THE CONTEXT OF SUCCESS: MEXICAN EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IN THE NORTHEAST

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by
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ABSTRACT

The Context of Success: Mexican Educational Achievement in the Northeast
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In the United States, many, including those who are native-born and those who settle here, faithfully espouse the American Dream. Commonly, higher education is seen as the main pathway to achieve this and success more broadly. However, not much discussion or consideration is given to the processes by which immigrants and their children must adjust and settle into a new country, community, and schooling system in order to achieve entrance into institutions of higher education. Several factors influence the difficulties that immigrant and their descendants will experience, as well as the pathways of mobility available to them. Perhaps one of the most important factors affecting immigrants' circumstances is the local context in which they are received. The primary goal of this dissertation is to uncover the factors facilitating Mexican students' transition into higher education as well as how local context affects this process and their broader treatment in southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City.

This dissertation addresses two main research questions: What factors and mechanisms facilitate Mexican students' transition into higher education, and how does local context influence this process. The first question seeks to identify the resources and difficulties that Mexican students encounter in their educational trajectory in order to analyze how these students and their parents are being received in their communities of settlement and how this affects their mobility. The second question aims to specify the extent to which local circumstances influence not just educational attainment and

mobility, but also discrimination and racialization. While much, namely assimilation, research has examined this group's mobility and integration, it has not adequately theorized the effect of location on mobility and integration. Additionally, assimilation research prioritizes mobility and integration over discrimination and racialization. While research on Mexican's discrimination and racialization is not as prevalent, it also does not focus on how location affects these dynamics. Taking existing scholarship's inadequacies into account and since most research on US Mexicans is focused on those living in the southwest, it is crucial to investigate the mobility, integration, discrimination, and racialization that Mexicans experience in locations outside of the southwest.

Given that this project is concerned with understanding young Mexican' experiences with education and settlement, qualitative inquiry is employed because it provides an opportunity to intricately observe social life. Sixty individuals, thirty-five are 1.5- and second-generation Mexicans from southeastern Pennsylvania, and twenty-five are second-generation and undocumented individuals from New York City, were interviewed for this study. All Pennsylvania respondents attended the same university and all New York respondents attended the same college. Criteria to participate in this research included having parents who migrated to the United States from Mexico, attended high school in Pennsylvania or New York, and being enrolled in the selected college in each state. The latter two criteria are efforts to make sure that participants have spent a significant amount of time living or a significant phase of their lives—especially high school and the transition to college—in the states under investigation in order to gauge the coming of age and higher education experiences of young Mexicans in these new destinations

Chapters two, three, and four encompass the empirical sections of this dissertation. Chapter two examines participants' communities and schools in Southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City as well as their families' characteristics. Such an examination demonstrates how students' local circumstances have a tremendous impact on their (educational) mobility because this context is where other significant factors such as family, school, community, and social networks exert their influence. Moreover, local contexts as well as populations are shown to affect the types of resources and constraints that respondents encountered along their educational pathways. Time of migration and arrival by participants' families in their respective communities also plays a vital role in respondents' educational attainment. Participants' transitions into young adulthood are also shaped by their local contexts. This chapter provides vital insights given its location-based analytical lens of educational attainment and young adulthood.

Chapter three analyzes the ways in which respondents are racialized as Mexicans and immigrants. Here respondents' experiences in their respective high schools, university, college, and southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City are looked at. As well as local context, local populations also influence the ways in which respondents experience racialization as well as various forms of discrimination and microaggressions. Respondents' encounters with these race-based forms of denigration illuminate the multiple ways in which Mexican students' transition from high school to higher education and beyond can be made more difficult, blocked, and ultimately stopped. Although respondents are educationally successful, this has not translated into structural assimilation. This chapter contributes toward the building of a context-based theory of integration and racialization.

Chapter four addresses the main question behind this project: what factors and mechanisms facilitate students' transition from high school to college. Across both locations, students' entrance into institutions of higher education is aided by the presence of multiple factors working in different combinations for each student; mainly relationships with mentors, friends, and family as well as participation in programs geared specifically to help marginalized students gain entrance into higher education. Local context influences the amount and density of resources that students have at their disposal toward their entrance into college. Such factors are significant because of the ways in which they counteract or buffer some of the constraints, difficulties, and racialization that students encounter in their pursuit of higher education. For Pennsylvania students especially, it appears to be more useful to consider the theory of cumulative causation or self-perpetuation of international migration—where each instance of migration generates more social capital and consequently a higher likelihood of additional migration in sending communities—and not just assimilation perspectives to understand how Mexican higher education attainment occurs.

Este tesis doctoral está dedicado a

mi madre, padre, y hermana major.

Esto no hubiera sido possible

sin sus esfuerzos, sacrificios, y ejemplos.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

In the United States, many, including those who are native-born and those who settle here, faithfully espouse the American Dream. Commonly, higher education is seen as the main pathway to achieve this and success more broadly. However, not much discussion or consideration is given to the processes by which immigrants and their children must adjust and settle into a new country, community, and schooling system in order to achieve entrance into institutions of higher education. Several factors influence the difficulties that immigrant and their descendants will experience, as well as the pathways of mobility available to them. Perhaps one of the most important factors affecting immigrants' circumstances is the local context in which they are received. The primary goal of this dissertation is to uncover the factors facilitating Mexican students' transition into higher education as well as how local context affects this process and their broader treatment in southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City.

Past sociological scholarship demonstrates that Mexican Americans have among the lowest educational levels of any racial or ethnic group in the US (Alba and Nee, 2003; Gandara and Contreras, 2009; Haller et al., 2011; Perlmann, 2005; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2008; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Telles and Ortiz, 2008). A variety of frameworks have tried to explain this low academic achievement. Yet, regardless of the approach taken, the focus has been on students who do not make it into college so that by default educational failure is emphasized. Since only a small amount of this research investigates how Mexicans are able to enter higher education, it is rare to read about how Mexican students understand and achieve educational success. Most sociological research on this topic relies on quantitative methods and assimilation frameworks to determine

which factors, and combinations of factors, render Mexican students least likely to go to college. Moreover, qualitative research focuses on the difficulties faced by some Mexican and other minority students in specific high schools. Overall, existing scholarship does not focus on students who have recently entered higher education and even less so on how they were able to get there.

Furthermore, the influence of location on Mexican educational attainment and broader settlement is not adequately scrutinized. Location is important given that Mexican migration since the 1990's is characterized by a large-scale dispersion to new or nontraditional destinations across the US (Hirschman and Massey, 2008; Zuñiga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005). Even though it is not yet possible to conclusively measure intergenerational mobility in new destinations, researchers must account for the increase of varied contexts of reception immigrants face (Marrow, 2013) since this context along with immigrants' own characteristics influence the conditions and opportunities they encounter (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Local context is especially vital to consider pertaining to educational attainment given that educational requirements, standards, policies, and resources for K-12 and higher education vary within and across states.

In this dissertation I argue that to get a clearer understanding of any difficulties Mexican students face in education, we must listen to the voices of those students who by moving from high school into college have managed to "overcome the odds." By examining factors relevant for current Mexican college students we can better understand how others might follow and the costs they might bear in this process. Using in-depth interviews and both physical and digital fieldwork with 60 Mexicans—including those who are undocumented, 1.5-generation, and second-generation—who have settled and

attend college in southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City, I investigate the factors and mechanisms which helped respondents transition to higher education. I hone in on the difficulties students they faced in moving from high school to college; the things they found helpful and unhelpful along the way; and how they perceived their school environments.

In addition, the influence of local context on these circumstances is examined. This dissertation concentrates on the *process* of educational attainment, not just the outcome at a single point in time, for Mexican students because the majority of research on this topic emphasizes students who do not advance to college. Taken together asking questions dealing with the above mentioned issues provides a clearer understanding regarding how Mexican college students in the locations mentioned make sense of their educational and broader environments. In fact, through the stories, narratives, and interactions that participants shared, much needed insight and nuance about how Mexicans are becoming adults in these new destinations is provided.

It is crucial to engage in research concerning this group for at least three reasons. First, this group is uniquely positioned at the intersection of two important national issues: education and immigration. However, much attention, both in mainstream media and in politics is afforded to framing (undocumented) migration as a problem of national security where Latinx[i] and specifically Mexicans are viewed as a threat to the US (Chavez, 2013). President Donald Trump's anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican rhetoric in

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[i] Alternative to Hispanic, Latino/a, and Latin@ aiming to include the various identities of Latin American-descent peoples; especially those who identify as gender non-conforming, trans, queer, agender, or gender fluid.

2015 and 2016 is just the most recent example. Such rhetoric has been present at least since 1965 where newspaper and television coverage of Latinx immigration as well as politicians have associated it with illegality, government failure, a threat, a flood, and an invasion (The Brookings Institution, 2008; Chavez, 2013; Massey and Pren, 2012a; Saenz and Douglas, 2015). Simultaneously, immigration is usually discussed as the only relevant issue affecting Latinx so that little consideration is given to the various inequalities affecting this group.

Second, we do not know much about how members of this group make sense of their educational experiences and thus very little is known regarding the processes that lead these students into college. Examining those making it to college may provide additional insight into structural, cultural, and other factors promoting educational mobility and that maybe lacking in Mexican communities. Last, it is important to provide nuanced accounts of this group's experiences because they are commonly homogenized as immigrants without much consideration of other aspects of their experiences that may be salient in their educational and broader experiences. In what follows I begin with a brief history of Mexicans in the US. I then move on to discuss the common approaches taken by researchers regarding Mexican low academic achievement.

History of Mexicans in the US

Although current Mexican college students are the focus of this dissertation it is vital to contextualize their experiences to past and present conditions[ii]. While most discussions about Mexicans today focus on immigration, their experiences in this country

[ii]This is not to say that all Mexicans in this country have had the same experiences but that they have been subject to similar circumstances because of their perceived homogeneity and racial inferiority.

have centered on issues of discrimination, labor, geography, and politics (Glenn, 2002; Massey, Durand, and Malone, 2002; Montejano, 1987; Smith, 2006; Telles and Ortiz, 2008; Zuñiga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005). Mexican immigration to the US is the oldest and largest continual flow from any country (Passel, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera, 2012) set off initially by the US annexation of what is now the Southwest in the 1840s and 1850s (Zuñiga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005). At this time, the overwhelming majority of Mexicans in the US resided in California and Texas. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, Mexicans were treated as second-class citizens subject to lynching, school segregation, segmented labor markets, and coercive labor practices (Black, 1997; Glenn, 2002; Montejano, 1987; Telles and Ortiz, 2008). Mexican culture was viewed as inherently inferior and in need of correction (Glenn, 2002; Telles and Ortiz, 2008). This is also when stereotypes of Mexicans as uneducated, ignorant, corruptive, lazy, and ultimately unworthy of becoming American were developed.

In the 1920s and 30s many eminent scholars, researchers, and other educational officials collectively viewed Mexicans, Blacks, and American Indians as innately less intelligent than Whites (Valencia, 1997). These views are part of the longstanding deficit thinking[iii] model used by scholars, educators, and policymakers to explain the lower academic performance of students of color, and that has created the myth that Mexicans do not value education (Valencia, 2015). Still, Mexicans faced racial hostility and many other difficulties trying to receive an adequate education. Throughout Texas where education was considered the worst for Mexican students (Grebler, Moore, & Guzman,

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[iii] Menchaca (1997) provides an examination of deficit thinking's foundation in US colonial times.

1970), separate and rudimentary schools lacking electricity, drinking water, libraries, and well-trained teachers "guaranteed to produce as little academic learning as possible" (Black, 1997: 15). By 1930, 90 percent of Texas schools were racially segregated (Rangel and Alcala, 1972). Such schools were a consequence of racist behavior and values placing more importance on Mexican children's agricultural labor more than their academic achievement (Black, 1997). The poor education Mexicans received in Texas between 1910-1930 may have had extensive consequences in limiting future generations' adult literacy, occupational status, and income (Black, 1997) given the majority of Mexicans entering the US lived in Texas for some time during this period (Foley, 1990).

Between 1929 and 1941, known as the era of deportations, federal, state, and local officials violently undid previously encouraged Mexican migration to politically appease white workers (Massey et al., 2002). During this time, the creation of the Border Patrol and fortification of the US-Mexico border were significant in racializing Mexicans as deportable (Ngai, 2004). In addition, public health officials and policy makers constructed Mexicans as genetically predisposed to sickness and diseased so that they were unfit for belonging in the US (Molina, 2006). Mexicans were thus viewed as undeserving and unhealthy migrants who stole jobs and took advantage of US society. Consequently, Mexicans were easily targeted as a convenient scapegoat for the despair of the Great Depression (Balderrama and Rodriguez, 2006; Molina, 2006). As a result, around one million Mexicans, of which approximately 60 percent were US-born children, were "repatriated" during the 1930s (Balderrama and Rodriguez, 2006). Such losses stifled the socioeconomic development of Mexican communities and interrupted, and in some cases ended, Mexican children's education (Balderrama and Rodriguez, 2006).

Again, this tremendously affected future generations of Mexicans in the US.

After this repatriation, the US government continued to be inconsistent toward Mexican migration. By 1942, the Roosevelt administration negotiated a temporary agreement, the Bracero Program[iv], to import hundreds of thousands of Mexican farmworkers (Massey et al., 2002). A recession after the Korean War and McCarthy era paranoia contributed to make "illegal" migration a political issue in the mid-1950s. In response to citizen's demands to alleviate this problem and grower's ongoing demands for more workers, the INS launched "Operation Wetback." This operation deported another 1 million Mexicans, both US-born and those born in Mexico, in 1954 alone, and doubled recruitment of braceros again. The absurd nature of this operation is evidenced by some workers being deported by the INS who then were transported back by the US Department of Labor. In total, between 1942 and 1964 an estimated 5 million Mexicans entered the US (Massey et al., 2002).

From 1965-1985, known as the era of undocumented migration, hundreds of thousands of former braceros became familiarized with US employment practices and routines, ways of life, and learned English (Massey et al., 2002). This knowledge was passed on to friends and family back in Mexico, reducing the costs of future trips and increasing potential benefits. During this time, Mexico experienced rapid population growth and a poor economy that contributed to the entry of about 6 million migrants, of which 81 percent were undocumented (Massey et al., 2002). Still, the patriotic sacrifice of several thousand Mexican American soldiers during World War II, Mexican American

[iv]Bracero loosely translates to farmhand. US industry and government officials only wanted the Mexicans' labor but not all else that came along. There have been other smaller binational agreements going back as far as 1909 between Presidents Porfirio Diaz and William H. Taft.

movement into cities, and an emerging adult second generation led to the growth of a small middle class in the US (Telles and Ortiz, 2008). The 1960s also saw the emergence of a "Chicano" generation of leaders who moved away from assimilation and toward racial affirmation in order to acquire civil rights for Mexicans (Telles and Ortiz, 2008). For some, this identity came to symbolize Mexican Americans' cultural and political autonomy in opposition to assimilation and acceptance into whiteness (Telles and Ortiz, 2008). Leaders favored direct confrontation in seeking dramatic changes in the social, educational, and economic positions of Mexicans.

Following the civil rights movement and other organizations, leaders formed the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) in 1968. Since leaders had long acknowledged education as the main barrier to Mexican economic mobility, MALDEF's litigation strategies focused on desegregation, school financing, and education in general (Telles and Ortiz, 2008). Mexicans however continued to be viewed as inferior and the limited education available to them continued to be segregated and inadequate. This view was aided in part because of continued deficit thinking and mythmaking regarding Mexicans and education. In the 1960s, deficit thinking shifted from genetic to cultural explanations (Valencia, 2015). Mexican children and families, especially those who were poorer, were targeted by much literature blaming their low educational attainment on pathological families and dysfunctional homes, especially parents' lack of valuing education and other inadequacies (Valencia and Black, 2002). Such thinking was influenced by cultural anthropologist Oscar Lewis' culture of poverty model (Valencia, 2015). By 1970 only 24.2 percent of Mexicans 25 years and older in the US attained a high school degree or more. Per deficit thinking, these low rates of high

school graduation were not a consequence of the structural realities—e.g., low expectations of children, segregated communities and schools, racial discrimination, lack of opportunities—which Mexican and other poor minority students of color experienced.

Stagflation and perceived disgraces at home and abroad[v] during the 1970s once again made Mexican migration a "problem" (Massey et al., 2002). A blend of social economic anxieties, the growing visibility of undocumented Mexicans, as well as the framing of immigration as an issue of border control and national security encouraged lawmakers to find a "solution." In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) passed to placate contradictory interests (Massey et al., 2002). Sanctions were imposed on employers who consciously hired undocumented workers to eliminate the "attractiveness" of US jobs. The Labor Department's budget increased to conduct more worksite inspections or "immigration raids." Additional resources were allocated to expand the Border Patrol in order to deter migrants from entering "illegally." To placate Latinx lobbies, immigrant advocates, and civil rights groups, "amnesty"[vi] was provided for long term undocumented residents. Those "legalized" were required to learn English and take civics classes. Agricultural growers were also placated by the inclusion of a special legalization program for current farmworkers. "Amnesty" allowed millions of Mexicans to move freely for the first time, compare labor markets, and settle down in nontraditional sites (Zuñiga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005). IRCA granted permanent legal

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[v] E.g, Vietnam War loss, Fidel Castro remaining in power, the takeover of the US embassy in Tehran.

[vi] IRCA granted legal status to those who had resided continuously in US since at least January 1st, 1982. These individuals still had to pay a fine, back taxes, and admit to guilt in coming "illegally."

residence to about 2.3 million Mexicans by 1992, of whom, most lived in California (Durand, Massey, and Capoferro, 2005). Increased native hostility and ruined economic prospects encouraged departure from California (Durand et al., 2005).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Mexicans' low educational achievement was also framed as a problem. Beginning with the National Commission on Excellence in Education's (1983) report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, the concept of "at risk" has been used within educational literature to focus on the factors predisposing some students for failure (Valencia, 2015). Mexicans and other Latinx are considered at risk students since they are overrepresented among poor and low-SES families (Valencia and Black, 2002). By the 1990s, this label became entrenched within educational research and among educators and policymakers (Valencia and Solórzano, 1997). The primary focus of this research is on individual and familial shortcomings including poverty, single parenthood, race or ethnicity, and English as a second language (Valencia, 2010). As such, the "at risk" label is a troublesome 1990s interpretation "of the 1960s cultural and familial deficit framework that locates alleged pathologies in the individual, family, and community" (Valencia, 2015, p.43) instead of focusing on larger forces that (re)produce inequalities. In April of 1990, Lauro Cavazos, a former US Secretary of Education and high-ranking Latinx in President Bush' administration, added to the perpetuation of deficit thinking used to explain Latinx low academic achievement in publicly lamenting that this group no longer valued or emphasized education[vii].

Segregation for Mexican students also continued and intensified throughout the

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[vii] See Snider (1990) for a detailed discussion of this incident.

1980s and 1990s (Donato, Menchaca, and Valencia, 1991; Orfield and Yun 1999). This was especially the case in states, namely in the southwest, where students had the largest enrollments and as Latinx became the largest minority group in the US (Orfield and Yun 1999). The Mexican population experienced tremendous growth in the 1980s and 1990s, almost an increase of 15 million people (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). Concurrently, between 1986 and 2008, the undocumented Mexican population not only grew from 3 million to 12 million people, but it expanded from a circular flow of male workers to three states into a nationwide phenomenon of settled families (Massey, Durand, and Pren, 2016). Such growth and change in the undocumented Mexican population has been attributed to enhanced border enforcement and militarization[viii] resulting from "self-interested politicians, bureaucrats, and pundits who framed undocumented migration as a crisis without regard to its underlying realities" (Massey et al., 2016, p. 6).

For instance, as the Bracero program was ended in 1964, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act limited Mexican migration to the US for the first time, and subsequent legislation in the late 1970s, as well as IRCA in 1986 further restricted it, migration did not stop, it simply continued as an undocumented flow (Massey and Pren, 2012b). Other factors contributing to Mexican population growth included national economic trends and wider globalization leading to economic transformations that demanded and integrated Mexican labor into economic sectors in various nontraditional communities of settlement (see Massey, 2008). Locally, the outmigration of native-born youth and the aging and low growth of native-born populations led industries to depend

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[viii] High-intensity floodlights, high steel fencing, Border Patrol officers stationed every few hundred yards, motion detectors, infrared scopes, trip wires, etc. were installed along the border.

on foreign and especially Mexican labor (Garcia, 2005; Zuñiga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005). As a result of the growth in this population as well as politicians and media coverage continuing to associate Latinx immigration with illegality, government failure, a threat, a flood, and an invasion (The Brookings Institution, 2008; Chavez, 2013; Massey and Pren, 2012a; Saenz and Douglas, 2015) legislation since the 1990s has increasingly been enacted to address this constructed "problem."

This included California Governor Pete Wilson who perpetuated rhetoric of Mexican migrants as "uncontrollable" and "unchecked" "illegal" migration (Ono and Sloop, 2002) and portrayed them as criminals and a threat to the American way of life (Gonzales, 2016). Not coincidentally, California Proposition 187, enacted in 1994, prohibited undocumented individuals from using state health care, public education, and other social services. At the national level, in 1996, both the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWOARA) restricted undocumented individuals' access to welfare, food stamps, and health insurance (Gonzales, 2016). This type of legislation is influenced by the long-standing image of (undocumented) Mexican migrants coming to this country to take advantage of its resources.

In addition, the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA), in combination IIRAIRA, greatly increased the crimes resulting in deportation, made deportation compulsory for all migrants sentenced to a minimum of one year in prison, and sharply limited undocumented people's eligibility for relief from removal

proceedings[ix] (Gonzales, 2016). More recent well-known examples of this type of legislation include Hazelton, Pennsylvania's 2006 ordinance that made hiring undocumented migrants a punishable offense and fined landlords who rented to these migrants. Most notoriously, Arizona's 2010 Senate Bill 1070—better known as “Show Me Your Papers”—required state law enforcement officials to attempt to ascertain an individual’s immigration status based on reasonable suspicion. Through a conflation of Mexican, immigrant, and “illegal,” Arizona SB 1070 resulted in the legal justification for racial profiling (Gonzales, 2016).

Several states have followed and even surpassed Arizona’s footsteps. Continued and expanded collaboration between Immigration and Customs Enforcement and local law enforcement has also increased the insecurity that migrant communities experience (Seghetti, Vina, and Ester, 2004; Stumpf, 2006). Legislation at all levels has blurred the distinctions between immigrants, Mexicans, “illegals,” and criminals since September 11, 2001. The contemporary emphasis on citizenship inspection continues to designate Mexicans as second-class citizens with inferior rights (Romero, 2011). All of this is in line with the US government's long history of racist immigration policies and law enforcement practices (Romero, 2011).

Recently only the proposed Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act addresses the education of Mexicans or Latinx at a national level. Locally, various states have implemented measures for undocumented students to receive in-state tuition and financial aid toward higher education. Still, as Latinx have become the largest

[ix] For further discussion of the mandates of these two laws, see Gonzales (2016).

minority group in the US, Latinx children are more likely than whites and Asians to be segregated in schools, attend schools of lower quality, and attend schools where a majority of students are poor (Orfield and Ee, 2014). Not surprisingly, residential segregation among Latinx has increased slightly in metropolitan areas since 1970, while their spatial isolation has increased substantially (Rugh and Massey, 2014). In addition, there has been an increase in anti-Latinx sentiment and hostility in the 21st century (Feagin, 2014; Rugh and Massey, 2014). Given the anti-immigrant, anti-Latinx, and anti-Mexican environment throughout the country since the 1990s, Mexican students' low educational achievement remains overwhelmingly unaddressed by policymakers, the media, and other societal institutions.

Education and Success Today

Mexicans continue to have low levels of educational achievement. Recent figures from the American Community Survey show that this group is twice more likely to not graduate from high school than the national population. Consequently, 27 percent of Mexicans in this country live in poverty (Motel and Patten, 2012). These outcomes can be traced to the history, outlined in the previous section, which is rarely present in the discussions of Mexicans in the US. Still, historical and ongoing patterns of inferior schools, exclusionary curricula, undertrained and insensitive teachers, and other restricted resources have contributed to the low educational achievement of Mexicans (Lopez and Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valencia, 2002). The structure of schools and schooling play an integral part in this low achievement (Conchas, 2001; Valencia, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). This is important to remember given that obtaining a college degree is a major determinant of who gets to enter the US middle class (Delgado, 2007).

However, despite a history of class conflict the myth persists that the majority of the US population belongs to the middle class (Zweig, 2000). Simultaneously, the upward mobility myth assumes that if one works hard enough they will be able to advance beyond their starting social class (Delgado, 2007). Combined, these myths portray the US as a land of unlimited opportunities and what many, particularly immigrants, refer to as the American Dream. In such a land, the reward for self-reliance, hard work, and overcoming obstacles is a gradual ascent toward success in terms of greater security, material wealth, and fulfillment (Delgado, 2007). Although such myths ignore structural realities, success and failure are still thought to result mostly from one's own merits and actions. At the same time, today's Mexican Americans and others face a different economic structure with more demanding class requisites[x] for success than past white ethnics (Jaynes, 2004). Thus, the ability to attain these skills is compromised for most minorities because of the difficulties experienced by all poor people in the US. Still, the myths outlined here are integral to the main frameworks, assimilation models, used to comprehend Mexicans' educational attainment and broader social outcomes.

Conceptual Approaches to Mexican Educational Achievement

Assimilation Variants

Assimilation theory is considered "the master concept in both social theory and public discourse" used to determine the path to be followed by immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: 44). Though some use assimilation theory to understand contemporary

[x]A twelfth grade education and "middle class presentation of self" are the very minimal necessary to attain reasonable labor market success (Jaynes, 2004).

immigration, it was developed by the Chicago school of sociology[xi] (Garcia, 2004; Steinberg, 2007) to make sense of the large influx of European immigrants into Chicago and other cities over a century ago. Warner and Srole (1945) argued that immigrant groups bring cultural traits from their country of origin, which, over generations, they discard in favor of American culture. Assimilation is crucial for immigrants to move into the US middle class (Warner and Srole, 1945) since it is thought that economic success is contigent on the extent to which immigrants and their children are Americanized. Gordon (1964) crucially distinguished structural assimilation or the forming of relationships between immigrant and "American" groups as the most important component of immigrant integration. Over time, various scholars have applied and expanded the ideas of the Chicago school, Warner and Srole, and Gordon.

Today two interpretations of assimilation are prominent: new assimilation and segmented assimilation. The former, is distinctive in that it prioritizes the role of certain institutions, through civil rights enforcement by the state, in facilitating assimilation (see Alba and Nee, 1997, 2003). Under this variant assimilation is a social process to be explicated mostly by socioeconomic outcomes occurring over several generations. Alba and Nee (2003) posit that educational attainment among Mexicans is quite low given that this *immigrant* group lacks substantial social, financial, and human capital. Perlmann (2011) argues that Mexicans' alarmingly high rates of high school dropout are influenced by men's early entry into the workforce and homemaking for women. Another key point of this perspective is that Mexicans and other Latinx are well on their way to fully

[xi]The work of Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, and Louis Wirth greatly influenced research about how immigrants adjusted and lived in the US (Garcia 2004).

assimilating into the white middleclass mainstream just as previous Southern and Eastern European immigrants did. Alba and Nee (2003) as well as Perlmann (2005) claim that it is only a matter of time, perhaps four or five generations, before Mexicans reach parity with the white middle class mainstream.

Segmented assimilation, uniquely differentiates the possibility of "downward" mobility given U.S. structural barriers including racialization and is contingent upon an immigrant group's community and cultural characteristics (see Portes and Rumbaut, 2001 and Portes and Zhou, 1993). Moreover, segmented assimilation focuses on the more recent second-generation youth. The starting premise of this framework is an unequal US society where the children of immigrant's experience either upward or downward mobility depending on an immigrant group's human capital, their context of reception, family structure, and community structure (Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2008; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou, 1999). Mexicans and Mexican Americans are more likely to experience downward mobility—disadvantages such as poverty, low levels of education, and relegation to inferior menial jobs—because of a lack of professional occupations, a negative context of reception that includes association with nonwhite physical characteristics and illegal status, and a lack of coethnic community resources (Haller et al., 2011; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2008).

Although each strand of assimilation research elucidates important factors, e.g. institutions and group contexts, affecting immigrants and their descendants' educational attainment and broader incorporation, a substantial debate exists regarding the efficacy of these models in explaining the experiences of Mexicans and their descendants. Existing empirical evidence on Mexican integration does not suggest that Mexicans are following

either a “downward” assimilation pattern as predicted by segmented assimilation, or a more linear pattern of intergenerational mobility predicted by classical and “new” assimilation theory. Such circumstances are partly a consequence of each model’s shortcomings. New assimilation studies tend to analyze national data sets from the early to mid-1990s. Though the slight mobility of Mexicans is present, we know very little about how this pattern emerged. More broadly, there is a lack of attention to the historical circumstances, not associated with immigration, confronting Mexicans in the US. This model's emphasis on institutions also ignores the retrenchment of both civil rights gains and the curtailment of state involvement because of neoliberalism.

Segmented assimilation work also relies on older research focusing on the experiences of second-generation individuals from San Diego and Miami, and over relies on an oppositional culture framework to explain low academic achievement. A vital and unique feature of segmented assimilation is its stress on how maintaining a close ethnic network of support helps second-generation students attain educational and, eventually, middle class success. However, culture is dichotomized and homogenized so that white middle class culture is the key to success in this framework. Native-born minority culture is viewed in direct opposition so that it is equated with downward assimilation or failure. An immigrant culture leads to success only if combined with aspects of white middle class culture and the shunning of native-born minority culture.

The most crucial shortcoming is each framework’s inattention to local context and how this influences educational achievement and broader integration. Much assimilation research focuses on urban studies in traditional immigrant gateway locations (Waters and Jimenez, 2005). Although it is not yet possible to conclusively measure intergenerational

assimilation in new destinations, researchers must account for the increase of varied contexts of reception immigrants face (Marrow, 2011) since this context along with immigrants' own characteristics influence their experiences (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Local context is especially vital to consider pertaining to educational attainment given that educational requirements, standards, policies, and resources for K-12 and higher education vary within and across states. The analytical chapters to follow expound on assimilation theories' shortcomings when it comes to explicating Mexican students' entrance into higher education as well as their broader experiences in southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City. Other important issues that assimilation research does not seriously consider are the effects of gender, class, and undocumented status on the children of immigrants experiences in this country. Besides assimilation theories, there are other conceptual approaches applied to Mexican low academic achievement with similar and also different shortcomings. I focus on some of these approaches below.

Cultural Approaches

In the last few decades, the most expansive work providing explanations as to why Mexican and other students of color have not succeeded academically comes from John Ogbu and his associates (Carter, 2005; Conchas, 2001; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Valencia, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). There are two main arguments that Ogbu and associates make. First, historical racism and institutional oppression have a large influence in shaping "historically oppressed" or involuntary minorities' opposition to paths to success available to whites. Such opposition stems from involuntary minorities' realization, given their historical oppression, of their limited chances of utilizing society's opportunity structure or institutions promoting social mobility. This leads to pessimism,

so that involuntary minorities reject assimilation into the opportunity structure, especially schooling. Accordingly, some minority students develop an oppositional culture against academic success since they tend to equate it with "acting white" (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986).

Second, involuntary minorities strategically adapt to oppression by preserving what they can of their cultural identities. Thus, students develop an "oppositional" identity and culture against academic success because they equate it with "acting white" and see little to no payoff from being engaged in their schooling. Academically successful minority students pay a high cost in that minority peers accuse them of "joining with the enemy." In such scenarios, "oppositional culture" is a resistance to white middle class culture, which is equated with educational success (Romero, 2008). However, at the same time, race and ethnicity are equated with academic success and failure by Ogbu, Portes, and associates (Romero, 2008). Often times it is specifically Mexicans and Blacks who are equated with failure in these analyses.

Although not strictly considered a proponent of deficit thinking, Ogbu's work has been criticized as being guided by such thinking (see Valencia, 2015). Proponents of deficit thinking focus on the failure of racial and ethnic minorities as a consequence of motivational and other familial and cultural deficits (see Barajas and Pierce, 2001 and Valencia and Black, 2002 for examples). Deficit thinking provides individualist accounts blaming minority children and their families for failing to graduate from high school and college because their values and or culture do not "adequately" socialize children to become academically successful (Barajas and Pierce, 2001; Valencia and Black, 2002; Valencia, 2015). Mexican students' educational failure is thus attributed to a deficient

culture or family that does not value education[xii]. Student success seems to be possible through the acceptance of this country's individualistic, meritocratic, and other white middle class values (Barajas and Pierce, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Ultimately, in Ogbu's and other work, and in deficit thinking more broadly, academic failure seems to be a consequence of racial minority students' nonwhite, particularly Latinx and African American, cultural identities.

Other research has found that academic success does not come at the cost of a minority identity for all students (Carter, 2005; Conchas, 2001; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Villanueva, Hubbard, and Mehan, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). These studies show that minority students do not have to choose between maintaining a minority identity and succeeding in school because some students view school success as a characteristic of belonging to the middle class. Consequently, because students are in or aspire to belong to the middle class, succeeding in school is seen as an appropriate behavior for them. Some researchers argue that the key to school success lies in the students' ability to manage their multiple worlds of school, home, and community (Carter, 2005; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Gibson, Gandara, and Koyama, 2004; Villanueva et al., 1994; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

There are many other shortcomings to Ogbu's work and research espousing deficit thinking. To mention a few[xiii], this type of research fails to account for the

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[xii]Much empirical research demonstrates that Mexican and Mexican American parents emphasize and value education as much as any other group (Gandara, 1995; Gibson et al., 2004; Valencia and Black, 2002; Valencia 2015).

[xiii] See Valencia and Black (2002) and Valencia (2015) for a discussion of the theoretical and methodological weaknesses of this research.

influence of racial discrimination and social inequalities, both within schools and outside of them, on the educational outcome of students of color and other marginalized students. Such research also ignores the long history of courageous struggle for educational equity that Black, Mexican, and other families of color have engaged in as well as the strengths and promise that these students possess (Valencia and Black, 2002; Valencia, 2015). This type of research also does not consider how historical and local circumstances influence the type of educational opportunities available to students.

