

**Latina/o Students' College-Choice Process: College Information and Decisions in School
Context**

Victor Martinez
Undergraduate Honor Thesis
Department of Sociology
University of California, Davis
One Shields Avenue
Davis, CA 95616

Faculty Advisor: Kerstin Lueck, Ph.D.

Email: vgmartinez@ucdavis.edu
Phone: 562-922-9394

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Context

Abstract

Existing literature on the college application process and decisions of Latina/o students predominantly focuses on the role of social capital: limited assistance from parents (Ceja 2004) and heavy dependence on siblings, family contacts, and school officials (Ceja 2006, Perez & McDonough 2009). Less attention has been paid to the role cultural capital plays in this process. Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 24 Latina and Latino high school seniors from three northern California high schools, this study compliments the social capital story by focusing on the cultural capital provided to these students throughout the college-choice process. I argue that, lacking an abundance of social capital to assist in the college application process, Latina/o students must rely on the *organizational habitus* (McDonough 1997) of schools to access valuable cultural capital. Middle-class high schools with a strong college-going habitus actively supported students' college-choice process with an *active engagement* strategy, making them eligible for and prefer selective four-year universities. The working-class high school, with a weak college-going habitus employed a strategy of *passive engagement*, leading students to have varied post-high school plans ranging from working to attending four-year universities. I also consider how familism, or a need to stay close to one's family, limits the influence of schools' organizational habitus in shaping students' post-high school plans.

INTRODUCTION

Existing research on the college-choice behaviors of students find that various factors, such as race/ethnicity, social-class, generational status, academic performance, and school contexts, serve to structure students' access to and quality of college related information, resources, and ultimately the selection of post-secondary institutions (Gandara 1995, Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee 1997, Paulsen & St. John 2002, Kim 2004, Grodsky & Jones 2007). These processes stratify students by race/ethnicity and social class; Whites, some Asian ethnic groups, and students from middle and higher socioeconomic backgrounds are over represented in the most prestigious and selective universities and Latino, Black, and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are over represented in the least selective colleges, especially two year colleges (Bowen & Bok 1998, Kurlaender 2006). Existing literature on the college-choice process suggests that Latina/o students prepare for and select post-secondary institutions in significantly different ways than other students (Ceja 2006, Martin, Karabel, & Jaquez 2005). Research on Latina and Latino students' low college enrollment highlights limited contacts with those with college related knowledge, heavy dependence on school personnel, and a high likelihood of choosing the least selective colleges due to familism.

Increasing the higher education participation rates of Latina/os has increasingly become a significant policy concern. This is due in part by the continuing stratification in postsecondary attendance by socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity, where in California Latina/os and other minorities are underrepresented in the top tier Universities of California and over represented at the low tier community colleges (Moore & Shulock 2009)¹. Latinos only make up 13%, 23%, and 30% of students attending University of California (UC), California State University (CSU),

¹ California's public higher education system has a clear hierarchy consisting of the University of California, then the California State University, and the California Community Colleges.

Latina/o College-Choice Process

and California Community College respectively (Moore & Shulock 2009) and among those Latinos who graduate high school and attend college, 75% go directly to community college (Gándara & Contreras 2009). The college attendance rate of Latina/os is of considerable importance as they are the largest growing demographic group in the United States (U.S. Census 2001), yet their college-going population has not kept pace (Hurtado 2002). As the Latino population continues to grow their educational attainment will be of key importance not only to themselves but to the national and state economic well being (Johnson & Sengupta 2009).

Though the literature on the Latina/o college-choice process has grown in recent years, there is still much to be learned about their college behaviors. Most of the research on the Latina/o population within the college-choice literature is quantitative (Kurleander 2006, Person & Rosenbaum 2006), while qualitative research predominantly focuses on the Latina experience (Gandara 1982, Ceja 2001). Research also documents the preferences of Latina/o students in college choices, but we do not know much about *why* these preferences are favored.

How do Latina/o students make decisions about where to go to college and what role do schools play in this process? This study adds to the literature of the Latina/o college-choice by qualitatively investigating the type of college information Latina/o students gain from schools and their college application and attendance decisions. I ground students' college-choice decisions in their school context to demonstrate how schools can shape college-going behaviors and preferences, an aspect that has largely been overlooked in the Latina/o college-choice literature. I argue that schools' *organizational habitus* (McDonough 1997) transmit varying degrees of knowledge, habits, and preferences to Latina/o students as they make post-high school decisions. This enables us to see how cultural capital enhances our understanding of the college decisions of Latina/o students.

Latina/o College-Choice Process

This paper first reviews the existing literature on the college-choice process of Latina/o students and the theoretical framework. I then present my methods of data collection and data analysis. My findings section discusses the college information available to first-generation college-bound Latina/o students in middle-class high schools, available college information in a working-class high school, and familism and college choices. The study shows that schools' *organizational habitus* and their *active engagement* or *passive engagement* approach to the college application process shapes Latina/o students' college choices. Additionally, familism limits the influence of schools' *organizational habitus* in shaping students' post-high school plans.

COLLEGE INFORMATION AND DECISIONS

The Role of Family

Parents are the most influential sources with regards to college information (Cabrera & La Nasa 2000), but non-college educated parents are often less able to provide college information and assistance compared to college educated parents (Ceja 2004; 2006, Choy 2001, McDonough 1997). Ceja's (2006) work shows that the ability to help their children in the college choice process is particularly limited for Mexican parents who lack knowledge of the U.S. higher education system. Despite a high value placed on education (Ceja 2004, Gandara 1995, Perez 1999) these parents cannot explain the application and admission process itself. This inability to act as a college resource prevents them from assisting their children.

Since parents' effort in helping their children in the college process is limited, Latina and Latino students rely heavily on other familial contacts such as siblings, friends, and extended family. Older siblings who have prior college experience serve as important sources of information for Latino/as (Perez & McDonough 2008, Ceja 2006). Siblings share their

Latina/o College-Choice Process

experiences of the college choice process and can create a pathway or expectation of college-going for their younger siblings (Ceja 2006). Relatives and family friends may also provide insight about certain colleges that can enable Latina/o students' college decisions (Perez & McDonough 2008). Perez and McDonough investigate Latina and Latino students' college selection process using a chain migration analysis and conclude students choose an institution if there is a support network, such as friends or relatives, already in place. This finding is of particular interest due to research that has shown the significance of familism in college-going behavior (Desmond & Turley 2009) and sheds some light on the possible reasons for these students' low college enrollment.

Familism can be defined as a social pattern whereby individual interests, decisions, and actions are conditioned by a network of relatives thought to take priority over the individual (Steidel & Contreras 2003). This social pattern can be expressed in dispositions, values, and beliefs that prioritize the welfare of the family. It can manifest itself in everyday actions or major decisions informed by one's attachment to family ties (Steidel & Contreras 2003). Focusing on familism, Desmond and Turley (2009) explore how this disposition may help in understanding college application patterns.

