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Immigrant Perspectives: Social reproduction and the future of second generation Mexican-American and Chinese-American immigrants

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Immigrant Perspectives: Social reproduction and the future of second generation Mexican-American and Chinese-American immigrants

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Abstract

Recent work done by Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut posits that future generations of Mexican Americans are not likely to improve on the poor socio-economic and cultural status inhibiting their success in the United States. While second generation Mexican American immigrants struggle to acculturate, both academically and economically, to their new homeland, other immigrant groups, such as Chinese Americans, are generally thriving. Through interviewing Chinese and Mexican parents of students at a Chicago elementary school, this study will examine the social and cultural capital of the two immigrant groups upon arrival to the United States, how these forms of capital have helped or hindered their acculturation process, and what effect this might have on the acculturation process and eventual educational and social success of their children in the United States.

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Introduction

“The theory of social capital is, at heart, most straightforward. Its central thesis can be summed up in two words: relationships matter” (Field, 2003, 1). Connections and social networks are used in all realms of society to gain access to resources like jobs and housing, in order to create upward mobility from one socio-economic level to the next. Horizontal, or informal, networks, such as family and friends, are trusted connections that often yield quick results, whereas vertical, or formal, networks, such as banks, often have a hierarchical structure that can “sometimes serve to exclude and deny as well as include and enable” (Field, 2003, 3).

Unequal access to resources and reproduction of power is the basis behind Bourdieu’s theory of social capital, which is very much tied to, or a dimension of, cultural capital. “Social and cultural capital reflect social relationships, cultural practices, and knowledge that are used to gain social and economic benefit” (Monkman, Ronald, & Theramene, 2005, 7), and can be passed down to the next generation. A child born into a family with high socio-economic status and knowledge (which is capital) is automatically endowed with a higher degree of cultural capital, hence more social capital. The knowledge passed down is a, “symbolic product of social fields, it has consequences which are more than simply symbolic; it ‘buys’ prestige, power and consequent economic positioning” (Grenfell & James, 1998, 22).

Bourdieu believes that social reproduction of dominant, cultural values take place in educational settings. “Cultural Capital is the product of education, which Bourdieu also often refers to as an ‘academic market’, and exists in three distinct forms: connected to individuals in their general educated character – accent, dispositions, learning, etc.; connected to objects – books, qualifications, machines, dictionaries, etc.; and connected to institutions – places of learning, universities, libraries, etc.” (Grenfell & James, 1998, 21). Through education, a higher

level of cultural capital can be attained, which, according to Bourdieu, will attract others with cultural capital. These attractions and connections are what create the networks needed for a greater degree of social capital.

Social and cultural capital can contribute to the successful acculturation of new immigrants, which can also benefit their children as they are entering the educational system in the United States. Social capital can also contribute to cultural capital through “contacts with experts or individuals of refinement (i.e. embodied cultural capital); or, alternatively, they can affiliate with institutions that confer valued credentials (i.e. institutionalized cultural capital)” (Portes, 1998, 2). In terms of the educational achievement of children of immigrants, studies have looked at the background of the families as it relates to social aspects of schooling and aspirations for their children. “The value of the cultural capital which the child acquires from the family depends on whether it coincides with the cultural attributes which are valued by the schools and form the basis for the schools’ selection, evaluation and rewarding of students” (Inglis & Manderson, 1991, 101). The cultural and social framework of an immigrant group can either be accepted or rejected by the dominant culture, which can greatly alter the economic and social success of immigrants and their children migrating to the United States. A lack of capital, whether social or cultural, could lead to continued repression for immigrant groups, as evidenced in studies done by Portes and Rumbaut (2001b).

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Mexican and Central American immigrants play a well-defined if controversial role in the American economy. They do the “dirty” work in virtually all industries in California and the Southwest, and they are increasingly filling these roles throughout the country. Their children, the second generation, may well outnumber immigrant Latinos in the workforce within the decade or two. But it is not at all clear what economic role they will play. Certainly they will be dissatisfied with and will reject the poorly paid dirty work done by their fathers and mothers. On evidence from San Diego and California generally, they will lose out to whites and Asians in the competition for the good jobs to which they and their parents aspire. They likely will occupy some middle status between the largely white and Asian middle and upper classes

and the dirty work that fresh waves of poor immigrants will eagerly embrace. This is not a pretty picture; indeed, if decent jobs in the middle are not there, it could turn out to be positively ugly. But in the absence of some miraculous change in the social dynamics associated with growing up Mexican in the United States, it seems starkly inevitable. (Lopez & Stanton-Salazar, 2001, 86)

According to Lopez and Stanton-Salazar (2001), the future of Mexican-Americans is not a promising one, while whites and Asians are competing for good jobs. In the school at which I taught, the discrepancy between Mexican-American students and Chinese-American students was considerable. The gifted classrooms are primarily made up of Chinese American students, while many Mexican-American students struggle in regular classrooms. What is the cause of such a discrepancy? How do social and cultural capital play a role in the incorporation of immigrant groups? Lopez and Stanton-Salazar believe that Mexican-Americans, “lack the web of organizations and social practices that have allowed specific groups to utilize traditional culture to help children achieve” (Lopez & Stanton-Salazar, 2001, 57). The number of resources and networks available to immigrant groups, whether familial or institutional, can allow for a better understanding of new social systems. “A well-functioning social support network, quite predictably, is closely linked to better adjustment to the new environment” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, 85). Social as well as interpersonal relationships are important for those living in a new country with social and cultural standards different from their own. “Immigrants, disoriented in the new land, rely on friends and relatives to provide them with tangible aid (such as running an errand or making a loan) as well as guidance and advice (including job and housing leads). The companionship of these friends and relatives also helps maintain and enhance self-esteem and provides much needed acceptance and approval” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, 85).

My research project relates to the social and cultural capital of Chinese and Mexican immigrants within the same community. Specifically I look at how these two forms of capital

affect their children's educational attainment. I examine the social networks both immigrant groups had at their disposal upon arrival, and: (a) what resources (such as jobs, housing, and learning about schools) were made available; (b) to what degree did they take advantage of those resources; (c) how those resources helped them adjust to their new home.

I also specifically examined the cultural practices of Chinese and Mexican parents, in hopes of determining whether a difference in their cultural capital has influenced their children's success in school. Contact between immigrant groups and the population of the host country can lead to different processes of incorporation, depending on whether the host country values and accepts the culture of the immigrant group. "One feature of contact deserving a serious conceptual consideration is cultural frame of reference. A cultural frame of reference, from the point of view of members of a given population, refers to the correct or ideal way to behave within the culture (i.e., attitudes, beliefs, preferences, practices, and symbols considered appropriate for members of the culture). There usually exists in a culture a widely accepted and sanctioned cultural frame of reference that guides people's behavior" (Ogbu, 1995, 195). Differences in status and cultural beliefs can lead to conflict between the interacting populations. My research delves into whether Mexican and Chinese immigrants have experienced cultural conflict, and how that may have affected their transition into their new country.

While much research has been done on the acculturation process of immigrants, second generation immigrants, social and cultural capital, and transnational migration, very little research has looked specifically at how the social and cultural capital of Mexican and Chinese immigrants has aided them in their acculturation process. My study includes narrative from the people I interviewed, and compares the two groups in an effort to find out why Chinese immigrants have a much higher success rate in the American educational system.

Review of Related Research

In this section I begin by reviewing the inception of capital as a theoretical concept, and the rise of social and cultural capital theories during the 20th century. I then discuss the scholars who have had a great impact on immigration and more specifically immigrant education research.

The Creation of Social and Cultural Capital

“The notion of capital can be traced to Marx in his analysis of how capital emerges from social relations between the bourgeoisie (capitalists) and laborers in the processes of commodity production and consumption” (Lin, 2001, 4). In order to gain more resources, capitalists would invest their current resources in the production of material goods. Laborers were hired to produce those goods, and were paid just enough to live. The bourgeoisie could not live without the proletariat, and vice versa. Marx describes the relationship as such:

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion as the proletariat, the modern working class, developed -- a class of laborers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital. These laborers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market. (Marx & Engels, 1848, Paragraph 29).

The consumption of necessary goods by the laborers worked to the capitalist’s advantage by making the laborers pay for products at a higher price than that at which they were produced. Laborers were therefore not able to acquire resources of their own, which helped to maintain a caste like system between capitalists, who continued to acquire more resources, and laborers, who had no prospect for investment. Lin summarizes Marx’s “classic theory of capital”, in which “the labor involved in the process of production does not generate or accumulate capital

for the laborers. The classic theory of capital is based on the explanatory argument that class differentiation is fundamental in capitalist society, where the exploiting class controls the means of production and collects all the surplus value generated from the labor provided by the exploited class” (Lin, 2001, 8).

In the classic Marxian theory of capital, laborers did not have, nor were they able to gain, the resources in order to move up in their social standing. In an effort to become upwardly mobile within the rigid class structure, laborers began to invest in themselves to increase their knowledge and skills, and thus increase their worth within the production process. This was an investment in human capital, which “unlike physical capital, is the value added to a laborer when the laborer acquires knowledge, skills, and other assets useful to the employer or firm in the production and exchange processes” (Lin, 2001, 9). The investment in self gave the laborers the ability to “demand from the capitalist’s payment beyond the exchange value for their labor” (Lin, 2001, 8). In this way, laborers were able to gain additional resources beyond what was required to live.

From the classic and human capital theories stemmed theories of capital which focused on cultural and social, rather than economic, limitations to upward mobility. While many theorists have applied social and cultural capital theories to their work, two theorists in particular have explored the concepts and gained the attention and recognition of the research community. Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman produced individual analyses of social and cultural capital, that vary based on possible hidden motivations of the “capitalists”, or those in power.

Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital is a more symbolic alternative to the theory of human capital. He states that, “Cultural capital can be acquired, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and

therefore quite unconsciously. It always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the more or less visible marks they leave (such as the pronunciations characteristic of a class or region), help to determine its distinctive value” (Richardson, 1986, 246). What does not present itself in this definition is Bourdieu’s belief that the transmission of cultural capital is not a static event. Instead of subjects only being structured, which would assume an event in which the subject would absorb the capital without thought or agency, they are a dynamic part of the structuring process, able to be reflexive and take action, which “is constituted through a dialectical relationship between individuals’ thought and activity and the objective world. Bourdieu further represents these two as habitus and field respectively” (Grenfell & James, 1998, 14).

Habitus is “an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted” (Bourdieu, 1977, 95). In other words, habitus can be the unthinking habits, or dispositions, formed from being immersed in specific social surroundings. Habitus can be formed through social inheritance, and then reworked and changed through practice, which is the dynamic reproduction of the structure in which it was produced.