School Structure Explanations

The qualitative work of Carter (2005), Flores-Gonzalez (2002), Valenzuela (1999), and Conchas (2001) argue against an "oppositional" culture or "deficiency" to explain minority student's failure and emphasize that the structures of high schools affect minority students' schooling experiences. Although each researcher focuses on a different population and site, there are similarities. The most important is that school structure and teacher treatment of students significantly affects the extent to which students are engaged in their academic work. Consequently, this greatly influences whether or not students "succeed." For instance, the ways in which urban minority students talk, dress, and act are interpreted by school officials as "proving" that they do not care about school. Thus judgments made by teachers and administrators, which play a crucial role in student's academic success and failure, regarding the ability of immigrant and minority students are often informed by ethnic and racial stereotypes (Ferguson, 2000; Alba et al., 2011). Socialization and cultural reproduction occur in schools so that a hierarchy of cultural meanings privileging dominant white middle class culture is enforced (Carter, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). Therefore, minority students feel

teachers deny them the legitimacy of their own nonwhite cultural expressions.

Regarding Ogbu's main arguments, the studies by Carter, Conchas, Flores-Gonzalez, and Valenzuela, demonstrate that students do not equate excelling in school with whiteness and that they hold an oppositional stance toward "the content of their education and the way it is offered to them" (Valenzuela, 1999:19). Furthermore, to various degrees, students' ethnic and racial identities play a significant role in their academic engagement. Student's levels of engagement are closely linked to the tracking within their particular school. Tracking systems within schools are usually segregated along racial lines where those in the "regular" lowest track, usually black, Latinx, and poor, are most susceptible to be ignored, placed in boring unchallenging classes, and perceived as not being committed to academic success. These students are also denied resources and support. Ultimately, this all contributes to students' academic disengagement, low achievement, and alienation. More importantly, low income and minority students are schooled in order to take their place at the bottom of society (Ferguson, 2000). Although there is some emphasis on local context playing a role in the school outcomes for the Mexican and other minority high school students in the above mentioned qualitative studies, these studies mainly focus on high school graduation.

Social Capital

In order to understand success and failure within schools, the structure within schools *and relationships* within them must be considered (Stanton-Salazar, 2004). According to Stanton-Salazar (2011; 2004; 2001) social capital theory explains educational attainment and achievement as intimately linked to having access to supportive networks and relationships. Social capital can be roughly understood as the

connections to individuals and networks providing access to the resources and support facilitating the accomplishment of academic goals. As Stanton-Salazar argues, it is important to distinguish between normative and critical frameworks of social capital. Normative frameworks, which dominate educational research, focus on integrative processes where academic learning, development, and striving are dependent on students' personal engagement into the "social and intellectual fabric of the school" (Stanton-Salazar, 2001:13). Stanton-Salazar argues that such frameworks fail to recognize the hierarchal relations of power and privilege within schools and how they are normalized by white middle class culture. Thus, this framework's assumption that academic success is premised on the internalization of the "right" norms, values, and identities is mistaken.

Within a critical framework, social capital represents a particular intergroup relation between those who have *it* and does who do not, as well as the processes, which consistently protect and reproduce such unequal relations within a particular institution (Stanton-Salazar, 2004). Under this framework, Mexican and minority students succeed when they have the institutional support, through relationships and networks, to make sense of the unspoken rules that organize school life[xiv] which determine success and failure. As Stanton-Salazar (2001:13) argues such support is important because

> school personnel treat students in a caring manner, [thus] creating the conditions for "bonding;" in turn, students come to identify with, and conform to, the established order; now integrated, students experience a heightened degree of motivation and make the necessary efforts to meet academic demands.

Social capital then must be understood as at least a two-dimensional occurrence

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[xiv]This includes the determination of what counts as ability and talent, how opportunities and resources are distributed, and how deviants and outcasts are created within schools (see Stanton-Salazar, 2004).

functioning within particular politicized institutions with specific power dynamics that simultaneously reflect societal inequalities (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Hence, academic success and failure are constructed through the dominant group's interests within schools.

Education, however, is but one context in which students are brought up. It is important to remember that Mexican and minority students are "subjected to contradictory forces competing over which system of values, ideologies, expectations, emotions, and coping styles are most appropriate, legitimate, and productive" within school, family, peer networks, and "the streets" (Stanton-Salazar, 2004:33). More importantly, Mexican students' patterns of low educational aspirations and achievement must be understood with reference to historical burdens of poverty, exploitation, discrimination, segregation, and nativist hostility cycles experienced by Mexican Americans over the last century (Lopez and Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Unlike the above reviewed research, Stanton-Salazar (2011: 1097) does point out that when Mexican and other low status students do make it to college it is usually due to "interventions that embed them in a network of institutional agents connected to services, organizations, and resources geared toward their empowerment."

Resilience among Minority Students: "Overcoming the Odds"

Relationships, support, and other resources have been recognized as important in research about academically successful minority students. Most recently there has been a growing emphasis on academic resilience within educational research (O'Connor, 2002; Waxman, Gray, and Padron, 2003). While varying definitions of resilience are used by different scholars across disciplines, for the purposes of this study, academic resilience is "the process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been

academically successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding" (Morales and Trotman, 2004). As with this study, one of the main focuses of academic resilience research is to identify factors contributing to the academic success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Gonzalez and Padilla, 1997; Morales, 2010; Waxman et al., 2003).

Akin to Mexican students, Black students must contend with socioeconomic disadvantages and racial discrimination. Various early studies demonstrate that Black children can and do succeed in school despite being poor, facing low teacher expectations, and scarce depictions of their success (Barbarin, 1993; Freiberg, 1993; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1989: cited in Floyd, 1996). Floyd (1996) found three common factors among college bound low-income African American students. 1) Support from family, usually mothers, in the form of "always being there" and "instilling morals and the desire to achieve" (Floyd, 1996, p.185). 2) External support, usually from teachers, coming in forms like believing in students to make it to college and pushing them to excel academically. 3) Each student exhibited perseverance and optimism in advocating "a strong belief in the power of hard work to overcome obstacles" and believing that their academic success would "pay off" (Floyd, 1996, p.186). These factors are consistent with previous resilience studies (Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1989). In a quantitative comparison of resilient and non-resilient Mexican American high school students, Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) found that a supportive academic setting, a sense of belonging, family and peer support, and valuing school were all reliable predictors of resiliency (measured in GPA).

O'Connor (2002) examined Black women who graduated from college in three cohorts: pre-Civil Rights, post-Civil Rights, and post-Reagan. She finds that

economically stable households, early cultivation of numeracy and literacy skills, high academic standards, close monitoring of social and academic activities by significant adults, were common among all her respondents. The last three factors are also present in earlier studies of academic resilience. Arellano and Padilla (1996) found that among thirty Mexican-origin students at Stanford the following four factors were central to their academic success: parental and other adult encouragement and support, an optimistic outlook, persistence, and strong ethnic identification. Twenty-two respondents attributed their optimistic outlook to enrollment in a gifted program (GATE) since early in their schooling (Arellano and Padilla, 1996). One of the first researchers to explain the academic achievement of highly successful Mexicans, all of whom completed postgraduate degrees, Gandara (1995) found among her fifty respondents that individual persistence and support from family were the most important to their successes.

While it is important to identify the factors present among resilient students, it is perhaps more important to identify the processes behind how and which factors work promote resilience (Morales and Trotman, 2004). Among academically resilient low-income college students of color, Morales (2010) found two clusters of protective factors present among a majority. The first cluster is characterized by a desire to move up in social class, caring school personnel, a sense of obligation to one's racial or ethnic group, and a strong future orientation. Cluster two is characterized by a strong work ethic (modeled by mothers), persistence, high self-esteem, an internal locus of control, attendance at a non-zone school, and high parental expectations through specific words and actions. Each cluster of factors worked in distinct ways to promote each student's academic success; such factors are also present in previous resilience research.

All of the approaches to Mexican's students' low academic achievement reviewed so far point to many different variables and mechanisms involved in the educational outcomes of Mexican and other low status students. Despite ample empirical research, regardless of approach taken, we simply do not know much about how Mexican students are able to transition to higher education. The main reason for this, as well as why I am engaging in this specific type of research, is that the various different approaches reviewed have not focused on the specific types of questions I seek to better understand. In addition, the majority of research on this topic does not focus on students who are currently enrolled in college. Moreover, the majority of research reviewed does not adequately consider the influence of local context in students' pursuit of higher education or in their families' incorporation experiences.

For instance, Hernández-León and Morando Lakhani (2013) found that the geographic and historical variations in economic conditions influence the mobility opportunities available to the children of Mexican immigrants in a new destination. In the following, concluding section I elaborate on my approach and methodology for my project in two key locations.

METHODS

This dissertation addresses two main research questions: What factors and mechanisms facilitate Mexican students' transition into higher education, and how does local context influence this process. The first question seeks to identify the resources and difficulties that Mexican students encounter in their educational trajectory in order to analyze how these students and their parents are being received in their communities of settlement and how this affects their mobility. The second question aims to specify the

extent to which local circumstances influence not just educational attainment and mobility, but also discrimination and racialization. While much, namely assimilation, research has examined this group's mobility and integration, it has not adequately theorized the effect of location on mobility and integration. Additionally, assimilation research prioritizes mobility and integration over discrimination and racialization. While research on Mexican's discrimination and racialization is not as prevalent, it also does not focus on how location affects these dynamics. Taking existing scholarship's inadequacies into account and since most research on US Mexicans is focused on those living in the southwest, it is crucial to investigate the mobility, integration, discrimination, and racialization that Mexicans experience in locations outside of the southwest.

Given that this project is concerned with understanding young Mexican' experiences with education and settlement, qualitative inquiry is employed because it provides an opportunity to intricately observe social life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) in allowing qualitative researchers to "attempt to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3). As a result, in-depth face-to-face interviews, follow up e-mail surveys, as well as digital and physical fieldwork were used to address the objectives of this study. Face-to-face interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions and focused specifically on any difficulties, obstacles, and challenges encountered; any encouragement, support, and help received; personal characteristics; their relationships with parents, school officials, friends; and their broader experiences in high school and college. Interviews averaged 75 minutes in length, were tape-recorded, and transcribed. Follow up email surveys asking about demographic information such as year of arrival to the U.S. and more specific

themes emerging during interviews were collected after face-to-face interviews. The details of the fieldwork for this project are detailed below.

Respondents and Locations

Sixty individuals, thirty-five are 1.5- and second-generation Mexicans from southeastern Pennsylvania, and twenty-five are second-generation and undocumented individuals from New York City, were interviewed for this study. In Pennsylvania, eighteen respondents were born in Mexico; their age of arrival ranged from four to fourteen years of age. At the time of the interviews, all of these respondents had attained some form of legal status in the United States. Fifteen of the Pennsylvania respondents identified as female. Among the New York City interviewees, eleven were born in Mexico; their age of arrival ranged from two to fifteen years of age. In stark difference, only one of these respondents had attained legal status, while three others were part of the deferred action for childhood arrivals program or DACA, thus the seven remaining respondents remain undocumented. Twelve of the New York City interviewees identified as female. Criteria to participate in this research included having parents who migrated to the United States from Mexico, attended high school in Pennsylvania or New York, and being enrolled in the selected college in each state. The latter two criteria are efforts to make sure that participants have spent a significant amount of time living or a significant phase of their lives—especially high school and the transition to college—in the states under investigation in order to gauge the coming of age and higher education experiences of young Mexicans in these new destinations. In selecting these interviewees, I expected those born in Mexico, having lived in the US for at least six years, have developed feelings about their settlement in their respective communities and schools.

Southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City were selected as locations for investigation because both have seen tremendous growth in their respective Mexican populations since the 1980s, are considered new destinations, are located outside the southwest, and that not much is known about the educational and coming of age experiences of this group there. Since respondents from southeastern Pennsylvania come from predominantly white and middle class rural-suburban communities and respondents come from mostly Black and Dominican working class neighborhoods in New York City, this allows me to compare two locations in the Northeast and theorize the effects of location on my respondent's education, mobility, racialization, and discrimination.

In Pennsylvania, Victory University[xv] was selected given the relatively high number of Mexican students there[xvi]. Victory University is a public state institution with over 20,000 students enrolled. At over sixty percent, White students make up a majority of the student population. By contrast, Latinx student make up fewer than ten percent of the population. Like most state universities, Victory and its campus is an integral part of the small town in which it is located. In New York City, Empire College[xvii] was also selected given its relatively high number of Mexican students. Empire College is a public institution that is part of the larger city and state college and university systems located in and around New York City and state. White students made up under thirty-five percent

[xv] Fictitious name.

[xvi] I take into account conversations with students and key university officials along with online searches, and estimate that around 100 Mexican students have come through this university since fall 2010.

[xvii] Fictitious name.

and Latinx student made up over twenty percent of the student body at Empire College[xviii]. Unlike most urban colleges, Empire has a decent-sized campus in New York City proper. Both campuses are enclosed so that there is some separation between the school campuses and their surrounding communities.

Recruitment and Data Co-construction

Recruitment for this project began in the fall of 2013 at Victory University. Through professional and friendship networks, I was put in communication with the university's Latinx Student Group and a university support program for the children of immigrants. After a few phone exchanges with two student group leaders, I was allowed to attend one of their meetings and describe my research during October of that year. Through this visit and three subsequent visits to the group's meetings from November 2014 through February of the following year, I eventually interviewed five students. After a meeting with the coordinator of the support program, my recruitment materials were sent through their list serve. Three students were interviewed through this initial electronic call. As I attended more of the student group's events and met more members, eventually I was granted access to their closed Facebook group where my recruitment materials were able to reach over one hundred current and alumni members of this organization. Through this Facebook group call an additional five students were interviewed. The initial thirteen interviewees' networks, help from two faculty members, and support from university staff who work with Mexican students allowed me to recruit and interview the other twenty-two students by the beginning of 2016.

[xviii] Specific student population percentages by race are not provided in order to protect participants.

In New York City, recruitment began in the fall of 2015 after a chance encounter with a member of one of Empire College's immigrant based student organization during American Sociological Association Annual Meetings. After establishing rapport with this individual through several phone conversations, I was invited to attend the group's screening of a film in late October. Once the film concluded, I was introduced to and established rapport with two group officials; this allowed me to describe my research to them. Subsequently, the group invited me to attend one of their meetings in mid-November. After attending this meeting, I was able to describe my research to nine Mexican students after the meeting had concluded. Given differing school schedules at my institution and at Empire College, it was not until February of 2016 when interviews with these nine students began. Throughout the spring semester of 2016, I attended three more of this organization's events to recruit more students. In addition, the initial interviewees put me into contact with an additional three students who were subsequently interviewed. The remaining thirteen interviewees were reached through placing a call for participants with different Latina/o Studies courses offered at Empire and a program that assists the children of immigrants at Empire. This program allowed me to place an electronic call for participants on their Facebook page that reaches thousands of Latinx students enrolled in various colleges and universities throughout the New York City area.

All interviews were conducted in person. However, I was also able to spend additional time, around thirty-five hours total, socializing with and observing fifteen of the Pennsylvania participants. All of this time spent with these students occurred on Victory's campus or the surrounding town and consisted of attending group meetings and events, including public celebrations of their Mexican and Latinx heritage, sitting in on

classes with students, going out to eat, visiting students in their residences, and or having short conversations to catch-up with them. These interactions and exchanges provided the opportunity to see how students navigated various aspects of their college experiences. I was also able to have over five hours of discussions with one university employee who has worked with the children of immigrants in various support programs and has been involved in Latinx student initiatives at Victory for over fifteen years. Over the course of this project, I have made thirty-five trips to Victory University. In New York City, I have spent additional time with twelve of the participants, around thirty hours total, mostly socializing and catching up with students on Empire's campus and attending the immigrant based student organization public demonstrations advocating for and sharing of undocumented students' experiences. Here I was able to have a little over two hours' worth of discussions with a faculty member who has worked with Mexican students in various capacities for the last five years. Twenty-five trips were made to Empire College.

Digital fieldwork involved exchanging text messages with students as well as monitoring their facebook profiles for the better part of the last two years. While an exact number of hours cannot be calculated, I have spent a considerable amount of time following students since our respective interviews. Text messaging usually consisted of asking students for clarification regarding their answers to interview questions, asking how they are doing halfway through each semester, and checking their progress from semester to semester. Once respondents' graduate from college, text messaging becomes less frequent. Students' facebook profiles are monitored every few months just to get an idea of what is going on in their lives during that time; this provides more details about who respondents interact with the most and what they like to do when they are not in

classes. Although it would provide more direct access to respondents, I have chosen not to become friends with any respondents on facebook to insure their privacy.

Dissertation Chapters and Major Findings

Chapters two, three, and four encompass the empirical sections of this dissertation. Chapter two examines participants' communities and schools in Southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City as well as their families' characteristics. Such an examination demonstrates how students' local circumstances have a tremendous impact on their (educational) mobility because this context is where other significant factors such as family, school, community, and social networks exert their influence. Moreover, local contexts as well as populations are shown to affect the types of resources and constraints that respondents encountered along their educational pathways. Time of migration and arrival by participants' families in their respective communities also plays a vital role in respondents' educational attainment. Participants' transitions into young adulthood are also shaped by their local contexts. This chapter provides vital insights given its location-based analytical lens of educational attainment and young adulthood.

Chapter three analyzes the ways in which respondents are racialized as Mexicans and immigrants. Here respondents' experiences in their respective high schools, university, college, and southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City are looked at. As well as local context, local populations also influence the ways in which respondents experience racialization as well as various forms of discrimination and microaggressions. Respondents' encounters with these race-based forms of denigration illuminate the multiple ways in which Mexican students' transition from high school to higher education and beyond can be made more difficult, blocked, and ultimately stopped. Although

respondents are educationally successful, this has not translated into structural assimilation. This chapter contributes toward the building of a context-based theory of integration and racialization.

Chapter four addresses the main question behind this project: what factors and mechanisms facilitate students' transition from high school to college. Across both locations, students' entrance into college is aided by multiple factors working in different combinations for each student; mainly relationships with mentors, friends, and family as well as participation in programs geared specifically to help marginalized students gain entrance into higher education. Such factors are significant because of the ways in which they counteract or buffer some of the constraints, difficulties, and racialization that students encounter in their pursuit of higher education. For Pennsylvania students especially, it appears to be more useful to consider the theory of cumulative causation or self-perpetuation (Massey, 1990; Massey et al., 2002) of international migration—where each instance of migration generates more social capital and consequently a higher likelihood of additional migration in sending communities—and not just assimilation perspectives to understand how Mexican higher education attainment occurs.

CHAPTER TWO:
MEXICAN SETTLEMENT IN SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA AND NEW YORK CITY

Although leading assimilation theories suggest that intergenerational patterns of mobility, including educational attainment, are contingent upon access to mainstream institutions, existing empirical evidence on Mexican integration does not suggest that Mexicans are either following a "downward" assimilation pattern as predicted by segmented assimilation, nor a more linear pattern of intergenerational mobility predicted by classical and new assimilation theory. Moreover, we know little about the processes and factors associated with entrance into higher education among Mexicans; much research has focused on factors that hinder access to these institutions. One way to address these issues is to examine how Mexicans are faring in their specific communities of settlement. In line with more recent research which has shifted focus to migrants in "new destination" sites (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011; Marrow, 2011; Massey, 2008; Smith, 2006; Zuñiga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005) this chapter examines the roles that students' southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City communities and schools play in their pursuit of higher education as well as their broader experiences.

Even as large numbers of Mexican migrants and families have been settling in new destinations, assimilation research continues to emphasize how well this group is being incorporated into the US mainstream. However, less attention has been paid to how Mexicans and other migrants both affect and are affected by the specific communities in which they settle. Thus new destinations serve as a "strategic research site" for observing several important aspects of settlement and integration; the process of accessing or being excluded from institutions in the early stages of settlement and the extent to which local

contexts influence the types of resources and constraints that the children of immigrants' encounter in their pursuit of higher education. Although each strand of assimilation research elucidates important factors, e.g. institutions and group contexts, affecting immigrants and their descendants' educational attainment and broader incorporation, there are common shortcomings in both types of research. The most crucial shortcoming is each framework's inattention to local context and more specifically settlement in new destinations. Much assimilation research focuses on urban studies in traditional immigrant gateway locations (Waters and Jimenez, 2005). Even though it is not yet possible to conclusively measure intergenerational assimilation in new destinations, researchers must account for the increase of varied contexts of reception immigrants face (Marrow, 2011) since this context along with immigrants' own characteristics influence their experiences (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Local context is especially vital to consider pertaining to educational attainment given that educational requirements, policies, and resources for K-12 and higher education vary within and across states.

The lack of focus on the contextual factors that lead people to migrate to and settle in specific communities is another key shortcoming in assimilation research. Contextual factors matter because where *and when* one settles and the process behind that settlement strongly influence the type of trajectory and experiences migrants, their children, and families will encounter there. Such factors go beyond the characteristics that Portes and Rumbaut (2001) emphasize for immigrant incorporation: human capital, US government and native population reception, and coethnic communities. Again, local context is key in the extent to which the factors emphasized by Portes and Rumbaut and institutions (Alba and Nee, 2003) are present and beneficial for immigrants wherever

they settle. One way to center local context and move beyond the limitations of assimilation work is to draw from research on international migration and examine new destination settlement locations.

This chapter is broken down into six parts. The first briefly summarizes research on international migration and cumulative causation. In the next two, the broader communities where participants and their families have settled are contextualized. The following two sections elaborate what it is like for respondents to come of age as Mexican within their high schools and broader communities. Emphasis here is given to the resources and constraints that high schools provide toward high school completion and entrance into higher education, interpersonal dynamics students experienced, as well as how local context influences these issues. The discussion section details various factors influencing respondents' transition to early adulthood and higher education.

International Migration and Cumulative Causation

International migration theorizing and research demonstrates multiple causal mechanisms—e.g. cost-benefit calculations, social capital, and international and national structural forces—influencing migration (see Massey, 1990; Massey et al., 2002). In an empirical evaluation of contemporary international migration theories based on Mexico to US migration as a test, Massey and Espinosa (1997: 940) found that the "dynamic expansion of migration between Mexico and the United States [follows]…from the operation of self-perpetuating, interlocking, and mutually reinforcing processes of social capital formation, human capital formation, and market consolidation." As such, international migration is subject to cumulative causation or self-perpetuation (Massey,

1990; Massey et al., 2002) where each instance of migration generates more social capital and consequently a higher likelihood of additional migration in sending communities. Especially influential for Mexican migration, social capital steadily accumulates through the growth of migrant social networks which acts as a feedback loop (Massey and Espinosa, 1997). This growth is imperative because such networks encompass the relationships and social capital connecting migrants with previous migrants, as well as nonmigrants in receiving and sending communities through kinship, friendship, and sharing a community of origin (Massey, 1990; Massey et al., 2002). Also important in the perpetuation of migration is the incremental build-up of individuals, private institutions, and voluntary organizations helping migrants, whether lawfully or unlawfully, enter a country (Massey et al., 1993).

As in traditional destinations, Mexican migration to New York City (Galvez, 2010; Smith, 2006) and Southeastern Pennsylvania (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011; Rose and Hiller, 2006) is characterized by cumulative causation. Existing research on these Mexican communities provides much needed insight into their social, economic, political, and religious activities in these new destinations. However, these studies do not focus on the extent to which local context influences Mexican young adults' educational achievement nor on their experiences in college. To get a better understanding of the relationship between educational achievement, local context, and being Mexican in these locations, I provide a brief historical overview of Mexican settlement in the main communities where respondents' families have settled in southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City below. The sections after provide much detail about my participants community and high school contexts.

Mexican Migration to Southeastern Pennsylvania

Recently Mexicans have settled in large numbers in the northeastern US and particularly Pennsylvania. Mexican migrants were initially recruited in large numbers to perform agricultural labor in the US through the Bracero Program—a binational agreement between the U.S. and Mexico lasting from 1942 through 1964. After the program was terminated, migration from Mexico to the US, both with and without documents, continued given the cumulative causation of this flow (Massey et al., 2002; Lattanzi Shutika, 2011). Mexican migrants trekked to southeastern Pennsylvania after learning about the demand for mushroom pickers through word of mouth as they searched for work (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011). The majority of migrants between 1968 and 1990 were men whose lives and families remained in Mexico (Lattanzi Shutika, 2005). Southern Chester County, known as the "heartland of mushroom country" (Garcia, 2005: 70) is one location where Mexicans ended up working. Another is Adams County, where Mexican male migrants have worked seasonally picking fruit, namely apples, since at least 1970 (Rose and Hiller, 2006).

Beginning in the 1980's agricultural industries across the nation underwent restructuring which consequently altered the surrounding communities' populations toward young Spanish speaking Latinx (Garcia, 2005). More broadly, industrial restructuring entailed shifts in the US economy toward "labor-intensive production and low-paid, non-unionized, foreign workforces" (Hirschman and Massey, 2008, p.8). Industrial restructuring also encouraged Latinx population growth in new destinations; examples include the meat-processing industry in rural destinations and construction in urban destinations (Parrado and Kandel, 2008). The restructuring of the mushroom

industry in southeastern Pennsylvania provided the initial lure to workers, but this alone did not spur the settlement of thousands of Mexicans there (Garcia, 2005). Indeed, the implementation of the Special Agricultural Workers (SAW) Program[xix], which legalized undocumented workers in agriculture, eventually allowed for the migration of women and children (Garcia, 2005). SAW was one provision of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, legislation meant to placate contradictory interests in a time when socioeconomic anxieties and the rising visibility of undocumented Mexicans combined to frame border control and immigration as problems (Massey et al., 2002).

Ultimately, the SAW program provided about one million Mexicans with legal status nationwide (Massey et al., 2002) and between 1500 and 2000 Mexicans in Chester County Pennsylvania (Smith, 1992). Most early migrants to Kennett Square received legal status through SAW and were also able to bring their families because of it (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011). Contrary to lawmakers' intentions, however, IRCA increased undocumented migration from Mexico nationwide (Massey et al., 2002) while SAW increased it in southern Chester County (Garcia and Gonzalez, 1995). Although undocumented Mexicans are also present in Adams County (Rose and Hiller 2006), it is unknown whether IRCA or SAW contributed to this. Still, one of the main consequences of IRCA is that it turned a formerly cyclical migration into a permanent one at a national (Massey et al., 2002; Durand et al., 2005) and local level. As a result, the number of Mexicans in Kennett Square, a town in Chester County, increased by about three hundred percent from 374 in 1990 to about 1154 in the year 2000 (Lattanzi Shituka, 2005). In

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[xix] SAW'S effects have not been documented in Adams County.

Adams County, there was a similar increase in the Mexican and Latinx population; 1216 Latinx were counted in 1990, a decade later the population tripled and Mexicans accounted for seventy-two percent of the population (Rose and Hiller, 2006). Encouraging further Mexican settlement in Chester County were the increased construction and landscaping job openings resulting from expanded suburban developments in the early 1990s (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011). Although not to the same degree as in Kennett Square, the Mexican population also grew in the nearby towns of Toughkenamon, West Grove, Avondale, and Oxford (Garcia 1997). Since the 1990s Mexicans also settled in Adams County for longer periods of time given the increase in year-round work in local poultry and pretzel plants (Rose and Hiller, 2006).

Still, through the 1990s Mexican migrants in Kennett Square occupied the margins of the community and faced alienation, isolation, and racial discrimination (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011). During the early 1990s, as Mexican families began establishing roots and buying homes in Kennett Square, they were initially met with community protests against their settlement (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011). As the Mexican population grew, so did their visibility, and their demands for rights in the town. For instance, in 1993, Mexican workers went on strike at Kaolin Mushroom Farms in order to improve their working conditions (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011). In addition, that year, La Comunidad Hispana, a local Latinx social service organization, established Alliance for Better Housing in order to bring low-income housing for Mexicans into Kennett Square (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011). This housing effort specifically triggered strong resistance from the native-born white population. Rapid Mexican population growth and settlement produced communal anxiety among the native-born white population given the perceived

differences and changes in language and cultural values that Mexicans represented. There was also fear that the native-born white population was losing their place, advantage, and identity in their community. Such reactions exposed nativist sentiments and were met with charges of racism coming from within the white native-born population (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011). This dissention and accusations of racism tempered some of the anti-Mexican sentiment in the town.

The above events, along with ongoing tensions and anxieties associated with the growing Mexican population, led to the founding of Bridging the Community in 1997, an organization aimed at reimagining the town to include all of its residents, fostering mutual aid, and the integration of Mexicans into Kennett Square (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011). Although noble in its aims, Bridging the Community consisted of mostly white, highly educated, affluent, English-speaking members and did not recruit any Latinx or Mexican residents. Regardless of its intentions, and having influenced the process of making the town more hospitable for its Mexican residents, this organization has maintained Kennett's native-born population's central position of power despite their dwindling numbers, and consequently "[has allowed] the English-speaking population to "take back" their community while maintaining their reputation as a civil, tolerant community" (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011, p. 165).

In spite of these dynamics, Kennett Square and the surrounding area in Chester County shifted from a mostly white and affluent area in the 1980s to become a new destination for Mexican families by the late 1990s and through the present; the majority of the Mexican population comes from the state of Guanajuato in Mexico (Lattanzi Shutika, 2011). By the year 2000, the population in Kennett Square was sixty percent

non-Hispanic white, twenty-eight percent Latinx, and about ten percent Black. Surrounding towns varied where the non-Hispanic white population reached a high of seventy-four percent and a low of forty-five percent, the Latinx population reached a high of thirty-eight percent and a low of seventeen percent, while the Black population reached a high of sixteen percent and low of eight percent.

Meanwhile, York Springs, Biglerville, and nearby communities in Adams County have become Mexican enclaves mainly for those coming from the state of Michoacán in Mexico (Rose and Hiller, 2006). Mexican communities in Pennsylvania are created as mini versions of the communities where migrants are from in Mexico and include stores that stock Mexican products directly from migrants' communities of origin, social spaces where people can speak Spanish, and churches where mass is conducted in Spanish (Rose and Hiller, 2006). Starting in the mid-1990s, more and more women migrated to Adams County in order to reunite with their husbands, but to a lesser extent to work as well (Rose and Hiller, 2006). By the year 2000, eighty-seven percent of the population was non-Hispanic white and about twelve percent Latinx in Biglerville. In nearby York Springs, the non-Hispanic white population accounted for seventy-four percent of inhabitants, while twenty-five percent were Latinx. The factors described in this section along with the mechanisms of cumulative causation have influenced the transformations in both Adams and Chester counties.

Mexican Migration to New York City

Migration from Mexico, specifically from the Mixteca region—parts of the states of Puebla, Oaxaca, and Guerrero—to New York can be traced back to the early 1940s (Cortina, 2003; Smith, 2003). This region accounts for approximately two-thirds of New

York's Mexican population (Smith 1995). Sociologist Robert Smith (2003) identifies four phases of Mexican migration. The first phase occurred from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s and involved a small number of individuals from the southern state of Puebla who already had relatives in New York. The second phase occurred from the mid-1960s through the mid-1980s and remained among a small group of people. Migrants coming during this phase were escaping political violence in Mexico, but in addition, higher wages and modern conveniences, such as electricity, available in New York increased the number of people, especially women, migrating.

The third phase lasted from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s and saw a tremendous growth in the number of migrants. Reasons for this included a profound economic crisis in Mexico and especially in Puebla (Cortes Sanchez, 2003; Smith, 2003), Mexicans being identified in New York as available and obedient workers (Smith 1995), and migration costs being substantially lower given the presence of relatives and friends in New York. At a national level IRCA's amnesty provision allowed tens of thousands of wives and children to move from the Mixteca region to New York to join their husbands (Cortes Sanchez, 2003; Smith, 2003). Overall, migration from the state of Puebla in Mexico to New York City, the principal destination for Poblanos, has been the highest of any state in Mexico since its establishment in 1946 and through 1995 (Cortes Sanchez, 2003). Almost all international migration out of Puebla is to the US. Among other reasons, the severe deterioration of economic and living conditions in the early 1980s in Puebla, the international out migration rate increased by a factor of twenty-six (Cortes Sanchez, 2003). Such hardships eventually led to the expansion of migration out of the Mixteca region of Mexico and other states.

The fourth phase of migration began in the late 1990s and is a consequence of various factors. First, there was "asymptotic stability" back in the Mixteca towns (Smith, 1995), which means that most people who want to leave for New York have already done so and those who remain in the Mixteca are not likely to migrate anytime soon (Massey, Goldring, and Durand, 1994). As a result, there has been an increase in the number of Mexican migrants settling permanently in New York. Second, the process of migration to and settlement in the US has changed (Durand et al., 1999). Increasing enforcement of the border, because of IRCA and other legislation, has curtailed circular migration and increased permanent settlement in the US (Massey et al., 2002). Binford (1998) calls this "accelerated migration" where towns in Mexico pass through the stages of migration much faster or sometimes straight to settlement. Another consequence of this "accelerated migration" is a large increase in the migration of adolescents without parents (Smith, 2005). This acceleration of migration has led to a disorganization of the migration process itself. Last, during the 90s, migration to different US destinations boomed. Simultaneously there was an increase in the nontraditional sites of migration from Mexico. Newer sites of migration include the states of Morelos, Tabasco, Tlaxcala, and from Mexico City.

Estimates put the Mexican population, including both immigrant and native-born individuals, at around 40,000 in 1980, around 100,000 in 1990, and around 300,000 in the year 2000 (Smith, 2006). Given that this population has more than doubled twice since the 1980s, Mexican migration is considered accelerated (Cortes Sanchez, 2003; Rivera-Batiz 2002). Unlike in southeastern Pennsylvania, Mexican migrants to New York City have not being recruited by a single main industry, like the agricultural sector. Instead,

Mexicans in New York City usually find work in multiple industries, but mainly in restaurants, retail stores, and construction (Marroni, 2003; Smith, 2006).
Mexican settlement in New York City through the 1990s was quite geographically dispersed (Smith, 2006). Given the great diversity that exists in the city, most immigrant, and even nonimmigrant, groups that may claim a neighborhood as theirs, do not constitute a majority there (Smith, 2006). While the Mexican population in New York City has grown tremendously since the 1980s, most Mexicans are just one minority group among other minority groups in their neighborhoods. Despite having a strong public presence or even being the largest minority in some areas, Mexicans are not a majority of the population even in neighborhoods considered to be Mexican (Smith, 2006). More specifically, Mexican settlement throughout the 1990s occurred in neighborhoods with large numbers of Puerto Ricans, so that Mexican's integration experiences centered on interactions with this group (Smith, 2006). Overall, the relationship between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in New York City is characterized by both positive engagement and alternating conflict (see Smith, 2006, pp. 34-36).

