

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE ROAD TO HIGHER EDUCATION

FOR THE HISPANIC STUDENT

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University-San Marcos
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements

for the Degree

Master of ARTS

by

Tina Loya Villarreal, B.S.A.S

San Marcos, Texas
May 2012

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE ROAD TO HIGHER EDUCATION
FOR THE HISPANIC STUDENT

Committee Members Approved:

Dr. Gloria Martinez-Ramos, Chair

Dr. Toni Watt

Dr. Mary Jo Garcia Biggs

Approved:

Dean of Graduate College
Dr. Michael Willoughby

Copyright

by

Tina Loya-Villarreal

2012

FAIR USE AND AUTHOR'S PERMISSION STATEMENT

Fair Use

This work is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-553, section 107). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgment. Use of this material for financial gain without the author's express written permission is not allowed.

Duplication Permission

As the copyright holder of this work I, Tina Villarreal, authorize duplication of this work, in whole or in part, for educational or scholarly purposes only.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Gloria P. Martinez-Ramos, Dr. Toni Watt and Dr. Mary Jo Garcia Biggs for their guidance and support throughout this writing process. I would also like to give thanks to Dr. Susan Day and Dr. Audwin Anderson for being encouraging leaders in my educational journey. A special note of gratitude to my mom, Oblira Loya, and dad, Abelardo T. Loya; they have helped me in so many ways to accomplish my educational goals. Thank you to my husband Ray and my son Mason who have had to take care of themselves on numerous occasions and have eaten more than their fair share of take-out. Also to my sister Blanca, the one person who can completely relate to where I came from and where I'm going. And to my daughter, Camila, who offered me a renewed source of inspiration.

This manuscript was admitted on March 11, 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	vii
ABSTRACT	1
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	4
Demographics of Hispanics in the United States.....	4
Students' Perceptions and Aspirations.....	5
The Family and Family Structure	7
Language and Literacy.....	9
Gender Differences in Aspirations and Outcomes.....	111
Social Capital	12
III. METHODOLOGY	15
Research Questions and Hypotheses	18
Measures	19
IV. FINDINGS.....	25
Bivariate and Multivariate Results.....	27
V. DISCUSSION	35
Strengths and Weaknesses	41
CONCLUSION.....	43
REFERENCES	46

LIST OF TABLES

Tables	Page
Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Hispanic and non-Hispanic White Subset	17
Table 2 Results of Chi-Square Analysis (Income and Race/Ethnicity).....	17
Table 3 Results of Chi-Square Analysis (Educational Aspirations and Race/Ethnicity) .	26
Table 4 Results of Independent Samples T-Tests.....	28
Table 5 Results of Chi-Square Analysis (Literacy/Language and Race/Ethnicity).....	29
Table 6 Results of Chi-Square Analysis (Familial Obligations and Race/Ethnicity).....	29
Table 7 Results of Chi-Square Analysis (Ed. Aspirations and Hispanic Males/Females)	31
Table 8 Results of Linear Regression Model (Parental Expectations v. Peer Influence) .	32
Table 9 Results of Linear Regression Model (Including all Independent Variables).....	34

ABSTRACT

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE ROAD TO HIGHER EDUCATION

FOR THE HISPANIC STUDENT

by

Tina Villarreal, B.S.A.S

Texas State University-San Marcos

May 2012

SUPERVISING PROFESSOR: GLORIA P. MARTINEZ-RAMOS

Although the number of Hispanics attending higher education has been increasing in recent years, Hispanic graduation rates are still markedly behind those of non-Hispanic whites. The percentage of Hispanic persons age 25 and over receiving a bachelor's degree or higher is 12 percent whereas 30.5 percent of all non-Hispanic whites obtain a degree (NCES 2010). Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin make up 15.8 percent of the United States population. Using a quantitative data analysis of 2,234 Hispanic high school students from the 2002 Education Longitudinal Study (ELS), this study examines issues and barriers faced by 10th grade Hispanic students and the impact that these factors have on their educational aspirations. Variables analyzed include the relationship between family structure, language and literacy, socio-demographic background, social capital and educational aspirations. Findings from this study suggest that there is a significant relationship between social capital (as measured by parental involvement in

their child's education) and educational aspirations. As the population of Hispanic youth increases, it is imperative that we understand how social and cultural factors shape academic achievement.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although the number of Hispanics attending higher education may be increasing, they are still markedly behind non-Hispanic whites. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 2010) of the U.S. Department of Education, in 2004 the high school dropout rate for Hispanics was 23.8 percent; this is in stark contrast to the dropout rate for non-Hispanic whites, which was only 6.8 percent. Furthermore, in March of 2005 the percentages of persons age 25 and over receiving a bachelor's degree or higher for Hispanics was 12 percent, and for non-Hispanic whites was 30.5 percent (NCES 2010). Hispanics have made gains in higher education and are going to post-secondary institutions in record numbers; however, proportionate to other ethnic groups, the achievement gap has not improved in the last several decades. Between 1997-98 and 2007-08 the rate of Hispanic students completing bachelor's degrees increased from 45,900 to 91,300 or an 86 percent increase (NCES 2010). The overall population is increasing but the gap in degree completion between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites remains. In addition to the disparity that exists between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white student achievement, there is also a gender gap between male (52 percent) and female (58 percent) Hispanic students' 6-year graduation rates for both public and private not for profit 4-year institutions (NCES 2010).

Much remains to be known about the impact of the family and family structure, including socioeconomic status and language/literacy, has on high school Hispanic students and how this affects their educational aspirations to attain higher education. Equally important, research is needed to understand the gender differences in the educational aspirations among Hispanic youth. Furthermore, peers are an important aspect of a high school student's life. It is imperative that we understand the influence a high school student's peers have on their decisions to attend an institution of higher education. Related to the variables of family and family structure, language and literacy play an important role in obtaining the educational skills necessary to succeed in higher education. There is a need for more understanding of how the family, socioeconomic status and literacy/language impact social capital; particularly, how does social capital affect these aspirations and ultimately educational attainment? For this study social capital will speak directly to the involvement of the parent in their students' academic career. To support my use of parental involvement as the main contributor to social capital, I have build upon the definition of social capital described by Qian and Blair (1999) as the strength of the relationship between the parent and the student. Also supporting this study's definition of social capital, Kao and Rutherford (2007) use parent-school involvement as a measure of social capital as part of their study to determine its effects on the academic achievement of immigrant minority students.

This study examines cross-sectional data from the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) 2002 and attempts to determine how the variables of race/ethnicity, family/family structure, language and literacy, gender, peer influence and social capital contribute to the educational aspirations of high school students. Also, how are these

variables related to one another and how do they ultimately shape educational attainment. The ELS is conducted by the United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Fulfilling congressional mandate, the NCES is charged with collecting, collating, analyzing and reporting data on conditions of the educational system in the United States (Ingles and Scott 2004).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Demographics of Hispanics in the United States

In 2009, the percentage of persons of Hispanic or Latino origin was 15.8 percent (US Census Bureau 2011). This population is the largest minority group in the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau (2011) defines Hispanics or Latinos as people who classified themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 questionnaire. These included, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban or other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino (US Census Bureau 2011). According to Cobas, Duany and Feagin (2009:9) the categories of Hispanic or Latino have “subsumed culturally and geographically heterogeneous groups with separate identities and histories” into inadequate labels. Among the Hispanic or Latino population there is great diversity in ethnic origin and nativity (Saenz 2010). Nonetheless, Latinos face obstacles on their road to higher education. This study will use the terms Hispanic and Latino interchangeably and often the terms race and ethnicity are used synonymously.

