MATERNAL ACADEMIC INVOLVEMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS IMMIGRANT HISPANIC/LATINO MOTHERS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD

by
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**Dedications**

This study was conducted in honor of my family. It is for my grandparents, Delene and Byron, who stressed the value of education for each of us, always. It is especially for my parents, Kenneth and Beatrice. Their resourcefulness, strength, and dreams have brought me to where I am today. They have taught me to respect, value, and learn from the people and cultures around me. They have expanded my world and helped me understand that there is never just one way to perceive an event or solve a problem.

My father’s ability to blend in with any ethnic group anywhere in the world remains unparallel. He sets my standard for relating to the world around me. Born and raised in Colombia, my mother left school at age 16 to help support her brother’s education. Watching her overcome many obstacles and graduate from college is one of my most precious memories and proudest moments.

This study is for my sister, Heidi, with whom I share my Colombian, German-American, African, Minnesotan, Bolivian, Massachusetts, Texan, Long Islander, and Washington, DC, metropolitan upbringing. It is for my husband, Steve, who sees the best in me and loves me always and unconditionally. It is for my dear friends Lora and Sheila who inspire, encourage, and support me every step of the way. It is for my niece and nephew, Emily and Christopher, that they might be inspired to reach their dreams.

Finally, this project is dedicated to the twenty-four women who shared their hopes, dreams, questions, and stories with me. I cannot express in words my gratitude for their assistance or the connection I feel to their struggle and determination to overcome and advance. It is a privilege to represent their voices in this document.
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ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: MATERNAL ACADEMIC INVOLVEMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS IMMIGRANT HISPANIC/LATINO MOTHERS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD

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This thesis is an explorative, qualitative study designed to increase understanding of low socioeconomic status (SES) immigrant Hispanic maternal involvement in their children’s academic achievement. The study is motivated by the disproportionately high rates of Hispanic school dropout, the link between low academic achievement and problem behavior, and the need to uncover malleable factors that can positively affect the academic success of Hispanic youth.

Four focus groups were conducted with a total of 24 low SES immigrant Hispanic mothers with middle-school-age children. Research question included: What are the general
academic achievement aspirations that these mothers hold for their children and what is their involvement in helping their children reach those aspirations.

Data were collected in Spanish, translated, back translated to ensure accuracy of translation, and coded using winMAX software. A second coder was used to ascertain reliability of coding. Conclusions were drawn by analyzing the type and frequency of the participants’ responses.

Findings supported previous studies that showed Hispanic parents hold high aspirations for their children, that they are unfamiliar with the steps necessary to help their children maneuver the United States educational system, and that they perceive their roles to be as supporters and providers rather than managers of their children's education. Language barriers emerged as the primary barrier hindering effective maternal involvement in their children’s academic life. However, some mothers seemed to counter that barrier with their incredible willingness to do anything possible to help their children. This study generated new hypotheses related to the effects of acculturation on maternal academic involvement. The author presents two conceptual models based on study findings: Acculturation stressors that lead to low maternal academic involvement and malleable factors that can encourage high maternal academic involvement among low socioeconomic immigrant Latinas. The paper concludes with practical implications, a discussion of limitations, and recommendations for future research.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction to the Problem

The U.S. Bureau of the Census estimates the current U.S. Latino population to be 38.8 million strong and growing (Census Bureau, 2002). In June 2003, the Census announced that Hispanics are now the largest minority group in the United States. Hispanic/Latino youth, however, have been the largest group of minority adolescents since 2000 (Census Bureau, 2000). This large group of youth is struggling disproportionately with several behavior problems that have long-lasting impact on their future success and well-being. Of particular concern to this study are their rates of academic achievement. In 2000, it was reported that nearly one and a half million Hispanic/Latino youth ages 16 through 24 left high school before graduating (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2000). It is frequently reported that although Latinos in this age group represent only 15.1 percent of the youth population in the United States, they account for 38.6 percent of students who drop out of high school (NCES, 2000). However, it is important to differentiate Hispanic youth who dropped out of U.S. schools from those who immigrated without having graduated from high school (Fry, 2003). According to a new study by the Pew Hispanic Center, 38% of Hispanic youth may not have completed high school, but only 15% of U.S.-educated Latino youth (both immigrant and native born) leave high school without graduating (Fry, 2003). While this rate of 15% offers a clearer and more positive picture of Hispanic youth academic achievement, it is still higher than the comparable rates for African-American (12%) and White (8%) youth (Fry, 2003).

These high and disproportionate rates of school dropout are critical in this era of technological advancement. Changes in job requirements make a high school education a minimum requirement to access training for the labor force (NCES, 2000). Unless effective
dropout prevention strategies are put into place, the United States will have a large group of Hispanic young adults who are under prepared for the work force.

For these reasons, their academic achievement challenges have reached national concern. On October 12, 2001, President George W. Bush signed Executive Order 13230 to establish the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. On July 15, 2002, the Bush Administration unveiled a new bilingual Web site to help Hispanic parents provide their children with a college education (White House, 2002). Hundreds of local-level programs around the country are working to reduce dropout rates of Hispanic/Latino youth (Secada et al, 1998).

With local and national efforts mobilizing around this issue, there may be some real gains in the coming decades. However, to identify and implement the most effective Hispanic dropout prevention programs, more information is needed about the complex factors that lead to current levels of academic achievement among Hispanic/Latino youth.

**Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study was to increase our understanding of Hispanic/Latino maternal academic involvement. This was accomplished by examining what low socioeconomic status (SES) Hispanic/Latino mothers aspire for their children, their definitions of success, their role perceptions, and their involvement in their children’s education. In the process we uncovered information on a variety of related topics, including challenges and confusions due to acculturation and acculturation gap (the differing rate of acculturation between parent and child).

Although this study examines the issues only from the mother’s perspective, we acknowledge the powerful influence both mothers and fathers exert over their children’s
behavior. We focused on maternal involvement because of the documented maternal influence on children’s attitudes regarding academic achievement (Romo, 1998) as well as on behaviors that impact academic achievement (Romo et al., 2002; Gfroeres & De La Rosa 1993; Santisteban et al., 1995; Gfroerer & De La Rosa, 1993).

The secondary purpose of this study is to contribute to the body of literature on a high-risk and understudied population and topic. Substantial evidence exists concerning racial and ethnic variations in parenting styles and family interaction. However, little information is available on Hispanic/Latino family dynamics, especially with regard to communication about academic achievement (Kao, 1997). Since the topic of this study is broad and promises to yield rich information, this study has the potential to contribute to the education, health behavior, and health communication fields.

Finally, our purpose is to contribute to the public health goal of bringing research into practice. This study represents the second collaboration between the University of Maryland and a local grassroots organization called Identity, Inc. The first collaboration was Kerr, M.H. (2002), The Effects of Family Involvement on the Problem and Prosocial Behavior Outcomes of Latino Youth. Data collected through this study will inform Identity’s parental programmatic efforts in Montgomery County, Maryland. Identity, Inc. is a community-based, nonprofit organization that delivers health care education and leadership training to Latino youth and their families. Combining key insights from the field with the academic rigor of a research institution increases the chances that the findings will be relevant to both the academic community as well as to service providers.
Research Questions

The lack of research on this subject necessitated the discovery of information that could be used in designing future hypotheses. The study used grounded theory whereby the field work phase was entered without a hypothesis. Events were described and explanations were based on observation. The following research questions were explored:

**Research Question I:** What are the general academic achievement aspirations that low SES immigrant Hispanic/Latino mothers hold for their middle school-age children?

**Auxiliary question:** What are low SES immigrant Hispanic/Latino mothers’ perceptions of success? Kao (1997) stated that ethnic minority youths’ perception of success is a missing link in our understanding of their academic achievement. We must also know parents’ perceptions of success to understand better Latino youth academic achievement issues.

**Research Question II:** How are low SES immigrant Hispanic/Latino mothers involved in helping their children reach those academic achievement goals? Parental involvement in academic achievement can involve many things. This study focuses specifically on two elements of involvement:

**Auxiliary question 1:** What discussions do the mothers have with their children about grades, school in general, school activities, peer acceptance, things their children learn in class, courses they should take, standardized tests, and plans for attending college?

**Auxiliary question 2:** What attempts do the participants make to connect their children with role models or others who can help them?
Justification for Study

This study provides an important contribution to the public health field for several reasons. First, youth academic achievement is critical to positive youth development (Flay, 2002). Because academic achievement and problem behavior (substance use, teen pregnancy, delinquency) share many of the same risk and protective factors, increasing our understanding of factors that influence academic achievement can increase our understanding of factors that impact problem behavior (Flay, 2002).

Second, extensive research is available on the dynamics of European-American parent-adolescent involvement and communication. Similarly, studies discussing environmental predictors of problem behavior proneness among youth have been largely limited to Black and White youth (Dinh et al., 2001). Little information exists about parent-adolescent involvement and communication in Hispanic/Latino families (Romo, 2002; Moore, 2001; Kao, 1997; Sobol, 2000). Problem behavior research on Hispanic/Latino groups is limited, as is research on parental factors that affect the academic achievement of Hispanic/Latino youth.

Third, parents have tremendous influence over their children. Parental communication is one of the factors found to protect youth from school dropout and poor academic performance. Other parental factors are support, school expectations, academic encouragement, and academic support (Sobol, 2000; URC, 1999). Recent studies have found strong links between parental involvement and positive youth development (Kerr, 2002), as well as overall behavior in school, motivation to learn, grades and test scores, and long-term success (Flay, 2002). Due to the importance Hispanics place on family (familialism), Hispanic parents could potentially exert more of an influence over their children than families with more individualistic norms. A recent study of Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic youth found that Hispanic youth were most likely to
feel that living close to their parents was important (Kao, 2001). In addition, a recent positive youth development study of Hispanic/Latino youth in Montgomery County, MD found a significant difference between Spanish- and English-speaking Hispanic/Latino youth with regard to family connectedness and parental monitoring. They found that youth who completed the survey in Spanish were significantly more likely to report that their parents always knew where they were after school than the youth who completed the survey in English. They also found that youth who completed the survey in Spanish were significantly more likely to agree that they could tell their parents how the feel about things than the youth who completed the survey in English (Shattuck and Associates and Identity, Inc., 2002). Increasing our understanding of immigrant Latino parent-child dynamics, and how acculturation mediates those dynamics, could help academicians and service providers bolster Hispanic parental influence.

Fourth, this study examined parents of children at a crucial age: early adolescence. This stage of development was selected because it is a time of changes within the child and conflicts within the family. It is a time when “the roles and responsibilities of both parents and youth are undergoing a process, occasionally a tumultuous process, of readjustment” (COSSMHO and Szapocznik, 1995). These changes can leave youth vulnerable to self-esteem and mental health issues (Lord et al., 1994). This study contributes insights about how acculturation affects this already complicated process.

Adolescence is also a time when parental involvement is critical. Middle-school age youth begin to assert their independence and are at increased risk of peer influence and pressure. They start thinking about short- and long-term consequences of their actions and make choices that affect the health of the individual and the community (ASPIRA, 2002). This is also the time their values about academic success, career choices, sexual activity, getting married, and
having children take shape (East, 1998). Key to this study are educators beliefs “that the seeds for dropping out in high school are planted during the middle school years” (Berla, Henderson, & Kerewsky, 1989, p. 15). In addition, middle school is also the time when students and their parents need to start taking actions and making choices that will help the students get into college (TRPI, 2002). There appears to be a need for immigrant Hispanic/Latino parents to shift their perceived role from supporter and provider to key decision-maker, partner, and manager of their child’s education.

Finally, we examined the subgroup of the Hispanic population that is most at-risk: low SES immigrant Hispanic families. Though disparities in Hispanic/Latino academic achievement are evident at all socioeconomic levels (NCES, 2000), aspects of low SES (such as having larger families, fewer resources, and the need to work longer hours) put families at an even greater disadvantage (HNM, Education, 2002). Low SES families have less time to get involved in school and help their children navigate academic systems, and fewer family members or relatives have experience attending college or interest in the college experience (TRPI, 2002). This study adds high-density housing and threat of eviction to the list of factors that make academic achievement more challenging to low SES families.

Though this study took place in only one county in the United States, the study participants represented twelve countries of origin. Montgomery County was selected because the percentage of residents who are Hispanic/Latino, 11.5 percent, is similar to the national average of 12.5 percent (Bureau of the Census, 2000). Hispanics in the Washington, DC area (including Montgomery County) represent a variety of countries of origin and therefore are more evenly distributed. This county was also selected for logistical reasons; both the author and the
collaborating organization (Identity, Inc.) have valuable contacts that greatly facilitated the recruitment phase of the study.

Finally, Montgomery County was selected because the academic achievement rates of Montgomery County Hispanic/Latino youth reflect the national rates. Educators in this county are under tremendous pressure to close the gap in achievement scores between minority students and non-minority students, and are actively seeking assistance (Wright, T. [Hispanic Parent Liaison/ MCPS, Gaithersburg, MD], personal communication, summer 2002). Information gleaned from this study could contribute directly to the efforts of these dedicated educators.

Qualitative methodology was chosen for this study because it is useful for obtaining rich data, and is well-suited for uncovering reasons behind trends and behavior. Quantitative research focuses more on obtaining hard and replicable data (ORC/MACRO 2002) and understanding the frequency and distribution of specific human behaviors (Rich and Ginsburg, 1999). Due to the limited amount of existing research on these issues, exploring immigrant Latina mothers’ experience with their children’s education seemed more important than quantifying frequencies or quantities of involvement or communication. The usefulness of quantitative research with immigrant populations regarding communication with their children is limited because of the likelihood of misinterpretation of questions and responses on the part of both the participants and researchers. Despite some limitations, the current study contributes hypotheses for future research.

Focus group discussions, the qualitative method chosen for this study, are ideal for immigrant groups who are more likely to be threatened in one-on-one interviews (Shedlin and Schreiber, 1995). Groups also minimize problems of participant literacy and comprehension.
levels. Most importantly, they allow for clarification of concepts where a questionnaire would not.

**Definition of Terms**

**Academic Achievement**—school success can be measured by whether students get good grades, graduate from high school, or attend college.

**Academic Encouragement**—parent/guardian and familial encouragement of adolescent to graduate from high school and go to college (Kerr, 2002).

**Academic Support**—instrumental parent/guardian support, including help with homework and attending parent-teacher meetings or conferences (Kerr, 2002); also can include financial support.

**Acculturation**—a process of change when groups and individuals from different cultures come into continuous contact with one another (Dinh et al., 2001).

**Acculturation Gap**—a difference in the acculturation rate between family members.

**Authoritarian Parenting Style**—parents are concerned with “law and order” and force their ideas on their children. They tend to be demanding and threatening, are not respectful of their children, and try to control their children’s behavior through reward and punishment (COSSMHO and Szapocznik, 1995, p. 91).

**Authoritative Parenting Style**—parents set fair rules and enforce them, but are always willing to listen to their children and include them as partners in making family decisions (COSSMHO and Szapocznik, 1995, p. 93).

**Behavioral Capability**—this concept maintains that if a person is to perform a particular behavior, he or she must know what the behavior is (knowledge of the behavior) and how to
perform it (skill). This concept distinguishes between learning and performance because a task can be learned yet not performed whereas performance presumes learning.

**Biculturality**—occurs when an individual adopts aspects of both the new and old cultures (Strait, 1999).

**Determinism**—refers to the probabilistic, rather than inevitable, production of effects by events. It is more than just a prior sequence of causes, and it is not independent on the individual (Bandura, 1978).

**Domains/Levels of Influence**

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has outlined seven domains of influence across which risk and protective factors function. Each of these domains influences an individual’s risk for, or protection from, problem behaviors (SAMHSA, 2002). They are:

- Individual—biological and psychological dispositions, attitudes, values, knowledge, skills, problem behaviors
- Peer—norms, activities, bonding
- Family—function, management, bonding
- School—bonding, climate, policy, performance
- Work—bonding, climate, policy, performance
- Community—bonding, norms, resources, awareness, mobilization
- Society/environmental—norms, policy/sanctions

**Educational Attainment**—the number of years of schooling completed (Schvaneveldt et al., 2001).

**ESOL**—English Speakers of Other Languages

**Focus Group Discussions**—Qualitative research methodology that uses interviews of small groups of people on a specific topic.
**Gender Roles**—refer to the appropriate expected behavior and lifestyle which a culture ascribes to males and females (Strait, 1999).

**Grounded Theory**—theory that is discovered or generated from data rather than being abstract and tentative. Grounded theory is developed by entering the field work phase without a hypothesis, describing what happens, and formulating explanations as to why it happens on the basis of observation (Bailey, 1987).

**Hispanic/Latino**—refers to individuals who trace their origins to Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Intergenerational Gap**—differences in attitudes, beliefs, and norms between generations.

**Internalization of Minority Status**—when a minority individual believes prejudices and stereotypes about their own group (Vega et al., 1995).

**Observational Learning**—behavioral acquisition that occurs by watching the actions and outcomes of others’ behavior (Glanz, 1997).

**Outcome Expectations**—occur when a person learns that certain events are likely to occur in response to his or her behavior in a particular situation and then expects them to occur when the situation arises (Glanz, 1997).

**Outcome Expectancies**—the values that a person places on a particular outcome (Glanz, 1997).

**Parental Academic Involvement**—the parental factors that affect youth academic achievement, such as communication, monitoring, support, expectations, aspirations, and knowledge of academic processes.

**Parental Control**—supervision, monitoring, communication, and setting and enforcement of rules and boundaries (Kerr, 2002).
Parental Support—encouragement, acceptance, nurturance, and love of a child (Kerr, 2002).

Permissive Parenting Style—parents pamper their children, allow them to disregard established family rules, and feel they must do everything for their children rather than let them learn things for themselves (COSSMHO and Szapocznik, 1995).

Problem Behaviors—a composite of undesirable adolescent behaviors, including those related to drinking, smoking, drug use, partying, violence, gang activities, and early or unprotected sexual activity.

Problem Behavior Syndrome Theory—the idea that problem behaviors have similar root causes and that improvement in one problem behavior can lead to improvement in others (Jessor and Jessor, 1977).

Protective Factors—factors that build resilience in individuals which helps them resist (decrease the likelihood of) problem behaviors (SAMHSA, 1999a; HHS, 2001; Jessor et al., 1995).

Reciprocal Determinism—the perspective that psychological function involves a continuous reciprocal interaction among behavioral, cognitive, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1978).

Resilient Individuals—people who abstain from problem behaviors even though they have been exposed to risk factors for those behaviors (HHS, 2001).

Risk Factors—factors that contribute to or increase the risk of developing problem behaviors (SAMHSA, 1999a; HHS, 2001).

Self-efficacy—the confidence a person feels about performing a particular activity, including confidence in overcoming barriers to performing the activity (Glanz, 1997).
Social Cognitive Theory—explains how people acquire and maintain certain behavioral patterns and provides the basis for intervention strategies (Glanz, 1997).

Social Exchange Theory—explains relationships between individuals and their environment (Glanz, 1997).

Social Learning Theory—a mechanical explanation of behavior dependent on expectations of rewards or punishments. The rewards or punishments can be observed, rather than experienced, and still be effective (Glanz, 1997).

Theory of Triadic Influence—this theory posits that behavior is caused by sociocultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors and that each instance of behavior creates a “feedback influence on its predictors” and affects future behavior (Flay, 2002, p. 412).
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Chapter II provides a brief description of the growth rates of the Hispanic/Latino population in the United States, as well as their rates of academic achievement. It then provides a review of relevant theories and the risk and protective factors related to academic achievement of Hispanic/Latino youth.

The Latino population is growing four times faster than the Caucasian population and more than twice as fast as the African American population (DeBord & Ferrer, 2002). Hispanic/Latino groups represent 17 countries (as well as Spain) and are ethnically diverse with European, Indigenous, African, Arab, and Asian ancestries. Despite their diversity, these groups are bonded by a common language and important social norms, such as respect for elders and the centrality of the family (Grossman & Shigaki 1994).

Since 2000, Hispanic/Latino adolescents have been the largest ethnic youth groups in the United States. This group of adolescents is struggling with substance use and abuse, high rates of teen pregnancy, and higher rates of school dropout than Asian/Pacific Islander, African American, or Caucasian adolescents (NCES, 2000). The high dropout rates are of particular concern because education level is directly related to future earnings (HNM, Education 2002). Socioeconomic status is positively related with health status and negatively related to problem behaviors such as substance abuse, sexual activity, delinquency, and suicide (Borowsky, Ireland and Resnick, 2001). School dropout not only predicts other problem behaviors but may cause them (and vice versa) (Flay, 2002).