Broadly speaking, by the year 2000, "Little Mexicos" emerged in various areas throughout the city including in the South Bronx, Sunset Park in Brooklyn, El Barrio or Spanish Harlem, and Jackson Heights in Queens (Smith, 2006, p. 20). Mexicans have found a place in New York City through the various political organizations meant to connect them with their communities of origin in Mexico (Smith, 2006), as well as various religious organizations devoted to La Virgen de Guadalupe (Galvez, 2010). However, this does not mean that Mexicans make up the majority of the population in these communities nor that they do not face any exclusion.

Coming of Age in Southeastern Pennsylvania

Thirty of the thirty-five respondents from Victory University were born, raised, or went to high school in southeastern Pennsylvania. All respondents born in Mexico had attained some form of legal status by the time they reached Victory University. Two main factors account for respondents' attainment of legal status. First, it is a combination of twenty-three respondents having parents working in agriculture, the specific recruitment of Mexican workers in Pennsylvania agriculture, as well as the SAW program granting legal status to agricultural workers. In addition, for those who did not obtain status through SAW, most already had family members with status in Pennsylvania and were able to use family reunification provisions in existing immigration legislation to gain status. Out of the thirty students, twenty-four come from Chester or Adams County. Of the six other students, four come from cities in southeastern Pennsylvania and the other two from small towns. Overall students represent twelve different communities. Four out of these twelve communities have populations which are predominantly nonwhite. Two of these four communities have a majority Latinx population; the other two have a majority Black population. The white populations within predominantly white communities ranged from a low of about sixty percent to a high of about eighty percent.

Integral to students' settings and broader experiences is the presence of agricultural fields and jobs that most of the respondents' communities are known for. Most respondents' parents worked in agriculture or other low-skilled and low-wage jobs such as cleaning houses and offices, as well as restaurant, and to a lesser extent factory work. This meant that respondents' class status was noticeably lower than the majority of the white peers around them. Despite this lower class status, twenty respondents and their

families still lived in communities where the majority of their neighbors were white. Moreover, the vast majority of respondents and their families lived in houses they owned. While neither class status nor residential location differentiated respondents and their families from their white neighbors, parents' occupations did. Respondents most consistently mentioned not wanting to work as much as their parents—who averaged eight to twelve hour workdays—and not wanting to engage in the same type of physically demanding work as their parents.

Minerva, whose family arrived in Pennsylvania when she was ten years old, encapsulates this narrative in discussing her commitment to finishing high school

> I think one of the things that really pushed me to do good in school and pursue a career is because I wanted to have a better job than the people around my area. I mean seeing my parents struggle, that was one of the main things. Seeing my dad tired, his hands being all hurt, and saying that his back was hurting, and seeing my mom working so much. Just being in a restaurant, as a waitress, or delivery person, or in the mushroom fields, was not something they wanted for me, and it was not something that I wanted for myself.

Most parents also encouraged their children to seek better opportunities outside of the type of work they engaged in. Manuel, born and raised in a small community where Mexicans are recruited to pick apples, remembered his parents' role in his wanting to go to college

> My parents told me to pursue my dreams and do what I would like to do because they didn't want me to be like them and have to work all the time where they pretty much never really got some rest. They worked at a local apple company where they were labor workers in the fields and in the factory. They would go in really early in the morning and came back late during the afternoon. So when I told them I wanted to go to college, that's when they put more support on me. They wanted to see me succeed, they wanted me to have a life that I could enjoy. I mean they have a life they enjoy, but I felt that they worked too hard in everything, they worked for the family all the time.

Overall, the jobs that respondents' parents held were usually associated with lower status within their communities. This occurred through respondents' various

mentions of the hardships that their parents go through as well as Mexican laborers being specifically recruited to work in the agricultural industry in southeastern Pennsylvania (Garcia, 2005; Gonzalez and Garcia, 1995; Lattanzi Shutika, 2011; Rose and Hiller, 2006; Smith, 1992). As will be elaborated in much more depth in chapter four of this dissertation, their parents' physically demanding jobs, their long workdays, and the lower status associated with these jobs all served as motivating factors (Salgado, 2015) for the majority of Pennsylvania respondents to seek improving their own and their family's socioeconomic status. In turn, this desire to improve their socioeconomic status was one of the various factors encouraging respondents to pursue a higher education. These and other factors facilitating Pennsylvania respondents' pursuit of higher education are conditioned by the local dynamics in their communities.

Southeastern Pennsylvania High Schools

Using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) as well as *U.S. News & World Report*, I was able to obtain key information about respondents' public high schools. For instance, only two of the eight high schools that participants attended had Latinx student populations accounting for more than twenty percent of the total student population; one was in the low twenties and the other in the low thirties. The other six high schools had Latinx student populations that accounted for between three and ten percent of the total student populations. Most of the high schools that respondents attended had enrollments between five hundred and one thousand total students; although there were three that had over seventeen hundred students. Table 1, below, summarizes some of the key characteristics of high schools in both southeast Pennsylvania and New York City.

TABLE 1. High School Context Comparison

HS Characteristics	New York City	SE Pennsylvania
Number of Schools Respondents Attended	Nineteen	Eight
Largest Groups in Schools	Lowerclass Blacks, Dominicans, & Puerto Ricans	Middleclass Whites
% Student Population Latinx	Min: low 30s in two schools	Min: less than 10 in four schools
	Max: over 50 in eleven schools	Max: low 30s in one school
Student-to-Teacher Ratio	Min: 12:1 in one school	Min: 13:1 in one school
	Max: at least 18:1 in twelve schools	Max: 24:1 in one school
Students Enrolled in AP Courses	23/30	13/25
Average Number of AP Courses	About five per school	About thirteen per school

Participants described the majority of teachers and administrators in their high schools as white. NCES data showed that the student to teacher ratios inside of the participants' high schools ranged from about fourteen to twenty-two students for every teacher; although most schools had a ratio that was less than eighteen students per every teacher. The high school completion rate is quite high at most of the high schools participants attended; these schools had at least a ninety percent graduation rate[xx]. These rates are reflected more broadly by US Census data where 86.6 percent of persons at least 25 years old in Adams County and 92.8 percent of those in the same age group in Chester County had at least a high school diploma (U.S. Census, 2015a).

[xx] This figure comes from US News & World Report high school profiles. In order to protect my participants' privacy, I do not list the specific high schools in Chester and Adams counties profiled.

According to most respondents, the majority of the Mexican students in their high schools did not complete high school. Perhaps further demonstrating the relatively small proportion of Mexican students that respondents represent is the fact that they were usually among the two to five Mexican students enrolled in their mostly white advanced placement (AP) courses. Twenty-three out of the thirty respondents from southeastern Pennsylvania were enrolled in AP and other college-prep courses. Such dynamics are part of what it is to be Mexican in southeastern Pennsylvania. Websites for respondents' high schools indicate that all but one of these schools offer an array of AP courses: English Literature, English Language and Composition, U.S. History, American Government, European History, Psychology, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Statistics, Latin, Computer Science, just to name a few. In addition to providing a low student to teacher ratio, and an average of over thirteen AP courses, the majority of respondents' high schools provided several extracurricular activities including multiple sports teams, language clubs, art, science, and political clubs, and in two schools, even a Latinx-culture centered student organization. All students attending high school in Pennsylvania participated in at least one extracurricular activity; a majority participated in more than one.

Here, the influence of local context on the resources available to the students in this study toward their pursuit of college admission is evident. With the exception of three students, all southeastern Pennsylvania respondents attended high schools in relatively small semi-rural or suburban communities. In such communities, students generally attend what is considered their local high school, which draws in students from geographically nearby communities. Contrary to the high schools available to respondents in New York City, which draws students from all over the five boroughs—

through an application process and complexly tiered system detailed below—the high schools in southeastern Pennsylvania serve as a funnel for students living in the much smaller towns around them. As a result, despite a majority of Pennsylvania students' parents working in low-wage and low-skilled jobs, which meant a noticeably lower class status for students than their white peers, these students were still able to attend the same high schools as their mostly white and middle class peers. High schools offered activities and classes that looked good on their college applications as well as other resources not as widely available to New York City high schools students.

Southeastern Pennsylvania High School Interpersonal Dynamics

While Pennsylvania high schools provide various resources toward college enrollment, it is important to note that my participants were not afforded the same type of treatment as their white peers. Nineteen of the thirty respondents explicitly discussed white teachers, counselors, and peers doubting their academic competency and/or their pursuit of higher education. These types of interactions are also influenced by students' local context. Furthermore, these types of interactions not only make it more difficult for Mexican students to pursue higher education, but in addition, such interactions are part of what it means to grow up Mexican in southeastern Pennsylvania. Moyses, who arrived with his parents in southeastern Pennsylvania at the age of six, and who like most of his fellow Pennsylvania participants, was among the few Mexican students in his mostly white AP courses, recalled

> I remember the first day of [AP Physics] class I showed up, and I was the only Mexican student in that class. I showed the teacher my schedule, you know I was in the right room, I was supposed to be there, and the teacher flat out told me that they made a mistake and that I was not supposed to be there. And I said what do you mean, you're Mr. [X], this is your class, you know, and even though it said it on my schedule and everything he still sent me to the guidance office to make

> sure that there was no mistake. That always stuck me the fact that it was like, I guess he couldn't believe that a Mexican student could be in this high level science class.

Moyses and ten other students provided accounts of when a teacher or counselor, the majority of whom were white, stereotyped them as not being academically competent enough to either be enrolled in high level courses or go on to a reputable four-year institution of higher learning. These incidents are examples of the stereotypical perception that all Mexicans are uneducated (Lee and Zhou, 2015), that Mexicans are not intelligent (Dowling, 2014; Vasquez, 2011), and the larger deficit thinking model that has created and reinforces the myth that Mexicans do not value education (Valencia, 2015). These incidents also serve to racialize participants as inferior to white students and will be addressed in much more detail in the following chapter. Similarly, an additional six students firmly believed that the teachers and or their respective high schools were not invested in helping prepare Latinx and Mexican students for reach college. In some cases, my respondents felt that their teachers were not invested in preparing them for college. Such lack of investment or caring for Latinx students on the part of teachers has been documented previously in southwestern urban high schools (Conchas 2001; Stanton-Salazar 2001; Valenzuela 1999).

Even though ten Pennsylvania respondents lived in majority minority, mainly Mexican, areas, from the description of their time in high school, it became clear that even these respondents spent a considerable amount of time interacting, albeit not in extensive ways, with white peers and adults. Reina was born and raised in a predominantly minority community, however, her high school experience was completely different. As she described it

> I went to, I am lucky enough to have gone to one of the better schools. Out of the two thousand kids in my school, I think it was me, my brother, and maybe two other kids that were Hispanic in the whole school of white kids. It was not easy at all. I always had a very small friend group, they were all mixed-raced, so I feel like I really didn't fit in too much at all. It was pretty hard there in [that part of Pennsylvania] near the farmland, it was not the easiest.

Although Black and Latinx residents account for over sixty percent of the population in Reina's community, Black and Latinx residents accounted for less than fifteen percent of the students at her well-performing high school where the mostly white student body, as Reina put it, "also came from money." Ramon, also born and raised in a majority minority community, had similar experiences at a different school

> I mean I feel like it is always difficult for me because my high school was predominately white and Jewish and like a lot of them were really well off. So I feel like I really didn't fit in there that much and there also were not any other Hispanics. Most of the minorities were either Black or Asian. So I was basically the only Latino male there in my year.

Reina and Ramon were not the only respondents to have these experiences during high school. All but two of the Pennsylvania respondents described attending predominantly white and middleclass high schools. Thus, most Pennsylvanian Mexican students stood out from their peers because of their racialized and classed distinctions. As these respondents articulate, attending high schools with majority white and of a higher class status provided additional difficulties above the already trying time that all adolescents encounter during high school and as they transition to early adulthood.

One mechanism through which respondents' Mexicanness was differentiated and reinforced was through interactions with white students. One aspect of these interactions was violence. In half of the Pennsylvania high schools, respondents discussed the presence or threat of violence between Mexican and white students. At Reina's high school, a white female student threatened to fight her because of being Mexican. Reina

further described the hardships of attending an almost all-white high school while being one of the few Mexican students as "Just [white] kids being stupid, thinking they could say certain things to us or threaten us. One time, my younger brother punched someone in the face because they called him a dirty wetback." Similarly, at her high school, Alma described white students provoking fighting through their racialized taunting, "Mexican students would get really angry when the white guys would call them a piece of trash from Mexico or tell them to go back to Mexico." At Moyses' high school, where there was a substantial Latinx student population, he discussed the relationship between Mexican and white students as "not good, there were a lot of fights between Mexicans and white kids, like it actually became a thing. Every Thursday or Friday there was a fight after school." In at least half of respondents' high schools, there was some explicit hostility toward Mexican students. Of course, this did not preclude respondents from interacting with or even establishing friendships with white students.

Although respondents' communities and high schools were predominantly white, twenty-three respondents described the majority of their friends, especially their closest friends, as being nonwhite and mainly Mexican. Such interpersonal dynamics indicate at least two broader circumstances. First, they allowed students to feel integrated into their high schools and their communities and more broadly a sense of belonging in locations where Mexicans are still considered a new, if not, marginally welcomed group. Students felt unwelcomed within their high schools given the above detailed hostility, the consistent patterns of racial segregation that exists because of academic tracking—where at most only a handful of Mexican students were enrolled in AP courses—as well as what respondents called a lack of mixing among students at the majority of their schools. A

lack of mixing meant that white students interacted mostly with white students, and that Mexican students interacted mostly with Mexican students. Further, some respondents felt that their high schools' administrations should have done something to better integrate different student populations.

Second, these interpersonal dynamics further solidified the salience of respondents' Mexicanness in relation to, yet in most cases, outside of their white peers' social worlds. For most students this meant that they experienced being Mexican specifically in relation to *not being white*. The salience of these distinctions was upheld through various mechanisms: the low status attached to parents' occupations, family socioeconomic status, interactions with white students, interactions with white counselors and teachers, and respondents' tokenized presence in AP and college-prep courses. Further, these distinctions were even more relevant considering that respondents did not describe the presence of any other racial or ethnic group in significant numbers within their various southeastern Pennsylvania schools and broader communities. As will be described below, this last dynamic is something that is quite different for respondents coming of age in New York City where they experienced being Mexican in relation to their mainly Black, Dominican, and Puerto Rican peers.

Coming of Age in New York City

Fourteen of the twenty-five respondents in New York City were born and raised there. Of the eleven undocumented participants, two had attained legal status through different processes and another six were enrolled in DACA. Although this study is not focused upon on the experiences of undocumented Mexicans, undocumented students were interviewed because undocumented status exerts much influence in what it means to

be Mexican in New York City. Overall, estimates show that nearly fifty percent of the Mexican population in New York City is undocumented (Bergad, 2011). At the time of this writing, mid-March 2016, all undocumented respondents are living in quite uncertain circumstances given President Trump's proposed immigration policies, executive orders, promises of implementing mass deportations of all undocumented individuals, and his specific singling out of Mexicans as criminals. Respondents represented communities from all boroughs, with the exception of Staten Island, in New York City. In addition, four respondents were either born or raised in three different communities located right outside of New York City. All respondents were from communities considered "Little Mexicos" (Smith, 2006) because they contain significant and growing Mexican populations.

Slightly more than fifty percent of respondents came from various sections of the Bronx. Two main characteristics differentiate the Bronx from the rest of the city's boroughs: it has a Latinx majority as well as the lowest percentage of white inhabitants among all boroughs. Federal figures place the Bronx's non-Hispanic white population at ten percent, the Black population at forty-three percent, and the Latinx population, regardless of racial identification, at fifty-four percent of the borough's overall population (US Census, 2015b). An estimated twenty-four percent of the Mexican population in New York City lives in the Bronx (Bergad, 2011). Queens stands out as the most diverse borough given that twenty-five percent of its population identifies as non-Hispanic white, twenty-six percent identifies as Asian, twenty-one percent as Black, and twenty-eight percent identifies as Latinx (US Census, 2015b).

Brooklyn and one of the communities located outside of New York City have the largest Black populations. In Brooklyn, about thirty-five percent of the population identifies as Black, while thirty-six percent of the population identifies as non-Hispanic white, and about twenty percent identify as Latinx (US Census, 2015b). Upwards of sixty percent of the population in one of the communities outside the city identify as Black, nineteen percent identify as non-Hispanic white, and fourteen percent identify as Latinx (US Census, 2010). Meanwhile, upwards of forty percent of the residents in Manhattan and the other two communities located outside of the New York City identify as non-Hispanic white. In Manhattan, forty-seven percent of the population is non-Hispanic white, twenty-six percent identify as Latinx, eighteen percent is Black, and thirteen percent is Asian (US Census, 2015b). For the other two communities outside of New York City, over forty percent identify as non-Hispanic white, around thirty percent identify as Latinx, more than thirteen percent identify as Black, and around six percent identify as Asian (US Census, 2010).

The above demographic portraits contrast significantly with those of students' communities in southeastern Pennsylvania. Besides much more racial and ethnic diversity in New York City, the population is also much larger. Nonetheless, none of the New York City students described their neighborhoods or even their neighbors as mostly Mexican. Only four described a "Mexican community" existing where they lived. Regardless of where New York City students' grew up and went to school, all but four of these students' social worlds centered around interacting with an overwhelming majority of Black, Dominican, and Puerto Rican students and individuals. Three of the remaining students lived in communities and attended schools with significant white populations; all

of these students were from communities outside of New York City. Five respondents included West Indian people, specifically Jamaican and Guyanese, in the Black category, while one included “Africans” in this category. Another three respondents mentioned that their neighborhoods contained Middle Eastern families and they interact with Middle Eastern students inside their high school. Only one student lived in a neighborhood with a significant Asian, mainly Chinese, population.

Another difference between the experiences of southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City respondents is parents’ occupations. New York City parents worked in a wide range of occupations including taxi driving, dry cleaning, various food service positions, various cleaning positions, painting, baking, street food vending, and even factory positions. The main industries for these parents were in construction, restaurants, and cleaning. Dissimilar to Pennsylvania, parents’ jobs in New York City did not carry a specific low status because of being associated with Mexican labor. Instead, the majority of parents’ jobs in New York City are associated with being immigrant jobs; one exception might be working in the back of the house within restaurants. Still, respondents’ families’ class status did not differentiate them from their neighbors as it did for respondents and their families in Pennsylvania.

Such living arrangements are mainly due to the racial and class residential segregation that exists in New York City, as well as all but three of these respondents and their families living in apartments near or within large public housing complexes containing mainly poor or working class immigrant and minority individuals and families. Moreover, these living arrangements have been shown to be directly implicated in the type of schools available to children and families living there. In spite of renting

being much more affordable than buying a house, especially in New York City, living in such areas relegates Black, Dominican, and Puerto Rican families to send their children to poor and low-performing school districts (Kasinitz et al., 2008).

New York City High Schools

Though the majority of respondents and their families shared their neighbors' class status, they still stood out from those around them because of being Mexican. Such distinctions were especially present within respondents' high schools. Only eight of the twenty-five respondents discussed interacting with other Mexican students inside their high schools. Still, the majority of these students described the Mexican populations within their high schools as small, if not, negligible. Only Anita, who arrived with her family to the New York City area at the age of three, attended a high school with a similar profile to the majority of southeastern Pennsylvania respondents' high schools. Anita specifically described the majority of her high school peers as "white, rich, and Republican."

Contrary to the small number of high schools present within most of southeastern Pennsylvania respondents' communities, usually one or two, as well as the geographic attendance requirements, New York City contains over four hundred high schools and over seven hundred programs (NYC Department of Education, 2016). An additional eight specialized high schools admit only top scoring students on a specialized entrance examination (NYC Department of Education, 2016). City high schools may be focused upon a specific subject or area such as mathematics, sciences, technology, and music, among others. Unlike southeastern Pennsylvania students, New York City students had to go through an application process in order to attend a public high school. More

importantly, students in New York City can attend a public high school anywhere in the city. All New York City residents are expected to apply to twelve schools after wading through a six hundred-twenty-six page online or physical high school directory listing about one page of pertinent information—one paragraph description of school, academic foci, language programs, AP courses, extracurricular activities, and other pertinent school information and statistics—for each high school or program (NYC Department of Education, 2016). The above school figures do not include the additional private and parochial high schools present throughout the New York City metropolitan area. The New York City high school system is by far the largest and perhaps most complicated in the country.

Overall, respondents attended nineteen distinct public high schools in and around New York City. Eleven respondents attended schools in other boroughs that required a minimum of thirty minutes to commute by public transportation. Even respondents attending high schools in their borough still had to commute. Given the complex nature and size of the high school system, much variation existed regarding each school's educational focus, quality of education, preparation for college, and other characteristics. The total student population varied from a low of two hundred students to a high of over twenty-seven hundred students[xxi]. Student to teacher ratios varied from a low of twelve to one, to a high of twenty-two to one. Most schools had a ratio of at least eighteen students to one teacher. While a majority of teachers at most of respondents' high schools were

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[xxi] All school figures—student population, percentage of student populations by race and ethnicity, student-to-teacher ratios, and graduation rates—were obtained using the NCES, *U.S. News,* as well as InsideSchools which provides much statistics and other relevant information specifically about New York City Public high schools.

white, there were also many more Black, Latinx, and other racial and ethnic minority teachers, administrators, and other school officials present when compared to Pennsylvania schools. Graduation rates varied tremendously as well: two schools were in the low forties, while three other schools were in the mid-nineties, the rest fell somewhere in between these figures. Lower rates of high school graduation were present in respondents' New York City boroughs, than in respondents' southeastern Pennsylvania counties: 70.2 percent of persons age 25 years or older in the Bronx, 78.9 percent in Brooklyn, 80.4 percent in Queens, and 86.3 percent in Manhattan had at least a high school diploma (U.S Census, 2015b).

Thirteen of the twenty-five New York City respondents were enrolled in AP or honors courses. Among respondents' nineteen high schools there was much variation in the number of AP courses offered: three did not offer any AP courses, seven offered between one and three AP courses, five offered between nine and twelve AP courses, and the rest offered between four and eight AP courses[xxii]. However, these numbers must be further contextualized. All but one of the schools offering between one and three AP courses included English or Spanish as the subject, so that there were at most two, but in most cases one AP subject course offered in math, science, history, politics, and other important subjects for college. Of the five schools offering between nine and twelve AP courses, two of them were located outside the city and they were also schools with significant white student populations. The wide variation in the number of AP courses offered in New York City high schools contrasts the consistency of the high number of

[xxii] These numbers were obtained from InsideSchools at http://insideschools.org/

AP courses offered in southeastern Pennsylvania high schools. This variation in the number of AP courses offered also means that New York City students' college preparation varied.

Again, as with the number of AP courses offered, the number of afterschool clubs, activities, and sports teams available in New York City schools varied. Nine students specifically mentioned there being a few, usually one or two, or no afterschool clubs or sports teams. One other respondent mentioned the school's main sports activity, swimming, being cancelled because of lack of funding. Six other students did not participate in after school activities because they were working or had other responsibilities. Overall, New York City students did not have as nearly as many extracurricular activities or AP courses available to participate in and place on their college applications as did the southeastern Pennsylvania respondents. New York City students had fewer resources available to them because of where they lived.

New York City High School Interpersonal Dynamics

Similar to southwestern Pennsylvania respondents, New York City respondents discussed feeling that their teachers and respective high schools were not invested in helping all students complete high school and prepare them for college (Kasinitz et al., 2008). However, this feeling was communicated through two distinct narratives. The first narrative, present among six New York City respondents from six distinct high schools, discussed by southeastern Pennsylvania students in the previous section. The other narrative, present among seven other students from five distinct high schools, was a direct critique of their teachers and schools; these students were in AP and other college-prep courses. Ester was born and raised in the Bronx, and she specifically described the

pattern of low academic performance at her high school as a consequence of teacher and administrator apathy. She specifically critiqued how teachers and administrators "[focus] their attention and resources on those students who seem like they are good" so that there is a "difference in treatment." Other students offering this critique specifically focus on how teachers, administrators, and the larger schools give more opportunities and resources to students they deem "good" and "smart." Still, New York City participants did not explicitly mention the reasons why students were receiving differential treatment

Existing research suggests that what school officials deem to be acceptable academic behavior among low-income immigrant and minority students is often informed by ethnic and racial stereotypes (Ferguson, 2000; Alba et al., 2011) and privileges white and middle class cultural expressions, styles, and tastes as the universal norm (Carter, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). School officials' failure to recognize nonwhite and low-income students' cultural expressions as compatible with academic success can facilitate these students' academic disengagement (Carter, 2005). Since low-income urban schools are ill-equipped to provide resources and social support for nonwhite and low-income students, and since access to resources within these schools is "reserved for students who have learned to *decode* [this raced and classed] *system,*" school officials must reserve their "best resources" for those students deemed "most deserving" (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 215) or what my respondents called "good" or "smart" students. Such a lack of investment by school officials toward their Black and Latinx students appears to be a characteristic of urban schools and thus an additional constraint that New York City respondents faced in their pursuit of higher education.

All New York high schools had a significant amount of Latinx students. The percentage of the student population that Latinx students accounted for ranged from a low of about forty percent at three high schools to a high of about eighty percent at two other high schools[xxiii]. Black students accounted for a low of nine percent of the student populations at three schools to a high of about forty percent at two other schools and sixty percent at one other school. Although white students represented over twenty percent of the student body at two schools, and Asian students represented over twenty-five percent of students at another, no respondents had white students among their closest friends and only one respondent had Asian students among their close friends. Reflecting the demographics of most students' neighborhoods and high schools, the vast majority of students had friends who were Black, Dominican, and Puerto Rican.

Being surrounded by and having close relationships with members of these groups led some students to identify closely with these groups. Mateo, who arrived with his family in New York City at the age of six, reflected

> High school was kind of confusing for me because, you know, I am Mexican and I went to [a mostly Black] school, so I didn't have a connection with my own culture. I was more into African American, Jamaican, and Guyanese culture. So I was growing up in a culture that is not mine… I mean this is going to sound a little funny, but I considered myself what you call a Blaxican. Because from what they heard, their food, it was kind of like I grew into it. Then my culture was basically food from my parents, but other than that most of my friends were Black, so it is a combination of both.

Similarly, Bernardo, who was born and raised in the city, and had mostly Dominican friends while in high school, discussed his identity as follows

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[xxiii] All school figures—student population, percentage of student populations by race and ethnicity, student-to-teacher ratios, and graduation rates—were obtained using the NCES, U.S. News, as well as InsideSchools which provides much statistics and other relevant information specifically about New York City Public high schools.

> I didn’t think of being Mexican in high school because I had grown up around mostly Black, Dominican, and Puerto Rican people. All of the ladies that I dated belonged to those groups as well. If anything I would say I was more Dominican because I knew and spoke that type of Spanish and slang, I knew the food, I danced the music, I hung out more with Dominicans, and I went to a whole bunch of my Dominican friends’ family parties. Especially to my best friend’s family parties.

Concurrently, ten respondents, including Bernardo, also mentioned the existence of “racial tensions” among the various different groups within their high schools and neighborhoods. For instance, Rocio, who along with her parents came to the city at the age of two, described her neighborhood as

> It was very confrontational living in [my neighborhood], you have racial divisions between the Black, Mexican, and even Puerto Rican communities. To them we were the new kids on the block, Puerto Ricans and the African American community have been there for decades. We are the new Spanish kids, being that, you do have confrontations, not always, but there is always that issue of “oh you are Mexican, so you are not down with us.”

Liliana, who was born and raised in the city, recalled that Black students would tease her by calling her by what she referred to as “stereotypical Mexican terms” such as “hey taco, and other things like that, or orale guey.” She also felt bullied by Dominican students who contested her Mexican identity because of her lack of Spanish speaking ability and because she didn’t like spicy food. Thus, some New York City students felt comfortable in their mainly Black, Dominican, and Puerto Rican communities and high schools, while some others experienced conflict. Ultimately, it appears that most students experienced both. Regardless, this was all part of what it meant for respondents to be Mexican in their respective New York City high schools and communities.

Another theme present in respondents’ descriptions of their high schools and broader communities is the presence of gangs, violence, and surveillance. Nine high schools required their students enter through metal detectors, had police or security officers openly roaming the hallways, had reputations for their students’ discipline

problems, and or were places where respondents encountered physical violence. Seven students personally experienced physical violence in their high schools. Unlike the racial violence present in southeastern Pennsylvania high schools, the violence in New York City high schools was described by respondents as being about “stupid stuff,” “drama,” or gang-related. Seventeen participants described their neighborhoods, both inside and outside of New York City, in terms of the extent to which gangs were present, as well as how violent, safe, rough, good, or bad they were. For Xitali, who arrived at the age of three with her family in a community outside of New York City, poverty, gangs, and using government programs are all connected

> So my parents tried their best to not raise me in a neighborhood where there were a lot of gangs. In [my community], I don’t know how familiar you are with it…It is now going through a revitalization process, there are condos and everything, but before no one really wanted to go there. That is where most of the WIC and food stamps offices were. City hall was there, but after dark you didn’t want to be there, and there is a strip where all the housing projects are.

Cruz, who was born and raised in New York City, and whose parents emphasized that he should stay away from drinking, drugs, and gangs, reminisced about his neighborhood in the following terms

> I grew up there since I was little, like a baby. I have been there for like nineteen years already. Really peaceful place you know. You rarely hear that something bad happened, like a stabbing or anything, like many other areas in the [borough]. I am glad about that.

Additionally, six respondents were directly affected through their own or family members’ contact with police as well as having family members who were in gangs. The close proximity of these potentially negative social circumstances provided respondents with cautionary tales regarding the dangers present in their communities and the

importance of education. The presence of gangs (Smith, 2006), violence, and police appear to be components of being Mexican in and around New York City.

Respondents' experiences in New York City also took on gendered meanings. Eight of the thirteen female respondents encountered the expectation that Mexican young women would end up pregnant and was something that they had to contend with as they were going through their high school years. This was especially the case for Perlita, who had arrived with her family in the city at a young age. Perlita's mother emphasized to her the hardships of teen pregnancy

> You know, I have seen other people, people that I used to be with or that I used to go to school with, they ended up pregnant, most of them in high school. A lot of girls were getting pregnant. So you get scared, when you think about "Could this possible happen to me?" You don't want to be in their shoes, you don't want to struggle like they did.

Regardless of whether participants personally encountered violence, gangs, drugs, and teen pregnancy, a majority of them needed to contend with the presence and perhaps expectation of violence, gangs, drugs, alcohol, and teen pregnancy while attending high school and more broadly throughout their adolescent years. These were all additional issues that New York City participants had to directly negotiate on top of everything else associated with the transition from teenager to young adult and the transition from high school to college. Pennsylvania participants did not discuss these issues during their interviews; of course, this does not mean that they were not present.

Being Mexican and Undocumented in New York City

Undocumented status was also a salient circumstance among a majority of participants. As previously stated, it is estimated that nearly fifty percent of the Mexican population in New York City is undocumented (Bergad, 2011). Not only were eleven

respondents themselves undocumented, but an additional six have older siblings and or parents who are undocumented. All but one of the undocumented participants explicitly mentioned their status presenting additional hardships or obstacles as they began to consider pursuing and transitioning to higher education (Gonzales, 2016). The main issues for these participants were the uncertainty behind whether it was possible to enroll in a college or university, whether they would have access to help, the uncertainty regarding being able to afford tuition given their parents' low incomes, and being the first in their families to go to college (Gonzalez, 2016). This uncertainty led a few respondents and their parents to consider a return to Mexico to attend college. Alejandro and his family arrived outside of the city when he was young. He came to understand the ramifications of not having US citizenship while in high school (Gonzales, 2011)

> It was like a big discovery for me. It made me realize that my path [to college] was not [going to be] a straight arrow like it was for my classmates. I think that I subconsciously tried to sabotage my chances to go to college because I was like if I do bad in school I will not get into college because I am not smart enough.

This self-sabotage was a response to hearing broader societal messages that undocumented students could not and should not go on to college. Most other undocumented respondents mentioned hearing these messages from the broader society.

Four respondents also heard these messages from family members as well as school officials. School officials particularly play an important role in whether or not undocumented students do apply for college because they are often gatekeepers of key information and resources in the college application process. Ana also arrived at an early age with her family in the city, and came to realize what her lack of legal status entailed while in high school. Further, her high school's college office officials served as an initial obstacle in her applying to college

> So at first I was not applying to college until the college office reached out to me and asked me why I wasn't applying. I didn't tell them that I was undocumented simply because when I went in to ask for help and I had a template of the application filled out so they could look over it, the secretary asked me why I was lacking a social security number, I told her that I didn't have one and just the look on her face of shock I guess, that turned me off and I didn't feel comfortable in that situation.

As was the case for undocumented students in New York City, but also for those who attained legal status in Pennsylvania, and US born students in both research locations, the presence of mentors and other adults providing key information and other forms of support was crucial in respondents' transition from high school to college. Such relationships and support will be the focus of chapter four of this dissertation.

For respondents who had undocumented siblings and or parents, their family members' status served as one motivating factor to pursue higher education. In Jose Luis' case, his older sister is undocumented and was able to attend and finish college

> She has always been my biggest role model. Since my older sister was not born here, it has been harder for her. And me, that I have had many resources like financial aid, it has been more about taking advantage of those resources because she had to pay out of pocket most of the time.

Guadalupe articulated the following when asked what motivated her to attend college

> Yea, I wanted to attend college because I want a better future than what I have seen in my family...if you're parents are both undocumented and you are born on US soil, you have a better chance of getting higher education than them. So I told myself you know go for it, take it, become something better than what you're parents are, at least with education, because I don't think that I am any better than my dad or my mom.

These narratives demonstrate a dual frame of reference among US-born respondents who have an immediate undocumented family member. Most of these respondents view going to college as a responsibility to their family given the sacrifices that their parents endured to bring them to this country, the lack of educational opportunities available to their

parents, and the (educational) struggles of their older siblings, all as a result of these family members not having legal status in this country.

The high presence of undocumented status among my participants and their families may be attributed to their time of arrival in New York City. Almost all respondents and their families arrived in the US, namely New York City, in the late 1980s and later. This was especially the case for undocumented participants and participants who had undocumented immediate family members. Furthermore, and unlike Pennsylvania respondents and their families, given that most New York respondents had few, if any, family members present in and around New York City, they are not been able to attain status through reunification provisions in existing immigration legislation.

Discussion

The salience of all participants' Mexicanness is influenced by the above mentioned local circumstances. Being Mexican in New York City involves living in mostly low-income, minority, and immigrant apartment complexes, as well as attending mostly low-income, minority, and immigrant high schools. Within these high schools, Mexican students encounter a wide variation in their school's educational focus, quality of education, resources toward high school completion and preparation for college. Pennsylvania high schoolers' experiences included much more consistency in their educational trajectory. Further, the presence of gangs, violence, teen pregnancy, as well as the effects of being undocumented all influence being Mexican in New York City. Instead of experiencing being Mexican in juxtaposition to a white or any other singular reference group, as was the case for Pennsylvania students, being Mexican in New York

was partly seen as a novelty among their mostly Black, Dominican, and Puerto Rican friends, neighbors, and others around them.