Relative to non-Hispanic whites, the Latino population is a youthful population with the median age of Latinos in 2009 only being 27 (Saenz 2010). It is projected that by 2050 Latinos will represent three out of every ten people or approximately 132.8

million people in the United States (Saenz 2010). Saenz (2010) explains the dilemma of having a large relatively undereducated population:

Latinos will increasingly be part of all societal institutions as both consumers and purveyors of services. Latinos need to be viewed as an asset that provides major benefits for the economy rather than as a liability that drains the economy. Given that Latinos continue to have the lowest levels of education across racial and ethnic groups; it is crucial that investments be made in the schooling of these youth to ensure that they are adequately prepared to contribute to the economy in an increasingly technological and global workforce. The future of the United States will increasingly be tied to the fortunes of its Latino population. (P.6)

Although the overall number of Latino youth completing high school and attending college is increasing, the uptrend has been slow (Fry 2002). It is imperative that we understand the factors that promote academic aspirations and achievement among Hispanic students as they transition from high school to higher education.

Students' Perceptions and Aspirations

The education a student receives in high school influences their motivation to pursue a higher education. Hispanic high school students often perceive more barriers on the pathway to higher education than their non-Hispanic white counterparts (McWhirter, Hawley, Torres, Salgado and Valdez 2007). Perceived barriers to higher education are important to examine because they are a direct result of lived experiences (Becerra 2010). McWhirter, et al. (2007) studied the perceived internal and external barriers to post-secondary education as anticipated by 140 Mexican American and 296 non-Hispanic white high school students. An eighty-four-item questionnaire was given to the students to determine the "Perceptions of Educational Barriers (PEB)" (McWhirter, et al. 2007:123). Upon analysis of the results, the authors found that Mexican American students expected to encounter more ability, preparation/motivation, and separation

barriers than the non-Hispanic white students in the study (McWhirter, et al. 2007). In their study, Mexican American students perceive more barriers to attending college, they perceive that these barriers will be more difficult to overcome when compared to the non-Hispanic white high school students. According to the authors, Mexican American students differed from their white cohorts in regards to perceived barriers; however, they did not differ in regards to their planning for education (McWhirter, et al. 2007). From NCES (2010) statistical data, we know that Hispanics have the lowest rate of completing a bachelor's degree or higher with a mere 12 percent reaching this goal. This means that there is a disparity somewhere between their plans and their outcomes of going to college. Lack of teacher support, familial pressures and romantic partner pressures may account for this gap according to McWhirter, et al. (2007).

Perna (2000) examined the variations in family structure and its impact on Hispanics and their college enrollment. Perna's (2000) study found that Hispanics continue to be underrepresented in higher education (Qian and Blair 1999; McWhirter, et al. 2007). The author stated that individuals make decisions to attend college by comparing the benefits with the costs of all possible alternatives (Perna 2000). Benefits would include higher lifetime earnings and better all around lifestyle. The costs involved in attending higher education are beyond the monetary costs of attending an institution to include factors, such as a decrease in leisure time and travel away from home (Perna 2000). Perna (2000) argued that the variance found in human, physical, social and cultural capital between racial and ethnic groups account for the distinctions in college enrollment and that members of the dominant class possess the most valued types of cultural capital in terms of economics and class status. Perna's (2002) research highlights

the disparity in capital among racial and ethnic minorities, but does not examine the role of familial obligations and parental involvement as factors contributing to social capital. My study will focus on how many of these variables are related and how they affect social capital.

The Family and Family Structure

The family is fundamental to understanding the differences in educational aspirations. Among Hispanics, the family is considered the most important social institution (Schaefer 2006). The family as a social institution has an impact on the outgrowth of academic achievement in higher education. Studies have shown that lack of encouragement or low expectations is not a factor in Hispanic students' achievement (McWhirter et al. 2007). Hispanic parents realize the importance of higher education and the role it plays in the success of their children. It is argued that one potential explanation for this contradiction between expectations and outcomes rests on the idea that familialism—or the obligation to the family and the loyalty of putting one's needs after the family's needs—is what keeps many Hispanic students out of higher education (Schaefer 2006). Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) also discuss this ideal of putting your own needs aside. Familismo is a strong and enduring cultural value in the Latino community (Saenz and Ponjuan 2009). Hispanic students have the desire for higher education but often have role conflict that is associated with the model of familialism/familismo. It is rarely academic ability that bars interested and qualified students from higher education. Family obligations, lack of financial resources or other personal reasons may keep some academically qualified students out of higher education (Becerra 2010).

According to Wojtkiewicz and Donato (1995), factors such as race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, student nativity and parental education and nativity contribute to educational attainment. In their analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Wojtkiewicz and Donato (1995) examine the dependent variable of high school completion against the independent variables of race and ethnicity, nativity, family structure, socioeconomic status, and parental nativity and found that the role of family impacts high school completion. Wojtkiewicz and Donato (1995) found Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics were more likely to experience disadvantageous family structures than non-Hispanic whites. Families most at risk include those with a higher percentage living in single-parent homes, larger sibships (4 or more siblings), and low parental educational achievement. More importantly, Wojtkiewicz and Donato stated, “Because children from Puerto Rican and other Hispanic families are more likely to have these attributes, the difference between them and non-Hispanic whites disappeared when these factors were controlled” (1995:568). Portes (1998) states that intact families and families that have at least one parent whose primary role it is to raise the children are high in the form of social capital that enriches a student’s education and personality development.

In 2010, the overall poverty rate for the United States was 15.1 percent; however, for Hispanics the rate was 26.6 percent (US Census Bureau 2011). Economic hardships may lead to higher family stress and less parental involvement in school related matters and activities (Altschul 2012). The ensuing challenging work schedules that go along with living below the poverty rate for many Hispanic families contribute to the fact that many Hispanic parents may not be as available at home (Bregman 2010). This problem may contribute to Hispanic students not having access to parental help with homework or

an available adult to attend school related functions. Similarly, McWhirter, et al. (2007) found there is relationship between parental educational achievement and high school students' post-secondary plans. If parents are unfamiliar with the educational system in the United States themselves, they are not able to provide the proper information to their children about college (Bregman 2010).

Language and Literacy

Language and literacy play an important role in the educational aspirations of Hispanic youth. Language varies based on nativity status among the different Latino ethnic groups (Saenz 2010). The most common languages spoken by the Hispanic population are English and Spanish, with Spanish maintained due to immigration as well as the previous generation passing down the language to the next (Ortiz 1989; Saenz and Ponjuan 2009). Unfortunately, this has been viewed as a social problem with many schools requiring students to use only English in classrooms (Ortiz 1989). The author explains when speaking Spanish is viewed as a social problem it is indicative of the xenophobia within the larger United States population (Ortiz 1989). Similarly, Cobas, et al. (2009:12) suggest that speaking Spanish is seen as “foreign” and “un-American” adding to the marginalization of Hispanics within the United States. Hispanic parents that are not fluent in English often face obstacles when they attempt to become involved in their children's education. “Parental attempts to obtain information about higher education may be thwarted by language barriers as well as the reactions of other individuals” (Bregman 2010:10). Culture and language that is not of the dominant culture is often ignored or devalued (De Gaetano 2007). A lack of formal Latino parental involvement in the school setting is often supplanted by informal support at home

including giving a student time to study and asking their student what occurred in school that day (De Gaetano 2007). This type of parental involvement fosters social capital in Hispanic students.

