

“Wow, I wish I had known!” How Social Capital Affects Hispanic Parents’ Dreams of  
Sending their Children to College <sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT

Despite an increase in the number of Hispanics immigrating to the United States since the 1990s, the rate pursuing higher education is significantly less than the White population. Research on the race/ethnic gap in college degrees tends to focus on societal barriers to explain this problem. Some scholars also find that the experiences Hispanic parents have in immigrating and acculturating may strongly influence how they guide their children. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, I examine how Hispanic immigrant parents make sense of their current and past work and educational experiences, and how these experiences affect their expectations and aspirations for their children's educational and occupational future. I find that the Hispanic parents in my sample tend to have high expectations for their children because they view the educational system in the United States as an improvement to the educational system of their country of birth. However, their own negative work and educational experiences within the United States and a desire to return to their home country instills pessimism in them that their children will experience the same barriers the parents faced. Thus, while first generation immigrants encourage their children to attain higher education, in many subtle ways they communicate to their children that a more realistic goal may be to pursue immediate employment after high school. In addition, immigrant families living in rural areas may lack access to the bridging capital resources of larger cities with more immigration that are essential for assisting immigrant youth in attending college.

**Keywords:** Hispanic, Higher Education, Immigrants, Rural Communities, Expectations and Aspirations, Social Capital.

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## INTRODUCTION

Many parents who immigrate to the United States often find their paths blocked when they want to guide their children into a higher education. These parents have high hopes in their children's future success within the United States. However, through the course of time, they begin to become discouraged as they become increasingly aware of their lack of knowledge on how to go about guiding their children to success. These eroded expectations create tension between parent and child. Since information and resources may be particularly scarce in rural areas, I chose to conduct my study within a rural area where secondary and high school education is inadequately developed to assist immigrant youth. Faculty and staff within many rural school systems are unaware of the obstacles that immigrant Hispanic children face and of the resources that will help them to overcome such obstacles.

What inspired me to do to research in immigrant Hispanic communities and eventually what brought forth a passion I never knew existed, were two little girls. When I was applying to the McNair Scholars Program in the hopes of gaining the tools I so desperately needed in order to pursue a doctorate, Dr. Prins, suggested I come up with a topic of research in order to impress the committee. I agreed, additionally spoke with Dr. Chardie Baird, and went out into the world in search of some unanswered question and possibly my future passion.

One day, I was in church about to teach a Sunday class when two young girls came up to me and asked if college was hard. I responded that it was hard, yes, but that it was very worth it to do what you wanted to do and learn great things. The blond haired girl proudly proclaimed that she would be a veterinarian when she grew up and would also go to college. The brown haired girl more softly said that she wants to be a veterinarian too, but that her mom said she should be a waitress instead because they make more money right away. This broke my heart,

but it also made me question why these two girls' outlooks on the future are different. I thought of the girls' parents and I found that they both were Hispanic<sup>2</sup> immigrants with great careers in their home country, so it puzzled me even more that one parent would encourage her daughter's dream and the other would suppress it.

I wanted to know more about this phenomenon. I didn't want to know how the girls received their parents' advice, but rather how the parents' past experiences affected the advice they gave to their children. The interview was a success and I was offered a position within the new cohort. One summer of paid research was enough to make me addicted to research, but was not enough time to answer my question. Once that summer finished and I had five qualitative interviews, I wanted more.

The burning questions that brought forth my passion for research have now multiplied to so many more questions, and my original research topic has yielded two answers, one of which I was never seeking. I feel as though my research is an accurate reflection of my whole academic life thus far. I started off with a single question and goal in mind. I have now ended with a different question and a different answer, and I could not be happier with where I landed.

My central research question is, how do gaps in information and resources for immigrant parents in rural areas affect their expectations for their children's ability to pursue higher education in the United States, despite high initial hopes upon emigrating from Latin America that their children would complete college? In what follows, I present my intellectual rationale, methods for collecting and analyzing data, preliminary findings, and suggestions for future research.

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<sup>2</sup> I choose the term Hispanic because my participant's self-identified as such.

## Literature Review

Goldenberg (2001) researched the amount of schooling that immigrant parents hope and expect their children to receive, as well as if those expectations diminish or grow as more time is spent within the United States. The authors followed the parents through their children's educational path of kindergarten to high school, and found that the parents' aspirations were high, with 90% hoping their children would go to college. In contrast, the parents' expectations for their children's success and ability to go to the university fluctuated greatly. Sixty percent of parents expected their children to go to a university in kindergarten, but only 6% expected the same thing once their children were in high school (Goldenberg 2001).

Parents' economic status can affect educational opportunities for their children. Davis-Kean (2005) and then Baum and Flores (2016) found that while all parents have high aspirations for their children, their expectations tend to vary by social class standing. Parents who have a higher economic status have higher expectations for their children than working class parents, for example, because they can afford to send their children to a well-funded school and pay for academic advantages such as tutoring, language lessons, and American College Testing (ACT) preparation. Those parents in a lower economic status are forced to send their children to less well funded schools with higher teacher-to-student ratios and fewer Advanced Placement (AP) courses. There is a greater emphasis on employment over pursuing higher education because the children are asked to work early on in order to help the family or to provide for themselves (Davis-Kean 2005, Baum and Flores 2016).

