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Fitting In: The Roles of Social Acceptance and Discrimination in Shaping the Academic Motivations of Latino Youth in the U.S. Southeast

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Abstract

Using data on 459 Latino 9th graders from the LA-SIAA and the NC-SIAA studies, we evaluate the specific educational values and beliefs that motivate the academic achievement of Latino youth and contrast the school experiences of Latino youth in an emerging Latino community, North Carolina, with the school experiences of youth living in a traditional settlement community, Los Angeles. Despite their greater fears of discrimination, we find that Latino youth in North Carolina are more academically motivated than their peers in Los Angeles. This is partially because they are more likely to be immigrants. Being an immigrant, having a stronger sense of ethnic identification, and having a stronger sense of family obligation were each linked to a more positive view of school environments. Therefore, these factors each partially explained the immigrant advantage in academic motivation and helped to counter the harmful effects of discrimination on academic motivation.

Keywords

Latino/as; Immigrant; Education; Motivation; Discrimination; Identity

Historically, Latino families have lived primarily in six states—California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey, and Illinois (Guzman, 2001). However, the 1990s were marked by the dispersion of Latino families to new settlement states in the South, Midwest, and Western Mountain regions of the United States (Suro & Tafoya, 2004). Among these, North Carolina ranked first in the growth of the Latino families, including many foreign-born Latino parents with children (Perry & Schachter, 2003). Though previous research suggests that Latino youth are at high risk of school failure (Perreira, Harris, & Lee, 2006) and enter and complete college at lower rates (Fry, 2004), they begin their high school careers with high academic aspirations (Hill & Torres, in press; Kao & Tienda, 1995). Yet, few researchers have studied the specific academic values and beliefs that underlie students' aspirations (Fuligni, 1997; 2001). Moreover, few researchers have studied the academic experiences and motivations of youth in emerging Latino communities as compared to traditional settlement communities.

In this article, we evaluate the specific educational values and beliefs that motivate the academic achievement of Latino youth and contrast the school experiences of Latino youth in an emerging Latino community, North Carolina, with those of youth living in a traditional settlement community, Los Angeles. By doing so, we gain insight into how the social

context of schools shape the academic adaptation of Latino youth, especially youth with immigrant parents.

The Social Context of Reception in North Carolina and Los Angeles

Research on immigrant families emphasizes how the characteristics of a host society or reception community shape youths' assimilation experiences and outcomes (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). According to segmented assimilation theory, the academic adjustment of immigrant youth depends on the interaction between family and community resources, intergenerational patterns of acculturation, and external challenges. These external challenges include racial discrimination in school, work, and neighborhood environments (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Garcia-Coll et al., 1996), the size and cohesiveness of co-ethnic social networks in a community (Alba & Nee, 2003; Waters & Jiménez, 2005), inner-city subcultures that promote deviant lifestyles and an oppositional culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), joblessness and concentrated poverty (Wilson, 1987), and the social isolation or segregation of minority populations (Massey, 1990).

In North Carolina, a combination of factors that both promote and inhibit the academic adaptation of Latino youth exists. The relative lack of racial and economic segregation of Latinos may facilitate youths' successful adaptation, but the presence of small, less-established co-ethnic communities may hinder their assimilation. In some communities, there has been an outpouring of support for the newcomers (Maitland, 2006). In others, local governments have passed ordinances banning the use of Spanish in public agencies and local police routinely work with officials from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E) to identify and deport Latino residents who are unauthorized immigrants (Martinez, 2006). In all communities across North Carolina, public employers in education, health and social services struggle to identify professionals able to communicate in Spanish and provide culturally appropriate services (Perreira, Chapman, & Livas-Stein, 2006).

Los Angeles, in contrast, has a Latino community that stretches back to the 1800s when the southwestern region of the U.S. was part of Mexico. Although Mexicans and other Latino groups in Los Angeles suffer from poorer economic conditions as compared to whites, they have a strong influence upon the social, cultural, and political context of the larger Southern California area. Spanish is commonly spoken, several prominent Latino politicians hold key elected offices, and a diverse array of Latino-focused businesses and services exist. In comparison to Latinos in North Carolina, Latinos in Los Angeles are far more integrated into the history and social fabric of the local communities.

Social Acceptance and Discrimination

Many North Carolinians harbor negative feelings about the influx of Hispanics. In a 1996 Poll, nearly half (42%) stated that they were uncomfortable with the increasing presence of Hispanics, about two-thirds (67%) said that they thought their neighbors would not approve of Hispanics moving into their neighborhood, and more than half (55%) said that they did not feel comfortable around people who do not speak English (Johnson, Johnson-Webb, & Farrell, 1999). Likewise, a 2002 poll of Los Angelinos found that 54% of blacks and 33% of whites living in LA believed that Hispanics were "most in conflict with their group" (Sears, 2002). Sources of ethnic conflict included gangs and crime, jobs and income, and access to higher education.

Social acceptance and discrimination at the community-level can translate into feelings of social acceptance and discrimination in schools and affect students' academic motivations (Guyll, Madon, Preito, & Scherr, in press). Although some studies have documented qualitatively the experiences of social marginalization and discrimination in schools

(Rosenbloom & Way 2004; Valenzuela, 1999), few have quantitatively examined minority adolescents' perceptions of either social acceptance or discriminatory experiences and their influence on academic well-being, especially among Latino youth (Shmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001; Stone & Han, 2005; Degarmo & Martinez, 2006). Current evidence, however, suggests that discriminatory experiences toward Latino youth reduce their academic motivation (Shmader, Major, & Gramzow 2001), lower their academic performance (Stone & Han, 2005; Degarmo & Martinez, 2006), and increase their risk of dropping out of high school (Degarmo & Martinez, 2006). At the same time, social support from teachers, parents, and peers can buffer Latino students from the negative effects of discrimination (Degarmo & Martinez, 2006).