Socioeconomic background and education can have a direct effect on literacy. Literacy in turn has a direct effect on educational attainment. Ortiz (1989) found, not surprisingly, native-born Hispanics had a literacy rate lower than that of non-Hispanic whites, yet higher than that of foreign-born Hispanics (Ortiz 1989). Among foreign-born Latinos, forty percent speak only Spanish (Saenz 2010). Ortiz (1989) found that Hispanics, overall, came from less advantaged backgrounds than non-Hispanic whites, and they had a high school dropout rate twice that of non-Hispanic whites. Ortiz (1989) concludes that low levels of literacy were found in the Hispanic population, which would account for the high school dropout rate. The author uncovered a very strong relationship between educational attainment and literacy. Ortiz (1989:162) "Education is an important issue for minority populations since they receive lower quality schooling, are tracked into a less academic and rigorous curriculum, and are expected to be poor achievers." English fluency or linguistic acculturation was related to perceived barriers in a study conducted by Becerra (2010). According to Becerra (2010) this population may witness more instances of discrimination, as they would have increased exposure to the majority culture. However, acculturated Latinos often have enough experience in the United States educational system to understand the availability of financial aid or other resources and do not view them as a direct barrier to higher education (Becerra 2010).

Gender Differences in Aspirations and Outcomes

Not only are there racial/ethnic differences in graduation rates, but there are differences among the male and female Hispanic student population as well. According to the NCES (2010) 6-year graduation rates for both public and private not for profit 4-year institutions were higher for females (58 percent) than males (52 percent). Females are consistently outperforming their male peers in regards to high school graduation, college entry and college completion (Buchman 2011). Researchers have examined the gender gap in educational achievement with many studies citing peers as a contributing factor to educational aspirations. There are several variables that may account for this variance in achievement. For example, Riegle-Crumb and Callahan (2009) found that Latina girls specifically benefit from having more friendships with third-plus-generation Latino peers, whereas Latino boys benefited academically from all co-ethnic peers. This may be because girls turn to peers for academic encouragement while boys see peers in a more competitive fashion and do not rely on them for academic validation (Riegle-Crumb and Callahan 2009). However, both Latino boys and girls benefited from having friends with high parental education. In the case of parental education, being Latino may be more important than being male or female in the outcome of this variable (Riegle-Crumb and Callahan 2009). As noted by Pino, Martinez-Ramos and Smith (2012:27) in a study conducted at Texas State University-San Marcos of Introduction to Sociology students, “among Latinos, first-generation students and females are more likely to have a concern for their education than second-generation students and males in high school, but these concerns do not translate into significantly higher levels of success in college as measure by college GPA.” Thus, Latino’s academic achievement may vary by generational status

and gender but how these factors are related to social capital were not examined in detail.

In a qualitative study conducted by Gonzalez, Stoner and Jovel (2003) Latina students enrolled in college often attributed their success to college preparation programs in which they received emotional support and access to information and opportunities for college. Friends also offered support and privileged information to college enrolled Latinas in this study and served as a source of encouragement for these students (Gonzalez, et al. 2003). These friendship ties are a source of social capital for both Latino boys and girls but in different ways.

According to Saenz and Ponjuan (2009:54), “Latino males are effectively vanishing from the American higher education pipeline.” Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) assert that one potential explanation is that many Latino males choose to join the workforce earlier than their Latina counterparts (Saenz and Ponjuan 2009). The idea that one must support their family or be the head of the household remains strong in the minds of young Hispanic males (Schaefer 2006; Saenz and Ponjuan 2009). Although we should not ignore one gender in favor of another, we should recognize there are unique challenges that each face in obtaining a degree in higher education. According to Buchman (2011), to understand the disparities in the transition to college (and to gender inequality) we must look at financial status and social capital, access to role models and mentors, the college admissions process, as well as individual aspirations. This study will address these gaps in the current literature.

Social Capital

Social capital theory provides the theoretical framework for this study. As stated by Portes (1998), the concepts behind social capital are nothing new to sociologists:

That involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for the individual and the community is a staple notion, dating back to Durkheim's emphasis on group life as an antidote to anomie and self destruction and to Marx's distinction between an atomized class-in-itself and a mobilized and effective class-for-itself. (P.2)

Social capital is a complex term to define. Bourdieu (1986:51) states social capital is, "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." On a similar note, Putnam (2000:21) defines social capital as "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity."

The variables of the family, family structure, language/literacy, gender and peer influence all contribute to the most influential variable of all, social capital. Educational attainment is elevated by social capital (Qian and Blair 1999; Putnam 2000; Riegle-Crumb and Callahan 2009). Qian and Blair (1999) explain how parents with higher income and education improve on a student's resources of human and financial capital. This human (parental education) and financial (parental income) capital is paramount to a student's aspirations and attainment of higher education (Qian and Blair 1999). Neither of these resources will benefit the student unless social capital is also in place. Social capital is a function of the family and, specifically, the strength of the relationship between the parent and the student (Coleman 1988; Qian and Blair 1999). Social capital can also be developed through other institutions such as neighborhoods, schools and teachers; however, this study will specifically examine social capital measured by parental involvement in their child's education (Coleman 1988; Qian and Blair 1999; Putnam 2000; Kao and Rutherford 2007).

Why is social capital so important to Hispanics students? Simply stated, social capital may help counter some of the effects of institutional neglect or abuse (Gonzalez, et al. 2003; Bregman 2010). Institutional neglect or abuse refers to the practice by teachers and counselors to actively prohibit minority students' access to college preparatory or high quality curriculum courses (Bregman 2010). Minority students do not possess the cultural knowledge of access to informal social networks that make college opportunities available (Gonzalez, et al. 2003). Human and financial capital varies by race and ethnicity (Qian and Blair 1999). The authors state, "We expect a greater impact of social capital on racial/ethnic minorities' educational aspirations and a greater impact of human and financial capital on non-Hispanic whites' educational aspirations" (Qian and Blair 1999:607). Racial and ethnic groups often have different cultural values, so the three types of capital are not equally important to each group.

Forming outgroup ties can positively impact achievement for Latino youth (Riegle-Crumb and Callahan 2009). With peer groups, especially friends that have parents with high education achievement, Latino youth are exposed to opportunities and information that may not be available to them from their own family background (Riegle-Crumb and Callahan 2009). So having friends is important, especially friends that have high social capital. "Social capital keeps bad things from happening to good kids" (Putnam 2000:296). Family and community ties assist students in their academic endeavors. Putnam (2000) found that even while holding constant factors linked to educational achievement, such as parents' education and income, family size, race and gender, children that had parents who were involved in their kid's schools were less likely to drop out and more likely to have higher grade point averages.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

I conducted my research study based on the data from the Education Longitudinal Study (ELS) 2002 to identify issues and barriers faced by high school aged Hispanic students on their journey to higher education. The ELS 2002 was downloaded from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu>). I analyzed the effects of race/ethnicity, parental expectations, parental educational achievement, familial obligations, socioeconomic status, literacy/language, gender, peer influence and social capital (measured by parental involvement) on the educational aspirations of high school students (10th graders). Data collected for the ELS 2002 study included 15,362 sophomore level high school students from a national sample of high schools. The high schools were then stratified by size, which resulted in a total of 1,221 eligible public and private schools, of which 752 schools participated. Students, parents and teachers completed questionnaires for the ELS 2002; however, my focus will be on the parents' and students' responses. The Texas State University IRB has exempted my study.

For the purpose of my study, only Hispanic and non-Hispanic white student responses were analyzed. The sample size consists of a total of 10,991 students; there were a total of 2,234 Hispanic students and 8,757 non-Hispanic white students in this

subset. Hispanic students made up 20.3 percent of the sample that I tested compared to 79.7 percent of non-Hispanic whites. Males and females accounted for approximately half of each of the Hispanic and the Non-Hispanic white student populations, with slightly more females than males in both groups. Refer to Table 1 below for the demographic characteristics of this sample. The Hispanic population had a higher percentage (22.9 percent versus 7.8 percent) of students with a total family income of less than \$20,000.00. A larger percentage of the non-Hispanic white population (59.6 percent versus 30.3 percent) has a total family income of \$50,000.00 per year or more. See Table 2 for total family income data.