Though some researchers believe there is a link between parental expectations and child success, Carpenter (2008) finds that there is no relationship between parental expectations and children's educational outcomes. Carpenter (2008) looked at the relationship between a parent's

expectation and aspirations and the child's success, and found that a parent's expectations and aspirations were not a significant predictor of how the child would succeed. According to Carpenter (2008), this was because he found no strong correlation statistically between parents' aspirations and the child's math and English scores. While it could be argued that these expectations and aspirations are not a deciding factor in their children's success, it is a guide on how much effort a student will put into their work. These parental expectations will also play a role in the decision to pursue a college degree or to pursue immediate employment. One study showed that the children of immigrants were aware of their parents' high expectations and aspirations. Because of those high expectations and aspirations, the children felt a need to do well in school in order to please their parents, thus emphasizing education within their life (Fuligni 1997).

Other factors, such as a parent's educational history, can also affect their child's educational attainment. The environment that is created for the child and the common goals that are established better prepare a child for college life. Those parents who have already attained a college degree will not only be more informed on the process of college application, but also, the necessary steps to prepare for it. Conversely, parents who do not have a college degree find it difficult to guide their children to attain one and simply revert to what they know, how to get a job (Hill 2010, Baum and Flores 2016). Due to these educational barriers, Hispanic students already trail their White counterparts in kindergarten, and that gap continue to grow into high school. The dropout rate for Hispanic students is over double their fellow White and African American classmates. This results in only 11% of Hispanics attaining a bachelor's degree, while 30% of Whites have already attained at least a bachelor's degree by the age of 25 (Schnieder 2006).

Other barriers that immigrant families face can also affect the expectations and aspirations they have for their children. Research finds that many immigrants are disadvantaged when they leave their home country to the United States. Much of the education, knowledge, and expertise that they bring with them to the United States goes unacknowledged. They are asked to assimilate quickly and seamlessly to the dominant culture in order to succeed within the United States, and that is not an easy task. In pursuit of the American Dream, different groups have taken on different approaches to succeed. It would appear, however, that certain tools are frequently used to overcome barriers, particularly bridging social capital within co-ethnic communities. Bridging capital refers to connections that are made between people with different backgrounds that will bring in different forms of knowledge. Bridging capital is different from bonding capital in that those connections are made based on similarities and those similarities bring those groups closer. Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) point out that a social capital framework, in which parents foster a positive relationship with their children that reinforces school learning and provides opportunities of support and encouragement for their children, will create the right environment for pursuing further education in the U.S. When this relationship is present and both parent and child agree, the parents' expectations tend to increase and so does the possibility of those goals being accomplished. These parent-child bond strengthens and expectations rise for their children.

The amount of social capital immigrants find with their children depends on the type of enculturation. "Generational consonance" occurs when both parents and children acculturate at the same time and at the same speed (Hao and Bonstead, 1998). "Generational dissonance" is when second generation acculturation is neither guided nor accompanied by change within the

first generation. In order for second generation children to have mobility and resist discrimination, they need consonant acculturation (Hao and Bonstead, 1998).

Family social capital is generated from the relationships between the family and other social institutions, such as cultural norms and values. The necessary foundation of family social capital is ethnic solidarity, which is the basis of trust that allows immigrant communities to distribute economic and educational resources to their children, also known as co-ethnic communities (Hao and Bonstead, 1998). When immigrants are not able to provide for their children due to constant discrimination and don't find a community, their children assimilate into a culture of disadvantage. The degree to which children are exposed to this capital is dependent on how the host country receives them and parents assimilate into the host country. In their study, Hao and Bonstead (1998) did find a positive correlation between the parents' involvement in the child's educational and curricular life, which resulted in an agreement on expectations. Communities, however, must be welcoming of immigrants to enable immigrant parents to participate in their children's educational activities.

Some ethnic groups have been able to do this with less trouble. As previously mentioned, some Asian Americans within the United States experience "hyper selectivity," as a result of historical social factors, which contributes to the success of the next generation. Hyper selectivity is the amount of education that immigrants have in comparison to non-immigrants (Lee, Jennifer and Min Zhou 2015). For example, Asian American adults in China who have degrees constitute 4% of the population in comparison to 50% of those in the U.S. In Vietnam, 5% of the native population has a degree as opposed to 28% of Vietnamese in the U.S. (Lee, Jennifer and Min Zhou 2015). Asian Americans in the United States have a dramatically higher educational attainment than those in their home land. The particularly high educational

selectivity within the United States affects the perception Americans have of Asians as being highly educated.