Additionally, the differences drawn between being Mexican and being Black, Dominican, and Puerto Rican in New York City were not nearly as rigid as the differences drawn between being Mexican and being white in southeastern Pennsylvania. Again, this is in large part due to New York City Mexican respondents sharing schools, neighborhoods, *and* class status with their Black, Dominican, and Puerto Rican peers. The salience of the distinctions between being Mexican and being white in southeastern Pennsylvania were upheld through various mechanisms: the low status attached to parents' occupations, respondents' family socioeconomic status, interactions with white students, interactions with white counselors and teachers, and respondents' seeming tokenized presence in AP and college-prep courses. Pennsylvania Mexican students experience much more direct racialization in their transition from high school to college, their transition to adulthood, as well as their broader communities. This will be the topic of the following chapter.

The process of transitioning to early adulthood for participants in both southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City is directly linked to their enrollment in higher education. However, the specifics of this process is intimately influenced by the local circumstances that students found themselves in. For all southeastern Pennsylvania participants, transitioning to early adulthood was largely premised on their moving away from their family's home and being on their own for the first time. Not only did this entail psychological and emotional distance, but in addition it involved physical and to various degrees financial distance as well. On average, Victory University is located three

and a half hours away by car from all thirty southeastern Pennsylvania respondents' communities and families. For the five respondents not from Pennsylvania, Victory is at least a six hour airplane ride from their respective homes. Moving away also meant that respondents had to adjust to their new college community encompassing Victory University. Such a move also entailed various levels of independence for respondents, especially the young women, as well as added adult responsibilities for one's self.

Transitioning to adulthood in New York City did not entail moving away from family. For a few respondents Empire College is located more than an hour away from their parents' apartments, but for most, it is less than an hour away. The vast majority of respondents remained in their parents' apartments while attending Empire College. New York City respondents gained some level of independence while still in high school given that most had to travel outside their communities to attend high school. As well, more New York City respondents, fifteen, compared to twelve southeastern Pennsylvania respondents, worked during high school. Subsequently, more New York City respondents already had experienced some financial independence from their parents by the time they reached college. These students already had experience balancing work, school, and family. Still, most New York City students had to negotiate being enrolled full-time in college as a first generation student, added family demands and responsibilities as an adult, and also working.

What conditions influenced these thirty southeastern Pennsylvania respondents to attend Victory University? What conditions influenced these twenty-five New York City respondents to attend Empire College? Again, local context influenced all respondents' higher education institution choices. In southeastern Pennsylvania, attending Victory

University is quite common among Pennsylvania high schoolers, especially those who are white; these were my respondents' main reference group. Among seven Pennsylvania participants, attending Victory was something that "everyone" around them talked about. When Reina was asked about applying to Victory, she stated "The thing is that when I was small and since I lived close to [one of Victory's branch campuses], everybody was always talking about [it]. So I was like I want to go to [Victory]. Honestly I have no idea if anything would have changed my mind."

As did Reina, another nine participants discussed applying to and enrolling at Victory because of the university's reputation as a good school with top programs; especially the business school and STEM programs. Sebastian, whose family arrived in Pennsylvania when he was nine years old, initially aspired to acting, but reconsidered after thinking about his future job prospects: "So I applied to business schools and [Victory's] being one of the best and [Victory] always being there, because everyone is always talking about [Victory, Victory]." Thus, participants and some of their parents believed that a Victory degree had added value which would translate into future job opportunities and earnings beyond parents' mostly low-wage and low-skilled jobs.

A broader dynamic influencing Pennsylvania students' selecting Victory University was having a friend, family member, or mentor previously or currently enrolled at Victory University. Eighteen respondents had a sibling or other significant individual who attended Victory University. Such circumstances can be attributed to the smaller and more concentrated Mexican communities present in southeastern Pennsylvania, the time of arrival in southeastern Pennsylvania for most participants' families, as well as when respondents were born. The age of Mexican migration in these

towns also plays a role given that just over half of respondents and their immediate families arrived in Pennsylvania in the 1990s and later. As respondents progressed into high school, significant numbers of Mexican students were already present and a subsequent small minority was on their way to college. For most respondents this meant having an older sibling or cousin who had already graduated high school and gone on to Victory University. These community and family dynamics combined with broader local dynamics to provide a denser network of resources toward college enrollment and encouraged respondents to specifically enroll at Victory University. It appears that the mechanisms of cumulative causation are present in the movement of Mexican students to Victory University; these dynamics will be analyzed further in chapter four.

Unlike southeastern Pennsylvania Mexican communities, New York City Mexican communities are not as concentrated; they are quite dispersed in and around the city (Smith, 2006). Moreover, New York City respondents have fewer family members who live close by and also tend to be older than their siblings as compared to southeastern Pennsylvania respondents. Thus, only four New York City participants had someone in their families or broader social circles who had attended Empire College. New York City students therefore had to fashion information, support, and help from various sources in order to figure out where and how to apply to college. Among most respondents, Empire College became their destination because of its proximity to their families and communities, its relative affordability, its wide major and program selection, and specifically for undocumented students, policies making them eligible for in-state tuition and not requiring them to submit a social security number.

This chapter demonstrated how participants' communities and schools in southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City have a tremendous impact on their pursuit of higher education. Moreover, local contexts as well as populations are shown to affect the types of resources and constraints that respondents encountered along their educational pathways. Such resources and constraints are influenced by the race and class of both respondents and their school and community peers. Time of migration and arrival by participants' families in their respective communities also play a vital role in respondents' experiences. In addition, participants' transitions into young adulthood are also shaped by their local contexts. Chapter three builds on the importance of local circumstances but will focus on the process of racialization for Mexican students in southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City.

CHAPTER THREE:
RACIALIZATION IN CONTEXT

Much sociological research on Mexicans in the United States has concentrated on their assimilation patterns, especially their educational attainment (Alba and Nee, 2003; Haller et al., 2011; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Telles and Ortiz, 2008). Even though recent research has shifted focus to Mexicans in “new destinations” away from the US Southwest (Lattazi Shutika, 2011; Massey, 2008; Smith, 2006; Zuñiga and Hernandez-Leon, 2005) there have been few examinations of the microlevel dynamics this group’s young people experience in these new locations (see Smith (2006) for exception). Moreover, an emphasis remains on how well this group is adapting in this country. Despite a growing literature on the racialization of immigrants, as well as continuing anti-immigrant policies and sentiments, many immigration sociologists and others continue to rely on integration and assimilation to comprehend Mexicans ‘circumstances in the US (Feagin and Cobas, 2014; Romero, 2008; Saenz and Douglas, 2015).

Since sociological immigration research tends to focus on assimilation and mobility, neither the discrimination that immigrants and their children encounter nor the larger-scale advantages and privileges afforded to native-born whites are seriously examined (Feagin and Cobas, 2014; Romero, 2008). Such an oversight reinforces the notion that Mexicans and other immigrants who are not upwardly mobile fail to do so as a consequence of their own shortcomings, discounts the racialization and discrimination they face, and assumes they will be welcomed into the dominant white middle class. Consequently, this obfuscates structural realities, dismisses racial domination, and reinforces this country’s racial hierarchy.

This chapter analyzes sixty Mexican college students' experiences with racialization in their southern Pennsylvania and New York City schools and communities. While assimilation perspectives would view students' college enrollment as an early indicator of their structural assimilation into the dominant white middle class, interviews paint a more nuanced picture. Markedly, students encounter racial microaggressions—in the form of stereotypes, jokes, and other derogatory comments—that racialize them as nonwhite, deficient, and inferior. As such this study provides empirical evidence as to how racism can potentially structure immigrants' and their children's opportunities.

This paper is broken into six sections. The first section specifies how the racialization of Latinx and Mexicans can be contextualized using contributions from the sociology of race, as well as how racial microaggressions fit into sociological analyses. The following section details how local context influences racialization; emphasis here is placed on racialization as an institutional process. Section three surveys how and where racialization occurs as an interpersonal process in both Pennsylvania and New York. The next section analyzes how the racialization of respondents' national origin varies by location. Section five examines two shared manifestations of racialization in Pennsylvania and New York. The discussion section pinpoints some theoretical implications.

Racialization of Immigration Studies

Immigration studies typically employ either a new or segmented assimilation perspective. The former is distinctive in prioritizing the role of certain institutions, through civil rights enforcement by the state, in facilitating assimilation, a social process

explicated mostly by socioeconomic outcomes occurring over several generations (see Alba and Nee, 2003). In the latter, the US is an unequal society where post-1965 immigrants and their children's trajectories depend on their group's human capital, context of reception, family structure, and community structure (see Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Portes and Zhou, 1993). Since Gordon's (1964) specification of assimilation's multiple facets, researchers emphasize structural assimilation, the establishing of primary relations between immigrant and native-born individuals, as the most crucial for immigrants' mobility. The blurring of social boundaries between immigrant and native groups, hinging on enduring and intimate contact between groups, is thought to lead to significant changes (Alba and Nee, 2003). Irrespective of the variant or focus, however, a crucial flaw of assimilation research is that it ignores the primary white agents who control major societal processes of adaptation and instead focuses on the immigrants who are usually the least powerful in this process of assimilation (Feagin and Cobas, 2014, p.6). Given this focus, immigration scholars tend to disregard white privilege as well as the structural inequalities that exist between native-born whites, people of color, and immigrants of color (Feagin and Cobas, 2014; Romero, 2008).

The emphasis on assimilation tends to overlook the varied difficulties that Latinx and Mexicans face, whether US-born or not, given their racialization as nonwhite, "a threat," "illegals," and "criminals" (Cobas, Duany, and Feagin, 2009; Chavez, 2013; Dowling, 2014; Feagin and Cobas, 2014; O'Brien, 2008; Romero, 2011; Saenz and Douglas, 2015; Smith, 2006; Telles and Ortiz, 2008; Vasquez, 2011). Difficulties include discrimination in the workplace, in schools, in public accommodations, anti-Spanish hostility and discrimination, racial profiling by law enforcement, and violence (Cobas,

Duany, and Feagin, 2009; Dowling, 2014; Feagin, 2014; Feagin and Cobas, 2014; O'Brien, 2008; Romero, 2011; Smith, 2006; Telles and Ortiz, 2008; Vasquez, 2011). However, these studies do not examine Mexican young adults' experiences in educational settings nor in new destinations. Furthermore, the process of racialization tends to be *undifferentiated* in terms of its sources as well as the extent to which local context plays a role. This chapter will address the racialization of young Mexicans who are coming of age in new destinations, the main sources of this racialization, and the effects of this racialization.

Given assimilation research's shortcomings, race critical scholars have argued the need for sociology of race perspectives in immigration studies. Three important sociology of race contributions—persistent racial inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2014; Omi and Winant, 2014), the embedded nature of white racial domination across societal institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2014), and the ideological justifications of racial inequalities and white domination (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2014)— not seriously considered in the sociology of immigration can contextualize Mexicans' racialization, discrimination, and low educational achievement. The theory of systemic racism brings these important contributions together where interconnected and codependent institutions continue to imbed racial oppression (Feagin, 2006), people of color are denied wealth accumulation and other material advantages, these inequalities are reproduced over time, and racial oppression is rationalized (Feagin, 2014). Rationalization occurs through a white racial frame that provides "a socially imbedded set of racial stereotypes, images, and emotions that is widely accepted and critical to maintaining white subordination of people of color" (Feagin, 2014, p.26).

Through this societal white racial frame, Latinx are racialized as a "dangerous, threatening, "foreign," [and] "un-American" nonwhite group with a recurrent emphasis on their alleged criminality (Feagin and Cobas, 2014, p. 29). Latinx' phenotype, language, and other perceived characteristics are also framed negatively (Cobas, Duany, and Feagin, 2009; Feagin and Cobas, 2014) and racialized. According to Feagin, whites developed the white racial frame to interpret and defend their privileges and advantages as meritorious, define themselves as superior, and people of color as inferior and deserving of their subordinate status across society. Thus, the white racial frame justifies, at a societal level, the discrimination, racialization, and inequities Latinx and others face.

Microaggressions in Sociological Analyses of Immigrants and Racism

Since post-Civil Rights racism is subtle, institutional, and seemingly nonracial (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) it is crucial to identify how it manifests[xxiv]. Equally vital is to examine how racism affects groups in different settings in order to get a fuller picture of where Latinx and other intermediate racial groups will be positioned in the US racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Examining how racism manifests in the lives of contemporary immigrants and their children also provides an alternative to assimilation in gauging their treatment. Incorporating racial microaggressions into sociological analyses of immigrants helps assess Mexicans' treatment in new destinations, whether

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[xxiv] This statement does not apply to the emergence of Donald Trump and a related rise in rampant and accepted overt expressions of racism toward Mexican and other nonwhite and non-Christian minority groups in the United States. All but five Pennsylvania interviews occurred before Trump announced his intention to run for president. All New York City interviews occurred between February and November 6th 2016. These five Pennsylvania interviewees and all New York City interviewees did not explicitly reference any blatant expressions of racism as a consequence of Trump's ascendance.

they are experiencing racism, and the extent of their racialization. Racial microaggressions are useful in examining these issues since they encompass "brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities," intentional or not, communicating "hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults" to a person or group (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). Psychologist Derald Sue and his associates have widely analyzed racial microaggressions and identify three types; (1) microassaults or conscious, explicit, and derogatory verbal or nonverbal attacks, (2) microinsults or subtle but insensitive and rude snubs which degrade one's racial identity or heritage, (3) microinvalidations or comments that exclude or nullify a person of color's experiences, thoughts, and histories. Taken together, racial microaggressions suggest that people of color[xxv] are criminally-inclined, foreign, unintelligent, and ultimately deserving of their low social status (Sue et. al, 2007).

Still, Sue and colleagues do not link racial microaggressions with larger structural forces. Sue et al. (2007, p.272) posit that racial microaggressions best describe the everyday occurrence of contemporary racism, emphasizing the subtle and unintentional aspects of interpersonal interactions. As such racial microaggressions are not contextualized within persistent racial inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2014; Omi and Winant, 2014), the embedded nature of white racial domination across societal institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2014), and the ideological justifications of racial inequalities and white domination (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2014). These

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[xxv] This is not to suggest that Asians, Latinx, Blacks, and other groups experiences are the same. For example Asians and Latinx are more likely than Blacks to be perceived as foreign, Blacks are most likely to be perceived as criminally-inclined, and Latinx and Blacks are more likely to be perceived as less intelligent (Sue et al. 2007).

sociological contributions, especially systemic racism, help to ameliorate Sue and his colleagues' limitations and extend our understanding of racial microaggressions as part of structural phenomenon. Simultaneously, racial microaggressions exemplify the recurring and unequal relationships that recreate the institutions perpetuating racial subordination, inequalities, and systemic racism (Feagin, 2014). In addition, examining Mexican students is crucial to better understand how different people of color experience microaggressions *and* if Latinx groups experience microaggressions differently.

Although the stereotypes, discrimination, and microaggressions that Latinx and other students of color experience throughout US colleges and universities are well-documented (see Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot, 2005; Feagin, 2014; Mueller, Dirks, and Picca, 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano, 2009), few studies tell us about the extent to which Latinx face microaggressions in high schools. One exception is Kohli and Solórzano (2012) who found that Latinx and other minority students faced microaggressions in the form of teachers mispronouncing their names in their K-12 schooling; students experienced feelings of inferiority. Other high school studies, while not focused on microaggressions, document school officials stereotyping and discriminating against Latinx students by assuming they do not care about their education and by holding low academic expectations (Carter, 2005; Conchas, 2001; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999). Thus, this chapter contributes to Mexican educational attainment research by focusing on those coming of age in a new destination, and microaggressions research by examining Latinx' college and high school settings. More broadly, this chapter adds to the literatures on racialization and systemic racism given its focus on microaggressions, local context, and young Mexicans.

Racialization and Local Context

Local context plays a crucial role in the type and extent of racialization respondents experience. Given southeastern Pennsylvania's predominantly white and middleclass settings, as well as smaller communities and classes, direct interactions between Mexican and white individuals are common. Conversely, race-based and class-based residential and school segregation in New York City make it so that the majority of my respondents' interactions occurred with other Latinx and minority individuals of the same class status. Therefore, racialization in southeastern Pennsylvania manifests more directly, mainly, through interpersonal interactions between my Mexican respondents and their white middleclass peers and school officials. Racialization in New York City occurred mainly through institutional mechanisms and is therefore less direct; for instance, current political discourse. Respondents experienced racialization, mainly, but not exclusively, as a process by which negative racial meanings are attached to the category of Mexican and in most cases to them. Such attachment of meaning serves the purpose of distinguishing Mexicans as an inferior and or deficient racial-ethnic group. Mexicans in respondents' southeastern Pennsylvania communities are explicitly positioned as inferior and or deficient in relation to white middleclass individuals. In New York City, Mexicans are not juxtaposed directly with any racial-ethnic or class group.

Direct Racialization in Southeastern Pennsylvania

People of color must navigate important spaces and institutions, including educational settings, that are often white controlled (Anderson, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Evans and Moore, 2015; Feagin and Cobas, 2014; Feagin, 2014). The whiteness of these spaces is a consequence of their histories, structures, practices, and discourses that

reproduce racial inequalities as well as the assumed superiority of whites and assumed inferiority of people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Evans and Moore, 2015; Feagin and Cobas, 2014). Various microaggressions (re)produced the spatial whiteness of respondents' educational settings in southeastern Pennsylvania by making them feel unwelcome and inferior. All but five Pennsylvania respondents recalled these incidents in their mainly white high schools and at Victory University. Again, Pennsylvania respondents experienced racialization, through various microaggressions, in a more direct way than New York respondents did.

In separate predominantly white high schools, six respondents believed that the teachers did not care about Latinx students (Conchas, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Six other students perceived that their white peers "looked down upon" Latinx students because of their language or accents; all but one of these students had a noticeable accent. For Alma, a 1.5-generation participant with a subtle accent, this involved students *and* some teachers making fun of her name. Wendy, who arrived in the US as a teen, and had a thick accent, encountered "belittling" from white and Mexican American students "[since] I don't understand them, they talk to me and they get mad because I don't understand and they say things that I don't understand. They laughed about it and that made me feel bad and discouraged." These examples of microassaults are part of a larger pattern where whites disparage Spanish, its speakers, and their accents since they are assumed deficient and inferior in juxtaposition to white unaccented English speakers who are viewed as superior (Feagin and Cobas, 2014).

Students also felt unwelcomed given their high school administrations' actions and inactions. At Moyses' school, Latinx students were called "wetback" and "spic," yet

according to Moyses, the administration overlooked these incidents and "nothing was ever done." This inaction normalized the use of slurs against Latinx students and marked them as inferior. At a different school, the administration changed the Latinx Student Group's name from "Latinx Working Together[xxvi]" to "We All Work Together" given white parents' objections that the former name was racist. Here the administration's siding with the white parents communicated that Latinx students do not need to be recognized by the administration, do not belong, and are less valued than whites (Sue et al., 2007). These examples constitute institutional microaggressions[xxvii]. Such practices reinforced the white domination of these spaces, and, more broadly, the various microaggressions reported perpetuate racial subordination and inequalities within respondents' respective high schools (Feagin, 2014).

Once at Victory University similar practices were present; a majority of respondents conveyed feeling unwelcomed and uncomfortable in a variety of ways. For ten students, the predominantly white student body was a surprise given that they expected a diverse setting from how Victory, and most college and universities, emphasize diversity. These respondents questioned the lack of diversity and wondered where all the Latinx students were. Henry, a US-born respondent who attended an urban high school with a substantial number of Asian, Black, Latinx, and white students, shared "I honestly believe that this is not fair how they have to reach a seventy percent white

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[xxvi] These student group names are fictitious.

[xxvii] Defined as "racially marginalizing actions and inertia of the university evidenced in structures, practices, and discourses that endorse a campus racial climate hostile to People of Color" (Yosso et al., 2009: 674).

quota[xxviii]." Recall that the student population at Victory is over sixty percent white, while only less than ten percent is Latinx. Historically white universities do not provide genuine diversity or equal access and opportunities to students of color; instead, they provide diversity of convenience where these universities seemingly admit students of color in order to enrich the experiences of white students (Yosso et al., 2009). Given that the exclusion of people of color is embedded into these universities and other white institutional spaces, such spaces are entrenched with white discourses, ideologies, and privilege so that the people of color now present in these spaces are consequently subjugated (Evans and Moore, 2015). More importantly, spatial whiteness is a characteristic of white institutional spaces, including Victory, because of the embedded nature of white racial domination across US institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2014).

Therefore, a lack of other students' like themselves signaled to respondents that they are outsiders at Victory (Sue et al., 2007). Other students explicitly noted feeling out of place because of these predominantly white settings. Cristina, who arrived in Pennsylvania at a young age, did not join any non-minority groups since she felt mainly white groups were uninviting. Minerva, who arrived in Pennsylvania as a teenager, quit her campus job because she felt treated unfairly by white adults. Agustin, another 1.5-generation respondent, felt that white students specifically did not talk to Mexicans because they are "not Caucasian." Other students felt unwelcomed through the many "stares" and "weird looks" coming from white students on campus and in town when

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[xxviii] Victory University does not have any official quota for any racial groups.

they were together with other Mexican students. These are part of the discriminatory barriers students of color face in and around historically white colleges and universities (Feagin, 2014). Regardless of students' national origin, gender, and phenotype, most felt unwelcomed because of being Mexican in this historically white university.

Besides the focus on diversity across college campuses, another common theme, especially over the last several years, has been the engagement by mostly white students in racially themed parties and cross-racial costuming (see Feagin, 2014; Mueller, Dirks, and Picca, 2007). A few years ago, members of a white fraternity were photographed at a Halloween party on Victory's campus in "Mexican" costumes that included fake mustaches, sombreros, and ponchos. Cross-racial costuming is typically guided by stereotypes, where success is determined by how well the racial group is "physically" and "behaviorally" captured (Mueller, Dirks, and Picca, 2007). Thus, white students holding up signs reinforcing stereotypes and the white racial framing of Mexicans as low-wage workers, "illegal," and drug dealers were no coincidence. While the students in the photograph, as well as the fraternity chapter, faced much criticism and backlash, Victory's administration only issued a statement expressing its disappointment with the incident and how it did not reflect the university's values. This (in)action exemplifies an institutional microaggression (Yosso et al., 2009), demonstrates the persistence of a strongly white-oriented campus culture at this historically white institution (Feagin, 2014), and further marked Mexican students as inferior.

Six respondents[xxix] believed that Victory's administration did not do enough to address the fraternity's derogatory actions. Gerardo, a 1.5-generation respondent who was the most involved in student organizations, believed he fit in pretty well at Victory. However, he had the following to say about this incident and diversity overall

> Gerardo: I feel like that [the incident] was handled pretty poorly…overall [Victory] sent out a wrong message. Like "don't do it because you make us look bad" instead of, you know, instilling a sense of diversity in the university. They tried to fix it but in the wrong way. I feel like there are a lot of promises that were not kept.
> Me: Do you think that is a broader issue on campus?
> Gerardo: Yea, I think that it is a bigger issue. Like for example when we have [Noche Mexicana[xxx]], the majority of the people there were Latino, you know there is no, again the university says diversity this or that, and maybe some people are trying to make that push but at the end of the day how many non-Latino students did you have at [Noche Mexicana] or [Noche Hispana[xxxi]]. When that [incident] happened, there were going to be all these programs for diversity, and they may exist, but they are not being advertised and they are not being pushed [by Victory].

Here and later in the interview, Gerardo questions whether Victory is as invested in publicizing Mexican and Latinx student organization events as it is in white students' events; namely fraternity and sorority related events. Two other respondents, like Gerardo, who were involved with multiple Latinx student groups, shared his sentiments. Victory's inertia left the impression that Mexicans students' concerns (Yosso et al., 2009) and events celebrating their cultural heritage are irrelevant. The university's response legitimized the white fraternity's white racial framing and racialization of Mexicans as

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[xxix] As of December 2016, twenty respondents have answered questions specifically about this incident. The six respondents referenced were the only ones mentioning the administration. Seven other respondents reported not being offended by the incident, three respondents found the incident to be racist, two others found it to be ignorant, and one respondent chose not to comment. Any further discussion on respondents' views on this incident is much longer and complicated than the space allotted here.

[xxx] These fictitious names for the events.

[xxxi] These are cultural events put on by Latinx students at Victory to celebrate their heritage.

drug dealers (Feagin and Cobas, 2014). Further, whether intentionally or not, Victory is reproduced as a white-dominated institution (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2014) where whites are assumed superior and people of color are assumed inferior (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Evans and Moore, 2015; Feagin and Cobas, 2014). All of the encounters in this section added to the difficulties facing respondents in their educational settings.

Indirect Racialization in New York City

Twenty-three of the twenty-five New York City respondents discussed observing negative perceptions of Mexicans or negative treatment of Mexicans through various societal institutions. Unlike in Pennsylvania, most of this negative framing and racialization was not present within educational settings. Eleven students specifically pointed to politicians', namely Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, vitriolic discourse targeting Mexicans as "illegals" and "criminals." Among southeastern Pennsylvania respondents, only two mentioned Donald Trump and no others referenced politics as sources of negative attitudes toward Mexicans. Jesus, who arrived in Pennsylvania at a young age, believed that Mexicans are mainly associated with "illegal immigration" and that "Donald Trump had definitely put that in the national spotlight." Ramon, whose mother is from Central America and his father is Mexican, and was born and raised in a southeastern Pennsylvania urban community, shared

> You hear about how much support Trump is getting, it kind of scares me that if this many people have strong feelings about Latinos being here, and just like online as well, I see some very offensive remarks on political pages from these people. I feel like a lot of people don't want Hispanics here.

The timing of interviews may be a factor in so few respondents' attribution of negative messages regarding Mexicans to Trump, since only five of the southeastern Pennsylvania interviews occurred after Trump announced his candidacy for president in June of 2015.

By contrast, all New York City interviews occurred between February and November 2016. Still, not all eleven New York respondents' observations of political discourse toward Mexicans may be attributed to a "Trump effect."

Three of the New York City respondents recalled hearing negative perceptions of Mexicans in politics prior to Trump's candidacy. Bernardo specifically referenced Republican representative Steve King's 2013 comments claiming that the majority of undocumented immigrants are drug mules with "calves the size of cantaloupes" "hauling seventy-five pounds of marijuana across the desert." Another three asserted that Trump's hateful rhetoric toward Mexicans and immigrants represents the status quo. Ester believes perceptions of Mexicans in the country "have always been a negative thing toward us, but now mainly with Trump and everything going on in politics, this lower view of us is now considered more legitimate." Juan, born and raised in a community outside of New York City, described increasing hostility toward Mexicans in this country as a result of the entire 2015-16 Republican primary season, not just Trump's rhetoric. Moreover, Juan referred to the fact that Mexicans have been framed as "stealing [this country's] jobs and coming in to abuse [this country's] resources" even before this election cycle. As such, hateful political discourse against Mexicans exemplifies microassaults (Sue et al., 2007).

Besides politics, four other respondents stated how the criminal justice system and law enforcement disproportionately target Latinx and Mexicans. Asked whether he had been treated differently because of being Mexican, Mateo disclosed

> Yes, when I was in high school, I mean, I got stopped by cops and their answer as to why they stopped me was just because of the way I looked…but ultimately they thought I was a gang member because of the way I looked. I am pretty sure it was about their assumptions.

Although not affiliated with any gang, NYPD officers racially profiled Mateo because of his dark brown phenotype and given that, as Mateo described, he was the only "Latino" around in the area. Going further, Daniel, born and raised in the city, connects personal experiences to larger structural forces. Some of Daniel's acquaintances, all Mexican and other Latinx, have been arrested for possession of small amounts of cannabis in New York City. As described by Daniel, such arrests were unfair since

> I had a friend, he was white, and he was the meanest pothead ever. I asked him one day what his father does [for work], he was like he is a judge (laughs). He does excessive drugs, his father is a judge, and he puts away people for drugs. I was like wow! That is white privilege. I guess that is how the system is supposed to work.

An additional four respondents singled out the media, namely mainstream news, as a site perpetuating negative racial stereotypes of Mexicans. Yadira, who was born and raised in New York City, believes the media covers Mexicans very negatively so that, according to her, attitudes toward Mexicans in this country can be summed up as "everyone is like they need to leave, why are they in our country, all they are doing is stealing our jobs, they are not doing good." Further, Magdalena, who arrived in the city at an early age, pointed to a lack of "positive representation in mainstream media" for "Latinos" where Jorge Ramos was "one of the few prominent Latinos" with some recognition and who catered to "Latino issues" as she was growing up. This media coverage represents a form of microassault (Sue et al., 2007). As these and other examples demonstrate, whether one is born in this country or in Mexico, negative messages about Mexicans, present throughout US society, are readily part of the socialization experienced by my young adult participants.

Other respondents referenced the government, society, and the education system, as places where Mexicans are portrayed negatively, are not represented positively, or not represented at all. Jose Luis described his intentions of becoming a politician given that "you don't really see too many Hispanics in government and everything, it is all white people" and this lack of political representation being a reason why not much is done about issues facing this community. Rosa Maria, born and raised in the city, believed that US society views Mexicans, especially immigrants, in a particular negative manner

> [J]ust because of our race or color, they tell us that we can't do certain things. They see us as less, they see us as people that don't have the same rights as others, like they treat us differently, we are more or less like garbage, that they can just do whatever they want, just because they feel that we don't have the same rights that they have.

Asked where she had picked up on this view of Mexicans, Rosa Maria mentioned a white high school teacher who prepared her for the possibility of encountering harsh attitudes, like those just quoted, outside of high school; she also reported encountering such attitudes at her mainly white workplace. Martin, who arrived with his family in the city at a young age, emphasized the following dynamic to explain his and other students' lack of engagement in high school

> Difficult would be going to a school where it is predominantly white teachers, teaching you very strict curriculum that doesn't necessarily have to reflect or bounce of you positively. Then that just leads to the lack of attention that you give to class.

Thus a lack of positive representation of Mexican, Latinx, or Black historical figures, as well as a lack of attention to issues facing these communities—poverty, immigration, etc.—signaled to Martin and his fellow classmates that the circumstances around them and their lived experiences are irrelevant.

Whether in political discourse, the media, school curricula, the government, and the broader society, New York Mexican young adults were surrounded by negative associations of being Mexican. According to their experiences, Mexicans are “illegals,” criminals, incapable of achieving positive things, and perhaps undeserving of accomplishments. New York respondents were not as likely as Pennsylvania respondents to report being subject to interpersonal microaggressions. Concurrently, New York respondents were more likely to experience aspects of systemic racism—racial inequalities, racial oppression, and a white racial framing of Mexicans—across multiple societal institutions than their Pennsylvania counterparts. Still, taken together, such incidents serve to racialize Mexicans as inferior and deficient. Respondents had to negotiate these negative messages as they moved from high school to college and into adulthood.

Interpersonal Racialization

Southeastern Pennsylvania

Interpersonal subordination, or microaggressions that explicitly denigrated respondents and other Mexicans because of being Mexican, was common in respondents' educational settings. Almost all respondents discussed experiencing and familiarity with stereotypes, what they termed slurs, racist comments, and other derogatory comments made against Mexicans. This is a common theme in other research examining the collegiate experiences of students of color (Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot, 2005; Garcia, 2004; Yosso et al., 2009). Five respondents specifically described the comments they heard directed at Mexicans at their mainly white high schools as either racial or racist, while another five were subject to slurs in either high school or college.

Ernesto, a US-born respondent and the darkest-skinned of all respondents, recalled white high school students telling he and other Mexican students to "go back to your country" and being called "apple picker[s] and other racist terms" given that Mexicans were seasonally employed in the local apple fields. Alma, who was amongst the lightest-skinned of respondents, also recalled how white students at her high school were cruel in calling Mexicans "beaners" and "other nasty comments;" she herself was not the target of these comments. Regarding hearing derogatory comments toward Mexicans in high school, those with darker complexions reported personal targeting more often than those with lighter complexions. A Dominican student at a Victory Latinx student social event called Maleno, a respondent with a medium complexion, a "beaner." Though Latinx individuals are not immune from espousing a white racial framing of Mexicans and others (Feagin and Cobas, 2014), the above incident was the only instance reported where nonwhite individuals directed derogatory comments at Pennsylvania respondents.

Moyses, who considers himself an easy going and friendly person, and has a medium to dark phenotype, had the following experience at Victory

> Well I actually had a very interesting first night out…For my scholarship...it required for us to come to the university a week before most students…The first night my cousin was taking [other Mexican students in this program and I] downtown to just walk around and stuff and we were walking by the student center and this group of white kids walked by us and one of them said, "oh my god these spics are taking over [town] now." So, it was interesting because I feel like you always hear that [this part of the Pennsylvania] is kind of racist and this and that, but to experience that the first night, so I was like oh shit, like okay, maybe there is some truth…

This example demonstrates how strong and negative the white racial framing of Latinx is among a group of white students since the presence of four students is enough to be

deemed a “takeover” of a historically white university town and triggered the use of a slur. Overall, the students described so far in this section experienced microassaults (Sue et al., 2007). All of these instances encompass the recurring and unequal relationships, recreating the institutions perpetuating racial subordination, inequalities, and systemic racism (Feagin, 2014).

Seven other students reported personally experiencing or hearing Mexican stereotypes or slurs in jokes or in a joking manner. These encounters qualify as microassaults given that the telling of any joke is intentional (Yosso et al., 2009). Daniela, who is half-white and Mexican, recalled her boyfriends’ friends in high school, all of whom are white, “constantly,” but jokingly, referring to her using slurs. This did not bother Daniela’s boyfriend; instead, he attributed her taking issue with these slurs to her being a “fiery Latina.” Regarding her white roommates at Victory, Alma detailed how their treatment of her changed once they found out she is Mexican

> But I never understand like why that happened. Just like I feel that after I tell them that I am different, that they kind of point out certain things like “oh well you say this sort of funny because you are Mexican” sort of thing. Or even stereotypical things like if it’s my turn to do the dishes, they say yeah “you do that because you are good at it.” But they may think that it’s funny, but I don’t find it funny.

