Aspirations and expectations in Latino youth: The role of barriers and support in the transition out of high school

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ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS IN LATINO YOUTH: THE ROLE OF BARRIERS

AND SUPPORT IN THE TRANSITION OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL

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<u>VITA</u>

Rachel Feuer was born in Bethesda, Maryland in 1983. She graduated from the Charles E.

Smith Jewish Day School in 2001 and received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Northwestern

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Currently, Latinos make up 15.1% of the United States (U.S.) population, and the percentage is expected to grow to 24.4% by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Latinos are both the largest ethnic/racial minority group enrolled in U.S. schools, and the minority group that currently has the lowest educational attainment (Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez & Solorzano, 2000). Only 63% of Latinos graduate high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Latinos earn only 6.7% of post-secondary degrees, 6.3% of bachelor's degrees, 4.4% of master's degrees, and 3.2% of doctoral degrees (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). This is a particularly unfortunate trend, given that men who graduate with a bachelor's earn on average 1.64 times more than men who graduate only from high school, and women who graduate with a bachelor's earn on average 1.68 times more than women who graduate only from high school. The economic and career outcomes of Latinos reflect their educational trends, with 21.5% of Latinos living in poverty, compared with 13.3% of the total population (Webster & Bishaw, 2007). The median household income of Latinos in 2006 was $38,747, compared with a $51,429 household income for Whites, and $32,372 for African Americans (Webster & Bishaw).

In order to effectively change the inequalities in educational, occupational and economic outcomes, it is vital to better understand the processes that influence those outcomes. There is empirical evidence suggesting that future expectations, aspirations and fears predict future outcomes (Buriel & Cardoza, 1988; Marjoribanks, 2003; Rigsby, Stull & Morse-Kelly, 1997) Wyman, 1993). For example, data analysis of the 1992 National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), Rigsby et al. found that the strongest predictor of math achievement was the number of years of schooling students expected to obtain. In another study of Mexican American high school students, Buriel and Cardoza (1988) found that student's personal expectations were

stronger predictors of their scores on standardized tests than were generational status, socioeconomic status or Spanish language background. In a longitudinal study of 7,248 Australian youth, Marjoribanks (2003) found that expectations had the largest association with young adults' educational achievement, measured by years of educational attainment at the approximate age of 20. In line with this research, many college preparatory programs are based on the idea that raising aspirations and expectations will lead to an increase in outcomes.

<div align="center">Aspirations, Expectations and Performance among Students of Color</div>

Although some studies use the words aspirations and expectations interchangeably, for the purpose of this paper, aspirations are defined as an individual's hopes or dreams for the future, while expectations are an individual's understanding of what is most likely to happen in the future (Yowell, 2002). In middle-class Caucasian adolescents, aspirations and expectations are typically virtually identical (Cook, Church, Ajanaku & Shadish, 1996). However, among students of color, although aspirations are linked to performance, the link is more complex. Previous studies have found a gap between aspirations and expectations and a gap between expectations and performance in low-income, African American and Latino students (Cook et al., 1996; Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2008; Roderick, 2003; Yowell, 2002). However, in Cook et al.'s study (1996), all African American participants lived in the inner city, while all White participants who lived in middle-class areas, and in Yowell's (2002) study of Latino students, all of the participants lived in low-income, inner city areas. Thus, it may be that the gap in expectations and aspirations and between expectations and performance in students of color is actually an effect of class and poverty.

Some studies show that ethnic minority students have higher educational aspirations and expectations than other Whites, (Farmer, 1985; Wilson & Wilson, 1992) despite their relatively

lower performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). In a study of 1,863 high school students, Farmer (1985) found that ethnic minority students have significantly higher educational expectations than did White students. Qian and Blair (1999) found that controlling for individual characteristics and parental human, financial and social capital, African Americans and Latinos have higher educational aspirations than Whites.

In fact, low-income, ethnic minority students' aspirations may be so high and lack grounding in behavior as to be considered unrealistic (MacLeod, 1987; Roderick, 2003). For example, in a study of 415 ninth-grade, low-income Latino students, Yowell (2002) found no relationship between occupational aspirations and school dropout, indicating a disconnect in Latino students' hopes and achievement. In an examination of the NELS of 1988, Hafner, Ingles, Schneider and Stevenson (1990) found that although 55% of eighth-grade Latinos expected to finish college and/or obtain a graduate or professional degree, only 23% planned to enroll in a college preparatory program in high school. Even though these students have high aspirations and expectations, their actions are setting them up for failure. In an ethnography of two groups of young men in a public housing development, MacLeod (1987) found that members of a Caucasian group of youth were unable to even articulate aspirations for the future, while members of an African American group had unrealistically high aspirations. The African American youth believed that if they worked hard, they could achieve anything (MacLeod, 1987). Given the poverty they were raised in and their limited job prospects, these aspirations were unrealistic. Although all of the members of the group graduated from high school, and most entered post-secondary education programs, only one of the men had completed a degree eight years later, and he is one of the only members of the group with a steady job. Messersmith and Schulenberg (2008) found that among high school students who expected to complete college,

being of African American, Latino or Native American ethnicity predicted *not* meeting their goals.

In addition to a gap between aspirations/expectations and behavior, researchers have also found a gap between future aspirations and expectations (Cook et al., 1996; Yowell, 2002). Cook et al. (1996) found that there was a gap between expectations and aspirations in second-grade inner-city, mostly African-American boys, while there was no such gap in second-grade middle-class boys, who were 70% Caucasian. However, it is difficult to determine whether the difference between the two groups is due to race or class. In Yowell's study (2002), students hoped to achieve higher levels of occupations than they actually expected to achieve. Students' top five hoped for occupational selves required college degrees, while their top five expected occupational selves varied from requiring a college degree to not requiring high school graduation.