Habitus, which is thought of as the subjective, and field, the objective, are mutually constituting. Field is, “a structured system of social relations at a micro and macro level. In other words, individuals, institutions and groupings, both large and small, all exist in structural relation to each other in some way” (Grenfell & James, 1998, 16). The relationship between field and habitus was described by Bourdieu as such:

the relation between habitus and field operates in two ways. On the one side, it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of immanent necessity of a field (or of a hierarchically intersecting sets of fields). On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and with value, in which it is worth investing one’s practice. (Bourdieu as cited by Wacquant, 1989, 44)

In other words, social relationships structure how people behave and the habits they form (field to habitus relationship), and the way people think makes the field (or networks) meaningful (habitus to field relationship). When the field and the habitus work in accordance with each other, reality can feel comfortable and easy, whereas a discord between the two can create a world in which there is a dissonance in everyday practices. In an interview with Wacquant, Bourdieu explained this relationship:

Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself 'as a fish in water', it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted. (Bourdieu as cited by Wacquant, 1989, 43)

Taking the world for granted can assist in the reproduction of existing, dominant structural frameworks. Given that education is a field, made up of networks and relationships, and students and teachers all have a habitus based on their life experience, it can therefore be assumed that if the habitus of a student and a teacher are similar, and fit into the school structure, the student will find it easy to adapt to the rules and principals in that field, and have their habitus redefined and expanded by their new environment to include those rules and principals as truth. While it is true that students are able to practice free will and think the way they choose, “those pupils with habitus which most resembles the structural dispositions, and hence, values through which the school seeks to work (the legitimate), are more likely to be disposed to a certain type of practice through a process of *elective affinities*” (Grenfell & James, 1998, 22). Elective affinities could most simply be described as beliefs and actions, and the unintended consequences of those actions. Therefore, the educational field becomes a prime location for the restructuring of habitus to align with the dominant rules and principals. Bourdieu explains the melding of habitus and education:

The habitus acquired in the family underlines the structuring of school experiences (in particular the reception and assimilation of the specifically pedagogic message), and the habitus transformed by schooling, itself diversified, in turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences (e.g. the

reception and assimilation of the message of the culture industry or work experiences) and so on, from restructuring to restructuring. (Bourdieu, 1977, 87)

The theory of social reproduction began with Marx who strove to, “rescue education from the influence of the ruling class” (Marx & Engels, 1848, Paragraph 98). Bourdieu furthered social reproduction theory by integrating cultural capital theory:

He argues that a society’s dominant class imposes its culture by engaging in pedagogic action (e.g., education), which internalizes the dominant symbols and meanings in the next generation, thus reproducing the salience of the dominant culture. Thus, cultural capital, as conceptualized by Bourdieu, derives its analytic contribution from the notions of social practice and social reproduction of symbols and meanings” (Lin, 2001, 14).

According to Bourdieu, cultures that fall outside of the dominant norm will be treated as inferior, and forced to change in order to survive in their environment. Education is the primary social institution in which to “legitimize” social norms. But, Bourdieu questions the idea of legitimacy: “What does legitimate mean?...An instruction, or an action, or a usage is legitimate when it is dominant and misrecognised as such, that is to say tacitly recognized” (Bourdieu, 1980, 110). Students who are able to reproduce the dominant culture and values are often rewarded, which reinforces the supposed legitimacy of the system. Those who do not assimilate or conform to the values of the dominant class will not only have a greater chance of failing at school, but also struggling in the labor market as many organizations are controlled by the dominant class. The knowledge garnered throughout all facets of life, “is capital because, as a symbolic product of social fields, it has consequences which are more than simply symbolic; it ‘buys’ prestige, power and consequent economic positioning” (Grenfell & James, 1998, 22).

Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory is very closely related to human capital, with one addition: Bourdieu’s theoretical stance reflects “the imposition by one class (the capitalists or a dominant group) of its values on another (the laborers or the dominated group); the appropriation of the latter’s labor to the benefit of the former is justified by this value system” (Lin, 2001, 15).

Without cultural capital, other capital such as economic, social, and symbolic capital can be greatly hampered.

Social capital, as defined by Bourdieu, is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are links to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (Richardson, 1986, 250). Rather than investing resources on gaining individual skills, social capital represents an investment in garnering social relationships to gain status or resources from a collective.

Both Coleman and Bourdieu perceive social capital as access to resources through social ties, but they take very different theoretical positions when discussing the benefactors of social relationships. While Bourdieu takes on a very Marxist view of social relations, in which the dominant class uses social relations in order to reinforce and reproduce their standing in society, Coleman has an integrative understanding of social capital. Rather than viewing social capital as benefiting only the privileged class, Coleman believes that social relationships and networks can be used for the good of the public as a whole, and that, “all social relations and social structures facilitate some forms of social capital” (Coleman, 1988, S105).

Coleman has created and analyzed many varying types and degrees of social relations that can cause the outcomes of social capital. The most basic of these types is simple and complex relations among actors. Simple relations are what we commonly think of as social relations between individual people and groups. According to Coleman, simple relations are, “primordial social ties, relations of friendship, ‘informal’ social relations of all sorts and authority relations such as those of master and servant or father and son.” He also states that,

“these relations can be seen as building blocks for much of social organization”, which can grow into “a community or a sprawling social network” (Coleman, 1990, 43). Simple relations are self-sustaining due to the relationship being an incentive in and of itself. This is in contrast to complex relations that are not self-sustaining due to the need for a third party to enable the continuation of the relation. From these relations, formal organizations are built. These types of organizations, “must be built, because it is based on more complex structures of incentives, involving three or more parties for each two-actor relation” (Coleman, 1990, 43). In other words, simple relations are “natural”, and form out of interests among the parties involved, whereas complex relations must be constructed by an outsider, and have well defined boundaries.

Coleman also refers to the importance of the effects of social capital on the next generation, and their achievement in school. Social capital has an, “effect on the creation of human capital in the next generation. Both social capital in the family and social capital in the community play roles in the creation of human capital in the rising generation” (Coleman, 1988, S109). Family background and the human and social capital possessed by parents are very important, according to Coleman, in the intellectual development of a child, but only if the parents are present and have a good relationship with the child. He states that, “social capital within the family that gives the child access to the adult’s human capital depends both on the physical presence of adults in the family and on the attention given by the adults to the child” (Coleman, S111). Therefore, parents with a great deal of social and human capital may not pass it on to the next generation if they are not present in which to do so.

Social capital does not only form from within the family, but is also supported by the community and social relationships held within communities. Schools are a community in which

parents create social relationships and associations through organizations such as the P.T.A.. If a parent in an organization has a great deal of capital, it benefits all of the others in that organization as well. This can happen, “when an individual asks a favor from another, thus incurring an obligation. He does so because it brings him a needed benefit; he does not consider that it does the other a benefit as well by adding to the drawing fund of social capital available in a time of need” (Coleman, 1988, S117). Without the creation of networks and relationships, social capital will not be garnered amongst the participants, which, according to Coleman, would hurt the overall development of the next generation.

While Coleman emphasizes, “how individuals can use sociostructural resources in obtaining better outcomes in their (individual) actions, [he] devotes much discussion to the collective nature of social capital in stressing trust, norms, sanctions, authority, and closure as parts or forms of the concept” (Lin, 2001, 25). He believes that any social resource that garners a positive return for an individual constitutes social capital.

Immigrant Research and Theory

Immigration and immigrant theory have been widely written about over the past 20 years. A sub-area of growing importance is that of the second generation immigrants. Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut, leading scholars in the field, have done a substantial amount of research on second generation children from a variety of immigrant groups, forecasting their future with optimism or pessimism based on results from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS), “a multifaceted investigation of the educational performance and social, cultural, and psychological adaptation of children of immigrants” (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001, 10-11).

According to Portes and Rumbaut, each group undergoes a process referred to as *segmented assimilation*, in which “outcomes vary across immigrant minorities and in which

rapid integration and acceptance into the American mainstream represent just one possible alternative” (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001, 6). Segmented assimilation represents three possible processes toward assimilation: Dissonant acculturation, consonant acculturation, and selective acculturation. “Dissonant acculturation takes place when children’s learning of English and interjection of American cultural outlooks so exceed their parents’ as to leave the latter hopelessly behind. This path is marked by higher levels of family conflict and decreasing parental authority because of divergent expectations and children’s diminishing regard for their own cultural origins” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001b, 308). According to Portes and Rumbaut, the expected outcome of dissonant acculturation is downward mobility, or a life of continued impoverishment and struggles, versus upward mobility which could mean, “moving into society’s mainstream in record time and enriching it in the process with their culture and energies” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001b, 10). Consonant and selective acculturation can both lead to upward mobility, the difference being that selective acculturation has much more community support, which allows for a greater availability of networks and resources. Consonant acculturation, which occurs when language and culture are abandoned gradually at the same rate across generations, often happens when parents have enough human capital to progress at the same rate as their children. Selective acculturation is similar to consonant acculturation in that generations progress at a similar rate, although the acculturation process is “embedded in a co-ethnic community of sufficient size and institutional diversity to slow down the cultural shift and promote partial retention of the parents’ home language and norms” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001b, 54). Due to the community involvement during selective acculturation, upward mobility is more likely during this process than during consonant acculturation in which discrimination is

experienced more often. In order to determine if an immigrant group is going through a dissonant, consonant, or selective acculturation process, certain factors are considered decisive:

- (1) the history of the immigrant first generation, including the human capital brought by immigrant parents and the context of their reception; (2) the differential pace of acculturation among parents and children, including the development of language gaps between them, and its bearing on normative integration and family cohesiveness; (3) the cultural and economic barriers confronted by second-generation youth in the quest for successful adaptation; and (4) the family and community resources for confronting these barriers. (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001, 6).

Portes and Rumbaut examine the human, cultural, and social capital of immigrants in their quest to identify causes behind successes and struggles amongst certain immigrant groups. They believe social capital, which they define as “the ability to gain access to needed resources by virtue of membership in social networks and larger social structures” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001a, 313), is the most important factor in creating opportunities for the second generation. Cuban immigrants in Miami, for example, have a great amount of community support which allows them to maintain their cultural heritage while simultaneously learning the English language and inner workings of the American system. “Such communities can cushion the impact of foreign culture and provide assistance for finding jobs. Help with basic needs, such as housing, places to shop, and schools for the children, also flow through these co-ethnic networks” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001b, 48). Mexican immigrants in San Diego, however, “are significantly more likely to report low bonds of solidarity and low levels of support from their co-ethnics, reflecting the weak communities that have emerged under their precarious conditions of arrival and settlement” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001b, 278). Due to a lack of human, cultural, and social capital, the prospects of the Mexican American second generation are bleak. “Mexican immigrants represent *the* textbook example of theoretically anticipated effects of low immigrant human capital combined with a negative context of reception” (Portes & Rumbaut,

2001b, 277). Lower than average test scores, low educational expectations, and dissonant acculturation represent the danger of downward mobility for Mexican-American youths.

Conversely, “children of Chinese and Korean immigrants and of Vietnamese refugees – groups that have benefited from strong preexisting ethnic communities or extensive resettlement assistance – perform much better on the average” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001b, 242). When reviewing the CILS results, Asian groups have higher educational achievement, and lower school attrition, whereas Mexican-Americans have the opposite results. “44 percent of Asian graduates are headed for the state’s elite, compared with 8 percent of Latino graduates. Since over 90 percent of recent Asian high school graduates and 80 percent of Latinos are the children of immigrants, these data suggest that inequality in the second generation will be massive, mirroring the gap between their parents” (Lopez & Stanton-Salazar, 2001, 83-84). According to Lopez and Stanton-Salazar, low educational attainment has a direct correlation to low occupational and income attainment. The fate of Mexican-Americans rests on gaining upward socioeconomic mobility, while maintaining “a clear sense of their roots, the value of fluency in a second language, and the self-esteem grounded on strong family and community bonds” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001a, 316).

Carola Suarez-Orozco and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco have also addressed the complex realities of children of immigrants. While much of their research has returned findings similar to those of Portes and Rumbaut, their outlook for the future of the second generation seems to hold a more optimistic slant. Rather than looking at the “dirty work” engaged in by many immigrants as a barrier to upward social mobility, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco view it as hard work which adds to their optimism about the future. “

The immigrant’s most fundamental motivation is to find a better life. Immigrants tend to do hard work essential to this project. That immigrants will do the impossible jobs that native workers simply refuse to consider indicates just how hard they are willing to work. The strong family ties and work ethic of

immigrants, as well as their optimism about the future, are unique assets that should be celebrated as adding to the total cultural stock of the nation” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, 159).

This optimism, however, does not detract from Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco’s view that human, cultural, and social capital are key factors in the success attained by immigrants.

Socioeconomic status plays an undeniable role; preexisting inequalities tend to intensify subsequent inequalities. Middle-class immigrants who arrive with more of what sociologists call “human capital” (education and resources) and “social capital” (networks and connections) will have an advantage in the struggle to protect and promote the welfare of their children. The neighborhoods and schools that parents can provide their children will play an important role in shaping their futures. (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, 123).

