In 1995, he approved a bill to implement standardized testing of California's children (Lucas et al., 1995). Different from the CLAS, the new Standardized Testing and Reporting program (STAR) was multiple-choice and based solely on facts and procedures. The STAR program required that all California public school districts use a single standardized test,

designated by the State Board of Education (SBE) to test each student in grades two

through eleven beginning in 1997 (California Department of Education, 2002; PR

Newswire, 2002; The Press Enterprise, 2002).

Across districts, the STAR system caused controversy, as schools, parents and

teachers alike were concerned that the STAR system would encourage "teaching to the

test" and thus undermine the state's intent to educate students (Mendel, 1997). These

worries were not unfounded. The STAR testing system tied monies to district and school

test performance (Asimov, 1998). In response to this shift, in 1999 school districts

around California spent months and tens of thousands of dollars preparing students for

the Stanford-9 test. Efforts included feeding students nutrition-supplemented doughnuts

on test days, putting up posters and holding pep rallies. In schools throughout LAUSD,

mandatory 15-minute sample questions were given to students daily and in Oakland, the

district spent $400,000 on test preparation materials to familiarize its 54,000 students

with standardized testing, months prior to the test. Booklets including "Taking the Terror

out of Testing" which included test-taking strategies, sample questions and activities

were used about 20 minutes a day and encouraged to be assigned as homework (Schevitz

& Fernandez, 1999). Under this system, teachers and schools that improved their test

scores stood to gain thousands of dollars in state financing. This ideology mirrors current

national reforms put into place through the No Child Left Behind Act which stipulates

that schools, which consistently do not improve face sanctions including the firing of

teachers, denial of tenure, school restructuring and school closures (Bell, 2002). In sum,

the allocation of funds to schools rests on a quantitative assessment (test scores) of

whether the student, the teacher or the school has "fallen behind" or below "acceptable" levels of progress. On the one hand, these shifts diminish the effectiveness and relevance of particular forms of educationally relevant social capital (e.g. monitoring student performance through graded coursework, course grades and G.P.A.), and regulating academic behavior since the usual criteria for progress (e.g. course grades and G.P.A.) have been replaced. On the other hand, these shifts assign increased academic weight in determining student's future educational opportunities (e.g. course tracking, course eligibility, college admissions, and high school graduation) to a student's performance on standardized tests (e.g. California Standardized Tests and the California High School Exit Exam).

Impacts of NCLB on Educators – from Teachers to Trainers

As student performance on state standardized tests are increasing linked to employment, teachers are faced with pressure to approach teaching in a fashion that is in many cases incongruent with general notions of what it means to be a teacher. For example, in a typical school year, teachers must prepare their students for two specific tests, the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) that is initially given at the end of the fall semester and the California Standardized Test (CST) that is given towards the end of each spring semester. Prior to each of these semester-end tests, teachers must prepare their students for "benchmark" tests that are given at the end of each quarter preceding the semester-end test and which provide indications of each student's performance. Finally, roughly two to four weeks prior to each one of these tests, all teachers are instructed to focus each class on preparing students for the upcoming test. In

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both of the districts from which this study was drawn, additional steps are taken to identify "low-performing" students (based on their previous year's scores) and structure "chat" sessions where teachers train students on techniques to raise their scores. In addition to these chats, school administrators offer incentives to students to remain in attendance during the week of testing and to do their best on the test. Recent incentives at both districts have included trips to local amusement parks (e.g. Magic Mountain) and chances to own expensive electronics (e.g. Apple IPods).

As discussed in chapter two, standardized testing is not new. The primary difference for teachers under this new policy is that the ability to compensate for the lack of in-depth learning that results from test-preparation is increasingly limited. Given the stakes of these test results, student performance and course progress (i.e. content covered) is addressed by oversight committees in weekly "collaboration" meetings where class level performance outcomes are presented without regard for student dynamics. For example, ensuring that each teacher is covering the same content at the same time is emphasized over whether a particular class or student is able to move to the next step. In a previous project, I interviewed teachers from each of these districts who often compared teaching to a game. Specific to this analogy was the sentiment that teachers are often required to rationally assess the number of students grasping the material presented. Where there are "enough" students to generate "acceptable" scores on a particular standardized test, the teacher moves on in the course despite leaving students behind. Given these dynamics, the teaching process has become increasingly structured in ways that focus on learning strategies which align with test performance and that move

away from the kind of flexibility that allows teachers to pursue more comprehensive and critical activities. Regarding the impact on students, as discussed in chapter five, students are aware and responsive to these structural shifts and are adversely affected when teachers are not able to expand upon learned concepts and/or fully address the dynamic needs of each individual student.

Parental Involvement: Full Steam in a Diminishing Direction

In chapter four, the voices of these immigrant families provided evidence of their overall lack of knowledge about the traditional process of educational attainment in U.S. public schools and about the impact of this limited knowledge on setting educational goals for their children relative to the parents' personal educational biographies. In chapter five, I highlighted how despite these limited understandings and lack of traditional, educationally relevant resources (e.g. parent's level of education that increase one's capacity to help their child with their schoolwork and the parent(s) economic status which generates the monetary resources needed to hire tutors), these families nevertheless forged alternative forms of capital to assist in their child's education and placed an increased emphasis on those forms of parental involvement that were within their control (e.g. monitoring of schoolwork, providing time to study for tests and remaining vocal about the importance of school).

As has been discussed in chapters four and five, the immigrant families in this study agree that schools should be student-centered. Correspondingly, schools should be designed in ways that best meet the needs of each student's learning progress. Among Latino populations this student-centered focus is particularly pronounced. The voices of

parents and children in chapter five reinforces research on how Latinos conceptualize the role of teacher and their expectations that teachers have a deep level of commitment to be advocates and promoters of student's learning. Teachers are viewed as experts who know what information needs to be taught and how best to deliver it. In addition, teachers are viewed as caregivers who protect the welfare of each student (Lopez, Sanchez & Hamilton, 2000; Padilla, Pedraza & Rivera, 2005; Hill, 2010). As such, movement away from a student-centered focus is likely to generate incongruence, divestment, and disengagement on the part of students and their parents. Currently, strategies pursued by schools to raise test scores come at the expense of student driven content making the level and type of involvement that parents are able to provide less effective.