Hispanic/Latino youth have had low high school completion rates for several decades (HHS, 2000). Completion rates between 1972 and 1998 ranged from a low of 56 percent in 1972
to a high of 67 percent in 1997 (HHS, 2000). The large and rapidly increasing number of Hispanic/Latino youth, coupled with high dropout rates, has brought this issue to the forefront of national media and politics.

In 2000, Hispanic/Latino youth made up 38.6 percent of high school dropouts but only 15.1 percent of the U.S. population (NCES, 2000). In 2000, 27.8 percent of Hispanic/Latino youth, or close to one and a half million, left high school before graduating (NCES, 2000). Age 16 seems to be the age when youth start leaving in large numbers\(^1\) (HHS, 2000; NCES, 2000). This finding, combined with the fact that the decision to drop out is formed over time, points to the need for dropout prevention programs prior to the ninth grade (Wells et al., 2002). Researchers recommend intervention at the junior high level or earlier (Feliz-Ortiz & Newcomb, 1992).

Based on these high school completion rates, it is no surprise that Hispanics/Latinos are underrepresented in colleges and universities. Hispanic/Latino college enrollment is growing rapidly, and college completion rates are rising for Hispanic/Latino men and women born in the United States.\(^2\) However, this increase reflects the growing Hispanic/Latino population rather than improvement in their rates of achievement (Hispanic Link Weekly Report, 2001; HNM Education, 2002). In 1997, 54 percent of Hispanic/Latino high school graduates attended college, but only 8 percent received a bachelor’s degree or higher\(^3\) (HHS, 2000). This finding is

\(^1\) Adding 15-year-olds reduces dropouts to 9 percent in 1998 (HHS, 2000) and 7.4 percent in 2000 (NCES, 2000).

\(^2\) Male college completion rates rose from 10.7 percent in 1979 to 15.4 percent in 1998; female college completion rates rose from 8.7 percent in 1979 to 17.4 percent in 1998 (HNM, Education 2002, p. 38).

\(^3\) 1997 rates for White attendance and completion were 68 percent and 35 percent, respectively. For Black attendance, the rates were 54 percent and 16 percent, respectively (HHS, 2000).
crucial because a college degree is the most important key to higher earnings and employment in professional positions (Schemo, 2002).

In Maryland, the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system has 36 middle schools with a total enrollment of 30,178. Based on the percentage of overall Hispanic/Latino MCPS enrollment, approximately 4,888 middle school students are of Hispanic heritage (MCPS, 2002). The average SAT score for Latino MCPS students (949) remains significantly lower than that for Whites students (1,154). This discrepancy has resulted in a call to action within MCPS to close the gap in standardized test scores among ethnic groups (MCPS, 2002).

MCPS dropout rates reflect national trends. According to the National Center for Education Statistics Core of Common Data (CCD), Hispanics/Latinos comprise 16.2 percent of MCPS enrollment, but account for only 10 percent of high school graduates.

We are just beginning to understand the complex reasons behind the Hispanic/Latino youth dropout rates. In an attempt to unravel the puzzle, researchers have examined a variety of environmental, acculturation, and individual risk and protective factors. These include socioeconomic and immigration status, traditional Hispanic/Latino cultural norms, acculturation and its related stress, parental influence, problem behavior syndrome, and level of information and knowledge parents have about United States academic systems (Santisteban, Szapocnik, & Kurtines, 1995; Kao, 1997; Goldenberg et al., 2001; TRPI, 2002).

The following pages highlight relevant theories useful in examining academic achievement and include a discussion on environmental factors, acculturation stress, and family factors such as parental academic involvement.

4 From MCPS, 7,651 students graduated in the 1999-2000 school year, but only 823 were Hispanic/Latino.
Review of Relevant Theories

The most useful theoretical constructs in studying Hispanic/Latino academic achievement are social learning theory (also called social cognitive theory), social exchange theory, acculturation strain theory, theory of triadic influence, and problem behavior syndrome theory. This section begins with a discussion of four key social learning theory constructs: learning by observation, reciprocal determinism, behavioral capability, and self-efficacy.

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Social learning theory states that people acquire and maintain certain behavior by observing the rewards and punishments received by others in response to their behavior (Glanz, 1997; NIH, 2002; Strait, 1999). Hispanic youth sometimes see high school graduates in their communities earning less than peers who dropped out and have been working for a couple of years, they may observe, perceive, and “learn” that staying in school does not correlate with salary (Secada et al., 1998). This is important because “the more students believe that doing well in school pays off, the more effort they exert in school, and the better they perform there”
Students who believe that dropping out has little impact on their future are likely to have decreased motivation to stay in school.

Reciprocal determinism, a second construct of social learning theory, states that “psychological function involves a continuous reciprocal interaction between behavioral, cognitive, and environmental influences” (Bandura, 1978, p. 344). It also states that the relative influence of these three factors depends on the individual as well as the individual’s circumstances (Bandura, 1978). For example, if an adolescent youth has a tendency to cut classes, the cultural, family, and peer norms can serve to encourage or discourage that tendency. Another example is the effect acculturation can have on a family as a whole. Perhaps a child who would have excelled in his/her country of origin faces insurmountable language and other barriers in the United States. Hispanic/Latino children may also be adversely affected by: parents who must work long hours; conflicts with other students at school; low self-esteem due to stereotypes, discrimination, and internalizing of minority status; or internal conflict and confusion over how to integrate opposing values and norms.

Behavioral capability states that one must have knowledge and skill in order to perform a behavior (Glanz, 1997). This factor is relevant because of the lack of practical information Hispanic/Latino youth and their parents have about our educational system, especially about what is needed to get into college (Kao, 1997; TRPI, 2002). Lack of knowledge may be the most devastating as well as the most malleable of all factors preventing Hispanic/Latino youth with college aspirations from achieving their goals.

Lastly, self-efficacy (confidence in ability to perform a certain task) is an important mediator between skills or beliefs and performance. Self-efficacy determines how much effort individuals spend on a task, how long they try to accomplish a task, whether they enjoy the task,
and how well they bounce back in the case of failure (Chin & Kameoka, 2002). “Children with higher academic self-efficacy achieve higher grades, test scores, and eventual educational attainment” (Chin & Kameoka, 2002, p. 449).

A second theory helpful in understanding academic achievement of minority youth comes from the field of marketing. Social exchange theory focuses on an individual’s perceived costs or benefits of certain behaviors (Schvaneveldt et al., 2001; Glanz, 1997). This theory is useful in understanding why some ethnic youth conclude there are more benefits to dropping out than to staying in school (Schvaneveldt et al., 2001). The perceived costs of dropping out are lower for youth who see few educational and employment opportunities available to them (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). The perceived benefits of dropping out include increased income from being able to work full-time and the satisfaction of being able to contribute to household finances (Schvaneveldt et al., 2001). A better understanding of the long-term costs of leaving school and the long-term benefits of staying in school could make a significant difference in the way Hispanic/Latino youth make decisions about staying in school.

Acculturative strain theory examines the effects of acculturation stress on individuals by considering the various stressful exposures that can result from cultural change. Acculturative stressors are interactive and related to other stressors found in family, peer, and school domains. Multiple stressful exposures can predict behavior problems among adults as well as youth (Strait, 1999). For example, studies have found that “the longer immigrant youth live in the United States, the greater the likelihood of engagement in health-risk behaviors” (COSSMHO, 2000, p 21). A detailed description of acculturation stressors is provided later in this chapter.

Two theories helpful in understanding the importance of academic achievement in relation to risky health behavior are problem behavior syndrome (PBS) theory and the theory of
triadic influence. PBS theory holds that behavior problems such as teen pregnancy, school
dropout, substance use, teenage suicide, and violent crime have similar root causes. In other
words, strategies that work for one behavior problem will likely benefit other behavior problems,
and improvement in one area will have a positive impact on other behavior problems
(Schvaneveldt et al., 2001; Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992). As set forth by Jessor and
colleagues (1995), the PBS theory informed the widely used risk and protective factor
framework described below.

The more recent theory of triadic influence (TTI) (Flay, 2002) is especially relevant to
Hispanic youth. This theory states that behavior is caused by the interaction of sociocultural,
interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors and that this interaction is mediated by intentions. The
focus of this theory on the interplay of factors seems critical when studying youth who are
constantly integrating feedback from two very different cultures. According to this theory, each
instance of behavior creates a “feedback influence on its predictors” and affects future behavior
(Flay, 2002, p. 412). So rather than one problem behavior simply predicting another, Flay
believes problem behaviors lead to or cause other problem behaviors.

Risk and Protective Factors

So what makes one child more and another child less likely to succeed in school and abstain
from problem behaviors? The risk and protective factor model offers many clues to this
question. This model is a unifying, descriptive, and predictive theoretical framework
(SAMHSA, 2002) that grew out of an effort to understand the factors protecting at-risk children
from developing behavior problems (Jessor et al., 1995). A key concept of this framework is
that risk and protective factors are not opposite ends of a spectrum but distinct concepts (Felix-
Ortiz & Newcomb, 1992; Jessor et al., 1995). Protective factors are independent variables and
Risk and protective factors function across seven domains of influence: individual, peer, family, school, work, community, and society (SAMHSA, 2002). Each of these domains influences an individual’s risk for, or protection from, problem behaviors (SAMHSA, 2002).

Family risk factors include the nature of family interactions such as parent-child communication, cohesion, and parenting styles (Szapocznik & Fein, 1995). Characteristics found in functional families that protect against problem behaviors include good family management skills; communication characterized by directness, reciprocity, and specificity; flexibility in handling intrafamilial and extrafamilial stressors in adaptive ways; and conflict resolution skills (Santisteban, Szapocznik, & Kurtines, 1995; Szapocznik & COSSMHO, 1995; Szapocznik & Fein, 1995). SAMHSA outlined risk and protective factors as applied specifically to Hispanic/Latino families that encompass cultural, family, and individual characteristics relevant to Hispanic/Latino groups (Appendix A). These include factors such as familialism, multigenerational kinship network, and ethnic pride. The traditional Latino norm of familialism (see Appendix B) is thought to cause Latino parents to have a greater influence on their children than parents in more individualistic families (Szapocznik & Fein, 1995). Evidence suggests that in minority families, parents are likely to comprise a larger part of their children’s identity than do parents of non-minority youth (Kao, 1997, p. 161).

Following is a discussion of risk and protective factors in three main categories: environmental, such as socioeconomic status and immigration status; acculturation, such as acculturation gap, norm conflict and confusion, identity confusion, and imbalance of power in the family; and individual, such as parental academic involvement.
Environmental Factors

Socioeconomic Status

*In some communities, the rapid growth of a poorly educated, heavily immigrant Latino demographic group is overpowering school systems and underserving the hiring needs of companies for skilled and educated workers (TRPI, 2002, p.4).*

Socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the most relevant environmental factors affecting Hispanic/Latino people. The 2000 poverty rate for Hispanic families (married couple with children) was 16.9 percent, compared with 6.3 percent families for Black and 3.8 percent for White families (HNM, Business 2002). “The poverty rate for Latino males working full-time (7.2 percent) continues to be more than three times higher than for similar Black and White male workers, 1.8 and 1.4 percent respectively” (HNM, Business, 2002, p. 28). Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, lack of material resources, lower levels of parental education, lower quality schools, and residence in areas of concentrated poverty certainly affect academic achievement of Hispanic/Latino youth, including grade point average (Jessor et al., 1995) and participation in higher education (TRPI, 2002).

Immigration Status

Immigration status is related to both SES and academic achievement. Hispanic/Latino youth born outside of the United States comprised 44.2 percent of dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24, whereas U.S.-born Hispanics/Latinos comprised 27.8 percent of dropouts in 2000 (NCES, 2000). However, Hispanic/Latino youth are two to three times more likely to drop out of school than non-Latino peers regardless of whether they are first, second, or later generation American and regardless of SES (NCES, 2000). Also, one study found that first and second generation children earned higher grades and test scores and were more optimistic about their future...
attainment than their third generation counterparts (Kao, 1997). However, in a later study Kao found that even though parents of third generation youth had a higher SES, their children had similar test scores and grades as compared with their first generation Hispanic peers. Kao concluded that these findings also suggest an immigrant advantage and credited it to the optimism inherent in immigrant parents (Kao, 1997; Kao, 2001).

Immigrant parents are “less likely to share decision-making power and to talk about school in general than are native born parents. Immigrant parents are more likely to talk about college and their children report that they are closer to their parents than youth of native-born parents” (Kao, 2001, p. 1). However, immigrant Hispanic parents tend to be less knowledgeable about college (TRPI, 2002) than non-immigrant Hispanic parents. Therefore they are not as able to guide their children through the processes of preparing, researching, planning for, and applying to college.

Immigration can also affect academic achievement indirectly. For example, when students arrive in the United States they are often held back a year, and being older than the typical student or being behind a grade level is strongly associated with school drop out (NCES, 2000; Resnick et al., 1997; Berla, Henderson, & Kerewsky, 1989).

**Parental Education Status**

Parental education status is positively related to youth academic achievement (Schvaneveldt et al., 2001; Chin & Kameoka, 2002). Immigrant Hispanic/Latino adults have the fewest years of education among ethnic groups in the United States. Due to tremendous SES gaps in their home countries where the majority live in poverty and access to education is limited, the average years of education among workers in Latin America and the Caribbean are reported to be 5.4 years (PAHO, 2001).
In the United States Hispanic/Latino adults fare better with regard to years of education, but are still lagging behind other ethnic groups. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 27.8 percent of Hispanic/Latino adults (25 years of age and older) have less than a ninth-grade education (March 1999). Various studies reported low Hispanic/Latino parental academic achievement, with fathers’ level of education higher than mothers (CDF, 1991; East, 1998; Cuellar, 1997).

Low parental academic achievement and income level relate to the academic achievement of youth in a variety of ways. First, grade repetition is highest among children whose mothers did not complete high school (HHS, 2000), and as mentioned previously, being held back is a predictor of school dropout rates. Second, familial financial pressures can lead youth to leave school regardless of their grades (Secada et al., 1998). Third, the two greatest predictors of a student’s college enrollment are parental education and income (HNM, Education 2002). Parents with a college education, regardless of ethnicity, are better able to help their children through the college process because they have practical information about what it takes to get into college (Hurtado & Gauvain, 1997). Fourth, low maternal level of education can be indicative of emerging mother-child cultural differences (Gfroerer & De La Rosa, 1993).

The lack of opportunities experienced by older Hispanic/Latino youth serves to demoralize younger peers (Hispanic Link Weekly Report, 2002). It also limits the availability of important protective factors—role models, mentors, and opportunities to learn about careers through observation of significant others (Pidcock, Fischer, & Munsch, 1997; Sobol, 2000). Discrimination and inequality of opportunities also affect parents. “Inaccessibility to needed services discourages parents, causing them to lose their confidence and to become angry or depressed in a way that adversely affects their parenting” (Rodriguez, 1995, p. 169).
Although Hispanic/Latinos are enrolling in college at a higher rate than White students, the need to work while in school makes them far less likely to earn a four-year degree (Schemo, 2002; Fry, 2002). Despite lower college participation of Hispanic/Latino youth overall, middle class Hispanics are now spending the same fraction of household income on higher education as other middle class U.S. groups (HNM, Education 2002, p. 39). Other good news is that the median household income for Hispanics/Latinos has increased and the poverty rate decreased slightly in 2000 (HNM, 2002).

**Acculturation**

Acculturation is the process of change that happens when individuals from different cultures come into continuous contact with one another. When people move to a new country, changes occur in their behavior, language, values, and identity (Dinh et al., 2001). These changes are moderated by age, gender, SES, length of time in the host country, and generational status (Dinh et al., 2001; Vega et al., 1995).

The complex process of acculturation seems to have both positive and negative ramifications for Latino youth, with a variety of mediating risk and protective factors. For example, a low level of acculturation can put Latinos at risk for low self-esteem and psychological distress—both are related to academic achievement and problem behavior (Flay, 2002). In addition, language and other barriers make it difficult to access information or obtain knowledge that enables full participation in a new environment. Conversely, individuals who

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5 Household income increased from $31,767 in 1999 to $33,447 in 2000 (HNM, 2002).

6 The poverty rate decreased from 22.8 percent in 1999 to 21.2 percent in 2000 (HNM, 2002).
navigate both cultures well (biculural individuals) have an advantage with regard to these issues because they do not feel shut out of either culture.

However, when an individual pertains to a group that is stereotyped and discriminated against by the larger society, increased acculturation can lead to internalization of minority status (Vega et al., 1995). In addition, biculturalism forces individuals to select features from “different and often conflictual networks” (Fraser & Piacentini et al., 1998, p. 84). Norm messages can become confused during this process, which can lead to increased mental health problems (COSSMHO, 1999) and increased problem behavior (Hurtado & Gauvain, 1997). Thus, the very nature of having a foot in each culture is a delicate balancing act that exposes youth to cross pressures and can result in social network instability which, in turn, leads to confusion about risk behavior (Fraser & Piacentini et al., 1998). These concepts fit in with Durkheim’s thinking that individuals can become confused, anxious, and self-destructive when societal norms are not stable. “Times of social upheaval and change often present individuals with grave uncertainties about what is expected of them” (Babbie, 2001, p. 127).

**Acculturation Stress**

*Hispanic youth may have to confront challenges beyond those typically associated with the adolescent period. These challenges, found in all immigrant groups, may include the navigation between two cultures and finding ways to culturally and linguistically connect with both parents and peers (Dinh et al., 2001, p. 305).*
The process of acculturating\textsuperscript{7} to a new culture can be stressful at any age, but it is especially difficult for ethnic minority adolescents (Gil & Vega, 1996; Dinh et al., 2001). Combining adolescent and acculturation processes with ethnic minority status can lead Hispanic/Latino youth to question their personal value and status within the larger society. This questioning further complicates the delicate process of identity development. The strain of acculturating has been positively linked to adolescent problem behavior as well as to lower school performance (Vega et al., 1995).

Acculturation causes stress in parents as well as youth. Parenting stress contributes to anxiety and depression which in turn affects parental involvement, communication (Vega et al., 1995) and teaching style\textsuperscript{8} (Planos, Zaya, & Busch-Rosnagel, 1997). These factors are associated with later educational outcomes (Laosa, 1982). Acculturation stress among parents is positively related to stress in youth and the development of symptoms such as problem behavior (Szapocznik & COSSMHO, 1995).

Stressors caused by the acculturation process affect communication between parents and children (Dinh et al., 2001). These include norm conflict, acculturation gaps, language barriers, and ethnic identity conflicts (Santisteban et al., 1995). Vega and colleagues found that immigrant and nonimmigrant Hispanic/Latino youth experience a variety of acculturation stressors in the school setting that place them at risk for lower educational aspirations (Vega et al., 1995).

\textsuperscript{7} Degree of acculturation can be organized into four typologies: cultural resistance, cultural shift, cultural incorporation, and cultural transmutation (Strait, 1999).

\textsuperscript{8} Hispanic/Latino mothers are struggling in all five areas germane to a mother’s teaching style: a mother’s mental health, levels of parenting stress, available social support, socioeconomic status, and mother’s level of education (NCES, 2000; Planos, 1997).
**Norm Conflict**

*Although acquiring sociocultural flexibility may reduce the conflict between old and new belief systems, the continual fluctuation from one set of principals to another may itself induce psychological stress (Strait, 1999, p. 97).*

The term *norm conflict* describes a situation in which the norms, values, and beliefs taught in the home conflict with the norms of the larger society. The same behavior that is valued and considered assertive in North American culture is devalued and considered disrespectful in traditional Hispanic culture. For example, Hispanic children are traditionally taught to be respectful, polite, and defer to authority (Enriquez & Pajewski, 1996; DeBord & Ferrer, 2002; URC, 1999; SAMHSA, 1995; Planos, 1997; Grossman & Shigaki, 1994). However, this behavior can be misinterpreted by North Americans as being subservient, servile, passive, or exceedingly deferential (Enriquez & Pajewski, 1996). If a child behaves in a way he or she believes to be appropriate but receives a negative reaction to that behavior, he or she could become confused as to which way to behave. This child would receive mixed signals regarding behavior that is viewed one way at home and an opposite way in school. It can be difficult and confusing for children to integrate opposing norms (Fraser & Piacentini, 1998), especially while going through the normal adolescent process of identity development.