I chose this dataset for a number of reasons. First, the data are collected by a government-sponsored entity charged with maintaining statistics on education in the United States. Second, the data were collected randomly and are representative of the entire country. Third, this dataset asked questions directly related to students' educational aspirations beyond the current year, which serves as the dependent variable of my study.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Hispanic and non-Hispanic White Subset

N=10,991	<i>f</i>	%
Hispanic	2,234	20.3
Non-Hispanic white	8,757	79.7
Male	5,448	49.6
Female	5,543	50.4
Hispanic Male/Hispanic total	1109	10.0
Hispanic Female/Hispanic total	1125	10.2
Non-Hispanic white Male/N-HW total	4339	39.5
Non-Hispanic white Female/N-HW total	4418	40.2

Table 2 Results of Chi-Square Analysis (Income and Race/Ethnicity)

TOTAL FAMILY INCOME FROM ALL SOURCES	HISPANIC	NON-HISPANIC WHITE
Less Than \$20,000 (lowest dummy)	22.9%	7.8%
\$20,001-\$50,000 (reference dummy)	46.9%	32.7%
\$50,001-\$75,000 (midhigh dummy)	14.6%	24.1%
\$75,001-\$200,000 (higher dummy)	14.1%	30.6%
Greater than \$200,000 (highest dummy)	1.6%	4.9%
TOTALS	100%	100%
P<.05		
The relationship is significant.		

Research Questions and Hypotheses

With my current study I investigated five central research questions:

Question 1: Is there a difference between the educational aspirations of Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic white students?

Hypothesis 1: Yes, there will be a significant difference in educational aspirations between Hispanics and non-Hispanic white students.

Question 2: Is there a difference between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students for the variables of parental expectations, parental educational achievement, familial obligations, socioeconomic status, literacy/language, peer influence and social capital?

Hypothesis 2: There will be a significant difference in all variables between Hispanics and non-Hispanic white students. Hispanic students will have a lower mean score for educational aspirations compared to non-Hispanic white students.

Question 3: Do Hispanic males and females differ in their educational aspirations?

Hypothesis 3: Hispanic females will have higher educational aspirations than Hispanic male students.

Question 4: For Hispanic students, do parents or peers have a greater influence on educational aspirations?

Hypothesis 4: Hispanic parents will have a greater influence than peers for the 10th grade Hispanic students.

Question 5: What is the role of social capital in the educational aspirations of the Hispanic students?

Hypothesis 5: Social capital will be the most influential variable for Hispanic students' educational aspirations.

Measures

The dependent variable of my study, educational aspirations, is based on the response to the survey question asking the student respondent how far they think that they will get in school. Responses ranged from “Less than high school” to “Obtain PhD, MD, or other advanced degree.” For race/ethnicity, I only analyzed responses from Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students. In addition, I examined the Hispanic student sample by gender. The variable of parental expectations describes the goals parents have for their children in regards to educational attainment. The variable of parental educational achievement refers to the highest mean level of education attained by both mother and father. To define familial obligations I will defer to previous research regarding familialism/familismo and use it in terms of the obligation to the family and the loyalty of putting ones needs after the needs of the family (Schaefer 2006; Saenz and Ponjuan 2009). Total family income will represent socioeconomic status. Literacy/language refers to the students’ native language, whether it is English or otherwise. Peer influence is conceptualized as the degree of importance that the student perceives their peers place on higher education. Social capital is a complex idea with varying uses and definitions. For the purpose of my study, I conceptualized social capital as measured by parental involvement in their child’s education (Coleman 1988; Qian and Blair 1999; Putnam 2000; Kao and Rutherford 2007).

In order to further clarify the conceptualization and operationalization of the variables, I will explain in detail the definition of each variable and the reasoning behind the more complex terms and definitions in the following section.

Educational Aspirations (Dependent Variable): The dependent variable of my study, educational aspirations, is operationally defined by the question, “How far in school student thinks he/she will get (1=Less than high school, 2=High school graduation or GED only, 3=Attend or complete 2-year college/school, 4=Attend college, 4-year degree incomplete, 5=Graduate from college, 6=Obtain Master’s degree or equivalent, 7=Obtain PhD, MD, or other advanced degree).” The “don’t know” category will not be calculated in the responses for the educational aspirations variable.

Demographics (Race/Ethnicity and Gender): My demographic data is represented by race/ethnicity and gender. I did not include age in my demographic data because all the student respondents to this questionnaire are 10th graders; therefore, I presumed the age range to be insignificant for the purpose of this current study.

Race/ethnicity was operationalized by three questions: “Are you Hispanic or Latino/Latina (1=Yes, 2=No); If you are Hispanic or Latino/Latina, which one of the following are you (1=Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, 2=Cuban, 3=Dominican, 4=Puerto Rican, 5=Central American, 6=South American); and Please select one or more of the following choices that best describes your race (1=White, 2=Black/African American, 3=Asian, 4=Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 5=American Indian or Alaska Native).” From these questions I pulled a subsample of all Hispanic students (including Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, Cuban, Dominican, Puerto Rican, Central American, and South American) as well as all non-Hispanic white students. There were no missing answers in the race/ethnicity category. I created a Hispanic dummy variable in order to compare Hispanic students to non-Hispanic white students.

Gender is simply operationalized by the following question, “What is your sex (1=Male, 2=Female). I also constructed two interaction variables; one consisting of all Hispanic females and the other of all Hispanic males. I did this in order to answer my third research question of whether or not gender affects the educational aspirations of Hispanic students.

Family and Family Structure: There are five independent variables in my study that attempt to encompass the influence of the family and family structure on the 10th graders educational aspirations; parental expectations, parental educational achievement, familial obligations, socioeconomic status, and literacy/language.

Parental expectations is operationalized by the following question, “How far in school parent wants 10th grader to go (1=Less than high school, 2=High school graduation or GED only, 3=Attend or complete 2-year college/school, 4=Attend college, 4-year degree incomplete, 5=Graduate from college, 6=Obtain Master’s degree or equivalent, 7=Obtain PhD, MD, or other advanced degree).” There were no missing responses for this question.

Parental educational achievement is the mean level of education as determined by the questions, “Mother’s highest level of education” and “Father’s highest level of education (1= Did not finish high school, 2= Graduated from high school or GED, 3= Attended 2-year school, no degree, 4= Graduated from 2-year school, 5= Attended college, no 4-year degree, 6= Graduated from college, 7= Completed Master's degree or equivalent, 8=Completed Master's degree or equivalent).”

Familial obligations is operationalized by the question, “I need to help support my family (0=No, 1=Yes).” Missing responses were disregarded.

Socioeconomic status is operationalized by the question, “Total family income from all sources (2= \$1,000 or less, 3= \$1,001-\$5,000, 4= \$5,001-\$10,000, 5= \$10,001-\$15,000, 6= \$15,001-\$20,000, 7= \$20,001-\$25,000, 8= \$25,001-\$35,000, 9= \$35,001-\$50,000, 10= \$50,001-\$75,000, 11= \$75,001-\$100,000, 12= \$100,001-\$200,000, 13= \$200,001 or more).” In order to complete a regression model, the category of 1=none, necessitated turning the socioeconomic status variable into 6 separate dummy categories. The first category “lowest dummy” included all responses of income less than \$20,000. The second category “reference dummy” included all responses from \$20,001-\$50,000. The next category “mid-high dummy” included all responses from \$50,001-\$75,000. The fourth category “high dummy” included all responses from \$75,001-\$200,000. The fifth category, “highest dummy” consisted of all responses greater than \$200,000. The dummy final variable, “none dummy” consisted of all the “none” responses.