Desmond and Turley's (2009) study, using data from the Texas Higher Education Opportunity Project, reveals significant racial/ethnic gaps with regards to college applications due to students' preferences to living at home during college. An increased importance placed on living at home significantly decreases the chances of applying to college, especially selective institutions. Desmond and Turley also find that Latina/os are most likely to report that it is important to live at home than any other racial/ethnic group. This is true for students with college-educated and non-college educated parents. Taking into account the preference to stay at

Latina/o College-Choice Process

home significantly reduces the Hispanic-white gap in applying to any college and a four-year college, and it makes the gap in applying to a selective college disappear. This study suggests that Latina/o students' college selection behaviors may be explained by cultural dispositions irrespective of social class.

Social Class Differences

Though Desmond and Turley's analysis suggested no social class differences in how Latina and Latino students select colleges, other research indicates that there are significant differences in how students of varying social classes gain college information and choose colleges. Using Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, both Lareau's (Lareau & Weininger 2008) and McDonough's (1997) work shows that there are significant social class differences in how parents involve themselves in their students' college search. Middle-class parents are heavily involved in the preparation and selection of college applications and schools. These parents attend college tours with their children and suggest certain schools to which to apply (Lareau & Weininger 2008, McDonough 1997). Working-class parents have their children proceed through college decisions and applications independently and when help is needed these students and parents rely on school agents (Lareau & Weininger 2008). This research has focused on White and African-American students, but no research on class differences among Latino families has been done. When taking this into account, Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital can prove fruitful in analyzing how Latina and Latino students go about their college preparation and would lend further insight to these students' college-going behaviors.

The Role of Schools

Researchers of Latina/o students' college-choice process have paid less attention to how organizational context plays a role in the students' behaviors. Yet other scholars (Alwin & Otto

Latina/o College-Choice Process

1977, Boyle 1966, Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore 1982) have given much attention to understanding the relationship between high schools and college enrollment in general. Findings from these studies confirm that a high school's organizational characteristics (norms, formal structures) shape college enrollment. This research further suggests that high schools create distinct approaches to college transitions (Alexander and Eckland 1977, Falsey and Heyns 1984, McDonough 1997). McDonough (1997) demonstrates that schools create disparate approaches in facilitating college transitions through what she calls "*organizational habitus*." She argues that organizational habitus -the formal structures and norms that work together to create predispositions towards certain colleges and college resources- affects students' college selections. Her work finds class differences in how high schools structure college resources and information. Middle and upper middle class high schools offer abundant college resources with a focus on prestigious schools; working class high schools have limited college resources, which leads to less favorable outcomes for working-class students.

Hill (2009) identifies the strategies that high schools use to structure their college resources, and the differing effects this has on students based on race/ethnicity. She identifies three distinct "college-linking" strategies that high schools employ to facilitate college transitions: traditional, clearinghouse, and brokering. She finds that the clearinghouse strategy, which is marked by good college resources but limited commitment to facilitating equitable access to these resources, results in disparate effects on college enrollment based on students' ethnic/racial characteristics. The results suggest that Latino students in schools using a clearinghouse strategy are more likely to forgo college enrollment than to enroll in a two-year school. Overall, high schools that lack a commitment to actively and equitably facilitate college resources have negative implications for Latino students' post-secondary outcomes.

Latina/o College-Choice Process

Wolniak and Engberg (2007) show how high schools' connections to networks of colleges also influence students' college matriculation. Attending a high school with an established connection to a particular institution increases the probability that a student will attend that institution. The results illuminate how high school-college networks can determine students' pathways to college. High schools with such networks can disadvantage students by narrowing students' exposure to a limited number of colleges, thereby structuring their post-secondary choices.

Latina/o students are often dependent on school resources for their college information (Cabrera & LaNasa 2001, Gandara 1995). We would therefore expect school contexts to have an effect on the college information these students receive and the college choices they make. This study focuses on the college information available to first-generation, college bound Latina/o students. I also argue that Latina/o students' college-choice decisions are not solely due to their disposition to familism, which research seems to suggest, but are shaped by school context as well.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cultural capital and *habitus* have been used extensively by educational researchers and sociologists to explain processes such as educational attainment, though not to Latina/o college-choice processes and decisions. Cultural capital consists of knowledge, habits, and tastes transmitted from parents to children that can be exchanged for social advantage and reproduce class status and privilege across generations (Bourdieu 1986). The value of cultural capital varies along class lines. Middle and upper-class families hold and transmit the most valued type of cultural capital; this set of knowledge, habits, and tastes enjoy institutional legitimization and support, especially in schools (Bourdieu 1986, Carter 2005). Cultural capital links family

Latina/o College-Choice Process

background and academic outcomes as Middle-class families possess the skills necessary to acquire the capital in schools (Bourdieu 1986, Lareau 2003). There are three ways in which cultural capital has its lasting effects, through the embodied state, objectified state, and the institutionalized state.

Embodied cultural capital is seen in one's presentation of self, where he/she is socialized to give certain performances that reflect and signal class status. This transmission of culture and traditions occurs over time through family socialization (Bourdieu 1986). Objectified cultural capital is the material manifestation of cultural goods, such as books, paintings, and artifacts. Institutionalized cultural capital includes educational credentials allocated by schools. These credentials allow for the transaction of cultural capital for monetary gains, as it is supposed to signal one's appropriation of certain cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986).

Bourdieu (1984) uses the concept of habitus to account for the acquisition and embodiment of cultural capital. Habitus includes aspirations, expectations, perceptions, and dispositions shaped by social structures such as class. The process of internalizing the various cultural signals and ideas is what makes it seem so "natural" for children of middle and upper classes to further their academic careers and children of working and lower classes to pursue other avenues besides schooling.

The United State's higher education system consists of over 4,000 colleges and universities, each with their own prerequisites, applications, and deadlines for admittance². Middle-class students and parents have turned to strategic plans and use of cultural resources to help secure their spot in one of the many highly competitive and prestigious universities (McDonough 1994). However, first generation Latina/o students do not have the necessary

² For a more thorough overview of the complexities of the U.S. higher education admission requirements see Lareau & Weininger 2008.

Latina/o College-Choice Process

cultural resources to guide them through the college application process. Using Bourdieu's concepts of *cultural capital* and *habitus* we can investigate how students go about the college-choice process and decide their post-secondary plans, where first generation college going students' lack of institutionally valued cultural capital leads them to be vulnerable to schools' college resources, and how their habitus leads them to apply to universities close to home.