Norm conflict can pertain directly to the comfort level of Hispanic students in a classroom setting. Hispanic students view the educational process as hierarchical, with the teacher being the absolute authority (Enriquez & Pajewski, 1996). This view is in stark contrast to the attitudes and behaviors of North American students who often challenge their teachers. Another norm conflict relevant to the academic success of Hispanic/Latino students is that of the community versus individual. Traditional Hispanics tend to be cooperative in nature rather than
competitive or individualistic (Enriquez & Pajewski, 1996) and place the good of the group over individual goals (Enriquez & Pajewski, 1996). Hispanic students prefer cooperative learning techniques where they can express themselves as a group and not as an individual. However, these techniques are no longer common in our school systems (Enriquez & Pajewski, 1996).

Familialism, a traditional Hispanic/Latino norm referring to the strong family ties evident in the traditional Hispanic family, serves as both a risk and protective factor. Evidence suggests that the positive or negative effect of familialism could be mediated by level of parental education, income, acculturation, and support network. For example, a tight-knit family system where every member is involved in the child’s education could positively impact youth academic achievement. However, since familialism places family needs ahead of individual goals (Sobol, 2000; URC, 1999; SAMHSA, 1995), it could lead children to drop out of school to help provide for the family or care for younger siblings. Some evidence exists that familialism has a positive effect and significant impact on Mexican origin youth whose parents have at least a high school diploma (Kao, 2001). Finally, male Latino participants in a recent exploratory study stated that they feel vulnerable in their new environment and identified the loss of family connections as a contributing factor (Fontes, Cruz, & Tabachnick, 2001).

When parents impose familialism on children who are being raised in an individualist society, it can cause conflict between parents and children or internal struggles within the children. For example, Spanish-speaking parents, or those who work long hours, may rely heavily on older children to care for their younger children and make sure younger children complete their homework. This practice can limit the time older children have for their own homework and can cause stress within the family (Ramos, 2002). This stress often is magnified because youth interact with others who do not have the same level of obligation, which can cause
rebelliousness or depression among youth (personal communication, December 2002, Belisa Lozano-Vranich, Psy. D. [President of Alsofa.com]). To make matters worse, parents are not likely to be aware of the norm conflicts faced by their children. Immigrant parents lack intimate familiarity with the world their children face outside the home. Since parents are responsible for teaching the skills and behaviors that will help their children fit in and succeed in society, this lack is problematic (Planos, Zaya, & Busch-Rossnagel, 1997).

**Acculturation Gap**

The term acculturation gap is commonly used to describe the difference in the rate that parents and children adapt to a new culture. In families where parents and children immigrate to the United States at the same time, children typically acculturate at a faster rate than parents. Within the family this difference causes a gap in language, behavior, customs, values, and identity—in other words, it causes norm conflict within the household. Conflict occurs in Hispanic families when behavior expectations differ (Strait, 1999). It's important to note that conflict is caused by the lack of concurrence between two people who adopt different belief systems, and not the adoption of either belief system (Strait, 1999). A common source of conflict occurs when parents try to hold on to traditional cultural values and native language and their children start adopting North American values and losing their native language (Szapocznik & Fein, 1995; Dinh et al., 2001). This conflict can cause communication barriers, as well as tensions resulting from parental dependence on their children as interpreters (Dinh et al., 2001). This dependence changes the balance of power in the family, leaves parents feeling alienated and

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9 Children whose parents immigrated to the United States years before they did experience additional problems such as feeling abandoned, uprooted, and confused as to why their parents would bring them to the United States if they do not have time to be with them (personal communication, Ramos, L, Spring 2002 [K-12 Counselor/Montgomery County Public Schools, Gaithersburg, MD]). For more information, see Appendix H.
less competent in guiding their youth, and lowers their self-esteem (COSSMHO & Szapocznik, 1995). Because of the hierarchical nature of Hispanic/Latino families, this can have devastating affects on the organization of family (COSSMHO & Szapocznik, 1995). The self-esteem of youth is also affected by this process because youth need their parents to provide leadership, guidance, and stability in order to build a healthy self-esteem (COSSMHO & Szapocznik, 1995).

This dissonance in values within the family creates severe problems in communication and an equally severe credibility gap across the generations. Because of the cultural and values gap, youths are confused and tend to seek refuge in their peers and to reject parental leadership, guidance, and limits. Under these conditions, youths find themselves without proper guidance at a critical time in their lives and thus may begin to “act out” against parents, traditional cultural values, and social norms (COSSMHO & Szapocznik, 1995, p. 79).

Conflicts within the family can cause communication barriers that exacerbate the normal parent-adolescent conflicts and increase adolescents’ risk of alienation from parents (Santisteban et al., 1993). Youth reject “traditional methods of parental discipline and family communication. Consequently, parenting styles that worked in the past are no longer effective” (COSSMHO & Szapocznik, 1995, p. 86). This reduces the positive influences parents can have on the child’s academic achievement (Kao, 1997, p. 187).

Language Barriers

Aside from the language barriers that can exist within families, language barriers outside the home can pose obvious problems. Parents with low levels of English-literacy cannot help their children with homework, often have trouble or are afraid to communicate with school teachers or
staff, and find it difficult to gather information about preparing for college (Kao, 1997; TRPI, 2002).

Despite their faster acculturation rate, language barriers affect youth as well as adults. Approximately 75 percent of Hispanics/Latino children ages 5 to 17 speak a language other than English at home (HHS, 2000). The percentages of children who had trouble speaking English increased from 38.2 percent in 1979 to 41.9 percent in 1995 (HHS, 2000). Some Hispanic/Latinos born in the United States experience language-based problems in school (Vega et al., 1995). Even for those who speak fairly well, their accents often trigger discrimination and communication problems. Parents and children can develop a complex about their ability to make themselves understood that stays with them even after they have obtained a good command of the English language (personal communication, April 2002, Weiss, B. [MCPS ESOL Parent Specialist]).

**Identity Development**

Identity development for ethnic minority youths is complicated and challenging. In addition to developing a sense of self, they need to develop a cultural identity, which is affected by the way mainstream society views their ethnic group (Sobol, 2000). “For certain immigrant minority youth, assimilation has negative connotations since it involves becoming part of a relatively disenfranchised group in U.S. society” (Kao, 1997, p. 190).

Ethnic group identity plays an important role in academic achievement. Group images affect conceptions of success by defining areas of competency and maintaining boundaries
between groups. Doing well in school can be misconstrued as “acting white\textsuperscript{10}” rather than in accordance to group norms. Youth are more likely to compare themselves to other members of their ethnic group and adjust their individual expectations accordingly (Kao, 1997). This helps to explain why Hispanic and Black youth have high perceptions of their own educational achievement, yet earn lower grades and test scores relative to their White (and Asian) counterparts (Kao, 1997).

“Since stereotypes about Hispanic achievement emphasize their concentration in manual labor, Hispanic youth form their conceptions of success around avoiding these occupations, and hope for office work. Such fears promote low academic outcomes because students are more concerned about avoiding failure rather than achieving the highest possible grade” (Kao, 1997, p. 38).

\textit{Loss of Support Network}

Leaving one’s country, home, family, friends, colleagues, etc., has profound implications for loss of support networks. Having a strong social support network, such as the traditional Hispanic/Latino extended family, can buffer the effects of stress (Gfroerer & De La Rosa, 1993), parental anxiety, depression, self-image (Vega et al., 1995), and mother-child interactions (Planos, Zaya, & Busch-Rossnagel, 1997). The high mobility rate\textsuperscript{11} among Hispanic/Latino groups exacerbates an already weakened support network, compounds the challenges faced by Hispanic/Latino youth (HHS, 2000), and makes longitudinal studies on these groups more

\textsuperscript{10} However, a new study found that Black and Hispanic students were \textit{more} likely than White students to report that their friends thought it was important to study hard and get good grades (Ferguson, 2002).

\textsuperscript{11} In 1999, 19 percent of Hispanic/Latino youth moved (HHS, 2000).
challenging\textsuperscript{12} (Dinh et al., 2001). Children from immigrant families, as well as first and second generation families, may grow up without extended family, which can be devastating to the identity development of youth.

\textit{Gender Norms}

Although they are being challenged today, traditional Hispanic/Latino culture socializes children by strict gender norms (SAMHSA, 1995; Gil & Vasquez, 1996). Gender norms dictate that Hispanic females are obligated to care for their family, and so the family can serve as both a risk and protective factor. Persistent sex-role stereotyping of occupations within the Hispanic/Latino culture continue to lead young women’s career choices (Weiler, 1999; Ortiz, 1995).

Gender norms affect parental factors such as communication and monitoring. For example, traditional Hispanic/Latino parents tend to carry a stricter set of standards for girls than they do for boys (Romo, 2001) and provide less supervision and are more accepting of boys (Sobol, 2000). These norms also affect girls’ expectations for school, career, marriage, and childrearing. A study on Mexican American adolescent girls’ marital and birth expectations showed that they “desired rapid transitions at a young age” (East, 1998, p. 150). East’s study indicates that Mexican American girls “placed significantly less importance on achieving school and career goals and considered it less likely that they would achieve these goals than Black, White, or Southeast Asian girls” (East, 1998, p. 155). They also had the youngest desired age for marriage and first birth. High educational aspirations did not protect Mexican American girls from a high perceived likelihood of non-marital birth (East, 1998) compared with White, Black,
and Southeast Asian young women. East’s study suggests that “Mexican American girls—unlike girls from the other racial and ethnic groups—are being socialized for marriage and childrearing to the exclusion of work-related or school-related roles” (East, 1998, p.159).

Another study found that, of Hispanics in college, females were at particular risk for leaving school—and comprised 92 percent of Hispanics who left school (Pidcock, Fischer, & Munsch, 2001). Ethnic differences in risk factors for college retention were associated with family, personality, and problem behaviors (Pidcock, Fischer, & Munsch, 2001).

**Family Factors**

*Parental Academic Involvement*

Parents have a tremendous influence over the behavior of their children. Parents can positively influence academic achievement, and prevent problem behavior, by sharing their aspirations and expectations with them, communicating that they love them, teaching them how to do things for themselves rather than doing things for them (COSSMHO & Szapocznik, 1995), and by including them in family decision making (Kao, 1997).

Parental academic involvement refers to factors that affect youth academic achievement, such as communication, monitoring, support, expectations, aspirations, and knowledge of academic processes. Also important to youth academic achievement is parenting style and level of stress and conflict in the parent-child relationship. Children with overly permissive parents are more likely to have low academic achievement (Kao, 2001).

Hispanic/Latino families consistently ranked lower in parental involvement than Black or White families (HHS, 2000). Enrollment in early childhood programs is indicative of readiness to learn in elementary school. In 1999 only 43 percent of Hispanic/Latino children were enrolled
in a “center-based” program (HHS, 2000). Between 1991 and 1999, Hispanic/Latino families ranked lower in the three literacy activities reported by the *Trends in the Well-Being of America’s Children and Youth* report (HHS, 2000). In the “read to every day” category, percentages for Hispanic/Latino families ranged from a low of 33 percent in 1999 to a high of 39 percent in 1996.\(^{13}\) In the “told a story at least three times a week” category, Hispanic/Latino families ranged from 38 percent in 1991 to 47 percent in 1996.\(^{14}\)

Some evidence suggests that the way we measure parental involvement is not sufficient to capture cultural nuances (Kao, 2001). For example, a study found that Asian parents communicated less frequently with their children about school than any other group (Kao, 1997; \& Kao, 2000), yet their academic success rates are the highest among the different racial/ethnic groups. This study found that Asian parents view success in school as children’s obligation and the parents’ role as providers of resources for their children (Kao, 1997). “[The parents’] task is not accomplished so much by daily discussion about classes, but rather by broad and repeated reminders of the obligation youth have to their parents more generally” (Kao, 1997, p. 166). This powerful element of obligation to family is an important cultural element that is rarely mentioned, much less measured, in parental involvement or problem behavior research.

**Expectations and Aspirations**

Hispanic/Latino parental expectations and aspirations for their children’s academic achievement are important as they are negatively related to their children’s health risk behaviors (Resnick et

\(^{13}\) Percentages for Black families ranged from 39 percent in 1993 to 44 percent in 1996. Percentages for White families ranged from 59 percent in 1993 to 65 percent in 1995 (HHS, 2000).

\(^{14}\) Percentages for Black families ranged from 34 percent in 1991 to 47 percent in 1996. Percentages for White families ranged from 40 percent in 1991 to 59 percent in 1996 (HHS, 2000).
Findings consistently indicate that Hispanic/Latino parents have high expectations about their children’s academic achievement regardless of the preparedness of their children (TRPI, 2002). However, there is some contradiction regarding whether parental aspirations predict achievement, or whether student achievement predicts parental aspirations. One study found that Hispanic parents’ expectations for their children rise and fall in response to their children’s actual academic performance (Goldenberg, 2001). A longitudinal study found that parental aspirations during their child’s 8th grade year continued to significantly impact GPA four years later during the child’s 12th grade year (Kao, 2001). A third study by Kao argues that parental aspirations can affect children’s academic aspirations and maintain those aspirations over time (Kao, 2002). Still other argue that regardless of whether the parents have high aspirations, they are not sufficiently informed about U.S. educational systems to help their children fulfill those parental aspirations (TRPI, 2002; Kao, 1997).

Studies have also measured the aspirations Hispanic youth hold for themselves. In East’s 1998 study of Hispanic, Black, White, and Southeast Asian girls, Hispanic girls were the only ones for whom positive aspirations for school and job were not related to a low perceived likelihood of non-marital birth (East, 1998). This study found that though Hispanic girls held high aspirations for academic achievement, they “placed significantly less importance on achieving school and career goals and considered it less likely that they would achieve these goals than any of the other groups in the study” (East, 1998).

**Perceived Role**

“Cultural differences in understandings about parental and children’s responsibilities can differ among ethnic groups” (Kao, 2002, p. 87). Low SES Hispanic/Latino parents may perceive their role as parents to be more along the lines of caretakers of basic physical needs (Rodriguez, 1995)
than as educators. This role perception naturally influences whether they talk to their children about school and the steps they take to get involved in their children education. These factors affect youth academic achievement at every juncture, but become critical for youth with college aspirations. “As choices in high school curricula expand, parent’s roles as ‘managers’ of their children’s academic careers are increasingly vital to successful educational outcomes (Kao, 1997, p. 164).

**Parental Discussions**

One way that parents transmit their aspirations and expectations to their children is by having frequent discussions with them (Kao, 1997, p. 164). However, ethnic families have proven to be complex in this area. Kao found that Hispanic/Latino and Asian-American families have the least parental discussions about school compared with Black or White families. In a later study she segmented this variable by immigrant status and found that immigrant Asian and Hispanic parents held fewer discussions about school (school courses, school activities, or things that were studied at school) than immigrant Black, immigrant White, and third generation White parents (Kao, 2001).

Since Asian youth had the highest and Hispanic youth the lowest academic outcomes (Kao, 1997; Kao 2001), she hypothesized that Asian families remind children of their obligation as students in other ways such that conversations specifically about school are not necessary (Kao, 1997). However, Kao found that discussions specific to college were related to increased expectations of college enrollment among youth, especially Hispanic/Latino youth (Kao, 1997, p. 186).
Parenting Style

Three types of parenting style have received a lot of attention in the literature: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Authoritarian parents are concerned with “law and order” and force their ideas on their children. They tend to be demanding, threatening, and try to control their children’s behavior through reward and punishment (COSSMHO & Szapocznik, 1995). Permissive parents tend to pamper their children, allow them to disregard established family rules, and do things for their children rather than teaching them how to do things for themselves (COSSMHO & Szapocznik, 1995). Authoritative parents tend to set fair rules and enforce them, listen to their children’s opinions about family matters, and include them as partners in making family decisions (COSSMHO & Szapocznik, 1995). This type of parenting style is most often found in White households and is most often recommended (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992).

The literature shows that students with authoritative parents have the highest school outcomes. However, parenting style also must be considered in a cultural context. Parenting style in immigrant families generally differ from North American families in three important ways: greater respect for parents and elders, greater parental authority, and closeness of family ties (Kao, 1997). Ethnic differences exist in the effectiveness of authoritative parenting style. For example, Asian parents are the least authoritative, but their children have the highest school performance (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). It is crucial to understand how youth from different ethnic groups interpret their relationship with their parents (Kao, 2001).

In Kao’s study, permissive parents were associated with lower achievement in 10th grade for students of all backgrounds. However, authoritarian parents did not negatively influence grades except for Black youth (Kao, 1997, p. 185). In fact, the more authoritarian Asian parents
were, the higher was the grade point average of the student (Kao, 1997). In a later study on
ethnic parenting styles (Kao, 2001), Kao measured “strictness of parent” by generation status.
She found that among Hispanics, immigrant parents were the most strict, though first generation
parents were also strict.\(^{15}\)

Traditional Hispanic/Latino parenting style often categorizes fathers as authoritarian and
mothers as permissive (COSSMHO & Szapocznik, 1995; Grossman & Shigaki 1994) in that a
father’s word is not be questioned and a mother’s teaching has a high use of modeling,
directives, and visual cues (Planos, Zaya, & Busch-Rosnnagel, 1997). “Hispanic youngsters
suffer from a combination of parental authoritarianism and low peer support” (Steinberg,

Steinberg hypothesizes that the “effects of authoritative parenting may differ as a
function of the ecology in which the adolescent lives” (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992, p.
725). His study showed that youth from all ethnic backgrounds fared better psychologically if
their parents were authoritative. However, the outcomes for academic achievement were mixed.
Hispanic/Latino and White youth were more likely to benefit from an authoritative parenting
style than Black or Asian youth (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). In other words, despite
the ethnic differences in the effectiveness of authoritative parenting style, it appears that
Hispanic/Latino youth would benefit from a shift in traditional authoritarian/permissive styles to
the more authoritative style.

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\(^{15}\) Kao defined strict as the level of control parents exerted over whether youth could date or participate in sports and other activities.
Lack of Information

One of the most malleable factors contributing to low Hispanic/Latino academic achievement is the lack of information among parents about what it takes to get into college. Studies have found that Hispanic/Latino parents have high aspirations for their children (Goldenberg et al., 2001; TRPI, 2002) but that aspiration is not backed with knowledge of how to work the system (TRPI, 2002; Kao, 1997).

A recent study found that Hispanic/Latino parents need more information about the college process (TRPI, 2002). Of the 1,054 Latino parents surveyed by telephone in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, 65.7 percent missed at least 50 percent of the items. According to the study, parents who have lower SES or those who are first generation immigrants are even less able to help their children through the college process (TRPI, 2002). According to this study, parents and caregivers are unfamiliar with the key milestones for getting into college. These include staying in school, taking demanding coursework, learning about college and the college experience, researching colleges, and planning how to finance college\(^{16}\) (TRPI, 2002). An interesting finding was that Spanish-language media rarely provide information that would help ground their audience in this process. Study participants reported that more information about college is presented in English-language media sources than in Spanish-language media sources (TRPI, 2002).

Problem Behavior Syndrome

Problem behavior theory offers another explanation for the high dropout rates among Hispanics. Problem behavior syndrome theory suggests that involvement in problem behaviors brings about

\(^{16}\) According to Kao, 2000, Asian-American parents are the most prepared in terms of financing college.
a change in the mind-set of adolescents, specifically toward violating community norms and standards (Schvaneveldt et al., 2001). This change could serve to reduce the protective factors (Jessor & Jessor, 1977) inherent in the Hispanic/Latino culture. Also, problem behavior does not occur in isolation, but is affected by environmental and acculturation factors (Szapocznik & COSSMHO, 1995).

Since family and individual behavior is interactive and interdependent, “family functioning is an important moderator of the emergence of behavior problems, particularly among Hispanics/Latinos” (Szapocznik & Fein, 1995, p. 25). Behavior problems “appear to be linked, at least in part, by parenting practices and skills” (COSSMHO & Szapocznik, 1995, p. 79). Finally, there is a reciprocal nature to problem behaviors (Resnick et al., 1997). For example, career goals affect teen pregnancy rates, which in turn affect ability and likelihood of academic success (East, 1998; Schvaneveldt et al., 2001). However, even though “the evidence for relationships among behaviors is strong, the direction of the relationships is often unclear” (Flay, 2002, p. 408). Nevertheless, improving youth academic achievement can have a profound impact on the rates of youth problem behavior.