Academic Motivation and Children of Immigrants

As they navigate between two worlds and begin to learn the culture of their new communities, the children of immigrants confront both positive and negative ethnic stereotypes for the first time. Coping with these ethnic stereotypes could potentially reduce the academic motivations of foreign-born youth as compared to their U.S.-born peers. Instead, Latino immigrant youth typically enter U.S. schools brimming with optimism and encouragement from their parents to overcome adversity and succeed (Perreira, Chapman, & Livas-Stein, 2006; Romo, 1984). Thus, some researchers have found that the academic performance of children in immigrant families, especially Asian families, is as good or better than that of their U.S.-born peers (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Fuligni 1997) and they are at lower risk of dropping out of high school (Perreira, Harris, & Lee 2007). Moreover, the cultural reference point for the children of immigrants is their home country where many face harsher environments and poorer quality schools than in the U.S. (Alvarez, 1971). This dual frame of reference adds to their optimism (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) and to their potential to succeed at school.

Ethnic and Family Identifications

The negative impact of discriminatory experiences can be countered by both positive experiences at school and immigrant optimism. These negative experiences can also be attenuated by social identification with a students' ethnic and family group. Ethnic identity represents the extent to which adolescents feel close to their ethnic background and believe that their ethnicity is an integral part of their larger identity. Numerous studies have suggested that adolescents' identification with their ethnic background provides meaning to their academic efforts and is associated with a higher level of motivation. For example, Chavous and colleagues (2003) reported a link between stronger ethnic identity and greater motivation and enrollment in college. Oyserman, Harrison, and Bybee (2001) found a positive association between ethnic identification and feelings of academic efficacy. Most previous work has been conducted with African American youth, but Fuligni, Witkow, and Garcia (2005) observed similar associations between ethnic identity and higher levels of motivation among students of Mexican heritage.

Similarly, adolescents who identify with their families appear to invest more in their schooling. In particular, students with a stronger sense of obligation to support, assist, and respect their families tend to have higher academic motivations (Fuligni, 2001). Adolescents from Latin American backgrounds place a greater importance upon family obligation than do their peers from European backgrounds across generations (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). Latino students with a strong sense of obligation to the family see trying hard and doing well in school as one of their duties as members of their family, both in response to the sacrifices made by their parents and to obtain better jobs to help them to support their parents in the future. This sense of family obligation can partially explain why Latino

students often have higher levels of motivation than their equally-achieving peers from European backgrounds (Fuligni, 2001).

Methods

Sample

We used data from the *UCLA Study of Adolescents' Daily Lives*, a mixed-methods study of the social identifications and academic adaptations of Latino adolescents, and the *North Carolina Southern Immigrant Academic Adaptation Study* (NC-SIAA) project, a companion study to the UCLA study. The combined LA-NC SIAA data includes 557 Latino adolescents (318 in Los Angeles; 239 in North Carolina) enrolled in school in Los Angeles in 2005–06 and North Carolina in 2006–07. The LA sample was selected from three public high schools with a high concentration of Latino youth. In North Carolina, a stratified cluster design was used to sample Latino youth enrolled in 9th grade in nine public high schools located in high-density, high-growth Latino immigrant receiving communities.

We deleted cases with missing values on the dependent ($N = 11$) or independent variables ($N = 87$), which resulted in an analytic sample consisting of 459 Latino youth (53% female; 47% male), averaging 15 years of age. The majority had immigrant parents (84%), but the percent of youth who were immigrants themselves (i.e., foreign-born or first generation immigrants) differed significantly between North Carolina and Los Angeles (67% vs. 18%), $\chi^2(1) = 113.45, p < .001$. Few of the youth ($N_{NC} = 8, N_{LA} = 62$) were U.S. born with U.S. born parents (i.e., third-plus generation immigrants). Table 1 provides detailed information on differences in the demographic characteristics of the North Carolina and Los Angeles samples.

Procedure

Both studies used the same recruitment and interview protocols. In their preferred language (Spanish or English), respondents completed a 45-minute in-school survey regarding their immigration histories, family relationships, cultural and ethnic identifications, educational attitudes, and mental health. They also completed a 15-minute take-home survey with additional questions on their household composition, parents' education and employment, and language use. Finally, respondents completed a daily diary checklist every day for two weeks. These daily diary checklists included questions about negative events and stressors; time spent on school, work, and family activities; academic engagement; feelings and moods; and role fulfillment.

One way analyses of variance were conducted to examine differences in academic motivations, discrimination, social acceptance, ethnic identification and family obligation between youth living in North Carolina and youth living in Los Angeles. Regression models were estimated to evaluate the influence of discrimination, social acceptance, ethnic identification, and family obligation on academic motivations. Regressions were adjusted for clustering within the 12 schools. Thus, the degrees of freedom in our regression model were determined by the number of clusters rather than the number of individual observations in the sample. Regressions estimated with school-level fixed effects yielded similar results.

Measures

Academic motivations—Four dimensions of academic motivations were considered – importance, usefulness, future value, and intrinsic value of education. Students rated how important the following 6 items were to them: “doing well in school,” “getting good grades,” “going to college after high school,” “getting an ‘A’ on almost every test,” “being one of the best students in your class,” and “going to the best college after high school”

(Fuligni, 1997). Youths' beliefs that education is integral for their future success in life (i.e., future value of school) was assessed with 5 items. Students responded to the following statements: "going to college is necessary for what I want to do in the future," "doing well in school is the best way for me to succeed as an adult," "I need to get good grades in school in order to get a good job as an adult," "it is important to do well in school to earn a good living as an adult," "doing well in school is the best way for me to get ahead in life" (Fuligni et al., 2005).

The intrinsic value of education and beliefs in its usefulness were assessed using an adaptation of multi-item measures developed by Eccles (1983). The intrinsic value of education was based on mean responses to 2 items: "In general, I find working on school work [very boring/very interesting]" and "How much do you like working on school work [a little/a lot]" (Fuligni et al., 2005). Beliefs in the usefulness of school was based on mean responses to 4 items: "For me, being in school is [not at all important/very important]," "Right now, how useful do you find things you learn in school to be in your everyday life?" "In the future, how useful do you think the things you have learned in school will be in your everyday life?" "How useful do you think the things you have learned in school will be for what you want to be after you graduate?" (Fuligni et al., 2005). Scores on each of these scales range from 1 to 5.