In a study of 932 high school seniors at four diverse Los Angeles high schools, Chang, Chen, Greenberger, Dooley and Heckhausen (2006) found that the majority of students aspired to go to a four-year college. However, Mexican adolescents had lower aspirations and expectations than Asian Americans and lower expectations than Caucasians and African Americans. Further, Mexican participants had the largest gap between aspirations and expectations of any group. In examining the NELS data of 1988, Mau (1995) found that while educational aspirations were strongly correlated with mathematics and science achievement, the degree of association was stronger for Asian Americans and Caucasians than it was for Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans.

Additionally, there is evidence that educational aspirations are less stable in African American and Latino students than they are in White students. Kao and Tienda's (1998)

examination of the 1988 NELS data revealed that African American and Latino students' educational aspirations were less likely to remain constant from the eighth grade to the end of high school than Caucasian or Asian American students' aspirations. African American and Latino students experienced a much larger decline in aspirations from eighth to tenth grade than did White or Asian American students. Importantly, contrary to other studies (Farmer, 1985; Qian & Blair, 1999; Wilson & Wilson, 1992) which show that Latinos have higher aspirations than Whites, Kao and Tienda found that on average, Latinos had lower educational aspirations than African Americans, Caucasians, and Asian Americans, at all three time points of the study. However, they also found that by the twelfth grade, differences between racial groups evened out, as many more ethnic minority students than White students had dropped out of school.

Although the findings about aspirations and expectations in ethnic minority group members are extremely important, it is crucial to remember that ethnic minority status is correlated with poverty. In some studies it is impossible to disentangle the effects of race/ethnicity or class (Cook et al., 1996; Yowell, 2002). In fact, Thomas (1976) examined low-income African American and Caucasian male high school students, and found that low-income Blacks were *not* significantly more unrealistic in their occupational expectations than were low-income Caucasians. In another study of the 1988 NELS data, Trusty (1998) found that socioeconomic status (SES) had the strongest correlation with educational expectations, over perceived parental involvement and parental reports of their own involvement. In addition, many studies group all ethnic minority students together. Yowell's (2002) study is the only one that focused exclusively on gaps between aspirations and expectations and aspirations/expectations and behavior for Latino students. It is possible that the process works differently for African American and other minority students than it does for Latino students.

Understanding the Gaps

Although the gaps between aspirations and behavior and aspirations and expectations are fairly well established, they are not well understood. Researchers have put forth a number of theories to explain why these discrepancies exist. Some research suggests that these gaps may be due to an ideological conflict between student's internalization of the "American Dream," and the lack of resources that students actually have to attain these dreams (Bohon, Macpherson & Atiles, 2005; Graham, Taylor & Hudley, 1998; Ogbu, 1993; Taylor & Graham, 2007; Yowell, 2002). In support of this theory, a qualitative study of high school immigrant Latinos in Georgia found that students felt a tension between the educational goals pushed upon them by their schools and teachers and the economic and legal barriers that they faced (Bohon et al., 2005). Students described the educational goals pushed upon them as "a big lie" because they often do not have the opportunity to attend college, due to financial concerns and illegal immigrant status. However, Bohon et al.'s study is the only one that examined this theory directly in a Latino population.

Alternatively, some students may see academic achievement as contrary to the traditional gender roles dictated by their ethnic identity (Bowman, 1993; Reyes, Kobus & Gillock, 1999). There may be a contradiction between the goal of performing well in school and the expectations that they will embody traditional gender roles in order to help their families. Latina girls may internalize traditional gender roles and perceive little need for formal education (Bohon et al., 2005). Bohon et al.'s qualitative study illustrated that immigrant Latina girls, especially those who immigrated in adolescence, internalized traditional gender roles that a woman's family and household duties make formal education unnecessary. Even high achieving girls thought that their family responsibilities made school unnecessary. Relatedly, Latinas have the highest rate

of teen pregnancy in the United States, at approximately 81.7 births per 1,000 women aged 10-19 years (Martin et al., 2007). This is problematic, as there is a high correlation between early pregnancy and poorer educational and occupational outcomes. Only one-third of teenage mothers complete high school (Maynard, 1996), and nearly 80% of teenage mothers end up on welfare at some point in their lives (Congressional Budget Office, 1990). Young Latino men may also be subject to cultural expectations that make it difficult for them to achieve academically. As a response to impoverished conditions, male students may also forgo academic goals in order to enter the labor force sooner, which is highly valued in some Latino families (Bohon et al., 2005; Yowell, 2000).

Another reason for the gap between aspirations/expectations and performance may be that students do not clearly understand the specific steps necessary to achieve their career goals. Studies have found that Latino students are not very specific about their goals for the future (Yowell, 2000; Yowell, 2002). In Yowell's (2000) study of 9th grade, predominantly low-income Latino urban high school students, participants were rated as having low specificity about their goals for the future. The majority of students felt that the best strategy to achieve their desired selves was "trying hard." In this same study, although students talked about "going to college," most did not talk about "completing college." In fact, most students indicated that their educational selves would end at age 18, which would not be enough time to complete college. Although students were thinking about the concept of college, they had not internalized the time necessary to actually complete college. In this study, students showed high educational and occupational aspirations, high rates of optimism, and high levels of internal control. However, students had very little specificity when it came to their goals. This lack of specificity (i.e.,

optimism about reaching goals without specific ways to achieve them) might have negative repercussions for students' academic achievement (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006).

Similarly, Brantlinger (1992) found that low-income adolescents had vague and general understandings of how to achieve occupational success, whereas high-income youth had a better understanding of the concrete steps necessary to achieve their goals. This lack of specificity may be due to a lack of knowledge and understanding about higher education and professional careers. In a focus group study of Chicago public high school students, Kao and Tienda (1998) found that Latino students did not have a clear understanding of the differences between various white-collar jobs. For example, one student said that she wanted to "do something executive, like a secretary or a lawyer," (p. 378) and another student did not understand the different educational requirements for becoming a pediatrician or a veterinarian. They found that Latino students also lacked an understanding of the college and financial aid application process. Some students were unaware of the possibility of financial assistance, while others believed that they could get scholarships simply for being Latino (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Kao, 2000). Latino youth who lack a framework for achieving their goals will have more difficulty meeting their expectations and aspirations.