This hyper selectivity also results in more human capital and ethnic capital, better positioning them to access resources within the host society, especially in the United States. These hyper selective groups create strong ethnic communities that give their non-educated members a better chance at mobility because these environments are created to produce an advantage over other immigrant groups (Lee, Jennifer and Min Zhou 2015). Hyper selectivity facilitates ethnic community growth by creating more businesses and institutions run by the same people who help provide ethnic resources. While hyper-selectivity is a benefit to these groups, it is also important to note that there are negative aspects to it as well. High expectations of Asian Americans ignore the racism they experience, as well as variations in their experiences prior to immigrating to the United States. Not all immigrants have access to higher education and social and cultural capital prior to or after immigrating. When they have been deprived of opportunities and social and cultural capital, and when they face discrimination in the United States, they may struggle to become upwardly mobile. Since they are nonetheless expected to succeed, they are personally blamed for their failure, when in reality, they were disadvantaged by racist discrimination and lack of access to the resources they require to succeed(Chou and Feagin, 2015)

Co-ethnic communities are also necessary in creating the mindset and framework that encourages educational attainment amongst their youth. It creates supplemental educational programs and knowledge about how to access public resources. This enables them to create cultural institutions, to support a strict success frame, and support an achievement mindset, all of which is critical to mobility in the host-society context (Lee and Zhou 2015). While there are

many other factors that affect Asian Americans' advanced education, such as immigrating with a degree, the community that Asian Americans have created to foster this mindset of success is an important factor in their future success. With the networks that are created through these more advantaged communities, they create their own resources to share with others. Through social capital the arriving immigrant is able to transition into a community that can assist them with housing, jobs and resources necessary for success.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) explain that in Hispanic immigrant populations, social capital is crucial for two reasons: first, it is a resource that provides economic goods and job opportunities, and second, it enforces parental norms and keeps at bay assimilation, or cultural loss, something families try to avoid. Those who have social capital are in a better position because they are able to inform one another about opportunities and pitfalls, and they can also receive more strategic goods, such as jobs. Social capital in turn creates co-ethnic networks. These co-ethnic communities help to provide additional help, as well as role models for their children (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Even when co-ethnic communities are created, the parents are still painfully aware of the circumstances in which their children seek education. Hill (2010) shows the paradox between high aspirations and low expectations among second and third generations. Parental aspirations of Hispanics are as high as the aspirations that parents of different ethnicities have for their children. However, when it comes to expectations, parents realize that their children are very limited in their access to tools that will make them successful. These low expectations are explained by two main factors within Latino children's educational path. First, newly immigrated Latinos are segregated into the poorest schools and are provided with a lower quality education (Hill, 2010). Well trained teachers are attracted to school districts with more funding, so often

times poorly funded school districts are left to settle for uncertified and undertrained teachers. Fifty percent or more of classes within high poverty and high minority schools are taught by out-of-field teachers; low poverty and low minority schools have less than 15% of their classes taught by out-of-field teachers (Haycock and Peske, 2006). Second, the language barrier between the Spanish speaking parents and the English-speaking school often makes parents feel frustrated, unwelcomed, and misunderstood. The difference in culture and expectations between the parents and school systems undermines the parents' relationship with their children's education (Hill, 2010).

One of the main ways parents influence their children in their native country culture is by teaching them the language. Schofield, et. al (2012) looked at the implications for the parent-child relationship and later academic success in Mexican-American families. They measured language fluency by doing a questionnaire for both parent and child, and found that when parent and child speak the same language fluently, they tend to have a better relationship. This, in turn, results in the child having higher academic achievement, as measured through Math and English test scores from the California Standards Test. With parental support and constant communication, children have more confidence and tend to become more successful in school (Schofield, Beaumont, Widaman, Jochem, Robins and Conger, 2012). Fuligni (1997) pointed out that when both child and parent are on the same page on their academic goals, the children feel the want and need to be successful for them. Stronger parental support with the link of common language means the child has a higher chance of success.

A common thread in all of these pieces of literature is that they were conducted in urban areas such as Los Angeles, New York, San Diego, and Miami, in which immigrant populations are high and dense. So while factors such as crime rates, drug use, housing availability, and

resources for immigrants affect parental experiences and their expectations and aspirations for their children, those factors may not be as apparent for families within rural areas. Rural communities tend to have lower crime rates, less housing availability, and hidden drug trade; their issues arise within the educational and employment sectors (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

According to the Program for International Student Assessment 2013 survey, “Urban schools are usually larger, have a more socio-economically advantaged student body, enjoy greater responsibility for resource allocation, are less likely to experience staff shortages, are more likely to have a higher proportion of qualified teachers, and have higher student-teacher ratios than schools in rural areas and towns” (Anon, 2013). Urban schools are able to advertise these more readily available resources for future college students to the parents. The larger ethnic communities allow immigrants to feel like they belong when away from their country of origin and provide role models that children can see themselves in who are those willing to guide the younger generation along the same path they went through. This environment helps shape the parents and children in their awareness of college education. While those within urban communities still face barriers to higher education, they are very aware of the resources available to them in order to succeed.

Rural communities are known for hospitality, calm life, and close-knit communities; however, the growing body of literature shows that immigrants face a number of barriers that reflect nothing of this idealized country life. Although immigrant populations are growing in many rural communities across the United States, they are still relatively small. There are few studies on the rural Hispanic/ Latino immigrant experience and its relation to education for the second generation, with the exceptions of *Latino Heartland* and *New Destinations*. The authors find that Hispanics within rural areas are faced with creating their own community, resistance

from an already established community, and the rapid changes that come with an influx of new immigrants (Vega, 2015, Zúñiga and Hernández, 2006).

Immigration to many rural U.S. communities was high up until the 1920s, before more restrictive immigration policies were put into place. Though there was a decline in immigration after that point (particularly between the two World Wars), another wave of immigration came between 1965 and 1986, when the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was enacted. This brought forth a lull in immigration to the Midwestern rural communities after 1986, and immigrants began to stay where employers were more lax in hiring and willing to pay them “under the table” - urban communities near the border. This changed population dynamics within the rural communities to one with a lack of diversity. When “New Destinations” migration took off in the 1990s, we thus began to see a struggle emerge in many rural communities (Zúñiga and Hernández, 2006; Vega 2015).