Literacy/language can be based on the nativity of the student and the parents, for the purpose of this study I based the operational definition of literacy/language on the question, “Is English your native language (the first language you learned to speak when you were a child) (0=No, 1=Yes).” There were no missing responses for this item on the questionnaire.

Peer Influence: Although peer influence can serve as a function of social capital, for the purpose of this study, I analyzed this variable separately from the social capital variable. Peer influence is determined by the question, “Important to friends to continue education past high school (1=Not important, 2=Somewhat important, 3=Very important).” Again, missing responses were disregarded for the data analysis.

Social Capital (measured by parental involvement): In order to operationalize the most complex variable, the concept of social capital, I created an index that includes the following four questions: How often discussed school courses with parents? How often discussed grades with parents? How often discussed prep for ACT/SAT with parents? How often discussed going to college with parents? The answers were coded as 1=Never, 2=Sometimes, 3=Always. The sum of the score for each question was taken; therefore, the higher the score, the higher the Social Capital Index. The Cronbach's Alpha for this index is .673.

To begin, I ran a chi-square analysis to compare the variable of educational aspirations to the variable of race/ethnicity. This test was central to my thesis that there is a difference between Hispanics and non-Hispanic white students' educational aspirations. Then, to better understand the relationship between the variables I ran an independent samples t-test using race/ethnicity as the dependent variable, then tested each independent variable that includes ordinal and interval responses (educational aspirations, parental expectations, parental educational achievement, socioeconomic status, social capital and peer influence). I also completed chi-square analyses to compare the variables of literacy/language and familial obligation to race/ethnicity. To investigate the hypothesized difference between Hispanic males' and Hispanic females' educational aspirations, I ran an additional chi-square analysis of educational aspirations by each gender. Although it is important to understand the relationship between the means of the variables by conducting t-tests, to further investigate the possible factors that contribute to the disparity between Hispanic students' aspirations and their actual achievement, I

completed a linear regression analysis of all independent variables. The test results are detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Question 1: Is there a difference between the educational aspirations of Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic white students?

First, the results of a chi-square analysis that compared the variable of educational aspirations to the race/ethnicity variable are the foundation of this study. These results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the educational aspirations of Hispanic students compared to their non-Hispanic white peers. See Table 3 below. Slightly over 10 percent of the Hispanic students surveyed aspired to achieve only their high school diploma compared to 6.5 percent of non-Hispanic whites. Also, 6.6 percent of Hispanic students plan to attend college but not complete their degree while only 2.9 percent of non-Hispanic white students feel the same. Overall, aspirations are high for both groups. For the Hispanic student sample, 74.4 percent of the students aspire to graduate from college or higher. A larger percentage (83 percent) of the non-Hispanic white aspires to graduate from college or higher. Interestingly, over 6 percent of Hispanic students plan to go to college, but do not anticipate completing their education.

Table 3 Results of Chi-Square Analysis (Educational Aspirations and Race/Ethnicity)

STUDENT EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS	HISPANIC	NON-HISPANIC WHITE
Less Than High School Graduation	1.8%	0.6%
High School Graduation Only	10.7%	6.5%
Attend Or Complete 2-Year College/School	6.5%	7.0%
Attend College, 4-Year Degree Incomplete	6.6%	2.9%
Graduate From College	39.1%	39.6%
Obtain Master's Degree Or Equivalent	19.4%	24.9%
Obtain PhD, MD Or Other Advanced Degree	15.9%	18.5%
TOTALS	100%	100%
<p>$P \leq .05$</p> <p>The relationship is significant.</p> <p>Reject the null hypothesis.</p>		

Bivariate and Multivariate Results

Question 2: Is there a difference between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students for the variables of parental expectations, parental educational achievement, familial obligations, socioeconomic status, literacy/language, peer influence and social capital?

Running an independent samples t-test using race/ethnicity as the independent variable, I tested each variable that included ordinal and interval responses (educational aspirations, parental expectations, parental educational achievement, socioeconomic status, peer influence and social capital). All variables except peer influence had a statistically significant difference in means between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students. Please refer to Table 4 below. Hispanic students' mean score for educational aspirations was 4.92 while that of non-Hispanic whites was 5.23, which tested to be a significant difference. This result is also supported by the previous chi-square analysis completed supporting the conclusion that there is a significant difference between the educational aspirations of Hispanic students compared to their non-Hispanic white counterparts.

Consistent with the literature on the subject, but somewhat unexpected, the mean parental expectations for higher education of Hispanic students is actually higher (5.41) than that of non-Hispanic white students (5.28). This relationship was significant. The parental expectations are higher than the students' expectations of themselves for both Hispanic and non-Hispanic whites. The parental educational achievement of Hispanic students (3.59) was significantly lower than that of their non-Hispanic white peers (4.76). Also expected, the socioeconomic status of the Hispanic sample tested lower at 8.19 than that of non-Hispanic whites at 9.69. There is also a significant relationship between the

means of Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students' social capital index. Not surprisingly, the social capital index is higher for non-Hispanic white students (8.63) than that of Hispanic students (8.43). Again, this was revealed as a statistically significant relationship. The difference in means for peer influence did not prove to be significant at the .05 level.

Table 4 Results of Independent Samples T-Tests

DEPENDENT VARIABLE:	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	P\leq.05
STUDENT RESPONDENT'S EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS			
Hispanic	4.92	1.552	Yes
Non-Hispanic white	5.23	1.388	Yes
Independent variables:	Hispanic Mean	Non-Hisp white Mean	P\leq.05
Parental Expectations	5.41	5.28	Yes
Parental Educational Achievement	3.59	4.76	Yes
Socioeconomic Status	8.43	8.63	Yes
Social Capital Index	2.49	2.51	No
Peer Influence			

For the nominal independent variables of literacy/language and familial obligations, I conducted a chi-square analysis of each variable to compare their relationship to race/ethnicity. The variables of race/ethnicity and literacy/language had a

significant relationship in which non-Hispanic white students are more likely to be native to the English language. Ninety-seven percent of non-Hispanic white students are native English speakers. Slightly more than half (50.4 percent) of the Hispanic students are not native English speakers. See Table 5 below.

Table 5 Results of Chi-Square Analysis (Literacy/Language and Race/Ethnicity)

LITERACY/LANGUAGE: WHETHER ENGLISH IS STUDENT'S NATIVE LANGUAGE	HISPANIC	NON-HISPANIC WHITE
No	50.4%	3.0%
Yes	49.6%	97.0%
P\leq.05 The relationship is significant.		

For the Hispanic students 46.2 percent feel it is necessary that they support their family, while only 33.3 percent of non-Hispanic white students perceive this obligation to their family. See Table 6 below.

Table 6 Results of Chi-Square Analysis (Familial Obligations and Race/Ethnicity)

Familial Obligations: Needs to support family	HISPANIC	NON-HISPANIC WHITE
No	53.8%	66.7%
Yes	46.2%	33.3%
P\leq.05 The relationship is significant.		

Question 3: Do Hispanic males and females differ in their educational aspirations?

The results of the chi-square analysis show that Hispanic males and Hispanic females differ in their educational aspirations. The results are significant. See Table 7 below. Overall Hispanic females have higher educational aspirations than Hispanic males. More male Hispanic students (13 percent) than female Hispanics (8 percent) think that they will only achieve a high school diploma. In fact, more Hispanic males than females think that they will achieve less than a 4-year degree. Interestingly, the number of Hispanic males that aspire to graduate from college (40 percent) is slightly higher than the percentage of Hispanic females (39 percent) that believe the same. However, as the table shows, more female Hispanics than male Hispanics believe they will achieve a Master's Degree or beyond.