Racialized joking premised on stereotypes and slurs, experienced by Alma and others, is part of the societal white racial frame which is critical to the maintenance of the subordination of people of color since it signals the inferiority of people of color, and that it is often thought harmless by the white individuals performing the jokes (Feagin, 2014).

Although all students who experienced these jokes and comments had to spend time and energy dealing with them, their reactions varied (Yosso et al., 2009). Only a few reported pushing back. Many respondents were so used to these jokes and comments that

they were not “phased” by them. Broadly speaking, Pennsylvania students became aware of their status as nonwhite given the subordination and differences made apparent through the jokes, comments, and stereotypes they were subjected to by mainly white individuals. Here, again, students faced microassaults (Sue et al., 2007) which facilitated interpersonal subordination. Students’ subordination demonstrates the embedded nature of white racial domination across societal institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2014) buttressed by the white racial frame. Overall, the encounters described in this section racialized Mexicans in general, and the students themselves, as inferior and deficient in relation to their white peers within their educational settings.

New York City

The main way that New York City respondents encountered interpersonal racialization is through interactions at their workplace environments. Fifteen of the twenty-five New York City respondents experienced this type of denigration, usually, but not exclusively, at the hands of white customers and employers in a variety of ways. When queried about living in New York City and how those around her perceive Mexicans, one respondent provides this example of a microassault (Sue et al., 2007)

> Liliana: I haven’t experienced racism in my neighborhood, but at work, yes, because I work at a hotel. I am a manager, relating back to the city, yes, most of the customers are from middle to high class white families that come in. Obviously some of the baristas do mess up and [customers] do want to speak to the manager and having a nineteen-year-old person of color as a manager, I have experienced it.
> Me: Have you had explicit things said to you?
> Liliana: That I remember, yes, because it happened recently. It was this group of four white customers who came in, and one was pregnant, and they brought some pastries they wanted to eat inside the restaurant, but it is more of cubicle. I had to tell them that if they were not going to buy anything, that they had to leave. Of course, me being the brown-skinned woman that I am, they reacted “hey, why are you, a minority, asking me to leave, why don’t I call security and have you taken out.”

This incident shows how quickly white customers use the white racial frame (Feagin and Cobas, 2014) to undermine Liliana's managerial position and authority given her "race," and perhaps her age and gender. In addition, these white customers use the frame to interpret her inconveniencing their actions and presence as a young "minority" as a trespasser in a fancy hotel needing removal by security.

Carmela was born and raised in a mainly minority community outside of New York City, has a lighter to medium complexion, and a very subtle accent. When asked about how others around her perceive Mexicans, she replied that some Latinx and Black high school classmates believed "they are good at cleaning" and "they are not as smart." She also remembered some personal experiences

> Actually, I do remember one incident, and I didn't take offense, I was working [at a supermarket] and this white lady came up to me and was like "oh you're English is really good, where did you learn to speak English?" And then there was another white lady who approached me, she was like "I have a job for you," and I stared at her, so she gave me her card, she was like, "oh I am looking for someone to clean my house." These were both around the same time.

The first "white lady" reproduces stereotypical assumptions of Mexicans as "foreign" since being American means being white (Feagin and Cobas, 2014; O'Brien, 2008; Romero, 2011). Such encounters are consistent with the societal white racial frame (Feagin and Cobas, 2014). The other "white lady" reproduces stereotypical assumptions that Mexicans are only capable of low-skilled and low-paying work. Although we do not know whether these white women perceived Carmela as Mexican, nor how the four white customers perceived Liliana, these encounters still serve to racialize Carmela, Liliana, and other Mexicans as inferior and deficient in these respondents' minds.

Marcelo, who arrived in New York City at a very young age, works at a food establishment in the city with mainly Mexican coworkers. He described his and his coworkers' treatment at their place of work as

> [C]ertain customers have a sardonic way of speaking, that they don't speak to you, they speak down to you because you are Mexican. And when they speak to an employee who is not Mexican, they talk to them in a better way. The customers I have noticed are white and Black and sometimes even other Hispanics, so it's basically everyone.

Marcelo confirmed that he and his coworkers sometimes speak Spanish in front of customers and that he believes this is mainly when customers speak to them in a demeaning manner. Regarding the white customers' treatment of Marcelo and his coworkers, this is an example of a larger pattern where whites disparage Spanish, its speakers, and their accents given that they are assumed deficient and inferior in juxtaposition to white unaccented English speakers who are viewed as superior (Feagin and Cobas, 2014). Moreover, other "Hispanic" and Black customers' similar behavior toward Marcelo and his coworkers demonstrates that minority individuals are not immune from espousing a white racial framing of Mexicans and others (Feagin and Cobas, 2014). Here and in other New York respondents' workplaces, microinsults (Sue et al., 2007) based on language are used to racialize Mexicans as inferior.

One other common aspect through which New York respondents experienced racialization in their work places was through assumptions about their competence. Guadalupe, who like most other respondents interacts with white individuals mainly through work, detailed interactions she had while a senior in high school

> Oh they felt superior, there were times in the [zoo], I was in the front of the zoo giving tours and our instructors were all white. I guess just because we were from the Bronx, they thought we were savages. They would just talk to us sometimes like unprofessionally, like make sure you don't do this or that, you know

> common courtesy stuff like how to interact with visitors. It was like oh, I didn't know we were stupid.
> Me: Would you say they were keeping extra tabs on you?
> Guadalupe: Yea, a lot of that. It is funny because it got to the point where this other white lady thought that we weren't working, so she went up to us and she is like how much do you guys get paid to not do shit.

Guadalupe and her Black and Latinx coworkers' white instructors assumed that their racial background, age, and place of residence meant that they were unfamiliar with how to greet visitors in a polite way and that they lacked manners. In addition, on a slow day when few visitors were coming in, an older white female employee assumed that Guadalupe and her coworkers were purposefully not working in order to collect an easy paycheck. Such assumptions are part of a larger narrative stereotyping urban minority youth as both unruly and lazy harkening back to the culture of poverty argument.

Irrespective of coming across microinsults, as Guadalupe did from her white workplace instructors, or microassaults (Sue et al., 2007), as Guadalupe did from her white coworker, most New York respondents' workplaces were among the few social spaces where Mexicans are racialized as deficient and inferior in relation to white people. It appears racialization is more direct and explicit when respondents are in white controlled spaces. Of course, this does not mean that white or any individuals are responsible for microaggressions and racialization. The whiteness of these spaces and resulting microaggressions and racialization are a consequence of their histories, structures, practices, and discourses that reproduce racial inequalities as well as the assumed superiority of whites and assumed inferiority of people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Evans and Moore, 2015; Feagin and Cobas, 2014). The microaggressions described so far are just some of the negative messages that respondents had to contend with as they transitioned into college and adulthood. Besides affecting where racialization occurs,

local context also influences how racialization manifests in relation to respondents' national origin. This is the topic of the following section.

National Origin Racialized

Mexicans in Southeastern Pennsylvania: Where Are You (Really) From?

Gloria, born and raised in a southwestern city with a large Mexican American population, and who has a medium complexion, reflected on being Mexican American

> Gloria: Have you seen the movie Selena?
> Me: Yes
> Gloria: Do you remember when Edward James Olmos' character said…
> Me: Yea, I know exactly what you are going to say. "You have to be more Mexican than the Mexicans"
> Gloria: "And more American than the Americans" (both laugh). You have to know your shit because like my cousins, who were from Mexico, would tell me that I was a "pinche gringa" [whitewashed Mexican] and I was…Still, there is a constant idea that you are a perpetual foreigner here, irrespective of your birth status. It doesn't matter if you have citizenship or if you were born here, when they look at you they assume you are "other" and I am talking about here [at Victory and this town] and back in [home state] too.

As Gloria's narrative and other research shows, Mexicans, regardless of citizenship status, are generally perceived as foreign and or "illegal" in the US. Twelve respondents reported hearing comments that assumed that all Mexicans, including themselves, were foreign or "illegal;" namely the former. Most typically this involved the students, both 1.5-generation and US-born, being told to "go back to your country" by white students in high school. These and other incidents are only some of the microinvalidations marking Latinx as not American (Sue et al., 2007).

Almost all Pennsylvania respondents recounted instances, usually at Victory, upon first meeting white peers where others asked where they were from, what they were, or had their national origin questioned. Questions like these function as a "racist hoop," despite most Pennsylvania respondents finding these questions benign, given the

stereotypical assumptions about Mexicans' "foreignness" (O'Brien, 2008, p. 129). Some respondents recalled, "Where are you from?" being the first question that people ask when meeting them, or being asked this "a lot." For instance, Cristina, who had no apparent accent, and a light to medium complexion, had been asked this question so many times that she wondered "Do I look like I am not from here?" In four other respondents' experiences, the person inquiring brings up the word "originally" when the respondent answered the small Pennsylvania town they come from. One of these respondents articulated how these encounters affected her

> Sofia: In the beginning when I would meet people and they would ask "Where you are from?" I would always say I am from [Pennsylvania town], and they are like where is that, is it here in [Pennsylvania]? Then they would ask where I was from again, that is when I started saying that I am originally from Mexico and that would be enough. But before when I say [Pennsylvania], they were just like no.
> Me: How did that make you feel, for them to keep asking you?
> Sofia: That really hurt me in a way because I think that I can't say that I am just Mexican or that I am just American because I am not just American since I grew up here, but I am Mexican, I feel like I am both and when they ask me that it is like they are denying the fact that I consider myself American too.

Although Sofia has no discernable accent when speaking English, in the eyes of her white peers, her medium complexion marks her as not American.

Sasha, much darker in complexion and also with no discernable accent, recounted experiences of others at Victory asking about her racial identity

> I mean I do say I am Mexican and they are like right away thinking that you know I was born in Mexico. I get it, I don't get offended, but it's just like please stop assuming. I was born in [southeastern Pennsylvania], I get it consistently from people, I was born and raised here.

Three others were asked similar questions so much that in response they developed a strategy (O'Brien, 2008) so when asked where they are from, these respondents come up with a random country to try to throw off the person who is asking. Still, the underlying

assumption behind these examples of microinvalidations (Sue et al., 2007) is that being American means being white (Feagin and Cobas, 2014; O'Brien, 2008; Romero, 2011) given that this country's persistent white racial framing of Latinx' racializes them as foreign and un-American. This was especially true and more explicit for interviewees who had noticeably nonwhite complexions.

Conversely, a few other respondents had their Mexican identity questioned because they were assumed to be too light-skinned and thus did not "look Mexican" in the minds of those asking about their background. Such incidents also exemplify microinvalidations (Sue et al., 2007). In Sara's case, she suffered a double-invalidation since assumptions about phenotype, citizenship, and national origin combine to render her both not American and not Mexican in the eyes of other Mexicans and whites

> Sara: When people ask me where I'm from, I say I'm from [Pennsylvania town], but then they are like "No, like where are you really from? Because you don't look American." But then again what is American?... I'm also Mexican, I was born in Mexico, and I speak Spanish and I have Mexican culture and traditions. I speak Spanish with my parents. I like music in Spanish, I have the best of both worlds really.
> Me: So when you say you are Mexican, does it vary by who is asking?
> Sara: No, I tell everyone that I'm Mexican. Most people don't believe it, they are like "you are so white [and have green eyes], you don't look Mexican." I'm like wait to you see my mom.

Daniela, who is half-white and Mexican, also faced a double-invalidation since others do not perceive her as Latinx given her light complexion, lack of Spanish, and lack of Mexican cultural characteristics. Yet, others do not perceive her as fully white because of her mixed-race status.

Sofia's, Sara's, Daniela's, and others' experiences remind us that Mexicans and Latinx' live complex racial realities in this country. Given how their varied phenotypes, cultural practices, languages spoken, and other characteristics are assumed as accurate,

yet in some cases contradictory measures of their racial, ethnic, and or national backgrounds and authenticity, they are subject to be considered, sometimes simultaneously, neither American nor Mexican. As has been detailed in this section, young Mexicans are racialized as "forever foreigners" (Tuan, 1998) regardless of citizenship status at Victory University and elsewhere in southeastern Pennsylvania, and thus they are excluded from being considered American. As an old (Mexican) saying goes, respondents face assumptions of being "ni de aqui, ni de alla" [neither from here nor from there].

Being Mexican in New York City: Assumptions of "Illegality"

While Pennsylvania respondents were subject to racialization as "foreign" and "not American," New York respondents' racialization centered on illegality. Fourteen of the twenty-five respondents reported facing assumptions of Mexicans as "illegal;" some referenced their high school peers, others singled out politics, the broader society, as well as interactions in college. Again, this racialization seems to be less direct than that experienced by Pennsylvania respondents; especially for New York-born respondents. Rosa Maria, born in New York City, pointed to her Black high school peers' jokes

> In high school, and it still upsets me until this day, a lot of people just think that Mexicans are all undocumented and they all just come here to take people's jobs. It still bothers me a lot because my parents are struggling, I still see it and I have a lot of family members. It bothers me because they are like Mexicans crossing the border, Mexicans are illegal, it is always the same racist things.

Such interactions elicit much emotion from Rosa Maria, especially anger, since her peers' jokes ignore the conditions necessitating Mexican migration to the US as well as her parents' and other family members' "struggles." It is important to remember that

respondents mentioning assumptions linking Mexicans with illegality during high school, experienced this before Trump, between 2008 and 2012.

When asked about others' attitudes toward Mexicans on Empire's campus, Ricardo, born and raised in the city, made a connection to the political climate

> I would have to say that, with the current presidential elections are definitely adding to the perceptions and stereotypes. I would have to say immigration, especially being considered illegal and an alien, this is stuff on campus. Like the use of certain language, some people may not know that others prefer to be referred to as undocumented, that there is different terminology than what they are using. Illegal is meant to dehumanize.

Unlike the racialization as foreign experienced by Victory students on campus, Empire students were less likely to be directly targeted by assumptions of illegality on their campus. Still, New York respondents experienced racialization as "illegal" in other social environments. Guadalupe, like a few other New York respondents, attends demonstrations and rallies to support immigration legislation such as the Dream Act and oppose anti-immigrant legislation and sentiments. At these rallies she has been confronted with various negative associations linking Mexicans, whether US-born or undocumented, especially with being

> Criminal and illegal. They lump everyone together and it is all based off how you look. Even though I am born here, in the eyes of the oppressors, I am illegal, and we [Mexicans] are all illegal. According to them, I don't belong here, we [Mexicans] don't belong here.

The above referenced incidents are microinvalidations since they exclude or nullify the varied experiences of Mexicans in the US (Sue et al., 2007).

Although some US-born respondents faced racialization as "illegal," undocumented respondents' who explicitly contended with this racialization dealt with

additional anxieties centered on dehumanization and a fear of deportation. Gustavo dealt with these circumstances specifically at Empire

> When I got here, I had a professor, he has written lots of books, he is a very important professor, supposedly. I had a political class with him on migration. The first day of class he called Mexicans, aliens instead of migrants…I really despised it. I was like Mexicans are not aliens, they are all human beings and I had this really huge argument with him. I really disliked his comments, I went after him when I saw him after class…he said that he called people as it is and I told him that I thought he is a racist…I raised a complaint [with the college] but they didn't do anything because supposedly he is a big deal and he is a prestigious professor but I think that he shouldn't even be here. That is one of the first times that I had a very uncomfortable situation here, so I dropped his class. And I told everyone I could that he is racist, I didn't care, because I felt really disrespected and uncomfortable in his class, I seriously felt that if he found out that I was Mexican that he was going to call USCIS or ICE and tell them that I was undocumented. I felt afraid for the first time for someone to know that I was undocumented.

Here, Gustavo links his professor's antagonistic language and stereotyping of *all* Mexicans as "aliens" with feeling "afraid" "for someone to know" he is "undocumented." Moreover, this fear may be premised on Empire's lack of attention to Gustavo's complaint. Such inaction is an institutional microaggression (Yosso et al., 2009) since it legitimized the professor's antagonistic language and stereotypes. Besides Gustavo, two other respondents communicated a fear of being deported given the negative societal attitudes they observe toward Mexican immigrants.

Again, local context influences the way in which Mexicans must contend with racialization in relation to being Mexican. In southeastern Pennsylvania, respondents experienced being Mexican through racialization as foreign and not belonging in their predominately white settings. More specifically, they are racialized as inferior and deficient in juxtaposition to their white middleclass peers through various interpersonal interactions as well as larger circumstances in their educational settings. Meanwhile, in New York City, respondents are racialized as Mexican in relation to being "illegal"

which carries the connotation of criminality. New York respondents experience racialization in a variety of settings, including their educational settings, but again, this racialization, with the exception of workplace settings, does not directly juxtapose them to middleclass whites or any other group. Moreover, New York respondents had to contend with assumptions of illegality inside and outside of their educational settings. Overall, respondents and other Mexicans in New York were racialized as generally inferior and deficient.

Racialization across Local Contexts

Moochers and Criminals

Although local context plays a role in the type of racialization experienced and how that racialization manifests, respondents in both locations still were subject to similar processes of racialization. Overall, sixteen of the New York participants and eleven of the Pennsylvania participants, mentioned that Mexicans are presumed to be taking people's jobs and or taking advantage of government resources. For some respondents, these stereotypes are linked directly to the perception that all Mexicans are "illegal." Respondents in both locations recalled learning such assumptions from a variety of sources.

David arrived with his family in Pennsylvania at a young age, and specifically connected Mexicans being perceived as "mooching off the government" and "being a waste of government resources" to being perceived as "undocumented." Similarly, regarding attitudes toward Mexicans in this country, Henry, a Pennsylvania-born respondent, observed "I don't think it is positive. Definitely, I think there is a negative connotation. There is this idea that we are stealing jobs and coming in for benefits, its

media driven." In New York, respondents articulated related observations. Daniel detailed personal experiences with "Anglo" students when previously attending a community college in a neighboring state, where they connected (undocumented) Mexicans "taking advantage of the government" with coming here to have "five anchor babies" and living off "welfare." Further, according to Daniel, "Anglos" get these ideas from the media. Jose Luis specifically noted the stereotypes of Mexicans taking advantage of government resources focus on the false belief that undocumented people, and specifically Mexicans, do not pay taxes. All of these examples are microinsults (Sue et al., 2007) since respondents themselves are not explicitly targeted as moochers.

Both in past and current times, Mexicans are assumed to be taking white individuals' jobs. This framing of Mexicans stealing jobs and taking advantage of government resources goes back as far as the Great Depression (Balderrama and Rodriguez, 2006; Molina, 2006), when they were first racialized as deportable (Ngai, 2004). In 1992, California Governor Pete Wilson, during his reelection bid, ran an ad mentioning that the federal government required California taxpayers to pay "billions to take care" of Latinx immigrants (Massey et al., 2002). Governor Wilson also perpetuated rhetoric of Mexican migrants as "uncontrollable" and "unchecked" "illegal" migration (Ono and Sloop, 2002). This framing is part of a larger "Latino Threat Narrative," present since the 1970s, where politicians and media pundits claim that Mexican immigrants and their children undeservingly use up government resources, but more importantly, they pose a threat to US Anglo institutions, culture, and ways of life (Chavez, 2013).

The notion of Mexicans and Latinx posing a threat to the US also includes stereotyping as criminals. Recall that the societal white racial frame racializes Latinx as a

“dangerous, threatening, “foreign,” [and] “un-American” nonwhite group with a recurrent emphasis on their alleged criminality (Feagin and Cobas, 2014, p. 29). This alleged criminality was regularly present in respondents’ narratives. Fourteen New York respondents and twelve Pennsylvania respondents pointed to assumptions about Mexicans being prone to criminality, mainly, but not exclusively, involvement with drugs and gangs. Pennsylvania respondents were more likely to encounter such assumptions at Victory University. Wendy, a 1.5-generation Pennsylvania participant, recounted

> I think like most of the [students], they think that Mexicans are criminals and that they use drugs. Yea, because I know some people…they think that Mexicans are criminals. When I talk to them I have to say that not everyone is the same way, it’s only a stereotype…For example my roommate, I think she knew Hispanic people before, but not Mexicans so much.

Likewise, Sasha encountered some of the same dynamics as Wendy

> There are a lot of stereotypes for Mexicans. I feel like a lot of [students] see them as if they are all true. I think it is about being misinformed, as I said you do not see a lot of [Mexicans] here and when you do, [students] think of some of the most negative things. Like right now, oh my god, there is so much killing in Mexico…with the drug cartels. [Students] think, oh my god, if I go to Mexico I’m going to die. But even here, students pretty much think of us, Hispanics in general, as criminals and drug dealers I guess.

Though not reflected in her narrative above, during her interview, Wendy, like Sasha, cited students connecting coverage of drug cartel violence and murders occurring in Mexico with the common stereotype of US Latinx as gangbangers and drug dealers. Both Wendy and Sasha face microinsults (Sue et al., 2007) since it is “Mexicans” and “Mexico” and not they themselves who are the targets of other students’ assumptions.

Still, male, more than female, students in Pennsylvania were more often the targets of explicit comments and especially assumptions of criminality; they were more likely to face microassaults (Sue et al., 2007). Alfonso, who has a medium complexion, arrived in Pennsylvania as a middle-schooler with his family in a town where other

respondents are also from. In this town, Alfonso remembered an incident of racial profiling that "opened" his "eyes" toward how whites in the town perceive Mexicans

> After school we [mainly other Mexican students] would all play soccer and go to a park. Our park, you drive up a hill and park at the top of the hill and then you walk down to the soccer field…and I remember that this one cop would drive up the hill and park… I saw him and he would get out of his car and he would go and try to open the doors to our cars. I was like what the hell is he doing, and my friend was like "He does that. He wants to see if you have any drugs in your car because he did that to me" …I never knew that he would do that, but we all, everyone in our community knows him, he is super racist. He is not allowed to do that…I thought it was odd, I was blown away that he would try to open your car to look for drugs and try to get [Mexicans].

Isaac, born and raised in a Southwestern city with a predominantly Mexican population, related an example of being "singled out." As the only Latinx among sixty students on his dorm floor during freshman year at Victory, white students questioned Isaac if he was in a gang and specifically "Are you in Latin Kings?" Maleno, another 1.5-generation respondent, and has a lighter to medium complexion, discussed the residents of the mainly white college town surrounding Victory

> I think that they feel [Mexicans] are inferior to them, because I have seen them, just look at us different when we go to one of the restaurants…And also like the really old people, they are really just kind of scared of you. One time I was in the Burger King in town, and I was behind an [old white couple] and the guy just saw me behind him and they just moved away from me because they thought that I was going to rob them or something.

New York City respondents encountered assumptions about Mexicans' inclination toward crime, drugs, and gangs within their high schools, in stores, in their communities, in the media, in politics, and in the broader society. In his mainly Latinx high school, where there were few other Mexican students, Gustavo acknowledged that students and teachers "assume[d] we are gangsters and drug dealers." Maria Jose, born and raised in the city, and with a medium complexion, shared that while shopping in high-end

department stores she had security guards “eyeing” and “following” her around. Yadira noted that in her neighborhood

> I think most of the people around, where I live, some people, they see how some people are, there are a couple of people who are Mexican, who are always [doing drugs]…and they are like “look at those Mexicans, they come here, they just come to [do drugs].

More broadly, Isaias, who arrived in the city as a teenager, called attention to how

> The only thing that they will put in the news is drug dealers who are Mexicans, maybe shootings where Mexicans are involved, or other bad stuff with Mexicans. More stereotypes. As if we are the only ones doing drugs. That just adds to the stereotypical Mexican image…that they are always turning to drugs.

Isaias’ identification of the pattern of media coverage toward Mexicans is noteworthy given that he has only been watching news for a few years. In other words, it did not take long for him to notice that such a pattern exits. All of these respondents’ experiences exemplify microinsults (Sue et al., 2007) since they were not targets.

Regardless of country of birth, age of arrival, gender, and other characteristics, almost half of all respondents recognized a proliferation of associations of being Mexican with stealing jobs, mooching off the government, crime, drugs, and gangs. Such meanings of being Mexican were present at a local and national level: in respondents’ high schools, their communities, at Victory University, in politics, in the media, and in the broader society. As has been the pattern, Pennsylvania respondents were more likely than their New York counterparts were to experience microaggressions through interpersonal interactions and in their educational settings. Still all of the incidents discussed in this section are part of the racialization of Mexicans as inferior and deficient and represent some of the added difficulties that Mexican students must deal with as they attempt to graduate high school and college.

Mexicans as Academically Incompetent

Not only did respondents in both southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City face racialization as moochers and criminals, participants in both locations faced instances of having their academic capabilities and intelligence questioned. Just over one-half of all respondents, twenty in Pennsylvania and eleven in New York, experienced such occurrences. Pennsylvania respondents' encountered such assumptions mainly in their high schools and at Victory University. Moreover, Pennsylvania participants were marked as not belonging at Victory through assumptions about their limited education and intelligence in relation to white peers. These assumptions implied that respondents, other Mexicans, and to a lesser extent Latinx should be excluded from higher education.

Pennsylvania respondents reported multiple ways that this occurred. For some, teachers doubted their academic achievements because they were Mexican. Ernesto, who was one of the few Mexicans in his advanced classes, remembered some teachers being "prejudiced toward Mexicans."

> My eleventh grade history teacher would stand behind me every exam…He would walk around and always end up behind my desk…And every exam it was the same thing, he thought I was cheating because I would score 97, 98, good grades. So he would always expect something, so he would always be monitoring me. And in my work he would mark it really specific, he would take off all these little points and I would talk to my [white] friends in class and ask if he took off for them…he wouldn't take off half the stuff he took off me.

At a different high school, two teachers questioned whether Moyses belonged in their respective high-level math and AP science classes

> I remember the first day of class…I was the only Mexican student in that class, I showed the teacher my schedule… I was in the right room, I was supposed to be there, and the teacher flat out told me that they made a mistake and that I was not supposed to be there and I said what do you mean, you're Mr. [X], this is your class. Even though it said it on my schedule and everything, he still sent me to the guidance office to make sure that there was no mistake, that always stuck me

> the fact that it was like, I guess he couldn't believe that a Mexican student could be in this high level math class.

These encounters are microinvalidations (Sue et al., 2007) since teachers doubted Ernesto's and Moyses' academic accomplishments given that they are Mexican.

Other respondents were explicitly steered away from "good" four-year universities by their white high school counselors; these actions are microassaults (Sue et al., 2007) since they targeted Mexican students in mainly white schools. Katherine, a 1.5-generation respondent with academic accolades, described her guidance counselor as

> Katherine: I didn't have a good relationship with him. Junior year of high school you are supposed to go in a meeting with them and they are supposed to advise you on college and which ones to go to. And when I went to him, he asked me if I wanted to go to college and which ones, and I mentioned [Victory], and he said "oh that's for rich white people, why don't we look into a community college." So I just got up and left (laughs).
> Me: How did that make you feel?
> Katherine: I felt stupid at first because I thought okay, so I'm dreaming, maybe there's no way I can go to [Victory] and I should consider community college…

Two other respondents had the same experience with this counselor, since, in his opinion, these students stood a better chance of getting into community college. Other students, regardless of national origin, also had white counselors discourage them from applying to Victory University since they were perceived incapable of meeting the entrance standards.

Overall, eleven students confronted such assumptions from their counselors. Among these students, gender influenced their racialization in that female students were more likely to be steered toward community college, while male students were more likely to be steered toward trade school. Milo, who arrived in Pennsylvania at a young age, immediately shared the following when asked to discuss his time in high school

> I think something that was really important to me…like showed me a new perspective of how the world really is was when I went to go talk to my

> counselor [about college]…So I went to my counselor and…she was like so, "I was looking at different possibilities for you after high school," and I remember that she told me "well there are like a lot of trade schools that will be perfect for you." One, I had never spoken to her about anything remotely related to what I wanted to do or my goals, she just automatically went down that road and then she tried to tell me that college wasn't an option, but trade schools are totally possible. And I don't know, that always stuck with me, even today. Sometimes I really think about it.

Above, we see clearly how a white racial framing of Mexican students has the potential to reproduce educational and other inequalities given how difficult it is for community college students to transfer and graduate from a four-year university. A white racial framing of Mexicans is also guiding the steering of male students toward trade schools.

Other students were explicitly told that Mexicans and Latinx did not deserve to be at Victory, since affirmative action helps them get there (Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot, 2005). Such snubs constitute microinsults (Sue et al., 2007). While Reina, born and raised in a Pennsylvania city, described loving Victory, she also detailed what she did not like

> Reina: I don't like that out of the forty thousand students on this campus, two thousand of us are Hispanic or Latino. And I think a little bit less that are Black. I don't think that is fair. It is like maybe four thousand of us out of forty thousand and that is insane to me.
> Me: What specifically about this bothers you?
> Reina: I think there is also a stigma attached to it here, I have heard multiple times some other non-Hispanic, mostly white, students they have been like "oh but you have so many opportunities because you are Hispanic, you are underrepresented, you definitely got here more easily than us or you get more aid because of that. Because of your race or whatever, and you get it easier because people give you more opportunities" and all this stuff, and (*more sarcastically*) I guess it was so easy not having the money or resources or finances to be here and stress everything, I guess okay you make sense. (*More agitated*) That to me is some of the most ignorant things that they don't know what they are talking about, they do not know what we have to go through to get here.

Reina connects Victory's lack of diversity with students' white framing of minority students at historically white universities and the added stigma such students are

burdened with since they are perceived to have unearned advantages and that such unearned advantages, not their own academic capabilities, get minorities into college.

In another variation of this theme, six respondents recalled white Victory students being surprised that they were doing well in “harder” STEM majors. Kevin, a science major, who was born and raised in the southwestern US but attended high school in southeastern Pennsylvania, shared

> I feel with the general student body, the perception that there is, is that Hispanics are less capable. I feel that that is pretty persistent. So like, there is always this extra admiration when like people are like “you are so competitive.” Its like, are you surprised because I am Hispanic? I think that is where I see it.

For Claudia, a science major, born and raised in a midwestern city, and two other female students, gender played a role in the microinvalidations (Sue et al., 2007) they faced

> Like a lot of the [Mexican male students] when I first met them and told them my major, they were like, “oh really?” Like they didn’t believe I was a science major, they thought my GPA was really bad…Like I was having a conversation with a guy who graduated, and I told him my major and he was like “no way.” I was like not knowing what to say. And he started asking me all these questions about my major… He was testing me.

Although Claudia and the other two students recalled others doubting their educational pursuits because of being Mexican, as they recalled, more often they were doubted because pursuing college was not seen as compatible by their families and what they viewed as the traditional womanly duties of having a family, children, and tending to the home by their mid-twenties. Still, these students, and almost all others, did have their parents support to pursue higher education.

As most of the instances among Pennsylvania students in this section show, respondents experienced a reinforcement of the stereotype that Mexicans are poorly educated and less intelligent (Chavez, 2013; Dowling, 2014; Lee and Zhou, 2015;

Vasquez, 2011; Yosso et al., 2009) in relation to their white peers. Together these microaggressions assume that respondents are not capable of getting good grades, meeting four-year university entrances standards, and succeeding in more demanding majors. As such, most of these instances represent the recurring and unequal relationships that recreate the institutions perpetuating racial subordination, inequalities, and systemic racism (Feagin, 2014). These instances also imply that respondents, other Mexicans, and to a lesser extent other Latinx should be excluded from higher education.

New York respondents encountered assumptions about their academic engagement and competence mainly in their high schools, from family, at work, and much less so at Empire College. Ricardo, who attended a Black and Latinx high school, recalled the general attitudes toward Mexicans in his high school linking education and criminality

> Oh man, we used to have a bad reputation. I was treated differently because they would be like "All you Mexicans are in a gang. You don't care about school. Mexicans are always cutting school." This was coming from students, teachers, and even security guards. They would just look at you and assume stuff cuz you were Mexican. We were perceived as trouble makers.

As with Pennsylvania male students, New York male students were more likely than their female peers were to face assumptions of criminality. This is one manner in which racialization manifests as a gendered process. Still, New York students were more likely to experience such assumptions in their high schools, while Pennsylvania students were more like to experience these assumptions at Victory University.

At her all-girl high school, Yadira had the following occur with a white teacher

> I had this one professor, she was like you know, she thought that I was going to fall into that stereotype where Mexicans don't do anything, they don't go to college. She was like, why go to college, there is no point, I don't see a future for you. I was like I am going to prove you wrong.

Not only does Yadira's teacher question her capacity for pursuing college and getting ahead in life, but in this same interaction she reproduced the stereotype that Yadira, as an urban minority woman, would end up pregnant at a young age. Likewise, Magdalena dealt with such dynamics among extended family

> It was also about proving to the rest of my family that I was going to make it to college because there was the expectation that I was going to get pregnant and end up with a whole bunch of children. I feel like I always had all of that in my mind.

Although four other New York female respondents encountered assumptions regarding Mexicans as academically incompetent and Mexican young women being likely to become pregnant at a young age, the connection between the two types of assumptions was not made explicit. Hence, only Yadira and Magdalena experienced explicit gendered racialization regarding their academic competence. Conversely, only one female Victory students, Claudia, experienced gendered racialization in relation to her education.

Elsewhere, Anita, at her workplace outside of New York City, had her white employers question "why I was going to college, like questioning me if it was worth it. As if I shouldn't be there." Anita's racialization as academically incompetent may also be due to her lack of citizenship since her employers did not like her being openly and vocally involved in advocating for undocumented students' access to higher education. Besides New York respondents' high schools, workplaces, and extended family, they experienced racialization as academically incompetent in their college settings. However, unlike their Pennsylvania counterparts at Victory, only one New York respondent encountered assumptions about his academic competence at Empire. Alejandro arrived in New York City as a teenager, and discussed "whenever someone knows that I am in

college, they are surprised. Like oh, “How did you get into college?” given that they also know he is Mexican. Two other respondents were similarly questioned by white peers at previously attended mostly white institutions. Bernardo specifically cited transferring out of his previous institution because of this and other stereotypes he dealt with. Thus New York students in this section, with the exception of Magdalena, had to confront microinsults (Sue et al., 2007) aimed at their academic competence.

Respondents in this study had to contend with various negative messages about being Mexican in multiple settings. Although only Bernardo was forced to transfer high schools or colleges because of the microaggressions and racialization he faced, all respondents had to contend with microaggressions inside and outside of their educational settings. Encountering such messages and assumptions, especially those emphasizing Mexican students’ academic incompetence, added to the already difficult times that all students must encounter as they transition from high school to college and into adulthood.