Hispanic/Latino youth are disproportionately affected by behaviors that are highly correlated to low academic achievement, such as substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and delinquency (Santiesteban, Szapocznik, & Kurtines, 1995; URC, 1999). Additional health issues faced by Hispanic/Latino youth include mental health problems, exposure to violence, and risk of contracting AIDS (ASPIRA, 2002). These behaviors severely limit a child’s chances to go to college, self-actualization, and earning potential (HNM, Education 2002), and they comprise the main threats to adolescent health today (Resnick et al., 1997).
Today’s youth face constant pressures to get involved in behaviors that will negatively affect their academic achievement. Parents must empower their children to navigate these pressures and make decisions on their own (COSSMHO & Szapocznik, 1995).

**Conceptual Models**

The previous discussion reflects the tremendous variety of factors related to academic achievement of Hispanic/Latino youth. Individual factors pertaining to youth such as biology, personality, and self-efficacy naturally affect youth academic achievement, but were not included in the literature review as they are the least malleable factors. Based on the literature review, Figure I depicts the main factors that affect parental academic involvement and youth academic achievement and suggests they are interrelated.

Figure 2 depicts the more malleable risk factors of concern to this study. We had proposed that general questions about maternal academic communication would reveal which of these factors affect parental academic involvement the most and the ways in which they affect it. Specifically, questions 7, 8, 9, and 10 in the moderator’s guide (Appendix C) are geared toward uncovering factors that affect communication. Other questions are geared to exploring aspects of parental academic involvement related to communication such as what the mothers think, believe, and expect. Figure 2 depicts that acculturation affects maternal academic involvement, with language barriers being the greatest challenge.
**Figure 1 Main Factors Affecting Hispanic/Latino (H/L) Youth**

**Main Factors Affecting H/L Youth Academic Achievement**

### Environmental Factors
- Socioeconomic Status
- Immigration Status
- Opportunities
- Role Models

### Acculturation Factors
- Acculturation Stress
- Norm Conflict/Confusion
- Acculturation Gap
- Language Barriers
- Broken Support Networks
- Gender Norms

### Parental Academic Involvement
- Communication
- Monitoring
- Support
- Expectations
- Aspirations
- Knowledge
- Conflict

### Youth Academic Achievement
- School Performance
- School Completion
- College Attendance

**Figure 2 Factors Affecting Maternal Academic Communication**

### Maternal Academic Communication

### Acculturation Risk Factors
- Language Barriers
- Acculturation Stress
- Norm Conflict/Confusion
- Acculturation Gap
- Broken Support Networks

### Parental Academic Involvement

### Youth Academic Achievement
- School Performance
- School Completion
- College Attendance
Summary

Chapter II provides a review of the literature of relevant theories, as well as the risk and protective factors related to academic achievement of Hispanic/Latino youth. This group of young people is disproportionately involved in problem behaviors that directly inhibit academic achievement and is experiencing alarming rates of school dropout. Factors that contribute to these rates can be categorized as environmental, acculturation, and family factors. This study seeks to uncover environmental and cultural factors affect maternal academic involvement. By doing so, this study has the potential to make a tremendous contribution to future research efforts as well as organizations who serve Hispanic/Latino families.
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative study used focus group discussions to collect data about parental factors in academic achievement of Hispanic/Latino youth. First mentioned in 1926, focus groups did not gain popularity until the 1950s (Basch, 1987). The methodology consists of interviews of small groups of people on a specific topic (Patton, 2002) and is used in the private, public, and non-profit sectors with a variety of audiences and purposes. “Groups create the give-and-take atmosphere in which opinions naturally form” (Rich & Ginsburg, 1999, p. 373).

Using Focus Groups with Hispanic/Latino Groups

Focus groups are particularly well-suited to research with understudied populations because they can be used to explore and identify themes, uncover the reasons behind the themes, and assist in the development of future hypotheses. Also, immigrant Hispanic/Latino women are more comfortable in groups than in individual interviews.

To find articles about using focus groups with Hispanic/Latino immigrants, the author queried five public health professionals with expertise in Latino issues, two health communication firms that work with Latino populations, one professional Latino-owned and operated focus group consulting firm, and the subscribers of a social marketing listserve. Only one article was identified from these efforts, supporting the statement that few articles are available on the process of using focus groups with special populations (Shedlin & Schreiber, 1995).

Several people were willing to offer personal experience in using focus groups with Hispanic/Latino groups. The author has combined personal statements from professionals in the
field, the training she received in preparation for the study, and observations gathered while conducting this study into the next section on the similarities and differences of conducting focus groups with Hispanic/Latino populations (compared with mainstream groups).

First, the similarities. Regardless of ethnicity, men and women should be separated, or have equal numbers, to prevent the formation of majority group within the group as they will likely dominate the discussion (Shedlin & Schreiber, 1995). Because some people in the group will be more comfortable speaking out than others, the moderator should encourage every one to speak and call on people who are particularly quiet (personal communication, Summer 2002, Marte, S. [Hispanic Focus Groups & Qualitative Research Consultant/Schwartz Consulting Partners, Incorporated, Tampa, FL]).

One differences between mainstream and Hispanic/Latino groups is the increased need to avoid threatening questions (personal communication, Summer 2002, Lettsome V. [Shattuck and Associates]). For example, ask “what do mothers think and say” rather than “what do you think and say.” The moderator should “put the ball in their court so they can tell you what you want to know” (personal communication, Summer 2002, Marte, S. [Hispanic Focus Groups & Qualitative Research Consultant/Schwartz Consulting Partners, Incorporated, Tampa, FL]).

Another difference is that Hispanic/Latino women are likely to talk in depth about a topic, especially social issues. Getting an idea of which topics are related to the study topic is important; so is keeping the participants focused on the topic (personal communication, Summer 2002, Marte, S. [Hispanic Focus Groups & Qualitative Research Consultant/Schwartz Consulting Partners, Incorporated, Tampa, FL]). Based on observations collected during the current study, the author recommends keeping the focus groups small (between five and eight participants).
Also, experts recommend using scenarios rather than conceptual questions when working with low SES Hispanic/Latino adults (Kattar, C., & Uriburu, D. [Directors/Identity, Incorporated, Washington, DC], personal communication, summer 2002). The current study included a scenario about a key point in discussion—dropping out of high school. This scenario provided a focus point for the participants to consider and react to and set the stage for key probing questions (Appendix C). The scenario worked well in the current study, however, so did the more direct questions.

Experts say that Hispanic groups are reluctant to express dislike of a product for fear of insulting the host or moderator. If the purpose of the focus group is to test a product, the moderator should take this reluctance into account and stress the importance of honest and varied opinions. Once “allowed” to say what they really think, they are more likely to do so. This tendency to be reluctant also varies greatly by Hispanic/subgroup according to age, country of origin, and geographic location. For example, Mexican American youth in the Southwest have been found to be much less likely to say they dislike something than are Cuban and Puerto Rican American youth on the East Coast (personal communication, winter 2003, Faura, J. [Cultura, Incorporated, TX]). It is also important to understand traditional Hispanic/Latino customs to ensure products or topics are relevant (personal communication, summer 2002, Marte, S. [Hispanic Focus Groups & Qualitative Research Consultant/Schwartz Consulting Partners, Incorporated, Tampa, FL]).

**Population Description**

Low SES Hispanic/Latino mothers of middle school-age children in Montgomery County, Maryland, were studied. The percentage of Hispanics/Latinos who reside in Montgomery
County (11.5 percent) is similar to the national average (12.5 percent) (Bureau of the Census, 2000).

The Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system is the largest in Maryland, the 19th largest in the nation, and the 12th fastest growing in the nation. Projected enrollment for the 2001-2002 school year is 136,653; 22,137 (16.2 percent) are classified as Hispanic (MCPS homepage). Unlike the national average, the majority of Hispanic/Latino people in the county do not trace their origins to Mexico (Bureau of the Census, 2000).

**Methods**

Four focus group discussions were conducted in January and February 2003 in collaboration with Identity, Inc. and Montgomery County Public School staff. In addition to the criteria that participants be immigrant Latino mothers with children ages 11 to 14, we screened the participants by level of education attained. This criterion added an element of homogeneity, which increased the comfort level among participants and the clarity of the data collected (as advised by Shedlin & Schreiber, 1995). Five to seven women participated per group (eight to nine participants were recruited).

Twenty three of the participants were Mestizas (a mixture of European and Indigenous races), one was Afro-Latina. This had a direct affect on the comfort level of one participant who was in the group with the Afro-Latina. The mother mentioned that her daughter was being harassed by other girls because she is Latina. When asked about the ethnicity of the girls who were bothering her daughter, she directed her response to the Afro-Latina participant, “I apologize for saying this, but they were Black girls.” The group atmosphere was open enough to enable this type of honest interaction.
The focus groups were held in locations familiar to the participants and did not include threatening elements such as video cameras and one-way mirrors customary in other types of focus groups. Questions were carefully phrased to increase honesty on the part of the participants and to decrease the chance of offending anyone.

Due to the discussion topic, many participants mentioned problems or needs of their families. Having predicted this input, the moderator had local community professionals serve as notetakers for the groups. At the conclusion of each group, the counselor or parent specialist was able to provide factual information about questions that had been asked as well as information about services available in the community.

Prior to the groups, the moderator researched what to do in case a participant became emotional during the group. According to Shedlin & Schreiber (1995), it is up to the moderator to decide whether the participant’s needs are critical and whether the group has been compromised by the situation. The moderator can choose to stop the group and attend to the participant in need or help the participant move past that issue and continue with the group. Claudia Campos (personal communication, winter, 2003), clinical psychologist, suggested addressing the person’s emotion while regaining control of the group by allowing some time for the person to tell her story, showing compassion by placing a hand on her arm, and gently moving the group on to the next subject. This strategy was successfully applied during the last group when two of the mothers became emotional.

There is conflicting opinion about how to increase honesty of Hispanic participants. Standard focus group methodology states that participants will be more honest if nobody knows them. However, some experts say Hispanics are more likely to disclose information if someone who knows them is present. Juan Faura, president of Cultura, Inc., found that Hispanic/Latino
groups are more honest when someone in the room group can “call them to the carpet” on what they are saying (personal communication, winter 2003, Faura, J. [Cultura, Incorporated, TX]) (participants do not need know each other, but a known party must be present). The current study supports this opinion. The author found that having a known and trusted person in the room was conducive to a more relaxed environment and open communication. Due to the many trust issues faced by this community, people who regularly work with the community served as recruiters and were present at the sessions. Their ability to build trust opened the doors to open and honest communication, and ensured the success of the groups.

In the first group none of the participants knew each other, but all knew the recruiter who served as the babysitter for that group. The recruiter/babysitter was present at the beginning and end of the group but not during the discussion. This group took longer to warm up than the second group. In the second group, all of the participants knew the recruiter (who served as a participant in the group). The recruiter also knew the notetaker. This group was the most open and free-flowing.

In the third group, none of the participants knew each other, but all the participants knew the recruiter. The recruiter served as the notetaker and was present during the group. This group was the least open, probably because it was the largest. In the fourth group, none of the participants knew each other prior to recruitment, but two connected to share transportation and discovered they belonged to the same church. By the time the group was held, these two recruits were better acquainted. The camaraderie of the two participants who had become acquainted seemed to spread to the rest of the group, making the environment more easy going. All of the participants knew the recruiter who served as the notetaker and was present during the group.
In addition to ensuring the participants’ openness and honesty, the moderator was responsible for keeping the discussion on track. The group in which nobody knew anyone besides the recruiter (group 1) and the recruiter was not present was very efficient and easy to keep on track. Participants opened up part-way into the discussion. The group where all the mothers knew the recruiter and the recruiter was one of the participants (group 2) was the most open but the most difficult to keep on track. The other two groups (groups 3 and 4) where the participants knew the recruiter/notetaker but not any of the mothers were easy to keep on track and still very open to sharing their opinions. Many of the participants stayed long after the groups ended talking to each other, the moderator, and the notetakers.

Focus group methodology states that desired group size ranges between 6 to 12 participants. In this study, the smallest group had only 5 women. Two groups had 6, and one group had 7. The author observed that the smaller the group, the more evenly everyone participated. However, each participant in the smallest group, at some point in the group, launched into a long monologue that was difficult to redirect. Long monologues did not occur during the group of 7. Managing this number of participants was still very feasible, but participation was not as evenly distributed. The author concludes that the larger the group, the less comfortable participants felt in sharing their opinions, and the less evenly participants contributed.

Cultural Competence

The author was aware that standard focus group elements could be threatening to this group of mothers and adapted procedures accordingly. For example, a video camera and one-way mirror were replaced with a trained, bilingual, bicultural notetaker and a audiotape recorder. The groups were held in the homes of the community workers/recruiters instead of formal facilities.
Special consideration to language and literacy was important. The focus groups and interviews were conducted in Spanish, and all forms were available in both Spanish and English. Even if participants were all bilingual, communicating in one’s native language allows for more nuances in self-expression, especially emotional distress (URC, 1999). Because of the high rates of illiteracy in this population, all forms and rules were read out loud rather than simply handed out.

Care must be taken in interpreting questions and responses. The screening question “Did you graduate or complete high school?” was adapted because of misinterpretation on the part of the potential recruits. Many potential recruits were saying that they had “completed” or “graduated from” high school, when in fact they hadn’t. Recruiters changed to asking “what was the highest grade you completed?” because some mothers considered themselves to have “completed school” or “graduated” the year they were no longer able to attend school.

The focus group discussions were conducted by the author who is bilingual and bicultural, had participated in two focus group moderator trainings (total of 30 hours), and had conducted focus groups with this population prior to this study. In addition, a professional focus group moderator served as notetaker for the first group and provided feedback to the author/moderator. The shared ethnic background of the author and participants facilitated the relationship between the moderator and the subjects (Sterk-Elifsen, 1995). However, the author is not an immigrant, a mother, or of the same socioeconomic background as the participants. The author turned differences in background into an advantage by explaining she wanted to learn more about certain topics and needed their help (Shedlin & Schreiber, 1995). She also explained that the voices of immigrant Latina mothers are not sufficiently represented in the literature and
she wanted to include them. The participants identified with this immediately and were very willing to contribute their opinions.

All other staff were carefully selected to maximize cultural proficiency of those recording the information: the not takers were all native-speaking Hispanics. The notetakers were Claudia Campos, clinical psychologist; Marieli Colon-Padilla, American Association of University Women; Beatrice Weiss, MCPS ESOL parent specialist; and Maria Garcia, MCPS ESOL counselor.

Child care is important for most focus groups, as are stipends, transportation, and refreshments. However, for women with larger families and more limited resources, these items are especially important. Getting the participants to arrive on time was one of the biggest challenges of conducting the groups. Regardless of efforts to stress the need to start on time, some participants arrived early, some on time, and some up to a half-hour late. Refreshments and Latin American food were invaluable to help pass the time and break the ice until everyone had arrived.

**Instrumentation**

Researching and developing appropriate tools such as a moderator’s guide, screening questionnaire, and consent form were crucial to the success of focus groups. The moderator’s guide (Appendix C) was used to keep the discussion focused and enable the moderator to doublecheck coverage of key topics. The screening questionnaire (Appendix D) was essential in ensuring the correct group composition and collecting basic demographic information. The consent form ensured the mothers were aware of any risks of participating in the study (Appendix E). An anonymous 5-item questionnaire was planned for the end of the focus group to capture additional information (such as how their 11- to 14-year-old child was doing in school,
whether the mothers had talked to their child about staying in school, and whether they had shared their aspirations with that child). The discussion of each group took the full hour, and there was no time left for the questionnaire (Appendix F).

The topics explored in the moderator’s guide are summarized below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics Explored in the Moderator’s Guide</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Research Questions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• What are the aspirations mothers hold for their children’s academic success?</td>
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<td>• What is their perception of success?</td>
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<td>• In what ways do the mothers get involved to help their children reach those aspirations?</td>
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<td>• What conversations do they have?</td>
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<td>• Do they connect their children with others who can help?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Additional Questions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Perceived Role</td>
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<td>• Who are the people responsible for a child’s education?</td>
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<td>• Communication</td>
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<td>• What is it like talking to children about their education?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What makes it easier or more difficult?</td>
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<td>• Does being in the United States affect communication?</td>
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<td>• Dropout Issues</td>
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<td>• How would a mother react to this scenario?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Why should children stay in school?</td>
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<td>• Why do children drop out?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What resources would help mothers help their children succeed in school?</td>
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</tbody>
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Screening and Recruitment

Aside from the moderators’ skill in building rapport and probing important topics, participant screening and recruitment are important elements of focus groups. The following screening criteria were developed to ensure that the groups were as homogeneous as possible:

- Hispanic/Latina mother of a child between the ages of 11 and 14.
- Did not graduate from high school.
- Spanish is preferred language.
- Not born in the United States.
- Child is enrolled in school and living at home.
- Mothers and their children were not separated for more than a year due to immigration.\(^{17}\)

All recruiters were bilingual and trusted members of the Montgomery County Hispanic/Latino community. Recruiters included Beatrice Weiss, ESOL parent Specialist, MCPS; Maria Garcia, MCPS ESOL counselor; Maribel de la Cruz, ESOL parent specialist, MCPS; Maria Sempetegui, MCPS bus attendant; and Margaret Weiss Behrns; ¡Soy Unica! ¡Soy Latina! task manager, NCADI.

The recruiters contacted potential participants in person or by telephone and interviewed them using a screening questionnaire (Appendix D) to determine eligibility. Two recruiters attended 10 meetings for Hispanic/Latino parents at local schools and followed up with those who expressed interest. Flyers were handed out at the meetings and posted at two local churches and one local market. Of all recruitment strategies used, personal contacts were the most successful. Three of the recruiters served several Montgomery Schools, and their support was invaluable in building trust and recruiting the required number of participants.

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\(^{17}\) This criterion was critical because Montgomery County’s immigrant Latino population is experiencing serious problems related to family reunification caused by long periods of separation due to immigration.
Human Subjects Protection

This study posed few risks to the participants. Some of the questions raised strong emotions and opinions (expressed or unexpressed) about issues related to their children: two mothers in the last group became emotional when talking about their children. Even though these two mothers became emotional, the benefits to the participants of this study appeared to outweigh the risks. The mothers were very supportive of each other and consistently expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their opinions about these very important issues. For example, one of the two mothers who became emotional stayed after the group to talk about her daughter's struggle with fitting in to school. She felt so benefited by the group discussion as well as with the conversation after the discussion that she declined to accept the stipend.

Every effort was made to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. At no time in the screening or registration process were the participants required to provide their full names: they were offered the option of using a pseudonym during the groups, though none chose that option.

The subjects were informed that the purpose of the study was to represent their voices in the field of literature about maternal academic involvement. The participants’ consent was obtained in writing prior to conducting the groups, and they were informed of their rights not to answer questions and to leave at any time without penalty [see Appendix E]. None left. [see Appendix G for IRB approval].

The author maximized the benefits to the participants of this study. In addition to $25 stipends, mothers received Spanish-language health communication material on enhancing communication with their children and information about child care, summer school classes, and programs geared for Latina women or Hispanic parents. Children who came with the mothers
received little gifts such as stuffed animals or activity books, depending on their ages. At each
group, an MCPS ESOL counselor, MCPS ESOL parent specialist, or a clinical psychologist was
present to talk to the mothers after the groups about any issues that arose during the groups.

**Focus Group Discussion Procedures**

The moderator and notetaker welcomed and offered refreshments to the participants as they
arrived and provided them with name tags. The moderator set up the audiotape recording
equipment, and the childcare provider attended the children who arrived with their parents. Once
participants arrived, the moderator read and had them sign the consent (Appendix E) form.

The moderator introduced the study and explained the important role participants would
play. Then she read the ground rules: everyone should participate, answer without regard to
what anyone else thinks as we are looking for a variety of opinions, and speak one at a time so
the recording will be clear. Participants were informed that if they were to become
uncomfortable at any point during the discussion they were free to leave and still receive their
stipend. All documents were read to participants because of the potential that some were not
literate. In our groups, 3 of the 24 women could not read in any language.

The moderator asked participants to respond to a non-threatening question that served as
an ice breaker (ORC/MACRO, 2002). Once the participants were warmed up, the moderator
presented the questions and scenarios, probed specific issues, and clarified points offered by the
group (ORC/MACRO, 2002).

At the conclusion, the moderator thanked the participants, distributed the $25 stipends,
and gave them each a package of Spanish-language parent communication materials developed
by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).
Reliability of Testing Devices

A moderator’s guide was developed to ensure that each of the focus group discussions would be conducted in a consistent manner (Appendix C). The guide was reviewed by health communication experts at different stages of development (Shedlin & Schreiber, 1995). These experts were Dr. Amparo Pinzon of University Research Corporation and Vivienne Lettsome of Shattuck and Associates.