As was also evidenced by Portes and Rumbaut, availability of jobs and good schools, and acceptance into a stable support network will assist in the fight for upward mobility. However, unlike Portes and Rumbaut, whose view of social capital is similar to that of Coleman, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco incorporate views consistent with Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory. They ask the question, “Does the educational system reproduce inequalities by replicating the existing social order? Or does schooling help to overcome social inequalities by being an avenue for status mobility?” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, 94). Immigrant social networks, in this case, would be in opposition to the ruling class whose motivation is to maintain power and keep immigrants from rising to dominant level of status. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco state three theoretical factors used by George De Vos and John Ogbu in determining schooling and status inequality in ethnically diverse societies:

First, how do immigrant and minority groups enter the new society? Did they come as voluntary migrants or were they incorporated against their will through slavery or conquest? Second, do these groups face a structural ceiling above which they cannot rise in the status hierarchy regardless of motivation, talent, and achievement? Third, is the cultural and symbolic ethos of reception saturated with psychological disparagement and racist stereotypes? These three factors will have a profound relevance for any understanding of schooling experiences as well as for the identity formation of minority and immigrant children. (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, 94)

The second and third themes stated above speak directly to Bourdieu’s theory of social and cultural capital. Regardless of motivation, talent, and achievement, immigrant children who do not display culturally accepted traits of the dominant culture will not be able to rise above a

certain level of status. Given that “immigrants are seen by many as coming from backward cultures and ethnic backgrounds” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, 38), it makes it difficult for many immigrants to gain cultural acceptance.

Members of these groups not only are effectively locked out of the opportunity structure (through segregated and inferior schools, and through work opportunities limited to the least desirable sectors of the economy) but also commonly become victims of cultural violence. They are stereotyped as “innately inferior,” “lazier,” “prone to crime,” and therefore less deserving of sharing in the dominant society’s dream. Facing such charged attitudes that assault and undermine their sense of self, minority children may come to experience the institutions of the dominant society – and most specifically its schools – as alien terrain reproducing and order of inequality. (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, 95)

Immigrant groups that hold a higher level of cultural capital, as seen through the eyes of the dominant class, will generally receive a more positive reception into the United States. “While all groups face structural obstacles, not all groups elicit and experience the same attitudes from a dominant culture. Social science research has demonstrated that some immigrant groups elicit more negative attitudes than others do. In U.S. public opinion polls, for example, Asians are seen more favorably than Latinos” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, 94). This favorable or negative reception can play a part in the way immigrants are able to view themselves through the eyes of the dominant society. This idea of “double-consciousness”, a term created by W.E.B. Du Bois, is a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in...contempt and pity” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, 99). Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco believe that Asian students may benefit from this because they realize that teachers expect more from them than other students, and work to perform at that level, whereas Mexican-American students may view themselves as lacking the ability to perform well in school due to demeaning attitudes surrounding them.

John Ogbu has done a number of comparative studies between what he terms as *voluntary* and *involuntary* minorities. Voluntary minorities are immigrants who “have generally moved to their present societies because they believed that the move would lead to more

economic well-being, better overall opportunities or greater political freedom” (Ogbu, 1991, 8). In contrast, involuntary minorities “are people who were brought into their present society through slavery, conquest or colonization” (Ogbu, 1991, 9). His studies focus on how the public education system works, for instance, for Chinese immigrants (voluntary) and African-Americans (involuntary). According to Ogbu, voluntary immigrants have a much easier time adapting to social differences because they “see the cultural/language differences as *barriers to be overcome* in order to achieve their long-range goals of employment, good wages and other benefits, rather than as *markers of social identity to be maintained*” (Ogbu, 1991, 20). In fact, voluntary immigrants not only strive to overcome language barriers, but they do so within an environment that does not threaten their native culture and language. This is what Gibson would refer to as “accommodation without assimilation” (Gibson & Bhachu, 1991, 71). While voluntary immigrants “may not give up their cultural beliefs, cultural practices and language, they are willing and actually do strive to ‘play the classroom game by the rules’ and try to overcome ‘all kinds of difficulties in school because they believe so strongly that there will be a payoff later’” (Ogbu, 1991, 20). The ability to maintain cultural beliefs, while learning the language and system of the new culture is similar to what Portes and Rumbaut refer to as selective acculturation, which attributes to upward mobility.

The voluntary/involuntary argument differs from the argument made by Portes and Rumbaut because, by Ogbu’s definition, Mexican immigrants would be in the United States voluntarily, which would mean they have a greater likelihood of success. This may be true when comparing Mexican-Americans with involuntary immigrants such as African-Americans, but as Portes and Rumbaut have detailed, Mexican-Americans and Chinese-Americans, both voluntary immigrants, have very different and unequal rates of success. Using his cultural-ecological

theory, Ogbu is able to explain minority school performance, and how both the treatment of the actor, and the actors' perceptions play into the voluntary/involuntary status given by him. His theory, "considers the broad societal and school factors as well as the dynamics within the minority communities. Ecology is the "setting," "environment," or "world" of people (minorities), and "cultural," broadly, refers to the way people (in this case the minorities) see their world and behave in it" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, 158). *The system* is a term used by Ogbu to describe, "the way the minorities are treated or mistreated in education in terms of educational policies, pedagogy, and returns for their investment of school credentials" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, 158). The way minorities are treated within the system allows Ogbu to understand and explain the roadblocks and barriers many minorities have to face. These barriers are called *collective problems*, and are made up of, "instrumental discrimination (e.g., in employment and wages), relational discrimination (such as social and residential segregation), and symbolic discrimination (e.g., denigration of the minority culture and language)" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, 158). Collective solutions allow minorities to respond to these structural barriers in different ways. Some minorities may respond by trying to overcome the barriers, while others take on an oppositional cultural and language frame of reference (see explanation below). These perceptions and responses can have a great effect on the overall school performance of minority groups.

Ogbu is aligned with other immigrant theorists in regards to the cultural capital theory. Ogbu believes that when two different populations come into contact with each other, they each bring a cultural frame of reference. "A cultural frame of reference, from the point of view of members of a given population, refers to the correct or ideal way to behave within the culture (i.e., attitudes, beliefs, preferences, practices, and symbols considered appropriate for members

of the culture)” (Ogbu, 1995, 195). Cultural frames of reference of two different populations can be in opposition with each other if they differ greatly in attitudes, behaviors, and ways of talking. The behaviors of the dominant group can be symbols of disaffiliation for a subordinate group, and can cause that group to view the dominant group as the enemy. “Among subordinate peoples with oppositional cultural frame of reference, the perceptions of what is appropriate or inappropriate for group members is emotionally charged because it is intimately bound up with their sense of self-worth and security in the face of denigration by the dominant group” (Ogbu, 1995, 197). Oppositional identity can also allow the dominant group to reproduce their dominant status through education. Defiance and opposition toward conforming to what is expected by the dominant culture in schools gives those in power a reason to shun the oppositional culture, which then recreates the oppositional frame of reference. In Ogbu’s words: “The requirements for school success, which involve mastering the school curriculum, learning to speak and write standard English, and exhibiting “good” school behaviors, are interpreted as white society’s requirements designed to deprive minorities of their identities” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, 178). While this ties in nicely with Bourdieu’s reproduction theory, it also takes it one step further. In the case of Ogbu’s respondents with an oppositional frame of reference, they were intentionally not conforming to what they thought were rules created by “white institutions”. They were aware of “the system”, and saw through the culture of dominance. In Bourdieu’s work, he assumes that cultural reproduction is opaque, with an agenda hidden from all those not within the dominant group. Ogbu was able to show that African-Americans would rather not assimilate in order to gain cultural capital for fear of losing their own identities.

Ogbu specifically discusses the experiences of Chinese and Mexican Americans, who, like all of the voluntary immigrants in his study, view the barriers in their lives as something that

needs to be overcome in order to gain economic success. In his study of Chinese, Mexican, and black Americans in Oakland,

most students of immigrant descent reported that the opportunity to succeed or make “progress” is better in the United States than elsewhere; equally important, they themselves as well as people in their families and communities believed that what makes a person successful in the United States is education and hard work, whereas back home a person succeeds by getting help from friends and relatives, by using contacts (“whom you know”), through favoritism, or “because of your name”. (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, 170).

They are able to distinguish between what they need to do in order to achieve their goal, from feeling forced to assimilate entirely to the dominant culture which might threaten their identity. They also did not feel as though they needed social capital to get ahead. Ogbu found that “immigrant Chinese have interpreted cultural hegemony in the United States as a problem to be overcome. They have rejected the mainstream white American definition of ‘social reality’ and/or have tried to counteract that definition through their own institutions” (Ogbu, 1995, 287). The Chinese students in Ogbu’s study were able to gain certain aspects of the mainstream language and culture, while maintaining their own ethnic culture. The conscious balancing of two cultures led the Chinese students to earn greater amounts of success within the American educational system.

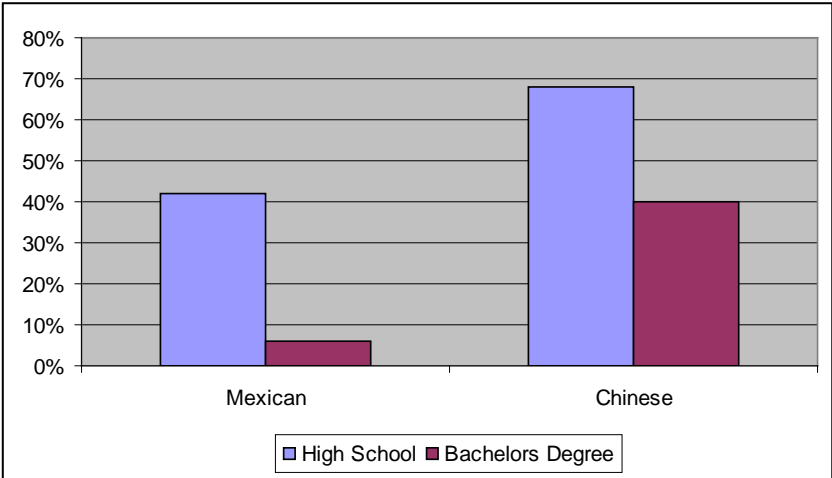
The common theme connecting the theorists detailed above, and the many other theorists who have written about immigration and education (e.g., Levitt & Waters, and Stanton-Salazar), is that cultural and social capital, or lack thereof, can have great consequences for the success of both first and second generation immigrants in the United States. The prevailing, albeit unfortunate, results of studies done by researchers show that “persistent school failure among large number of Mexican-descent students and other Hispanic groups in the United States is a pervasive, well-documented and enduring problem” (Matute-Bianchi, 1991, 205). My research takes into account all of these studies, and attempts to understand why, according to Ogbu,

voluntary Mexican-American immigrants should be doing well in school, but instead, according to the research done by Portes and Rumbaut, they are failing to do so.

Methodology

My research is based on interviews with the parents, and in the case of Tiffany, the sister, of my former students as well as two years of participant observation. As a third grade teacher in an inner-city school in which the majority of students are Chinese or Mexican, I observed in-depth the ways in which both groups performed, and interacted, in the classroom.

Chicago, Illinois is one of the largest cities in America, with a population of approximately 2,750,000, and one of the five largest immigrant receiving states. According to the 2006 census, 21%, or just over 1/5, of the total Chicago population is made up of Mexican-Americans, while only 2% are Chinese-Americans. The following graph shows the education levels, as recorded in the 2000 census, of these two groups:



This graph shows high school and bachelor's degree attainment for Mexican and Chinese immigrants over the age of 25. Fewer Mexican immigrants graduated from high school and

college than did Chinese immigrants, with less than half graduating from high school, and less than 10% graduating from college.

Bridgeport (the real name of the community) is on the south side of downtown Chicago with a population of 47,073 (2000 Census). Within this community, only 7% are Mexican-American, while 26% are Chinese-American. Of the 30% of the Bridgeport population that is foreign born (i.e., born outside of the United States as citizens of another country), 15% are not citizens of the United States. Of the total Bridgeport population, 23.5% reported an income of less than \$10,000 per year.

The K-8 school at which I taught, located within the Bridgeport neighborhood, has a population of 55.5% Chinese, and 25% Hispanic.