Table 7 Results of Chi-Square Analysis (Ed. Aspirations and Hispanic Males/Females)

STUDENT EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS	HISPANIC MALES	HISPANIC FEMALES
Less Than High School Graduation	2%	2%
High School Graduation Only	13%	8%
Attend Or Complete 2-Year College/School	8%	5%
Attend College, 4-Year Degree Incomplete	8%	5%
Graduate From College	40%	39%
Obtain Master's Degree Or Equivalent	18%	21%
Obtain PhD, MD Or Other Advanced Degree	11%	20%
TOTALS	100%	100%
$P \leq .05$		
The relationship is significant.		

Question 4: For Hispanic students, is it parents or peers that are more influential to educational aspirations?

Although, there was not a statistically significant difference in means between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students in peer influence, there was a significant

difference in means in parental aspirations. In the parental aspirations variable, Hispanic students had a higher mean level of education (5.41) than that of non-Hispanic whites (5.28). See Table 8 below. To gain a further understanding of the relationship between the variables, I ran a linear regression analysis with the Hispanic dummy variable, parental aspirations, and peer influence—parental aspirations has the greatest influence on the educational aspirations of Hispanic students. The variables of race/ethnicity, parental expectations and peer influence account for 24.7 percent of the difference in the independent variable of educational aspirations. This is a significant finding.

Table 8 Results of Linear Regression Model (Parental Expectations v. Peer Influence)

VARIABLES	BETA	SIG.
(Constant/non-Hisp white)		.000*
Dummy Hispanic	-.099	.000*
Parental Expectations	.391	.000*
Peer Influence	.239	.000*
Adjusted R Square .247		

*significant at .05 level

Question 5: What is the role of social capital in the educational aspirations of the Hispanic students?

To further understand the relationship between race/ethnicity, parental expectations, parental educational achievement, familial obligations, socioeconomic status (measured by 6 separate dummy variables), literacy/language, gender, peer influence and social capital (measured by parental involvement) and how each influences

educational aspirations, I conducted a linear regression analysis using all independent variables listed above. I did not include the “reference dummy” variable. The reference dummy variable consisted of all income responses ranging from \$20,001-\$50,000. This variable had the highest mode and therefore served as my income reference category in the regression model. In the regression model, only the variables of social capital ($p=.003$), gender ($p=.025$), and mid-high income dummy ($p=.014$) remained significant. Please refer to Table 9 below. Social capital has the greatest influence on educational aspirations when all other variables are considered.

Table 9 Results of Linear Regression Model (Including all Independent Variables)

VARIABLES	BETA	SIG.
(Constant/non-Hisp white)		.000
Gender	-.115	.025*
Race/Ethnicity	-.054	.398
Parental Expectations	-.074	.153
Familial Obligations	-.091	.075
Parental Educational Achievement	.033	.537
Lowest Income Dummy	.70	.191
Mid-high Income Dummy	.129	.014*
High Income Dummy	-.003	.951
Highest Income Dummy	.016	.742
Social Capital Index	.152	.003*
Peer Influence	.010	.850
Literacy/Language	.013	.838
Adjusted R Square .069		

*significant at .05 level

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The results of this study contribute to the current understanding of the relationship between social capital and the educational aspirations of Hispanic students in the United States. Recent literature suggests social capital is an important dimension to students' educational aspirations and attainment; however, few studies have conducted empirical studies using a national dataset examining multiple indicators to operationalize social capital (Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama 2012). My study uses a multidimensional construct of social capital (an index created using 4 survey questions regarding parental involvement); thereby, furthering the understanding of the factors that contribute to increasing the number of Hispanic students that achieve a degree in higher education. My finding, that social capital has the greatest influence on educational aspirations when all other variables are held constant, is consistent with what other researchers have found regarding the importance of social capital (Wojtkiewicz and Donato 1995; Qian and Blair 1999; Saunders and Serna 2004; Altschul 2012). In their study of first generation Latino students enrolled in a college access/intervention program, Saunders and Serna (2004) found social capital to be the pivotal factor in college enrollment. In fact, they found that

“Hispanics are as likely as Whites to enroll in a 4-year college or university after adding measures of social and cultural capital to controls for gender, costs, benefits, financial resources and ability” (Saunders and Serna 2004:148).

Several factors including parental expectations, parental educational achievement, familial obligations, socioeconomic status, literacy/language, gender, peer influence and social capital influence Hispanic educational aspirations. Hispanic parents hold a pivotal role in their children’s education, as Hispanic parental involvement (i.e. social capital) shows to be a crucial factor for Hispanic students’ educational aspirations. However it is important to note that in this current study, scores on the social capital index (parental involvement) are lower for Hispanics than for non-Hispanic whites; however, at the same time, Hispanic parents have higher educational aspirations for their children than non-Hispanic white parents. This finding supports other researchers’ findings that state that Hispanics value education (Brown, Santiago and Lopez 2003). Paradoxically, despite higher parental expectations, Hispanic students still aspire to lower levels than their non-Hispanic white counterparts. I found that Hispanic students did indeed have a lower mean educational aspirations score when compared to non-Hispanic white students. Also, some Hispanics (males more so than females) plan to go to college, but do not plan to finish. Do these students expect obstacles to their attainment of a 4-year degree? The literature suggests that Hispanics do perceive more barriers than non-Hispanic white students (McWhirter, et al. 2007; Becerra 2010). Perceived barriers are results of lived experiences and/or lack of knowledge of the educational system (Becerra 2010). However, McWhirter, et al. (2007) claim that despite perceived barriers in the case of Mexican American students, they did not differ from their white cohorts in regards to

planning for their education. My study found evidence to the contrary. Hispanic students do have lower aspirations than their non-Hispanic white cohorts and this contributes to their lower educational attainment.

My study highlights the anomic gap between Hispanic parents' expectations and their children's aspirations. The best way to understand the apparent disconnect between parents' aspirations and the students' educational attainment partially lies in parental involvement (social capital). It is not that Hispanic parents do not want to be involved; circumstances such as lack of time, access, knowledge or encouragement may hamper even the best of intentions to get involved (Bregman 2010; Altschul 2012). Latino parents don't know how to navigate the educational system so are not able to pass down this critical information to their children (Santiago 2011). Much of the information available regarding higher education is available to target high school students, not their parents; therefore, an information gap (not a value gap) persists (Brown, et al. 2003). Even if information is available in Spanish as well as English, there still persists a general unfamiliarity with the formal higher education system in the United States. My results show the social capital index score was higher for non-Hispanic whites than for Hispanic students. Hispanic parents want higher education for their children (as shown by the results of this t-test) yet they are not as involved in their children's education as the non-Hispanic white parents. Social capital is elevated by parental education and income (Qian and Blair 1999; Altschul 2012).

Parental educational achievement for the Hispanic students was lower than that of their non-Hispanic white students. "Unlike other immigrant groups, many Hispanics come from their home countries with little formal education" (Brown, et al. 2003:42).

Literacy/language is a very salient issue when it comes to the education of Hispanic students in the United States. After completing a chi-square analysis to compare the relationship of literacy/language to race/ethnicity I found that slightly more than half (50.4 percent) of the Hispanic respondents did not list English as their native language. The need to learn English as a second language may be a contributor to lower literacy levels among Hispanic students. According to Ortiz (1989), low levels of literacy were found in the Hispanic population, which accounts for the disproportionate high school dropout rate; thus diminishing college enrollment rates for Hispanic students. Literacy is also influenced by nativity. The acculturation process for the Hispanic/Latino/a population is perpetual due to the constant influx of immigrants into the United States (Saenz and Ponjuan 2009).