“The interviewer is the primary data collection instrument” (Shedlin & Schreiber, 1995, p. 138). The moderator attended two trainings (one 6-hour training and one 24-hour training) and had prior experience conducting focus groups with Hispanic/Latino mothers. The moderator possessed the personal characteristics deemed crucial for ensuring the quality of the data: openness; flexibility; patience; a sense of humor; and the ability to be nonjudgmental, listen carefully, and project interest in the group and topics. The moderator also had knowledge of the target population and the research topic and was bilingual and bicultural.

The moderator trained the notetakers in recording verbal responses to the scenarios and questions asked during the discussion. Each notetaker was instructed not to participate in the group and to interrupt only if she needed an answer repeated.

Data Analysis

After data collection was complete, the researcher prepared the data for coding and analyses. The primary steps of data analysis are data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification (Rich & Ginsburg, 1999). The steps used in this study are described below.
Data Reduction

The researcher reduced the data by transcribing the interview tapes in the original language (Spanish) and then translating them into English for manipulation. Two of the transcripts were back translated to ascertain the accuracy of translation. In addition, each notetaker was asked to compare the English translation with the Spanish-language transcript of the group she assisted. In all cases, the English translation was deemed to be accurate and did not need revision.

The data were prepared in two different ways. First, the author reviewed the translated transcripts and identified and color coded broad themes. Examples of major themes were aspirations, perceived roles, involvement, and communication. She listed the themes in a Word document and then identified and added sub-themes found in the transcript. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the discussions resulted in an abundance of themes and sub-themes.

In order to group and streamline the themes, the author consulted with a professional qualitative data coder, Vivienne Lettsome. Together, the author and the coder consolidated the discussion topics into nine major themes with several sub-themes under each major one (Appendix H).

Data Display

The data were then imported into winMAX, a software program designed for coding qualitative data. winMAX is promoted as a tool for text analysis appropriate for grounded theory research that allows researchers the flexibility to examine data in different ways. The first step is to develop codes based on the main themes of the discussions. The second step is to assign codes to text in each transcript. Then the researcher can activate one or more transcripts, and one or more codes. For example, coding the transcripts in winMAX allowed the author to activate each
code separately and count how many times a certain topic came up in the discussion. It also allowed the author to see whether the topic came up in all four groups or in only one or two of the groups.

**Conclusion Drawing**

Consistent themes emerged related to the research questions about aspirations, perceptions of success, and perceived maternal roles. Themes related to maternal involvement were substantially more varied. Results were determined by examining the prevalence of the types of responses there were given to a question. For example, to the question “what do you want for your children,” nine mothers responded “a good education” or something similar such as “a college degree.” Seven responded “a better future” or something similar such as “that they be better off than we are.”

Conclusions were drawn by examining the results in relation to findings in previous studies covered in the literature review (Chapter II), the author’s experience, and consulting with experts. The literature review for this study is particularly strong as it incorporates peer review articles from many fields. It also includes findings from three related dissertations (from different fields) focusing on Hispanic groups: One on parent-child conflict in ethnically diverse families from the field of clinical psychology (Sobol, 2000), one on social pressures related to ethnic youth academic achievement from the field of Sociology (Kao, 1995), and one on the factors that prompt Latina dropouts to return to school from the field of education (Cortez, 2002). These dissertations examined Hispanic academic achievement from varied levels of influence: peer, individual, and environmental. Based on the three dissertations alone, the author can define two levels of influence that affect Hispanic academic achievement—individual (self-esteem) and peer (ethnic group social norms)—and one level of influence that affects parent-
child conflict and subsequently academic achievement—environmental (acculturation stress).

By thinking about the dropout problem abstractly, the author more easily connected seemingly disparate factors that are malleable, that are not being addressed, and that together seem to be exacerbate the tumbling of power from parent to child. Conclusions are discussed in Chapter V.

**Verification**

One of the benefits of using software to code data is the ease of comparison between coded segments. For example, reliability can be checked by having a coder recode the data and compare the second set of codes with the first. In this study, reliability was checked by having a second coder reenter and analyze the data from different sections of each transcript. The coded transcripts were compared to ascertain what percent of the time the two coders agreed on how to code a segment of text. This process revealed that codes were not broad enough to produce a high inter-coder reliability score. The inter-coder reliability score was 50 percent. The author and the professional coder held a three and a half hour discussion where they addressed each instance of disagreement and found that conceptually they agreed 93 percent of the time. In other words, the professional coder agreed with the author’s conclusions about what the participants’ comments meant 93 percent of the time, but the professional coder only agreed with the author as to how to code the participants’ comments 50 percent of the time. This low score was due to the length of the transcripts, the complexity of the data, and the specificity of the codes. This process is better saved for less complex data with more limited coding options.

One benefit resulting from the use of coding in *winMAX*, was the creation of a categorized record that allows the researcher to find any theme addressed by the study quickly. This feature was useful in drafting the results of the study and could be useful to the author for future research.
Summary

Four focus groups were conducted in January and February 2003. Participants were screened by immigrant status, level of education, language preference, and age of children. Every effort was made to ensure the participants confidentiality and protect them from adverse risks related to the study. Most of the mothers stayed after the conclusion of the groups talking to other mothers or focus group staff. Focus groups are a useful and effective way to explore issues pertaining to immigrant Latino mothers. The mothers welcomed the opportunity and were thankful for the experience.

Data were transcribed, translated, and back translated before they were categorized using winMAX software. This software allowed the researcher to examine the data in different ways and provided a permanent database of the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the focus group discussions. Due to overly specific codes, the score attained through the inter-coder reliability exercise was low. However, conceptual agreement between coders regarding what participants said was high.
## Timeline

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CHAPTER IV: PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

This study involved conducting four focus groups with low socio-economic status immigrant Latino mothers of middle-school students in Montgomery County, MD. A discussion on the reliability and validity are presented first, followed by a description of the focus group participants. These are followed by presentation of the data by research question.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument and Findings

The instruments in this study were the moderator’s guide and the moderator. To increase the validity of the moderator’s guide, expert reviewers were used in the development of the moderator’s guide, to ensure the appropriateness of the approach and questions (for example, to make sure there were no leading questions). Also to increase validity of the findings, trained bilingual staff was used to conduct the groups. For example, the moderator was prepared for and comfortable with the unique communication style of the group and the note taker was instructed to interfere with the discussion.

Focus group discussion participants are not intended to be representative of larger populations. However inferences can be drawn from their opinions. Despite the fact that participants were screened to be similar in some respects (immigrant, mother of child 11-14 years old, did not complete high school, Spanish preferred), we had a broad representation of countries of origin among participants. Therefore, findings were not specific to one ethnic subgroup of immigrant Latinas.

We used a variable known to apply to Hispanic/Latino parents, high academic aspirations for their children (Kao, 1997; East, 1998; TRPI, 2002), to compare our participants to participants in previous studies. Our findings regarding parental aspirations echoed that of
earlier studies, and suggested our mothers may be similar to the larger Hispanic/Latino population in other ways as well.

To confirm reliability of the findings, a second coder re-entered and analyzed a section of the data from each transcript. As mentioned above, this coding exercise did not produce a high reliability score and is not recommended for data as varied and lengthy as this.

**Description of Participants**

There were 24 participants with five to seven in each of the four groups, representing 12 Latin American countries. Ten were from El Salvador, three from Mexico, two from Ecuador, and one each from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, and Peru. There was no Caribbean representation among the participants. See chart below for representation by country of origin.

4% = 1 person
The range of time in the United States varied from nine months to 20 years, with the average being nine years and the median being 9.5 years. The highest grade in school completed ranged from zero to 11 with an average of 6.7 and a median of 6. The highest grade completed by anyone in the family ranged from two to 16 (College grad) with an average of 8.8 and a median of 9. However it is important to keep in mind that school systems in Latin America are not parallel with ours, so highest grade reported reflects an approximation.

The participants were screened by language preference, and all preferred Spanish. Only two of the 24 women were also comfortable speaking in English (one had been here 20 years, and the other was from Panama where there is a large American influence). The 24 participants had a total of 78 children (39 girls and 39 boys). The average number of children per mother was 3.25, and these children had an average age of 11.15 and a median age of 11.5. Twenty-eight of the 78 children fell in our age range of 11-14 (17 girls and 11 boys). The average number of children participants had in our age range (11-14 years old) was 1.16.

The participants were not directly asked about their occupation, but many of them mentioned cleaning houses and working at fast food establishments. Others mentioned driving school or ride-on busses. Several mentioned they had two to three jobs. Only two (a married recent arrival with young children, and a recently widowed mother of five children) mentioned they were not working at this time. The participants were not asked about marital status but three mentioned that they were single parents during the discussion on things that made communication more difficult. The researcher noticed a trend of stepfathers present in their lives, and that almost all the mothers had sets of children 10 to 13 years apart. After one of the groups, a mother explained that immigration takes its tolls on their families and they remarry or connect with new partners and have children again. Dr. Judith Arroyo further explained that
Hispanics tend to live in a family unit. If their original families are torn apart, they will form new ones (personal communication, Spring 2003, Arroyo, J. A. [Health Science Administrator, NIAAA]).

Research Questions Examined

Aspirations

Research Question 1: What are the general academic achievement aspirations that low SES immigrant Hispanic/Latino mothers hold for their middle-school age children?

The academic aspirations held by low SES immigrant Hispanic/Latino mothers are high, predictable, and clear; we achieved saturation of themes almost immediately. Their aspirations for their children included a good education, professional careers, and a better future than they would have had in their country of origin. The participants viewed the United States as the land of opportunity, and many mentioned the sacrifice they made in order to bring and raise their children here. One example is:

\[ I \text{ think the other mothers said it all; we want a better future for our kids. That is why I came from Argentina, for them.} \]

Perceptions of Success

Auxiliary question: What are low SES immigrant Hispanic/Latino mothers’ perceptions of success?

When asked what a better future would look like, or what it would mean for their children to be successful, the mothers said they wanted their children to have a good education, professional careers, careers of their choosing, and opportunities to reach their potential. Several mothers said they wanted their children to be and have what they couldn’t, although a few of
them expressed a desire to continue their own education or upward mobility as well. The mothers equated being a professional with “getting ahead” and “being someone in life.” Conversely, they viewed menial labor professions, hanging out in the street, or dropping out of school as undesirable.

Other aspirations specified for their children were not to suffer and to be economically independent (not need financial assistance). Two of the mothers mentioned marriage as an additional aspiration. During this discussion about aspirations, one mother added that she didn’t want her children to think they were better than their parents because of their greater opportunities (this comment relates to the power struggle discussed in Chapter V).

Perceived Role

In order to understand the participants’ academic involvement, we must first understand perceived roles of the mothers, and their perceived roles of others. The question “who is most responsible for your child’s education” resulted in consistent responses “parents and teachers.” However, throughout all four discussions it was stated that the role of parents was to work and provide opportunities for their children’s education. They further specified that the mothers’ roles were to monitor, motivate, advise, guide, and support their children, and that their male partners perceive their roles mainly as provider for the family.

They specified that children’s roles were to study and do their homework. Another theme that was consistent in all four groups was that children’s selection of career or educational path was up to the children. They said it is wrong to force a career on a child. Examples of how they prepared their children for careers seemed to consist of asking what they are interested in and looking for opportunities to further their interests. The participants did not mention obtaining information that would help prepare a child for a career as part of their role. Their
statements suggest they depend heavily on the child accessing the school community (peers, teachers, counselors) to learn what the child needs to do. Here is an example of a conversation between a mother and her son who wanted to be a police officer:

*I tell my son “as you go through school you will find out what you need in order to be a police officer.” My son said he needs credits. “Ok, then, you already know what you need to do.”*

A mother in the second group mentioned that her son told her about three exams he needed to take in order to go to college. When asked “who told your son about the exams” the mother responded:

*It may have been the counselors in the high school. He researches with his friends...*

It is interesting to note that even though the mothers overwhelmingly stated that their children should choose the careers they like, those that are “in them,” they were clear about which careers were not desirable (cleaning lady, fast food worker, stock boy), which would do (salesman, policeman, soccer player), and which were highly prized (any professional career).

**Academic Involvement**

**Research Question II:** How are low SES immigrant Hispanic/Latino mothers’ involved in helping their children reach those academic achievement goals?

This question was examined by asking “How do you help your children achieve the aspirations or dreams you just mentioned?” Responses to this question were more varied than responses to questions about aspirations or perceived roles. Mothers stated they help their children’s academic achievement by: communicating with them (asking how their day went or whether they did their homework); providing financial, emotional, moral, and spiritual support;
motivating them; serving as advisor and guide; keeping on top of homework; getting involved in school; and immigrating to America to provide them increased opportunities. For example:

You always have to tell them they can, even if they say they can’t. And if they do something good, throw them a party so they know that was good. That is emotional support.

You have to be behind them, struggling, helping them.

Mother’s also supported their children by going to their schools. Overall, the mothers viewed the school as a place to 1) seek advice, 2) get information, 3) find out how their children are doing, 4) make requests such as having exams proctored in Spanish, place a child in honors class, and 5) enroll the child in summer school. Three mothers mentioned attending school meetings specifically for Latino parents, and one mentioned volunteering for school events. Several mothers mentioned sending notes to school when the child doesn’t understand the homework. Here are some examples:

I don’t speak English, but I try to help them with homework. Or if I can’t, I tell someone at school they need help. We are investigating, in other words, helping and motivating so they get ahead.

I will go to the school to seek advice about what to do with you because I don’t want you to leave school. Keep studying.

I learned that kids with good grades get placed in honor class, and my daughter has excellent grades. I had to go to the school and talk to the counselor and ask why my daughter doesn’t have honor class.

You can think your child is calm, but, if you don’t go to the school, you won’t know.
Though the focus of this study is on mother’s involvement, a question was also posed to the mothers about the father’s involvement with the children. Responses were mixed. Fathers were said to work longer hours than mothers because they get paid more for their work. According to the mothers, fathers had less time than mothers, less patience, less inclination to be on top of the kids, and were less detail oriented. Several married participants mentioned the fathers were very helpful when they were home, but they had to work long hours. Others stated that the fathers were focused on paying the bills and not on raising the kids.

What happens is he says “I work and bring the money home.” But we work too. When my son says “Dad, listen to me, I want to talk to you.” He says “Go talk to your mom.” I’m the one that needs to listen because he is too tired.

In my case it is different. We both try to educate them together. My husband is a good father, he is a good friend to my sons. He is more their friend than I am. I know the woman is the pillar of the home, but in my case we are a pair.

Two of the mothers mentioned that their partners take on some of the maternal roles because they know more English than the mothers. For example, one helped with homework, and one found himself in charge of the “birds and the bees” talk with his daughter:

I don’t know how to talk to her about it. Some girls have already been told about condoms and everything. I got a flyer from the school but it was in English and I couldn’t read it. I put it in front of her father. I don’t know whether she gets embarrassed or whether he does. He is very open with her and tells her many things, but he can’t tell her that.
Like mothers, fathers serve as a support. They were reported to be more able to help with math and things that required English. They also were said to help motivate their children to remain in school by giving them money so they wouldn’t feel the need to work. One father went to Montgomery College and paid his son’s tuition, but the son dropped out part-way through the semester. The mothers’ examples of what fathers say to their children to motivate them to stay in school sounded very much like the mothers’ motivational statements, “Don’t end up like me.”

**Topics Discussed**

**Auxiliary question 1:** What discussions do the mothers have with their children about: grades, school in general, school activities, peer acceptance, things their children learn in class, courses they should take, standardized tests, and plans for attending college?

This question was approached by asking the mothers to describe a typical conversation they have had with their children (or by probing “what do you say about that” “what did you say about that” etc. as they brought up different themes). The researcher found it was almost unnecessary to ask them to describe their conversations as they volunteered this type of information throughout the discussion group. They frequently included direct quotes they have said to their children, or their children have said to them.

The topics mothers discussed with their children included doing homework, graduating from high school, attending a university, their future success and employment, grades, and how their classes were going. There was very little discussion about which classes their children were taking, the tests needed to graduate from high school, the steps necessary for getting into college, or specific requirements for desired occupations. Even when asked directly, “You have mentioned homework. What else do your children need to do in order to graduate?” The mothers responded “homework” or “to prepare for the next day’s class.”
**Communication Strategies**

In contrast to the majority of participants who used negative examples such as “if you don’t study you will be cleaning floors,” or, negative and over generalized examples such as “don’t be like me” and “this is not what I want for you” to motivate their children, a few mothers were direct and specified consequences of the child’s behavior.

*If you don’t study you will work much and earn little. If you keep studying you will earn money more easily.*

*I talked to him and told him this is the deal, they told me those boys are troublemakers.*

*My son wants to know if he can wear an earring. I tell him go ahead, but people will treat you according to how you look.*

Other strategies were also revealed during the discussions. Several mothers suggested using incentives to get children to study such as buying them something, taking them somewhere they wanted to go, or even giving them money (though not all agreed with this). Some mothers used guilt such as “don’t make me sad” or “do we neglect our duties?” or “you don’t want your mom to get mad and explode.” One mother said she often yelled at her children, and a second mom in that same group acknowledged she also yelled at her children frequently.

Mothers mentioned they used inquiry about studies to get the dialogue started. Being their child’s “friend” was mentioned a few times but more for discussing sensitive subjects such as sexuality than education. One mother mentioned deferring to the child to ease communication: “I make myself smaller than they are.” Another said she negotiates with her child, for example: “We’ll go to that place, but do your homework first.” One said it helps to be very specific with the child, and not talk in general terms.
During the process of examining mothers’ communication with their children, we gleaned insight into the mothers’ motivation for talking with their kids about school. The main reasons mentioned were not wanting their children to suffer like they did or be helpless. One mother stated this in a more positive way: “In this world you can’t count on making it with any old job, you need to finish school and get a good education.”

**Factors Influencing Communication**

Mothers were asked whether talking with their children was easy or difficult, and why. Their responses were typical of any parent-child relationship: it is easier to talk with children if they are motivated, doing well in school, and appreciate their parents’ efforts and sacrifices. One mom stated that spending time with her kids and reviewing their homework made it easier to communicate with them. Another said that taking a course at her child’s school for Latino parents helped tremendously.

Factors that seemed to make it harder to talk to their kids about school were specific to low SES immigrant populations: language barriers between parents and children, lack of knowledge or information about children’s academic worlds, children struggling with emotional and psychological problems without resources to adequately treat them, and lack of time and attention due to long work hours.

Language barriers, especially as they relate directly to lack of information, were the most prevalent factor interfering in parent-child communication. In some cases, the language barriers existed between mothers and children. For example:
As long as I’m saying um hm, aha, she is happy. I don’t understand everything she is saying, but the most important thing is that they see we are interested in what they are saying. That they know we love them and can count on us.

Mine can’t translate a word from English to Spanish and that makes things difficult. Forget about homework, even a simple discussion such as “mom, I have a pain here, what do you call this?” She can’t say it in Spanish.

In one group the mothers were asked how mother-child language barriers affects communication, and two mothers responded:

Little by little we become more distant because I am not able to understand.

The communication gets cut.

**Parent-child Conflict**

During the discussions, mothers mentioned areas of conflict they had with their children. Factors that lead to parent-child conflict were categorized into 1) acculturation-related, 2) typical adolescent, and 3) other. The majority of parent-child conflict topics mentioned fell into the first category, acculturation. Topics in this category included discipline confusion over the use of 911 and corporal punishment laws, children saying their parents can’t relate to them because they are not from here, children taking advantage of their parents’ limited English ability and fooling them with regards to grades and homework (in addition to the examples below, the author also heard from MCPS teachers that some students tell their parents “E” stands for excellent when in fact it means “fail.”), the child losing their language and culture, and children wanting to behave the way American children behave (such as not greeting people or sleeping over at their friends houses).
**Acculturation-related conflict**

Here are examples of acculturation-related conflict. Specifically, these related to the acculturation gap, language barriers (language barriers can lead to or exacerbate acculturation gap), and homework and grades.