Although students' expectations about who they will become in the future should generally contain concrete and specific information that can help guide behavior (Marcus & Nurius, 1986), Yowell (2002) found that Latino youths did not have more specific knowledge about their expectations than their aspirations. For example, one student's expectation for themselves was "In order to complete high school. I need to work harder … then I'll be fine" (Yowell, p. 69). This expectation lacks the specific steps that would allow the student to guide his behavior towards completing high school.

Low-income, ethnic minority youth may also get less specific guidance from their parents about creating aspirations and the concrete plans to achieve them. Parents have a great deal of influence on youth's aspirations (Qian & Blair, 1999), accounting for up to 75% of the variance (Teachman & Paasch, 1998). For example, Latino parents were found to have more influence on their children's aspirations than did parents in any other ethnic group (Clayton, 1993). In addition, controlling for SES, Latino parents have higher aspirations for their children than Whites (Qian & Blair, 1999; Wilson & Wilson, 1992). However, Latino parents are more likely than Caucasian parents to be under-educated and of low SES (Behnke et al. 2004; Webster & Bishaw, 2007). Parents who have not gone to college or completed high school may have trouble helping their children navigate the complex educational systems (Behnke et al., 2004; Bohon et al., 2005). In addition, some Latino parents are new immigrants and may not have a complete understanding of how to achieve success in the United States. Many Latino immigrant parents also struggle with a language barrier. In a qualitative study, a major barrier to educational attainment of Latino high school students was that their parents did not have the knowledge to teach their children the specific steps necessary to pursue a college education (Bohon et al., 2005). They did not know what programs and grants their children could apply to, or what questions to ask teachers and guidance counselors (Bohon et al., 2005). Perhaps because parents are unable to help their children reach their aspirations, parents may also not discuss aspirations with their children. In Behnke's (2004) in-depth interviews with Latino adolescents and their parents, most parents had not discussed future aspirations with their children, and only half of parents were aware of their children's aspirations.

Another reason for the gap between aspirations and performance may be due to a lack of understanding of the importance of education. In Bohon et al.'s (2005) study of high school

Latino immigrants in Georgia, boys felt that they could make enough money to support a family without a high school degree. They insisted that there were little differences in available jobs for those with and without a high school degree, despite evidence to the contrary (Bohon et al., 2005). Although this erroneous belief may be due to a lack of knowledge about the economic realities, it is possible that these boys had internalized the ideological conflict between the American dream and the resources available to actualize that dream (Ogbu, 1993). They may have stated that jobs were the same with or without a high school degree because they felt that they would never be able to earn a degree, regardless of their goals.

<u>Reasons for Aspirations Among Students of Color</u>

In order to better understand the gap between aspirations and expectations, it may be important to understand the ways in which Latino students differ from other populations in terms of why they aspire to educational success. Studies have shown that Latino students have different reasons regarding why they want to be academically successful. In Yowell's (2000) study of low-income Latino youth, most students described occupational success and care of their parents as a rationale for educational achievement, and no students talked about learning or growth. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995) identified a form of motivation achievement in Latino youth called affiliative achievement, which is grounded in the desire to care for family and to compensate their immigrant parents for their sacrifices in attempting to create a better life for their children. Additionally, Yowell (2000) found that Latino students viewed education as instrumental in their occupational success, rather than something to undertake for the purposes of learning, personal growth, or mastery. Given that Latinos seem to desire academic success in order to help their families and to achieve economic success, it seems logical that students might

drop out of school if their families needed them to work more immediately, or if they found a job that they thought paid well enough to make it worthwhile.

<div align="center">Possible Selves Theory</div>

Possible selves is a useful theoretical framework for exploring future aspects of self concept because it helps us understand the implications of the gaps between aspirations and expectations and aspirations/expectations and performance, and to understand what may be preventing low-income Latino youth from achieving their goals. The theory of possible selves states that there is an integrated relationship between self concept, motivation and behavior. The self concept is theorized as constantly changing due to current experiences and conceptualizations about the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Because possible selves theory connects past and future experiences, it provides the link between self concept and behavior. For example, getting an A on a test may activate in an adolescent a possible self of graduating from high school. This possible self provides motivation to engage in other behaviors that promote graduation from high school. Possible selves provide the context for the meaning an individual makes of his/her own behavior, provide incentives for behavior, and guide behavior (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

According to Markus and Nurius (1986), possible selves consist of hoped for, expected and feared selves. Hoped for selves are aspirational. They are similar to fantasies, and are not grounded or concrete. Expected selves contain both abstract goals and the specific strategies necessary to achieve them. They contain scripts, plans and strategies for goal actualization, and they provide the link from aspiration to behavior. As children mature, their expected selves must become increasingly concrete in order to be helpful. Feared selves are possible selves that an individual wants to avoid. They usually come from outside role models, such as unsuccessful

peers, siblings or parents. Feared selves are important because they motivate a person to avoid potential future selves.

Balanced and Specific Possible Selves

In order to achieve the best outcomes, youth must have balanced and specific possible selves. Balanced possible selves consist of aspirations and/or expectations in an arena, combined with fears in that same arena. For example, a balanced academic self could be: "I would like to be a doctor. However, I am scared that I will have trouble with the chemistry pre-med classes." Balanced possible selves are most adaptive because they provide motivation for both approach and avoidance behaviors (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Wanting to be a doctor can motivate behavior to work hard at school, while fear of doing poorly at pre-med classes similarly motivates to avoid negative outcomes. Perhaps a student who is fearful of doing poorly will get extra tutoring, which will help her to accomplish her goal of becoming a doctor. This balance enables people to consider possible challenges and strategies to overcome them. Oyserman (1995) and Oyserman and Markus (1990) have found that balance in achievement-related possible selves has a positive effect on school persistence. However, in Yowell's (2000) study of Latino high school students, contrary to expectations, there was no association between balanced possible selves and educational attainment. Possible selves that are not balanced may be either positive (i.e., dominated by aspirations and expectations, with little mention of fears) or negative (i.e., dominated by fears, with little mention of aspirations and expectations). Unfortunately, besides Yowell's (2000) study, there has been no research on balanced possible selves in a Latino population.