Recent large waves of migration to rural areas has come about due to immigrants seeking labor in newly constructed factories such as meat packing plants, food processing, and carpet factories. These jobs bring forth isolation from community, exhaustion, and little autonomy, creating a barrier to attaining social capital within their communities. Immigrants often face long work hours and huge turnover rates because the factories tend to treat them as replaceable property (Zúñiga and Hernández, 2006).

Hispanic migration to small rural communities where strong inter-ethnic competition for jobs occurs can produce unfavorable climates for today’s population of immigrants. Migration for labor is, ironically, associated with restriction of opportunities for upward mobility such as low rates of home ownership, low rates of degree attainment, and high rates of poverty, despite having a large community. This is because the factories try to recruit more people in to erode

workers' rights and lower their wages through competition, and that brings hostility from those who are already there because they are trying not to lose what few resources they have, including jobs, homes, and whatever limited resources they have from the local schools (Zúñiga and Hernández, 2006).

The network recruitment that these plants do in order to constantly replenish their workforce with low-wage workers brought forth the perception of Hispanics as the group that does the dirty work. This segmented labor market assimilation consists of primary and secondary labor markets: Workers in the primary markets are seen as valuable human capital with highly specialized work, so for them, stability is easier to find. Workers in the secondary market, however, are seen as expendable and find employment in unstable work (Massey and Sánchez 2012). The perception is accommodated by institutions that would rather invest in a population that is "destined" for the top rungs of society as opposed to immigrants who are "created" for the "dirty work" (Zúñiga and Hernández-Leon 2006).

"Dirty work" jobs, such as factory and hospitality work, make it extremely difficult to create co-ethnic communities because of the lack of diversity within the workers arriving at the same location to do the same job. With a lack of locally-based human capital (immigrants' human capital from abroad is often not recognized in the United States), social capital becomes incredibly important. The communities are kept alive through networks and institutional changes that help get the youth back into school. These institutional interventions are critical in creating access to higher education for first generation students.

Rural school systems are often unable to support the influx of Spanish speaking students and have difficulty teaching students who are trying to adapt to their new environment. These schools have insufficient English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and appropriately

trained aids, and the schools fail to attract teachers who are culturally competent. ESL and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students are isolated from others and feel marginalized, noticing a lack of representation in career courses with a simultaneous pressure from parents to seek employment immediately after high school (Millard and Chapa, 2004). With a lack of available resources, they find themselves at a great disadvantage to those in urban settings with a higher level of immigration who are better prepared for encountering different cultures, and access to resources to help with transitioning through immigration. The children in urban contexts feel more comfortable in their new communities and are more prepared for higher education than their counterparts in rural areas.

Zúñiga and Hernández-Leon (2006) conducted a focus group with immigrant parents within rural communities and found that limited legal status and low levels of learning English were perceived as more of a barrier to success than education per se. In questionnaires from that study, agencies within the community pointed to lack of access to language classes and vocational training as a barrier to mobility for the immigrant parents within the community. Conversely, in Portes and Rumbaut's (2001) study conducted in urban cities, parents cite the neighborhoods filled with violence, drugs, and lack of supervision for their children as the top barriers to success that their children will have to face. The researchers made special note to add that these parents are not concerned with lack of opportunities as a barrier to their children's success; they believe their children have plenty of resources. Therefore, there is a stark contrast between rural parents who find themselves without enough resources and urban parents who find themselves with plenty.

Even with the increase in immigration by Hispanic/Latinos to these rural areas, they are a small ratio of the communities to which they are arriving, and one of the first things immigrants

do is seek others like themselves. Places of worship often become sanctuaries of support for navigating new communities, alleviating the trauma of displacement from their country of origin. Immigrants start to network through places of worship, they talk about life, their children make friends with other children, and they start to share their common experiences. These experiences provide a sense of belonging and validate practices they both may have. In turn, the church becomes the nucleus of the community (Vega 2015) which produces social capital.

As the restructuring of these new communities begins, families may start to revert to the structure that is known to them. The fathers may go out to work and provide for the family and, many times, the women are asked to stay home and take care of the children. Women may be expected to pass down the values and culture onto the children because they are the ones who stay home to raise them. This lifestyle may mean confinement to some women, not working for the first time in their life, and becoming dependent. Social position plays a critical role in shaping gender norms and expectations within the family. While mothers stress an education for their girls, they also stress domestic roles. These roles bring up a conflict in what should be valued above the other, whether girls should marry or go to college. They are asked, sometimes forced, to stay closer to home if they do decide to pursue an education (Schmalzbauer, 2014). Boys, on the other hand, may be allowed to be more ambitious in pursuing post-secondary education and moving far away to do so.

In sum, many of the studies above look at the immediate surroundings of the children or how parental expectations and aspirations affect their children. These studies have predominantly been done in large urban areas, an environment that differs greatly from a small rural town. Despite the continued need for it, there is less research on how expectations and aspirations are

developed within a parent's mind based on their own experience of achieving the American Dream in rural America, and there is even less on this development within immigrant families.