In our sample, our measures of academic motivation possessed good internal consistency -- importance ($\alpha = .83$), usefulness ($\alpha = .75$), future value ($\alpha = .79$), and intrinsic value ($\alpha = .77$) of education. In Table 2, we report correlations between each measure of academic motivation and the independent variables described below.

Social acceptance—Social acceptance was defined along four dimensions—school climate, adult encouragement, daily positive school experiences, and any positive ethnic treatment. Adapted from Tyler and DeGoey (1995), our 4-item measure of school climate tapped the extent to which students felt that they were respected and valued by the school (e.g., "I feel that the adults at my school respect the work that I do"). Our measure of encouragement by adults at school was based on responses to two items regarding how often adults at school had encouraged a student to take college placement or honors courses and how often they had encouraged a student to continue his/her education after high school. With scores ranging from 1 to 5, both scales possessed good internal consistency – school climate ($\alpha = .87$) and adult encouragement ($\alpha = .73$). The correlation between these two measures was $r = .27, p < .05$

We derived the school experiences measure from daily diary self-reports on whether students: (1) got along with adults at school, (2) did not get along with adults at school (reverse coded), (3) had an argument or were punished by an adult at school (reverse coded), (4) were harassed, picked on, or teased by a student in school (reverse coded). Responses to these items were summed across 14 days. The final score ranged from 0 to 56. Also derived from daily diary self-reports, our measure of any positive ethnic treatment captured responses to the statement "something good happened to you or you were treated well because of your race or ethnicity." Any affirmative response to this question across the 14 days was coded as 1, 0 otherwise. Both daily positive school experiences and positive ethnic treatment were correlated with students' perceptions of the school climate (Table 3: $r = .32, p < .05$, and $r = .18, p < .05$, respectively).

Discrimination—We defined three dimensions of discrimination – perceived likelihood of discrimination, concern about discrimination, and any negative ethnic treatment. Perceived likelihood of discrimination was derived from a measure developed by Mendoza-Denton et al. (2002). Respondents are presented with four situations in which the respondent is

potentially being mistreated (e.g., watched by a store clerk in a convenience store). Respondents then indicate the likelihood of such treatment ever occurring to them. Concern about discrimination was measured in response to these same situations. Responses to the 4 items in each scale were summed and scaled to range from 0 to 16. Cronbach's alphas were .81 and .83 for the likelihood and concern scales, respectively. Our final dimension of discrimination – any negative ethnic treatment – was measured using our daily diary reports and captured responses to the statement “something bad happened to you or you were treated poorly because of your race or ethnicity.” Affirmative responses to this question across the two-week period were coded as 1, 0 otherwise.

Analyses of correlations (Table 3) and factor analyses (not shown) suggested that the three dimensions of discrimination were related but were best treated as different measurement concepts. Perceived likelihood of discrimination and concern with discrimination were most highly correlated ($r = .59, p < .05$), but less correlated with any negative ethnic treatment ($r = .28, p < .05$ and $r = .19, p < .05$, respectively). Multi-collinearity between these three measures of discrimination had no substantive effect on regression coefficients.

Ethnic identification—Two aspects of cultural identification were considered. Ethnic affirmation and belonging (e.g., “I am happy that I am a member of the ethnic group I belong to,” “I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group,” and “I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments”) was derived from a subscale of items on the popular Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure developed by Phinney (1992). Ethnic identity centrality was measured using an instrument developed by Sellers et al. (1997). Students responded to seven items including “In general, being a member of my ethnic group is an important part of my self-image,” “being a part of my ethnic group is an important reflection of who I am,” and “being a part of my ethnic group is not a major factor in my social relationships.” Scores on both scales ranged from 1 to 5. Cronbach's alphas for ethnic affirmation and ethnic centrality were .87 and .71, respectively. The two dimensions were positively correlated (Table 3: $r = .67, p < .05$).

Family obligation—Finally, we considered two measures of youths' sense of family obligation. Six items measured family respect; students evaluated the importance of respecting parents and older family members, doing well for the sake of the family, and making sacrifices for the family (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). Six items measured the value students placed upon supporting their families in the future: how important students believed it was to help their parents financially in the future, live or go to college near their parents, and help take care of their parents and other family members in the future (Fuligni, 1997). Scores on both scales ranged from 1 to 5. Cronbach's alphas for the family respect and future support scales were .77 and .77, respectively. The two dimensions were positively correlated (Table 3: $r = .66, p < .05$).

Results

Academic Motivations in North Carolina and Los Angeles

One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) showed that in comparison to Latino youth living in LA, Latino youth in North Carolina had a stronger belief in the usefulness of education and reported more intrinsic interest in academics (Table 4, part A). However, students in LA and North Carolina did not differ significantly in the importance or future value of education.

We regressed each measure of academic motivation on the indicator variable for students living in North Carolina and controlled for students' gender, students' age, family structure, and parents' education (Table 5, part A). We found that differences in the usefulness and

intrinsic value of education persisted between North Carolina and Los Angeles after these demographic controls, $F(1,11) = 6.62$, $p < .05$, and $F(1,11) = 7.68$, $p < .05$, respectively.

Effects of Discrimination on Academic Motivations

One-way ANOVAs indicated that at the same time that students reported higher academic motivations in North Carolina relative to LA, they were also more likely to report being treated poorly because of their race or ethnicity; they perceived a greater likelihood of discrimination in their communities; and they were more concerned or anxious about discrimination (Table 4, part B). Thus, we observed higher rates of academic motivation among Latino youth in North Carolina despite the presence of discrimination.

To estimate the independent effect of discrimination on academic motivations, we regressed each measure of academic motivation on our three measures of discrimination (Table 5, part B). We found a significant negative association between the perceived likelihood of discrimination and academic motivation with three out of four of our measures, b s $-.03$ to $-.04$. In contrast, the extent to which students were concerned or anxious about discrimination was positively associated with academic motivation, b s $.02$ to $.05$. Overall, our three measures of discrimination were jointly significant in every model except for the model on the future utility of education, $F(3,11) = 6.69$ to $F(3,11) = 4.33$, p s $< .05$. Moreover, with the inclusion of discrimination measures, the coefficient on the indicator variable for North Carolina increased. This suggests that the relatively high levels of discrimination in North Carolina suppressed some of the difference in academic motivation between youth in our two locations. In the absence of discrimination, students in North Carolina would have had even higher academic motivations.