My research sample was recruited through the school at which I taught. Many of my student's parents are first generation immigrants who have come to America from Mexico and China. My rationale in choosing this group of respondents was primarily based on feasibility and appropriateness to my research subject. I interviewed four parents, and a sister who spoke for the parents due to their limited English skills. Three were from China, and two from Mexico. In choosing this sample size, I mainly took into account feasibility, although my secondary concern was legitimacy, and making sure I had more than one respondent from each group. The legitimacy, however, was somewhat marred by the high educational attainment of all of my respondents, as seen below. I was not able to capture the stories of a wide range of immigrants, with a wide range of educational levels and English proficiency. While my respondents did have differing experiences upon entering the United States, they were all able to overcome many obstacles because of their access to education.

The data for this study consists primarily of respondent's responses to the interview questions I asked them. I chose to interview participants rather than pass out a paper survey because I felt I could get more in depth responses that would otherwise be limited by the amount of space on the paper. Due to the unavailability of an interpreter, I only interviewed parents who were able to speak English. This limited the number and variety of the respondents I was able to interview, as many of the parents at my school had very limited English proficiency. Along with being fluent English speakers, my parents were also educated. All of my respondents had at least a college degree, except for Tiffany, who had one year left of college, one had a master's degree, and one had a PhD.

Based on my experiences in the classroom, and seeing, first hand, the differences in achievement levels, I was able to gather data in the classroom working with second generation Chinese and Mexican students, which is referenced throughout this paper. I also include comments and reactions from speaking with other teachers at my school regarding their experiences with students in their classrooms.

I had only an informal relationship with the parents of my students, so I had a very limited concern of bias impacting the authenticity of my study, although my perspective had been constructed around my presence at the school and relationship with the children. The relationship that I had with the parents, and the trust that had been gained through our parent/teacher communication, allowed them to feel free to discuss their experiences with me. Also, I was somewhat familiar with their children, and how they were performing in school, which allowed me to make a connection between parental experiences in the United States and student achievement within a specific Chicago Public School.

My interest in doing this research project is centered on getting to know the groups of people I am studying, so as to better represent their thoughts within this paper. While data collection through surveys can allow for a greater research sample, and can better accommodate a quantitative study, I believe quantitative results can give false claim to objectivity and universal truths. My study is aimed at portraying and attempting to understand the lived realities of those being interviewed. I worked within the interpretive paradigm, in which my aim was to “understand the complex and constructed reality from the point of view of those who live in it”, and to focus on “particular people, in particular places, at particular times – situating people’s meanings and constructs within and amid specific social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and other contextual factors” (Schram, 2003, 33). While I would have loved for my research to have a transformative effect, which is consistent with a critical approach, it was not the main focus of my research. Rather, I was in search of stories that told of immigrant experiences in America, how they have navigated their way through the complex systems, and what their prediction is for future generations.

Ethical Considerations

One ethical concern that I have had to consider is my ability to distinguish my role as teacher from that of “participant observer”. Much of the information I have detailed throughout my thesis about the academic differences between Mexican and Chinese immigrants comes from daily observations, over four years, as a teacher, not as a researcher. I had obviously not intended to observe my students through the lens of a researcher, but have nonetheless seen a discrepancy in academic achievement between the two immigrant groups. While interviewing parents, I represented myself as a researcher, although the parents also knew me as a teacher. As

I stated above, I did not present myself as anything other than what I am; a teacher who has the best interest of the children at heart. Therefore, a certain amount of trust was already in place.

In order to guarantee the “fair representation of the participants’ natural behavior or understandings” (Schram, 2003, 104), I disclosed all information to the participants regarding my desire to inquire about their views on the resources available to them upon arrival to the United States. I also disclosed my purpose, which was to relate the information given to me to the possible success of their children within the public school system, and that their experiences might be able to help other immigrants trying to find their way in America. The only information that I hesitated to discuss was that of previous findings by scholars stating that the future of Mexican Americans is bleak unless something is done to create a change. I believe that given that information, my participants would have felt it necessary to change their responses in order to “prove” that their children do not fall into the category of those struggling to succeed in school and society as a whole.

Finally, to protect the privacy of the school and the participants involved in my study, I used pseudonyms rather than real names throughout this paper. This will ensure complete anonymity on the part of the participants and the school at which I taught.

Findings

Every life holds a rich story. I was reminded of this following my conversations with those I interviewed. The struggles and accomplishments endured by many came through in the stories told by a few. While the experiences of my respondents are by no means identical, the

common thread was a desire to find greater opportunities for themselves and their children. All of the people with whom I spoke felt as though they had found and taken advantage of the opportunities offered in America. But their stories are unique in that four out of the five respondents were at least partially educated in the United States (all respondents have high levels of educational attainment), and have overcome many of the barriers to mobility that continue to hinder other immigrants and their children. While they are optimistic about the future of America's second generation, they have also witnessed the struggles experienced by friends, family, and neighbors that have impeded their journey toward the "American Dream".

Of my five respondents, three of them, Tiffany (age 19), Priscilla (age 44), and Winston (age 43), are from China. Tiffany is the sister of a former student, and spoke on behalf of her parents due to their limited English proficiency. Their reasons for immigrating to America are varied. Winston's and Priscilla's families both came due to political unrest following the 1997 transfer of the sovereignty of Hong Kong from British to Chinese rule. Winston's family was concerned with the economic opportunities that would come with the transfer, while Priscilla left China, "Due to uncertainty about Hong Kong's political situation and for children to have better educational environment". According to Winston, "At that time, mainland China had a bad reputation" for not having opportunities for advancement within their system of work.

"Everybody, no matter how smart you are, they all get \$36.00 a month, straight labor. And they share everything. So, they don't have competition, because it doesn't matter how hard you work; you won't go anywhere". His father moved his family to America when Winston was entering high school, so that his family could get more education, and have the opportunity to earn a better living than they would have had they stayed in China. Winston now lives with his wife,

twin girls, and a son in the ethnic enclave of Chinatown in Chicago, and works for a well known consulting company.

Tiffany's family came to America long before "the handover" because America offered, "more opportunities, and [her parents] wanted to have another child. So, [her parents] wanted better education for [her] and whatever U.S. citizenship offers". Due to the one-child per family policy in China¹, implemented in 1979 to temper its booming population increases, Tiffany's parents would not have been able to have any more children after Tiffany was born. They moved to America in 1988 without having any family in the country at the time. Her mother works for the Chinese American Service League, and had to decline being interviewed personally due to her poor English skills. Her father works in construction, and her brother is in the gifted and talented program at the same public school in Bridgeport.

My other two respondents, Thomas (age 41) and Alexandra (age 37), are both originally from Mexico. Thomas's father had lived in the US before he was born, and his mother moved to Chicago for monetary reasons, because it was "difficult to make ends meet" in Mexico. Thomas was very young at the time, but can recall the help they received from his father's family when they arrived in the United States: "When we came over we stayed with them for a month or two until you get on your feet and then they would get you a small little apartment and typically in a Hispanic neighborhood and you would rent and start out and go from there". They chose Chicago over Texas, where other relatives lived, because Chicago was known as being a "big industrial town, so even if you didn't have a college degree you could find a nice factory job, at least to get by". Thomas continues to live in Bridgeport with his wife and daughter, Rosa,

¹ In 1979 the Chinese government adopted a one-child-per-couple policy in order to curtail the rising population in China, which the government believed would slow down economic progress. The policy is not all encompassing, as rural couples, couples without any other sibling (who can have two children), and ethnic minorities are allowed to have more than one child. If an urban couple had more than one child, they risked losing their job, house, and food rations. For more information on this topic, see the study by Tyrene White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949 – 2005* (Cornell University, 2006).

who is an honor student at the local public elementary school. Thomas is employed by a large telecommunication company, and works with both English and Spanish speakers alike.

Alexandra was from a middle class family in Mexico City, and came to America to study English. Her father had been promoted with his work, Televisa, and he had asked her if she wanted to live in the United States with him when she was 17 years old. She thought it would be a great opportunity to go to school for a short time, and then return to Mexico. But things didn't work out the way they had planned:

The work for my father didn't work as well as he wanted to, so he ended up with no job and my other sister, she decided to stay in Mexico. She didn't want to lose her place in the University because it was so hard to get in. So she decided to stay there and I try to see if I can work, pay for my sister, help my father with his stuff to normal and then I can go back to Mexico.

She has been in the United States ever since. She still lives in the Bridgeport area with her husband, son (age 7), and daughter (age 10), who is an honor student at the local elementary school.

Human Capital: Language and Education

Many of the students I taught spoke only their parent's native language at home, which, for some, made it difficult to learn a new language at school. I had many parent/teacher conferences in which my student was asked to translate our conversation. These students were often the only connection between school and home.

Tiffany and Thomas were both brought to America by their parents when they were very young (ages 6 and 4, respectively). They were both educated entirely within the Chicago Public School system, and would therefore be considered second generation immigrants. Their perspectives differ from those of the other respondents because they do not know what it is like to live anywhere other than America, even though their connection to their ethnic and cultural

heritage is very strong. Both of their stories are similar in that they spoke of their parents having a difficult time learning English, which limited the job opportunities available to them, and also put them in the position of having to translate for their parents. Thomas recalled the many times he was asked to step in for his mother:

Not only for school, for doctors, utility company, because back in the '60's they didn't have, now finally, I work for AT&T, I take English and Spanish calls, so I get a lot of folks who don't speak any English so they're [fortunate]. In the '60's they didn't have that. So I remember going with my mother to the doctor and explaining the symptoms, she said she felt a little dizzy, she said this and she said, ask her about the family history, and I would have to interpret all this stuff, and it still goes on. It goes on with the new wave of immigrants.

This is an example of role reversal, which Portes and Rumbaut discuss at length as contributing to dissonant acculturation. Thomas's "learning of the English language and American ways and simultaneous loss of the immigrant culture" may have undercut his mother's authority in the household. While Portes and Rumbaut do not assume that dissonant acculturation leads to downward mobility, they do acknowledge the stress it can cause within a family.

Tiffany witnessed the effects of language barriers on the mobility of her parents. Even though her parents had completed high school and some post-secondary education in China, they were limited in the jobs they could find in the United States because they lacked the ability to speak English.

When my father came, his English wasn't that good. He didn't know English at all. So, he had to do a lot of ...hard labor, I guess. He was a chef for a while; now he's in construction. He used to work for a company, but now he's self-employed.

My mom had a little bit more English training while she was in China, so when she came – She was actually a housewife for a while, because she had my brother. So, until he was three years old, she didn't work. Then, she started working [at the Chinese Service League]. She had a little bit more English background, so that's why she was able to find a better job working in an office.

Although both Tiffany and Thomas witnessed the lack of the English language as being a barrier to mobility, their views began to diverge when speaking of the importance of maintaining their language of origin. While they both believe that being bilingual is important, Thomas was adamant about the negative effect bilingual education within schools has on immigrant children.

He feels as though it does children a disservice to be given information in both Spanish and English: “I don’t think they would give [Spanish] up, because I know how to read and write in Spanish, but I think they should give it up [in school]”. He believes that living in a prominently Spanish speaking community makes it very easy for immigrants to maintain their native language, without having to learn English. While this allows for an easy transition to the United States, he believes it does not benefit the new immigrants in the long run. “I feel that [speaking English] is *extremely, extremely* important because I think that when you present yourself in a logical manner, you earn respect when you know your facts, when you know your rights, when you can express them.” When asked what is preventing people in his community from learning the language, he responded that much of it has to do with working long hours, and a purely Spanish speaking community:

Working, working at relatively low paying jobs, so they love overtime because it means that they can pay their bills versus getting a shut off notice from the gas company or what have you. They probably don’t have the energy [to learn English]. Also, all the stores speak Spanish. You have your brand of food, your brand of this and your brand of that, you turn on the T.V., you don’t have to watch ABC News, you can watch Univision. So there is no incentive for anybody to learn [English] and then they get a job at a restaurant where they wait tables or do yard work, or somebody says, the boss is saying this, or one guy kind of just does this or that, once they get the hang of the job they don’t even need someone to tell them what to do. And there’s no incentive for it. And that’s the double-edged sword, they feel comfortable at first but in the long run it takes away political power, it takes away knowledge.