Next I discuss methods and data; then I discuss the role of cultural capital in my schools. I argue, lacking an abundance of social capital to assist in the college application process, Latina/o students must rely on the organizational habitus of schools to access valuable cultural capital. Students' sensibility to familism, or a need to stay close to one's family, limits the influence of schools' organizational habitus in shaping students' post-high school plans.

DATA AND METHODS

Methods

This study draws from qualitative data consisting of structured, unstructured interviews, and field observations from a sample of 24 Latina and Latino high school seniors from three northern California high schools. School counselors from each high school and one teacher were also interviewed. Advantage High School³ and Distinguished High School are located in middle class neighborhoods, and most students in attendance were middle or upper class. Community High is located within a predominantly working class neighborhood with a majority student population from a low socioeconomic background. These schools were chosen in part to understand students' college-choice decisions within different social class contexts.

Students from Advantage and Distinguished High School were selected based on their school counselors' and teacher recommendation or their participation in the college prep

³ All schools, names, and cities are pseudonyms in order to protect my participants.

Latina/o College-Choice Process

program Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). Community High school students were randomly chosen by me from a list, provided by the school counselor, of Latina/o students in their last year of high school. All students were further screened and chosen based on their parents' educational background and their plans to go on to some post-secondary education. The majority of the students were the first to go to college in their family, though four students had parents with some college experience. Students interviewed from the two middle-class high schools were a part of the AVID program, so I do not have interviews with Latina/o students outside of the program. My findings are thus limited to students involved in the program; I return to this point in my conclusion section.

Students from Distinguished High were interviewed privately in their schools' college resource room during their lunch breaks. Advantage High students were interviewed privately during their AVID class in one of the school computer labs. Community High students were interviewed privately in their school's computer and resource room during their lunch break and their recreation class. The one teacher interview was conducted during school hours in her own classroom. Informal interviews were also conducted with school counselors throughout the study during regular school hours.

Interview questions were semi-structured to allow participants to share their insights, but questions were structured enough to allow for cross comparison between participants. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. In addition to interviews, observations were also conducted at various times of the research project. I noted visible college related resources available throughout the schools, and captured descriptions of school counselors' office and teachers' classrooms. Attention was paid to visible signs of a college-going culture.

Latina/o College-Choice Process

Due to the nature of qualitative and ethnographic research, which leads to small sample sizes, I cannot make broad generalizations based on this study alone. This study is meant to explore the college-choice process, in-depth, and the decisions of 24 Latina and Latino students from these three specific schools. My findings, however, should be taken as exploratory in order to view the social processes that occur between Latina/o students and schools during their college-choice process.

The data were analyzed through focused coding in order to understand students' various decisions in relation to cultural capital and habitus. I paid attention to recurring patterns and themes that emerged from the reported experiences of students, teacher, and school counselors. The patterns were then compared across social class categories.

Advantage High

Advantage High School is located in an upper-middle class neighborhood named Lawrence. The city is pegged as one of the most educated cities in the United States due to its large percentage of residents with a graduate degree. Lawrence's adult population boasts a 60 percent four year college degree attainment rate while 80 percent have at least one year of college training. Lawrence has also received many accolades for its high achieving schools that consistently rank in the top percentile on California's standardized tests.

Advantage High describes itself as having a "reputation for academic excellence and an emphasis on preparation for college", a claim backed by the particularly high college enrollment rates of graduates. About 80% of students from Advantage High go on to four year universities twice the average rate for California public high schools and approximately 97 percent of seniors enroll in some kind of postsecondary education after graduation. The high college-going rate is aided in part by the fact that the high school employs six full-time guidance counselors, a

Latina/o College-Choice Process

scholarship and financial aid personnel, a college resource center, college entrance programs such as AVID, and an abundance of advanced placement courses.

Distinguished High

Distinguished High is located in the middle-class community of River City. River City prides itself for being a family-oriented community where “families put down roots”. The city highlights the fact their school district has received many state and national awards such as the national blue ribbon school award. Most recently, Distinguished High was named a 2009 California distinguished school.

Unlike Advantage High, Distinguished High does not have a particularly high four-year college enrollment rate. Martha, Distinguished High’s college and career counselor, suggested that their placement rate is around 30 percent, but the majority of graduates do go on to some type of postsecondary education. But Distinguish High shares important similarities with Advantage High. It is fully resourced with four guidance counselors, a college and career counselor, a college resource room designated specifically for college informational books, and college entrance programs such as AVID.

Community High

Community High School is a small school located in a rural, agricultural city serving 370 students, 51 percent of which is Latina/o. The high school has a 52.5 percent student population on free and reduced lunch program. The high school offers a limited number of advanced placement and honor courses, provides vocational courses, and employs one full-time guidance counselor, a part-time counselor, and a career technician. The school has little signs of a comprehensive college designated area; they have a joint computer/college and career center with sparse college informational resources. Community High notes that 85 percent of their

Latina/o College-Choice Process

students go on to some type of postsecondary school while 20 percent of them went on to four year colleges. The remaining 15 percent of students go on to join the military or vocational training. The school works with university sponsored college preparatory programs, like Upward Bound and TalentSearch, which provide college counseling to a limited amount of students.

FINDINGS

Gaining College Information

To maneuver through the highly complex application process of the higher education system Latina/o students attending middle-class high schools were actively given most of their college information from school resources, which I conceptualize as *active engagement*. Latina/o students attending the working-class high school were not given much college information, a strategy of *passive engagement*. The strategies had effects on students' post-secondary plans. Students' familial ties further constrained their post-secondary options.

Middle-class schools implemented strategies characterized by *active engagement* in helping their Latina/o students through the college-choice process. This strategy consisted of intervening early in Latina/o students' schooling by providing tutoring, class time for studying, announcing important deadlines for tests and applications, instructing students on what makes a good college applicant, and showing them how to apply to colleges. The schools actively participated in these students college preparation, application, and decision process by giving them information and knowledge that they would not have been able to receive from their parents. All of the participants had parents who had not gone or finished a college degree and could not give their students college information; these students reported getting a majority of their information from school personnel.

Latina/o College-Choice Process

Ms. Harper, a History teacher and coordinator of the AVID program at Advantage High, believed the program helps the Latina/o students feel empowered and proactive when it comes to thinking about going to and preparing for college. The program seeks to provide knowledge, habits, and skills that first generation college-going Latina/os do not have access to, but are commonly shared by the middle-class students who attended Advantage High. In my interview with Ms. Harper she pressed the idea that the Latina/o students in the AVID program were better prepared for college than the average Advantage High student. She believed most of the other students, who were white and middle-class, were going to be at a disadvantage once they left high school because most of their parents dealt with all their academic problems. In helping these students fulfill Latina/o college aspirations, the school begins early in preparing students in a variety of ways. This included tutoring and general strategies of good study habits to help students do well in classes, as the school believed students' performance in classes are important to their college matriculation. When I asked Ms. Harper how they helped students regarding college, she said:

The AVID class helps them in those higher level classes with the tutorials. Um, twice a week we bring students from [a University of California campus] and have them work with the kids in things like higher level math classes, their AP classes, to give them that support and that tutoring.