My research would fit in within the literature of employment and educational history as two of the factors influencing parents' expectations and aspirations for their children. A parent's circumstances are a large factor in how perceptions and beliefs are shaped and affects how they raise their children. A positive post-immigration experience for parents may produce higher expectations for their children's success in the United States. The opposite may be true if a parent has a terrible post-immigration experience in that they might be inclined to believe their children will have the same experience. I believe this could be one of the reasons why there is such a low rate of Hispanic/Latinos in higher education. In my research I explore how the context of reception in rural Kansas affects Hispanic immigrants and their expectations regarding their children's pursuit of advanced education in the United States.

## Methods

To understand how immigrant parents' expectations are mediated within a U.S. rural setting, I interviewed parents about their experiences and expectations. I chose Manhattan, Junction City, and Topeka for my research because they are located in the rural agricultural state of Kansas, where immigration patterns are roughly consistent with those in "new destinations." This pattern is reflective of regions in Indiana and Nebraska. There was point in time with large waves of immigration, a lull after harsher immigration laws, and we are currently experiencing an uptake. These three cities are near meatpacking towns and food production factories (e.g., Russell Stover) so they are an exemplary new destination. They also have less well developed educational resources for immigrant children than many large urban areas, and this is partly how I define them as "rural."

I interviewed 15 individual parents born in Puerto Rico, Colombia, Mexico, and Ecuador. In this study, I decided to define Puerto Rican immigrants as foreign because in the Insular Cases of 1901-1903, the United States Supreme Court defined Puerto Rico as a foreign country. In a domestic sense, the government, culture, and customs are separate from that of the main land, which gives them little rights as Americans (Insular Cases, 2007). It is important to note, however, that Puerto Ricans are considered American citizens and that citizenship will greatly affect the parent's outlook for their children's future. Families that have citizenship within the host country will have an easier time and more resources than those who don't.

I recruited participants from Spanish-speaking churches in Northeast Kansas. Participants are all first generation, Hispanic immigrants with second generation children. A first generation immigrant is defined as an individual who was born in or spent a large portion of their life in a foreign country and then immigrated to the United States. All participants have had at least one

job prior to immigrating and have had one job since immigrating to the United States. There is no minimum requirement for their educational experience. The participants did not have children until after they immigrated, or their children had not reached the age of 10 during the immigration process. Arriving to the United States at an early age provides the participants' children an easier time acculturating in all aspects of the American culture.

I used convenience sampling for this study because I am an active member of the churches the participants attend. Thus, I have already built rapport with the church members and this preexisting relationship allows them to speak freely and confidently with me. Within my church, I was seen as one of the active youth members who was here in Kansas to continue her education. I was living alone, so I was noted as an adult, but having spent a good portion of my time within that church with my parents, I was also seen as a young girl. The relationship was formal because they had yet to know me personally, but also familiar because they had a relationship with my mother. Since the majority of participants had a relationship with my mother, they were welcoming to me as her daughter and respected my research as an adult. In order to make my participants as comfortable as possible, I translated all of the documents (semi-structured interview protocol, consent form and debriefing form) into Spanish and English, and gave my participants a choice as to what language they wanted to read. I conducted the interviews in either English or Spanish, depending on which language they felt most comfortable speaking.

### *APPROACH*

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 15 parents who immigrated to the United States when their children were under the age of 10. I asked each participant a few preliminary questions to confirm what had been discussed about their immigration history and

status in previous interactions. If the interviewee fit the inclusion requirements for the study, I provided him or her with a consent form, gave her time to review it and ask questions, and if she was still willing to participate, we scheduled a mutually convenient time and place for the interview. I called participants one day prior to the scheduled meeting to confirm the date, time, and location of the interview. All interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants. At the beginning of the interview, I once again gave participants the opportunity to review the consent form and asked them to sign the document.

The interview was an in-depth, semi-structured format, with additional probes when necessary. I used an in-depth interview guide to examine how Hispanics who are first generation immigrants to the United States view their own educational and employment history, and the expectations and aspirations they hold for their children's future education and employment in the U.S. The questionnaire asked about the participants' educational and employment history in their native country and in the United States. It explores the reasons why the participant wanted to immigrate and what they were seeking once here. Lastly, it looks at what expectations they hold for their children, what they hope for their future, and what they do to encourage that vision.

I recorded the interviews and told the participants that they did not have to provide any information they weren't willing to give. At the close of the interview, I asked the participants how they felt about the interview, if they had any new questions about what was discussed or about what will be done after this point. I then provided the interviewees with a copy of the debriefing form, which describes what will be done with all the tapes and transcripts after the study has concluded, who to contact if they have more questions, and the purpose of the study in detail.

## *METHODOLOGY*

I took an inductive research approach, and coded the respondents' responses as I searched for shared concepts. This was designed to look for any patterns of what most or all the respondents said in response to the same questions asked. In addition, I examined their responses for "exceptions" to the patterns found in the initial round of coding.