In this chapter, I argue that the forms of capital currently utilized by these immigrant families (and thought to be effective based on traditional markers of student performance in a student-centered learning environment) are increasingly becoming less important in determining the overall academic success of their children as a result of the growing test-centered focus present in U.S. public schools. While institutional change potentially generates incongruence for any institutional actor, I argue that the characteristics of Mexican immigrant families create a heightened sensitivity to the effects of these shifts and provides a window into understanding the long-term impacts on students and parents generally.

Assessing Achievement in Families

In support of their goal to aid in the academic success of their children, the immigrant parents in this study focused on the importance of receiving good grades as markers of academic achievement. Quantitatively, 98% of mothers, fathers and children noted that receiving good grades was important for educational success.

In contrast to the schools systems current emphasis on the importance of standardized testing, the parents and children in this study emphasized the role of grades in determining academic achievement. Across every parent and child interviewed, no mention was made linking one's performance on a standardized test to either academic achievement or as impacting one's educational mobility. When asked about academic achievement, both parents and children referenced grades as evidence of one's performance. As one mother noted, "He does very well. This last year he got out with B+." Highlighting how parents remain involved with their child's education, another mother notes how she monitors grades received on report cards.

> He's an average kid. He's from a B to C, C should be the lowest...there's times when like last year, the whole year he tried to tell me he had a C but his report card and teachers told me he had an F. How you going to tell me that when we're going to get your report cards the next week.

Finally, parents perceive these grades as indicators of course specific performance and signal overall achievement through the accolades that schools give as a result of a student's cumulative G.P.A. In these examples two fathers notes how achievement is recognized by grades, G.P.A. and the honors they generate.

> She's doing pretty good…I would say not a straight A's but I would say for the past…well all through elementary and junior high she made honor roll. So yeah, it's not enough straight A's but good enough.

> She (daughter) is doing outstanding. She has a 4.0 average. Uh…lots of carry over from the previous year. She's a freshman. She's more challenged this year. Um…as I stated before, we were real surprised because she wasn't being challenged in the previous year in eighth grade. But now she's finding it more challenging. She's taking harder classes…AP classes. And of course her goal is to follow her older sisters who are attending Universities. So she's more focused this year…She wants to do is open as many doors and opportunities as she can possibly do via her academics first.

Beyond their symbolic meaning, letter grades provide one window into understanding the effects of parental involvement. Traditionally grades are generated from assessments on course work and classroom tests where the content of the latter is traditionally based on the content of the former. As course work involves assignments both inside and outside the classroom and as classroom tests typically require study time outside of the classroom, the forms of parental involvement (e.g. monitoring the completion of homework, structuring time at home for reading and studying) typically enacted in these families are functionally aligned with their child's academic success. At the same time the misalignment between the parent's criteria for indexing success namely classroom performance and letter grades and the institutional criteria of success, namely standardized test scores may reduce or undermine the effectiveness of parental involvement in promoting student achievement.

This lack of recognition of the new centrality of standardized test performance as a criterion against which schools assess academic success is consistent with their parents limited understanding about the meaning of formal levels of education or the requirements needed to achieve degrees of educational attainment in the U.S. that I documented in earlier chapters. As I noted, this limited understanding about the

operation of the formal education system makes it difficult for parents to be fully effective by being able to offer specific advice or to engage in specific activities (e.g. monitoring completion of schoolwork especially as the work becomes more difficult in high school) that would help their students succeed.

As reviewed in chapter two, cultural understandings that align with institutional structures generate potentials for positive behavioral outcomes in the lives of those participating within a given environment. Regarding education, the ways that families understand the educational expectations of the dominant culture arguably influence the ways in which they are able to involve themselves in the academic experience of their children. At a general level, the hopes and dreams of these Mexican parents closely align with the dominant cultural beliefs surrounding educational attainment and correspondingly they exert tremendous effort to involve themselves in their child's education. Despite these efforts, institutional shifts created in the wake of NCLB have limited the relevance of these strategies to how their children are increasingly evaluated. As funds for schools and job security for teachers and administrators have increasingly become tied to student performance on standardized tests, teachers and schools have moved further away from both the academic weight assigned to homework and out-of-class projects. Instead, emphasis has been placed on forms of "contained" instruction that rarely extend beyond the classroom and which align with specific testing components, regardless of whether they map onto either linear or holistic styles of learning.

Assessing Achievement in Research

Past and present research on academic achievement utilizes subject specific achievement grades, overall grade point averages (G.P.A.), and performance on norm-referenced standardized tests. Historically, examinations and evaluation of one's course work functioned as two primary mechanisms in the assessment of one's level of mastery within a specific course or area of study. Across both schools districts where the children in this sample attended, achievement grades were issued and were intended to reflect the outcomes of the aforementioned evaluation process. Student performance on state and federal mandated standardized tests have also served as measures of student competency and continue to be used as support for decisions about course placement and tracking. And of course tracking has long-term implications for future academic related opportunities (Eccles & Harold, 1996). As course work and their resulting achievement grades have become increasingly disconnected from state prescribed linear learning targets that tend to reflect concepts assessed on now federally mandated, standardized tests, it is increasingly necessary to clarify how achievement is defined and to distinguish between these academic performance indicators.

Course grades are based on student performance after all required lessons, assignments and examinations have been completed and assessed. These grades are traditionally viewed by educators and educational institutions as indicators of a student's motivation and ability to perform at specific levels. In sum, grades are intended to reflect the degree to which students have mastered the course material. Achievement grade designations include: "A" indicating "Outstanding Achievement", "B" indicating "Above

Average Achievement", "C" indicating "Average Achievement", "D" indicating "Below Average Achievement", and "F" indicating "Failed to meet minimum standards. With the exception of an "F" as a course grade, credit is awarded for the class taken. These credits correspond to requirements for graduation and in both districts each student must complete 215 credits in the general areas of English, Mathematics, History, and Science.

Grade Point Average: Given the possible variability between content, learning objectives and level of difficulty across courses; researchers tend to rely on a student's G.P.A. as an indicator of overall student performance. Grade point averages are typically the product of computing an average or mean score derived from numerical values assigned to designated performance levels. Across both districts grade points are assigned as follows: "A" earns 4 points, "B" earns 3 points, "C" earns 2 points, "D" earns 1 point, and "F" earns 0 points. Given this methodology, G.P.A. can be calculated over time and across similar or varied sets of courses. At the same time, researchers have often cited the need to use caution when analyzing grades and the problems of meaningfully comparing grades across students, schools, districts, or states that possess varying levels of institutional resources. Finally, because grade point averages are not standardized (i.e. additional grade points awarded for classes with honors or advanced placement designations), it is difficult to compare G.P.A. across students.