Specific possible selves are those with a great deal of clarity and detail. The more specific youths' expectations are, the more their behavior can be guided by their possible selves (Markus

& Nurius, 1986; Oyserman, 2004). For example, a specific expected possible self would be: "I am planning on going to a technical school in order to be a car mechanic. In order to get into technical school, I need to finish my application and send in my transcript, and I need to fill out the FAFSA financial aid form." A specific feared self and the actions it leads to might be "I want to graduate from high school, but I am worried that I will get pregnant and have to drop out. Therefore, I am going to avoid having sex during high school." Specific academic possible selves are important to guide behavior towards academic and occupational success. As low-income Latino students have future aspirations and expectations that are not as specific as middle class Caucasian students, (Brantlinger, 1992; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Yowell, 2000; Yowell, 2002), they are at a disadvantage in reaching their goals.

<div align="center">Transition from High School</div>

While even young children have thoughts about who they could possibly be, adolescence is a formative time period for the development of possible selves. The end of high school is a time at which possible selves should become concrete and specific, in order to motivate specific goal-directed activity. The transition out of high school should be a time when possible selves are particularly salient for adolescents because they are more likely to be concerned with the demands that will be placed on them in their next step (Kalakoski & Nurmi, 1998; Yowell, 2000).

The transition from high school is one of the beginning stages of the extended transition to adulthood that is characteristic of contemporary American society (Arnett, 1998). This transitional period, called "emerging adulthood," is the "period of development bridging adolescence and young adulthood, during which young people are no longer adolescents but have not yet attained full adult status" (Arnett, 1998, p. 312). The transition from high school is a

time of major changes in roles and responsibilities. It can be a confusing and risky time for youth, as they lack defined social roles. Literature shows that American young adults tend to consider their transition to adulthood complete when they have learned to accept responsibility for themselves, make independent decisions, and be financially independent (Arnett, 1998).

Although little is known about the transition from high school for Latino students (Colón, 2007), the transition can be particularly risky for students of low SES (Plank & Jordon, 2001). Researchers use a concept called "talent loss" to describe the fate of qualified students who do not succeed in making the transition to institutions of higher education. Among students in the highest 20% of high school performance, those in the lowest SES quartile experience ten times the "talent loss" of those in the top quartile of SES, when talent loss is defined as the percent of high school graduates who do not enter any post-secondary educational institution within five years of graduation. When "talent loss" is defined as the percent of high school graduates who do not enter a four-year institution within five years, those in the lowest SES quartile experience five times the "talent loss" (Plank & Jordon, 2001).

In a large-scale study of Chicago public school (CPS) students, Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca and Moeller (2008) found many "potholes" in the transition from high school to college. They found that although 100% of the students in their sample aspired to go to a four-year college at the beginning of the study in the 11th grade, only 72% planned to go to a four-year college, and only 59% applied to a four-year college. And, even though 51% of the original sample was accepted into a four-year college, only 41% ever enrolled. Even those students who enrolled in college often enrolled in schools that were not a good match for them, based on their grade point averages (GPAs) and ACT scores. In fact, only one-third of the students who aspired to complete college applied to a college that was a good match for them. Most CPS students attended

colleges that were significantly less selective than their optimal college. Latino students were the least likely to attend a college and the least likely to enroll in a college that was a good match. Unfortunately, the less selective schools have lower graduation rates, and even among those CPS students who enroll in college, only 45% have graduated in six years, compared to 64% at the national level (Allensworth, 2006).

Additionally, Roderick et al. (2008) found that Latino students struggled the most with the transition to college. They were the least likely to plan to enroll in a four-year college after graduation and the least likely to apply to a four-year college. Only 60% of Latino graduates who aspired to attain a four-year degree planned to attend a four-year college in the fall, compared to 77% of African-American and 76% of White/Other Ethnic graduates. Fewer than half of Latino students who aspired to a four-year degree applied to a four-year college, compared to about 65% of their African-American and White/Other Ethnic counterparts. Additionally, Roderick et al. found that this gap between Latino students and other students was not explained by immigrant status. These findings may be explained partially by Latino students' having less specific and balanced possible selves than students of other ethnicities. They may have unrealistically high expectations and aspirations, coupled with a lack of specific knowledge and relevant fears that would enable them to actually meet their goals.

In a prior study using the same data I used, Colón (2007) found that one year after Latino adolescents graduated from high school, seven (22%) participants were attending college, six (18%) were working, 12 (38%) were attending college *and* working, and seven (22%) were neither working nor attending college. Interestingly, thirteen (41%) participants experienced fluctuations in their work and/or college status during their first year of the transition (e.g. enrolled in college and then dropped out). It appears that like participants in Roderick et al.'s

(2008) study, many participants in this study experienced disruptions in their transition out of high school.While Colón (2007) and Roderick et al.'s (2008) studies have begun to illuminate the transition process for Latino youth, Roderick et al.'s study is the only one that begins to explore looks at aspirations and expectations during the transition. It is important to understand how aspirations and expectations influence the transitional process and how the transition may influence aspirations and expectations.

<div align="center">Barriers and Support in the Transition</div>

There are many factors that affect the success of students' transitions, including barriers and support experienced during the transition. Barriers and support may also influence the ways in which youth think about their future. Barriers are anything material or abstract that impedes or hinders the transition to adulthood. For the purposes of this study, support will be limited to defined as anything material or abstract that facilitates or enhances the transition to adulthood. Colón's (2007) analysis of this study's data found that youth experienced barriers related to academics, finances, work, immigration status, lack of sense of belonging, family, college resources, discrimination, and culture. Other studies have found that Latino students were more likely to feel that they did not fit in at their four-year colleges, and that they experienced high levels of discrimination and harassment in college (Weissman, Bulakowski & Jumisko, 1998). Ethnic minority students may enter post-secondary schools at an academic disadvantage as well. In a study of a Chicago-area community college, 35% of Hispanic students were admitted needing remedial education, compared to 8% of White and 45% of Black students (Weissman et al., 1998). In a study of directors of school-to-work programs, researchers found many barriers in the high school-to-work transition, including poverty, a lack of understanding of different

cultures, lack of integrated/relevant high-school curriculum, and lack of communication between businesses and schools (Wentling & Waight, 2001).