*I’ve talked to my child but he criticizes me. He tells me that what I say was from back home, “that was your house, your life. Now we are in America.”*

*They try to change the way they do homework. They tell me “our homework is different than yours was.”*

*I noticed two grades she brought me were different than what the teacher gave her...she would get someone else to give her grades and someone to call...I told her the grades were different and she said the teacher gave them to her.*

The following examples also related to acculturation, specifically to norm conflict and confusion:

*Youth just want to have a good time--there is so much freedom in this country. I thank God for being here but I miss my country because they have less freedom there...My daughter has started with “and why not me?”*

*That doesn’t happen in our countries. You could be 40 and if your mom tells you to do something, you say “Yes, mom,” even if you are married and everything!*

There were also acculturation-related examples specific to United States’ systems. Especially pervasive in two of the groups was confusion over the use of emergency phone number “911.” According to the mothers, children were told about 911 from peers, teachers, counselors, and the police and then use that information to undermine their parents’ authority.
Once mine said “you can’t punish me,” and I said, “Didn’t I give birth to you?” Since they were in kindergarten they’ve been threatening me with [calling] “911.”

I think the government here protects them [children] a lot, but it also puts them at risk because they feel free and they want to be better than we are [their parents]. At age 15 they feel grown up and with power.

It is the laws they have here.

Closely related to struggles with the United States systems were social influences that led their children toward independence rather than obedience:

Mexico would be different because your children are more under your rules. Here that is not the case and they decide not to mind their mothers. They tell them “if your mother raises her hand to you, or treats you like this, call 911.”

Other kids talk to them, they say that they have other rights, that they are free. My 10-year old daughter tells me “I’m going to call 911.” I tell her “that is your right, but the police doesn’t wash your clothes or feed you. I’m the one that feeds you...Don’t pay attention to your little friend.” She says “But mom, my counselor also tells me that when you hit me or scold me I should call 911.”

My daughter was in kindergarten and the police gave a talk and told them about 911. So she came home and called 911 and when the police arrived she was scared.

The teachers tell them [to call 911].
Adolescent-related conflict

Mothers also mentioned conflicts that seem more typical to adolescence than acculturation. These topics included children wanting to dress a certain way, wear earrings (for boys) and wear make-up (for girls).

For example:

*They want all these brand names, like NIKE.*

*I like her to wear dresses and she wears jeans.*

*He tells me “my friends have ponytails and earrings.”*

*At that age, you can tell them anything but they think they know better.*

*Mine already wants to paint her eyes and nails and I tell her,” No, we were not raised that way.” She feels she is more grown up than she is. She is still a girl because she is 11.*

*My daughter wants me to take her to the movies with her friends...she doesn’t like me to stay in the mall...she only wants to go somewhere with me if she knows I’m going to buy her something.*

One mother stated that even these typical adolescent issues are more pronounced here than in her country of origin. She explained that immigrant Hispanic mothers come from countries where they are largely surrounded by those of similar social class and ethnicity with similar norms and values. According to this mother, the fact that kids in the United States go to school with kids from all spectrums of SES and from dozens of cultural groups makes raising children more challenging.
Other Conflict

For each of the other parent-child conflict topics (other category) there were just one or two comments per topic. One mother said an older child had been a gang leader involved in problem behavior such as doing drugs, cutting class, and committing crimes. Another mother said her only problem with her son was that he didn’t want to stay in school; he wanted to be a carpenter like his father. One mother experienced conflict with her daughter over homework:

The youngest one is so sensitive about her homework—she doesn’t like anyone to touch it. I want to help her because they call me from the school, but she doesn’t let me touch her papers. She doesn’t want to do it because she doesn’t want to go to school.

One mother said she had problems with her children fighting with each other, and one mother argued with her son because he did not want to participate in religious classes.

Mothers’ Response to Dropout Scenario

A specific topic of interest to this study was communication about school dropout. Participants were asked to imagine that the 16-year-old child of a family friend dropped out of school to work, and that their 11 to 14-year-old child expressed an interest in doing the same when they reached 16. They were asked “what would you do or say?” “how would you respond to your child?” or “how should a mother respond?” This was the only question where mothers were asked to focus specifically on 11 to 14-year-old children. Four of the mothers said they would force their child to stay in school. For example:

I think you should force their hand a little bit.
Three said they would inquire as to the reasons their child wanted to leave and tailor their response accordingly. For example,

*I would ask why they want to drop out, and, depending on what they say, one knows how to respond. I'd make her see that if she studies she can work in something she likes and that is something most of us don’t have. I never dreamed of studying to be a cleaning lady!*

*See what is going on with the kid. Help them see leaving school is not the way to resolve problems.*

Three said they would encourage their child not to work, work less, postpone working, or understand that they can’t put school second to work. For example,

*I told mine she could work and see what it was like to be responsible, but that she should never forget about school.*

Three said they would motivate their child to stay in school by giving them examples of the costs of dropping out (working in menial labor) and benefits of graduating (earn more money). For example,

*I would sit down and give examples. My daughter likes clothes, so I would explain she will need money to buy those clothes when she is 18 or 19. I show her how much a teacher earns, a secretary, a nurse, a doctor...she understands that.*

*I tell my son “Dropping out is not good. You need to study so you can be somebody. Not just so you learn, but so you won’t be left behind.”*
Two said they would advise their child not to leave school but did not give an example of how. Two said they have asked their child at some point whether or not they wanted to stay in school. For example,

*I’ve said to him, and I know I’m in the wrong, “do you want to continue or not?”*

Sub questions to this theme were “why should kids stay in school?” “why do kids dropout of school?” and “what would help them stay in school?” A discussion of these items follows.

**Why Should Kids Stay In School?**

In terms of why they should stay in school, they responded that they would be better prepared, earn more, and have better futures. The most frequent strategies mothers mentioned was to motivate the child with variations of the message “I want you to study because I want you to be somebody” and “If you don’t study you wont be anybody” (the latter, negative version was mentioned much more frequently than the former). Examples of these messages are:

*We make her see that if she doesn’t have a career here she will be like me, cleaning houses. On take-your-daughter-to-work-day I take her and show her that I have to clean strangers’ bathrooms and floors. I tell her “I do it with all my heart, as if it were for the Lord, but that is not what I want for you.”*

*“You need to study, if you don’t, you’ll be washing plates, working in a restaurant. That is not the future I want for you.”*

*“If you don’t study you will be cleaning floors.”*

*I would try to make them think about the consequences leaving school would bring.*
Why Children Leave School

In terms of reasons children leave school before graduating, 17 of the 24 mothers attributed school dropout largely to lack of parental attention, communication, and support—which one mother said caused rebelliousness in youth, another said it caused youth to feel inferior, and a third said it created opportunities for negative peer influence.

Some examples are:

Yes because parents have two and three jobs. There is always something for the child to eat, but there is a lack of attention and communication. Children spend most of their time alone. Parents don’t know whether children do their homework. Parents concern themselves with making sure kids go to school but not with their academic behavior...children find support from friends on the street and leave, fall in love, get pregnant, and things get complicated.

Sometimes one gets home and the child is waiting. He/she wants someone to listen to him/her. “Listen mom, I want to talk to you.” But I am tired, hungry and want to eat. There is no time to talk and the child goes to his/her room and the mom didn’t listen.

They [children] feel inferior because nobody pays attention to them. They are talking and you put them off.

Parental support. Without that, they don’t concentrate on studies and their mind wanders to other things. They think that if they leave school, their problems will be resolved.
Seven mothers said children leave to work. They want to make money to buy their own things, to help the family, and they believe that working is more important than school. For example:

*There are kids who like money and when they start working they love money and lose interest in school. They want to be able to buy things and wear what they want.*

Six mentioned peer influence:

*My son’s friend is working and told him he doesn’t need to keep studying.*

*My son is 15 and doesn’t want to study. His classmates tell him that when he is 16 he can leave school even if we don’t want him to.*

*My son has a friend that already graduated. He tells my son he may as well not study and look for work.*

Four mothers attribute dropout to the increased freedom youth experience in the United States.

*They take freedom by the horns and ditch school.*

*Kids think they are free when they turn 16. They tell the parents they can no longer tell them what to do.*

*They get confused because they haven’t been taught to differentiate things since childhood. They confuse freedom and think their freedom includes leaving school.*

Three mentioned teen pregnancy or getting someone pregnant, and one related teen pregnancy back to feelings of being “too free” in this country. Two mothers said children leave out of rebelliousness or because they simply don’t want to go. Two mentioned marital problems
between parents that affect children’s ability to concentrate in school. One mentioned children’s
language barriers, one mentioned bad teachers, one mentioned psychological problems, and one
mentioned drug use.

When asked what would help, the mothers responded “love, trust, support,
communication.” One also said parents should be specific when talking to kids, and help them
make short-term goals such as graduating rather than holding out for long-term goals such as
careers.

**Auxiliary question 2:** What attempts do the participants make to connect their children with role
models or others who can help them?

This question was approached by asking questions such as: “who helps you help your
children to be successful?” or “where do you turn for help?” or “is there help in your lives?” and
finally, “does your child have someone besides their parents they can learn from, like a role
model?” Often times, these question were initially met with silence. Even though the mothers
had mentioned using many resources, they did not consider there to be any “help” in their lives.
They mentioned several places they could go to get information and support, such as libraries,
school, community centers, but they made it clear these were sources of support and not “help,”
as they do not feel there is help in their lives.

In terms of their child’s education, most of the comments were related to homework.
Because of the extreme language barriers faced by immigrant parents, their children’s siblings
were overwhelmingly the most used resource for homework help. Five mothers mentioned using
older male siblings to help younger children. One mother explained her older children came to
the U.S. more recently, so in her case the youngest girl helps the older brothers.
The children’s aunts and uncles were mentioned by several mothers as people who helped their children by serving as positive role models, sending them books, or answering questions about homework. One mother said her daughter looked up to the mother’s sister and friends as role models, a second woman said she had a brother that served as a role model to her children, and two mothers mentioned that their children had someone outside the family that served as a role model or mentor, but in both cases the children found the mentor on their own. Overall, very few women mentioned anyone in their lives they considered a role model for their children.

Outside of family, the most frequently mentioned resource was schools, followed by God, libraries, churches, community centers, friends and neighbors, and psychologists.

Examples of other sources of support:

She has a friend that lives close by. When she doesn’t understand something, I run to the neighbor to see if she can help me by explaining a bit. We get together—the classmate and her mother, my two boys, the friend, that way we can do it together.

I want to add that we also have God and the Bible to help us and watch out for our kids...We can’t live in their world, my only recourse has been to pray to God to watch over her. With a morning prayer I am calmer.

The libraries offer English classes in the morning and programs for adults and children.

**Barriers and Hardships**

Barriers mentioned by the mothers that directly affect the success of immigrant Latino youth include language, unfamiliar school subjects, negative peer influence, feelings of isolation, racism and discrimination, inadequate schools and teachers, emotional problems, hyperactivity,
lack of role models, and illegal status. Barriers that affect the parent’s ability to help their child include: language; illiteracy; acculturation issues; and limited time, information, financial resources, and support networks.

Substantial hardships are faced by the families with regard to high-density housing. Mothers mentioned they are forced to live in cramped quarters with several family members in small apartments, or even entire families living in one bedroom. They wish they could provide more space for their children to spread out. Several mothers in the first focus group talked about these struggles and agreed that there is more space in their countries and, in that sense, more freedom. A mother in this group, as well as a mother in the second group, stated she had been threatened by neighbors claiming they would have them evicted or deported because their children make too much noise. The mother in group two had received a call while she was at work from her terrified child saying the neighbors were going to call the police and have them deported. At the time of the focus group, a mother in group one was at risk of being evicted due to the noise her children made—even though she paid her rent on time. Another mother in group one was considering going back to El Salvador because she was tired of cramped quarters and such a low standard of living.

Other hardships mentioned during the discussions were single-parenthood and having children with learning disabilities or hyperactivity. They explained that these factors compounded their struggles because it was hard to find anyone to watch special needs children while they worked. One mother complained she couldn’t receive appropriate counseling for her child, and several mothers requested programs, counseling, or support groups for their children.
**Needs**

At the conclusion of the groups, the moderator asked the participants to imagine she had magic powers and could provide the services they most needed to help their children be successful in school. When asked what would help them, or what services they need, the mothers mentioned a dozen different things that would help.

The most frequently requested service was more bilingual outreach to Hispanic parents, increased attempts on the part of the school to foster trust between schools and the Hispanic community, and the need for homework to be translated into Spanish so they could help their children and not be taken advantage of by their children (seven mothers).

The second-most requested service (six mothers) was summer school and other recreational programs during the summer. This was coupled with the need for transportation to get them to and from summer activities (three mothers) since most of the mothers work.

Six mothers requested groups for their kids, whether the groups be homework help, counseling, or support groups. They feel more should be done for their children. One mother suggested that it would be wonderful to have mother-child groups where they could spend quality time together.

Four mothers requested classes for parents that included English lessons as well as parenting information. One of these mothers specifically requested classes on guiding adolescents. A fifth mother requested weekly meetings for Hispanic parents. Five additional mothers requested abilities such as strength, patience, courage, and “all the qualities to have successful children.” These ‘skills’ could be integrated into classes.
Tying in to the request for counselors for their children, two mothers specifically requested psychologists for their children. One of these also requested a psychologist for herself stating that even if there were opportunities for her children in plain sight, she might not see them because of her “own head” or state of mind. She said that “psychologists can help parents understand themselves better.” She also tied psychologists to acculturation by stating: “Sometimes we want to raise them the way we were raised and we can’t. Psychologists can teach you how to be more flexible and tolerant based on what each individual child needs.” When another mother in that same group said that what she wanted was to escape, to “fly away,” the mother advocating psychologists said “a psychologist would help with that, too.”

Two of the mothers requested scholarships for their children, and one also requested a scholarship for herself. A third mother mentioned hoping her son would receive legal status and a scholarship (in an earlier part of the discussion).

A mother in the third group, with the most pronounced challenges due to being illiterate, could not think of anything that would help her.

Summary

Four focus groups collected opinions from 24 low SES immigrant Hispanic/Latino mothers representing 12 Latin American countries and having a total of 78 children between the ages of two months and 28. The mothers who participated in this study held very high academic aspirations for their children, such as graduating from high school, attending college, and having fulfilling careers. Mothers were actively involved in supporting and monitoring their children but were faced with many challenges; language barriers were among the most frustrating. The mothers’ communication about school centered largely on doing homework and grades.
There was a lack of information about other graduation or college entry requirements.

The mothers used a variety of strategies for communicating with their children, including motivation, incentives, guilt, negotiation, inquiry, yelling, and deference. A large percentage of the parent-child conflicts revealed during the discussion were related to acculturation. Conflict typical to all adolescents was also mentioned. Mothers agreed about why children should stay in school and what needed to be done to help them. There was tremendous variety in terms of why they dropout, with lack of parental involvement being mentioned most frequently.

The mothers identified a dozen types of services that could help them help their children be successful in school. These included: increased bilingual outreach; summer classes and activities for children; transportation; parenting classes, groups, and meetings, scholarships, and mental health service providers.
CHAPTER V: ANALYSES AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter V discusses the methodological, theoretical, and practical implications of the results presented in chapter IV, both in relation to this study’s specific research questions (maternal aspirations and academic involvement), and in relation to the broader issues of youth academic achievement and parental influence in Hispanic/Latino families. Findings from this study that support previous studies are noted and new insights are provided. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and offers recommendations for future research.

Methodological Implications

Despite the scarcity of information on using focus groups with immigrant Latinas, focus group methodology was useful in exploring the research questions. The methodology was appropriately adapted to be for the target audience based on the author’s personal experience as well as through consultation with experts in the field. The successful application of this methodology resulted in an open and comfortable atmosphere in which participants volunteered highly personal information and sometimes socially undesirable information. A few women admitted to being undocumented, having hit children out of frustration, having children involved in drug or criminal activity, or suggesting to their children that they had the option of dropping out of school.

Like with any group dynamic, the participants’ contributions to the group were affected by the comments of the other participants in their group. For example, in a conversation after the conclusion of the fourth group, a mother mentioned that hearing about another mother’s problem-son made her hold back from expressing too much pride in her daughter. It is possible this dynamic occurred in reverse as well. For example, in the second group, there was a mother
who expressed much pride in her highly motivated daughter. It is possible that other mothers in that group held back information that would paint their children in a negative light.

This study uncovered a critical need for published articles on adapting the focus group methodology to immigrant Hispanic groups. The author queried a variety of sources in order to find published information about this process. These sources included two health communications firms that conduct focus groups with Hispanics (University Research Corporation and ORC/MACRO), a professional Latino focus group and qualitative research consultant firm (Schwartz Consulting Partners, Inc.), and subscribers to Alan Andreason’s social marketing listserv. These efforts resulted in input about personal experience but identification of only one article.

Differences in conducting focus groups with Hispanic/Latino groups vs. mainstream groups became clearer throughout the process. Key points include 1) the need to have someone in the room who knows each participant or participants who know each other, 2) the need to keep the group size small; 3) the need to foster trust; 4) the need to understand scheduling and other logistical considerations; and 5) the need to set aside time and funds for translation, and back translation (or translation review). These considerations are discussed further under methods.

It is important to document variations in methodology for different populations because rules that serve one population can be inappropriate for another. For example, focus group rules state that to increase honesty and comfort level, participants must not know each other or anyone else involved (ORC/MACRO 2002). However, Latino experts state that when conducting focus groups with Hispanics, there must be someone in the room who knows them in order for them to be honest (personal communication, Winter 2003, Faura, J. [President, Cultura, Incorporated, TX]). Even though this information was not obtained by the author prior to conducting the
groups, it is supported by the author’s experience with the current study. In three of the four
groups there was someone in the room who knew the participants (in two groups recruiters
served as note takers, and in one group, a recruiter was also a participant). In the first group, the
recruiter served as the baby sitter, but she was not always in the room. The author found that the
more the participants knew each other, the more comfortable the women were, and the more
open and honest they seemed to be.

Other ways in which the author adapted the process for immigrant Latinas included
rewording a confusing screening question, removing standard but threatening elements such as
one-way mirrors, video cameras, and observers, selecting locations convenient to public
transportation, using recruiters that were known and trusted by the community, and fostering a
welcoming atmosphere by providing refreshments, child care, and transportation for those who
needed it. Even though some of these items are standard for all focus groups, they are especially
critical to low-income populations who have limited resources, trust issues, and larger families.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study provides key insights to maternal academic involvement among low SES immigrant
Latina mothers of middle school-age children. Language barriers were the most prominent
barrier mentioned by the mothers. This study supports previous studies that have found that
Hispanic/Latino parents generally have very high aspirations for their children, but don’t always
have the information needed to guide their children through the North American academic
system. In addition it supports those that have found that low SES Hispanic/Latino parents may
perceive their role as parents to be more along the lines of caretakers of basic physical needs than
of managers of their children’s education (Rodriguez, 1995; Kao, 1997).
This study ties in to a dissertation published by the University of Chicago that found that Latino youth are more geared toward avoiding stereotypes than achieving success (Kao, 1997). In our study, the mothers repeatedly mentioned that they tell their children not to grow up to be like them, i.e., cleaning ladies, fast food restaurant workers, stock boys, etc. Based on the prevalence of these statements from the mothers (and examples the mothers gave of fathers’ statements) it is likely Hispanic youth get this tendency from their parents. Therefore, shifting parental motivational comments from negative to positive is likely to shift Latino youth orientation from avoiding stereotypes to striving for goals.

Finally, this study generated three related hypotheses and two conceptual models. These new hypotheses tie back to the theories reviewed in chapter II. The first hypothesis presented below relates to Social Learning Theory in that a mother’s self-efficacy is likely to affect the proposed key variable—information-seeking behavior. The second and third hypotheses presented below illustrate another SLT concept, reciprocal determinism (how the environment affects the individual and vice versa). Factors in the second hypothesis presented below (increase information and awareness) also tie into to the SLT concept of behavioral capability. If a mother doesn’t know to do certain things, she incapable of doing them.

Each of the hypotheses below seem similar, but point to different ways of approaching the problem. The first new hypothesis proposes there is a causal chain related to maternal language barriers that promotes feelings of helplessness in the mothers (see figure 4), and identifies a key variable (see figure 5) that could influence or predict youth academic achievement. The second hypothesis identifies four malleable factors contributing to current academic involvement behavior among immigrant Latina mothers (see figure 6), and posits that immigrant Latina maternal academic involvement behavior can be encouraged by affecting these
four factors. The third hypothesis identifies acculturation factors that contribute to or exacerbate the tumbling of power from parent to child (see figure 7). These hypotheses are diagramed and described in greater detail below. Figure 8 displays a conceptual model of factors identified in the study that influence low maternal academic involvement. Figure 9 depicts factors identified in this study that could encourage high maternal academic involvement.