Standardized testing: Given how the results of student performance on standardized are tied to the functioning at the classroom, school, and district level, pressures to perform on standardized tests has increasingly led teachers to teach "to the test", regardless of whether this strategy aligns with a longer-term learning plan (Brint &

Teele, 2007). At the same time, standardized testing is meant to provide parents with a guide as to how their children are performing in comparison to students locally and across the country. Finally, standardized testing allows students' progress to be tracked over the years. When students take the same type of test yearly (adjusted for grade level) it is possible to assess if a student is improving, losing ground academically, or remaining stagnant. Since all students in a school take the same test (with respect to grade level), standardized tests are designed to provide an accurate comparison across groups (i.e. classes, schools and districts).

As discussed in chapter 3, both the Stanford 9 (SAT-9) and the California Achievement Test (CAT-6), implemented in 2003 were used to assess student performance for the students in this project. Given that these tests vary in content, scoring and delivery, comparative analyses can be misleading. As a result of these differences, the California Department of Education has prepared a conversion figure which assists in understanding the corresponding percentile ranks between the CAT/6 and SAT/9.

Standardized test score units of measure: Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs) derive from national percentile ranks and normalized as standard scores with a mean score of 50. NCE's are equal-interval scores that result from dividing the normal curve into 99 equal parts. This assures that the differences between NCE units at different positions on the scale are equal (unlike percentile ranks). The NCE is a standard score that denotes individual or group status within a specific grade. These are not intended to measure across different grades or to be used as indicators of growth.

NCE's can be interpreted in much the same way as percentile ranks. NCE's may be averaged to describe group performance. NCE's can be averaged for most groups because of their equal-interval scaling. In this way they are unlike percentile ranks, which cannot be averaged because of their frequency-based scaling. NCE's were designed to provide an equal-interval scale that would have essentially the same meaning for any nationally normed achievement test at any grade level and would be intrinsically meaningful to teachers and parents. NCE scores are like other standardized scores such as Z-scores and stanine scores. NCE's may be thought of as roughly equivalent to stanines to one decimal place. Stanine scores express test results in nine equal steps ranging from 1 (lowest) to 9 (highest). The average or "passing" stanine is a score of 5 or above. In general, stanines 1,2, and 3 are well below average; 4 is slightly below average; 5 is average; 6 is slightly above average; and 7,8, and 9 are well above average. (California Department of Education 2005).

Pairing of Grades and Standardized Test Scores: What it Means to Achieve

Conflating achievement grades and standardized test scores has long been viewed as theoretically and statistically sound. Although, I argue that as K-12 education has increasingly become consumed with the test scores rather than grades, G.P.A. and other indices of classroom based learning, the value of these two units of measure need to be carefully assessed. Across the school districts that the students in the sample attended, a generally accepted passing mark was an achievement/letter grade of a "C". A "C" represents the idea that a student has demonstrated an average level of competence in their mastery of the concepts and objectives covered in a particular subject. While

earning a "D" still technically constitutes passing for which course credit is awarded; a "D" also represents the idea that the student has performed "below average". Culturally, "below average" is also understood as an unacceptable mark of progress and thus the use of "C" as passing is most useful in understanding and aligning achievement at both institutional and cultural levels.

In this study, 85.2% of the students earned an "average" or passing grade in English/Language Arts and approximately 40% (40.5%) of these students performed at an "above average" (B) to "outstanding" (A) level. In contrast, only 45.6% of students scored at "average" or passing levels on the Language Arts portion of their standardized tests and only 23.9% performed at a "slightly above average" (stanine = 6) or "well above average" (stanine = 7) level. Approximately 81% of the students earned an "average" or passing grade in Mathematics and almost half (47.9%) of the students performed at an "above average" (B) to "outstanding" (A) level. In contrast, only 51.2% of students scored at "average" or passing levels on the Mathematics portion of their standardized tests and only 24.5% performed at a "slightly above average" (stanine = 6) or "well above average" (stanine = 7) level. Across both standardized tests no students scored at the highest levels of achievement (stanine of 8 or 9).

In order to analyze the overall performance of each student and in an attempt to further understand the disparity between performance in a student's course and on standardized tests, G.P.A.'s were calculated by combining both math and language arts course grades. Based on a "passing" grade point of 2 (which corresponds to an achievement grade of "C"), 85.1% of the students had an "average" overall G.P.A. of 2.0

and almost a third (29.8%) performed at an "above average" or "outstanding" level with a G.P.A. of 3.0 or above. Given the logic behind stanine scores, average stanine performance levels can be generated in the same way these grade point averages were computed. Based on an overall "average" or passing stanine score of 5 (generated by averaging stanine scores across language arts and mathematics), no student in this sample performed at an "average" or passing level.

Implications of Parental Awareness

Parental understandings about the importance of scoring well on standardized tests on their child's eligibility for entrance into advanced level courses (which foster college-level skill sets and provide a potential to abnormally raise one's grade point average through the assignment of additional grade points) and on raising the profile of their child's college options including admission and financial aid, are likely to generate a focus on helping their children to do well on these tests. In doing so, this is also likely to raise consciousness about the fact that given the current design of these standardized tests, their children are not able to utilize many of the traditional methods used to earn good grades and perform well in school. Currently, the absence of this consciousness is particularly detrimental for these immigrant families whose children frequently note the value placed on the messages received by their parents (i.e. earning good grades) and whose parents actively stress a concentration on performing well on their schoolwork which is often only loosely connected to the types of facts and concepts stressed on standardized tests. For example, in discussing the academic performance of their child,

one mother in this study notes her daughter's exceptional composition skills as affording her enhanced opportunities.

> She is a good student. She likes school, probably English the best. She wasn't doing good before but she said they (teachers) weren't challenging her. She's a very good writer and her grades are better now that she's more into it. I told her, keep improving your writing, that's how people seen you're more educated.

Consistent with many English/Language Arts teachers, learning to effectively translate thoughts into words is a primary course objective. Unfortunately, on standardized tests, measures of competence in English revolve around defining vocabulary words, memory recall which stresses the quick identification of facts over comprehension and the ability to dissect and identify the constituent parts of a sentence.