Students may also achieve successes or experience support during the transition from high school. Colón (2007) found that most Latino youth in her investigation described feeling supported by their family or their peer group. In a study of an ethnically diverse, large, metropolitan college in California, Strage (1999) found that feeling integrated in college and feeling a sense of belonging to your college is associated with positive academic outcomes. In addition, Anaya and Cole (2001) found that interacting with and forming relationships with faculty members is positively associated with academic achievement in Latino/a students. It is also conceivable that Latino youth might experience other forms of support in the transition, such as institutional support at college or at work, or social support from colleagues or bosses at work.

Barriers experienced during the transition may influence expectations, aspirations and fears. According to Rosenberg (1979), people form conclusions about themselves by observing their own performance and attainment. If students have faced barriers that have not allowed them to perform as well as they hoped, they may lower their conclusions about themselves, and thus their expectations and aspirations (Jackson, Kacanski, Rust & Beck, 2006). Studies have supported this theory, and have shown that educational performance has a strong impact on educational aspirations. The impact is similar for Whites, Asian Americans and Hispanics (Qian & Blair, 1999). Stronger beliefs that there are barriers to educational and occupational success are associated with lower aspirations, particularly for minority youth who are less recent immigrants (Jackson et al., 2006). Barriers may become internalized, limiting aspirations (Constantine, 1998). According to Ogbu and Simons (1998), those at highest risk for low

educational attainment are those who believe in the permanence of the systemic effects of racial discrimination in access to education and vocational opportunities. This may be because they develop compensatory beliefs about academic effort and performance. They believe academic effort will not pay off for them (Graham, Taylor & Hudley, 1998; Ogbu & Simons, 1999). Relatedly, students who perceived lower levels of barriers reported higher aspirations for their future careers (Jackson et al., 2006).

Like barriers, different forms of support may influence expectations, aspirations and fears. In a study using a community college sample, Terenzini (1992) found that positive experiences inside and outside the classroom enhanced students' self esteem and perceptions of themselves as learners. It seems likely that enhanced self-esteem and a perception of oneself as a learner would allow students' aspirations and expectations to remain high.

Given how many barriers and forms of support youth experience in the transition out of high school, it is important to explore the ways that they may affect aspirations, expectations, and fears for the future. Although a few studies (Jackson et al., 2006; Qian & Blair, 1999) have explored the role of barriers on aspirations and expectations, none have examined the mechanisms by which they impact aspirations and expectations, and none have focused on social support at all.

<div align="center">Rationale</div>

Latinos are both the largest ethnic/racial minority group enrolled in U.S. schools, and the minority group that currently has the lowest educational and occupational attainment (Huber et al., 2000). In order to change the inequalities in educational, occupational and economic outcomes, it is vital to better understand the processes that influence those outcomes. There is empirical evidence suggesting that future expectations, aspirations and fears predict future

outcomes (Buriel & Cardoza, 1988; Marjoribanks, 2003, Rigsby et al., 1997, Wyman, 1993). However, among low-income Latino youth, there are gaps between aspirations and expectations, and gaps between aspirations and expectations and behavior (Cook et al., 1996; Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2008; Roderick, 2003; Yowell, 2002). Although we know that these gaps exist, there is a dearth of research on why exactly these gaps exist in Latino students. Much of the research has been conducted with African American and other ethnic minority students, rather than with Latino students. Additionally, with the exception of Roderick's (2008) and Colón's (2007) study, there has been no research on Latino students during the transition from high school, which is hypothesized to be an extremely important time in the development and maintenance of expectations and aspirations. This study expands on Colón's (2007) study by examining the impact of barriers and forms of support on aspirations and expectations, and it expands on Roderick's (2009) study by looking more in-depth at the reasons for changes in aspirations and expectations.

In the current study, I explored low-income, Latino youth's aspirations and expectations and how barriers and social support experienced during the transition from high school contribute to these gaps. I used a mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2007) with data from two time points in order to fulfill these goals. Time 1 (T1) involved a quantitative survey in high school with questions about future aspirations and expectations, and Time 2 (T2) involved one-on-one qualitative interviews about the transition from high school and expectations and aspirations for the future.

Given the prior research on gaps between expectations and aspirations in low-income Latino youth (Cook et al., 1996; Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2008; Roderick, 2003; Yowell, 2002), I expected that there would be a gap between participants' expectations and aspirations at

T1 and T2. Given that low-income youth experience barriers during the transition, I expected that their aspirations and expectations would be lower at T2 than T1.

Because there has been very little research explaining the gaps between aspirations and expectations in low-income Latino youth, the nature of participants' aspirations and expectations was examined, including how balanced and specific they are. I explored any gaps between expectations and aspirations and expectations and behavior. I also studied the role of barriers and facilitators in the transition on participants' aspirations and expectations.

Figure 1 is a model demonstrating the expected relationships between the major constructs of the study. As shown in the figure, possible selves are made up of aspirations, expectations and fears. Youth were expected to have fears about their aspired and expected possible selves and their ability to reach them. Related to these aspirations, expectations and fears is youth's behavior. I expected that in high school, aspirations would be higher than expectations, which would be higher than participants' actual behaviors. Over the course of the transition, youth were expected to be influenced by barriers and forms of support. Those who experience more barriers will have larger gaps between their aspirations, expectations and behavior, while those who experience more forms of support will have smaller gaps.