Alexandra also witnessed and had her own experiences with language as a barrier to mobility after she moved to the United States. She had intended to come to the U.S. in order to go to school and learn English. That did not happen due to unfortunate circumstances with her father’s job. She would later go back to school to learn English, but the years in between were hard for her because of her limited knowledge of the language. She was forced to work doing manual labor in restaurants, and while she was working she met many other immigrants, from both small towns and large cities, who were once professionals in Mexico. “People have to have the doctors or lawyers or things like that, they don’t have their papers, they speak very little

English, so even though they have a career they end up as dishwashers and it's really frustrating." In Alexandra's experience, even if an immigrant does have papers, it is very difficult to get a good job without knowing the language.

Alexandra's children, both second generation Mexican Americans and native Spanish speakers, began their school years getting some bilingual education at their public school. When asked if she liked the bilingual education her children received, or if she would have preferred an English only classroom, she replied,

English only. I went to the school, English 101, it was only English. And I think I learned a lot more from that class than from the ESL classes, because you are forced to speak and write and do everything in English. If you want to manage the language you have to completely study it. But I know some kids if you don't translate to them they don't want to try to understand. They just want to have everything translated. And that's not the way they learn. Some kids need different help. Because they came here when they are older, like fourth grade or fifth grade, they don't have any English basis. So they really need that push. It's good to have a bilingual system but not to keep the kids too long in the bilingual system. Because otherwise they will find it easy all the time to translate for them. But they need a little push in the beginning.

English was easy for her children to learn, but she understands that other kids need some transitional education to help them with learning the language. As with Thomas, she views extended use of bilingual education as being a crutch, and that the best way for children to learn the English language is to educate them in an English only classroom.

Winston's girls are both in the gifted classroom at school. Unlike many of the other students at their school, their first language was English, even though their father does not speak the language well. While Winston was glad that his children were able to be successful in school and had no troubles with the English language, he now laments the fact that he did not teach them both English and Chinese. He sees them resisting learning Chinese because it is foreign to them, and they don't understand why they would need to know it. They understand bits and pieces of Chinese, because their grandparents speak it to them, but they are unable to converse entirely in Chinese. As Winston says, "and, then, right now, my daughters talk American

Chinese”. He laughed at his comment, but immediately turned serious when he added, “they know I want them to learn Chinese”.

Language and education can be so intertwined that it is difficult to speak of one as distinct from the other. Many first generation immigrants come to America without knowing English, but it is the second generation that is often times trying to learn English in tandem with the other core subjects required by the curriculum. Language acquisition is a critical time in a student’s life, and “giving attention to the home language raises it to a place of dignity and respect, rather than permitting it to become a source of humiliation and shame for bicultural students” (Darder, 1991, 102). School expectations and teacher support both play a crucial role in the healthy development of bilingual students.

The respondents I spoke with were overwhelmingly aware of the importance of learning English as one of the keys to educational success. But, language was not the only educational issue that reared its head during our discussions. When asked about other issues that may affect the educational success of children of immigrants, each of the respondents spoke of the different educational systems and expectations of the schools in their native land as being a barrier for children being required to meld into a new educational model. Thomas referred to families who come from the countryside in Mexico with limited education as not being able to value and support their kids’ education as much because they were never exposed to it themselves and don’t feel as though it is something they, or their children, can attain.

I think that in their eyes its some sort of, they’re almost living in the world of kings and big castles, there’s a privilege up here and we’re never gonna be there versus, wait a minute, we may not make it all the way up there, but how about just a few rungs up and then my son will be even higher and so forth and so forth”. He describes the hopeless shrugging of the shoulders as, “ni modo”, as if to say, “whatever.”

He feels as though the Mexican population around him just accepts what is given to them, instead of trying to create a better situation for themselves and their families. “[If] someone

were to say, ‘I’m going to cut down on your hours or transfer you to this other job’, ‘well what can I do?’ Instead of help me understand why you’re doing this, if you’re justified because I think I have a different opinion of my job performance or whatever, it’s just ‘well, what can I do?’”

Thomas feels as though the shrugging of the shoulders leads to a survive versus thrive attitude. He speaks of the “ni modo” attitude when money is tight and times are tough:

Their way out is let me get my 12 or 14-year-old boy to help me, whether it be delivering newspapers or working at a restaurant or what have you, and it’s a vicious cycle. There’s like no way out, or at least they don’t get creative about it. ‘I’d rather struggle for another five years and once he had his equivalent of high school he either goes to the big city and learns a little bit more, but at least knows and has a thirst for learning, learning the language, become more successful’. It is very difficult – it frustrates me sometimes because they have this – eh, eh attitude.

Overall, Thomas exhibited what Darder might consider *cultural alienation*, or “an internalized identification with the dominant culture and a rejection of the primary culture” (Darder, 1991, 55). Although he married a woman from Mexico, with limited English speaking abilities, his comments during our discussion seemed to lean toward espousing American values, while looking down on his primary culture. He certainly identifies with his Mexican roots, but does not encourage his daughter to do the same. Some examples of alienation include “identifying herself/himself as American, refusal to speak Spanish, belief in the inferiority of the primary culture, and denial of the existence of racism” (Darder, 55). With the exception of the refusal to speak Spanish, I believe Thomas can identify with the examples stated above.

Alexandra’s responses when asked about the educational difficulties of Mexican students were very similar to what Thomas had to say. She also referred to the many immigrants coming to the United States from rural areas, and how the parents from those areas are coming with very little education. “It’s not happening 100%, but most of the rural communities have fewer schools, fewer teachers, a lot of kids. And I think that’s a problem there. There is no money to –

kids like [my daughter's] age go to just work in the fields or wherever they need to work, or with their mom taking care of the other kids. It's not – that doesn't help, they're already in big need of support the financial issues of the family that they forget about the education of the kids.”

When asked why she thought children of Mexican immigrants were having difficulty in American schools, she responded, “I think because we don't have the support of the parents. Their parents don't – some of them don't even read, so how are you going to teach – have your kid study the flashcards, the sounds of the letters, the math, whatever. That's what I do, but none of the other kids have the support. Sometimes you don't have the support at home then you are by yourself. And then the teacher at school have five hours but with all the kids, it's not individual.”

The importance and necessity of English language acquisition and educational support in the home were repeated by all of my respondents. Each one believed that lack of education and understanding of the English language could inhibit upward mobility amongst second generation immigrants, although their views differed when speaking of immersion, or education only using the English language, vs. bilingual education, or education using both the native and English language, within schools.

Discrimination

The effects of discrimination are not as tangible as language and education barriers, especially not in present day America where much of the discrimination taking place is veiled. It is also not always a barrier to mobility, in the views of my respondents. While they all spoke of having felt discriminated against in their lives, some spoke of how discrimination had been beneficial to them and their children. The respondents who have felt the negative effects spoke

of their experiences with venom in their voices, obviously remembering the subtle ways in which discrimination can take form.

My respondents have all lived in the United States for most or all of their lives. Still, because of their skin color, accents, and background, they are thought of as different by “mainstream” Americans. Alexandra spoke of how hard it was for her to go to school and work in a primarily white school:

I had a really bad experience when I started college in Moraine Valley. I was working at the community college – mostly white, not Hispanic, there were some Muslims, very few black people, maybe two or three Hispanic in the whole school. It was really, really small community, the Hispanic community there. I started working there because I needed to work, so I can pay for my classes and some of the guys that came to the library start talking to me, “oh, where is your horse”, and “andale, andale”, things like that. Things that I don’t speak and I don’t grow up with that and it’s not part of my experience, my culture, my education, and I got really disappointed with that.

Alexandra felt as though she did not have an equal chance of success due to stereotyping. As soon as people labeled her as Hispanic, she was no longer seen as valuable, and didn’t receive the same treatment as others. According to social reproduction theorists, this treatment continues in order to keep what McLaren refers to as *subordinate cultures*, in oppressive conditions in order to legitimize the *dominant culture*’s position (McLaren, 1988). Alexandra said that people in America have,

very strong stereotypes about Hispanic people. That’s why it’s hard for us to go whatever place to fit in, because they mark you with the accent. You are Hispanic. Even when you go to an office and ask for information. I don’t know, whatever place, they start speaking to you really loud like you are deaf. I’m not deaf, I just don’t understand everything they say. They speak really loud and really rude. And white people get, “Oh hi! Can I help you?” Why don’t I get the same treatment? I’m going to do business for your company, I expect the same.

Bourdieu (1980), Darder (1991), Ogbu (1991), and Suarez-Orozco (2001) would all state that the reason Alexandra was not treated the same was because her culture did not fit into the norms that the dominant class was trying to reproduce. Darder states that, “subordinate cultures are maintained in oppressive conditions not only through the dominant culture’s function to legitimate the interests and values of the dominant groups, but also through an ideology that

functions to marginalize and invalidate cultural values, heritage, language, knowledge and lived experiences – all of which constitute essential elements for the survival of subordinate cultures” (Darder, 1991, 30). Alexandra’s values, heritage, language, and knowledge were all being questioned and oppressed through simple acts of communication.

Alexandra does not feel as though her son or daughter have to endure the same stereotyping as she has had to, due in part to their ability to speak the English language without an accent. Her children are bilingual and bicultural, which gives them the advantage of being able to function well within two different cultural environments. Thus, they are able to, “mediate between the dominant discourse of educational institutions and the realities that they must face as members of subordinate cultures” (Darder, 1991, 48).

Growing up in Bridgeport, Tiffany was able to be in an environment that was accepting of immigrants from many countries. She excelled at school, made friends, and adapted quickly to the “American” way of life. This put her in a difficult position, and left her feeling as though she did not belong in either her Chinese home or with her American friends. When asked if she felt like she was stuck in the middle, she said, “Not even. Like, I’m just the outsider in both cultures. It’s hard for me, because I get discrimination from both sides, but I learn to just disregard it. I feel that because they feel this way, I need to educate them and help the future generation so they will not feel the same pressure that I have”. The feeling of “otherness” can leave the second generation feeling caught between two worlds, not being able to identify with either. While Tiffany was able to overcome her feelings by embracing her Chinese heritage, it could have left her feeling lost.

Priscilla, a Chinese immigrant who moved to America 20 years ago, feels as though she had been discriminated against at certain times, although she found her home as a teacher at her

elementary school in Bridgeport, “because over 60% of the student population are of Chinese origin, and the administrators have encouraged and valued Chinese culture”. According to Priscilla, discrimination has not factored into the overall successes and failures in her life. She was able to earn a PhD, and is a well respected teacher at her school.

Both Tiffany and Winston, as Asians, spoke of having to deal with the “model minority” stereotype. Most of the discrimination they have both felt stemmed from students, teachers, and employers assuming that they were smarter and harder working than most. Tiffany said, “I have this distinctive memory of once when I was doing math homework, one of my classmates came up to me and asked me this question on math. I looked at it and I was like, ‘I don’t know.’ He’s like, ‘You’re Chinese, so you *have* to know math! That’s your thing.’” While she knows of students who would internalize the outward pressure they felt, she was able to say, “Just because I’m Chinese doesn’t mean I have to be good at math – Or it doesn’t mean I have to be good at *anything*. I’m me, so I’m good at what I do. Not because I’m Chinese, but because I’m me”.

Winston has seen the “model minority” stereotypes at play, both with himself and his daughters, but feels as though it can be beneficial. He likes that teachers expect his daughters to be good at math and science, because he feels as though they work harder and do better to meet the higher expectation. He also thinks they will have an easier time finding a job due to their minority status. In the computer science department at his company, “most of the time they would like to hire Asian people because they’re hard worker. They don’t complain that much...so a lot of people like to hire the minority. And then the other thing is when you’re hired, when you get the minority under you, you will get a point. You have a female, that’s one point. If you’re female Asian, you’ve got two points.” Winston was referring to affirmative action and the hiring of minorities who have been underrepresented and discriminated against in

the past. The system for rewarding companies that hire minorities is a great one for Winston and his daughters. In this case, he has a positive feeling toward discrimination in that it will give his daughters a leg up on the competition in the future.