Effects of Foreign-born Status on Academic Motivations

A greater percentage of Latino youth in North Carolina (vs. Los Angeles) were first-generation immigrants born abroad to foreign-born parents (67% vs .18%), $\chi^2(1) = 113.45$, $p < .001$. Thus, foreign-born status may confound the relationship between the context of reception (i.e., experiences in North Carolina vs. LA) and academic motivations. One-way ANOVAs indicated that foreign-born youth had higher academic motivations than U.S.-born youth on measures of the usefulness ($M_{FB} = 4.42$; $SD_{FB} = .75$; $M_{US} = 3.92$; $SD_{US} = .79$; $F(1, 457) = 46.68$, $p < .001$) and intrinsic value of education ($M_{FB} = 3.33$; $SD_{FB} = 1.22$; $M_{US} = 2.68$; $SD_{US} = 1.05$; $F(1,457) = 37.60$, $p < .001$). Foreign-born youth also reported a greater likelihood of discrimination ($M_{FB} = 6.56$; $SD_{FB} = 4.62$; $M_{US} = 4.75$; $SD_{US} = 4.08$; $F(1,457) = 19.56$, $p < .001$), concern with discrimination ($M_{FB} = 6.81$; $SD_{FB} = 4.97$; $M_{US} = 5.23$; $SD_{US} = 4.59$; $F(1,457) = 12.28$, $p < .001$), and negative ethnic treatment (24% vs. 17%, $\chi^2(1) = 3.46$, $p < .10$).

Adding foreign-born status to our regressions (Table 5, part C) revealed positive associations of foreign-born status with the usefulness of education ($b = .38$, $F(1,11) = 26.98$, $p < .001$) and the intrinsic value of education ($b = .59$, $F(1,11) = 50.90$, $p < .001$). Moreover, the coefficients on the indicator variables for North Carolina decreased 42% and 25%, respectively. Thus, the foreign-born status of youth explained a substantial portion of the differences in academic motivations between youth living in North Carolina and those living in Los Angeles.

Effects of Social Acceptance on Academic Motivations

To evaluate whether differences in social acceptance could further explain differences in academic motivations of Latino students living in North Carolina and LA, we again conducted one-way ANOVAs followed by a regression analysis for each measure of academic motivation. The results indicated that students living in North Carolina (vs. Los

Angeles) had a greater sense of social acceptance along every dimension – positive school climate, adult school encouragement, daily positive school experiences, and any positive ethnic treatment (Table 4, part C). Further, positive school climate, adult school encouragement, daily positive school experiences, and any positive ethnic treatment were each associated with greater academic motivation (Table 6, part A). The four social acceptance measures were jointly significant in every model, $F(4,11) = 27.16$ to $F(4,11) = 12.63$, $ps < .001$. Moreover, once social acceptance variables were included, the coefficient on the indicator variable for North Carolina became insignificant or reversed its sign and became significantly negative. Thus, the positive school environments fully explained the higher academic motivations of the youth in North Carolina.

Finally, the coefficients for foreign-born status and the perceived likelihood of discrimination decreased substantially upon the inclusion of social acceptance variables. To further evaluate these effects, we followed Baron and Kenny (1986) and calculated a Sobel test (1982) for mediation. A mediation analysis requires three regressions: (1) the dependent variable on the independent variable, (2) the dependent variable on both the independent variable and the mediator, and (3) the mediator on the independent variable.

We focus our mediation analysis on the most influential social acceptance variable – school climate. The first and second regressions have already been completed (see Table 5, part C and Table 6, part A). We thus regressed school climate (the mediator) on foreign-born status and school climate on discrimination (results not shown). A Sobel test for the significance of mediation confirmed our hypothesis (usefulness: $z = 3.24$ $p < .01$, intrinsic value: $z = 3.06$ $p < .01$). School climate partially mediated the relationship between foreign-born status and both the usefulness and intrinsic value of education. School climate also fully mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination and three dimensions of academic motivation (importance: $z = 4.18$, $p < .001$, usefulness: $z = 8.25$, $p < .001$, intrinsic value: $z = 6.23$, $p < .001$).

Effects of Ethnic Identification and Family Obligation on Academic Motivations

ANOVAs were conducted to examine differences in the ethnic identifications and levels of family obligation between youth living in North Carolina and Los Angeles (Table 4, part C). Latino youth in North Carolina reported significantly higher levels of both ethnic affirmation and belonging, and ethnic centrality than were reported by Latino youth in Los Angeles. Additionally, Latino youth in North Carolina reported significantly higher levels of family respect and obligations to support their families in the future.

To evaluate the independent effects of ethnic identification and family obligation on academic motivations, we estimated regressions (Table 6, parts B and C). Ethnic affirmation and belonging was weakly associated with the importance and the intrinsic value of education ($bs = .16, .20$ $ps < .10$) and strongly associated with both the usefulness of education ($b = .19$ $p < .05$) and its future value ($b = .15$ $p < .001$). Due to the high correlation of ethnic affirmation and belonging with ethnic centrality (Table 3: $r = .67$, $p < .05$), the associations between academic motivations and a student's sense of ethnic centrality were not identified in the regression framework. However, correlations (Table 2) demonstrated notable links between ethnic centrality and importance of school, usefulness of education, and intrinsic value of education.

Family respect was strongly associated with all our outcomes – importance ($b = .34$, $p < .001$), usefulness ($b = .26$, $p < .001$), future value ($b = .23$, $p < .001$), and intrinsic value ($b = .25$, $p < .05$) of education. In contrast, family support was only significantly associated with the usefulness of education ($b = .14$ $p < .05$). The weak relationship between family support and academic motivations may be partially explained by the high correlation between family

support and family respect (Table 3: $r = .66, p < .05$). Correlation analyses (Table 2) demonstrated that adolescents who believed they should support their families placed a stronger value on achieving academic success as well as the usefulness, the future value, and the intrinsic value of education.