Figure 1. Possible Selves in the Transition and its Relation to Barriers and Support
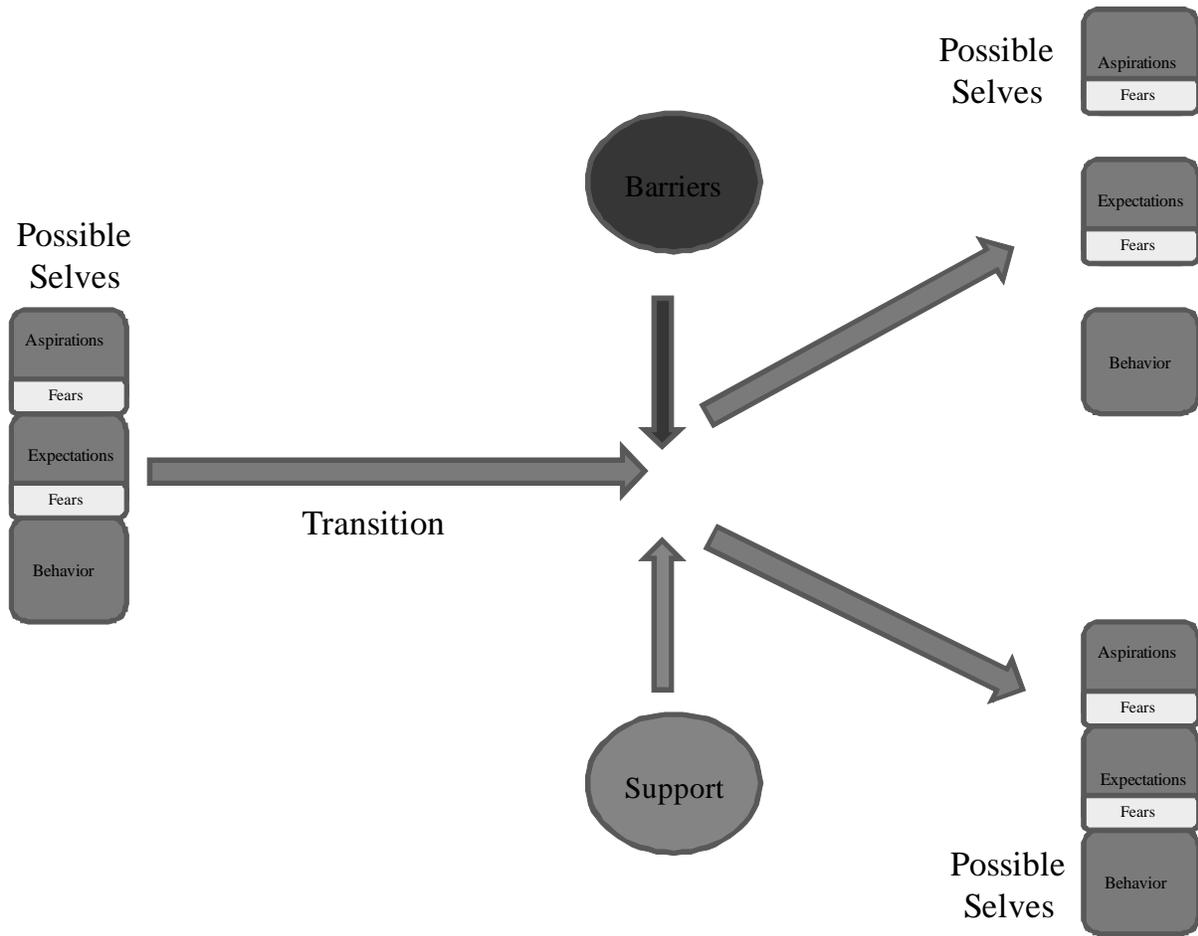
Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study used qualitative interview data from Latino youth to explore the following

questions:

Research Question I. What are youth's educational and occupational expectations and aspirations

for the future?

Research Question II. What are youths' plans to fulfill their expectations and aspirations?

Research Question III. What are the gaps between expectations and aspirations? What are the

gaps between aspiration/expectations and behavior?

Research Question IV. What is the nature of youth's educational and occupational possible

selves (i.e., positive, negative, balanced)?

Research Question V. What barriers are related to youth's possible selves, and what sources of

social support are related to youth's possible selves?

Quantitative data from the survey at T1 and data from T2 were used to test the following

hypotheses:

Hypothesis I. There will be a gap between participants' expectations and aspirations at Time 1

and at Time 2, such that participants' aspirations will be higher than their expectations.

Hypothesis II. Participants' aspirations and expectations will be lower at Time 2 than Time 1.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

This study explored future aspirations and expectations of Latino high school students using data from two studies: a quantitative study with 143 participants and a follow-up qualitative study with 32 of the original participants. This study employed a mixed-methods design. Specifically, a sequential explanatory design (Creswell & Clark, 2007) was used in which quantitative methods were conducted at T1 followed by qualitative methods at T2. In this design, qualitative methods are used to build upon the quantitative results collected during the first phase. For the purposes of the current study, the qualitative phase is more dominant due to my focus on exploring aspirations and expectations during the transition out of high school.

Context

Participants were recruited from an urban public high school in Chicago. A purposive sampling design was used to select a majority Latino high school in Chicago. In a purposive sample, an investigator relies on his/her judgment in order to select units that are typical of the target population (Singleton & Straits, 2005). The school was selected based on two criteria: a) a Latino-majority school and b) an ethnically diverse Latino school. The school was 95% Latino, with a predominantly Mexican and Puerto Rican population (Valdez & Rodriguez, 2002). The school population was predominantly low income (85%), with a high mobility rate (30%) (Valdez & Rodriguez, 2002). The school was under-resourced and underperforming, and it was ranked as one of the four poorest performing Latino majority schools in Chicago (Valdez & Espino, 2003), was placed on academic probation due to its underperformance, and the graduation rate was 53% (Valdez & Espino, 2003). Academic achievement was extremely low, with 82% of students failing eleventh grade reading, and 94% failing eleventh grade math

(Valdez & Espino, 2003). Chronic truancy was relatively high, with 20% of students absent from school without a valid cause for 18 or more of the last 180 school days (Valdez & Espino, 2003).