What type of information do the tutorials help with?

All [the tutorials] are based around the idea that students themselves need to find out what questions they have, what things they don't understand, and pin point how to get the answer to those. So it's sort of this active learning, higher order thinking skills that we teach them... more philosophical and analytical. So that's one component, and the other component is self advocacy. When you don't understand something or when you're behind, if you've missed school, or you've done poorly on a test, not to just like sit back and let it slide and let it build into a huge problem, but to go into the teacher, to access their office hours, to show up and make sure everybody knows that you are interested as a student. It's almost like a behavioral training on how to be a, um, an engaged student.

Latina/o College-Choice Process

In Bourdieu's terms, Advantage High's habitus led it to intervene early in the college preparation of potential first generation college students to ensure their preparation for four-year universities. This intervention consisted of teaching them how to ask "more philosophical and analytical questions" and how to proactively approach teachers for help. It also includes embodied cultural capital, like teaching students "how to sit in class", "how to sit up", "how to make a positive impression on people". By actively giving Latina/o students cultural knowledge of how to act like an "engaged student", Advantage High hopes to prepare them to succeed in college. I heard similar sentiments expressed at Distinguished High. These middle class schools drew from their cultural resources to help their students academically, which they know is important for college admittance. The schools taught and gave students cultural capital in the form of knowledge of how to act and think a certain way to get the information they needed.

In addition to preparing students academically for college, Advantage and Distinguish High actively engaged in helping Latina/o students through the college application process. The schools set time aside to fill out the applications with students, read and edit application essays, and teach them to study for the SAT exams. School officials constantly mentioned that college admittance was increasingly becoming more selective, so their emphases on these requirements were for the purposes of increasing students' chances of getting admitted. These interventions had real effects on students' approach to the application process. Mario is a first-generation college hopeful who aspires to be a computer engineer. Though he attends Advantage High, a predominantly white middle class school, he and his parents live in a duplex which is a part of a low income migrant housing program. Both his parents work at a major soup company's warehouse. His mother does assembly line work and his father works in waste disposal. Mario's parent's limited knowledge of college information hindered their ability to provide him specific

Latina/o College-Choice Process

support, because of this his school served as his primary source of college information. Mario explains that the AVID class helped him prepare for the SATs and the application process, information that his parents could not provide since they did not go to college, saying:

In AVID class we got to have, um, books, the SAT books and all that stuff. Sometimes we worked on it in class and then we went over it as a class.

When did you start doing that?

Uhh, ever since we started AVID... I started, I want to say, my tenth grade year and last year.

What other stuff did you do in the class?

Sometimes we would pick a subject and sometimes, uh, she wrote an essay. She gave us a topic and we had to write about, you know, the topic. And then you would turn it in and she would give you a grade like if they were, the actual people were grading them, the essay. And then she would give you like a score from one to five to see how good you were.

The AVID class devotes a considerable amount of time preparing the students for the SAT because school officials know that students score on the test would have an impact on their chances of being admitted. The schools' *active engagement* prepares their students for the test by providing books with practice questions and tests and then reviewing them as a class. Teachers also felt it necessary to practice the writing portion of the SAT test. Teachers sometimes recreate an SAT-style scenario where students write a response paper in a limited amount of time. They are then given feedback to improve their score on the actual test. Many of the students found it extremely helpful that this was done during class time as they did not always prepare on their own.

Jasmine, for example had enrolled in Distinguished High after moving from another city in the local area. She described the change of schools as being difficult; the move created problems in her early years including becoming disinterested in her studies. After being pushed

Latina/o College-Choice Process

by her AVID teacher, Jasmine was working towards attending a four-year university, though she only had vague knowledge about the 4-year college requirements. After admitting that she had taken the SAT once already, but felt that she did not do well, she explains:

I really didn't do anything [to prepare]. I was doing other stuff. (Chuckles.)

How many times did you take it?

Just once, I had to take it over but I missed it. I'm taking my ACT in December; I'm taking both of them.

Why did you decide to take both of them?

I don't know, I'm in AVID and they told me it's better to take both of them, just to see which one you get higher on.

Jasmine's hesitancy to study for the SAT was not uncommon among my participants, nor was her lack of understanding regarding why she was taking both the SAT and ACT. Her situation, one shared by other Latina/os I interviewed, shows how schools' intervention in students' college preparation process provided them with information about how to best market oneself to colleges, in this instance taking a variety of tests to gain a higher score. Some students were unaware of the differences between the SAT and ACT and did not bother to take both. But those who were encouraged to take both the exams had more chances to gain higher scores. Middle class schools made concerted efforts to help students put their best face forward, in regards to test scores, in order to be competitive in applying to colleges.

My middle class schools also helped students by setting time aside to review applications and approving them before submission. David, a bright middle-class student whose parents both started college but did not finish, aspired to be an engineer. He explains how both the AVID class and the school helped him navigate the application process.

So how is the application process so far?

Latina/o College-Choice Process

Uhhh, the CSUs are easy, you just do one and the rest of them are, you're done. And I haven't started the UC yet. So, I've written the essays though, cause we do them in English. It helps doing them in class... I think all the English classes write the essays.

So you already did the CSU application?

Yeah.

Did you do that in class also?

In AVID we did it... And then, uhh, like [our AVID teacher] would review it and make sure it's all good to submit it.

How much time do you guys dedicate to talking about college stuff?

Uhm, we go to the computer lab like two times a week to look up college stuff. So, you would count that as, so maybe... 2 or 3 days a week.

David found it easy to accomplish these goals, submitting applications and writing college essays, because both the AVID class and his English class provided time to help students complete the application itself and essay questions that were also needed as the following interview excerpt shows. David was aided by the school in writing college essays, something done for all senior students, which ensured that their essays were done for submission. The AVID and English teachers provided editing and feedback on the students' essays in order to fine tune their writing and have the best possible essay to submit to colleges. By providing time for writing college essays in class, Distinguish High ensured that students who may have not done this on their own had them done in order to send them off.

Guiding students through various college websites was a big part of preparing Latina/o students, as David described. It helped students navigate through different websites to find college related information and make informed college decisions. The large amount of time used for internet searches gave them the knowledge to then do searches on their own, as Natalie, who hopes to go to a four year college with her sister and cousin states:

Latina/o College-Choice Process

[Our AVID teacher] tells us what websites to go on to and like for other stuff like financial aid and scholarships and stuff like that... Without [the websites] I would probably not get all that information.