Additional analyses indicated that the relationships between ethnic belonging and both the usefulness and future value of education were fully mediated through school climate (usefulness: $z = 4.70, p < .001$, future value: $z = 3.89, p < .001$). Thus, students with a strong sense of ethnic affirmation and belonging tended to report more positive school climates which, in turn, were associated with stronger academic motivations. Similarly, the relationships between family respect and each measure of academic motivation were partially mediated through school climate (importance: $z = 2.85, p < .01$, usefulness: $z = 4.13, p < .001$, future value: $z = 3.35, p < .001$, intrinsic value: $z = 3.97, p < .001$). Students with a strong sense of family respect tended to report more positive school climate and this positive school climate was associated with greater academic motivation. The full regression models are reported in Table 7.

Discussion

In what has sometimes been referred to as a new Latino Diaspora (Hamann, Wortham, & Murillo, 2002), Latino families have been moving to areas of the U.S. where they had little or no historical presence. This Diaspora provides researchers with the opportunity to evaluate how the social contexts of emerging versus long-standing Latino communities affect the development of Latino youth. Given the importance of education to the socioeconomic mobility of Latino youth and the increasing size of the Latino population in the U.S., policy makers are increasingly interested in understanding and reversing their low educational attainment. Some have argued that their education attainment is low because they place a low premium on education (Valencia & Black, 2002). Therefore, we studied the specific academic values and beliefs that motivate Latino adolescents to perform well and stay in school.

In our comparison of Latino youth living in North Carolina and Los Angeles, we found youth living in both communities had high academic motivations, but the motivations of youth in North Carolina were higher. At the same time, youth in North Carolina reported experiencing more discrimination and worried more about the likelihood of discrimination in their every day lives. Though these discriminatory experiences negatively affected their school experiences and academic motivations, Latino youth in North Carolina proved to be remarkably resilient. They faced the threat of discrimination, overcame it, and continued to show an extraordinary motivation to excel in their academic pursuits. As evidenced by the positive relationship between concerns about discrimination (as opposed to the likelihood or experience of discrimination) and academic motivations, some students even used their fears to further motivate themselves. As hypothesized and documented by others (Foley, 1990), perhaps knowing that discrimination could potentially constrain their economic opportunities, they chose to combat it by delving into their school work and proving their potential. As a result, they did not fall into the trap, identified by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) in their studies of African-American youth, of developing oppositional identities that undermined their academic success in the presence of discrimination. So, what explains the high academic motivations of Latino youth in North Carolina?

The high academic motivations of youth in North Carolina reflected, in part, their immigrant status. On average, foreign-born youth, in contrast to U.S.-born youth, enjoyed going to school and working on their school work. Moreover, they strongly believed that the things they learned in school were useful and would help them succeed in life. This result is

consistent with previous research on academic aspirations and expectations showing that the first-generation children of immigrants have higher academic aspirations and expectations than their third-generation peers (Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman, 2006; Kao & Tienda, 1995). It also lends support to the immigrant optimism hypothesis and research on immigrant's dual-frame-of-reference (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Immigrant youth and their families move to the U.S. to build a better future and improve upon the opportunities available to them in their home countries. Thus, they expect to overcome, not fall victim to, their relatively low socioeconomic status in the U.S. and their parents' limited educational backgrounds.

The high academic motivations of youth in North Carolina also reflected their positive school experiences. Even though youth experienced discrimination both at school and in their communities, daily positive experiences, positive treatment by peers at school, and encouragement by teachers and other adults at their schools counterbalanced these negative experiences and fostered a generally positive school climate. Therefore, our results strongly suggest that social acceptance, especially as measured by school climate, not only affects academic achievement directly (Stone & Han, 2005), but also indirectly by increasing academic motivations and reaffirming immigrant students' strong academic values and beliefs.

Finally, a strong sense of family obligation and ethnic identification contributed to individual differences in academic motivations. As previous studies have demonstrated, Latino youth exhibit a high degree of loyalty and commitment to their families (Fuligni, 2001; Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999) and one of the primary ways that they can demonstrate respect for their parents and the sacrifices made by their parents is to succeed in school. Thus, family respect strongly motivates their academic endeavors along every dimension – importance, usefulness, future value, and intrinsic value of education. Furthermore, a strong sense of ethnic affirmation and belonging helped to motivate Latino youth by improving their perceptions of the school environment. Youth who were proud of their heritage were more likely to feel respected at school and this translated into higher academic motivations.

As one of the first studies comparing the academic experiences of youth in an emerging and a long-standing Latino community, this study contributes substantially to research on the social context of immigrant adaptation. To further expand our understanding of social context and immigrant adaptation, additional studies with comparable quantitative and ethnographic data on emerging and long-standing communities should be undertaken. School board, housing, English-language only, community college admission, and licensure policies enacted at state and local levels can influence the educational progress of youth, their health, and their overall economic well-being. Thus, to better design policies that facilitate the adaptation of immigrant youth, studies with sufficient variation across community contexts are needed.

Additional studies should follow Latino students and other students from immigrant families as they transition through adolescence into adulthood in emerging immigrant and Latino communities. To the extent that social contexts shape development, the educational and economic trajectories of youth growing up in emerging immigrant communities could differ quite substantially from the trajectories of their peers in communities with a tradition of receiving and accommodating new immigrants. While the Diaspora of Latinos and immigrants creates a challenge for policy makers and schools, it also creates an opportunity. Schools can actively work to foster a sense of belonging among immigrants, facilitate their transitions to the U.S., and, in so doing, motivate them to succeed and to realize their full potential.

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Biographies

Krista M. Perreira (Ph.D. in health economics, U.C. Berkeley, 1999) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Public Policy at UNC-Chapel Hill. Her research focuses on the relationships among family, health, and social policy, with an emphasis on Latino and immigrant families. Her most recent work combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies to identify how acculturation and migration processes influence the health and academic achievement of Latino youth in North Carolina.