The community where the school is located is on the border of two of the most heavily populated Latino neighborhoods in Chicago. In 2000, Latinos comprised 65% and 84% of the two neighborhoods' populations (Institute for Latino Studies, 2005). The community is relatively undereducated and underemployed. In one of the two neighborhoods, approximately 23% of the adults 25 and older did not possess a high school diploma, and 20% of people lived below poverty level. In the other neighborhood, approximately 29% of the adults 25 and older did not possess a high school diploma, and 17% of people lived below poverty level (Institute for Latino Studies, 2005).

Time 1

Time 1 Participants

Participants were 143 students in their senior year of high school. The mean age was 17.87 years (SD=.65). Participants were 52% (n=74) female and 48% (n=69) male. The sample consisted of 39% ($n = 56$) Puerto Rican, 42% ($n = 60$) Mexican, and 16% ($n = 23$) other Latino, which included bi-ethnic students (e.g., Mexican & Puerto Rican) and students whose origins were from other Latin American countries. Three percent ($n = 4$) were biracial (e.g. Puerto Rican and African American). Thirty-two percent ($n = 45$) of the participants were first generation (foreign-born), 51% ($n = 73$) were second generation (U.S. born), 8% ($n = 12$) were third generation, and 3% ($n = 5$) were fourth generation. Eight (6%) of the participants did not provide sufficient information to determine their generational status.

Information was gathered on household structure and the education level of participants' parents. Eighty-five (60%) participants lived with both parents, while 51 (36%) lived in single-

parent homes. For those who lived in single-parent homes, 50 (99%) lived with their mother, while 1 (1%) lived with his/her father. Five participants (4%) did not live with their parents. Household data were missing for two participants. More than half of the participants' parents had less than a high school degree; specifically 53% ($n = 66$) of their mothers and 61% ($n = 65$) of their fathers. Parents with at least a high school education consisted of 35% ($n = 43$) of the mothers and 26% ($n = 27$) of the fathers. Nineteen individuals (13%) did not know the educational level of their mother while 35 (25%) did not know the educational level of their father.

Time 1 Procedure

Participants were recruited through presentations conducted by a bilingual and bicultural team in English and Film Studies classes identified by school personnel to be representative of different academic tracks. Of the 209 students who were invited, 187 (90%) indicated an interest in participating in this study. Informed consent was conducted with all participants. Adult consent forms were distributed to students at least 18 years old and child assent accompanied with parental consent forms were distributed to those under 18 years of age. In addition, the research team contacted parents/guardians to ensure that they received the consent form and to answer any questions related to the study. Eighty percent ($n = 150$) of the 187 students actually participated in the study, but the non-Latino participants ($n=7$; 5%) were excluded from the current study which resulted in 143 students.

Surveys were administered in the classes in which participants were recruited, and they took 30-45 minutes to complete. Before completing the survey, students were told that their responses were confidential and that they would not be identified in any written reports. Surveys were read aloud in most classes, in order to allow students with reading difficulties to participate.

Two members of the research team were present in each classroom where data were collected to answer any questions participants might have had. Each participant received a $15 gift certificate to a local entertainment store for completing the study.

<u>Time 1 Measures</u>

The complete survey was available in Spanish and English for bilingual and monolingual participants. With the exception of two measures which were already available in Spanish, all measures were translated from English to Spanish and then back-translated to English. Two participants filled out the survey in Spanish.

<u>Demographics</u>. Participants were asked to report their age, sex, race/ethnicity, household structure, and generational status. Generational status was determined by assessing the place of birth of participants, their parents, and their grandparents (in or outside of the U.S.).

<u>Aspirations and expectations</u>. Two questions were asked to assess aspirations and expectations (Stevens, Putchell, Ryu & Mortimer, 1992). Educational aspirations were measured by asking, "If it were up to you, how far would you *like* to go in school?" with responses ranging from 1 = *less than high school graduate* to 6 = *Ph.D. or professional degree.* Expectations were assessed by asking, "What is the highest level of schooling you *really think* you will finish?" with the same response scale.

<div align="center"><u>Time 2</u></div>

<u>Time 2 Participants</u>

Participants (*N*=32) were Latino high school graduates who had taken part in the T1 study, and who had agreed to be contacted for a follow-up study. Fifty-nine percent (*n*= 19) were female, and 40% (*n*=13) were male. The mean age of participants was 18.80 years (*Range* = 18-20 years). The race/ethnicity of the participants was Puerto Rican (*n* =10; 31%), Mexican (*n* = 9;

28%); Central American (*n* = 5; 16%); Biethnic (e.g., Mexican and Puerto Rican; *n* = 5; 16%), or

Biracial (e.g., White and Mexican; *n* = 3; 9%). The majority of participants came from

immigrant families. Forty-three percent (*n* = 14) of the participants were first-generation (born

outside the U.S.) while another 38% (*n* = 12) were second generation (born in the U.S. with at

least one foreign-born parent). Nine percent (*n* = 3) were third or fourth generation. The

generational status of 9% (*n* = 3) of participants was unknown because they did not know the

birthplace of one of their parents. Five (16%) participants disclosed in Study 2 that they were

undocumented immigrants. Forty-seven percent (*n* =15) of participants' mothers and 41% (*n* =

13) of their fathers had less than a high school education. Hence, many participants were the first

generation to graduate from high school.

Time 2 Procedure

Eighty (53%) of the 150 participants in T1 were interested in the follow-up study and

provided their phone numbers. They were then contacted over the phone approximately one year

after their participation in Study 1. The research team attempted to contact all 80 participants.

However, 22 (28%) had phone numbers that were not working, 16 (20%) participants were

unable to be reached, five (6%) declined to be interviewed, one (1%) was ineligible because he

was still in school and three (4%) did not provide phone numbers. Those who declined

participation did so because of time constraints or lack of interest. In total, 33 (41%) participants

scheduled interviews. Because the study is focused on the experiences of Latino youth, one

participant will be excluded from analyses because she is African American. Thus, the total

number of participants for this study is 32. From this point forward, data of the 32 participants

will be reported.