## Results

My initial question of whether parents' past experiences affected their expectations and aspirations for their children was quickly answered with a "yes," but that question led me to another path of discovery of that process: I discovered that parents within these rural communities are unaware of the universities expectations of future students and how to better prepare their children for that path. The resulting inability to sufficiently prepare their children for higher education leads to these parents emphasizing what their experience has taught them – how to seek immediate employment. This lack of knowledge is a product of the lack of social capital found within these rural communities. Because of the lack of resources and shared knowledge, these parents have a difficult time guiding their children to a path that they themselves haven't walked though yet.

### *SHARED EXPECTATIONS FOR COLLEGE*

Parental experiences can dictate how they guide their children, but do not have a large impact on the aspirations and expectations they have for their children. All of the parents in my study had high expectations and aspirations for their children to go to college or have a great career. They believed their children would do well because of the educational opportunities that are provided to all children in the United States regardless of citizenship. Parents would be assured of their children's future success because of free education, the sheer will to succeed, and the peaceful environment in which to raise their children. These were all major reasons that were mentioned by the parents for their assurance in their children's future educational and employment success, despite their own difficulties.

For example, Jenny emigrated from Mexico and found herself at an interesting crossroads, as one child was born within the United States and the other in Mexico. Even though

she is married, she is forced to work two jobs in order to provide for her two children. Despite her own negative experience within the United States, she still believes it will be a positive one for her children in which they will be financially well off and in a position of respect. She compares the educational system from Mexico to the one in the U.S. and attributes her children's future success to the U.S. educational system.

I tell my children to take advantage of the school in America because there are many who want to study but they can't study because they are dedicated to work. And those who can, don't take advantage. I tell them in Mexico those who graduate with a degree, of those who graduate middle school or that finish high school, it's a proud thing for Mexico. Because, between, as I said before, between work, paying for your own school, over there you pay for everything. In difference to America, you only have to be dispensable, desire to learn and desire to succeed in America.

Parents have high expectations because when they compare education in their native country to the United States, they find that the U.S. better prepares students for their futures. The number one reason parents quoted for their children's sure success was that the United States provided free education for everyone. They felt that their children were receiving an appropriate education. They also felt safer in the community that they currently resided in than in their home country, which was the primary reason for staying within the community. This desire to keep their children in a safer community outweighed the parents' desire to return to their home country where they held professions they felt proud of and were surrounded by family. The U.S. education system and the relative safety of their communities here are why the parents believe that their children will be able to make it into college and have the career they hope for. In

comparison to their home country, participants felt their children were getting so much more in the U.S.

Scholars conducting research with urban populations ask the same questions of parents' histories and their children's future success. As discussed earlier, parents' employment and socio-economic status can affect their children's educational outcomes. Jobs that are found within urban populations consist of blue collar work in factories and hard labor. While there were some cases of different forms of employment in the rural setting, employment consists of primarily the same hard physical labor and factory jobs. Their socio-economic status is similar in pay and benefits (given that the costs of living are lower in rural areas, lower wages there were also offset with lower costs of living). Both my study and the narratives shown in *Legacies* (2001) describe how in both urban and rural areas parents with similarly high educational history will immigrate with degrees that are not validated upon arrival or never arrive with a degree at all, making the economic situation of people within the locations virtually identical. Yet in 2014 students in urban communities were almost 14 percent more likely to attain at least a bachelors degree than those students in rural communities (Marre, 2014) .Why is there evidence of more Hispanic students going to college within urban areas as opposed to those in rural areas?

#### *UNAWARENESS OF COLLEGE EXPECTATIONS*

One difference I found within the rural population that may not be as extreme in urban population of Hispanics wasn't presented until after the interviews. After the interviews, when the recorder was shut off, they began to reflect and they realized that they didn't know how to help their children achieve educational success. They lacked the information to be able to guide their children to actually achieve those higher careers and educational goals that they had set for them, and it was in a way that they didn't even realize it was something they needed. The parents

felt like they knew their children would reach the goal but in finally speaking to me, they realized that they still had so much to learn.

In one instance, I interviewed a couple from Puerto Rico, Rick and Rachel, who welcomed me into their home like I was family. Rick joined the U.S. Army and was stationed in Kansas; after his enlistment ended, Rick and Rachel decided to stay in Kansas because they felt it was a peaceful environment to raise a family in. They asked me to stay and eat dinner, and I watched Rachel place her eldest daughter, who was considering college, right next to me. She told her daughter to ask me questions about college and so she did. The daughter asked me about how to balance college life and church, what she should do to get ready, and if she should do it at all. I answered all of her questions and even gave her advice on things she hadn't asked about.

As dinner finished with the family, the parents and I stayed at the table and we began the interview. Once the interview was finished and the recorder was turned off, we continued to stay at that dinner table and talk. We talked for an extra hour and only about one subject: what is college, how to help, and if they can help. They addressed the fact that a bachelor's degree would help their children tremendously, but they were also consumed with the fact that they knew nothing of the process or how their children would survive financially. They reluctantly admitted that they didn't know how to help their children achieve this goal. Even though Rick earned a bachelor's degree, his education was financed by the Army and completed through online universities. He felt unprepared and unfit to guide his daughter on her future endeavors. I began to list to them the many different ways they could receive help and how to better prepare their daughter for a life in a four-year college or university.

After we were finished with our long conversation of everything imaginable when it came to preparing for their daughter's new step in life, Rick said something to me that would

sum up all past and future interviews I would have. He stated that all parents should know about these things, and if they knew about them, then things would be different. Although I did not press him to elaborate on the details of what would become different (because at that moment I was not an interviewer but a family friend), we agreed that the amount of Hispanics going into college and climbing the socio-economic ladder would be higher.