Thomas believes that discrimination is still a relevant barrier to mobility for people from Mexico, but does not attribute it to racial, but rather cultural discrimination. He feels as though cultural barriers can be overcome by being able to “blend in” to American culture. Being able to identify with the people around you is important.

If somebody goes out there and says, ‘How about those Bears?’ and the other guy is saying, ‘Oh, I was watching soccer’. It’s two different worlds. So, once you start immigrating, once you start becoming an American, then I think that it breaks down a lot of barriers that perhaps a lot of American and Europeans might have. But prior to that there is a big gap. Again, I still keep in touch with some of my friends from high school, a buddy of mine who’s German and Polish descent, 30 years and we go to ballgames, we do this and we do that. It would be different if I had never bothered to learn English and I would never keep in touch with them.

Thomas believes that through assimilation, people will no longer feel the discrimination that continues to plague many immigrants in the United States. By becoming “one of us”, as Thomas puts it, they don’t have to endure stereotypes and derogatory names. In a time when the definition of “an American” is becoming more and more blurred, some still feel as though the way to overcome adversity is to assimilate and become, “one of us”.

Cultural Capital

Much like discrimination, cultural capital can be veiled in ideas such as societal norms and expectations. Within Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, the dominant culture imposes its values onto the non-dominant groups, thereby reproducing the dominant group’s values. In this case, the reproduction of American values continues via the schools and the classroom.

What seems like a natural way of thinking and acting to most Americans is not natural to many immigrants. Culture is part of our identities, it’s what defines where we came from, and

where we are going. While finding networks of people to assist in the logistics of transitioning to a new country can be fairly straightforward, trying to navigate within a world of unquestioned biases toward certain cultures can be much more difficult. Discrimination was already discussed above, although stereotyping and preconceived ideas of certain cultures are what can lead to a low level of cultural capital. As a participant observer, I was able to witness first hand the cultural attributes that teachers tend to appreciate in their students, such as working hard, and a quiet demeanor, along with other behaviors teachers and others may judge as less desirable in comparison with American culture. This correlates with Bourdieu's argument that a society's dominant class reproduces what they deem to be socially acceptable behavior through pedagogic action (e.g., education), and those who do not understand the symbols and meanings behind these behaviors are kept out of the dominant social circle, thus decreasing their chances of gaining cultural and social capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Often, dominant behaviors are reproduced without the knowledge of the actors. After talking with Thomas and Winston, I noticed that their desire to "blend in" with the American culture outweighed their desire to have their native culture accepted. When I asked Thomas if he felt as though his culture had been accepted into society and viewed as equal by the dominant culture, he replied:

No. Well, I don't think that's a black and white answer. I think there's gray. I think that again, if you're the kind of person that can blend in, that can go out there and talk to everyone about hey did you see the Sox game or what do you think about this – [you can attain American values (said by the interviewer)]. Right. If you can identify with somebody. If somebody goes out there and says, how about those Bears and the guy is saying oh, I was watching soccer, it's two different worlds. So once you start immigrating, once you start becoming an American, then I think that it breaks down a lot of barriers that perhaps a lot of Americans and Europeans might have. But prior to that there's a big gap.

In other words, Thomas feels as though it is the responsibility of the immigrants to "blend in", to learn about what Americans value, and try to accommodate those values by making them their own. Winston also used a sports analogy to discuss the importance of being able to talk with

people regardless of cultural background. Although he admits he is not able to make small talk, he says it is good for when immigrants, “go out to find a job, and they need to talk to the people. Because for me, I don’t like football. I like soccer. So, when we talk about football, then that’s bad for me. Everybody’s watching *Monday Night Football*. Tuesday, everybody, it’s like they’ll have a meeting at eight o’clock in the morning [because everyone’s been watching it the night before]”. While these examples may seem benign as far as social reproduction theory is concerned, it relates to what Ogbu would call cultural frames of reference. Both Thomas and Winston view the dominant culture as something in which it is important to fit in order to get ahead, whereas if they had an oppositional frame of reference, they would oppose the dominant culture in an effort to establish their own.

As a third grade teacher in Chicago, I had Mexican, Chinese, and Caucasian students in my class each year. Overall, the academic performance of my second generation Chinese students was much better than that of my second generation Mexican students. I found that the differences in academics and behavior were much less when comparing third generation Chinese and Mexican students with Caucasian students. There are many possible reasons for these differences, all relating to cultural capital. First, parental involvement at conferences, and during the school year, allow a teacher to believe that the educational success of the child is of utmost importance. Second, the behavior of students in the classroom in part reflects what is being taught at home, and this can add to or detract from how their culture is viewed by Americans, and hence, whether their cultural capital in this country leads to positive or negative acculturation.

During my 5 years of teaching in Chicago, I had scheduled parent/teacher conferences with approximately 150 parents and many impromptu before and after school conferences as

well. Many of the parents spoke English, while some did not. Our school provided us with translators on occasion, but the majority of non-English speaking parents did not come to school to speak with me other than parent/teacher conferences, and sometimes not even then. While this behavior may have been viewed as not taking an interest in what was happening at school, what I found through discussions with parents at parent/teacher conferences was that the Chinese parents played an important role in the student's learning at home, and viewed school as the place where teachers were in charge of their child's learning. This is in contrast to the parents of the Mexican students, who were not very visible at school, and, as I found through discussion with the parents of my students and the students themselves, weren't able to help out as much at home due to work responsibilities, many children to care for, and/or language difficulties. By far, the most influential and forceful parents at my school were the parents of the Caucasian students who were involved in many school decisions, and generally did what they thought necessary to support their children. Based on conversations I have had with other teachers, they appreciate and respect the Chinese for allowing them to do their jobs, but also supporting them by working with the kids at home, while they have had a more difficult time with the Mexican parents who they didn't think played an active role in their children's education. A veteran, white, gifted and talented teacher said, "I like that the Chinese parents take a keen interest in their children's education. At times, it can be challenging because they know what they want. But, I'd rather know that the parents are working with their kids at home, than only allow learning to take place during school, which is how it is with my Mexican parents". While it seems as though, in this case, the American culture and Chinese culture are not actually similar, the positive reaction to the Chinese culture from teachers only helps to raise their level of cultural capital within schools.

Behavior in school also plays a big part in forming teacher's beliefs about the culture of immigrant families. In general, the Chinese students in my class sat quietly, listened to instruction, and completed their work, whereas the Mexican students tended to be talking to friends, walking around the room, and playing with toys at their desk. For some teachers, having a noisy class was never an issue. However, many teachers at my school preferred classes that were quiet and seemed to be paying attention. When I asked the white, gifted and talented teacher to give me words that described her Chinese students, she said, "disciplined, well-behaved, structured". I also asked her to describe her Mexican students: "Open to learning, struggling". Again, while the behaviors of Mexican children and Chinese children can be different, many teachers preferred the behavior of the Chinese children, which helped to strengthen their cultural capital, while the Mexican cultural capital was lowered based on so-called bad behavior in school.

So how do the views of teachers affect the children? All of topics discussed above contribute to how teachers view their student's culture. If teachers feel as though a student's culture is similar to their own (or at least compatible with it), that adds to the cultural capital of that student in the eyes of the teacher. This, in turn, can create a positive relationship between the teacher and the student, in which the teacher is more understanding and forgiving of difficulties the student might be having. Also, the expectations for those students might be higher, which can create a self fulfilling prophesy in which the student works to the level the teacher expects. All of the teachers I spoke to said that they thought expectations for their Chinese students were much higher at their school. Inversely, if the teacher does not find value in a student's culture, or does not understand the ways of the culture, the expectations might be lower, which could also create a negative self fulfilling prophesy in which the student themselves

start to feel devalued. Because people's views on how they value certain cultures can be veiled and not discussed openly (when asked bluntly, the teachers I spoke to did not openly admit to valuing the Chinese culture over the Mexican culture), it is difficult to investigate the effects of low cultural capital on the students. I found it was common that teachers viewed themselves as neutral and unbiased toward student cultures, which means that

many racist, classist, and sexist attitudes and behaviors are most often disguised by faulty common-sense assumptions utilized extensively to assess student academic performance or classroom behavior. For example, most teachers still retain notions of culture that reflect colorblind or melting-pot assumptions and a bootstrap mentality. Simply put, these teachers believe that all people are the same in spite of race or culture, that the United States is a place where all cultures have (or should have) melted together to form one culture, and that anyone who wants to succeed *can* succeed, irrespective of social or economic circumstances. (Darder, 1991, 114)

It is with this mentality that Bourdieu's social reproduction theory has the chance to rear its head.

The assumption that all cultures should assimilate to American ways can cause students from disenfranchised communities to feel marginalized and doubt that the educational system can work for them.

Social Capital

The families of the immigrants have played such a key role in their stories, and were spoken of often when discussing social capital. Coleman's theory of social capital deals specifically with the social networks and supports that people are able to garner. The support that some received when arriving in a new land for the first time eased their incorporation into, and understanding of their new home. Conversely, those who did not have any family or community connections felt lost and stranded while trying to figure out the language and intricate workings of their new country.

Thomas, Tiffany, and Winston all had family members already in the United States when their families moved. While Thomas and Tiffany were both young when their families came to

the United States, they remember the assistance they and their parents received from family members and friends upon their arrival. Thomas remembers the assistance his mother received when they first arrived:

My father and his family were here from the '50's and she knew family from them and they gave her a hand. They would come over and either you stay there for a month or two until you get your feet and then they would get you a small little apartment and typically in a Hispanic neighborhood and you would rent and start out and go from there.

Although Thomas's mother also knew people in Texas, she decided to move to Chicago because, given her first grade education, she had a better chance of finding work in the factories.

Tiffany also remembered all of the support they received from family and friends, but even more, the impact the community service league has had on her life and the life of her family:

From my knowledge, [my dad] had friends here. And relatives-of-relatives, or whatever. I guess, like, "the Chinese network" it's called. [*Laughter*]. They outreach a lot, to each other. He had friends and relatives here, so I guess that's how he was able to find work. And the Chinese-American Service League was also a great help to us when my mom and I came. So, I took a lot of business classes [at the Chinese-American Service League], they tutored me a lot in English and whatever, for school. So, basically, our biggest resource is definitely the Chinese-American Service League.

Portes states that, "social capital, grounded on ethnic networks, provides a key resource in confronting obstacles to successful adaptation" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 64). Tiffany's family had an easier time adapting due to the ethnic networks they were able to make through the Chinese-American Service League.

Although Priscilla's brother was living in Ohio at the time of her arrival, she was able to stay with them for ten days. She did not want to bother him too much, because he was a busy doctor and she felt like she was intruding. After she made her way to Chicago, she felt like the community support she received was the key to helping her learn the new city and social system that she and her family found themselves in.

First, I met a Chinese mother at the same preschool where I sent my daughter. She brought us to the Chinese Church, where I met lots of Chinese people. We got much support from them. They taught me

many things that sped up our acculturation in addition to the information provided by my brother. Many of them were graduate students or had already earned a Ph.D. degree from the local colleges. We benefited greatly for the support network.

When asked about whether she felt there was an obligation within the community to help people look for jobs or money, Priscilla mentioned the Chinese-American Service League and the great resources it provides.

In Chicago, there is the Chinese-American Service League in South Chinatown, and the Chinese American Mutual Aide Association on the north side of the city. I think those people are more familiar with helping new immigrants. But, I would like to help if anybody asks for help.