Currently, test drills that are mandated in many of the subjects taught in these students' classrooms (e.g. math, language arts, science, history and reading) are not graded and do not factor into the students course grades. Given that the parents in this study consistently link an evaluation of their child's academic progress to the grades their children receives in class, the seriousness that students would likely accord to these pre-test activities is low. Consequently, their performance on these standardized tests are also likely to remain low, despite performing well on their coursework.

This is not to say that parents would not recognize the value of standardized tests. As discussed earlier, standardized testing has been present in schools for decades although, the results of these tests did not impact student progress from year to year, impact their ability to gain entrance into desired or beneficial classes (e.g. G.A.T.E., honors and advanced placement), influence college admissions decisions, or affect their

course grades or overall grade point average. Additionally, beyond the schools' message to parents about making sure that their children were not absent during testing days, parents have been historically left out of the standardized testing loop. As a result, parents continue to place an emphasis on earning good grades. As has been discussed in previous chapters, these children look to their parents for guidance who continue to stress course work rather than test scores. Unfortunately, while this strategy may satisfy parental expectations, it increasingly impairs student's ability to gain access to important educational opportunities. In spite of satisfactory grades, low test scores limit their future options.

Educational Policy Implications

In this section, I argue that we need to identify ways of either using parents as more effective allies in assisting their children to succeed in this new test oriented school culture or enlist parents to aid in working to change the testing culture itself. Short term and long term implications need to be considered.

First, this disconnect between school evaluation policies and parental involvement represents wasted opportunity since it is not clear to most parents that their usual strategies for helping their children (monitoring, designating study time, checking work) may not be as helpful as test preparatory strategies. The implication of this situation is clear: parents need to be better informed about the centrality of testing as the new way in which student achievement is measured. In addition, schools need to do a better job of providing parents with specific ways that they can assist their children prepare for this critical test taking task. Finally students themselves need to be better informed about the

importance of tests and not allow students to gauge their educational progress on grades or GPA alone. These are short-term adaptations to the shift to a testing oriented school culture.

An alternative and long-term implication is not to merely become more adept at dealing with the demands of testing but to question the validity of the testing movement itself. If testing does, in fact, discourage critical thinking in favor of memorization techniques it may be important to support policy oriented efforts to restructure the testing process to bring evaluation procedures back into alignment with traditional conceptions of learning. Based on traditional understandings of what it means to be an educator, this reform would likely generate teacher as well as parent support.

In order to address this long-term plan to re-visit and perhaps reform the test culture, I argue that advocates and concerned actors (knowledgeable parents, teachers, researchers and community members) must build grassroots campaigns to critically examine the current process of testing. While teachers possess institutional knowledge that may be critical to mounting efforts to address and reform testing, there are clear barriers preventing any efforts at reform. First, students' performance on standardized tests is often linked to the continued employment of teachers. Second, the teachers' unions continue to support these testing mandates. This limits the effectiveness of teachers as reform advocates who can pressure school boards and policy markers. Instead of a frontal attack on testing policy another approach involves raising awareness among parents about how these current practices inhibit traditional models of learning as a way to enlist parents as policy allies in advocating for reforming these tests in ways that

bring the competencies that they measure into greater alignment with the students'

regular class curriculum. In doing so, parents would be able to remain relevant to their

child's schooling and help to ensure their academic success. Clearly there is not a single

or simple solution to this set of problems but it is evident that a policy that takes into

account the interests of all parties - parents, teachers, administrators and of course

students themselves – is necessary to address this issue and craft a long term and

sustainable solution.

Summing Up

Understanding the discrepancies between how these students perform on different

and increasingly unrelated primary indicators of student success provides insight into

how immigrant families understand the academic achievement of their children. Further,

how these families interpret their child's academic performance also provides insight for

teachers, schools, researchers and policy makers about how and when Mexican

immigrant parents involve themselves in their child's education. Discrepancies between

classroom grades and indicators of standardized test performance are also important for

understanding the significance of the structural and cultural shifts within K-12 education.

Moreover, they provide a basis by which to understand feelings of frustration on the part

of parents who directly involve themselves in the academic lives of their children yet do

not see the positive results of their efforts. Often these children tend to achieve at high

levels when evaluated on their letter grades and G.P.A., yet are also identified as "low

performing" on the basis of their standardized test outcomes. As a result, they are

institutionally directed into low track classes which limit opportunities that run counter to

the general and specific aspirations held by these parents and students.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Future Directions

Contributions to Past Research

The results of this project support and extend past research on immigrant families and academic achievement. In the U.S., schools are generally understood as vehicles by which successful students are able to secure a better quality of life (Schultz, 1961; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Collins, 1979; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Oakes, 1985; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Rosenbaum, Kariya & Maier, 1990; Kerckhoff, Raudenbush & Glennie, 2001). And, as upward mobility is a fundamental facet of U.S. mainstream culture, educational attainment is widely viewed as essential. Here, the delivery of social and material technologies by teachers and schools dovetail with the student's adoption of societal norms and values on education and the educational process, thus facilitating an ability to gain access to cultural and institutional opportunities (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Brint, Contreras & Matthews, 2001).

On this aspect of delivery, three principal factors are often held as necessary for the successful acceptance of these technologies and the realization of related opportunities: one's degree of alignment with specific institutional models of learning; the extent of educationally relevant resources available to the learner; and the transfer of information from teacher to student. Given that the process of international migration involves environmental, cultural and institutional shifts from country of origin to host country, this learning relationship is impacted and thus affects how immigrant populations achieve educationally. As a result, understanding how schools deliver

information and how immigrant populations acquire this knowledge has been a long-standing concern among educational researchers.

Cultural alignment and assimilation theory: Latino populations are often at the center of this concern as they continue to achieve at unsatisfactory levels and drop out of school at significantly higher rates than their non-minority counterparts (Delgado-Gaitan, 1988; Fernandez et al., 1989; Vaznaugh, 1995; Secada et al., 1998; Driscoll, 1999; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1999; Lopez et al., 2000). Past research on educational attainment and cultural alignment has utilized theories of assimilation to explain and predict academic achievement in immigrant populations (Park, 1914; Gordon, 1964; Chiswick, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Borjas, 1990; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1995; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Waters, 1999; Gonzales, 2005). At a general level, these theories focus on the idea that the greater the degree of alignment of the individual with relevant cultural, environmental and/or institutional arrangements, the better able an individual is in adapting to cultural, environmental and institutional demands. As the beliefs and values of particular cultural arenas may conflict with the demands of one's environment and/or institutional participation, results on the overall impact of assimilation remains mixed.