**Hypothesis 1–Language barriers are countered by information-seeking behavior**

The author expected to find significant discussion in the focus groups related to acculturation gap (differential rates of acculturation between parent and child), norm conflict (struggles due to conflict between North American and Hispanic/Latino values and norms such as individualism vs. familialism), and other elements of acculturation. These issues did come up in the groups. Participants mentioned culture shock, broken support networks, acculturation gap, norm conflict, and confusion as to how to raise their children in the United States. They also mentioned challenges related to immigrant life in the United States, such as long work hours and low pay. Particularly related to this study is their challenge with high-density housing and living with the threat of eviction (it is not hard to imagine that cramped quarters make it unlikely that children have adequate or quiet study space). However, the participants most frequently mentioned a very basic element of acculturation–language barriers. Participants focused largely on their own language barriers, but they also mentioned language barriers faced by their children, and in some cases, an inability to communicate with their own children.

Maternal language barriers affected the mothers’ ability to help with homework, obtain information key to their child’s success, and getting involved in their child’s school. It is because of these barriers that mothers become dependent on their children and others, and become vulnerable to being taken advantage of by their own children. Maternal language
barriers caused mothers to feel helpless, or as one mother stated, as insignificant and helpless “as an ant.” It is likely these barriers also affect maternal self-efficacy to help their children with academic issues.

Another interesting effect of maternal language barrier is how it can alter traditional parenting roles. For example, one mother described how her male partner found himself in the position to explain sexuality to their adolescent daughter because of his greater English ability. A second mother explained that normally she would be the one to help with homework, but in her case, the father helps because he knows more English. These are excellent examples of the academic challenges researchers face when trying to understand the Hispanic family—family dynamics are mediated by acculturation and are in a constant state of flux.

The participants mentioned that language barriers directly affected their children’s school experience by making it difficult for their children to understand their homework assignments, perform well on exams, or mix with a wide variety of peer groups. One mother stated her son’s limited English caused him to hang around with kids he did not like because they were the only ones who also spoke Spanish. It is reasonable to assume that children’s language barriers have many more effects than those mentioned during these four groups.

One mother said her child couldn’t even tell her where he hurt in Spanish, much less talk about school. This description of language barriers between mothers and their children was especially disconcerting. This dynamic essentially prevents the mother from being able to transfer values, provide rules, reinforce values, or set expectations. Another mother said she lets her daughter talk to her and keeps the dialogue going by saying “ah ha” but often does not understand what the daughter is saying. This is even more disconcerting because the mother is creating the illusion of dialogue where none exists. Lastly, a mother stated that this type of
language barrier serves to create distance between mother and child. This is sure to be likely, and merits research and intervention.

As mentioned above, the dynamic of mothers being unable to communicate with their own children likely influences far more factors than the two mentioned by the mothers, and merits more attention than simply being classified as a “language barrier.” However, figure 3 represents only information collected from the mothers in this group, and so mother-child language barriers are diagrammed in the simplicity with which they were discussed by the mothers. Figure 4 includes factors caused by one type of language barrier (maternal) that in turn cause feelings of helplessness (as identified in these four focus groups).

Figure 3 Language Barriers Identified in Study

Language Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s Barrier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Can’t verify homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can’t obtain key information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reluctance to go to the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dependent on kids or others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Kids can take advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can shift parental roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= Feelings of Helplessness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Barrier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Difficulty understanding assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limited to Spanish-speaking peers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother – Child Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Impedes communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creates distance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Maternal language barriers posed tremendous obstacles, but, despite these obstacles, the mothers exhibited a willingness to do anything possible to help their children. In fact, the greatest assets to Hispanic/Latino children seemed to be their mother’s willingness to support them. For example, mothers reported actively seeking out information about summer programs and financial assistance, going to school to find out how to get their children’s exams proctored in Spanish, or finding out why their child was not enrolled in honors classes. In other words, the language barriers seemed to be countered by the mothers’ willingness to find affordable programs and seek information about resources for their children. Therefore the author hypothesizes that maternal information-seeking behavior may be an important predictor of immigrant Latino youth academic success. Needless to say, there are countless others. See Figure 5.
Hypothesis 2– Behavior change is encouraged by changing four malleable factors

Need for Increased Outreach

Mothers demonstrated much confusion over American systems such as the fact that teachers, counselors, police officers, and other students encouraged children to call 911 if their parents raise their hands to them. It seems this information is provided to students without considering their cultural context, and causes parents to feel that United States systems impede their right (and ability) to maintain control over and discipline their children. This issue is not specific to Latino populations; other groups face similar frustrations with laws they perceive shift power from parents to children. The question is, why do parents feel these laws prevent them from disciplining their children? Do they feel that physical discipline is the only form of discipline available to them? More likely they view their right to discipline their children, as well as their authority, differently than we do. They may not view one form of discipline in isolation, but rather, interpret this limitation on their discipline options as an affront on their authority as a whole. It is also likely that teachers, parents, and others “fail to differentiate sufficiently and clearly between forms of discipline such as spanking and other forms of physical abuse. This appears to lie at the heart of the problem” (personal communication, summer 2003, Lindarte, E. [Independent Consultant]). School and law enforcement staff must take into account possible
interpretations of the information they disseminate into a community, and adapt the way they present this information accordingly.

Mothers also expressed feelings of resentment regarding the manners of school staff, and the view that schools blame parents for their children’s behavior. These feelings are not conducive to involvement in school activities and indicate a lack of trust between parents and the school. Increasing bilingual outreach to parents would allow for explanations of school policies, increase trust between parents and schools, and likely increase involvement of Hispanic parents in the school. Training those outreach workers to differentiate spanking from physical abuse when disseminating information about the availability of 911 would alleviate confusion about these laws among children and parents.

Need for Increased Information

During all four focus groups, discussion about maternal academic involvement in children’s academic achievement focused around homework. There was a lack of discussion about which classes their children were taking, the tests needed to graduate from high school, the steps necessary for getting into college, and specific requirements for desired occupations. When mothers were asked what else besides homework was needed, they responded “homework” and “preparing for class.” When they were asked how their children select their classes, they were unsure, and, when one mother was asked who gave her son information about the availability of scholarships, she said she didn’t know. This demonstrates a clear need for providing information about the basic steps their children need to take to be successful in school and to get into college.

One mother mentioned that she learned at a school meeting for Hispanic parents that she should sit with her children while they did homework. She stated that once she had this information, she changed her behavior. A participant in a different group attended a similar
meeting and stated that the information she learned made her very sad because she hadn’t known
to sit with her child while he did homework. This suggests that new information about how to
help their children may encourage immigrant Latina women to change their behavior
accordingly. However, due to the complex factors leading to behavior change, increased
information alone is not sufficient\textsuperscript{18}. For example, the mother’s environment may not allow her
to change her behavior, even if she has the necessary information and desire to do so (personal
communication, summer 2003, Pinzon, A. [University Research Corporation]).

\textit{Need for Increased Awareness}

A key reason that Hispanic/Latino parents are not accustomed to being involved in the various
steps a child needs to take to reach academic success in the United States was explained by one
of the participants. She said that in her country the school determines the track of classes for
each child, and children, much less the parents, have little choice in the matter. Therefore,
another way to impact the behavior of Latina mothers is to increase their awareness of the
expectations and need for their greater school involvement in the United States educational
system.

\textit{Need for Shift in Perceived Roles}

Schools and community programs have long been aware of the need for changing the perceived
role of immigrant Latino parents who largely consider school matters the child’s responsibility.
Teachers report that Hispanic/Latino parents more frequently ask about their children’s behavior
than their achievement (personal communication, Winter 2003, Weiss, B. [MCPS ESOL Parent
Specialist]). This study supports previous studies which identify a critical need for a shift in

\textsuperscript{18} Bandura outlines three elements for behavior change: cognitive/personal, behavioral, and environmental.
Hispanic/Latino parents’ perceived role from provider/supporter/motivator to “manager of a child’s education” (Kao, 1995; Kao 2000).

Based on participant comments that stated they changed their behavior after learning that they should sit with their children while they did their homework, evidence that the mothers were not aware of the steps their children need to take to be successful, as well as evidence that they view their roles more as supporters and providers than managers of their children’s education, the author proposes a second hypothesis: increased outreach + increased information + awareness of greater need for school involvement + can shift in perceived role toward manager of education can encourage behavior change. See figure 6.

**Figure 6 Factors Likely to Influence Behavior Change**

[Diagram showing the factors influencing behavior change:]
- **Increase Outreach:** Build trust and understanding between parents and school staff.
- **Increase Information:** Steps they need to take to ensure child’s success.
- **Increase Awareness:** Of the expectations and need for them to be more involved.
- **Shift Perceived Roles:** From supporter and provider to manager of child’s education.

Behavior Change: Maternal Academic Involvement
Hypothesis 3—Acculturation factors can lead to the tumbling of power from parent to child

Earlier we established that language barriers, dependence on children and others, and in some cases, their children taking advantage of their language barriers and fooling them, were causing immigrant Latina mothers to lose confidence in their abilities and feel helpless. One can easily imagine how these factors could be detrimental to a parent’s self-esteem, and as well as their self-efficacy to assist their children with school matters. On top of that, add confusion regarding the United States educational systems, culture shock regarding freedom afforded to youth\(^\text{19}\), and their confusion over the corporal punishment or “911” laws, and it is clear that these factors were whittling away at their parental power.

Several women expressed confusion over how to raise their kids in another culture; they expressed a desire to raise their kids the way they were raised, but also expressed concern that they can’t do that here. In the first focus group, a mother turned to the moderator during the discussion to ask “what is the best way to instill the two cultures in them since they are living in one and bringing much from another?” Several mothers stated they were challenged by the amount of freedom that youth in the United States are afforded—freedom to choose classes, freedom to hang out with their friends, and freedom to disregard their parents’ wishes.

Other hardships reported by the mothers included confusion over laws and the use of 911. They reported that counselors and teachers tell their children they can call 911 if their parents hit or abuse them. The mothers reported children threatening them with the use of 911, and they stated that though the United States government laws protect children, they also put them at risk because it does not permit parents to discipline their children. Rather than viewing corporal

\(^{19}\) A recent study that used focus groups with Latinos to explore attitudes toward sexual abuse also uncovered the desire among parents for less freedom for their children (Fontes, Cruz, & Tabachnick, 2001).
punishment laws in isolation, these mothers seem to be interpreting the laws more generally in a way that undermines their authority to discipline their children. This factor, on top of language and other acculturation issues, exacerbates the tumbling of power from parent to child.

Figure 7 Factors that Shift Power from Parent to Child

These various hypotheses can be tied together into two conceptual models. The first diagrams acculturation stressors and other factors that can lead to low maternal academic involvement. The second model diagrams malleable factors that encourage high maternal academic involvement. Solid arrows indicate causal relationships. Broken-line arrows indicate contributing relationships.
In conclusion, a key implication of this study is that there are several acculturation factors that shift power from parent to child, such as language barriers, the influence of North American...
norms on their children, unfamiliarity with American systems, and children taking advantage of them. When these factors co-exist they exacerbate the tumbling of power from parent to child and increase the parents’ feelings of powerlessness. In the hierarchical Hispanic family, parents and elders expect to be respected authority figures. However, language barriers affect this relationship in such a way that parents find themselves dependent and powerless. This serves to destabilize the family unit as a whole.

This hypothesis is key because of the documented influence parents have on youth academic achievement and other problem behavior. It is also important to note that the traditional hierarchical and tight-knit Hispanic family structure. Due to these dynamics, Hispanic parents have the potential of having greater influence over their children than other parents. It is crucial to help them reverse the factors that lead them to feel powerless.

**Practical Implications**

**Increase Staff Proficient in Issues Faced by Hispanic Students**

The confusion over the 911 corporal punishment laws speaks to the need to markedly increase the number of staff proficient in issues faced by Hispanic students. Counselors, teachers, and school administrators must have a better understanding of the different cultural contexts and how information they provide, such as the availability of 911, could be interpreted by their Hispanic/Latino student and parent body.

Increasing the number of staff proficient in Hispanic issues, as well as increasing the number of bilingual staff would address the participants’ request that schools foster more trust between school staff and Hispanic parents and children (I include bilingual staff separately because being bilingual doesn’t necessarily make someone proficient in, or even sympathetic to, the issues). The current lack of knowledge and understanding between North American staff and
Hispanic families leads to misperceptions on the part of both the schools and the families. Schools may view Hispanic parents as disinterested, or worse, placing limited value education. To the contrary, Hispanic immigrants make tremendous sacrifices to raise children in the United States for the main purpose of providing them greater opportunities and a chance for a good education. This is supported by Kao’s study (2002).

Parents on the other hand, complained about the lack of manners on the part of teachers and administrators. They often perceive informality on the part of teachers as disrespect or a lack of manners.

**Provide Spanish-Language Support to Parents of Children in ESOL Classes**

A participant in the third focus group expressed a need for having homework assignments translated into Spanish so that she could help her children complete the assignments, and prevent her children from fooling her. The six other mothers in that group unanimously and emphatically agreed with this suggestion. When this suggestion was brought up by the moderator at the end of the fourth group, there was a more mixed reaction. Some women liked the idea, and some did not because they stated that parents needed to learn English. The group came to the conclusion that for parents who had children in ESOL classes, it would be a good idea.

**Increase English Classes, Summer Programs, and Transportation**

The overwhelming language barriers, as well as the participants’ requests, indicate a clear need for more convenient English classes. The participants stated the most convenient place to attend classes would be at their child’s school. Some mothers in the groups did have access to ESOL classes through their child’s school, while others did not. There may be other ways to help them
learn English as well. The long work hours and care-taking of large families left little time to attend classes. Perhaps video or audio cassettes that teach conversational English could be the first step for those unable to attend classes.

The need for more convenient summer classes, programs and transportation for children was also evident. Mothers expressed despair that without these resources their children would sit by the television all summer and do nothing. A mother in the second focus group stated she argued with school staff who insisted her child could not enroll in summer classes because he was not doing poorly in his classes and was not referred. A mother in the third group would have been able to send her child to summer classes, except that the school buses do not run by her house in the summer. Mothers reported that classes at community centers and libraries were often too expensive, though one mother seemed particularly adept at obtaining reduced fees for her children.

**Institute a National Network of Orientation and Support Groups**

Previous studies have found that more acculturated Latinos suffer more mental health problems than immigrants due to the strains of having to reconcile conflicting norms and values as they become more acculturated into the new culture. This study suggests that though mental health strains may be greater in first, second, and third generation Hispanics, there is already a pronounced need for mental health services among immigrant Latina mothers. The need for psychologists was mentioned by several mothers in reference to themselves and to their children.

Since acculturation strain contributes to the mental strain faced by the mothers, the author proposes a two-tiered approach to supporting Hispanic parents: 1) orientation and 2) support. First, we should provide orientation regarding United States educational and other systems, as well as cultural norms to prepare them for the coming norm conflict struggles with their children.
(or to recognize norm conflict struggles within their children) and to orient them to academic involvement expectations and needs. We could also provide communication skills to bolster their natural tendencies to monitor and support their children. Children of immigrants may not have anyone to guide them; they may be either going it alone or leading the parents. These orientations would provide parents with information necessary in helping their children maneuver the process of acculturation and successfully integrate the “best of both worlds.”

There is also a clear need for support groups for Hispanic parents (and according to the mothers, for the children as well). Support groups would serve to counter the feelings of helplessness, isolation, powerlessness, and confusion by providing a ready group of people going through similar experiences. Just knowing they are not the only one experiencing these issues would offer relief and a sense of support. They could share pertinent information and learn success strategies from each other. These groups would go a long way towards helping the parents regain and maintain their authority over their children.

The author predicts that if these two resources were in place, it would drastically reduce the mental health problems of United States Hispanics by reducing isolation and increasing information (a network similar in reach to alcoholics anonymous comes to mind). A national program that could be tailored to meet local needs would be ideal. If these groups are expanded into programs that can: 1) increase awareness of parental academic involvement expectations and needs; 2) educate parents about United States systems; 3) teach communication skills; and 4) address the need to shift perceived parental roles, I believe the programs could significantly and positively impact Hispanic youth academic achievement.

These suggestions are similar to recommendations made in a new study about acculturation, parenting, and academic achievement among immigrant Mexican youth.
Implications from this study included translating report cards, letters to parents, signs in the schools, etc. That study also identified a need to educate parents about the education system, suggests that school staff devise strategies to increase effective parenting skills (Plunkett & Bámaca-Gómez, 2003).

**Limitations**

The topics examined in this study are complex and far-reaching. The author does not intend to address the full scope of factors related to Hispanic youth academic achievement. This study is merely a reflection of the insights gained in four focus groups with immigrant Latina women, a thorough literature review, and conversations with experts. The study was small in scope and faced limitations in methodology, study design, validity, and reliability.

**Methodology**

Focus groups can not be generalized to the larger population, especially when they are conducted in only one geographical area with a population with pronounced regional differences. Bias is inherent in self-report data, and issues of social desirability exist in any group interview. Bias could also be unknowingly introduced by the author during the conducting or reporting of the focus groups. However, much effort was directed toward the preparation of the moderators guide to prevent leading questions, receiving feedback after the first group from a more experienced moderator, and having the note taker’s review the author’s translations of the transcripts. It is also possible that the focus groups would have benefited from using projective techniques during the discussion, but the author did not learn about these in time for the study.
Study Design

Due to limited resources, this study examined only immigrant Latina mothers. It would have been fascinating to hold similar groups with immigrant fathers as well as the youth themselves. This study did not include observation of mother-child interaction, nor did it include other methods to achieve triangulation of data. Due to logistical reasons, we were not able to schedule mothers of daughters separately from mothers of sons, so there was no examination of how mother’s academic involvement might differ by gender of child. Lastly, the screening criteria were set tightly to ensure a fairly homogeneous group (low SES immigrant Hispanic mothers with middle school-age children who prefer to communicate in Spanish). However, this screening criteria, coupled with the fact that the groups took place in only one county, did not enable us to identify any regional or ethnic differences regarding maternal academic involvement. This may be a serious limitation as there is evidence that Mexican American youth drop out at a much higher rate than do Cuban American youth (COSSMHO, 2000).

Validity

As mentioned earlier, only one methodology was used which did not allow for triangulation of data. Individual interviews were originally planned with focus group participants to further clarify comments offered during the groups, but these were dropped from the study early in the planning due to limited resources. However, the author held many discussions throughout the study with professionals in the fields of health communications, education, clinical psychology, sociology, public health, research, and family studies. These discussions helped the author substantiate and confirm findings.
Reliability

In order to obtain reliability, the author hired a second coder to code certain sections of the transcripts. The author then compared the coded segments of her transcripts with the coded segments of the professional coder. Agreement was determined by adding up the number of instances where either coder inserted a code, and figuring out the percentage of times the two coders agreed. However, due to the broad scope and complexity of the data, as well as the level of specificity in the initial codes, the codes only produced an inter-coder reliability score of 50%.

The author and the professional coder held a three and a half hour discussion where they addressed each instance of disagreement, and found that conceptually they agreed 93% of the time. In other words, the professional coder agreed with the author’s conclusions about what the participants’ comments meant 93% of the time, but due to the overly specific and numerous coding categories, the professional coder only agreed with the author as to how to code the participants’ comments 50% of the time.

Recommendations for Future Research

The implications of this study indicate that there is a tremendous need for additional research with immigrant Latino populations. First, research on how to apply focus group methodology to this population is needed. For example, experts say that unlike mainstream groups, Hispanic groups should know someone in the room. It would be helpful to know more about this dynamic, and how it is affected by regional or ethnic subgroup differences.

Second, expanding the current study to include fathers and youth would allow for a broader and more accurate look at the immigrant Latino family dynamics. It would also be interesting to compare these dynamics with those of other immigrant groups as well as with non-immigrant populations.
Third, it would be interesting to test some of the hypotheses offered under “theoretical implications.” For example, a study that explored immigrant Latino mother’s information-seeking behavior in relation to youth academic success could be a valuable contribution to the field. Similarly, ascertaining whether certain factors (increasing outreach, providing information, increasing awareness, and shifting perceived roles) encourages behavior change, could provide a template for programs aimed at Hispanic parents.

More research is needed in the crucial area of parental power and authority. This study highlights acculturation factors that seem to be contributing to siphoning of power from parent to child, but this area merits much more study. Related to this idea, it would be interesting to do a study that explores how acculturation affects parental roles and other family dynamics. Though there has been research that relates acculturation to problem behavior in youth, more research is needed to understand the effects of acculturation on child development and parent-child relationships.