Socioeconomic status is lower for the Hispanic students than for the non-Hispanic white students. The Hispanic poverty rate is 26.6 percent, compared to 15.1 percent for the total population of the United States (US Census Bureau 2011). Socioeconomic disadvantages, high poverty rates, lower levels of SES and language barriers add to the challenges that Hispanic youth face in the American educational system (Crosnoe 2005; Altschul 2012). These variables are difficult to disentangle because they are closely related and each contributes to the educational aspirations of Hispanic youth. Altschul (2012:27) found parental involvement in education to be, “an important explanatory factor for the link between SES and achievement suggests that investing in the human and social capital of Mexican American parents may be a fruitful intervention strategy to improve youth’s achievement.” Again, social capital (parental involvement) has been shown to be a crucial factor in the academic success of the Hispanic student.

Unfortunately, the results of my tests indicate that Hispanic students' parental educational achievement as well as socioeconomic status is lower than that of non-Hispanic whites. Social capital will be lower due to these factors (Wojtkiewicz and Donato 1995; Crosnoe 2005; Altschul 2012).

Familial obligations was a significant variable in the Hispanic students surveyed compared to the non-Hispanic white students. A larger portion of the Hispanic students felt the need to support their family, while a smaller percentage of the non-Hispanic white population felt the same obligation. Strong family bonds reinforce cultural ties as well as the family's responsibility for success for Latinos (Santiago 2011). This result is also consistent with data, that in Hispanic community, the family is the most important social group (Schaefer 2006; Saenz and Ponjuan 2009). Some Hispanic students may be getting mixed messages from their parents. They perceive the need to support their family, yet their parents also expect them to go to college. I believe this conflict is vital to understanding why Hispanic students' educational aspirations are lower than non-Hispanic white students as well as lower than parental expectations.

In examining gender difference in educational aspirations among Hispanic students I found that overall Hispanic females have higher educational aspirations than their male counterparts; eighty percent of Hispanic females plan to graduate from college or beyond while only sixty-nine percent of Hispanic males think the same. This finding is consistent with the literature regarding Hispanic female achievement and is on trend with current data in the United States which shows 6-year graduation rates for both public and private not for profit 4-year institutions were higher for females at 58 percent than males at 52 percent (Crosnoe 2005; NCES 2010). In a study of Hispanic high school

students using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Crosnoe (2005:574) found that the most successful student prototype, what he called “high achieving, strongly oriented” students, tended to be young Hispanic girls. Although overall Hispanic students suffer from lower aspirations than their non-Hispanic white peers, male and female Hispanic students may need differing intervention strategies to increase academic aspirations and subsequently academic achievement in each group.

I wanted to determine the influence of parents versus peers on the Hispanic students compared to the non-Hispanic white student respondents. I hypothesized that Hispanic parents would have a greater influence on their children’s educational aspirations than their peers would. The literature suggests that peer influence is important to both male and female Latinos (Riegle-Crumb and Callahan 2009). However, my study shows that parental expectations are more influential to Hispanic students than the influence of their peers. The Hispanic family has a major influence on educational aspirations. In the Hispanic culture family is very important as reported by Schaefer (2006). This finding supports my claim that social capital is a function of parental involvement with the student.

So then, what is the role of social capital in the educational aspirations of the Hispanic students? I correctly hypothesized that Hispanic students would have a lower mean score on the social capital index. Social capital is the most influential variable for both Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students; however, non-Hispanic white students have the advantage because their scores for social capital are higher than that of the Hispanic students in this study. My findings remain consistent with previous research, such as that of Qian and Blair (1999) who expected social capital to have the greatest

impact on racial/ethnic minorities' educational aspirations. Also consistent with my conclusions, Wojtkiewicz and Donato (1995) found that when variables such as parental educational attainment and disadvantageous family structure were controlled for, the negative effects of being Hispanic were eliminated. I do not think we can overstate how important it is for all parents to be involved in their child's education; particularly for Hispanic students, parental involvement can be the link between failure and success. "Parental involvement in education mediated the influence of both family income and maternal education on youth's academic achievement" (Altschul 2012:13). Simply stated, social capital (parental involvement) does matter (Putnam 2000).

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths of my method include using a government-sponsored survey conducted with a national random sample of high schools. The results of this study can be generalized to the larger population of high schools in the United States with similar demographics. The variables I tested in this study were supported by previous literature on the subject of Hispanics and higher education. Along with the well-supported and researched variables such as literacy and socioeconomic status, I included the often-neglected variables of gender and peer influence and how they relate specifically to Hispanic students. I also used multiple indicators to measure social capital; thus creating a more reliable outcome.

The weakness of my method can be found in the operationalization of complex terms such as social capital and educational aspirations. In a follow up study I would use at least 2 more questions/responses to capture social capital. I would also like to create an index for educational aspirations. I would use additional questions in the operational

definition of educational aspirations such as; “plans to take the SAT or ACT”, “plans to take Advanced Placement test”, and “has gone to counselor for college entrance information.” These supplemental questions to my current operational definitions would enhance the reliability and validity of the study. Research has shown that there may be a distinct difference between the effects of maternal and paternal educational level on student achievement (Altschul 2012). In a follow up study, maternal versus paternal educational attainment should be analyzed separately. I must also note that educational aspirations do not always translate directly to educational attainment. Also, data analyzed were from 2002 and it is unknown what factors have changed in ten years that could alter any findings. A longitudinal study using the next wave would be beneficial to understanding if the relationships between variables have changed over time.

CONCLUSION

It is hardly an overstatement to say that education is the single most important factor for success in the United States. Hispanic students face many barriers on their road from elementary school through high school and on to higher education. Each barrier is compounded by the next and can adversely affect educational aspirations. Based upon the literature and research available on this issue there is no argument that a gap exists between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites regarding the attainment of higher education; there is however some debate as to which factor is the most important indicator of the discrepancy. This study expands on the current knowledge of Hispanic student achievement; Hispanic youth have lower educational aspirations compared to their non-Hispanic white peers. In contrast, Hispanic parents have higher educational expectations for their students than the non-Hispanic white parents. The discrepancy between student aspirations and parental expectations lies in social capital. Social capital (as measured by parental involvement) is the most influential variable to educational aspirations for Hispanic students. Social capital is an important variable to both male and female Hispanic students. Unfortunately, social capital (measured by a four question index) showed to be lower for Hispanic students than for non-Hispanic white students. Gender does matter when it comes to educational aspirations and notably Hispanic

females have higher educational aspirations than Hispanic males. When it comes to influence on educational aspirations, Hispanic parents have greater influence than peers.

Social capital varies by race/ethnicity. Mc Whirter, et al. state, “Interventions are needed to assist Mexican American students in identifying and pursuing their educational goals in a manner that respects and enhances their familial and community ties” (2007:134). Likewise, collaboration between high school guidance counselors, families, community-based organizations as well as university recruiters is needed to properly disseminate useful information on higher education to the Hispanic student population (Becerra 2010). Further, Altschul (2012) concludes that when educational resources are available to Latino families they in turn achieve higher academically. Current programs administered at Texas State University-San Marcos (<http://www.vpsa.txstate.edu>), such as the Welcome Bobcats Program (a personal phone call to all new students by a faculty or staff member) and PAWS Alert (an early warning system to address student concerns) can foster a sense of family that is essential for the success of Hispanic students.