On the one hand, some researchers argue that alignment with one's host country facilitates their navigation through institutional systems. Here, an adherence to one's home culture and language creates friction that impedes success in the host country (Bourdieu, 1986; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). On the other hand, other researchers have

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argued more recently that the abandonment of one's home culture and language essentially limits their potential to connect to both possibly supportive migrant communities that have retained the values, beliefs and language of their home country and host networks due to their limited cultural and linguistic capacity to successfully interact with native or adapted members of that host country, thereby diminishing their total access to relevant resources (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Gonzales, 2005).

Contributing to this debate, I argue that consideration of where and to whom one most effectively aligns is predicated on understanding the relevant cultural frameworks already held by migrating populations. Nancy Hill's (2010) work on understanding scholastic behavior as influenced by family culture mirrors this line of thinking. She considers how cultural frameworks, across race and ethnicity, affect parent educational involvement with their children and how that transmission of culture impacts family-school interactions. This project extends Hill's (2010) emphasis on understanding the impact of family culture on school performance through placing a finer point on cultural variations within ethnicity. Specifically, this project examined the educational beliefs and values of Mexican immigrant parents and their second-generation Mexican American children. The qualitative statements and quantitative responses from both the immigrant mothers and fathers in this study mirrored cultural and institutional beliefs of the host culture about the purpose of schooling and the value of academic achievement in the United States. However, in spite of this similarity in understanding and endorsement of the purpose and value of education between Mexican American families and

nonimmigrant families, Mexican American adolescents still did more poorly in terms of academic achievement signaling the fact that having high expectations are not enough. As such, I argue that while the basic tenets of assimilation theory may be sound, they are potentially less effective in explaining or predicting academic achievement within immigrant families where the alignment between host and home country already exists.

Reinforcing the impact of this cultural alignment on educationally centered parent-child interactions, I found positive relationships between parental dispositions towards education and their child's attitude and performance in school. Specifically, in families where the parents (based on both qualitative and quantitative measures) voiced aspirations of educational achievement and expectations of academic success for their child, these children talked about the worth of school, their subsequent work ethic, future goals and levels of academic achievement. These findings suggest a clear correspondence between parental and child educational aspirations and expectations.

At the same time, these findings also lend support to lines of research that consider achievement as altered by culturally tempered understandings of the educational process (Carger, 1996; Olmedo, 2003). Specifically, the parents in this sample contrasted their child's academic success with their own experiences and more limited levels of academic achievement in both Mexico and the U.S. as a way to motivate their child to succeed and surpass their parents' level of academic success. These findings help to inform and refine assimilation arguments as they apply to Mexican immigrants. The fact that their cultural values and beliefs initially already align with the classic model of education in the U.S. lends support to a shift in emphasis from assimilation perspectives

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that stress the need from these immigrant families to align themselves with existing socio-cultural arrangements towards research that investigates how these existing alignments are cultivated in parents for the academic success of their children.

Unfortunately, as the prescriptions for academic achievement success have shifted in U.S. public education, this parent-child correspondence continues to stress strategies and goals that do not necessarily generate educational outcomes that are institutionally viewed as a success and which do not enhance their child's future educational opportunities. I argue that the shift from grade based evaluations to standardized test based criteria has contributed to this discrepancy between educational values and achievement outcomes. I return to this issue in more detail below.

Social capital and achievement - Toward recognition of the multiple forms of social capital: Classically, research on academic achievement and educational attainment has positively linked social capital with the educational outcomes of children through increasing access to resources that facilitate such success (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1987; Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990; Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Bennici & Strang, 1995; Portes, 1998; Gonzales, 2005). Specifically, capital including parents' level of educational attainment, linguistic fluency, occupational status and income has often been cited as fundamental in the cultivation of academic success (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1987; Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990). On the one hand, the findings of this study confirm and extend work on the impact of social capital on academic achievement. The qualitative responses of parents and children concerning the factors that contribute to one's academic success or failure lent support to the argument that a lack of resources

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including, money, linguistic and cultural fluency, formal education and community resources, negatively impact student success through limiting the extent to which parents' are able to provide traditional academic support to their children. Indeed, the lack of these critical resources created hardships for the family members interviewed. Specifically, as our findings illustrate, parents who lack higher levels of educational attainment are often ill equipped to help their children address problems and questions about the coursework that they bring home from school. Additionally, the fact that many of these parents did not attend school in the U.S. creates a difficulty in guiding their children along paths that might help to promote educational mobility. On the other hand, these hardships did not necessarily lead to a failure on the part of all parents to academically involve themselves in their child's education or diminish the level of their child's academic performance.

Parental poverty and job difficulty as motivators: Our findings suggest that contrary to lines of thinking that conceptualize traditional academic predictors and functioning in a singular fashion, traditional social factors affect the educational outcomes of ethnic minorities in multiple ways. Specifically, traditional forms of educationally relevant capital including, parent's educational attainment, earnings, job type and occupational status are also negatively associate with the academic success of students in immigrant families. Parents and children reflected this dynamic in their thoughts on factors contributing to academic aspirations and the motivation to succeed in school. For parents, their experiences of hardship in their home country, workplace and everyday life provided an impetus to sacrifice and push for the academic success of their

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child. For their children, these messages needed no verbal explanations. Several children

from low SES households noted how witnessing the struggle of parents legitimized

messages about the value of education and provided motivations to succeed in school.

    Cultural brokering as a motivator: Beyond parents' economic and educational

status, English language proficiency has also been cited as a resource as children with

limited English language skills are more likely to be funneled into lower academic tracks

(Stewart, 1993). Consistent with research that connects language proficiency with access

to educational resources (Gandara, 1995; Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Ogbu, 1994), the

qualitative responses from the parents in this study underscored the difficulties that non-

English speaking parents experience when interacting with school personnel. At the

same time, the qualitative responses from both parents and children provided insights

about alternatives they developed to lessen the impact of these linguistic barriers.