What other resources did you use for information?

Like, College Board. It gives you all the facts about that school and then what their ranks are and admissions. All that kind of stuff, I used that to determine if I could get in or not.

Do a lot of people use that?

Yeah, like AVID is major on College Board and California Colleges.

Use of the internet, particularly college assistant websites like College Board, was common among all interviewees at Advantage and Distinguished High School. Many of the students gave instances of how they “googled” certain schools and college programs. Students would also go home and do internet searches on their own to find out information about schools of interest. The knowledge of how to navigate online resources is valuable capital for these students. Simply having access to Internet resources is not enough to gain college information, as many students and parents are not knowledgeable at efficiently navigating college information websites (Venegas 2006). This naturally seeming act of conducting web searches for information was enabled by the fact that the schools readily provided students structured time to do Internet searches during school hours. The time spent in school using online resources made it “natural” for students to use internet searches to gain college information on their own time.

Since Latina/o students’ parents did not have the cultural resources to draw from and provide the capital necessary to navigate the complex higher education process students had to rely on their schools for capital. Thus far I have presented the quality of college related information available and given to the Latina/o students in the middle-class schools. The acts that I conceptualize as *active engagement* coupled with the *organizational habitus* of middle-class schools, which normalized the expectation of attending a 4-year college, gave students the

Latina/o College-Choice Process

necessary cultural capital to carefully conduct, evaluate, and finish the college application process. Middle-class schools habitus influenced student decisions to apply to four-year universities while the school's dissemination of cultural capital led them to be eligible to apply. In the next section I elaborate on how the direct participation of schools in the college application process shaped students' application behaviors.

“It’s Like, OH, You’re Smart”: College Choices, Habitus, and School Effects

School officials from Advantage and Distinguished High made it clear that these Latina/o students were expected to go on to four-year universities, yet Latina/o students' habitus limited the influence of schools' organizational habitus in shaping students' post-high school plans. Teachers, counselors, and other college prep staff were aware of the advantages of going to a four year versus 2-year or vocational schools. The teacher and school counselors I interviewed saw 2-year institutions as a trap; very few students actually transfer to four-year colleges. Middle class schools not only worked to make Latina/o students eligible for four-year colleges, but advised them on how to go about applying specifically for four-year colleges.

The process of choosing which colleges to apply to was methodical. Students were instructed by their teacher to apply to five colleges and universities: one “safety school”, three “target” schools, and one “reach” school. Selections were based on grade point average, high school courses, and SAT scores, though other factors were also considered. Safety schools are universities assumed to be more or less guaranteed admission. Target schools are universities where student's academic record would make them competitive applicants. Reach schools are universities that would be significantly more competitive to be admitted into and often represented students' “dream school”. School officials hoped this method would ensure that students gain admittance to as many four-year colleges as possible. For most of these students

Latina/o College-Choice Process

the California State Universities acted as both their safety schools and their target schools. The University of California (UC) schools were seen as reach schools; the acceptance rate to UCs has been declining making them more selective. All students in my sample, who were attending middle-class schools, applied to or planned to apply to four-year universities. For many this included a University of California campus. Students' four-year college choices were supported by the AVID teachers and school counselors, whom intervened in students' decisions if they were seen as straying from the four-year college track. For example, Jasmine received several Ds due to her tough transition to a new high school. Coupled with perceived low support from her family, she reconsidered trying to get into a four-year university.

[My Parents] want me to get educated, but they don't really care if I stay here in... a community college or a four-year [university]. They don't care.... They didn't go to school; they only went to elementary. My older sisters don't care either. They think it's a waste of time. They say that you can get a good job even though you don't go to a four year.

... I know they want me to, they say they want me to get educated and do something with my life, but then when I tell them, like... when I told them I wasn't applying they were just like "Oh, ok." And then why I told them I did apply they were like "o.k. good," but they didn't like, "*Oh*," they didn't really care, like "oh whatever." [Emphasis in original transcript]

Her plans quickly changed once she met with her AVID teacher, who pushed her to apply to universities.

Well, like... at first I wasn't going to apply because my parents couldn't do anything and they didn't care that I was applying. I told [my parents] and they didn't really care, and [my AVID teacher] was pushing me to do it, and she was the one that got me to apply. And then she went over it [the application] and everything to [sic] me.

Jasmine was first turned off from applying to four-year colleges because the obstacles seemed too overwhelming: she had to retake several courses during her last year of high school, which meant having no lunch period, and also go through the college-choice process with little perceived support and tangible help from her family. If it were not for her AVID teacher pushing

Latina/o College-Choice Process

her to apply to four-year colleges and providing her with one-on-one attention, including suggesting re-taking classes to become eligible, Jasmine would have not applied.

School counselors persistently encouraged students, like Araceli, to apply to four-year colleges if eligible to do so. Araceli was born in Mexico and migrated to the U.S. with her parents and siblings when she was a child. Her childhood dream was to go into medicine; she wanted to be a doctor. But after realizing this could take 8 years she decided to go into nursing, a similar job that could be reached in less time. Early in the application process she considered attending a local community college, but after meeting with her counselor she was persuaded to apply to four year universities.

I wanted to go to the community college first... I thought it was going to be better to take the basic classes at [community college] and then transfer to a university.

What do you mean by better?

It was going to take less time and it was going to cost less... and then the counselor talked to me and convinced me to apply to colleges, and then that's when I started researching [nursing programs].

Araceli had the necessary grades to go onto a four-year university and her school counselor believed she should apply. Her plan of saving money by going to a two-year school and then transferring-a common path for many students-was discouraged by her Advantage High school counselor. The counselor convinced Araceli that a four-year college was the best option for pursuing a career in nursing. This prompted Araceli to ask for information about the “best” programs in nursing and led her to apply to several California State Universities with well known nursing programs. Though she was persuaded to apply to four-year universities, specifically universities with “good” nursing programs, Araceli also wanted to stay close to home. When asked why this was important she told me:

Latina/o College-Choice Process

I don't know, I just want don't want to be too far from my family. Yeah, I'm close to my family... because I'm like the smallest one [of the family].

... My parents want me to stay close so that way I don't have to pay that much money, like I can live with my parents... If I stay in Sac State I'm probably going [to commute].

When Araceli was choosing colleges to apply to she hesitated about going too far from her family. Her habitus, which is partly informed by family ties, shaped her final college choices. The sense of security that her parents and siblings offered was important to her. She only expressed an interest in going to colleges further away from home if a friend would also be attending. Her balancing of wanting to attend a "good" nursing program at a four-year college and her need to stay close to her family led Araceli to apply to three nearby CSUs and a nearby UC. These colleges were all close enough to her family for Araceli, but she stated that she preferred the state school closest to her family. The Latina/o students in the middle-class high schools balanced their expectation of going to a four-year university with their need to stay close to their family, so that students applied to four year universities but those that were closest to home.