Discussion

Unlike most sociological analyses of immigrants, which emphasize assimilation and mobility, this chapter employed racial microaggressions, racialization, and sociology of race contributions to scrutinize the experiences of Mexican young adults in southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, Pennsylvania and New York Mexican students had to contend with various racial microaggressions throughout their social environments as they transitioned to young adulthood. Far from representing the interpersonal manifestations of racism (Sue et al., 2007), respondents’ confrontation with racial microaggressions has larger structural consequences. Racial microaggressions were the main mechanisms through which my

Mexican respondents experienced racialization as inferior, deficient, foreign, “illegal,” moochers, criminals, and academically incompetent. More broadly, in Pennsylvania, racialization functioned to (re)produce the whiteness of the spaces, namely Victory University, where respondents transitioned to young adulthood. Here respondents are marked as inferior and deficient in relation to their white, and largely middleclass, peers. For New York respondents, racialization worked to signal certain institutional spaces—namely politics, the government, the media, workplaces—as exclusionary to Mexicans, Latinx, and immigrants, if not outright anti-Mexican, anti-Latinx, and anti-immigrant.

Not only did location influence the effects of racialization, location also influenced the sources and type of racialization that respondents dealt with. Racialization in southeastern Pennsylvania occurred primarily in respondents’ high schools and at Victory University, and chiefly in interpersonal interactions with their white peers and white high school officials. Therefore, Pennsylvania participants were more likely to face racialization on an interpersonal basis. Meanwhile, in New York City, racialization occurred mostly as an impersonal process by which respondents are exposed to various negative messages toward Mexicans in various institutional spaces; mainly in political discourse, the media, less so in their high schools, and rarely at Empire College.

Among New York respondents, interpersonal racialization occurred predominantly at their workplaces and mainly at the hands of white employers, coworkers, and customers. It appears that interpersonal racialization is more likely to occur in white controlled settings. Moreover, the meanings attached to being Mexican differed by location. For Pennsylvania respondents, being Mexican is experienced through racialization as foreign and thus not belonging in their predominately white

settings. On the other hand, New York City respondents experienced being Mexican through racialization as “illegal” and its added connotation of criminality.

The racialization encountered by respondents in both southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City have broader theoretical implications. First, the microaggressions and racialization present in both locations are part of the societal white racial frame where Latinx are considered a “dangerous, threatening, “foreign,” [and] “un-American” nonwhite group with an emphasis on their alleged criminality (Feagin and Cobas, 2014, p. 29). Consequently, my respondents and their Mexicanness were marked as subordinate and experienced subordination across various institutional spaces. In Pennsylvania this was mainly in respondents’ high schools and at Victory, while in New York, this was mainly and most explicitly in respondents’ work places. Hence, it appears that the manifestation of the white racial frame as well as systemic racism—although the latter is outside the scope of this chapter—are also subject to variation by local context.

One other theoretical implication to consider is the relationship between racialization and integration for immigrants. Of the two main assimilation perspectives, only segmented assimilation highlights racialization and other racial dynamics. Unfortunately, this perspective merely operationalizes race as “color,” where the process of racialization remains undertheorized so that it is not clear how the second generation is assigned racial meanings (Lopez, 2003). Under sociology of race perspectives, attention to the racialization of Latinx has increased, yet less attention focuses on the racialization of immigrants and even less on how racialization and integration can be mutually occurring processes. Both processes should be considered in tandem for at least two reasons. First, local and national institutional arrangements in education, the labor

market, politics, and other social arenas structure integration into a new country (Crul and Schneider, 2010). Second, the US bestows economic, political, and other resources and privileges to those deemed white over those deemed nonwhite (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2014). Thus, the integration of immigrants must be considered in relation to such distribution of resources and opportunities (Saenz and Douglas, 2015).

This is particularly the case for immigrants and their descendants, who like my participants, cannot separate the immigrant aspects of their lives from their nonwhite social status. Accordingly, I would argue that *racialization is part of the integration process* for young adult undocumented, 1.5-generation, and second-generation Mexicans in both southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City. All sixty respondents reported confronting multiple microaggressions throughout their time in high school and in college. More telling is that respondents disclosed these instances during interviews where the topics of discussion did not include microaggressions, discrimination, racialization, or racism. The focus of interviews was on their high school and college experiences. As such, it is reasonable to assume that respondents have contended with more microaggressions and racialization on a day-to-day basis than they spoke about. Furthermore, respondents have experienced being Mexican in relation to their and their family's migration as well as their nonwhite social status.

On top of the microaggressions, racialization, and discrimination present within respondents' high schools and communities, respondents also had to negotiate various educational disadvantages in their transition to higher education. Such disadvantages included their low socioeconomic status, parents' lack of English fluency and broader low educational achievement, and unfamiliarity with the various steps in the process of

getting to college. In spite of all of this, respondents were able to fashion a network of support, resources, and relationships in order overcome such “odds.” The following chapter focuses on the factors facilitating respondents’ transition to higher education.

CHAPTER FOUR:
TRANSITION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

The preceding two chapters respectively established how local context influences both the resources and constraints respondents' faced in high school as well as the racialization they faced in their southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City settings. This chapter will cover the factors facilitating Mexican students transition to higher education and how local context influences such factors. Overall, students in this study were able to fashion a set of resources from their relationships with family members, school officials, and others in order to facilitate their transition into their respective institution of higher education. However, there appears to be a denser network of available resources for students in southeastern Pennsylvania which led them to Victory University. For example, a majority of participants either had family members or friends who previously attended Victory or were concurrently enrolled there. Such differences are also due in part to local context.

For each student it was critical to have enough information, support, and encouragement from their parents, teachers, counselors, family members, and other significant individuals in order to be able to consider a college education as something that is not only possible for them, but something that they are capable of attaining. The reason behind this is because students have either been stereotyped or have been made aware of the stereotypes that Mexicans are not academically competent students. As discussed in chapter three, a significant proportion of respondents mentioned that individuals in their home towns, in their respective educational settings, and this country held the perception that Mexicans are not academically competent. The relationships mentioned together with enrollment in various programs assisting the children of migrant

workers or disenfranchised students to attend college, combined to make college possible for them. Thus college attainment was far from the individual accomplishment that it is commonly assumed to be in this country. In total, fifty-eight of the sixty interviews will be referenced. Two of the southeastern Pennsylvania respondents are excluded given that these respondents attended high school in the southwest about ten years prior to the rest of the interviewees.

Mexican Students' Transition to Higher Education

As discussed in chapter one, considerable sociological research on the children of Mexican immigrants focuses on their assimilation patterns and especially educational attainment. Given that Mexicans still have among the lowest levels of educational attainment and a relatively high rate of exiting high school, much of this research emphasizes which factors, and combinations of factors, render Mexican students least likely to go to complete high school. New assimilation theorists (see Alba and Nee, 2003) argue that Mexicans' low levels of education are a consequence of this *immigrant* group's lack of social, financial, and human capital. Similarly, segmented assimilation theorists argue that Mexicans and Mexican Americans are more likely to experience downward mobility—social hindrances such as poverty, low levels of education, and relegation to inferior menial jobs—because of their lack of professional occupations, a negative context of reception that includes Mexicans being associated with having nonwhite physical characteristics and illegal status, lack of a strong coethnic community, and lack of coethnic community resources (Haller et al., 2011; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2008).

To some extent new assimilation theory emphasizes broader structural forces, e.g. human capital and state institutions, to explicate Mexican's low levels of educational attainment. Meanwhile, segmented assimilation theory tends to rely on cultural dynamics, namely an oppositional culture, to illuminate the factors behind the low educational attainment rates of this group. It seems that both perspectives would benefit from focusing on larger structural forces, cultural dynamics, as well as other micro-level interactions. Since assimilation and other perspectives tend to concentrate on the factors that influence Mexican students' lack of completing high school, these perspectives cannot demonstrate what does lead these students to complete high school and go on to college. Furthermore, these perspectives do not scrutinize the influence of local context on educational attainment for the children of immigrants.

Taken together, ten distinct *overlapping* factors were commonly present among New York City and southeastern Pennsylvania respondents' narratives about their schooling experiences. Factors included encouragement and motivation from parents, wanting to improve family and own socioeconomic status, keeping the immigrant bargain, having a relationship with a college-enrolled or college-educated individual, support from high school teachers and counselors, enrollment in a college preparatory program, and having a mentor or role model. Such factors operated at various levels: micro-level factors include internalized motivations and familial dynamics, meso-level factors include guidance from school officials, and macro-level factors included enrollment in various college preparatory programs. Table 2, below, summarizes all factors and their prevalence for all respondents in New York City and thirty-three of the thirty-five respondents in southeastern Pennsylvania.

TABLE 2.
Description and Prevalence of Factors Facilitating Student Transition to College

Factor	Description	Type	NYC	SE PA
Parental Encouragement & Motivation	Parents supported child's pursuit of college	Micro & Parental: Parent to child	25/25	32/33
Improving SES	College education viewed as a way to improve SES	Micro & Parental: internalized motivation	16/25	29/33
Keeping the Immigrant Bargain	Desire to "pay back" parents' immigration related sacrifices through doing well in school	Micro & Parental: emotional motivation	18/25	23/33
College Educated Adults	Adults providing motivation to start thinking about attending college, the know-how to complete high school, and how to navigate the college application process	Micro & Familial: external motivation and information from acquaintance	11/25	20/33
Support from Teachers & Counselors	Teachers/counselors provided encouragement, support, and or information on how to apply to college	Meso & Extra-familial: external motivation and information from institutional agent	22/25	27/33
College Preparatory Program	Programs providing tutoring for classes, SATS, help with college applications, mentoring, leadership skills, etc.	Macro: institutionalized information	14/25	22/33
Mentor/Role Model	Individual providing caring relationship, information & guidance toward college applications, and or example to emulate	Micro, Interfamilial, & Extra-familial: emotional connection, motivation, & information	13/25	24/33

TABLE 2. Continued
Description and Prevalence of Factors Facilitating Student Transition to College

[xxxii]*Support from Others*	*Friends and other adults providing support and or information toward attending college*	*Micro & Extra-familial: external motivation and information*	*22/25*	*19/33*
Proving Others Wrong	*Motivation to go to college from those who doubted that Mexicans and or respondents were college material*	*Micro, Interfamilial, & Extra-familial: internalized motivation*	*10/25*	*11/33*
Setting Example	*Respondents wanted to show others that Mexicans can make it to college*	*Macro, Interfamilial, & Extra-familial: internalized motivation*	*9/25*	*11/33*

Below, the ways in which some of these factors contributed to students' transition to college, as well as how multiple factors interact, are discussed. Each student was able to transition to college *given a combination* of multiple factors working simultaneously in their educational trajectory.

Parental Encouragement and Motivation

The myth that Mexican Americans, especially poor and working class parents, do not value education lingers (Valencia and Black, 2002). This myth relates to the perception that all Mexicans are uneducated (Lee and Zhou, 2015) and that Latinx immigrant parents are not involved in their children's education (Louie, 2012). More generally, parents who are poor, working class, and or who are minorities are perceived to be deficient compared to white middleclass parents (Koyama, 2007). Such assumptions fall under the long-standing deficit thinking perspective which provides

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[xxxii] The final three factors listed in Table 1 will not be discussed given that they are similar to other factors and that these were not emphasized as much by respondents.

individualist accounts blaming minority children and their families for failing to graduate from high school and college because their values and or culture do not "adequately" socialize children to become academically successful (Barajas and Pierce, 2001; Valencia and Black, 2002; Valencia, 2015). However, in studies of Mexican and Mexican American students who graduate from high school, college, and in some cases attain post-collegiate degrees, support and encouragement from parents is crucial to these achievements (Arellano and Padilla, 1996; Gandara, 1995; Garcia, 2004; Smith, 2008).

Among the respondents in this study, all but one young woman from southeastern Pennsylvania, had some level of encouragement and support from their parents in pursuing a college education. This encouragement varied in terms of how implicit or explicit parents discussed higher education expectations for their children, what they did to enforce such expectations, and how involved they were in their children's education. Daniela, a Pennsylvania respondent who is half white, did not have any help from her parents in her transition to college given that they were unfamiliar with this process. Despite this unfamiliarity, Daniela had the following to say about her Mexican mother

> Well my mom was always really supportive in whatever I wanted to do, she was always there to help me through whatever process it was. My mom also expected a lot. She didn't really know the specifics [of graduating high school and getting to college] but she would say "you can do more." So she encouraged me quite a bit.

Overall, parental support was usually emotional and moral (Stanton-Salazar, 2001) given that parents have few resources and have relatively little educational experience (Gandara, 1995). Still, a majority of respondents used their parents and their encouragement as their main motivation in their pursuit of a college education. Isaac, a Pennsylvania respondent born and raised in the southwest, described his parents thusly

> I had a lot of encouragement from my family, both of my parents really wanted me to go. But it was just, you know, encouragement without direction. It was just "you need to do something" but they didn't necessarily tell me how. Still, I can't hold that against them because they themselves were ignorant to how to apply to colleges and stuff like that.

Furthermore, Isaac felt additional motivation to finish high school and go to college given that his father exited high school in the tenth grade (Salgado, 2015). Other respondents described their parents as being involved in their schooling. Rebeca, who arrived in Pennsylvania at a young age, described staying focused on getting to college because of her parents and especially her mother

> I think for one part it was definitely my parents and just their constant looking at my report cards and making sure I was doing well in classes… And I think my mom has always been very outspoken, like that is just the way that she is, I'm not sure if it is the "Latina in her" or if she was born like that, but she is very adamant about being involved in school even if she couldn't really speak the language, she had language barriers, she always tried to talk to the teachers and somehow get involved.

Rebeca's mother used previous experience with her older sibling, who graduated from high school and college, in order to be involved in Rebeca's education.

Similar to Isaac's narrative above, some New York respondents pointed out that their parents' encouragement was a bit directionless. Ricardo, a New York City-born respondent, recalled his parents' involvement

> It was pretty minimal. Mostly, I would say it was church style, like "*no mas vamos a la iglesia el doce de Diciembre*[xxxiii]" (We are only going to church on December 12th). Like "alright on report card day, call me in, just for the parent teacher conference," they loved to hear how good or bad I was doing and reprimand me for it and then just wait for the next conference…[With college] they would talk about college and they would say, "busca las becas" (look for scholarships), those were kind of their expectations, but there was really no enforcement mechanisms, it was mostly talk, there was no pressure to do so. I mean, I don't blame them that much, but they didn't look into it that much, you know.

[xxxiii] The twelfth of December is a Catholic holiday celebrated in Mexico, as well as by some Mexican and Mexican Americans in the US, to honor La Virgen de Guadalupe.

Like Ricardo, several other respondents, more so those in New York, mentioned that they felt that their parents could have done more than just encourage them. Such "noninterventionist parenting style" without any explicit aspirations or goals has been found among parents in studies of Mexican students (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). However, like Ricardo, and Isaac above, these respondents were also cognizant that their parents' ability to actively help and guide them to complete high school and apply to college was constrained due to their lack of English language skills, familiarity with the US educational system, and free time given their work schedules.

Even with their parents' direct involvement in their education being limited, parents' encouragement and motivation was crucial for respondents. Such was especially the case for undocumented students. Anita, who arrived in the New York City area at a young age, discussed how important her mother was in her educational trajectory

> I think my mom, definitely siendo *muy exigente* (being quite demanding). Just her envisioning, and sharing her vision of the future with us, I think it is what has fueled me to continue being in school, especially, I would say, with seeking opportunities. Like no matter what "you are going to go to college, we'll figure out a way, we have to ask people, don't stay quiet." She pushed me to find the opportunities. Definitely, without her positivity I wouldn't have made it to college. Without her motivating and constant words of keep going, there is going to be a way, her opening up that hope in me to see that there was a way to do it and go to college. I think I admire her for that, especially after all that she has been through.

Magdalena, also without legal status, was one of the few respondents to specifically mention their father as the parent to give them the most support

> My parents always expected that I was going to college, no matter what, it was out of the question to not go. Whether I would work or if they had to work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, it was going to happen. They were very supportive. They always told me to try my best, you know if things are going bad, it is okay, there is always tomorrow. Don't give up…It's actually interesting because my father didn't like me, still doesn't, to put work before

> school because he thinks that education should come first. He wanted me to focus specifically on schooling and didn't let me work while I was in high school.

As demonstrated in Anita's, Magdalena's, and many other respondents' narratives, their parents' encouragement, motivation, and perhaps more importantly, their determination to help their children enter college opened up what Patricia Gandara (1995) calls a "culture of possibility" for their children's futures. Although limited, parents' involvement and determination is crucial given that it can counteract the negative messages that respondents hear about Mexicans being academically inferior as well as the broader disadvantages they face as nonwhite, female, lower class, and undocumented students in this country.

The only respondent who did not receive explicit encouragement and support from her parents was a young woman named Minerva who arrived in Pennsylvania as a pre-teen; her parents were indifferent about her pursuit of a college education. In spite of this indifference, Minerva's father communicated the expectation that Minerva and her siblings were to get a better education than he had obtained and financially help he and his wife as they age. Unfortunately, parental encouragement and support were not nearly enough to get my respondents into college given that low- and working-class immigrant parents tend to be unfamiliar with how the educational system in this country functions and face significant obstacles to becoming involved in their children's schooling (Alba et al., 2011; Gandara, 1995; Garcia Coll et al., 2002; Kasinitz et al., 2008; Louie, 2012; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Specifically, these parents usually have difficulties comprehending how US educational bureaucracies function and developing the kinds of relationships that would provide them with valuable information (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Parental encouragement did not provide respondents with how to reach college.

Despite parents' limited abilities to guide their children through college applications, their encouragement and motivation usually served as an initial motivation for respondents to start thinking about college as something for them. As will be detailed in the following sections, other factors in combination with parental encouragement and motivation helped respondents get to college. Like Minerva, every participant was able to transition to college given the presence of multiple other factors, including internalizing their parents' and family's economic and migrant struggles.

Improving Socioeconomic Status

Regardless of country of birth, and whether working in New York or Pennsylvania, the vast majority of participants' parents worked in agricultural fields, factories, restaurants, house cleaning, construction, or other menial jobs. Unsurprisingly, sixteen out of the twenty-five New York participants and twenty-nine out of thirty-three in Pennsylvania discussed wanting to improve their own and their family's socioeconomic status. Respondents most consistently mentioned not wanting to work as much as their parents, on average eight to twelve hour workdays, and not wanting to engage in the same physically demanding and low paying work that their parents did. Many respondents' parents conveyed to their children that studying and going to college was a good way to avoid their own lives as manual laborers.

Both parents' emotional support toward their children's education and emphasizing of the importance of studying is part of what Vivian Louie found among her Chinese, Columbian, and Dominican respondents; she terms this an immigrant working-class cultural model of education (Louie, 2006, 2012). In effect, respondents in this study internalized their parents' struggles. Hence, completing high school and obtaining a

college degree were seen as avenues to help alleviate some of these struggles for themselves and their parents. Still, this internalization varied.

Ricardo, born and raised in New York City, shared "I really really did not want to work for a long time and expend my physique or wear myself down by working all the time and still not have anything" given that he saw how much his father worked and how little he was compensated. Thus, going to college was a way to avoid this situation. Similarly, Perlita, who arrived in New York City at a young age, saw college as a way to avoid ending up in her mother's predicament

> …I witnessed [my mother], a long time ago when I was younger, she was always working, she was never there, she would have to come home late and still have to cook and clean and she wasn't able to spend any time with me. I also used to see how much she used to struggle.

Moreover, Perlita also saw going to college as a way to avoid her "future children" from going "through the same thing" as when she was growing up. Pennsylvania participants viewed college in a similar fashion as their New York counterparts. Nora, who arrived in Pennsylvania at as a pre-teen, shared

> My purpose of going to college was to have a better living, not that I don't, but I would see my parents, they get low income so it is like they get paid minimum wage. Both of my parents are workers in a mushroom factory. And honestly I didn't want to go through the same situation as them.

These and other participants in both locations were made aware of how their parents' limited education constrained their job options and their socioeconomic status.

With Sasha, a US-born respondent, her parents used an explicit and gendered warning to present the importance of higher education for future financial circumstances

> It was pretty much them saying like you guys have to do well in school, read, do your homework, because if not you will end up like this. I guess they meant hard jobs and long hours working in agricultural jobs…working in the mushroom [fields]…[To my sisters and I] they were like "if you don't do well in school you will end up like this and maybe get married with one of those guys." They meant

> farmworkers or older men I guess (laughs). They would just kid around, but those were reasons to stick to school.

Sofia, who arrived in Pennsylvania at a young age, heard similar reasoning from her mother regarding being pushed to pursue college

> Well I mean [my parents] wanted me to become someone and they expected me to become that someone… My mom would always tell me like "Do it for you, if you want to be someone in life, if you want to make your children proud one day, you want to like be able to give them what they want."

In New York, Alicia, who arrived in the city as a toddler, remembered her father pushing her "to get an education" since he believed "that as a woman" Alicia "shouldn't have to depend on a guy later on." Ester, a respondent born and raised in the city, made the connection between obtaining a college degree, having a low-income job, and the importance of financial independence for women because her mother was not able to finish high school and was a single parent struggling to raise two children as a house cleaner. Ester discussed her mother's influence in the following way

> She always told us that we needed to get an education because we didn't want to be like her. She was always encouraging us to continue school and to not give up easily because that is what happened with her.

Such imparting of self-reliance and independence from Mexican immigrant parents to their children, more so for daughters, has been found in the few studies of Mexican students in college (Gandara, 1995; Garcia, 2004). However, these previous studies did not specifically highlight the connection between obtaining a college degree and financial independence for daughters.

For a few Pennsylvania students, both male and female, their parents explicitly told them that their choices after high school were to work in agricultural fields or to go to college. This was one of the tactics respondents' parents used to enforce the

expectation of going to college. When Ernesto, a US-born participant, was asked about the types of expectations his parents had for him in high school he shared

> They wanted me to be a real man and make sure that I could care for my family in the future so I don't have to work like my parents who are barely making minimum wage jobs to support us. [My dad] works in the field from six am to five pm. So he asked me in my ninth grade year if I wanted to work with him, but its wasn't as a punishment but to teach me a lesson of what life is like without a career. He would have me working there and he was like do you want to do this for the rest of your life? I'm just like, obviously not. So like that's how my dad instilled it in us, out of the whole entire family, we are the only ones who go to college. Because my parents made us, he made us, he didn't really force us, he asked us but in a way that we couldn't really say no. So my dad, he had all five of us there. He put my sister in the office. So we all understood the value of this is life without an education. That question he asked us "Do you really want to be waking up at six am, making minimum wage, barely enough?" just stuck with me.

Ernesto and his siblings were able to experience some of the struggles of working in agricultural fields. Specifically, their father's lesson demonstrates, in a concrete way, the connection between having the equivalent of a sixth grade education and how this can lead to limited economic opportunities such as working for minimum wage for eleven hours a day at a physically demanding job. Of course, this was only one factor contributing to Ernesto's pursuit of college.

While the tactic just discussed was less frequently present among New York parents, it nonetheless occurred. Alejandro, who arrived in New York City as a teenager, shared the following regarding why he looked up to his father

> Alejandro: He kept on telling me that I should study, he would take me to his work, not because we needed money. He wanted to teach me how hard it is to do [construction] and like how awful it can be sometimes. Just the conditions that you have to work in, and with education you can have better opportunities for a better job.
> Me: Do you think he took you to work to show you how hard it is without an education?
> Alejandro: It was mostly that. After work, he would tell me over and over again, just keep studying, I am pretty sure that you don't want to do this for the rest of your life.

Just like in Ernesto's case, Alejandro's father presented his son with a concrete connection between having a low level of education and limited economic and job opportunities. As will be discussed in the following section, not only did his father's economic struggles provide Alejandro with a reason to pursue college, but so did his father's sacrifice of working seven days a week with only six hours of sleep in between shifts. Alejandro and many other respondents pursued college as a way for them to keep the immigrant bargain and pay back their parents for their sacrifices.

Despite social class being relevant in both locations, recall that Pennsylvania respondents experienced social class in relation to their white middleclass peers and New York respondents experienced it in relation to their lower-classed minority peers. As such it appears that going to college and obtaining a better job than their parents is a way for Pennsylvania respondents to close the social distance with their white middleclass peers, while in New York going to college and obtaining a better job is a way for respondents to distinguish themselves from their lower-class minority peers. Still, for most of this study's participants, social class is relevant in that it is embodied in their parents' struggles with low-paying and physically demanding jobs that left parents either constantly busy, tired, or both throughout the respondents' time in high school. Given these struggles, respondents were made aware of the connection between obtaining a college degree and obtaining a good paying job that was not physically demanding.

Keeping the Immigrant Bargain

Respondents being motivated to pursue a college education by their desire to improve their socioeconomic status is related to their keeping the immigrant bargain—the expectation that the children of immigrants will repay their parents' sacrifices in coming

to the United States by doing well in school and therefore being more upwardly mobile than their parents (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Louie, 2004; Smith, 2006). To be clear, wanting to keep the immigrant bargain and wanting to improve socioeconomic status are similar and did in fact coincide among respondents in both locations. However, these motivations were also mutually exclusive for twenty-two of the fifty-eight respondents discussed in this chapter. Keeping the immigrant bargain arises out of parents' concerted efforts to juxtapose the limited or lack of educational opportunities they encountered as children in Mexico to the available schooling opportunities for their children in the US (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Such parental urgings are intended to impart in children a sense that success in school is a familial obligation to both "justify and honor the sacrifices and tribulations of immigrant parents" (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 81).

A majority of this study's respondents witnessed their parents working long hours in low-paying menial jobs and saw this as a sacrifice that their parents were making for them. In addition, respondents also mentioned the sacrifices their parents made in bringing them to this country to take advantages of the opportunities not present back in Mexico. In all, twenty-three Pennsylvania respondents and eighteen New York respondents, regardless of citizenship status, gender, or whether they were born in the US, mentioned the immigrant bargain's key themes when describing the purpose of going to college for them and the role that parents played in this pursuit

> I thought the purpose of going to college was to basically advance your family, not just, I didn't look at it so much as like getting an education for me, it was more so I'm doing it because I have to do it because my parents didn't have a chance to do it and it was expected of me—Cristina, 1.5-generation Pennsylvania respondent

> For me I would say, what really helped me was how I looked at my family's situation and everything that my parents had to give up in order for me to be in

> the US. So, I used that as my motivation and I feel that's what helped, and it continues to help now that I am about to finish college, I feel like that is my main driving force, knowing that I am doing something that my parents wanted me to do, but I also want to do for them.—Moyses, 1.5-generation Pennsylvania respondent

> I would have to say…my dad [really influenced me to pursue college], I know he was never really gung ho about it, but I always thought that he worked so hard for everything. Why can't I work hard at just school? I only have to worry about school, it is my only preoccupation. I might as well go one-hundred-thirty percent at it so I can be as hardworking as him, on his level—Reina, second-generation Pennsylvania respondent

Since Isaac was born and raised in the US southwest, his keeping the immigrant bargain with his parents involved moving thousands of miles away from his family to attend Victory University

> I had no problem leaving my family, not because I was emotionally disconnected with them but it was more of I felt that that is something I had to do and it was necessary. Going to college wasn't necessarily for myself it was more so that if I, you know, would come to college in hopes of getting a good job, getting a good salary, and hopefully helping support my family because both my parents don't have what most people would say are regular jobs or income or salary that, you know, is on a regular basis. I want to try and get my family to feel that they don't need to work as often or as much especially with the work that my father does in building cars because it definitely strains his body now that he is older.

Isaac ended up applying and attending Victory despite the distance from his family because it has well-renown programs in business, the sciences, and other high paying fields which lined up with his desire for a "good job" and "getting a good salary." As with several respondents from both New York and Pennsylvania, keeping the immigrant bargain for Isaac involved wanting to financially help his parents in order to lessen the physical toll that their menial jobs have on their bodies as they age into their fifties and sixties. In most cases, respondents viewed keeping the immigrant bargain as an emotional responsibility and obligation to their parents.

New York participants, both those born in the US and those born in Mexico, shared narratives espousing themes of the immigrant bargain similar to Pennsylvania students. Xitlali, who arrived in the New York City area as a young child, was raised by her undocumented mother. In her first couple of years in high school Xitlali did not take her education seriously and cut class regularly. Xitlali changed her ways and became focused on completing high school and going to college when she realized "that if [my mom] migrated and brought [me] here, there is a sense that she wants something better for [me]." For Mateo, it was not until he reached college where the connection between his parents' sacrifices and his end of the immigrant bargain became more apparent

> The fact that my parents were not asking me for rent or things like that, that made me feel more responsible about school. That made me feel the responsibility by paying them back for my degree. I think I was always focused, because that has always been my goal. It didn't matter what degree it was, just that I had to get a degree…Yea, I wanted to make their sacrifice worth it. In high school I didn't think about it that way, it was more about being educated. But when I got to college I saw their struggle and got a fuller picture of it and understanding my history made it even bigger.

Regardless of when participants became aware of the connection between their parents' sacrifices and their end of the immigrant bargain, this realization served as additional motivation to their sense of the responsibility they had to their parents to graduate high school and obtain a college degree.

For some New York-born respondents, their parents' undocumented status served as an additional component of their keeping the immigrant bargain. When asked what she thought the purpose of going to college was, Rosa Maria responded

> [While I was in high school], I just thought about my parents, I mean I did think about myself, but not as much. It was mostly for my parents because I really wanted to be able to help them out I guess… I was born here, and they weren't. I was the first person to graduate from high school in my immediate family, so I wanted to make sure that their sacrifice was not in vain.

In Cruz's case, the connection between going to college and his parents' undocumented status was much more explicit

> It was more about, you know, how if you have a good job, you start having a good base, you could probably support your parents getting citizenship, that is what I heard, not sure if it is true. That is basically my main goal, getting to college, getting a good job, I could probably support my parents with legal documentation. That was my main goal ever since I went to school, hey I am going to work hard to give my parents residency and citizenship… I think the best thing that motivated me was doing my parents proud, they did so much for me and I can't repay them by doing stupid things around school. They have always supported me in everything, they are really loving parents and I am glad I have them for parents. They are really really amazing, they are the reason I kept going strong, to make them proud.

Besides the sacrifices involved in migrating to the US, working long hours in low-paying and physically demanding jobs, and providing them with educational and other opportunities in the US, participants with undocumented parents acknowledged the added sacrifices that their parents incurred in "breaking the law" through their unauthorized presence in this country. The added sacrifices of their parents being undocumented only added to these respondents' sense of obligation to their parents.

A majority of this study's participants had internalized some of their parent's sacrifices in coming to this country and thus developed a sense of responsibility to pay them back by going to college. Consequently, it appears that both a desire to fulfill the immigrant bargain and wanting to improve socioeconomic status result from parents' lack of human capital. The presence of such a relationship between parents' lack of human capital and students' motivation to graduate high school and enter college is a dynamic not considered by either new assimilation theory and segmented assimilation theory. Both theories emphasize a lack of human capital as a major factor in Mexicans' low level of education. Of course, these motivations along with parental encouragement may not be enough to facilitate Mexican students' completion of high school and

transition to college given that most parents were not familiar with the college application process nor did they possess any college experience. As previous research with working-class minority and immigrant students has demonstrated, my participants' transition to college was also greatly facilitated by support from those who can provide these students with knowledge about the college application process as well as personal experiences with college.

College Educated Adults

Previous research demonstrates that low-income Latinx students who manage to make it to college benefit greatly from the presence of a college-educated adult to provide guidance in this process (Gandara and Contreras, 2009). College educated older brothers, sisters, cousins, friends, and other adults were crucial in providing participants with added motivation to start thinking about attending college, but more importantly with the know-how to help them complete high school and especially how to navigate the college application process. Eleven New York participants had older siblings and other individuals they knew who were attending or had attended college. This included Guadalupe's mother, the only parent who attained a college degree in the US among my interviewees. Among other respondents, this also included a respondent's aunt and other non-familial adults such as an older girlfriend, an older brother's girlfriend, and a friend's older sister. For twenty Pennsylvania participants, the college educated adults in their social circles were mostly older brothers and sisters, cousins, or less so friends who previously attended college, including Victory. In some cases, these college-educated adults were enrolled at Victory when participants graduated from high school or had previously graduated from Victory.

What are some reasons behind a much smaller number of family members in college for New York participants? This smaller number of college educated family members, and adults overall, among New York participants is due partly to their families' migration histories. Recall from chapter two that New York participants and their families, on average, arrived later in New York City than Pennsylvania participants and their families arrived in southeastern Pennsylvania. Moreover, participants' parents in southeastern Pennsylvania were more likely than parents in New York City to have extended family networks present in their communities of settlement. As a result, Pennsylvania students were more likely to have older siblings who had already attended and graduated high school as well as older siblings who had previously attended and perhaps graduated college.

When asked who was the most influential in getting him to think about going to college, Juan, a respondent born in New York City, singled out his cousin who was accepted to an ivy league college a couple of years before. Specifically, Juan credits seeing "how good she was doing and how much she enjoyed it. I was like, that could be me as well, enjoying my education." For Daniel, his older cousin helped him fill out his college applications and his FAFSA form. Such help was important because Daniel was unable to get this help at his school because the counselors there were always too busy. While in high school Bernardo, also born and raised in New York City, had a partner who was interested in going to college and then medical school. According to Bernardo "because she was one year older she went through that process before me and I was hearing about it" so that because of her, Bernardo "started to become aware of college as a possibility" and the steps involved in getting to college. Guidance from college

educated adults proved crucial for Daniel, Bernardo, and some others because it provided them with the initial thrust to start thinking about college and concrete help with college applications.

In Anita's case, she also benefited indirectly from someone else's transition to higher education

> So our guidance counselors talked a lot about college, state colleges, and making sure you were taking the SATs. I didn't know what that was. I had one of my best friends…her sister went to [ivy league university]. She really helped me a lot because her sister had already navigated the college process, so I was really piggy-backing off of her (laughs). You know, I was asking her a lot questions with the SATs, how her sister got to [ivy league university]. So I learned from her and seeing what she was doing.

Despite Anita having guidance counselors who presented her with information about different colleges and how to get there, she and her family were unfamiliar with how to use that information and other aspects of the college application process. Luckily, her friend did have familiarity and was able to help Anita with taking the SAT. As the cases detailed so far demonstrate, not all New York participants were able to benefit in the same way from knowing college educated individuals. Furthermore, even though eleven New York participants knew someone who had attended college or obtained a college degree, not all of these participants were able to receive guidance or other help from their college educated acquaintances. In fact, Guadalupe's college educated mother was not heavily involved in her daughter's application process. Instead she told Guadalupe "you have the resources online to do it, there are no excuses." This points to the necessity for respondents to have multiple sources of guidance, support, and information in the complex college application process. For some respondents their college educated

acquaintances served as role models for them to look up to and follow in their footsteps. This will be detailed in a later section.