Supporting research on children as cultural brokers (Buriel et al., 1998) between their

immigrant parents and their host society, the children in this study often acted as

intermediaries between school officials and their parents. As these children undertook

increased degrees of responsibility in their education, they also voiced feelings of

empowerment and a sense of control in how they could potentially perform in school.

    Alternative resources – Looking outside the home: In contrast to past research that

failed to explain how some individuals and families overcame various academic obstacles

despite lacking traditional resources, our findings contribute to current research, which

suggests that traditional forms of social capital are not the only effective resources related

to academic success. This project extends research on the identification of alternative

forms of social capital (Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Gonzales, 1995), and argues that less

recognized forms of social capital including the involvement of extended family,

community members, and teachers both directly and indirectly impacts student success

through the moderation of deficient forms of traditional social capital. On the one hand,

these findings support previous research on alternate forms of capital, which focuses on

these actors as positive models of success and have the potential to provide educationally

relevant resources. In this case, the familial and cultural ties these immigrant parents

maintained provided them with alternative ways through which to provide positive

models of academic support (e.g. the use of friends and extended family as tutors) and

educational guidance (e.g. friends, family, community members, and teachers who

function as educational role models and provide information on educational attainment).

On the other hand, and in contrast to this previous research, these findings also encourage

a new line of thinking which stresses the need to understand how alternative sources of

social capital including friends who are poorly performing students and extended family

members who have made poor educational choices and dangerous life decisions, function

as negative models who nevertheless stimulate positive academic results.

Implications for Re-casting the Matrix of Social Influences

These findings suggest several conclusions. Specifically, a variety of agents

including parents, siblings, teachers and legislators need to be considered in order to

better understand individual academic achievement issues in immigrant samples. First, I

consider parents' role in their adolescent's educational achievement. Contrary to notions

that parents from disadvantaged populations are disinterested in the educational outcomes

of their children, the immigrant parents in this study made use of what limited resources were at their disposal to stay involved with their child's educational progress. Parental factors, including their own level of education, their hopes and expectations for their children's educational attainment, the quality and quantity of their involvement and their socioeconomic context were all revealed by these interviews to be important factors in shaping children's expectations and in keeping them on track to achieve academic success. Second, teachers were seen as important players by parents who relied on teachers to assist their children's educational achievement in view of their recognition of their own academic limitations that, in turn, limited the degree to which they could directly assist their adolescents with school related tasks. Teachers are important to their children as well; adolescents look to teachers for messages of support and encouragement, which paralleled parent sentiments especially in terms of motivating children to do well in school. However, we still have an incomplete understanding of how the parental attitudes of immigrant parents concerning the importance of educational achievement, combine or conflict with teacher attitudes and behavior in the classroom.

As this project focuses on factors that influence academic achievement and provides a critique of how proficiency is assessed within the classroom and as evaluated on standardized tests, less is understood about how these dynamics function within advanced level courses. Does the lack of parental understanding about the content of advanced courses undermine teachers' efforts on behalf of children of immigrant parents or does this motivate teachers to try to compensate for the parents' limitations in offering direct assistance with mastery of course content? And how do parental attitudes about

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the importance of educational achievement impact teacher attitudes and behaviors? Does this parental endorsement increase teacher efforts to help immigrant parents realize their goals of academic achievement for their adolescents? Clearly, the call for more research on targeted educational outreach for immigrant communities is well justified.

Third, these data challenge assumptions about the inevitability of negative effects of peers on achievement outcomes. Peers were found to play important roles in helping maintain a focus on achievement goals as children selected peers who valued academic achievement and reflected on unmotivated peers as evidence of the importance of obtaining an education. In doing so, all of these peers functioned as important partners in the promotion and maintenance of high levels of academic achievement. The familial, school and peer group characteristics that promote this type of positive peer selection process needs more attention.

The many faces of achievement among MA students: Finally, regarding academic performance, this project calls for the need to pay increased attention to alternative ways of measuring academic achievement among Mexican and Mexican American populations. While this study lends support to previous findings that suggest that children of Mexican immigrant families have low levels of academic achievement in math and literature on standardized tests, these students also tended to perform at or above satisfactory levels when grades were used as the measure of assessment. This suggests that the low achievement of Mexican American children may be exaggerated and, in turn, calls for more research on the reasons underlying the discrepancy between grades and standardized test outcomes for this population. Perhaps more support and

guidance in test taking is needed. Our findings suggest that parents currently know little about the academic relevance of these standardized tests for their child's educational success. Raising parental awareness about the purpose and intended use of these tests could allow parents, who we found to be dedicated to the betterment of their child, an avenue by which they could understand how, in the short-term, to best prepare their children for these tests, and in the long-term, to assess the design of these tests and push for any needed reforms so that these tests better reflect their children's classroom based learning. In addition, ways to improve the ability of parents, children and teachers to better coordinate their efforts to enhance student learning need to be explored. For example, increased efforts to better align measures of academic achievement such as grading policies across schools, districts, and states could lead to less reliance on standardized testing as a way of measuring achievement. In turn, the achievement gap between Mexican American and European American groups may, in fact, turn out to be less dramatic if grades were to become the cross state criteria for assessing achievement.

Methodological Implications of this Research

Methodologically, this study reaffirms the call to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative measures in studies that seek to enhance understandings, forward explanations and develop predictive models of children's academic achievement. While the use of standardized fixed-item, pre-categorized-response questions permit insightful analyses, they are limited by the fact that they do not allow for a full reporting from the interviewee. Given that the information obtained in quantitative fixed-response surveys are bounded by both the questions asked and the possible responses, this information is

always fragmentary and potentially incomplete. Incorporating a mixed-method approach to data collection that included open-ended, qualitative questions, allowed for a more robust picture of immigrant families and their lived experiences with the U.S. educational system.