Middle-class highs schools' college emphasis had significant impact on Latina/o students' decisions. Programs were offered throughout the year to help students think about the variety of available four year institutions. Eric, a student looking to go to Art school, spoke about the college representatives that often visited his high school. It was during one of these college information sessions that he became interested in enrolling at The Academy of Art in San Francisco. The school recruiters prompted him to begin courses before enrolling to earn college units ahead of time. Eric explains that attending the school prior to enrolling was helpful to him; he received personalized attention and information from the professor.

When I went to go to take a pre-college class in the Academy of Art University, after every class I would stay a little longer than the other students for [sic] I can talk to my

Latina/o College-Choice Process

teacher. He advised me to come to the art school if I really wanted to... He told me to be successful I had to focus and concentrate on what I'm doing. Even though it is art school, he said that it is a lot of hard work. And to get your money's worth that I should learn as much from my teachers.

Eric's decision to attend the Art Academy in San Francisco was made after considering only one other Art academy. Both schools were fairly close to his family's residence, so he felt comfortable attending both of them and did not consider any colleges outside of the general area. College information sessions were abundant at my middle-class schools and were attended by many of the students I interviewed. The visits from college representatives helped shape students' attitudes about their college preparatory behaviors. Some participants even considered and/or applied to out of state universities after attending the programs.

Overall, Advantage and Distinguished High students from my sample applied to and aspired to attend four-year universities. Students hoped to attend a University of California campus, UCs having a reputation for being some of the "best" colleges in California. These high schools supported and furthered students' desires for selective universities in very direct ways which included an overall "college-going" culture. The students' college decisions, however, were balanced by their habitus, or disposition to stay close to their family. Students applied to universities considered good schools (particularly 4-year universities and University of California) that were close enough in proximity to their families that they felt comfortable.

"I Create My own Destiny": Working-Class College Information

Community High School, situated in a working-class neighborhood, provided little college specific information to their Latina/o students; limiting their access to valuable cultural capital. I conceptualize their appropriation of college information as *passive engagement*, a strategy marked by limited direct intervention, scarce college information, and frayed connections between students and school personnel limiting college information. The school

Latina/o College-Choice Process

mostly saw it necessary to provide capital to students during the submission process, which greatly limited students' post-secondary options. Community High School's habitus, of an absence of college information and active intervention by school officials, meant students relied on their own cultural repertoires for post-high school planning; this lead students to leave college planning and applications until late in the school year.

Community High had few signs of a "college-going" habitus (McDonough 1997). The campus had a college and computer resource room, a school counselor, and a career technician that served as their main channels for college information. The college and computer resource room had little visible college information available. One three-shelved bookcase along a single wall contained all of the college and career workbooks, catalogs, pamphlets, and flyers. Five college-related brochures were laid out on the bookcase and only one focused on four-year universities. The others were brochures for local community colleges and available vocational programs. There were approximately 20 non-college brochures and flyers available for programs like the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, California highway patrol, and an automobile technical school. The computer mouse pads were printed with a U.S. Army design. A number of course catalogs from various colleges and universities were scattered across the bottom shelf in no particular order, though they did not appear to be current or kept up by anyone on a regular basis. I rarely saw students use any of the information available in the room during my visits. The only occasion I witnessed was two young men stopping to read a U.S. Army pamphlet and setting it back down.

In addition to scarce college information, Latina/o students reported receiving little to no college related information from the school's staff before their senior year of high school. Only one student noted receiving college information during her sophomore year. Leticia approached

Latina/o College-Choice Process

Ms. Baker, the school's career technician, after her mother had been in an automobile accident that left her needing physical therapy. The student became interested in pursuing one of the careers that had helped her mom recuperate. Leticia had an easier time approaching Mrs. Baker in the early years of high school than most Latina/o students. Her older brother had been close to the career technician in high school, and had already introduced them. For many students, help often came from the career technician during the application submission process. Students received help on their applications when they were confused, and were at times called in by Ms. Baker to finish the applications. Students seemed happy to receive this type of assistance, describing Ms. Baker as friendly, comfortable to talk to, and generally very helpful. Although, this direct assistance in filling out applications was not seen by students anytime before the college application process began. Ms. Baker told me the school did the "best they could" given the resources they had available to disseminate college information. Their main tool was a billboard where they would post various information, including college application deadlines and financial aid information. During my last visit at Community, High Ms. Coleen, the head school counselor, was preparing to do a college workshop for parents and students later that night. This was a new program that the counseling office had started one year prior. Ms. Coleen had a power point presentation on the various post high school pathways available to students. This presentation was titled "I Create My Own Destiny" and overviewed high school graduation requirements, 2-year colleges, vocational schooling, 4-year universities, and issues with regards to the job market; indicative of the school's habitus of broad post-high school options deemed acceptable.

My students also had frayed ties with teachers and the school counselor; perceptions of untrustworthiness, unsympathetic counseling, and ambivalence towards school personnel's roles

Latina/o College-Choice Process

led students to avoid key agents of college information. Leticia, the student who had received prior help in choosing her career path from Ms. Baker, did not approach the head counselor for any college information. When asked why, she hesitantly stated:

Well, like, my sophomore year I was going to apply to something and she [Ms. Coleen] made a comment and I took offense to it... she said “you have to be smart to apply there.” And basically I don’t think a head counselor should say that, should *ever* say that. And this year so many people have gone to the alternative high school... she didn’t give them the chance to take an online class, she just straight up booted them out. And... She didn’t let me drop a class because I wanted to take a more important one. She didn’t let my friend drop honors English to take regular English because math wasn’t as important as English I guess. And just dumb reasons.

Leticia had approached Ms. Coleen to apply to a program that interested her, but the counselor’s negative response led Leticia to break any future contact. It was clear that two years later, Leticia did not feel comfortable nor did she want to talk to the counselor about anything. She explained that “not a lot of people like [Ms. Coleen]” and that Ms. Baker is much more welcoming to talk to. This lack of connection to a key college preparatory gate keeper limited students’ access to college information that could facilitate the application process. Many students I interviewed described negative experiences with the school counselor. Javier, who aspires to be an orthopedic surgeon, echoed Leticia’s sentiments.

... She [Ms. Coleen] always talks down to people. Like to [my friend], she told him that he’s not smart enough to get into certain schools and she was like telling him to not even bother applying. So yeah, [Ms. Baker] is all like, “Oh yeah, just apply to it. Just see if you get in.” She actually tries to motivate you to do something you don’t think you can do and [Ms. Coleen] doesn’t.