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Stephanie Potochnick is a doctoral student in the Department of Public Policy at UNC-Chapel Hill with dual master degrees in Sociology and Public Policy from UNC-Charlotte. Stephanie has served in the Peace Corps as a rural public health extension worker in Ecuador and has implemented educational programs on AIDS/HIV prevention, domestic violence, reproductive health, and general health practices. She also facilitated the creation of community banks and oversaw their micro enterprise activities in Ecuador.

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Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Latino Students in NC and LA

	NC		LA		T or χ^2
	N	%/M	N	%/M	
Student Characteristics					
Females	116	55%	125	50%	1.15
Age (mean)	210	15.32	249	14.84	-7.61 ***
Generational Status					
First Generation	140	67%	43	18%	113.45 ***
Second Generation	62	30%	140	57%	34.94 ***
Third Generation	8	4%	62	25%	40.14 ***
Country of birth					
United States	66	31%	206	85%	136.95 ***
Mexican	77	37%	23	10%	47.84 ***
Central American or Caribbean	47	22%	6	2%	42.81 ***
South American	20	10%	6	2%	10.22 ***
Age at arrival					
Born in U.S.	66	31%	206	85%	135.27 ***
Under age 6	27	13%	20	8%	2.55
Ages 6–12	71	34%	14	6%	57.83 ***
Ages 13 or more	46	22%	2	1%	52.63 ***
Speaks and understands English very well	86	42%	203	82%	77.78 ***
Reads and writes English very well	76	38%	163	66%	35.3 ***
Speaks and understands Spanish very well	131	68%	81	39%	35.39 ***
Reads and writes Spanish very well	85	44%	39	19%	31.05 ***
Family Characteristics					
Lives with two parents	121	58%	148	59%	0.16
Both parents employed	113	61%	138	64%	0.34
Parent graduated high school	102	49%	191	77%	39.06 ***
Number of family in household (mean)	210	3.92	249	3.49	-2.42 *
English spoken at home	119	60%	223	90%	57.28 ***

	NC		LA		T or χ^2
	N	%/M	N	%/M	
English primary language spoken at home	33	17%	135	55%	70.45 ***
Spanish spoken at home	183	91%	206	83%	6.12 *

† p<.10,

* p<.05,

** p<.01,

*** p<.001

NOTE: T-tests using the sattertwaitte adjustment for unequal variances were used to compare differences in means. Chi-square tests were used to compare differences in proportions. Second and third-generation youth include a small number born abroad to U.S. citizens. The standard deviation on age is .86 for the North Carolina sample and .38 for the Los Angeles sample. The standard deviation on household size is 1.99 and 1.77 in North Carolina and Los Angeles respectively.

Table 2

Correlations of Dependent and Independent Variables

	Total			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent Variables				
(1) Importance of Academic Success	1.00			
(2) Usefulness of Education	0.51 *	1.00		
(3) Future Value of Education	0.58 *	0.41 *	1.00	
(4) Intrinsic Value of Education	0.36 *	0.47 *	0.28	1.00
Independent Variables				
(5) North Carolina	-0.02	0.26 *	-0.05	0.18 *
(6) Foreign born	0.06	0.30 *	0.01	0.28 *
(7) Age	-0.06	0.15 *	-0.02	0.12 *
(8) Female	-0.04	0.09	0.06	0.12 *
(9) Parent graduated high school	-0.01	-0.21 *	-0.03	-0.19 *
(10) Two-parent family	0.05	-0.03	0.03	0.00
Social Acceptance				
(11) Positive School Climate	0.32 *	0.54 *	0.26 *	0.38 *
(12) Adult School Encouragement	0.13 *	0.25 *	0.16 *	0.14 *
(13) Daily Positive School Experiences	0.11 *	0.34 *	0.03	0.31 *
(14) Any Positive Ethnic Treatment	0.13 *	0.25 *	0.06	0.20 *
Discrimination				
(15) Perceived Likelihood of Discrimination	-0.02	0.02	-0.06	0.02
(16) Concern about Discrimination	0.13 *	0.14 *	0.09 *	0.16 *
(17) Any Negative Ethnic Treatment	-0.04	0.02	0.01	0.06
Ethnic Identification				
(18) Ethnic affirmation and belonging	0.19 *	0.32 *	0.14 *	0.20 *
(19) Ethnic centrality	0.14 *	0.24 *	0.06	0.11 *
Family Obligation				
(20) Family respect	0.39 *	0.38 *	0.28 *	0.30 *
(21) Future support	0.32 *	0.38 *	0.22 *	0.33 *

*
p<.05

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Table 3

Correlations of Independent Variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)
Demographic Variables																	
(1) North Carolina	1.0																
(2) Foreign born	.52 *	1.0															
(3) Age	.35 *	.39 *	1.0														
(4) Female Parent graduated	.05	-.05	-.03	1.0													
(5) high school	.29 *	-.22 *	-.34 *	-.07	1.0												
(6) Two-parent family	.03	.06	-.01	-.03	-.06	1.0											
Social Acceptance																	
(7) Positive School Climate	.18 *	.22 *	.08	.03	-.12 *	.02	1.0										
(8) Adult School Encouragement	.11 *	.07	.05	.09 *	-.03	.01	.27 *	1.0									
(9) Daily Positive School Experiences	.76 *	.43 *	.30 *	.08	-.27 *	.05	.32 *	.10 *	1.0								
(10) Any Positive Ethnic Treatment	.23 *	.28 *	.08	.05	-.10 *	.05	.18 *	.05	.14 *	1.0							
Discrimination																	
(11) Perceived Likelihood of Discrimination	.28 *	.20 *	.09	-.06	-.13 *	.07	-.11 *	.07	.16 *	.21 *	1.0						
(12) Concern about Discrimination	.15 *	.16 *	.03	.03	-.23 *	.10 *	.03	.06	.13 *	.17 *	.59 *	1.0					
(13) Any Negative Ethnic Treatment	.17 *	.09	.05	-.05	-.14 *	.02	-.03	.03	.04	.33 *	.28 *	.19 *	1.0				
Ethnic Identification																	
(14) Ethnic affirmation and belonging	.31 *	.27 *	.15 *	.08	-.12 *	-.07	.30 *	.20 *	.29 *	.15 *	.18 *	.19 *	-.02	1.0			
(15) Ethnic centrality	.32 *	.20 *	.15 *	.02	-.16 *	-.03	.19 *	.11 *	.30 *	.14 *	.23 *	.20 *	.04	.67 *	1.0		
Family Obligation																	
(16) Family respect	.12	.10 *	.06	-.02	-.12 *	-.02	.30 *	.08	.18 *	.07	.01	.12 *	-.06	.34 *	.29 *	1.0	
(17) Future support	.16 *	.16 *	.09	.02	-.24 *	-.01	.27 *	.11 *	.24 *	.08	.02	.17 *	-.02	.34 *	.31 *	.66 *	1.0