Fourth, it would be interesting to examine legal vs. illegal immigrants in relation to the many issues raised in this document. Though the author acknowledges the logistical difficulties of such a study, this dynamic has been completely untouched. There are a large proportion of illegal Hispanic immigrants in the United States public school system. If they are aware that they cannot get scholarships for college, or if they put themselves through college, that they cannot legally obtain a professional job even with a college degree, what motivation would they have to pursue high academic achievement?

Finally, research is non-existent on a new and emerging segment of the immigrant Latino population—parents who have been separated from their children for long periods of time are facing seemingly insurmountable family reunification issues. These families were screened out
of this study to help keep findings clear. However, there is a critical need to understand this
dynamic and provide schools with tools and strategies appropriate for these families.

**Summary**

This study supports studies that have found immigrant Hispanic/Latino parents to have high
aspirations for their children, lack information about how to help their children maneuver the
academic system, and perceive their roles to be more caretaker and supporter rather than
manager of education. It also ties in with a study that found Latino youth are more geared
toward avoiding negative stereotypes than achieving success. Low SES immigrant
Hispanic/Latino children have far more challenges than support with regard to their academic
achievement. These children would benefit greatly from programs that help parents help
children succeed in the United States. Maternal language barriers seem to be the greatest barriers
impeding maternal academic involvement. There is also a need for increasing information about
United Stated educational and other systems, providing information about the steps children need
to take in order to succeed in school, and shifting maternal perceived roles from supporter and
provider to manager of a child’s education.

The study identified acculturation factors that seem to be undermining parental authority.
The author suggests that together these factors exacerbate the tumbling of power from parent to
child. The author presents two conceptual models which diagram factors that influence maternal
academic involvement.

**Final Conclusion**

The amount of insight gathered in a study so small in scope points to the potential for
understanding Hispanic academic and other problem behavior rates. There are tremendous gains
to be made by focusing attention on Hispanic family dynamics and acculturation issues. Given the extent and continuing growth of the population, it would serve us well to get a firm grasp on the issues and begin to outline strategies to successfully assist people through this most difficult transition—the transition from being Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Argentinean, Mexican, etc., to being “Hispanic” or “Latino” and raising “Hispanic” or “Latino” children in the United States. Providing outreach and support to parents about acculturation issues as well as guiding their children through educational and other systems would help Hispanic children prosper in the United States.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RELATED PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Excerpt from SAMHSA’s Toolkit for Hispanic/Latino Community Groups (1999).

Section on factors related to substance use and abuse, pages ___.

http://www.health.org/initiatives/hisplatino/community/toolkiteng.htm

Substance Abuse Protective and Risk Factors in the Hispanic/Latino Community

Protective Factors in the Hispanic/Latino Community

The Hispanic/Latino culture provides many of the protective factors that help prevent substance use and abuse. These include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bonding</th>
<th>Healthy Beliefs and Clear Standards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>— &quot;Familialismo&quot;</td>
<td>— Spiritualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Multigenerational kinship network</td>
<td>— Respect (hierarchical based on age)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Ethnic pride</td>
<td>— Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Commitment</td>
<td>— &quot;Confianza&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— &quot;Simpatia&quot;</td>
<td>— Concern for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Strong female presence</td>
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Individual Characteristics

— Dignity
— "Personalismo" (interpersonal skills)

Risk Factors for the Hispanic Community include:

• exposure to alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use
• conflicting attitudes in the community about drug use
• extensive exposure to drug use as shown in the media
- high rates of mobility, or people `moving from one place to another'
- poverty, poor housing, and crime
- barriers to employment, communication problems due to lack of proficient English skills, and discrimination and acculturation experiences
Appendix A Continued…

Excerpt from SAMHSA’s Toolkit for Hispanic/Latino Community Groups (1999).

Section on factors related to substance use and abuse, pages ___.

http://www.health.org/initiatives/hisplatino/community/toolkiteng.htm

III. Factors Related to Substance Use and Abuse

Figure 1

Protective Factors and Risk Factors for Substance Use

Individual risk characteristics
- friends who engage in the problem behavior
- social isolation
- lowered self-esteem
- cultural conflict
- racial and ethnic discrimination

Community risk factors
- availability of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs at social functions
- frequent family moves/migration
- deteriorating and crime-ridden communities
- barriers to employment
- unemployment/underemployment
- inaccessible upward mobility
- inadequate housing

Protective Factors
- Familism
- Multigenerational kinship network
- Ethnic pride
- “Simpatía”
- Strong female presence
- Healthy Beliefs and Clear Standards
- Spirituality
- Respect (hierarchical based on age)
- Trust
- “Contiuenza”
- Concern for children

Individual Characteristics
- Dignity
- “Personalismo”
- Strong female presence

Family risk factors
- parental attitudes and involvement in drug use, crime and violence
- failure of parents to monitor their children
- parental absenteeism
- single parent without support
- lack of family rituals
- differing generational levels of assimilation

School risk factors
- new values system
- language barriers
- social isolation
- low achievement expectations
- low educational levels
APPENDIX B: TRADITIONAL HISPANIC/LATINO VALUES AND NORMS


Culture and Values

This great diversity makes it difficult to generalize about Hispanics/Latinos. Nevertheless, a few common characteristics are worth noting. Compared with the dominant culture in the United States, Hispanics/Latinos maintain more traditional family structures and observe more traditional gender roles. In addition, historical events have given many Hispanics/Latinos a distrust of government institutions, so they may relate to individuals on staff at an institution rather than to the institution itself. Finally, Hispanics/Latinos in general share many important values. The following are brief descriptions of some of these values.

Colectivismo (collectivism) is associated with high levels of personal interdependence, conformity, and sacrifice for the welfare of the group. Hispanics/Latinos generally differ in this orientation from the more individualistic, competitive, achievement-oriented mainstream culture.

Confianza (trust, confidence) is a critical element of interpersonal relationships. While confianza can be gained by virtue of personal and family reputations, it is usually earned over long periods of time and during times of crisis. Confianza is generally seen as a value of mutual benefit. This value is frequently manifested by the consumer behavior of Hispanics/Latinos who may travel greater distances or pay higher prices to do business with a known and trusted person.

Familialismo (familialism) is a term used by researchers of the Hispanic community to refer to the centrality of the family in Hispanic/Latino culture. The family structure often includes extended family and close friends considered family, such as madrina (godmother), padrino.
(godfather), comadre (co-mother), compadre (co-father), aunts, uncles, neighbors, cousins, and so on. Many Hispanics/Latinos continue to live with extended family and use the family network for support with child rearing, personal problems, and economic assistance.

**Fatalismo (fatalism)** embraces the belief that much of life is beyond one’s control. This belief is manifested by the frequent expression *si Dios quiere* (God willing). Fatalism is often associated with the assumption of passive roles in dealing with negative situations.

**Machismo (machismo)** denotes strength, independence, masculinity, and responsibility in customary male behavior. Men are expected to be dominant, strong, protective, good providers, and authoritarian heads of their households. A recent Washington Post article (Morin 1993) cited a study that found that Hispanic/Latino men were more likely to want to marry than non-Hispanic/Latinos because of the importance that machismo attaches to raising a family. In recent years, however, machismo has taken on the negative connotations of sexism, chauvinism, and sexual aggression.

**Marianismo (marianism)** is a term used by researchers of the Hispanic community to refer to customary female behavior. Marianism values submissiveness, humility, tolerance, self-sacrifice, virtue, and devotion to the male. This value has eroded as Hispanic/Latino women have become more acculturated.

**Orgullo (pride, dignity)** among Hispanic/Latinos extends to the self, family, culture, and national identity. Recognizing the importance of this value is essential to developing positive relationships with Hispanic/Latinos.

**Personalismo (good character, personable use of self)** consists of using positive personal qualities to accomplish a task. This value may require asking about the family and health of the
person with whom one is dealing before addressing the subject at hand. Unlike the more direct, detached style of the Anglo culture, Hispanic/Latinos value personal rapport in business dealings.

*Respeto* (*respect*) influences both personal and professional relationships. *Respeto* is evident in the language by the distinction between *usted* (you, formal) and *tu* (you, informal). When speaking to older persons, persons of distinction, and persons whom one does not know well, *usted* is the proper form of address.

*6IP SMD* (*simpatico or congenial attitude*) is an approach to social interaction that avoids conflict and confrontation. To be simpatico, one is agreeable and strives to maintain harmony within the group.

*Espiritualismo* (*spiritualism, holism*) is sometimes reflected the Hispanic/Latino culture by a blending of physical and mental health practices. Many religious beliefs, which vary among ethnicities and nationalities, combine belief in God with a belief in saints, psychic powers, and the spiritual world. For example, some Mexican Americans rely on *curanderos*, healers who use their professed God-given powers to treat conditions with herbs and other home remedies.
APPENDIX C: MODERATORS GUIDE

A. Introduction

Thank you all for coming here today. I’m Margarita and I will be leading the discussion today. This is ______ she will be taking notes on your comments.

B. Objectives

This discussion is about the ways parents are involved in their child’s education. I would like to thank you very much for participating in this study. The information you provide today is very important – it will be used to develop programs for Hispanic youth and parents in Montgomery County.

You have been selected to participate in this study because you meet a specific set of criteria—you are either the mother of a boy or a girl between the ages of 11-14. If you do not have children in this age group, please inform the group leader immediately.

C. Procedures

1. We will begin in a few moments, but first I’d like to go over the ground rules [point to ground rules on easel]. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers -- answer what you truly think regardless of the opinions of anyone else. All ideas are good ideas, If you are uncomfortable with a question, feel free to pass, we have a lot of things to talk about, at times we may need to stop the discussion in order to move on, we apologize for that in advance.

2. We will tape record your comments to help us get all the important info. you will be sharing, but please know that your answers are confidential and your names wont show
up anywhere. Since we are using a tape recorder, please try to speak one at a time so that the tape will be clear.

3. This discussion should take about two hours. If you need to use the restroom, please go ahead and do so.

4. If at any time you are uncomfortable with the scenarios or questions, you are free to leave. You will still receive your stipend.

D. Introductions

I am really excited to hear what you have to say, but first I’d like you each to tell us your name and in a couple of words, tell us something about yourself such as: Where you are from? How many kids you have, and what are their names or ages?

E. General Discussion

Aspirations and Conception of Success

1. What is that parents want for their kids out of life? (Probe: For example, what do you hope for your (daughter’s or son’s) future, what do you want your (daughter or son) to be as adults? When you think of your (daughter or son) as reaching success, what do you think of?

2. What does the word success mean to you?

Parental Involvement

3. How can parents/mother help their kids be successful? (Probe: providing basic necessities, by providing school supplies, helping them with homework, by talking with them about school, by meeting with the teacher, by attending school functions and
activities, by connecting them with others who can help them, in what ways can others help?).

**Perceived Role**

4. Who are the people responsible for a child’s education? (Probe: your (daughter or son), you, your spouse or partner, your (daughter’s or son’s) teacher, someone else?) (If other than parent, how do they help your child? What is their role?)

**Communication**

5. What is it like talking to children about their education? For example, what kinds of things to you say to your (daughter or son) about their education? What might motivate someone to talk to their (daughter or son)? (Probe: what do you say about school or getting an education in general, about grades, about involvement in school activities, about college, about their future?)

6. What makes it hard to talk? What makes it easier?

7. How does the way a parent communicates with their child affect their academic achievement? (Probe: does it matter how often you talk to your (daughter or son), what you say when you talk to your (daughter or son), the way you speak to your (daughter or son), whether you are paying attention when they talk to your (daughter or son), whether you and your spouse/partner talks to your (daughter or son), or whether just one of you does most of the talking?) What are the best ways to talk to kids about school?

8. Describe a typical conversation a mother would have with her (daughter or son), about school (Probe: how do the conversations usually go, are they comfortable, stressful, easy, difficult, calm, argumentative? Would she typically speak to the (daughter or son),
would the father speak to the (daughter or son), or would they speak to the (daughter or son) together?)

9. For those of you who said it was stressful or difficult, why did you say that? (Probe: is it because you don’t know what to say? Your child doesn’t want to talk about it? Disagreements with your child?)

10. Are there things about communicating with a child being raised in the United States that are different than communicating with a child being raised in Latin America? (If so, what is different?)

11. For those of you who said it was comfortable or easy, what makes it so? (Probe: is it because you and your child agree on matters pertaining to school, or because you have friends or family that help you talk to your child about school, does your spouse support your efforts, what kind of support do you have within your circle of friends or family?)

12. What is your dream wish list of the things that would help ensure your child’s success in school?

F. Dropout Scenario

A child hears about a family friend who left school at 16 to work in an office/restaurant. This child tells his/her mother he/she can’t wait until they are 16 so they can do the same. Reaction: How should the mother react? What should she say to the child about this?
Probing Questions

- What are some reasons you think children should stay in school?
- How important is it that your child finishes high school? Why or why isn’t it important?
- Is it just as important for girls as for boys? Why or why not?
- For what reasons is it ok for children to leave school? Why do you think children leave school?
- How much influence do you think his/her friends exert over his/her decision to stay in school?

I. Closing

That is all the questions we have for you. Do you have any comments or questions for us?

Thank you for your time!
Name_____________________________ Best Time To Be Reached________________
Daytime Phone #____________________ Evening Phone #____________________

1. Would you like to participate in a discussion about Hispanic mothers and their children? If you qualify and participate in the study you will receive a stipend of $25.
2. Where were you born? (If born in the United States please thank the person for their time and discontinue questioning. If born in Latin America, continue).
3. Are you more comfortable speaking in Spanish or English? (If Spanish or “either” continue. If English, thank the person for their time and discontinue questioning).
4. Do you have a child living at home age 11-14 and enrolled in middle school?______ (If no, please thank the person for their time and discontinue questioning. If yes, continue).
5. Is that child a boy or a girl?_____________(use for group placement)
6. How many years have you lived in the U.S.?_______and how many years have your children lived in the U.S.?______________
7. Did you and your child immigrate to the U.S. more than a year apart?
8. To what country do you trace your roots? ______________________
9. Have you completed high school? ______________________ (If yes, please thank the person for their time and discontinue questioning. If no, continue).
10. What is the highest grade you completed? __________
11. What is the highest grade completed by anyone in your family?__________
12. Are you available on __________________?(date of focus group discussion)
13. Will you be able to arrive at (location of focus group discussion) by (time of focus group discussion)? Please know that if you arrive after the start of the discussion you will not be able to participate.

Qualifies for study__________ Does not qualify for study__________
### APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification of Project/Title</th>
<th>Hispanic/Latino Mother-Child Communication related to Educational Attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Age of Subject (Please note: Parental consent always needed for minors.)</td>
<td>I state that I am over 18 years of age and wish to participate in a program of research being conducted by Margarita Weiss Behrens in the Department of Public and Community Health at the University of Maryland, College Park.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>The purpose of this discussion is to help a community program learn about communicating with children ages 11-14.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>During this discussion I will be asked questions about how parents are involved in their children’s education. The discussion will be tape recorded and a note taker will write down what is said. My name will not be connected with my comments at any time. The notes will only be used to help the researcher analyze the information. I have the right to ask questions of the moderator, refuse to answer any questions, or leave the group at any time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>All information is this study is confidential. The comments I provide will be grouped with comments of others and included in a reporting. My name will not appear in that report or in any public document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risks</td>
<td>Normally there are very few risks associated with this type of study. However, one result of the study is that I may think more about my child’s education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits, Freedom to Withdraw, &amp; Ability to Ask Questions</td>
<td>The discussion is not designed as workshop for parents, but to help the investigator learn more about communication between Hispanic/Latino parents and their children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Information of Investigators</td>
<td>Investigator Contact Information Margarita Weiss Behrens Health and Human Performance Building Department of Public and Community Health University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 (301) 468-2600 x 5240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please add name, signature, and date lines to the final page of your consent form</td>
<td>NAME___________________________________________ SIGNATURE______________________________________ DATE____________________________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NAME___________________________________________ SIGNATURE______________________________________ DATE____________________________________________
APPENDIX F: EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. You were selected for this group because you have a son or daughter between the ages of 11-14.

2. What is the exact age of that child? ________

3. How is that child doing in school?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

4. Have you told this child how you feel about them staying in school?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

5. Have you talked to this child about what you hope for their future in general?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

Thank you for participating in this study.
APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL
APPENDIX H:  *winMAX CODES*

A. Aspiration for kids
   Better future
   Professional Career Good Education
   Self-actualized
   Self-sufficient

B. Perceived Roles
   Child's
   Father's
   Mom's
   Parent's

C. Mother's Involvement
   Communication
      Advisor/guide
      Connect kids to role models
   Homework help/reading
   Mom's take on Dad's involvement
   School involvement or lack of
   Support: $/Emotional/Moral/Spirit

D. Communication
   About/reaction to dropout
      1. Why should stay in school
      2. Why kids dropout
         Lack of parental time attentions
         Peer influence
         Working/making money
         Rebelliousness/problem behavior
         Confusion/freedom
      3. What would help
      4. Why they don't go college

Factors
   Make easier
   Make harder
      Adolescent/Rebel
      Emotional/psych problems
      Lack time/attention
      Language barrier
lack information

Strategies used--about education
Motivate child
Incentives
Negative example/threat
Positive examples

E. Parent child conflicts
Acculturation related
Discipline/911 confusion
Dismiss parent/know better
Fool mom--Homework/grades
Losing culture-language/manners
Sleepovers
Adolescence - Typical
Other

F. Dream Barriers/child’s education
Life in America
American system
Differences in culture/expect
Language/Helplessness
Emotional/psych
Illegal status
Language/new school subjects
Racism/discrimination
Housing/Lack of space
Inadequate schools/teachers
Peer influence
Low SES
Lack money/transportation
Lack time/attention/communication/patience
due to working many jobs)
Limited opportunities for higher education
Illiteracy
Marital problems/Single parenthood

G. Dream helpers
Cultural Protective Factors (Familialism)
Mom's willingness/efforts/sacrifice
Family helps with homework

Resources
Good teachers/staff/peers
Role models in family
God/Churches/Community Centers
Friends/neighbors
Financial assistance
Libraries/Books
Psychologists
Schools/Teachers/Counselors

What else would help?
Classes and programs (for kids and adults)
Outreach to parents with information
Abilities
Scholarships
More school transportation
Mental health providers
Bilingual resources (school staff, homework in Spanish)
APPENDIX I: PRESENTATION FOR HISPANIC/LATINO PARENTS

“Parent Meeting in Spanish” at the Brown Station Elementary School Media Center, Tuesday, May 21, 2002, 7pm. Linda Ramos, ESOL Counselor at 15 Montgomery County schools (elementary, middle, and high schools).

“What the Children Tell Me” (translated from Spanish to English)

1. They don’t let me talk on the phone with my friends.
2. They don’t let me go out with my friends, go to the movies, or get together with classmates to work on a school project.
3. If I tell them I need to buy supplies for a school project they tell me they don’t have money or time to go get them. They say “we’ll go tomorrow.” Tomorrow never comes.
4. I have to keep the house clean, do the laundry, and prepare dinner.
5. I’m responsible for making sure my brothers and sisters to do their homework, when I have my own to do.
6. My brothers and sisters don’t mind me and then my parents get mad at me.
7. I have to work to help my family with household expenses and sometimes I don’t have time to do my homework.
8. I’m afraid to tell my parents the truth because they then they will hit me.
9. I do everything my parents ask me to, but it is not enough. They are not happy with what I do.
10. My mom/dad never has time for me, but they always have time for their boyfriend or girlfriend.
11. My mom/dad brought me to this country to live with them but I don’t know why. They haven’t talked to me in two years.
12. I stay in my room all day because I don’t have anyone to talk to.
13. Why did they send for me if they don’t want to be my parents?
14. Sometimes I feel like I’m interrupting my mom’s life.
15. Sometimes I think my parents like my sister better than they like me.
16. I get up on my own, make my breakfast, and get ready for school while my mom sleeps.
17. My parents brought me here so I could have a better life.
18. I want my parents to be proud of me, and that is why I have to work hard.
19. I want to live with my mom, but my dad won’t let me.
20. One of my parents is always saying negative things about the other.
21. I am happy in the United States and don’t want to go back.

22. I want my mom/dad to talk with me and listen to me, and not scold me like he/she always does.

23. They react badly to me.

24. They tell me I’m too fat, too thin, don’t study, and that I’m a bum. I do everything wrong!

25. I want my parents to trust me more.
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