Instances of bad experiences spread through the student population, so when I asked students about their relationship with the school counselor they noted that they “had heard stuff”. In explaining why she did not speak with the school counselor, one student admitted she was not entirely sure “what she [Ms. Coleen] did”, emphasizing the fact that she did not observe Ms. Coleen perform typical school counselor duties like being available to talk to students. Though I

Latina/o College-Choice Process

do not know the extent to which these stories reflect Ms. Coleen's behavior, the perceptions were real, impacting students' attitudes towards their school counselor. She was not seen as a safe and reliable person for help, leading students to often avoid going to ask questions. More importantly, since Ms. Coleen was one of only two college information resources available to a lot of the students, the frayed ties and negative perceptions were detrimental to the college information available to Latina/os.

The lack of readily available information and help from the school counselor was coupled with a limited view of teachers' ability to help students prepare and apply for college. Students' views about teachers' roles as college informants were ambiguous. This limited students' avenues to gaining capital even further. Some did not feel that teachers cared about student college plans, and did not bother approaching them. Nancy, who had plans of going into cosmetology after high school, stated teachers were mostly "into their own subject" more so than students' "personal lives". She continued by saying:

With a teacher I've never had that type of communication; they've never asked me, you know? ... Like [my] English teacher, he's more into his own thing and my Government teacher, you know. I don't think I would go up to them for advice.

Students did not use teachers as college information resources nor did teachers actively try to engage in students' college-choice process. This was in stark contrast to Advantage and Distinguished High School where students had multiple school contacts over multiple years in high school, school personnel who actively nurtured and pushed students towards a four-year college pathway. Students did not give specific accounts of approaching teachers for college planning help, and felt that most teachers were unwilling to help and that they were just there "to teach". A student even noted that if the teachers would make a better effort to "bond" with students, it would help them better prepare for college.

Latina/o College-Choice Process

Given the small size of Community High, especially its size of teachers and staff (approximately 350 students and 25 staff), frayed ties among students, teachers, and counselors are especially damaging, since there were few people from whom students could get college help. While teachers are generally not expected to provide college information, in some schools they do provide this type of support. Community High teachers, however, did not see this as service they would be able to provide to students. The lack of concerted effort in providing consistent, quality college information, and assistance led students to go through the college application process relying primarily on their own cultural repertoires and the school's *organizational habitus*, leading to varied post graduation plans.

“7 Great Reasons to attend CC”: College decisions, Habitus, and School Effects

Community High School's college resource strategy of passive engagement produced a wide range of post-high school plans among students. Some thought about finding jobs right after school while others planned to enroll in four-year universities. While students from the middle-class high schools were pushed by school officials to apply to and attend four-year universities, most Community High students did not report similar pressures from school staff. Like students from the middle-class schools, Community High Latina/o students balanced their college decisions with a desire to stay close to their family. Their sense of familism played a major role in shaping which colleges they applied to and hoped to attend.

Juan, who was known as the “class clown” among his peers, was planning to attend the local community college for a couple of years while working a full-time job, and then debating whether to join the Army or a police academy. He told me that his mother did not like his idea of entering the work force first and foregoing college. She thought college would give him a better opportunity of attaining a job with higher income in the future. Before concluding that he would

Latina/o College-Choice Process

work and attend community college, Juan's older brother had mentioned to him that he would be able to get him a construction job in Georgia if he was interested. Juan considered moving to Georgia to make "good money" in construction, but eventually decided that it was too far away from anyone he knew. He felt that he would be too bored since there would be no one he knew in the area. His ultimate goal was to become a police officer, an idea that came from his love for the police television shows he regularly watched with his younger siblings.

Money was an important factor for Juan, which is why he insisted on getting a job and going to a community college (since they were less expensive). He also considered joining the Army after learning from the school counselor- in a rare meeting with her - that they would pay for his college education if he enrolled for a period of time. More than half way into his senior year of high school and Juan was still unsure of his future educational plans. What he did know was that he wanted to stay close to friends and family. Other students who were planning to attend vocational or trade schools also desired to stay close to or live at home while completing their work. These students never considered attending four-year universities or transferring to universities from community colleges. Their limited views regarding other college options was mirrored by the school's embrace of divergent post-high school options, including going straight to the workforce.

Many students I interviewed who planned to attend four-year universities were involved in Upward Bound, a college access program. Upward Bound provided students with the information Latina/os in middle-class schools received. Upward Bound is a summer program; students meet and stay in dormitories at a local four-year university. The program offers high school courses taught at an accelerated rate, to mimic the college experience. Students receive college preparatory help: counselors go over eligibility requirements for four-year universities

Latina/o College-Choice Process

and give students practice SAT questions. In the summer before their senior year students get help on their college essays and financial aid applications.

My Upward Bound Latina/o students aspired to attend four-year universities. Like students from my middle-class schools, they hoped to attend a University of California campus. Working-class students believed a degree from a four-year university would help them achieve their career goals. Consider Raul, an Upward Bound participant of three years. He really enjoyed his experience, and made close friends with many other participants. Ineligible to apply to the California State University of his choice due to grades, he decided that he would use his time at community college to work towards transferring to a nearby University of California campus. He was initially disappointed that he would not be able to attend a “real” college right after high school, but seemed satisfied with the idea of transferring to a UC, which he saw as a better option.

I think Cal States are more... easier to get into for students and UC --- was, or UCs were more for people with, who were more higher in their education uhm, more advanced in their classes.

... I like challenges, so I think UC --- offers that cause I'm surrounded with more mature people and more people that are concentrated in school than in partying or doing all this stuff so I think UC Davis is the way to go for me.

Raul, like all of the students aspiring to attend four-year universities believed that a University of California would provide him with a better intellectual atmosphere than other schools, like a California State University. Many students shared this belief, but Upward Bound students articulated the idea more frequently.

Raul was considering several other colleges including universities in southern California, several hundred miles away from his home. After discussing his college plans with his parents, he decided that staying close to home would be better for him.

Latina/o College-Choice Process

.... If you're far away you can't really call mom up and [say] "Oh, I'm sick" or "I need help". So it just made me realize that it's better to stay closer to home just in case of an emergency.