These mixed methods also allowed for more nuanced understandings about the historical experiences of immigrant parents and how their own educational experiences affected interactions with both their children and U.S. schools. Past research has discussed the relative differences between educational attainment in Mexico and the U.S. with assertions about the comparability of secondary schooling in Mexico with a U.S. high school education (Portes 1979; Buriel, 1984; Chavez & Buriel, 1986; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001). In general, these the findings of past research asserts that the receipt of a *secundaria* or secondary education in Mexico, which involves the compulsory completion of the eighth grade, is roughly equivalent to a U.S. twelfth grade education. The qualitative and quantitative findings from this project help to further understand the nature of their cross-country educational equivalence. In the majority of cases, the parents in this study indicated that they completed their education in Mexico before coming to the United States. Through the use of fixed-response questions, achievement was measured by an indication of their highest grade level completed. Consistent with past research, parents defined the completion of public school as having finished the eighth grade. However, the qualitative responses from parents indicated that while they completed school in Mexico, these parents perceived that the content acquired through their eighth grade education in Mexico left them ill prepared to adequately to assist their

own children in their daily schoolwork in the U.S. educational system. This mixed method format allowed parents to make specific their level of educational attainment and then expand on the type and depth of schooling that they received in Mexico and versus the education provided in the United States. This methodology also provided data by which to better understand how international educational attainment affected the extent to which immigrant parents were able to substantively involve themselves in their child's schooling.

Policy Implications

It is clear that parents' ability to assist their children in achieving their children's own academic goals and parents' own educational aspirations for their children were limited by parents' own lack of understanding about how to navigate through the K-12 educational system. For example, many parents are unaware of the prerequisites such as certain secondary school courses, test scores on college entrance exams or minimum grade point averages that are required for pursuing an education beyond high school. Most of these parents have had little experience and have few concrete ideas about how to foster academic success, even though they clearly held the belief that they wished their children would be academically successful. Moreover, they embraced the objectives of the school and of their children's teachers although, constrained by their understanding of these goals. It was not a matter of lacking the right goals or the right attitudes; it was largely a lack of institutional knowledge about how the educational system is structured and organized that limited their ability to effectively deal with the system on behalf of their children.

Among these immigrant parents there was a discrepancy between their own understanding of the U.S. educational system as a scholastic and socialization entity and as well as an appreciation of the most effective ways to deal with the school system and its personnel on a social or interpersonal basis. From a scholastic perspective, parents echoed mainstream U.S. notions of what it means to be a successful student. Specifically, successful students complete homework assignments and class projects, study for tests, and earn high marks/grades for their efforts. Along social dimensions, these parents endorsed classical notions of schools as socialization agents. In this respect, schools function as institutions that impart understandings about appropriate social roles and systems of reward and punishment for appropriate behavior and academic work (mirroring the types of socialization messages that are stressed upon new immigrants).

Previous research highlights how students, classrooms, and schools, differentially engage in sorting practices along social and scholastic dimensions and thereby reproduce particular academic outcomes for specific groups (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Oakes, 1985). The findings from this study suggest that parents involve themselves in their child's education in compensatory ways across social and scholastic dimensions so as to increase the effectiveness off what limited academic knowledge they do have. In this respect, measures of parental involvement and a child's academic achievement that include questions which assess and identify alternative forms of parental involvement and student motivators, are likely to enhance understandings about in-group variation on the educational achievement of socioeconomic, ethnically homogeneous populations. These

findings also suggest that programs aimed at better informing Mexican parents and their Mexican American adolescents about their educational options and the intricacies of academic achievement could prove worthwhile.

Finally, it is important for studies focused on disadvantaged ethnic minority students to understand and appreciate that social comparison processes and choice of referents are shaped by adolescents' embeddedness in family systems. As the narratives attest, these family systems shape educational aspirations among adolescents by both raising and lowering their expectations -- sometimes simultaneously. Encouragement from parents, siblings, extended family to excel in school are often paired with prospects of being happy and securing a "good" life. Unfortunately, what constitutes a "good" life or "good" job is often relative to the knowledge, experience, and perceptions of those influential family members, thus potentially creating competing viewpoints and conflicting educational outlooks on the part of the student. Along class dimensions, family members who occupy physically demanding, low-skill, low-paying jobs understandably (although not exclusively) defined a "good" job as one that was indoors and that used one's mind more than one's body. The fact that such jobs may only require a high school diploma (e.g. entry level positions in retail, sales, and data entry) creates both expectations of excellence throughout their high school careers and aspirations that do not necessarily include the need for advanced level courses, college prep examinations, college or vocational training.

Along cultural lines, these children are also socialized into systems that stress mutual support and sacrifice as part of what it means to be family. On the one hand, this

support and sacrifice created powerful motivations on the part of the child to "keep pushing" in school. On the other hand, the reason that many students kept pushing was so that they could eventually reach a point when they could reciprocate that support. While systems of mutual support do not necessarily impede one's educational aspirations, notions of sacrifice do contain the potential to rationalize the lowering of one's own expectations for the larger benefit of the whole such as the family unit.

Implications for the Educational System

Why would one expect parents and communities to abandon the public school system? I argue that these decisions are not formed in haste. Rather, NCLB punctuates a long fought battle over the nature of public schooling and reinforces the fact that the current trajectory of public education is moving further away from the concerns of the public. Early implementation of English-Only standardized tests highlights the propensity for individuals to reject traditional models of schooling. Corona-Norco Unified School District signaled one of the earliest reactions as it requested an exemption for students whose primary language was neither English nor Spanish and students in special day classes (special education) in 1996 (The Press Enterprise, 1996). As school board officials pointed out, this law would have a large impact on Southern California where the number of students whose primary language is not English was three times higher than anywhere else in the nation (Video Monitoring Services of America 1997). The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) was also affected by the implementation of English-Only standardized tests. Countywide, Los Angeles serves twenty-seven percent of the English language learner students in California (Dataquest,

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2009). In response, LAUSD Superintendent Ruben Zacarias sent a form home with all

the district's students informing parents of their right to waive their children out of the

testing process, despite legal restrictions against soliciting parents to keep their children

from testing (City News Service, 1998). Soon after, the state notified all other California

districts that the Educational Code "forbids" a district, school, administrator or teacher

from informing parents of their right to exempt their children from taking the test (City

News Service, 1998). In 2002, teachers, parents, students and local community members

from LAUSD formed an action group specifically designed to combat the saturation of a

testing culture within their schools and in recognition of the fact that existing outlets

including the California Teachers Association and the Parent Teacher Association (Vega,

2003). This educational social movement organization held that these tests imposed

regulations on the classroom, restricting "non-essential" activities which detracted from

daily standardized test preparation. Currently, this group continues to maintain their

struggle at local, state and federal levels to raise awareness about the dangers of these

standardized tests on schools (e.g. restructuring and closing), teachers (e.g. scripted

teaching), students (e.g. test-based tracking) and on traditional models of learning and

socialization which benefited children and their communities. These efforts serve as

illustrations of the extent to which parents, teachers and concerned administrators within

public education have gone to in trying to move away from these testing constraints.