In Pennsylvania it appears that students' college educated adults played a more direct role in their transition to higher education and specifically to Victory University. For example, Manuel, a respondent who arrived in Pennsylvania at a young age, pointed to his older sister as the most influential in getting him to start thinking about going to college and, unlike Juan's older cousin above, navigating the college application process

> Well my sister, she told me about it. She saw my grades, my grades were fair and okay and she was like well you could do better than that, I know you can. She was like "if you do, you can actually go to college and get a degree and all that." And she always talked to me every time she saw me about what I would need to do. We just talked about it, she's the one who pretty much showed me how to apply.

Kevin, who was born in the southwest and attended high school in Pennsylvania, cited his older sister as the main person to help him with the college application process. She was also the person who opened the possibility of going to college for him

> My older sister, she was the first in our family to graduate high school, so as she started getting to [the college application process], I was going into high school. This was when college started becoming a [possibility for me]…I think what did motivate me, after my sister graduated [high school], was just like the fact that someone had done it. So, it was like she did it, there is no reason why I shouldn't be able to do it.

In the cases where participants attended Victory while their family members or friends were also attending, participants were able to gain additional benefits including knowledge about navigating Victory, transitioning to college there, living away from home for the first time, and gaining an initial social circle. Akin to the migration between countries, my Pennsylvania participants' move to college carried uncertainties, risks, and hopes for a better future. Thus, participants who previously visited older kin and friends

at Victory had grown comfortable and familiar with the campus so that their decision to attend Victory was influenced by these factors. Milo sums this decision process up thusly

> I decided on here because of a lot of things. But the biggest was my brother being here. Like I said before I am totally open to talking to new people, but just the thought of going to a whole new world was a little frightening and I knew that this place was really really big, but I knew my brother. It was like it is at least one person. I remember I went to the college tour here and then I had visited my brother many times before, so I knew the campus and I always thought it was a very beautiful campus.

For Minerva and Concha, both the first in their households to graduate high school and go to college, having older cousins at Victory played a role in them deciding to attend college there. The presence of these older cousins also eased Minerva's and Concha's parents' concerns. Having friends enrolled at Victory was also important for some participants' decision to apply and attend. In Alma's case, having her life-long friend from back in their small Pennsylvania town provided her with someone she could connect with, "resources," and a "support system" after transferring to Victory.
In effect these older kin and friends are part of social networks that provide the social capital connecting my participants to college. Such connections are important in that they are one source providing concrete vital information about college, how to apply, and where to attend.

However, having the emotional and moral support of parents, internalizing parents' struggles, as well as guidance in the college application process from college educated kin and other adults, were only part of the various factors informing respondents' pursuit of a college degree. Furthermore, having a relationship with a college educated adult did not always provide participants with sufficient know-how regarding how to navigate the college application process for a variety of reasons. For

instance, some respondents' college educated acquaintances had graduated high school more than five years previous so that they could not help respondents with the "new" college application process. Likewise, some participants did not live in the same area as their college educated acquaintances so that distance and time was an issue for them to receive guidance. Therefore, it was essential for a majority of respondents to have teachers and guidance counselors providing them with guidance and information regarding how to complete high school, how to fill out college applications, and the transition to higher education.

Teachers and Guidance Counselors

School officials, especially teachers and guidance counselors, play an influential role in students' educational achievement. Teachers and guidance counselors must often be advocates, mentors, parents, and even psychologists to students while simultaneously being obligated "to act as purveyors of unequally distributed rewards and punishments" and "as gatekeepers and controllers of scarce resources" (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 162). Research has found that school officials perpetuate the inequalities facing low-income, minority, immigrant, and female students (Conchas, 2006; Espinoza, 2012; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Still, these same school officials can interfere in the reproduction of inequality for their students since they can offer support when family and friends may not be able to (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In this study, twenty-two New York respondents and twenty-seven Pennsylvania respondents mentioned receiving support from their teachers and or counselors toward their completing high school and reaching college.

Cuauhtémoc, born and raised in New York City, specifically singled out one teacher's gestures in getting him to start thinking about college

> [My AP English teacher] was probably one of the first people that got me to start thinking about going to college. I remember he asked us if we had an application ready for a scholarship that was due the next day. After class, he came to me and asked why I hadn't done the application. I was like I didn't think I was smart enough to get into college. So he asked me a whole bunch of questions and pretty much made me realize that I could get into college. He then asked me to call my parents and see if it was okay for me to stay late after school and he took me to his house, had his daughter who was in college help me, gave me dinner, and drove me home because he wanted to make sure that I finished the application for that scholarship. I remember thinking that if he put so much time and effort into it, then maybe I should too.

Here Cuauhtémoc's teacher provides what sociologist Roberta Espinoza (2012, p. 8) terms a pivotal moment, which she defines as academic interventions "by school-based, college-educated adults" impacting "students' educational trajectories in changing their social and psychological orientations toward schooling and academic achievement." Without such an intervention and motivation, Cuauhtémoc's doubting of his own abilities may have fully prevented him from considering college.

For Yadira, her history teacher was quite influential in helping her transition to college, especially since her guidance counselor was not as responsive

> I remember that I needed more information because everything was unclear. It wasn't until my senior year that everything became clear. And it was my history teacher that helped me a lot with transitioning from high school to college. She was a big help mainly with resources, just with filling out the paperwork that you need to hand in. She was also the one person that always dedicated her time to and answered all our questions about tuition, programs, and majors.

Cuauhtémoc, Yadira, and other students described teachers that went well beyond what is considered the standard role of educators in this country. The teachers singled out by respondents showed patience, caring, and also a willingness to accommodate to their students' specific circumstances (Espinoza, 2012; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). These types of relationships are important given that they signal to students that there are school officials who are willing to provide care, support, and guidance toward their schooling. These

relationships also served to counteract the school officials who doubted students' academic competency and pursuit of higher education, as well as those school officials whom respondents felt were not invested in helping preparing Latinx and Mexican students to reach college.

Among undocumented students, their counselors played even more crucial roles in distinct ways. For Martin, his counselor's constant "nagging" made him fill out college applications despite doubts about the feasibility of being able to attend college

> So just like any other student, you get your booklet of colleges. I remember he had pulled me aside to his office, I was one of the last students to have filled it out, he was like "Oh, why aren't filling it out like every other student who was eligible to graduate? Why don't you do it?" I had to tell him that I didn't think that I was capable of doing it and I don't think I want to do it. There was also the status side of it. Can I go as an undocumented student? Will I get financial aid? Will I have to pay straight out of pocket? He was mostly like, for lack of a better word, "fuck it, just give it a chance. If you get rejected or approved, the fact is that you tried to do it." So, I was like alright, if this is what is going to get me off my back, then I will do it.

Although this counselor did push Martin to apply to college, Martin did not feel that he explained the differences between various types of colleges available; private, public, community, city, and state colleges and universities. Additionally, Martin later went on to describe the relationship with his counselor and all high school officials as "a procedure where [they] would call students into their office biweekly and kind of to check in with them and ask if there are any issues at home, or in school, or at work."

Anita's high school provided many resources—rigorous curriculum, various student organizations, low student-to-teacher ratios, large selection of AP courses, etc.—geared toward college enrollment. Even though Anita accessed her school's resources, her undocumented status and low socioeconomic status limited where she could apply to college. Below she describes how two guidance counselors helped her enroll at Empire

> When I opened up and I told my guidance counselor about my undocumented status, my junior year, it was because she had a list of thirty possible institutions of where I should be applying to or that she thought I could get into. I told her, I don't think I can afford that, she was like "we can do financial aid," and I told her I was undocumented. She started tearing and I cried. I clearly remember that day in her office. As a result, she put me in connection with another guidance counselor who had been working with ESL students and the community college track and he just happened to know somebody in the admissions office at [Empire] and by the time we had already identified these issues, it was late, like I had already applied many institutions, and gotten acceptance letters. He was like there was no way you could afford that, you need to go to [a state or city school], and I can [help you] get into [Empire].

Both Martin and Anita received important help from their guidance counselors. However, their relationships with these guidance counselors were not as caring or close as the relationships between other respondents and their teachers and counselors. Despite the lack of a close relationship, these counselors did help counter some of the negative aspects of being undocumented for their students. Moreover, the support these counselors provided their students was not available anywhere else. As a whole we can see the complexity of relationships between students and school officials

Agustin arrived with his family in a small Pennsylvania town at a young age. During his time in high school he became interested in robotics and joined his school's club; this was headed by a physics teacher. As a result, Agustin developed a close relationship with him

> He was the one who recommended me to apply to [Victory] and he wrote me a letter of recommendation when I applied here for [a STEM] program. He was really supportive and gave me nice advice about life and not just school.

This teacher played an important role because he took into consideration Agustin's specific interests, robotics, and suggested he apply to Victory because they have well-renown STEM programs. Like many other participants, Agustin saw college as a way to improve his socioeconomic status. Thanks to his teacher, Agustin ended up majoring in a

STEM field at Victory because he was able to match both his interests and his desire to improve his and his family's socioeconomic status. Similarly, Claudia, born and raised in a Midwestern city, cited a close relationship with her sociology teacher who was also influential in her applying to college

> I still keep in contact with him, I still meet up with him sometimes for lunch. He was very encouraging. I knew I wanted to do something with science in college, I originally thought about forensic science and he was telling about checking out specific schools and about financial aid and about this and that. I really appreciate him for that because that wasn't part of his quote-un- quote job.

As a result of her sociology teacher's advice "about checking out specific schools," Claudia decided to pursue a science degree at Victory. Claudia decided on Victory in part because of her interests in science, its highly-ranked science programs, and how this would help her fulfill the immigrant bargain with her parents.

Sofia, another 1.5-generation respondent, described one of her teachers, a volunteer in a program described below, and one of the many ways he provided support

> There was a time when I wanted to drop out because I had too much going on and I remember my business teacher...[sat down with me and] took out a calculator, and he did all the math of how much rent, a car, you know all the stuff when you are independent you have to pay for, and how much I could make on minimum wage…and he was like you can't do this (laughs). And I was like okay I won't. It changed my mind.

Sofia's relationship with this teacher was quite significant for two reasons. First, Sofia did not have anyone "older who went to college" or who "went to school in the US" so that for her trying to get to college was "a struggle because I never had somebody to study with or somebody to guide me." Second, Sofia was one of the students whose white counselor had suggested she apply to community college, and this made her even more uncertain about going to college. Although this teacher did not guide Sofia through her

college applications, this teacher is a pivotal moment educator (Espinoza, 2012) given the uncertainty she had about going to college.

Henry, a Pennsylvania-born respondent, attended a very well-regarded high school known for its rigorous academic entrance requirements and rigorous college preparation. Although Henry felt supported and encouraged by "everybody," he still singled out his counselor

> She was very helpful, she helped me to get where I wanted to go. I felt like she always [had the right information] for me. She was actually pushing me, "you have to get this done by this time. You can't push this off any longer." She helped me do almost everything.

Again, since Henry, like many other respondents, was not familiar with the college application process, nor did he have any family members who could assist him, his counselor provided much needed guidance with college applications. Taking into account Anita's, Henry's, and other respondents' experiences with applying to college, the availability of resources and information does not mean that students will be able to take advantage of such resources. This also points to the necessity for students facing educational disadvantages due to their race, class, gender, citizenship, and immigrant backgrounds to have multiple sources of guidance toward college enrollment.

Teachers and counselors played extremely crucial and varied roles in students getting to college. Mainly, as nonfamilial adults who provided social and cultural capital that made students' transition to college much less complicated, uncertain, and difficult. In some cases, these school officials made students' transition to college possible (Espinoza, 2012; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2008; Gandara and Contreras; 2009; Garcia, 2004; Louie, 2012; Stanton-Salazar; 2001). Given that parents' lack of various types of capital appears to be offset by school officials' social and cultural capital toward

some students' entry to college, this an additional dynamic that both new assimilation and segmented assimilation should consider since both theories emphasize a lack of parental human capital as a major influence in Mexicans' low education attainment levels. Relationships with school officials are quite crucial for this and other reasons.

Institutions of Support: College Programs

So far, various factors facilitating participants' transition to higher education have been specified: parental encouragement, a desire to improve socioeconomic status, keeping the immigrant bargain, support from college educated adults, and guidance from school officials. It is important to remember that not all of these factors were present for all participants. In fact, the extent to which each factor provided each participant with motivation, support, or information toward enrolling in college also varied. Even students who had some help from college educated adults and school officials still needed some guidance in completing high school, applying to colleges, and enrolling in college. These are the gaps in information and know-how that college preparatory or readiness programs filled for students.

Participants were able to access vital information about applying to and attending college through their enrollment in a number of programs geared toward assisting the children of migrant workers and disadvantaged students. Fourteen New York participants and twenty-two Pennsylvania participants were enrolled in programs which helped them complete high school, prepared them for college, and assisted them with their college applications. In New York City, students were enrolled in city and state university affiliated college-readiness programs, local community organization initiatives, and high school specific programs. In southeastern Pennsylvania, students were enrolled in

federally funded national educational initiatives such as Upward Bound and the Migrant Education program, as well as more localized initiatives through their high schools. The federally funded programs are especially analogous to the migrant-supporting institutions that are important in the cumulative causation of migration (Massey et al. 1993).

One of these city and state university affiliated programs in New York also provided participants with financial aid which made attending college more affordable. Almost all New York participants mentioned affordability as something that made applying to college seem uncertain. More broadly, students enrolled in these programs were able to spend two months taking prep courses and learning the routines of going to college. For instance, Rosa Maria, a US-born respondent, learned much about "what college is" and "what to expect" including "for the first time, finding out what a syllabus is." Through another of these affiliated programs, Marcelo, who arrived in the city at a young age, also learned "what it is like to be in college" and credited the program as "a big factor" in learning about the application process, the different types of college and universities he could attend, as well as different majors. These types of programs were especially beneficial for Rosa Maria, Marcelo, and several other respondents who did not have access to any adult with college experience. In some cases, guidance counselors were the ones to suggest enrollment in these college-affiliated programs to participants.

Jose Luis, another New York City-born respondent, participated in a local non-profit organization's education initiatives at the suggestion of his art teacher. Subsequently, he was able to access a variety of resources geared toward his completion of college applications and enrollment in college. As Jose Luis described it

> Even though it started with them offering art and computer classes, this program did a whole lot more for me. It assigned us to a counselor who helped us fill out

> the applications, got us fee waivers, helped us with FAFSA, and even took us to see colleges in and around the city. We were also able to take classes at a nearby community college helping us with our math and writing. On top of all of that they gave us summer jobs, and they even put me in contact with people who had gone through their program and were already in college.

Rocio had to be convinced by her counselor and friends to submit a “long application” to a similar program within her high school. According to Rocio, this program

> [Targeted] low-income families and students to help them with their academics, exposes them to cultural diversity, and like it was just preparing us for college and life after high school…Every student was paired up with at least two mentors and they would stick with you for the next three years. I think I definitely benefited from that. During the academic year, we would meet every Saturday for like test prep, homework time, talking to your mentors, if you were like stressed, grammar, your writing skills, and communicating, and interviewing skills.

Access to these important resources in the high school completion and college application process was key for Jose Luis, Rocio, and many other respondents given that access to these resources was usually not available from their high schools or from their families. For Rocio and other undocumented respondents, access to these resources and caring relationships with school officials was even more essential in their transition to higher education given the various uncertainties they faced regarding whether they could attend college and whether they could afford to go to college. Again, the examples discussed so far demonstrate the importance of having multiple sources of support, information, and encouragement facilitating respondents’ transition to college.

In Pennsylvania, a few participants were enrolled in Upward Bound; their participation lasted for three years during high school. Alfonso’s discussion demonstrates the importance of such programs

> You go there (to a college campus) for the summer for six weeks and take the courses you will be taking next year in high school, so when you go back to high school you…have covered about sixty percent of the material. You go on a weekly basis to tutoring and when senior year comes, they take you on college

> tours, I saw like twenty colleges before coming [to Victory]. They have guest speakers, they help you with financial aid, they have a FAFSA workshop, and all kinds of workshops. They really facilitated the whole thing, they pointed out for me this is the application, this and that.

For Alfonso, who arrived in the US as a teenager, Upward Bound helped him complete high school and get to Victory University. Participation in this program was especially crucial for Alfonso and other respondents who did not have a college educated adult, mentor, or role model to guide them through the college application process. Although Gerardo, who arrived in Pennsylvania as a pre-teen, was not enrolled in Upward Bound, he benefitted from it when his friend Alfonso took him to a financial aid workshop. This is but one example of how relationships and institutions worked simultaneously to help Pennsylvania participants in their pursuit of higher education.

Further demonstrating the importance of relationships, and although Alfonso benefited greatly from Upward Bound, he would not have learned of it if not for a Migrant Education Program[xxxiv] (MEP) specialist in his high school. MEP is a federal TRIO program which specifically aims to help the children of migrant workers complete high school and prepare them for college. A few other participants also benefited from the MEP in their respective high schools. When asked about the college resources her high school provided for minority students, Sara, a 1.5-generation participant, responded

> I was involved in this migrant program and they are the ones that really helped me a lot and I know a lot of people in there and actually a lot of them come to this school today. So that's what really helped me, but my school specifically they didn't really help at all.

[xxxiv] Alfonso did not qualify to be enrolled in the Migrant Education Program during high school.

Similarly, Pennsylvania-born brothers Roberto and Nelson received little college assistance from their high school guidance counselor who suggested they were not capable of gaining admission to Victory. Instead, the Migrant Education Program (MEP) in Roberto's and Nelson's high school buffered their counselor's discrimination and provided them with information, guidance, and support that facilitated their transition to Victory [xxxv]. For Elvis, who arrived at a young age in Pennsylvania, it was also the MEP that provided him with the information about the grades it would take to get into college, the financial help available, and much more

> [The Migrant specialist] motivated me to do something with my life because I saw people that I knew and they weren't really doing anything with their lives. He brought this opportunity to me and I can kind of went on from there.

Other programs in specific high schools also introduced college, provided tutoring, and helped students with the college application process. Especially important was the information that participants attained regarding financial aid sources available to them. In addition, these programs allowed participants to become engaged in their community, develop communication skills, visit colleges, meet Latinx enrolled in college, gain internships, and attend career workshops. Perhaps the most successful program has been Resources, Inspiration, and Support in Education (RISE)[xxxvi] in Chester County. Since 2010 it has helped over eighty[xxxvii] Mexican and Latinx students, including nine from this study, complete high school and enroll at various universities throughout

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[xxxv] Roberto and Nelson stated that the Migrant Education Program in their high school steered them to Victory because of a program similar to MEP which provided additional financial aid and resources.

[xxxvi] Fictitious name.

[xxxvii] Number given in personal communication from program coordinator.

Pennsylvania, including Victory. David, a respondent who arrived in Pennsylvania at a young age, nicely sums up how he and other students benefited from this program

> Yea, a lot of it was just telling the students, telling me, how it was actually possible to get to college, because I guess that there is this thought that some students have that you can't pay for it or afford it. It just opened our eyes to this possibility and showed us how to do the application.

Unlike the previously mentioned programs, this program is funded by donations and fundraising and most of the teachers and other adults helping students do so on a voluntary basis. In addition, it was up to students to enroll themselves in this program.

Two additional programs that participants were involved in are part of national organizations geared specifically toward Latinx students. Several students participated in Latinos in STEM (LiS)[xxxviii], a leadership program for Latinx high school students which focuses on STEM fields and careers and also provides mentorship. Juan, who arrived in Pennsylvania as a toddler, participated in this program in high school and subsequently joined the Victory student organization that facilitates this program. He described some of what this program did for him, which he now does for high school students back home

> [LiS members go] back home to one of the high schools in [southeastern Pennsylvania town] and there is going to be a group of about one hundred kids and [some of us] are going to have some activities for them and tell them a little bit about engineering and encourage them to finish high school and go to college.

Gerardo, another 1.5-generation respondent, also participated in this program in high school and college, described what he liked about the program

> It was run by Latinos, I loved that, and it was geared toward high school students and again that is when I realized that this existed, that's when I found about the major I am in now, and I met a girl there she was a senior and she talked about her work experience and what she had done. I didn't have those experiences in high school.

[xxxviii] LiS, Amigas, and CMEP are all fictitious names.

Meeting Latinx in college and the professional world was important for Gerardo and others in this program because this was usually the first time that they interacted with other Mexicans and Latinx with such accomplishments. Seeing Latinx and Mexicans in college was also important because it buffered against the negative stereotypes about Mexicans being academically inferior present in their high schools.

Several other students participated in a separate program, Amigas, which specifically provided young Latinx women with educational opportunities, leadership training, and mentoring. Concha, Katherine, and Minerva, all 1.5-generation respondents, recalled the importance of going to this program's national conference. It allowed them to travel without their parents for the first time and it also helped them to start thinking about going to college as something that was possible for them. Concha specifically felt that she received much support from this program

> I feel that by seeing others [graduate high school and go on to college], that would be the kind of support we would give each other. I would say that out of the twenty-five girls that were in [Amigas] with me, about ten went on to college.

As with LiS, Amigas also allowed its members to meet Mexican and Latinx female college students and professionals. These relationships were especially crucial for Concha, Katherine, and Minerva since they provided them with tangible examples to emulate as they were the first from their respective families to attend college.

More than any other program, the College Migrant Education Program (CMEP) at Victory provided students with initial resources to ease students' transition to college: workshops about what to expect in college and choosing majors, tutoring and homework help, social events, rooming with fellow migrant students, financial aid, and mentorship. Nine participants mentioned CMEP explicitly as a key reason they decided to attend

Victory. In total, sixteen participants entered Victory through CMEP[xxxix]. Guidance counselors, teachers, MEP specialists, and even some students' older siblings who were previously enrolled in CMEP encouraged participants to specifically apply to Victory University given the resources that CMEP provides for the children of migrant farmworkers during their first year of college. Since most Pennsylvania respondents and their families settled in towns where Mexicans are specifically recruited as farmworkers, the CMEP also sent recruiters to some respondents' high schools. Therefore, there were many factors specifically encouraging respondents to apply to and attend Victory University.

Even though programs to assist marginalized students with entry to college were present in New York City and southeastern Pennsylvania, the types and density of resources these programs provided varied by location. There were more connections, and perhaps more direct connections, between the different programs, programs and high schools, as well as programs with students' institutions of higher education in southeastern Pennsylvania than in New York City. Not only was CMEP at Victory directly linked with respondents' high schools, but the director of CMEP has relationships with different MEP specialists at some of the respondents' high schools. The coordinator of RISE used to be a MEP specialist and had a working relationship with the coordinator of CMEP at Victory. Since the coordinator of RISE is a Latinx woman, she was also involved with some students in Amigas. The Victory student organization LiS, with members who are alumni of high schools throughout southeastern

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[xxxix] CMEP at Victory was discontinued in 2014; I may be investigating the consequences of this.

Pennsylvania, also had working relationships with their respective high schools. Thus, there is a much denser network of resources available to Pennsylvania students given the various relationships that exist between students, their older siblings, and the various adults in their high schools and college-readiness programs they were enrolled in. Recall that the Pennsylvania students' communities usually had one high school that was attended by all students from surrounding communities.

By contrast New York students attended a larger number of high schools so that there were not nearly as many connections, nor relationships between individuals, among the various college-readiness programs in their high schools, communities, nor with Empire College. A less dense array of resources can be partially attributed to the much larger size of New York City, the much larger and more complicated system of high schools, as well as the larger number of colleges and universities in and around New York City. Still, participation in these programs was vital in helping students finish high school, start thinking about going to college, applying to college, and making it to college. Such programs provided students with a roadmap which served to transform their "college aspirations into realistic expectations" (Louie, 2012, p. 101) in providing them with key information that their parents may not possess (Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2008). The following section will discuss relationships fostered with individuals that also facilitated turning students' motivations to attend college into direct actions.

Mentors and Role Models

Thirteen New York participants had a close relationship with someone who greatly influenced and guided them in their pursuit of higher education. Role models provided students with a specific trajectory to emulate. In Guadalupe's case, she was the

only participant in either location to have a parent who attained a bachelor's degree in the US; she did not participate in any college-readiness program. Guadalupe's mother played a crucial role in her striving toward higher education

> My mom went to college, at the moment she is getting her masters. So [my siblings and I] sort of had to follow her and go for the best, which for her the best was to go to college. Right from the start I always remember her enforcing that on us…And just seeing how my mom lived her life, to be where she is today, that spoke for itself, like wow, I want to be like mom.

Among a few students, their teachers served as role models. For Bernardo it was his AP Calculus teacher

> I thought he was really cool because he would speak Spanish in class sometimes, he was Puerto Rican, he was young, and he would even invite some of us to go to some salsa performances he used to do. I think he was also getting his masters at the time, but still, he was like the first Latino that I ever met who had gone to college, let alone beyond that. All of that definitely made me think more about going to college. Also, I think it helped that I really liked math and he saw that and would encourage me. So I looked up to him.

Guadalupe, Bernardo, and other students were inspired by certain individuals given that they provided an example for them to follow in environments where there were few, if any, college-educated Latinx or Mexican adults. Moreover, these respondents were able to see people like themselves who were academically successful and served to counteract the various negative messages about Mexicans and education coming from various sources around them. Unfortunately, New York respondents were less likely than those in Pennsylvania to have relationships with college-educated adults.

Other students, regardless of citizenship status, had a mentor who provided them with a caring relationship as well as key information and support toward their pursuit of higher education. Gustavo, who arrived in the city as a teenager had a music teacher as his mentor

> [H]e transitioned from being my teacher to being my friend. He was one of my closest friends, and even today we still speak, it has been almost ten years since we first met. I think that I speak to him more than I actually speak with my best friend...He would go far beyond from what was expected of teachers. He actually made sure that I succeeded, he was like well you know, because I told him that I wanted to be surgeon and neurologist. He told me, not to bring me down, that it is a very expensive career and at the time I didn't really have the opportunity to even get into medical school. So he told me that I had to really think about an alternative, he didn't say don't do it, but he was trying to help me to understand that it was going to be a very difficult path in my circumstances. I could tell that he was always looking out for the best for me, he said that he would support me in whatever I wanted to do. But if I studied music, I could make a living, be a teacher like he is. He said "even if it is not here, you can go back to Mexico and do it over there or anywhere in the world where they have great programs and they would be happy to have you. You have a lot of talent and passion in this and you should give it a try. Even if you go for the medical thing, you can still try music as well." So he made me open my eyes in certain ways, even though the decision was ultimately mine. But he influenced me in an indirect way, never really pushing anything.

Gustavo's mentor qualifies as a pivotal moment educator since his efforts went beyond the job description of a teacher, provided Gustavo with information about opportunities, promoted Gustavo's personal growth, showed much caring, and provided advice beyond academic matters (Espinoza, 2012). Gustavo as well as a few other undocumented participants benefitted greatly from the caring and multi-faceted relationships with mentors and the key information, encouragement, and advice such individuals provided given the uncertainty about their futures that these individuals faced because of their undocumented status.

In Pennsylvania, twenty-four participants had a close relationship with someone who greatly influenced them in their pursuit of higher education. Among some, and unlike for New York participants, this was an older sibling that helped them considerably and that they viewed as a role model. Milo's description of who influenced him the most in getting to college nicely captures this sibling dynamic

> Well, I think probably my brother because he was definitely a really good guide since he had already been through it…He was the one that really helped me through the process and one of the biggest influences in me coming here and motivating me to keep pushing forward and working hard.

Similarly, for Ernesto it was his older brother who was most influential in him getting to Victory; Ernesto's brother previously graduated from Victory. Milo, Ernesto, and other respondents with older siblings who had either graduated from college or were attending college when respondents were applying to college described being encouraged to follow in their respective older siblings' "footsteps."

For others, it was a mentor, usually a teacher or other school official, that had the most impact on them. Rebeca's science teacher provided her with a caring relationship, advice about "everything," information about colleges where Rebeca and this teacher would "literally just sit there afterschool and google colleges and look at them" to select where to apply, as well as help with the actual college applications. In some cases, mentors also fulfilled an additional important role for students in predominantly white high school settings. Sara detailed

> I came to have a close relationship with my college advisor because I could relate to her since she's also a minority, she is African American. Yea, she had just recently graduated from [nearby] university, so I could really relate to her. She just pushed me. Everything she said was really useful. She helped me with a lot, with SATs and ACTs, she helped me a lot with applications too.

For Sara and other students who did not have a family member or friend with college experience, having a relationship with a college educated Mexican or other minority adult was important because it lessened their doubts about whether they could achieve something that was not common among people like them in their respective communities. Moreover, Sara being able to "relate" to her Black advisor was also important because it relieved Sara from feeling out of place in her predominantly white high school.

Minerva's relationship with her mentor, the coordinator of RISE, was extremely important. Minerva was the first person in her immediate family to go to college and thus this mentor "always pushed me to go for what I really wanted to do, because she thought she saw potential in me for pursuing a career rather than staying at home and doing what my other siblings had done." The relationship between Nora and this same mentor was equally vital for her since her parents were reluctant to allow her to stay afterschool. According to Nora, her parents "wanted me to stay home because they have traditions in Mexico that women have to stay in the home and it's bad if you are outside the home." Thus, although Nora's parents' supported their daughter's pursuit of higher education, Nora's mentor spent considerable time convincing them that it was to her benefit to participate in afterschool activities geared toward helping her academically and reaching college. Since this mentor was the coordinator of RISE and involved with Amigas, Nora, Minerva, and some other female students had access to various types of resources and support toward getting to college.

Graduating from high school and transitioning to Victory was made possible in large part because of the information and example provided by role models as well as the trusting and caring relationships that participants had with their mentors. Relationships with mentors provided students with access to the support, services, and resources necessary to complete high school (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). Participants' mentors played powerful roles in changing the lives of working-class youth by believing in their capacity to get to college and by specifically showing them how to get there (Louie, 2012). Since students like my participants tend to occupy the bottom of our society's hierarchies—race, class, gender, citizenship status, language—mentors have

considerable transformative power (Espinoza, 2012). Mentors and role models, especially those located within schools, played a crucial role in their working-class minority students' educational trajectories since they have invested enough time to comprehend their students' circumstances and "applied that insight to help them succeed by providing access to the social and cultural capital typically found in the social networks of the middle and upper classes (Stanton-Salazar, 2001)" (as quoted in Espinoza, 2012, p. 131).

Discussion

In our society, there is a general perception that Latinx immigrant parents are not involved in their children's education and a related expectation that Latinx students do not make it to college (Louie, 2012). The specific myth that Mexican Americans, especially poor and working class parents, do not value education also lingers (Valencia and Black, 2002). As it pertains to my respondents, there is also a general perception in the United States that all Mexicans are poorly educated (Lee and Zhou, 2015). Such assumptions all fall under the long-standing deficit thinking perspective which provides individualist accounts blaming minority children and their families for failing to graduate from college and high school because their values and or culture do not "adequately" socialize children to become academically successful (Barajas and Pierce, 2001; Valencia and Black, 2002; Valencia, 2015). Although much research demonstrates that Mexicans have among the lowest educational levels of any racial or ethnic group in the United States (Alba and Nee, 2003; Gandara and Contreras, 2009; Haller et al., 2011; Perlmann, 2005; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2008; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Telles and Ortiz, 2008), research on Mexican students tends to focus on the factors explaining failure.

Specifically, in analyses, such as those of Portes and associates, as well as Ogbu, that use an "oppositional culture" framework, Mexicans, their identities, and cultures are equated with failure (Romero, 2008). Yet, there is little contextualization of what culture is, how it works, and how exactly this affects educational attainment for those who do manage to beat the odds by transitioning to college. Using interviews with fifty-eight undocumented, 1.5-, and second-generation Mexicans enrolled at a Pennsylvania public state university and New York public college, this study identified ten factors that facilitated their transition to college. For each respondent, it was the presence of *a unique combination of multiple and simultaneous factors* which helped them to make it to college: parental encouragement, a desire to improve individual and familial socioeconomic status, fulfilment of the immigrant bargain, support from college educated others, support from teachers and or counselors, enrollment in college-readiness programs, and having mentors and role models. The presence of these factors also signals that minority, low-income, and immigrant students are more likely to surpass the various disadvantages they face when they have multiple levels of factors to assist them. For instance, at the micro or familial level in terms of encouragement from parents as well as an internalization of their struggles, with meso level factors such as relationships with college educated adults and school officials, and with macro or institutional level factors such as resources from college readiness programs.

All of the factors identified were resources that students used in order to graduate high school and transition to college. These resources were in the form of motivation, encouragement, and support that made students believe that college was something they could attain and countered the perceptions and stereotypes that people like them are

uneducated. Perhaps more importantly was the specific information and guidance that helped students learn about different majors and colleges, how to apply to college, and how to get to college. Thus, one way that culture appears to manifest for this study's respondents is through what Ann Swidler (1986) terms strategies of action. That is, my respondents were able to beat the odds in transitioning to college through the motivation, support, and encouragement of their families and their experiences, teachers, counselors, and others *in combination* with the right information about college and the college application process. Having this information proved crucial for students' ability to strategize for a college education and ultimately make it to college. The identification of the factors, *as well as the combination* of these factors, which helped Mexican students in southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City transition to college may not have been possible through a quantitative analysis nor a focus on failure.

It is important to remember that my respondents and other minority and immigrant working-class students do not have access to the same resources, both inside and outside of their family and schools, as their white and middleclass peers. White and middleclass students and their parents know more about specific educational opportunities and resources; which classes better prepare students for college, who the better instructors are, and advantageous extracurricular activities (Espinoza, 2012). Specifically, these students and parents "also know how to approach school authorities to extract the most resources from the institution and are more likely to exercise influence with these authorities" (Espinoza, 2012, p. 29). Moreover, students like my respondents may face additional disadvantages such as having parents who do not speak fluent English, who did not complete high school, and who do not have familiarity with the US

educational system. Hence, it becomes imperative for students like those in this study to have access to an array of resources, information, and support to be able to transition into higher education.

In addition to the above specific factors, local context influenced students' transition to college in at least three ways. First, participants made the decision to go to college in part because of the lack of job opportunities they see for themselves in their communities without a college education. In most cases, participants' parents pushed them to seek better jobs than their own overwhelmingly low skilled and low paying physically demanding jobs. Pennsylvania participants mainly sought to avoid their parents' agricultural jobs. New York participants mainly sought to avoid their parents' cleaning, restaurant, and construction jobs. Therefore, participants and their parents saw a college degree as a viable way to get ahead and into the mainstream economy. Second, migration histories in both locations influenced the number and type of relationships respondents had with college educated adults. Since Pennsylvania parents were likely to have arrived earlier and were more likely to have extended family networks, students were more likely a higher number of and more direct relationships with Mexican adults who had already graduated high school and who had previously attended and perhaps graduated college.