*
p<.05

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Table 4

Mean Differences in Academic Motivations, Discrimination, Social Acceptance, Ethnic Identification, and Family Obligation between Latino Students in North Carolina and Los Angeles

	NC		LA		F or χ^2
	M	(SD)	M	(SD)	
A. Academic Motivation					
Importance of Academic Success	4.10	(0.81)	4.13	(0.70)	0.12
Usefulness of Education	4.35	(0.79)	3.93	(0.78)	34.01 ***
Future Value of Education	4.52	(0.67)	4.58	(0.61)	1.23
Intrinsic Value of Education	3.17	(1.28)	2.75	(1.03)	15.53 ***
B. Discrimination					
Perceived Likelihood of Discrimination	6.80	(4.57)	4.37	(3.92)	37.5 ***
Concern about Discrimination	6.66	(5.01)	5.21	(4.53)	10.58 **
Any Negative Ethnic Treatment (%)	27%	---	13%	---	13.11 ***
C. Social Acceptance, Ethnic Identification, and Family Obligation					
Social Acceptance					
Positive School Climate	3.78	(1.06)	3.40	(0.94)	16.00 **
Adult School Encouragement	4.04	(1.08)	3.79	(1.14)	5.74 *
Daily Positive School Experiences	44.81	(5.05)	32.68	(5.17)	639.71 ***
Any Positive Ethnic Treatment (%)	39%	---	18%	---	29.78 ***
Ethnic Identification					
Ethnic affirmation and belonging	4.49	(0.68)	3.96	(0.91)	48.32 ***
Ethnic centrality	3.80	(0.78)	3.24	(0.91)	50.82 ***
Family Obligation					
Family respect	4.08	(0.64)	3.92	(0.76)	6.36 *
Future support	3.73	(0.82)	3.45	(0.87)	12.49 **
	N=210		N=249		

[†] p<.10.

* p<.05.

** p<.01.

p<.001

NOTE: One-way analysis of variance was used to compare differences in means. Chi-square tests were used to compare differences in proportions.

Table 5
Effects of Location, Discrimination, and Foreign-born Status on Academic Motivation (N=449)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Importance of Academic Success	Usefulness of Education	Future Value of Education	Intrinsic Value of Education
	b (s.e.)	b (s.e.)	b (s.e.)	b (s.e.)
A. Baseline				
North Carolina vs. Los Angeles	0.00 (0.11)	0.34 (0.12) *	-0.09 (0.07)	0.29 (0.11) *
R ²	0.01	0.10	0.02	0.07
B. Discrimination Experiences				
North Carolina vs. Los Angeles	0.03 (0.11)	0.38 (0.11) **	-0.07 (0.08)	0.32 (0.11) *
Any negative ethnic treatment	-0.10 (0.16)	-0.05 (0.14)	0.03 (0.09)	0.10 (0.13)
Perceived likelihood of discrimination	-0.03 (0.01) *	-0.03 (0.01) *	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.04 (0.02) *
Concern about discrimination	0.04 (0.01) **	0.03 (0.01) **	0.02 (0.01) *	0.05 (0.01) **
R ²	0.05	0.12	0.05	0.09
C. Foreign-Born				
North Carolina vs. Los Angeles	-0.03 (0.10)	0.22 (0.09) *	-0.09 (0.09)	0.08 (0.11)
Foreign-born vs. U.S. born	0.15 (0.10)	0.38 (0.07) ***	0.06 (0.05)	0.59 (0.08) ***
Any negative ethnic treatment	-0.09 (0.16)	-0.04 (0.13)	0.03 (0.09)	0.12 (0.12)
Perceived likelihood of discrimination	-0.03 (0.01) *	-0.03 (0.01) **	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.04 (0.02) *
Concern about discrimination	0.03 (0.01) **	0.03 (0.01) **	0.02 (0.01) *	0.04 (0.01) *
R ²	0.05	0.16	0.05	0.14

† p<.10,
* p<.05,
** p<.01,

p<.001

Note: Regressions include additional controls for students' sex, age, living in a two-parent family, having at least one parent with a high school degree, and an indicator variable for missing values on parent education.

Standard errors are adjusted for clustering at the school-level.

Table 6
Effects of Social Acceptance, Ethnic Identification, and Family Obligations on Academic Motivation (N=449)