This realization came to all of us during this conversation and, just as importantly, I realized this moment would have never happened if I had not gone to their house and had a simple conversation with them. This is important because in these rural communities, many immigrant parents lack access to something that most urban Hispanic communities have, and that is social capital and a dense co-ethnic community that can convey information about how to access institutions of higher education, and how to succeed in college in the United States. While parents have their own knowledge of education and careers in their home country, that knowledge is no longer seen as relevant by this new culture. Through instances as the one described above, parents begin to realize their culture and knowledge does not have capital in the United States.

*WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, GET A JOB*

If the parents haven't received a higher education, they do not necessarily know what is needed for their children to achieve it. If they do not know anyone who has received a higher education, then they are further deprived of information and resources. So when the time comes for their children to go to college or to go find a job, they will encourage a child to pursue that degree while simultaneously telling them to get a job. This is especially true if parents have not received information about scholarships and financial aid for their children. The immediate employment route will seem more logical because it will provide immediate economic safety for

their children, as opposed to the risk for success in college. And because college may seem like an economic burden to most households since they themselves have yet to experience the long term benefits of a higher degree in the United States, the parents feel the best route for their children's immediate well-being is employment. For Frank, a retired Army soldier from Puerto Rico, his approach to raising his children emulated this dynamic, and he had not even realized it previously. He spoke of how he raised his two boys to have perfect grades and be well behaved all throughout their educational careers. But he also emphasized taking a very "hands-off" approach, one that many parents spoke of having. He told me he didn't want to push his children into any path because at the end it should be their decision and his wants shouldn't matter. But as the moment arrived in which the parent's advice would guide them to a certain path, this is what happened

With the younger one, he went for a year to Puerto Rico to study, he didn't finish but, yea, I was helping him, so for lack of help he can't complain he can't say that he didn't finish because of that. Because I was helping him so he didn't finish but he returned back, when he returned I was still in Germany. So he was getting little jobs, like in Burger King and things like that so I said "no, this is not a life." So I said "Come on, let's take a walk to the Airforce Recruiter," and he entered

In Frank's and in other parents' experience, they will want their children to do well in education when it is free, but when it has to be paid for, we see the encouragement decrease. When faced with the decision to guide their children to go to college or to pursue employment, parents will likely resort to what they know. Frank knew of the military as a good career path, and so he guided both of his children to the same path.

This experience is also one I had endured within my household when pursuing my college degree. Both of my parents had emigrated from El Salvador and neither of them had achieved a college degree. They too had emphasized a hands off approach in raising me, but simultaneously encouraging a strong work ethic and an emphasis for immediate employment. While it became a point of controversy within my family of me pursuing a degree, it was not because they felt I wasn't intelligent enough. It was because of the financial uncertainty that was brought forth in the four years it took to receive that coveted degree. Due to my parents' financial worry, they required me to get a job while I went to the university, and during all the times in which my education became difficult, they let me know it was ok to simply stop and have a job for a while. Hispanic parents are not devaluing education; on the contrary, they find it to be incredibly necessary for future success. The parents are simply valuing the security only money can bring even more, and because their solution to financial woes was employment, they are likely to encourage their children to pursue that same path in order to avoid the struggles they went through.

Of all the participants whose children had grown up, none of them completed a college degree for various reasons. When that path became difficult for their children, the parents resorted to what they knew - how to get a job. In high density populations, the educational game plan is passed down from group to group, generation to generation, in order to assure success in the next generation. In rural communities who have not yet been given game plans, their children are forced to create their own plans and to navigate it all on their own, which, in turn, reduces their chances of success. But through multiple generations of secrets, sharing, and final success, they are able to share that plan for success with future generations.

*THE NEED FOR SOCIAL CAPITAL*

There is not a high population of Hispanics in rural areas, and there isn't a diversification of careers amongst the Hispanics who are there. The population will tend to have the same career paths and educational levels within rural areas. There is plenty of bonding social capital, coming together as a community over what they share, but a lack of bridging social capital, differences in the community so that gaps in knowledge can be filled by others. That lack of bridging social capital in the Hispanic population hurts them in a couple of ways. First, they are unable to share their cultural capital, which is what they know and their past experiences, which will help others navigate through new or difficult terrain. Second, it reduces the possibility of receiving new information, finding and meeting new people who are different than you and who may have access to educational and occupational opportunities that they can share. Third, ESL and ELL programs may be absent or deficient, and teachers may not realize what help new immigrant children need to get to college. Any one of these elements would greatly help children to overcome the barriers that Hispanic students who wish to pursue an education face and yet all of them are deficient.