Like the students from Advantage and Distinguished High, Community High students felt very insecure about moving too far from their family. Concerns about emergencies that could arise that would necessitate family assistance were a factor that Raul took into account when deciding what four-year university he would eventually transfer to. Similar to his peers, an overall feeling of close family relationships and the need to maintain them played a huge role in deciding which four year college to attend for these students. The Latina and Latino students at Community High chose a variety of different post high school paths. Students chose to work, receive vocational training, go to community college, and attend a four year university. The decisions were always mitigated by a concern over proximity to family, like their peers in middle-class schools.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Existing literature on the college application process and decisions of Latina/o students predominantly focuses on the role of social capital (Ceja 2006, Perna 2000, Valenzuela 1999). Despite adding to our understanding of the college-choice process of underrepresented students, the use of social capital alone cannot adequately explain the college decision making process of Latina/o students. This paper shows that lacking an abundance of social capital to assist in the college application process, Latina/o students must rely on the *organizational habitus* of schools to access valuable cultural capital.

Using Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital* and McDonough's (1997) extension of Bourdieu's *habitus*, this paper found that schools' *organizational habitus* shaped the quality of college information available and how this information was disseminated to students at Advantage, Distinguished, and Community High Schools. A strong college-going habitus was

Latina/o College-Choice Process

present at both middle-class high schools and a weak college habitus was present at the working-class high school. The differences in organizational habitus shaped the decisions that first-generation Latina/o students made concerning the type of post-secondary education to pursue. However, their decisions were shaped by both school structures and their own habitus which was conditioned with a strong sense of familism. The Latina/o students from my sample did not want to attend an institution too far in distance from their families, limiting the available schools to which they would apply.

Students attending middle-class schools benefited from their school's *active engagement* approach to the college application process. Teachers, school counselors, and college assistance programs such as AVID provided Latina/o students with cultural capital, including how to study for both class tests and the SAT, how to engage with teachers, and how to write and edit essays for the SAT and college applications. This strategy aligns with Nancy Hill's (2009) brokering strategy, which is marked by substantial resources and a strong commitment to access and distribution of these resources to students; this study adds to Hill's findings by illustrating how schools distribute resources and what the resources might look like. These schools also provided students with a calculated application method for four-year universities. The schools' use of *active engagement* and its organizational habitus, with a disposition towards four-year universities, shaped students' college application decisions. All students aspired to apply to and attend four-year universities, ideally a University of California campus. These findings held for both young women and men in my sample. These students' parents did not hold the necessary capital and habitus to adequately help their children through the college application process, which Lareau (1999, 2000) marks as a moment of social exclusion. The school thus took an

Latina/o College-Choice Process

active and concerted role in the Latina/o students' college process, circumventing any negative affects of parents' exclusion.

Latina/o students in the working-class school had access to less cultural capital to navigate the college application process, accentuating their social exclusion (Lareau & Horvat 1999). Their school employed a strategy of *passive engagement*; similar to Hill's (2009) traditional strategy, which is marked by limited resources and a limited commitment to distribution of resources. Some college resources were made available, but the organization lacked the same concerted push to get Latina/o students into four-year institutions. Community High School started college planning during students' second year of high school. This began with a sit down meeting with the school counselor, and over the next two years included meetings with students and help with application information during the latter part of the college-choice process, but only if initiated by students. Additionally, students' ties with school counselors and teachers were frayed. Students felt distrust towards and ambiguity around school officials' roles as college informants. Latina/o students were sensitive to direct experience and rumors about the school counselor as not being able to provide specific college information and perceived undermining of student aspirations. While frayed ties may be specific to Community High, these students have few alternative contacts to access college information.

Staff at Community High did not intentionally guide Latina/o students to non four-year universities merely because of their social-class or race/ethnicity. McDonough's (1997) research highlights how schools are located within a social-class context and therefore are involved in a complex negotiation of neighborhood expectations and school goals and capabilities. Counselors are caught within their own institutional demands, and did their best to do their jobs without the financial support enjoyed in middle-class schools.

Latina/o College-Choice Process

Consistent with Desmond and Turley's (2009) findings, the vast majority of the students in my sample held a particular disposition to familial bonds when making college or university application decisions. Students chose to apply to universities close to their home so that they could either commute or visit family during weekends, eliminating potentially more advantageous universities or "discarded possibles" (Bourdieu 1998). While my finding highlights the importance of schools' organizational habitus in providing or failing to provide students with valuable cultural capital to apply to four-year institutions, a habitus shaped by familial bonds clearly constrains Latina/o students' options.

Information derived from schools and particularly college-access programs such as AIVD and Upward Bound acted as huge college information resources for Latina/o in all schools irrespective of their social-class context. These students were given particular attention in regards to their academic progress and the college-choice process. All students in these programs aspired and applied to four-year universities and a majority of these students applied to a University of California campus. Implementing similar college-access programs in all schools serving first-generation students may aid students' process of preparing for and choosing colleges, particularly four-year universities. Though this may not be plausible in poor under resourced school districts as necessary teachers and tutors are expected to be provided by the district. Policy changes at the federal level can be helpful, where school districts with large populations of underrepresented, first-generation students are mandated to implement fully subsidized college-access programs.

Additionally, it is important to note that students' college aspirations need to be formed and shaped early in their educational careers since research shows that a "college-going habitus", or disposition to attend college, that is formed earlier in children's lives has significant affects on

Latina/o College-Choice Process

students' four-year attendance after high school (Grodsky & Riegle-Crumb 2010). Establishing college-access programs starting as early as 6th grade may aide in students' future college choices. These efforts may be limited in their success as students' habitus, specifically a disposition to familial ties, exert a significant force on Latina/o students' college decisions.

The findings conceptualize how schools disseminate valuable college information to Latina/o students, and specifically what the information provided by schools affords students; something quantitative studies cannot capture (Hill 2008). Furthermore, the findings highlight the affect schools have on underrepresented students making them particularly vulnerable to deteriorating school resources. These findings warrant future studies that examine the role cultural capital plays in accessing college information in schools for Latina/o students. As public schools continue to increase in enrollment sizes and school counselor case loads increase, students will be expected to seek out college information on their own. This is particularly problematic as research shows that Latina/o students and other underrepresented students do not readily seek institutional help (Stanton-Salazar 2001). My study primarily focused on Latina/o students who were well integrated in their schools (specifically the two middle-class schools); they were enrolled in the college access program AVID. Students not enrolled in the program, within the middle-class schools, were not interviewed. These students' experiences through the college-choice process are not known. The successful acquisition of capital from the schools could have been very well have been different for these students.

Future research that looks at Latina/o students not enrolled in college access programs may find the concepts of *cultural capital* and *habitus* useful in examining *how* and under what circumstances Latina/os go about accessing college information from school agents and thus contribute greatly to our overall understanding of the college-choice process of Latina/o students.

Latina/o College-Choice Process

As the Latina/o population continues to grow, the current levels of educational disadvantage will have a significant impact on both local and national economic levels; an increasing portion of the U.S. population will be insufficiently prepared for work. The educational disadvantage of Latina/os is not a community problem; it is a pressing issue for the United States as a whole and direct actions must be taken.

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