Most recently, the state of Arizona passed educational legislation (HB-2281) in 2010 that

mandates the elimination of any courses which center on ethnic solidarity or raise

awareness about current discriminations against minority populations and which has

generated backlash by parents, students, teachers, administrators and community members (Arizona State Legislature, 2010). While the latter example is not centered on the issue of standardized testing, all of these instances help to understand the context behind the lack of faith in the ability of public schools to change course or consider opposing viewpoints.

Supporting the argument that despite rhetoric about change, schools are largely unresponsive to reform efforts. For example, public schools have attempted to quell calls for reform through the incorporation of cultural, vocational, and liberal educational dimensions into their curriculum. Unfortunately, research by Brint, Contreras and Matthews (2001) confirms the fact that these claims are rarely enacted within schools or classroom activities. Brint et al, (2001) found that liberal education was touted but not taught as socialization messages concerning the values of uniqueness, talent, cultural diversity, choice and variety were rarely incorporated into classrooms.

Taken together with the statements from parents in this study about their inability to communicate with their child's teachers or other school officials, these parents understandably look for alternatives to help ensure that their child is receiving the best education possible. In this sense, a decision to make use of school vouchers or communal based home-school programs is as much rooted in anger toward public education as it is in their focus to care for their child. Alternative educational organizations are largely independent of the kinds of state and federal mandates that traditional public schools face. These organizations generally claim that they offer new educational choices to parents, innovative opportunities for children and increased

flexibility to teachers. Given the rising populations of minority students that will be potentially affected by governmental changes, I argue that the growth of alternative educational organizations will increase as the level of discontent grows among both families and educators. In turn there will be an increasing tendency to look outside of a public educational system for more desirable alternative educational options for their children and themselves.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of the study need to be noted. First, although this study helps to better understand academic achievement among Mexican immigrant families, these findings may not be generalizable to all Latino families. All of the families in this study resided in suburban areas of California so the generalizability to Mexican and Mexican American families in other states or even in large urban centers may not be appropriate. However, while these findings are not generalizable to all Latinos, the western United States is home to 55% of the population of Mexican origin Latinos (U.S. Census, 2003). Additionally, of all Latinos, approximately 67% are of Mexican descent. Thus while these findings are not generalizable to all Latinos, they are applicable to a large portion of this population.

In addition to the focus on families of Mexican decent, this study examines the effects of generational status, class and culture in relation to the U.S. public educational system. As a result, this study is limited both in terms of understanding the more general dynamics impacting immigrants and how these immigrant populations are formally educated across the variety of educational options potentially available to immigrant

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families and ethnic communities (e.g. private, for-profit, charter, magnet, and home-school organizations). Future research should also evaluate how other immigrant populations interact with alternative educational organizations.

Second, the findings were also limited by sample size. Unlike many of the large-scale studies of academic outcomes, this specific sub-sample contained only fifty-five families. While the sample size is a limitation of the study, it can be argued that through the use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this study provides a more detailed examination of the issues than many of the larger sample studies.

On the issue of generational status, this study only examined immigrant parents and their second-generation children. In order to gain a more complete understanding about cultural shifts across generational status, a wider range of generations is needed. In addition, an increased focus on measures of acculturation to better identify cultural beliefs and values that are in flux would be worthwhile. Subsequent analyses will incorporate qualitative and quantitative data from the larger subset of second generation parents and their third generation children.

These findings were limited by the cross-sectional nature of the data. The qualitative and quantitative responses obtained from parents and children on parental involvement, attitudes toward schooling and academic achievement were all measured when students were in either the ninth or tenth grade. In subsequent analyses and for future studies it would be ideal to measure parental involvement, attitudes toward schooling in the ninth or tenth grade and the student's academic achievement in the tenth or eleventh grade respectively.

Regarding future research, a final suggestion can be made. Too often, research on social interaction between individuals and their environment critically investigates the attitudes and behaviors of individuals while assuming the static nature of the institutions that they are potentially involved with. While institutional theory notes physical and ideological permanence as a hallmark of social institutions, they are nevertheless dynamic phenomena influenced and changed by some of the same factors that shape individual behavior. This work has shed light on some of the institutional changes in U.S. K-12 public education and these findings are interpreted in light of these shifts. As researchers continue the valuable task of understanding social phenomena for the potential benefit of the society, we need to pay equal attention to the ways that individuals and structures mutually interact.

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Appendix A: Qualitative Interview Guide - Parent

Questions

Tell me a little about how your son/daughter does in school?

Do you have concerns about how your child does in school?

Why do you think some children do well in school and some do not?

Sometimes there are differences between what we want for our kids and what the school wants. What kind of differences have you noticed between what you want for your child and what the school wants?

What kinds of values or lessons do you wish the school encouraged more?

As Mexican parents, do you find that there is a conflict between your cultural values and the school system?

Do you ever worry that your child might be losing his/her Mexican customs or identity?

Do you think it is easier for children whose parents went to school in the United States to get good grades?

In what ways is your family similar to the families of other Mexican children that your child goes to school with?

In what ways is your family different from the families of other Mexican children that your child goes to school with?

In what ways is your family similar to the families of white children that your child goes to school with?

Tell me about how you imagine your child's life as an adult?

Appendix B: Qualitative Interview Guide - Adolescent

Questions

What are some of the family stories you've heard that tell what you should be like and what you should do with your life when you are an adult?

Tell me a little bit about how you feel about yourself as a student.

Why do you think some students get good grades and some students do not?

What kinds of things can parents do to help their kids to do well in school?

What kinds of things can teachers do to help students to do well in school?

Are there any students who you look up to because they perform very well at school?

Do you view yourself as more Mexican or American? Why?

Has there ever been a time that you felt that being Mexican-American might help your school performance?

Has there ever been a time that you felt that being Mexican-American hurt your school performance?

Do you think being Mexican-American affects the way teachers treat you?

Is their any difference between you and other Mexican American students in terms of how you approach school?

Is their any difference between you and white students in terms of how you approach school?

In what ways do you think that being a girl/boy has an effect on how you do in school?

Do you think your parents have different expectations for you as a student than they would if you were a guy/girl?

Do you think your teachers have different expectations of you as a girl/guy than they would if you were a guy/girl?