Third, a much denser network of resources was available to Pennsylvania students given the various relationships that exist between students, their older siblings, and the various adults in their high schools and college-readiness programs they were enrolled in. In Pennsylvania, there were also more connections, and perhaps more direct connections, between the different programs, programs and high schools, as well as programs and

Victory University. This may also be due to the size of students' communities and school systems. Recall that the Pennsylvania students' communities usually had one high school that was attended by all students from surrounding communities. Meanwhile, New York City is much larger so that there is a much larger and more complicated system of high schools, and has a larger number of colleges and universities. There is no concentration of either college educated adults or family members more generally.

The following and concluding chapter summarizes this dissertation's empirical findings in relation to the major conceptual approaches that investigate Mexican students' educational attainment, provides potential policy implications, outlines research limitations, and discusses future research directions.

CHAPTER FIVE:
CONCLUSION

> [With] Mexican families, you have a lot of *machista* [male chauvinist] parents who favor their children and don't feel that their daughters can go to college. That exists in my family. But I have been lucky enough to have two supportive parents, lucky enough to go to [Empire] where I had these wonderful professors. [It] was [my parent's] dream too right, me graduating college. It was a joint effort that we all worked towards… I also have these mentors who I feel indebted to, and my community, so I feel like whatever I can do to help [my parents] and to help guide anyone, it is my duty and my obligation to do so.

Although much research has investigated the educational attainment rates of Mexican students, only one study[xl] comes to mind where the focus was on Mexican students who were able to complete college. It is quite surprising that sociological and other research has not investigated the factors that make it more likely for Mexican students to complete high school, enter college, and graduate college. Now, well into the second decade of the twenty-first century the high school completion rates of these students continue to be amongst the lowest of all racial and ethnic groups in this country. Xitlali provided the above quote to end our interview; it encapsulates how various different factors work together to help Mexican students reach college.

Supportive parents usually provide their children with an initial inclination toward higher education. In addition, some students feel motivated to validate their parents' sacrifices in migrating to the US. Mentors, role models, as well as school officials usually provide students with specific information about the college application process and higher education that parents usually do not know. Other individuals, whether friends, school officials, or other adults, also provide some of this information. Although not

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[xl] Educational researcher Patricia Gandara's (1995) *Over the Ivy Walls.*

mentioned above, college preparatory programs provided most students with resources to reach college. As Xitlali points out, Mexican students transition to college is a collective effort.

Most students, like Xitlali, recognized that they received much support, encouragement, and information from various sources. The *combination* of these various helpful individuals and factors provide students with an array of resources to mitigate against the multiple disadvantages they face. Since respondents' parents are immigrants they usually lack English fluency, a familiarity with the US educational system, as well as social relationships with college educated individuals. Consequently, these young people must look outside of their families to become familiar with the college application process as well as what it takes to reach college. Furthermore, respondents' race, class, gender, and citizenship status all provide additional difficulties in their transition from high school to higher education. The histories, populations, and structure of their respective southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City schools and communities greatly influence both the resources and difficulties that respondents face in this transition.

This concluding chapter has four aims. First, to contextualize the main research findings from this study within the existing frameworks used to tackle the issue of Mexican students' low educational achievement. Second, it is important to use this study's main research findings in order to elucidate the role of policymakers as well as policy in the educational achievement process. Third, although this study identified crucial factors and mechanisms which made it more likely for Mexican students to complete high school and reach college, a reflection of the research process and of

pertinent limitations involved in the process of carrying out this research is provided. Last, and in some ways to alleviate some of these limitations, it becomes necessary to map out suitable future research directions.

Theoretical Implications

The introductory chapter of this dissertation detailed how assimilation frameworks, cultural approaches, school structure explanations, social capital research, and resilience studies have addressed Mexican students' low educational achievement. In this section, I summarize the educational trajectories of this study's participants within some of the main aspects of these conceptual approaches.

Assimilation Variants

Both new assimilation and segmented assimilation theories posit that educational attainment in the US is quite low among Mexicans given, among other factors, that this *immigrant group* lacks substantial social, financial, and human capital. As discussed throughout the preceding chapters, the vast majority of respondents' parents and families had low levels of educational achievement[xli] and worked in physical demanding, menial, and low paying work. These parents, more so those in New York City than those in southeastern Pennsylvania, had few, if any, acquaintances who were familiar with the transition to college. Hence, it is the *parents* in this study who are without much social capital. However, the vast majority of respondents were able to establish important relationships with teachers, counselors, and others who served as mentors and role

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[xli] Most parents came to the US with the equivalent of a primary school education from Mexico. Most respondents were also the first in their immediate families to graduate high school and attend college in the US.

models and that provided them with important information about college and how to get there. In other words, respondents were able to utilize various sources of social and cultural capital given some of the caring relationships they had with school officials and others. This is an important distinction since it is the interaction between the types of capital that respondents and their parents have at their disposal and the extent to which they can leverage said capital, which then influences students' educational achievement.

What are the implications behind this distinction? It is important to remember that new assimilation tends to focus on much broader structural forces in their approach toward the integration of immigrants. Meanwhile, segmented assimilation also focuses on structural dynamics but adds an emphasis to micro-level dynamics such as identity formation and parent-child relationships as well as the larger community structure where the children of immigrants find themselves living. Accordingly, neither new or segmented assimilationists focus on a crucial aspect of any student's schooling trajectory, the relationships and other dynamics within schools, in their explanations as to why Mexican students' have a relatively high rate of exiting high school without completing it.

In view of this, just as this study and other researchers have, both assimilation frameworks would stand to benefit from adding attention to what happens within the schools that children of immigrants attend. Mexican, Latinx, and other students are discouraged by a lack of caring or invested teachers and this can lead to students becoming disengaged from their schooling (Carter, 2005; Conchas, 2006; Espinoza, 2012; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). It may be the case that Mexican and other students do not complete high school because they encounter negative relationships in school contexts.

An additional and crucial component to the dynamics within schools are the negative assumptions that some school officials and peers may hold against Mexican and other minority and immigrant students. As several respondents in both New York City and southeastern Pennsylvania pointed out, they were subject to various negative and stereotypical messages from their peers, teachers, and counselors centering on the perceived academic incompetency of Mexican students. Other research has found that this type of treatment from school officials can influence the academic disengagement of minority and immigrant students, which in turn can lead to them exiting high school without completion. For the majority of the respondents in this study, it was caring relationships with other school officials, as well as support from parents, that helped buffer against the negative effect of racial stereotyping and discrimination. Incorporating this important emphasis on the potential role of racial stereotyping and discrimination within schools for the educational achievement of the children of immigrants would also be beneficial to assimilation frameworks. This is especially true for segmented assimilation research since this discrimination and stereotyping appears to be a mechanism through which the second generation experiences racialization.

Institutions

New assimilation theory prioritizes the role of institutions, namely civil rights enforcement by the state, in the facilitation of assimilation (see Alba and Nee, 1997, 2003). Specifically, civil rights era institutions and policies promoting diversity facilitate the integration of some members of the second generation (Kasinitz et al., 2008). In this study, sixteen Pennsylvania and seven New York City respondents participated in federally funded programs that helped them graduate high school and reach college.

However, it is important to place Upward Bound, Migrant Education, and the New York city- and state-affiliated higher education programs into respondents' specific social contexts. Enrollment in these programs were only one of the various factors helping them get to Victory University and Empire College. Despite these programs increasing the academic resources that participants were able to use on their way to college, having access to these programs is not enough. For instance, Latinx students tend to have a tougher time accessing institutional resources that are outside of the family and outside of their ethnic communities (Louie, 2012). Though much research has found that the second generation's success is greatly influenced by institutions (Fernandez-Kelly and Portes, 2008; Haller, Portes and Lynch, 2011; Louie, 2012; Kasinitz et al. 2008), not as much is known about the mechanisms through which the children of immigrants can take advantage of these resources. Both in this study and in other research (Louie, 2012) students were able to take advantage of programs like Upward Bound given the caring relationships they had with institutional officials. Again, it would appear that assimilation research would benefit from a focus on within school dynamics and relationships.

Although larger institutions and policies may be behind the programs helping Mexican students reach college, we must not forget the vital role of individuals. Especially in southeastern Pennsylvania, organizations and programs geared toward supporting Mexican students' transition to college emerged precisely because these students were not getting the support and resources needed from their schools in order to graduate high school and reach college. Caring individuals pushed to establish such programs and or were the key in respondents joining such programs. This is the case with smaller programs such as Resources, Information, and Support in Education (RISE), as

with national initiatives Latinos in STEM (LiS), as well as federal TRIO programs such as the Migrant Education Program (MEP). RISE was created specifically to supplement the educational needs of "Hispanic" children since these students were not getting enough support from their predominantly white high schools. Originally, RISE received government funding but was later cut and now operates exclusively on donations, private funding, and volunteering given the reputation of this previous migrant specialist who founded and coordinates RISE. At both a national level and at Victory University, LiS was founded precisely because Latinx STEM students found that they were not being served in national STEM organizations.

Furthermore, the resources and information provided by MEP, RISE, LiS, Amigas, and even Upward Bound reaching students was also contingent on other relationships. Respondents who participated in MEP usually did so because they heard about it through word of mouth from their friends, older siblings, and caring school personnel. Respondents found out about RISE given that their volunteers and participants were quite involved in the community. Some of the volunteers in RISE were previous students in this program who had already graduated from college and came back to the community to mentor high school students. Members of LiS at Victory were mainly graduates of various high schools throughout southeastern Pennsylvania so that they were providing resources and information to their friends, previous high school peers, and fellow coethnics when LiS visited and recruited Latinx high school students throughout southeastern Pennsylvania. While national institutions and policies provided the initial infrastructure for the programs benefiting my respondents, respondents were connected to these programs through various individuals and relationships. Some of the programs in

both southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City were not a result of the civil rights movement; instead, these were initiatives undertaken by a combination of specific high schools, communities, organizations, and individuals trying to address the various disadvantages facing these and other immigrant and minority students.

Coethnic Communities

Segmented assimilation theory specifically emphasizes the importance of a coethnic community in providing immigrant families with social capital and other resources assisting them to avoid downward mobility and perhaps become upwardly mobile. Mexicans have a greater likelihood of experiencing downward mobility—disadvantages such as poverty, low levels of education, and relegation to inferior menial jobs—because of a lack of coethnic community and other resources (Haller et al., 2011; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2008). However, it appears that various local factors influence the presence and extent of resources within immigrant communities. Since parents in Pennsylvania were more likely to have arrived earlier and to have extended family networks than those in New York, students in Pennsylvania were more likely to have a larger amount of and more direct relationships with Mexican adults who previously completed high school and who had previously attended and perhaps also completed college.

It also appears that Pennsylvania students had a much denser network of resources available given the many relationships existing between students, their older siblings, and various adults in their high schools and college preparatory programs. In Pennsylvania, there were also more connections, and perhaps more direct connections, between the different programs, programs and high schools, as well as programs and Victory

University. This may also be due to the size of students' communities and school systems since Pennsylvania students' communities usually had one high school that was attended by all students from surrounding communities. Meanwhile, New York City is much larger so that there is a much larger and more complicated system of high schools, and has a larger number of colleges and universities. Thus, it appears various mechanisms influence the structure of immigrant communities and the resources available there. Because of various local mechanisms, the children of Mexican immigrants in various nonurban communities were able to access an array of community resources helping facilitate their transition to higher education.

Other Approaches

Cultural approaches such as the work of anthropologist John Ogbu and his collaborators as well as proponents of deficit thinking argue that Mexican and other minority students fail academically because their families and cultures are deficient. In this type of research, academic success seems to be possible only through the acceptance of this country's individualistic and other white middle class values (Barajas and Pierce, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Therefore, maintaining a minority identity seems to be antithetical to academic success. The patterns present among the respondents in this study run counter to these assertions. As in other existing research, all of the respondents, as well as their parents, valued education and especially the pursuit of higher education. Furthermore, as referenced in the opening quote of this chapter and as discussed throughout chapter four, a vast majority of respondents were partially motivated to pursue higher education given that they saw it as a commitment and or responsibility to themselves and their parents. A majority of respondents also mentioned that their parents

migrated to the US in order to provide them with opportunities not available in Mexico. Regardless of focusing on respondents or their parents, their motivations were family and not individual oriented. All respondents also referenced pride in their Mexican heritage.

Much of the factors that facilitated respondents' completion of high school and entrance into college have been established in previous resilience, school structure, and social capital studies of low-income students of color (see Carter, 2005; Conchas, 2006; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Floyd, 1996; Gonzalez and Padilla, 1997; Morales, 2010; Stanton Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). The tendency in these studies is to focus on students from urban settings. Most crucial was the identification of the combination of factors helping respondents overcome the odds of reaching college (Morales, 2010). Still, school structure and resilience studies specifically would benefit by taking into account how multiple levels of factors interact inside and outside of school to influence students' level of achievement. This study also contributes how time and space influence students' transition to college. As has been demonstrated, local context influences the availability of certain resources to assist marginalized students in their transition to higher education. Also important to consider is that much of the research focused on Mexican students is quite dated. In this sense, this study provides vital insights into how low-income students of color, from both urban and nonurban settings, are able to complete high school and enter college in the twenty-first century.

Additional Theoretical Application

Local context was quite influential in the process of transitioning to higher education for the children of Mexican immigrants. Given the specific characteristics of the southeastern Pennsylvania communities respondents come from, this dissertation

demonstrates that the theory of cumulative causation provides an insightful analytical lens through which to understand these processes. The processes and factors that led my participants to overcome the odds in transitioning to an institution of higher education appear uniquely local. For instance, the availability of the programs geared specifically to help the children of migrant workers—education programs in high schools throughout southeastern Pennsylvania, CMEP and other programs, and the connections between the high school and Victory programs—were present given the growth of the Mexican populations in these communities. Such population growth was a consequence of cumulative causation and the reliance on migrant and cheap labor to pick the mushrooms and fruits in these communities.

In addition, the structure of the school system in these communities with one or a few high schools for each major suburban town and its largely white and middle class populations also played important roles in my participants' educational achievement. Since few schools exist in these communities, Mexican students attend the same schools that white middleclass student do—schools with substantial resources and where the majority of the population graduates and goes on to college. Given the growth of Mexican students in these schools, ESL programs along with some of the programs detailed in this dissertation had to be established in order to meet some of the needs of this growing population.

Although further investigation is warranted, it appears that the transition between high school and college can be understood as migration to mainstream higher education institutions by the children of immigrants. Push factors include wanting to improve socioeconomic status, encouragement by family and school officials, and enrollment in

various education programs geared toward college preparation. Pull factors include desired institutional diversity at Victory, the College Migrant Education Program, and other programs. A group of pioneer migrants was established at some point around 1992, which set this process in motion. These pioneers sent remittances in the way of experiences and information to their communities back home that leads to more migration. As such it appears to be more useful to consider the theory of cumulative causation or self-perpetuation (Massey 1990; 1999; Massey et al. 2002) of international migration—where each instance of migration generates more social capital and consequently a higher likelihood of additional migration in sending communities—and not just assimilation perspectives to understand how Mexican achievement occurs.

As Pennsylvania participants are graduating from Victory and their younger siblings, nieces, nephews, and other coethnics come of age in southeastern Pennsylvania, it appears that the perpetuation of migration between their home communities and Victory may continue. Of course, given that funding has been cut for one of the main programs connecting young "migrants" from southeastern Pennsylvania to Victory University this is a phenomenon that warrants further investigation. This would appear to be a worthwhile long-term test of cumulative causation's relevance for educational attainment among the children of immigrants.

Policy Connections

Improving the theory we as researchers use to better comprehend the social environment around us is important. Perhaps more crucial is to apply this comprehension to elucidate how policymakers and policy influence social environments in order to alleviate some of the disadvantages that marginalized populations encounter. To this

point, the patterns present among this study's participants and their experiences can be useful in addressing some of the disadvantages that the children of immigrants, lower class, and other students encounter as they attempt to complete high school and enter college. At the risk of oversimplifying the various lived experiences of the sixty Mexican young people in this study, one of the most important patterns to emerge is the differences in academic resources that students of varying racial and social class backgrounds have at their disposal. As discussed in chapter four, distinct combinations of multiple academic resources facilitated my participants' transition to higher education. Much of these resources providing students with information about the different types of colleges, careers, majors, and how to decide on which of these make the most sense for students, are on average, more likely and more easily present in white and middle class students' social environments.

If we focus on the differences between the resources available for southeastern Pennsylvania respondents and New York City respondents, students in southeastern Pennsylvania were more likely to have a much denser network of resources than those in New York City were. Similarly, students in three of the communities outside of New York City attended high schools that had much more resources than their counterparts in New York City did. There was also much variation in the resources available to students in New York City. Despite facing discrimination and racialization, students who attended high school with white and middleclass peers had more resources at their disposal. Although not previously broached in this study, the issue of school funding was quite relevant for all students in this study given that they all attended public high schools. Going back to Jonathan Kozol's (1991) *Savage Inequalities*, inequalities in public school

funding within states, between states, and between cities and suburbs continue (Baker, Sciarra, Farrie, 2015; Porter, 2013; Turner et al., 2016). This has especially been the case for schools in New York State and in New York City (Lovett, 2015; Spector, 2016).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in Pennsylvania high-poverty school districts spend thirty-three percent less than districts with the least amount of poverty (Chute, 2015). Much of these disparities result from local tax revenues determining a significant amount of school funding and a history of race and class inequalities which usually leaves schools and districts serving primarily poor and minority students underfunded. Thus, legislators, policymakers, and others involved in school funding decisions are implicated in the amount of resources available for the respondents in this study.

Pennsylvania students grew up and went to school with mainly white and middleclass peers in suburban communities. New York students grew up and went to school with mainly other immigrant and minority lower class peers. The differences in resources available to similar populations—students whose parents have low levels of education and work long hours in physically demanding jobs—can be attributed to the ways in which our society tends to differentially allocate resources by race, class, and other categories *at a local level*. Such a consideration is even more pressing given that government resources tend to be allocated within states at quite small levels of geographic distinctions: cities, boroughs, townships, municipalities, etc. What's more, for quite some time now, the election of politicians who tend to have the most influence in implementing the allocation of federal and other dollars is local. I want to make clear that I am not advocating a more individualist mentality when it comes to addressing

educational and other inequalities. However, I am suggesting that given our current political climate, it makes more sense to try to assist people and groups at a level that seems to be much more receptive to agitation and reform. It appears that supporting equitable funding and those who are involved in implementing it *at a local level* is a concrete way to try and lessen the disadvantages faced by minority, immigrant, and low-income students.

Another important aspect of my participants' academic trajectories was the role played by various school- and community-based organizations geared toward aiding the children of migrant workers and other disadvantaged students reach college. Such organizations are becoming increasingly more important given the cuts to public education and specifically to schools and programs within them where majorities of students are more likely to be nonwhite and poorer. As a case in point, in 2014, state policymakers decided to end the funding of CMEP. It will be necessary to investigate the effects of this policy decision. Given the discussion of cumulative causation in the previous section, there may be enough resources in place in the communities previously served by CMEP to continue to bring Mexican students to Victory University. Moreover, in New York City charter schools are increasingly become part of the various debates regarding school funding. This is also something that may potentially have an effect on the college transition resources available to students similar to those in this study.

Research Limitations and Reflections

The stories, narratives, and interactions that respondents shared have presented much insight and nuance into the processes behind how Mexicans in southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City transition to college and adulthood. Here I want to

surmise a few issues that stood out throughout the research process. First, in the early conceptualization of this research project many concerns came to mind. Perhaps the most relevant was the extent to which my own lived experiences would influence this study. Of course, all researchers' lived experiences influence their research. However, it was specifically the various similarities I share with many of the study's respondents as the son of Mexican immigrants, having being born and raised in New York City, having attended college in Pennsylvania, and being the first in my family to go on to college. Since there has not been much research on young Mexicans in the Northeast and especially in Pennsylvania, I was unsure how much to rely on my own lived experiences and how much to rely on my sociological training to guide me in creating relevant interview questions to ask potential respondents. In the end, I used a combination of my lived experiences, sociological training, and some pilot conversations with Mexican college students from previous unrelated research to guide me in conceptualizing the questions interviewees had to answer.

At least initially, I believed that my lived experiences positioned me as an "insider." However, at the outset of my fieldwork and recruitment of students at Victory University it proved quite difficult to locate Mexican students and surprisingly even more difficult to convince students to participate in this research. My being US-born Mexican, not being from any of the small southeastern Pennsylvania towns respondents come from, and speaking slightly Caribbean Spanish, among other characteristics, positioned me as an "outsider" in the eyes of the students first met at Victory. These students were mainly Mexican-born, native Central Mexican Spanish speakers, who reside in a small number of southeastern Pennsylvania communities. Indeed, a few of the US-born respondents at

Victory identified national origin, place of residence, and type of Spanish spoken as characteristics that marked them as initial outsiders in relation to the larger group of Mexican-born students who attended high school together and came from a few southeastern Pennsylvania towns. It was not until I started recruiting students in New York City that I realized how local dynamics could inflect the racial-ethnic-national identification of "Mexican." The same characteristics that initially marked me as an "outsider" to Victory students marked me as much more of an "insider" among Empire students. For instance, it took me less than a full calendar year to recruit, build rapport with, and interview respondents at Empire. Meanwhile at Victory, it took me more than twice as long to do the same.

This study purposefully focused on students who were able to overcome significant odds in transitioning to college. Of course I realize that much of what respondents experienced in this transition has been influenced by their prior experiences in elementary and middle school as well as outside of school. Unfortunately, this study was not able to focus on those experiences. Still, relying on qualitative methods to carry out this study was also quite purposeful. Therefore, this study can only help us speculate about those students who are not able to complete high school nor enter higher education. As some critics may posit, that the patterns among this study's respondents may not be applicable to students outside of southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City, is a significant limitation of this study. This is something that was taken into consideration when first conceptualizing this research. In this study, as in most qualitative research, the "loss" of generalizability was purposeful. My intention was to focus on the nuance and depth of Mexican young people's transition to college not emphasized in the majority of

existing research. Taking together, all of these purposeful actions led directly to my being able to dedicate as much time as I did to investigating a process, transitioning to college, that does require a significant amount of time. Had this been a quantitative study, much of nuance and depth behind my interactions with participants, as well as their stories, narratives, and experiences would not have been made present.

In the process of recruiting, interviewing, and interacting with the sixty young people in this study, I have been lucky enough to build rapport and trust with individuals without whom this project would have been possible. Thus, I believe it is my obligation to ensure, to the best of my abilities, that they are able to read and influence my interpretation of their lived experiences so that I can provide as much appropriate depth and nuance about what I have seen and what they have told me. This has involved presenting this research to the students at both Victory University and Empire College, engaging students in conversation about my writing and presenting of this research, and providing them with the ability to read anything I plan to publicly publish and present.

Future Research Directions

Despite my concerted attempts to provide as much nuance and depth about my respondents' transitions to higher education, the preceding pages only account for my interpretation of a small portion of my respondents' path from the time they were teenagers in high school to their more recent experiences as young adults in and beyond college. Therefore, many more questions emerged in the process of carrying out this research. Here, I discuss some questions and issues needing continued investigation.

Salience of Phenotype and Gender in Racialization

Chapter three demonstrated that the racialization of respondents and Mexicans in

general was the principal social effect of the microaggressions they encountered. The microaggressions respondents experienced racialized them as nonwhite, inferior, foreign, “illegal,” moochers, criminals, academically incompetent, and to different degrees made the students aware of Mexicans’ low status in this society, especially in relation to white individuals. A majority of the Pennsylvania respondents explicitly acknowledged being aware of this status. Discussing whether they expected to face any challenges upon graduating college, twelve Pennsylvania respondents mentioned their being “Hispanic[xlii]” or Mexican as something that may work as a disadvantage in getting hired, continuing their education, or generally in their future.

Nora, who is 1.5-generation and had a lighter complexion than most other Pennsylvania respondents had, answered, “I mean it is not easy and mostly it's because I'm Mexican, it's not easy, I'm expecting to have a rocky path.” Nelson, a Pennsylvania-born respondent with a medium complexion, shared “sometimes just being Hispanic, you never know like if that could be an advantage or disadvantage” in the workforce. Claudia, who was among the darkest of Pennsylvania respondents, remarked “I don’t know why, I’ve always had this idea that whenever an employer sees my name on a resume, they are going to subconsciously discriminate against me because I am Hispanic” given the perception that “all Mexicans are illegal.” Understanding that being Mexican may pose potential disadvantages in their futures may be a consequence of the various negative messages that these respondents encountered in their high schools and broader surroundings.

[xlii] I use the term Hispanic here because it is the label these students explicitly used during their interviews.

In addition, six other Pennsylvania students described being aware of the differences in the opportunities, resources, and privileges that white students have but that Latinx students do not; and how they considered this unfair. Minerva, a 1.5-generation respondent who was one of the lightest-skinned students, pointed to some of these privileges when asked if she had anything else to share to end her interview

> I know that being like Hispanic in general and having to compete with the white students, I know, I kind of see that, not as challenging, but I know that we have, like a I don't know how to put it. I feel like we have to try harder than them cuz I know they have it more, like more easy, like they are privileged in that sense and that sort of stuff pisses me off a lot. Cuz I know for a fact that I try really really hard in my school work and trying to get everything done, but yet for me I feel like that's never enough to meet some aspects. And because they are white and privileged they have easy access to jobs and can do anything. I know that for a fact because one of my roommates, she is in the exact same major and she doesn't really try all that much. She goes out three to four nights a week. She doesn't go to class and doesn't do anything but just by her being white gives her an advantage compared to me. I feel like she doesn't do work, but I have try ten times harder just because I know that I'm different. It's more of a challenge not just being a woman but by being a Hispanic woman and having to proof myself. So seeing that in comparison to the white students here, that's really tough and it really pisses me off because its 2014 and you would think that we wouldn't have to face all these challenges but they are still here and out there. So it is challenging.

Here and elsewhere in her interview Minerva makes an important connection. "Hispanics," especially in her small town, do not have access to the same resources that white students, like her roommate, do—e.g. college educated middle class parents who are fluent in English and can pay for and advocate for them to be placed in college readiness programs and classes—in high school. Once in college, Minerva and other working class "Hispanics" usually have to work to afford tuition, whereas her roommate and other middle class white students may not. Minerva makes another vital connection demonstrating the importance that whiteness plays in her collegiate experience in emphasizing the cumulative burdens of being a "Hispanic woman" where she has to work

“ten times harder” to “prove” herself in a society that considers those who are white and male to be the standard all others are judged by.

Two main research inquiries that come to mind regarding Pennsylvania respondents’ discussion of being Mexican in relation to being white are the potential influence of phenotype and gender in the racialization that respondents encounter. For instance, those with darker phenotypes in Pennsylvania were more likely to be the targets of derogatory comments about Mexicans *and* to be perceived as foreign than those with lighter phenotypes. Yet, recognizing that Mexicans have a lower status than whites in this country does not appear to be influenced by a student’s phenotype because there was no one group of students—those with either lighter, medium, or darker complexions—who were more likely to discuss this issue than the others. One way to address what appears to be a discrepancy is by explicitly asking respondents to describe any derogatory comments about Mexican that have been directed at them and instances of being perceived as foreign. Respondents would also be prompted to discuss how common they believe such encounters are for Mexicans in general and the reasons, if any, why they believe Mexicans encounter such treatment. In addition, respondents would be questioned about any disadvantages they feel Mexicans face in relation to white people and the extent to which they are concerned that they may face these disadvantages. I assume that respondents’ answers to this more direct line of questioning about respondents’ and Mexicans’ racialized experiences may be influenced by their phenotypical experiences.

Meanwhile, New York participants were not as likely to discuss being Mexican in relation to the disadvantages they may face nor to being white. Among New York City participants, only five mentioned being Mexican as something that may work as a

disadvantage in getting hired, continuing their education, or generally in their future. Guadalupe's mother reminded her that she is "Brown" and will have to compete for further education with a "white person who came from a better university" than Empire College. Similar to Claudia above, Cruz, another respondent born in the city, shared that he felt that once employers look at your resume and if "your last name sounds Hispanic or Latino, sometimes that sounds iffy for them, [but] if it sounds white, they will be like "Oh, we will contact them." Mateo, who arrived in New York City at a young age, disclosed that "as far as being Mexican it is always a challenge in the United States because there a notion that every Mexican here is illegal" and that given the climate because of Donald Trump "it is becoming even tougher."

Four others in New York discussed that Mexicans do not have access to the same resources or advantages as white individuals in the US. Alejandro discussed the following when asked what prevents people in this country from reaching college

> Skin color, it is mostly white people who can go to college. People of color have to struggle, go to work, they don't get enough financial aid. And because you are white, you are supposed to be more successful. People just tend to help you. If you are not white, you have to go out and ask and look for help, because no one wants to help you. If you are white, opportunities just come to you.

Alejandro's response stands out because at the time of our interview, he had only lived in the US and his specific New York City neighborhood for six years. In such a short amount of time Alejandro has become aware of how our society bestows resources and privileges to those deemed white over those deemed nonwhite (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2014). Still, phenotype does not appear to influence New York respondents' experience with derogatory comments nor their awareness of Mexicans' low status. This may be the case because there was not as much variation in their phenotypes.

Respondents in both southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City described encountering what can be described as gendered racialization. Regardless of location, male respondents were much more likely than the female respondents to face assumptions of inclination toward crime, using drugs, and being in gangs. Still, these assumptions appear to be much more salient in New York City than in southeastern Pennsylvania given that such assumptions are mainly attributed to young urban minority men of color and that New York respondents lived and attended school in communities with significant Black populations. Additional research would investigate the extent to which male and female respondents in both locations have faced assumptions of criminality, are familiar with these assumptions, the sources of these assumptions, and any potential effects for respondents in order to clarify the extent to which this gendered pattern of racialization is present, where these messages emanate from, and how they affect respondents.

New York female respondents were much more likely than their male counterparts and Pennsylvania counterparts to encounter stereotypes that they would end up pregnant at a young age and that they should not bother pursuing higher education. Like with assumptions of criminality, additional research on this issue would scrutinize the extent to which male and female respondents in both locations have faced assumptions of single parenthood, are familiar with these assumptions, the sources of these assumptions, and any potential effects for respondents in order to clarify the extent to which this gendered pattern of racialization is present, where these messages emanate from, and how they affect respondents. One other consideration regarding gendered racialization is to ask male and female respondents about the extent to which they feel their “race” and

“gender” has affected the opportunities and constraints in their trajectories beyond college and specifically if these two identifications have cumulatively burdened them in any way.

Being Mexican and Concerns for the Future

Regardless of gender, phenotype, citizenship status, and national origin, respondents in both southeastern Pennsylvania and New York City were cognizant of the disadvantages and potential for disadvantages because of being Mexican in relation to being white in the US. Nonetheless, this was something that more Pennsylvania respondents discussed while also discussing this much more explicitly than respondents in New York City. What leads more students from Victory University to be concerned about their futures specifically because of their Mexican background? One plausible explanation is the influence of local context. From the moment they entered their communities’ schools, Pennsylvania students encountered white peers. Furthermore, and especially once they entered high school, Pennsylvania Mexican students had to compete with white peers who had a higher socioeconomic status. In high school and college classes, and perhaps at work, young adult Mexicans in Pennsylvania also had to contend with standing out as one of the only, if not only, Mexican among their overwhelmingly white peers.

As Minerva detailed in her interview, these white middle class students usually had access to more resources and perhaps a higher quality of resources. Given close interactions with white students as they transitioned into college and young adulthood, Pennsylvania respondents became more aware of the differences in socioeconomic status and access to resources between people like themselves and their white middleclass

peers. Also, recall that Pennsylvania respondents were more likely than New York respondents to encounter interpersonal racialization from their peers.

While Pennsylvania students were more consistently concerned with racial dynamics, New York City students much more consistently mentioned concerns with economic circumstances. This preoccupation may be attributed to the fact that in New York lower socioeconomic status is more common. The particular focus on limited economic circumstances in New York City, but not in southeastern Pennsylvania, may be attributed to the prestige associated with the specific institutions of higher educations in each location. Empire College is just one of the many city, state, community, public, and private colleges and universities located in and around New York City. As some respondents themselves admitted, not too many would consider Empire College a particularly well known or great school. Victory University on the other is well known and regarded both inside and outside of Pennsylvania. As several respondents referenced in their decision to attend Victory, the business, STEM, and other programs there are highly ranked. To this end, a degree from Victory may not only have more prestige but may also mean higher earnings in the future than a degree from Empire.

There also looks to be a racial component to each institution's reputation. Victory University seems to be the school of choice for many white students inside and outside of Pennsylvania; over sixty percent of the over 10,000 students at Victory are white. In fact, Victory University has a reputation for being a majority white university. Empire College on the other hand is known for having a high percentage of its student body being comprised of minority students. Here, Latinx students make up over twenty percent of the student population. Several respondents pointed to Empire's demographic as a reason

why others perceived the education available there to be inferior. Further research is needed to ascertain the extent to which respondents in both locations have racial and economic concerns and their reasoning behind this. However, as already discussed, I am under the assumption that local context influences orientations toward the future.

Intergenerational Mobility in New Destinations

This study set out to identify some of the circumstances that made it more likely for the children of Mexican immigrants to graduate high school and make it to college. For Xitlali and most of the other students in this study some of the same factors that helped them reach college also helped them to finish college. As of March 2017, exactly half of the sixty Mexican students in this study have completed college. Two crucial questions with sociological implications come to mind: 1) What factors help students who face multiple disadvantages complete college? 2) What effects does a college degree have on these students' and their families' livelihood?

Initial interviews asked about the difficulties and resources that respondents have encountered in college. However, there was no direct focus on college graduation given that the vast majority of interviews were completed before respondents graduated college. At the moment I have been in touch with many of those respondents who have graduated college. Once this study is completed, I will begin following up with those who have graduated college in order to identify what they believed helped them finish college. In addition, a second round of interviews will investigate the potential effects of having attained a college degree on respondents' young adult lives. These follow-up interviews will examine respondents' socioeconomic status, further education, occupations, geographic mobility, and family formation about three years after graduating college. A

third wave will be taking place three to five years later. Theoretically, this project will provide an empirical test of the extent to which adult Mexicans are following a "downward" assimilation pattern as predicted by segmented assimilation, a more linear assimilation pattern as predicted by new assimilation, or perhaps something else entirely.

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