What became obvious when talking with Winston, Priscilla, and Tiffany was the importance of community centers such as the Chinese-American Service League. Alexandra did not find a resource similar to the CASL initially to help her with her transition, nor did she have any family in the United States. She found that while working in a Mexican restaurant, and speaking with the other people that worked there, that she was able to learn about the different schools in the area and eventually enrolled in a program at National Louis University. It took her a while to figure out what she needed to do to enroll, but once there she found that, “they [had] a community service for students that came from other countries”. She found that service to be very helpful. While they did not help her with housing, they helped her with

“everything about the system, the schools, what I [had] to get so I can relate my classes from Mexico to here so I can be in the same level. More like an education side. For housing and other stuff, we were pretty much on our own. Which was really hard. Things that people take for granted when they are here, because they know where to go, they know where to buy things. You don’t know anything.”

Because she did not have family to turn to, like Thomas did, she felt confused and overwhelmed by the transition, and it took her a much longer time to acculturate.

Acculturation

Who will go, and who will stay? I was curious to find out how the length of stay in America could affect the acculturation of the children and parents involved. It seemed only natural to think that if a family was coming to America to work for a short time, but planned on going back to the home country, they wouldn't invest as much time and energy into getting to know the language and the systems needed to navigate their new home successfully. Due to the proximity of Mexico versus China to the United States, it would be much easier for Mexican immigrants to find their way back to their homeland. Thomas agreed, stating,

That's where the big difference between Asians and European immigrants versus at least Mexican, Latin-American. They never plan on going back, but they never verbalize that. They verbalize the opposite. I'm going to work for five years, get a little money and get my house [back in Mexico]. It never happens. No. They're here 15 years and once they get married and once they have kids they're not going to go back, yet they don't have that mental mindset to say, okay, I'm not going to go back but make this my home. They never truly feel [that this is home]. Once they go back they always come back to the U.S. Even if they stay a whole year down there, even if they do this, or do that, they always come back. That's why you have a lot of seasonal temporary workers, because they make a little money, they go back.

Alexandra felt the same when asked a similar question. She said that most of the people she knows come from a rural area in Mexico to work in the United States. When asked if they are here to stay, she said, "Most of them. I say 90% are planning to return, but only 10% do. Like me. I was planning to [go back] and never did. I didn't plan to work here, just to study and I ended up living here."

I asked Thomas if he thought temporary citizens were able to commit themselves to helping their children become successful in school. He responded by saying,

No. I think they give it lip service, but I don't think it's a necessary action. I think they're honest, and genuine saying, "I want my daughter or son to become a success", but they don't take advantage or perhaps they're not aware of – there are steps to take for that to happen. You can't just wish it to happen. I need to make sure that they're studying and make sure they're off the street. I need to provide them with motivation.

All three of my Chinese American respondents mentioned schooling as being a key reason why they or their parents came to America to live, and moving back to mainland China was never discussed after they immigrated to the United States. Visiting relatives in China is

something they have all tried to do, but many of their family members have also made the move to the United States. Priscilla states that she wouldn't want to return to China because, "America has more living space, better educational environment, and better job opportunities. In Hong Kong it has been highly competitive for entering colleges". Priscilla's brother and parents both moved to the United States, as did Tiffany's and Winston's families. Other than a few cousins and distant aunts and uncles, all three of the respondents have their immediate families living close to them, which has allowed them to disconnect themselves from their native homeland with much more ease than my Mexican respondents indicated. So just how much does community and family help in the transition to living in a foreign country? My respondents spoke about their experiences upon arrival in the United States.

Hopes and Aspirations

The path to America is not an easy one for many immigrants, but every year hundreds of thousands of immigrants work through the system to gain American citizenship, with hundreds of thousands more crossing the borders illegally. What is it that makes people want to give up everyone and everything they've known to move to a foreign land? My respondents answered that question simply and overwhelmingly: The next generation. Winston and Alexandra did not come to America with their offspring in mind, but that is why they have stayed in America. Tiffany and Thomas *were* the next generation, and their parents moved to America so that they could have greater opportunities. And Priscilla wanted her "children to have a better educational environment". Woven throughout all of their narratives was the idea of hope and the chance for a better life.

Alexandra grew up in Mexico City, and while she could have gotten her education and a job in Mexico, she felt as though the opportunities were limited. She came to the U.S. because in Mexico City, with 2.9 million people, “There is not enough jobs. And I think people are trying to look for some other opportunities”. Her father found another good job after he lost his first job, and her mother also found work in the United States. Her sister went back to Mexico for university because it was too expensive to pay for schooling in Chicago. Alexandra believes in the Mexican school system, but is still hoping that her children will finish university in the United States, and go on for a further degree. She feels as though, with the right education, the United States offers many more opportunities for a nice life, and is working with her children so that they can take advantage of those opportunities.

Like Alexandra, Winston hopes that someday his children will be able to live his dream, which has now become “the American dream”: steady work, a nice house, the ability to raise a family. When he came to the United States with his parents, he was in high school and remembers the responsibility he felt toward studying hard for his parents. Like his parents, he said that immigrants, “work 10 hours a day, sometimes they work 12 hour days. You see a parent work so hard and they ask you for study, you go for higher education or you stuck with me in the restaurant, like me. You don’t want to do that. When you get the higher education you get a good job and the kid says, ‘Yeah, my parent can do that; I can do that, too’”. Winston was able to make his parents proud by working hard to get an advanced degree in computer science, and he has those same expectations for his kids. He believes that America can provide for his family in a way China could not. He believes a degree in America is worth a lot more, and you will get paid a lot more for it than if you were to live in China. “In Hong Kong, people get a degree, maybe [employers] pay \$10,000. In America, you have education, its \$20,000. Double”.

Winston visited Hong Kong in 1987, and that was the last time he has been back to his homeland. While he would like his children to understand their Chinese heritage, he is firmly planted in America, and doesn't have any plans to return to China.

Thomas's mother was forever thankful that she was able to live in America. According to Thomas, she said, "When I came to this country, I forgot what hunger is. I never, ever, all I knew was that if I was able bodied I could do a job that would feed me and put a roof over my head". When she would cross the border from Mexico into the United States, she would say, "I'm home".

Discussion and Analysis

The main goal of this research was to examine if the social and cultural capital of Mexican and Chinese immigrants helped or hindered their acculturation process, and whether the parent's capital affected the educational success of their children. The stories told by my respondents were much more complex and variable than a simple black and white answer, which reflected their rich lives and gave voice to social and cultural capital theory. I found that social and cultural capital does, in fact, play an important role in the acculturation process of immigrants, and, beyond my original intent, my research has also shown the importance of language, human capital, and locality in making a successful transition.

The finding that most surprised me was that of positive discrimination spoken of by both Tiffany and Winston. Winston especially thought of teachers' raised expectations due to his race as a benefit, and they both felt as though those expectations helped them to perform better. Portes and Rumbaut's findings conclude that self esteem plays the largest part in determining a child's aspirations for educational attainment (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001b, 215-220). Suarez-

Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) spoke of W.E.B Du Bois' theory of double consciousness, in which there is an internal awareness of how one views themselves and how others view them. Stereotypes and discrimination can create a struggle between those two perceptions, and can cause one to change their identity to fit the perceptions of others. In the case of the Chinese students, double consciousness was a benefit to them, because they were able to have a positive self image based partly on the teachers' positive perception of them. Positive messages from teachers and outside sources increase the level of affirmation, and therefore increase the child's aspirations. My respondents affirmed that although the model minority stereotype is a form of discrimination, it has been helpful for them and their educational aspirations.

I found through discussions with other teachers that they did not view the Mexican culture as being similar to their own, nor did they think the Mexican students were as motivated and disciplined as their Asian counterparts. My Mexican respondents also spoke of the discrimination and stereotyping they have had to endure. Negative stereotypes have created a lower level of cultural capital for the Mexican population as a whole and according to both Portes and Rumbaut, and Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, a low level of cultural capital could lead to downward mobility. My study does not accurately reflect the downward mobility spoken of by Portes, Rumbaut, and Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, mainly because all of my respondents were well educated English speakers. While this is a weakness of my study, it also leads to my conclusion that while a low level of cultural capital (the dominant culture's negative view of other cultures) may hinder upward mobility, it is certainly not the only or most important factor. Human capital, or the ability to increase your social standing through education, as evidenced by the upward mobility of my respondents, is possibly of greater importance than cultural capital. With this said, a high level human capital alone does not garner a greater degree

of cultural capital. For example, one can invest in English language classes, but may still speak with an accent. In this case, he or she may still not gain a higher level of cultural capital because of discriminatory practices against those with accents. This supports Portes's and Rumbaut's statement that a lower level of human capital *combined with* a negative context of reception (low level of cultural capital) will create disadvantages for immigrants. My Mexican respondents both believed that because they were able to overcome the oppression they felt, get a good education, and raise their human capital, they were able to gain the upward mobility that their parents had wanted for them.

While my Mexican respondents' testimonies did not correspond with Portes and Rumbaut's findings that, "aspirations for their children are significantly lower than for other groups (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001b, 278), they do support the overall importance of social capital in the acculturation process. Alexandra had a very difficult time learning the system, and it wasn't until she enrolled in a college that she found the support she needed. Neither she nor Thomas spoke of a community service made available to them upon arriving in the United States, whereas all of my Chinese respondents spoke of the Chinese-American Service League, and what a great help it had been, and continues to be, to them. The existence of such a service is most likely due to the Chinese ethnic enclave found in Bridgeport, which supports Portes and Rumbaut's statement that, "children of Chinese and Korean immigrants and of Vietnamese refugees – groups that have benefited from strong preexisting ethnic communities or extensive resettlement assistance – perform better on the average" (Portes & Rumbaut, 242). While Chicago has Mexican enclaves, Bridgeport is not considered one of those enclaves. Therefore, much of the assistance available is located in a different neighborhood, which makes it more difficult for newly arrived immigrants to access. My Mexican respondents spoke of teaching

their children about the Mexican culture and keeping their culture alive within their home, whereas the children of my Chinese respondents continue to take classes at the Chinese American Service League, along with reinforcement from home, to help maintain their cultural heritage.

My findings on social capital support Coleman's view of social capital which states that, "Individuals engage in interactions and networking in order to produce profits" (Lin, 2001, 19). Social relationships are fostered in order to find housing, jobs, money, and a greater social standing. This was evidenced by my respondents who were able to stay with family when they arrived in the United States. Those who did reported that their family members were able to help them make social connections, which then helped them to find work and housing. For Thomas, this is where the social networking stopped, but my Chinese immigrants all reported familial help, along with the help of the Social Service League. Not only did the league help with housing and networks, but also provided workshops in which immigrants were able to learn English, bus routes, and cultural customs often found in America. This not only helped the Chinese immigrants improve their social capital, but also their cultural capital, which can often become co-mingled.

Bourdieu's view of social capital is very much intertwined with cultural capital in that the ability of a person to gain social networks to find housing and jobs very much depends on the dominant culture's acceptance of that person's culture. In the vertical model of social capital, in which people make connections with others below and above their social status, persons with a low level of cultural capital would have a difficult time making connections with those of a higher status, aka, the dominant class. It is difficult to prove that the educational system is reproducing inequality in order to maintain power when so much of what people believe is

hidden behind unquestioned norms and values. I do believe that my findings with regard to cultural capital show the dissonance between cultures, and that dissonance creates stereotypes which have a negative effect on the Mexican population. While I do not believe teachers I spoke with are consciously trying to repress Mexican students (they may be doing it, but most may not be aware of their actions), teachers expect a certain amount of conformity and judge those who do not comply. This creates inequality and helps to maintain the dominant culture's standing, which is aligned with Bourdieu's definition of social capital.