This need for bridging social capital was clearly addressed in Portes and Rumbaut's *Legacies* but I quickly realized it was largely or entirely missing within many rural communities. It was within the process of these interviews that I noticed that I was becoming bridging social capital. The church tends to be a central point of the community for immigrant Hispanics, so as I would ask around my church questions in order to find participants, the parents also took the opportunity to learn more about me. When I would mention that this study is for a paper within my university, it was as if a light bulb had turned on and they would so quickly say, "Wait here I'm going to get my child" or "how did you get to the university?" I was amazed by the amount of questions they had about finances, resources, living alone, and balancing spiritual and

educational priorities. Even if the parents were not recruited, they would still bring their children to me as a light into the world of academia. To the parents whose children did plan to go to college once they graduated high school, when I would inform them about all that they could do in the transition, I would get the same response: “wow, I wish I would have known that.” That was the number one complaint, especially for Mary as she is currently pursuing her bachelor’s degree in computer technology for the second time. She has two children and currently works at a school district but takes night classes so she can be able to reach the same type of IT job she had back in Ecuador. As she is pursuing her studies and thinking of her children’s future studies, she finds herself in a difficult place of having to pay for her education. When the interview was over, we spoke of this dynamic and I asked if she could say anything to the secretary of education, what she would say. She was kind enough to let me record her response. “I would ask that they make education less costly or that there would be more scholarships for the people because I believe the majority of people that don’t study, even if they have the desire, is because the education is too expensive in this country.”

Mary is the sole provider for her household and wishes getting her degree would be financially easier on her, and eventually her children. It is her major point of complaint, and for other families who I have had this conversation with, it is their only one. But this complaint never arises until the end of the interview, when we sat down and had a formal conversation. Mary’s version was the only one I was able to record, but all the parents who had children preparing to enter would have the same response and the same complaint. It is not because of a lack of advertising only, it is also a lack of existing programs that will help these students enter into higher education. Because of the small population of Hispanic/Latinos within the primarily White community, they are more likely to experience racism within the educational system.

Their children are pushed further back because of the belief that they don't speak English sufficiently well or they might be in a situation in which they do need the assistance of programs such as ELL, but the staff by not being trained well enough to help them and the children will fall further behind.

In urban areas in which the Hispanic population is much higher, there are many more programs to help immigrant youth attain higher education, and that is why they will have more equally distributed college degrees according to their demographics. This change was evident in Omaha, Nebraska, where many Hispanics had immigrated to gain employment at the meat packing plant. In 1990 only 9 percent of Hispanic adults had attained a college degree, in comparison to 19 percent of Non-Hispanics, and it wasn't until there were institutions to facilitate the incorporation of newcomers that the number of Hispanic/Latinos receiving a college degree began to increase to above the national average (Zúñiga, Hernández-Leon, 2004).

The quality of the relationship between a parent's history and their expectations and aspirations for their children does account as a factor in whether youth will pursue college, but what is more important is the environment that is set up for their children based on the tools available to the parents to help their children fulfill their expectations. When parents face obstacles and lack information, they are unable to help their children meet their expectations. If they are unaware of the tools or knowledge necessary to take their children to what they aspire and expect them to be, then the words mean nothing. So I believe expectations and aspirations have more of an effect in the environment of children who live in urban areas where the population has more social capital and cultural capital. By contrast, those in rural areas who are not aware of social and cultural capital are at a significant disadvantage.

### Conclusion

While expectations and aspirations are almost identical in both urban and rural areas, it is the application of plans in order to achieve that expectation that greatly differs. Immigrant parents have high hopes and plans for their children to pursue a college degree and to have successful careers that will provide for themselves and their future family. But it is the community in which these families live that can make a true difference. In many urban areas, Hispanic communities tend to have many more outreach programs for education, higher diversification of employment, and well-established paths that their children can follow if they wish to pursue a college degree. These programs and diversity create a co-ethnic community thriving with the social capital necessary to promote higher education along with employment. These communities are much more likely than rural communities to have readily available role models for their children, and these children can actively see themselves in those higher positions because of it. Hence, parent and child can have the same goals and a clear plan to achieve it. But this is often missing in rural communities. Hispanic/Latino populations aren't as dense in rural communities, so they are often overlooked for programs and resources. This forces those who wish to have an education to go away from their community to where there are more opportunities, removing the possibility of diversification and social capital. Parents never find a link to prepare their children for a life of higher education, and their children never see themselves in those higher statuses because they lack the role models to do so.

Rural communities are cut off from these important resources that can help parents in educating their children. There are too few resources and those resources that are available are nearly invisible to them, and because of the lack of social capital within these communities, they have no way to create the plans in order to successfully achieve their goals. So when children

make a decision between going into the unknown world of college and risking thousands of dollars or simply finding a job, it's easy to understand why the rates of bachelor's degrees is lower for Hispanic/Latinos within rural communities than those in urban settings.

In order to go forward I would suggest a couple of initial solutions, to be elaborated and extended over time. First, schools should create an environment with an emphasis on higher education, on whatever level the student needs. This would require implementing more AP courses, if any exist yet, providing ACT prep and advertising programs that help with educational future success. Also, I suggest that the school recruit teachers who are culturally diverse and have the proper training to work with immigrant children. This will not only allow the students to see a diversity of professionals but also give the students the individual attention they need. Second, these school districts need to involve the parents within the academic community and directly advertise to them. When these programs are created it should become the school's priority to let these parents know of its existence, and more importantly in their native language. During parent-teacher conferences, have a translator assist in the conference so that both parties can have a clear line of communication on what is expected of child, parent, and teacher. Third, the community should begin to foster that social capital by offering incentives to children who do complete a college degree, to return to their home town; and that wealth of knowledge can be shared to aspiring college students and their parents who wish to help them.

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