Future research should focus on retention initiatives for Hispanic students in both high school and higher education. A follow up study using data from the next two to three rounds of the Educational Longitudinal Study would be beneficial in discerning if the disparity gap between aspirations and attainment is closing. A strength of this current study lies in the use of a nationally representative sample of high school students surveyed by the United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); thus allowing for the results to be generalized to the larger population of high school students. This study also examines variables in a distinctive combination not present in previous research utilizing a national dataset with such a large sample of

students. Limitations of this current study include only analyzing the self-identified aspirations of the sophomore class with no confirmed indication of plans to execute their goals and the complex operationalization of terms such as social capital and educational aspirations.

Although Hispanic students are attending college in greater numbers than in the past, graduation rates are reduced by part-time status, a large concentration of enrollment in community colleges, and the tendency for the Hispanic student to delay attendance to a non-traditional age (Fry 2002). Hispanics are now the largest minority group in the United States (US Census Bureau 2011). It is projected by the year 2050 the Hispanic population will represent three out of every ten people, almost doubling its current percentage of 15.8 percent (Saenz 2010; US Census Bureau 2011). The American educational system is experiencing a surge in enrollment of Hispanic students. This trend is likely to continue and this coupled with a long problematic history of stratification all add to the importance of studying the academic experiences of Hispanic students (Crosnoe 2005). It is imperative that we find solutions to the problem of low educational achievement within the Hispanic population. The answer is improving the social capital of the Hispanic student. Colleges that really understand how to serve the Hispanic population understand the important role of the Latino family (Santiago 2011). Initiatives that expand the supporting role of the family from high school through college degree completion will result in the highest achievement for current Hispanic students as well as setting up the road to success for future generations.

REFERENCES

- Altschul, Inna. 2012. "Linking Socioeconomic Status to the Academic Achievement of Mexican American Youth Through Parent Involvement in Education." *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research* 1:13-30.
- Becerra, David. 2010. "Differences in the Perceptions of Barriers to College Enrollment and the Completion of a Degree Among Latinos in the United States." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 9:187-201.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." Pp. 241-58 in *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J.E. Richardson. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Bregman, Allyson Blair. 2010. "Educational Aspirations: Supporting College Trajectories for Latino Youth." PhD dissertation, Department of Education and Psychology, The University of Michigan.
- Brown, Sarita E., Deborah Santiago and Estela Lopez. 2003. "Latinos in Education: Today and Tomorrow." *Change* 35:40-46.
- Buchman, Claudia. 2011. "Theory and Research in the Sociology of Education." pp. 441-456 in *The Sociology of Education*, edited by Alan R. Sadovnik. New York: Routledge.
- Cobas, Jose A., Jorge Duany and Joe R. Feagin. 2009. *How the United States Racializes Latinos: White Hegemony and Its Consequences*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Coleman, James S. 1988. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology* 94:95-120.
- Crosnoe, Robert. 2005. "The Diverse Experiences of Hispanic Students in the American Educational System." *Sociological Forum* 20:561-588.
- De Gaetano, Yvonne. 2007. "The Role of Culture in Engaging Latino Parents' Involvement in School." *Urban Education* 42:145-162.

- Fry, Richard. 2002. "Latinos in Higher Education: Many Enroll, Too Few Graduate." *Pew Hispanic Center*. Retrieved March 2, 2012 (<http://www.pewhispanic.org>).
- Gonzalez, Kenneth P., Carla Stoner and Jennifer E. Jovel. 2003. "Examining the Role of Social Capital in Access to College for Latinas: Toward a College Opportunity Framework." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 2:146-170.
- Ingels, S.J. and Scott, L.A. (2004). The High School Sophomore Class of 2002: A Demographic Description First Results From the Base Year of the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (NCES 2004-371). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Kao, Grace and Lindsay Taggart Rutherford. 2007. "Does Social Capital Still Matter? Immigrant Minority Disadvantage in School-Specific Social Capital and Its Effects on Academic Achievement." *Sociological Perspectives* 50: 27-52.
- McWhirter, Ellen Hawley, Danielle M. Torres, Susana Salgado and Marina Valdez. 2007. "Perceived Barriers and Postsecondary Plans in Mexican American and White Adolescents." *Journal of Career Assessment* 15:119-138.
- Ortiz, Vilma. 1989. "Language Background and Literacy among Hispanic Young Adults." *Social Problems* 36:149-164.
- Perna, Laura Walter. 2000. "Differences in the Decision to Attend College among African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites." *The Journal of Higher Education* 71:117-141.
- Pino, Nathan W., Gloria P. Martinez-Ramos and William L. Smith. 2012. "Latinos, the Academic Ethic, and the Transition to College." *Journal of Latinos and Education* 11:17-31.
- Portes, Alejandro. 1998. "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24:1-24.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone*. New York. Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.
- Qian, Zhenchao and Sampson Lee Blair. 1999. "Racial/Ethnic Differences in Educational Aspirations of High School Seniors." *Sociological Perspectives* 42:605-625.
- Riegle-Crumb, Catherine and Rebecca M. Callahan. 2009. "Exploring the Academic Benefits of Friendship Ties for Latino Boys and Girls." *Social Science Quarterly* 90:611-631.

- Rios-Aguilar, Cecilia and Judy Marquez Kiyama. 2012. "Funds of Knowledge: An Approach to Studying Latina(o) Students' Transition to College." *Journal of Latinos in Education* 11:2-16.
- Sadovnik, Alan R. 2011. "Theory and Research in the Sociology of Education." pp. 3-21 in *The Sociology of Education*, edited by Alan R. Sadovnik. New York: Routledge.
- Saenz, Rogelio. 2010. Population Bulletin Update: Latinos in the United States 2010. Population Reference Bureau. Retrieved November 4, 2011 (<http://www.prb.org>).
- Saenz, Victor B. and Luis Ponjuan. 2009. "The Vanishing Latino Male in Higher Education." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 8:54-89.
- Santiago, Deborah A. 2011. "All Together: the Role of Latino Families in Higher Education." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* Retrieved March 3, 2012 (<http://chronicle.com>).
- Saunders, Marisa and Irene Serna. 2004. "Making College Happen: The College Experiences of First-Generation Latino Students." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 3:146-163.
- Schaefer, Richard T. 2006. *Racial and Ethnic Groups*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2000. "Persons of Hispanic or Latino Origin." *State and Country Quickfacts*. Retrieved April 6, 2011 (<http://quickfacts.census.gov>).
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2009. "USA Quickfacts." *State and Country Quickfacts*. Retrieved April 6, 2011 (<http://quickfacts.census.gov>).
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. EDUCATION LONGITUDINAL STUDY (ELS), 2002: BASE YEAR [Computer file]. ICPSR04275-v1. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [producer], 2004. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-10-11.
- U.S. Department of Education. 2010. "The Condition of Education 2010: Educational Attainment." *National Center for Education Statistics*. Retrieved March 2, 2011 (<http://nces.ed.gov>).
- Wojtkiewicz, Roger A. and Katharine M. Donato. 1995. "Hispanic Educational Attainment: The Effects of Family Background and Nativity." *Social Forces* 2:559-574.

VITA

Tina Felisa Loya Villarreal was born in San Marcos, Texas on September 4, 1977, the daughter of Oblira and Abelardo Loya. She attended San Marcos High School, then went on to earn her Bachelor of Science degree in Applied Sociology at Texas State University-San Marcos in San Marcos, Texas, in December 2002. After working in the private sector for several years, Tina returned to Texas State University-San Marcos to work and entered the Master of Arts in Sociology Program; which she completed in May 2012.

Permanent email address: tv12@txstate.edu

This thesis was typed by Tina Loya Villarreal.