According to Ogbu's theory of voluntary immigrants being more successful and able to acculturate than involuntary immigrants, I had originally looked at my two groups of respondents as being voluntary, which would have challenged his theory with regards to Mexican immigrants. The more I spoke with my respondents, the more I questioned whether *any* of them migrated to America voluntarily. With the exception of Alexandra, whose father got a job in the U.S., my other respondents came out of necessity. My Chinese respondents migrated to America in the late 80's due to political unrest in their country. While according to Ogbu's definition of involuntary immigrants, neither Mexican nor Chinese immigrants would be considered involuntary, I believe their migration could have been forced, and although they voluntarily moved to the United States, they may have chosen to stay in their homeland if not for the political situation in China and lack of work in Mexico. Thomas's mother, similar to many Mexican immigrants, moved to America because there were no work opportunities at home, which could also be considered a forced migration, although not according to Ogbu's definition which states that voluntary immigrants, "chose to move permanently and become minorities in the United States in hopes of a better future. These minorities do not interpret their presence in the United States as having been forced on them by the U.S. government or by White

Americans” (Ogbu, 2003, 50). Ogbu’s definition clearly identifies the Mexican and Chinese immigrants I interviewed as voluntary immigrants, which means they would not be expected to have oppositional frames of reference. More specifically, both immigrant groups, “interpret the cultural differences as barriers to be overcome”, versus those with oppositional cultural frame of reference (involuntary immigrants), who are “ambivalent in their interpretation of cultural differences as barriers and markers of groups identity” (Ogbu, 1995, 271). Based on these definitions, I believe that all of my respondents view cultural differences as barriers to be overcome, the difference being that some have assimilated and some have acculturated.

What I found interesting was the fact that my Mexican respondents did not feel at all as though their identity was being threatened. In fact, Thomas was very much in favor of immigrants becoming as “American” as possible. The Chinese respondents, on the other hand, absolutely personified “accommodation without assimilation” (Gibson & Bhachu, 1991, 71). All of them had learned the American system, and did what they needed to in order to be successful, but none of them had given up their language or cultural identity. While both Mexican and Chinese migration may have been forced, they both fit into Ogbu’s definition of voluntary immigrants as people who try to overcome barriers. I believe it could be argued that many more Mexican migrants might be classified as involuntary immigrants based on both their reasons for coming to America, and their acculturation process once here.

Another part of my findings that did not entirely align with the research was with regards to Portes and Rumbaut’s theory of dissonant, consonant, and selective acculturation. It was their belief that consonant and selective acculturation would lead to upward mobility, while dissonant acculturation, when the child’s acculturation process is happening at a much faster rate than the parent’s, would lead to downward mobility. My findings showed that all of my respondents

achieved upward mobility. All of my Chinese respondents experienced selective acculturation. They all maintained their own language and culture, while acculturating to their new environment with much support from their family and/or community. They all migrated with a fairly high level of human capital, which also helped to ease their transition. I believe Alexandra also experienced selective acculturation, in that she came to the United States with a high level of human capital, and a father with a work visa, which eased her transition even without community support. She is still in touch with her language, family, and her Mexican culture, and would like her children to be familiar with their Mexican roots as well. Thomas is my only respondent that I believe partially defies the predictors laid out for him. His childhood very much reflects the definition of dissonant acculturation. He had to translate for his mother, who never really learned the language, and he has a diminishing regard for his cultural origins. Regardless of their divergent acculturation, Thomas absolutely achieved upward mobility and continues to maintain a very close relationship with his mother. I do, however, agree with one indicator of dissonant acculturation with regards to Thomas: His connection to his culture and people within the Mexican community is not strong. He gets angry when he sees Mexicans not embracing their new American ways. His wife's family is still in Mexico, and he does not have a desire to go back to visit. Finally, he does not believe in maintaining one's language of origin, evidenced by the fact that his daughter does not speak fluent Spanish and he does not believe in bilingual education. I do see this as a tragic effect of dissonant acculturation; one which could sever family connections, and not provide an affective support system for immigrants caught in the middle of two cultures.

Thomas made his beliefs about language in schools very well known, although he was the only one of my respondents who believed that immersion in the English language was better

than bilingual education. Alexandra's daughter did very well in her bilingual classes. She learned English quickly and excelled at school. In fact, all of the children of my respondents did very well at school, which is another weakness of this study. I do not think it is a coincidence that many of the parents of my struggling students did not know enough English to be interviewed. With that said, I think bilingual education classes, *especially*, for those students who do not have English speaking parents at home, is crucial for a student's success. Because of the high human capital and knowledge of English of my respondents, they were able to spend time with their children helping them with their school work. But, many immigrant parents do not have that luxury, and the effects of that can be detrimental to their children's educational attainment.

My final topic for analysis comes from an issue that was not spoken of much in the related research, but is one that I think is very important: locality. I found that my Mexican respondents had many more ties to their homeland, whether it was family or, in Alexandra's case, and appreciation and longing for her life in Mexico. Because of the close proximity to the United States, is it relatively easy for Mexican immigrants to go back to visit their homeland, or move back after they made enough money. Both of my Mexican respondents affirmed the fact that some immigrants they know have never truly committed themselves to being a U.S. citizen, and always intended to move back to Mexico. This is in contrast to my Chinese respondents who do not know of anyone who is planning on moving back to China. I think this plays a big part in a child's ability to acculturate.

I also think locality has a very practical application in this discussion as well. Many Mexican immigrants who come to the United States are from rural areas, and do not come with much human or financial capital. Because of the proximity, they do not need as much capital in

order to gain access to this country. The Chinese respondents that I spoke with all had enough money to fly themselves and their family members to the United States, and although many Chinese immigrants end up doing manual labor, they come with a generally higher level of education.

In conclusion, I feel as though my research confirms the theory that higher levels of social and cultural capital have a positive effect on the educational success of children. Adding social services for immigrants is happening all the time, and needs to continue. The change that can happen in order to walk down the path of educational attainment for all is in the minds of teachers and individuals who consider themselves American. Questioning stereotypes and understanding that American does not stand for one culture only, will create change in everyone and allow children to feel as though their culture is harmonious with the culture of their new home. There isn't one right way of being, even though teachers, often times, like to see conformity in their classrooms. Given the high levels of immigration continuing from year to year, this is not an issue that will disappear, but if we can begin a discourse within schools about questioning our engrained views, a transformation could begin to happen.

Future Research

Throughout my research on the effects of social and cultural capital on the educational success of the second generation, I became very interested in the issue of locality, and how transnational ties and commitments affect the acculturation and educational attainment

of children. I think ethnographic and quantitative research would be helpful in learning about the successes of acculturation of families who have transnational ties versus those who do not.

I also think my study could be expanded by speaking with immigrants who do not know English to find out their thoughts on social and cultural capital.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

1. What kind of community help did you receive upon arrival to the US?
2. What kind of family aid did you receive upon arrival to the US?
3. Do you feel as though there is an obligation within your community to help people looking for jobs or money?
4. Why did you come to America?
5. What type of expectations do you have for your children?
6. How involved are you in your children's education?
7. How much education did you receive before coming to the US?
8. Do you plan on returning to your native land?
9. How do you feel about the type of education your child is receiving? Are teaching styles and classroom structures similar or different from what you experienced in your native land?
10. Do you live with people of the same ethnic background? How has that affected your transition to the US (ie, language skills)?
11. How important do you think learning English is for success in the US?

Do you feel it is more important for your children to learn American values or maintain native values? How do you encourage either or both? How do you feel about the American culture? What are some similarities and differences between the American culture and your culture?
12. Have you ever felt discriminated against?

APPENDIX BCONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**Educational disparities: A comparative study of the role of social and cultural capital of first generation Chinese and Mexican immigrants in the acculturation process of their children****What is the purpose of this research?**

I am asking you to be in a research study because I am trying to learn more about the social and cultural resources of Chinese and Mexican parents, and how that affects the educational success of their children. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a Chinese or Mexican parent of a Healy School student. This study is being conducted by Carolyn Bruner at DePaul University.

How much time will this take?

This study will take about 1 hour of your time.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to be interviewed by Carolyn Bruner.

What are the risks involved in participating in this study?

Being in this study does not involve much risk beyond what you would encounter in daily life. Questions will be asked about your immigration experience, and your thoughts on the public school system. There is a minimal risk that you will feel uncomfortable about answering certain questions.

What are the benefits of my participation in this study?

You will not personally benefit from being in this study. However, I hope that what I learn will help Mexican and Chinese immigrants locate the resources they need for successful participation into American society. This will hopefully allow their children better opportunities at home and at school.

Can I decide not to participate? If so, are there other options?

Yes, you can choose not to participate. Even if you agree to be in the study now, you can change your mind later and leave the study. There will be no negative consequences if you decide not to participate or change your mind later.

How will my privacy be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. In any report we might publish, we will not include any information that will identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Whom can I contact for more information?

If you have questions about this study, please contact Carolyn Bruner at 773-991-1405. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Shay-Ann Heiser Singh, Coordinator of the DePaul University's Institutional Review Board at 312-362-7593 or by email at sheiser@depaul.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.


Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have all my questions answered. I consent to be in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

IRB Exemption--CB062806EDU (Bruner, Carolyn)

From: **Heiser Singh, Shay-Ann** (SHEISER@depaul.edu)
 You may not know this sender. [Mark as safe](#) | [Mark as junk](#)
 Sent: Wed 7/05/06 11:00 AM
 To: Carolyn Bruner (carolyn_bruner@hotmail.com)
 Cc: Chennault, Ronald (RCHENNAU@depaul.edu)
 Good morning,

Your project entitled "Educational Disparities" has been received and has been classified as exempt. Under very recent changes made to institutional policy, exempt projects receive only an administrative review by IRB staff to confirm eligibility. Once projects are confirmed by IRB staff to be exempt, researchers on exempt projects are free to begin their work and are not required to submit additional materials or annual updates. As your project has been determined to be exempt, your only obligation moving forward is to resubmit your materials for prior review and classification/approval if you propose substantive changes to the project.

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In case you are interested and for your future reference, these are the details of the change. At its regular meeting in April 2006, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) decided that exempt projects submitted to the IRB will no longer be substantively reviewed by the IRB and instead only will receive an administrative determination of eligibility for exemption. This change makes DePaul's institutional policies more consistent with federal requirements and will affect researchers in the following ways:

- When submitting exempt projects, researchers now are required to submit just four documents for IRB review: the exempt application, an information sheet, the measures, and documentation of training. (Recruitment materials, letters of collaboration, and collaborative IRB memos are no longer required for exempt projects.)
- Although researchers are responsible for ensuring that all collaborators' requirements have been met prior to beginning recruitment, they are no longer required to submit documentation from such collaborators. For example,
 - Researchers working with collaborators from other institutions on exempt projects are responsible for getting collaborating IRB approval if required by the collaborating institution's policy. However, the DePaul IRB will not require documentation of approval;
 - Researchers doing qualifying exempt educational research in schools will be responsible for ensuring that they have met any school district requirements for conducting research, as well as any school-specific requirements (e.g., getting approval from the principal) prior to beginning recruitment. However, the DePaul IRB will not require documentation that these requirements have been met.

- Presuming that the four required items have been submitted and provide sufficient information to make a determination of eligibility for exempt review, the IRB will notify the researcher by email that the IRB has received the project and determined it to be exempt. If the project qualifies as exempt, the IRB will not provide substantive feedback on materials or request revisions, and once researchers have received confirmation of exemption from the IRB, they are free to begin recruitment and data collection. If a project has been submitted for exempt review and is determined to be ineligible for exemption, the researcher will have to satisfy the additional requirements of expedited or full review, as needed.
- Researchers are no longer required to submit renewal information for exempt projects. The sole ongoing obligation of researchers on exempt projects is to submit their materials for re-review if substantive changes are proposed. Researchers with questions about whether this is the case should contact me.

The procedures for receiving review at the college/department-level have not changed, so researchers are still required to submit their projects for review by their Local Review Board (LRB) prior to submitting to the IRB.

In the upcoming days, the IRB will be working to reconcile partially-approved exempt projects and renewals with the new policy, including notifying some researchers that previous contingencies on their projects have been removed. We ask for your patience as we work through these projects. In addition, several forms and the webpage will be revised early this summer to reflect the change and specifically to remove unnecessary questions and provide more guidance to assist researchers in accurately determining whether their projects qualify for exempt review.

Many thanks for your time, & the best of luck on your research,

Shay-Ann Heiser Singh
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