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
	Importance of Academic Success		Usefulness of Education		Future Value of Education		Intrinsic Value of Education	
	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)
A. Social Acceptance								
North Carolina vs. Los Angeles	-0.29	(0.11) *	-0.07	(0.12)	-0.19	(0.10)	-0.52	(0.13) **
Foreign-born vs. U.S. born	0.02	(0.10)	0.19	(0.06) **	-0.01	(0.06)	0.41	(0.08) ***
Any negative ethnic treatment	-0.12	(0.12)	-0.08	(0.10)	0.03	(0.07)	0.13	(0.08)
Perceived likelihood of discrimination	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.02	(0.02)
Concern about discrimination	0.03	(0.01) *	0.02	(0.01) *	0.02	(0.01) †	0.03	(0.01) †
Positive School Climate	0.19	(0.05) **	0.32	(0.05) ***	0.14	(0.03) **	0.28	(0.06) ***
Adult School Encouragement	0.05	(0.03)	0.08	(0.02) **	0.06	(0.03) *	0.04	(0.02)
Daily Positive School Experiences	0.02	(0.01) *	0.01	(0.01) †	0.00	(0.01)	0.04	(0.01) **
Any Positive Ethnic Treatment	0.18	(0.09) †	0.23	(0.08) *	0.04	(0.08)	0.23	(0.11)
R ²	0.17		0.38		0.12		0.26	
B. Ethnic Identification								
North Carolina vs. Los Angeles	-0.11	(0.12)	0.14	(0.10)	-0.13	(0.10)	0.03	(0.07)
Foreign-born vs. U.S. born	0.11	(0.10)	0.33	(0.06) ***	0.02	(0.06)	0.55	(0.08) ***
Any negative ethnic treatment	-0.05	(0.14)	0.00	(0.11)	0.06	(0.08)	0.15	(0.11)
Perceived likelihood of discrimination	-0.03	(0.01) *	-0.03	(0.01) **	-0.02	(0.01)	-0.04	(0.02) *
Concern about discrimination	0.03	(0.01) *	0.02	(0.01) *	0.02	(0.01) †	0.04	(0.02) *
Ethnic affirmation and belonging	0.16	(0.08) †	0.19	(0.08) *	0.15	(0.03) ***	0.20	(0.10) †
Ethnic centrality	0.04	(0.06)	0.03	(0.06)	-0.03	(0.04)	-0.07	(0.09)
R ²	0.09		0.20		0.08		0.15	
C. Family Obligation								
North Carolina vs. Los Angeles	-0.10	(0.08)	0.16	(0.09)	-0.13	(0.08)	0.00	(0.11)
Foreign-born vs. U.S. born	0.11	(0.10)	0.34	(0.07) ***	0.04	(0.05)	0.54	(0.07) ***
Any negative ethnic treatment	-0.03	(0.13)	0.01	(0.11)	0.07	(0.08)	0.18	(0.12)
Perceived likelihood of discrimination	-0.02	(0.01) †	-0.02	(0.01) *	-0.02	(0.01)	-0.03	(0.02) †

	(1) Importance of Academic Success		(2) Usefulness of Education		(3) Future Value of Education		(4) Intrinsic Value of Education	
	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)
Concern about discrimination	0.02	(0.01) \ddagger	0.02	(0.01)	0.02	(0.01)	0.03	(0.01) *
Family respect	0.34	(0.05) ***	0.26	(0.04) ***	0.23	(0.05) ***	0.25	(0.10) *
Future support	0.10	(0.06)	0.14	(0.05) *	0.04	(0.04)	0.22	(0.11) \ddagger
R ²	0.20		0.27		0.13		0.21	

\ddagger p<.10,
 * p<.05,
 ** p<.01,
 *** p<.001

Note: Regressions include additional controls for students' sex, age, living in a two-parent family, having at least one parent with a high school degree, and an indicator variable for missing values on parent education. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering at the school-level.

Table 7

Full Regressions on Academic Motivation (N=459)

	Importance of Academic Success		Usefulness of Education		Future Value of Education		Intrinsic Value of Education	
	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)
North Carolina vs. Los Angeles	-0.29 {0.19}	(0.10) *	-0.06 {0.04}	(0.11)	-0.19 {0.15}	(0.09)	* -0.47 {0.20}	(0.13) **
Foreign born vs. U.S. born	0.02 {0.01}	(0.09)	0.18 {0.11}	(0.06) **	-0.02 {0.01}	(0.05)	0.39 {0.16}	(0.08) **
Discrimination								
Perceived likelihood of discrimination	-0.01 {0.06}	(0.01)	-0.01 {0.04}	(0.01)	-0.01 {0.09}	(0.01)	-0.01 {0.05}	(0.02)
Concern about discrimination	0.02 {0.12}	(0.01) †	0.01 {0.06}	(0.01)	0.01 {0.10}	(0.01)	0.02 {0.09}	(0.01) †
Any negative ethnic treatment	-0.06 {0.03}	(0.11)	-0.04 {0.02}	(0.08)	0.07 {0.04}	(0.07)	0.16 {0.05}	(0.10)
Social Acceptance								
Positive school climate	0.12 {0.17}	(0.04) *	0.27 {0.34}	(0.05) ***	0.10 {0.16}	(0.03) **	0.23 {0.20}	(0.05) **
Adult school encouragement	0.04 {0.06}	(0.03)	0.07 {0.10}	(0.02) *	0.05 {0.09}	(0.03) †	0.04 {0.03}	(0.02)
Daily positive school experiences	0.01 {0.13}	(0.01) *	0.01 {0.11}	(0.01)	0.00 {0.03}	(0.01)	0.04 {0.26}	(0.01) **
Any positive ethnic treatment	0.17 {0.10}	(0.10)	0.22 {0.12}	(0.09) *	0.03 {0.02}	(0.07)	0.22 {0.09}	(0.10) †
Ethnic Identification								

	Importance of Academic Success		Usefulness of Education		Future Value of Education		Intrinsic Value of Education	
	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)
Ethnic affirmation and belonging	0.03 {0.03}	(0.07)	0.02 {0.03}	(0.06)	0.06 {0.08}	(0.04)	0.03 {0.02}	(0.08)
Ethnic centrality	0.00 {0.00}	(0.06)	0.00 {0.00}	(0.06)	-0.05 -[-0.07]	(0.05)	-0.12 -[-0.10]	(0.08)
Family Obligation								
Family respect	0.28 {0.27}	(0.05)	0.16 {0.14}	(0.03)	0.19 {0.21}	(0.05)	0.18 {0.11}	(0.10) [†]
Future support	0.07 {0.08}	(0.06)	0.10 {0.10}	(0.05)	0.03 {0.04}	(0.04)	0.18 {0.13}	(0.10) [†]
R ²	0.26		0.43		0.17		0.29	

[†] p<.10,

* p<.05,

** p<.01,

*** p<.001

Note: Regressions include additional controls for students' sex, age, living in a two-parent family, having at least one parent with a high school degree, and an indicator variable for missing values on parent education. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering at the school level. Standardized coefficients (BETAS) are reported in brackets underneath the unstandardized coefficients.