Informed consent was obtained before the interview began. Each interview was conducted at a location of the participant's choice (e.g., home, work, school setting) by one of three researchers. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 to 120 minutes, and they were conducted in either English or Spanish. Participants were paid $20 for the interview session. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim and then transcripts were verified against audiotapes by the research team. All names were removed from the transcripts to ensure confidentiality.

<u>Time 2 Measures</u>

A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) was used to gather information from participants. Pilot interviews with two Latino college students were conducted to assist in the development of the protocol. Consistent with qualitative methodology, the interview protocol was revised as data were collected and analyzed to ensure that researchers came as close as possible to the phenomena of interest (Glesne, 1999).

There were four main sections of the interview protocol. The first interview section began with introductory questions to build rapport and gain a sense of what participants were currently doing (e.g., whether they are working or in school). In the second section of the interview protocol, researchers asked about participants' experiences in high school and the role of various individuals, including mentors, school personnel, peers, and family, in participants' decision making about plans after high school. In the third section of the interview protocol, participants were asked about their adjustment to life after high school, including any obstacles and social support they experienced during the transition, their expectations about the transition, their various responsibilities, and their sense of belonging in any new environments (e.g., workplace). In the last section, the main focus of the proposed study, researchers asked about participants'

aspirations and expectations for their future regarding school, work and life outside of school/work. Participants were specifically asked to picture what their life would be like in five years. They were asked to discuss what they would be doing with regard to work and/or school, how they envisioned their familial and romantic relationships, and what they expected their household structure to be. They were also asked to describe how they would spend their free time.

<div align="center">Quantitative Data Analysis</div>

In order to test Hypothesis I, stating that participants' aspirations were higher than their expectations at each time point, I conducted a paired sample t-test at each time point. In order to test Hypothesis II, that participants' aspirations and expectations were lower at T2 than T1, I conducted a paired sample t-test for aspirations and another for expectations. In order to conduct these tests, I coded the T2 qualitative data into the categories in the Stevens et al. (1992) scale used in T1.

<div align="center">Qualitative Data Analysis</div>

This study aims to understand future aspirations, expectations and fears in the context of barriers and successes experienced during the transition from high school for Latino youth. In order to answer the questions in this study, interview data from T2 was used. These interviews were transcribed and initial data analysis was conducted by a set of researchers and undergraduate research assistants in 2004.

For purposes of the current investigation, any text in the transcripts related to the future and to barriers and support during the transition was coded using the guidelines for elaborative coding described by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). All 32 transcripts were reviewed for this

study. Elaborative coding is a method that involves using theoretical constructs from previous studies, in addition to developing new theoretical constructs from the data.

I began with a list of the theoretical constructs, including constructs from the Possible Selves literature (i.e., "Aspirations," "Expectations," and "Fears.") and from past studies of this sample on barriers ("barriers" and "support").

Next, another research assistant and I read through the transcripts to develop lists of repeating ideas. Repeating ideas are the smallest unit of meaning coded. They are ideas that are mentioned more than once in one transcript, or that are mentioned in more than one interview (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). For example, a repeating idea in this study was an expectation related to change in college status, such as expecting to transfer to a different school or to drop out of school. We then categorized these repeating ideas into larger categories, called repeating themes, which are coherent categories that pull together multiple repeating ideas. For example, expectations related to changes in college status was categorized into a theme of school-related expectations. We then grouped themes into theoretical constructs, such as "expectations." Some of the themes fit into the theoretical constructs that I found in the literature, while others suggested new categories of theoretical constructs. For example, the theoretical construct of "expectations" is discussed in the possible selves literature, but the theoretical construct of "values" was not present in the possible selves literature but emerged from the data. An example of the elaborating coding method is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

An Illustration of Elaborative Coding

Interview Text	Repeating Idea	Repeating Theme	Theoretical Construct
"I kind of expected myself to be working at a store."	Work Expectations in high school	Work Expectations	Expectations
"The only thing is that I just wanna do something so my mom can be happy."	Aspiration to make family proud	Aspirations related to family	Aspirations
"I hope I finish [college]"	Aspirations related to degree completion	College oriented Aspirations	Aspirations

Once a solid code list was developed, I worked with another research assistant. We each coded the same interview transcripts, and then we met to discuss the coding and resolve any discrepancies in our data interpretation. In the case that we are unable to come to a consensus, we consulted with my advisor and other graduate students. I also continued to make revisions to the themes as we coded the transcripts. We coded 10 transcripts together, until we reached an inter-rater reliability of 88%. I calculated inter-rater reliability using a formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) which divides the number of coding agreements by the number of coding agreements combined with coding disagreements, in order obtain a reliability ratio. This was then divided by 100 in order to obtain a reliability percentage. After reaching an 88% reliability, I coded the remaining transcripts on my own. I continued to discuss any questions in the coding with my advisor and my peers.

Evaluation of Research Findings

Justifiability of research findings and interpretations is a criterion used to evaluate the quality of a qualitative study (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Three ways to distinguish between

justifiable and unjustifiable interpretations of the data are transparency, communicability, and coherence. Transparency involves explicitly stating the steps of your data analysis process, so that others can know how you arrived at your interpretations. Communicability involves ensuring that your themes and constructs can be understood by other researchers and the research participants themselves. Coherence entails making sure that your theoretical constructs fit together and allow you to tell a coherent story (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

I took additional steps to enhance credibility, which is the extent to which the findings reflect the experiences and views of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), by employing triangulation, peer debriefing, and negative case analysis. Triangulation involved cross-checking the data by using multiple investigators throughout the analyses. Peer debriefing involved discussing findings with four researchers outside our research team. In order to conduct negative case analysis, I actively searched for cases that contradicted my findings, and I adjusted my findings until they included all cases.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

What are youth's educational and occupational expectations and aspirations for the future?

Overview

Results related to educational aspirations, expectations and behavior while in high school will be discussed first, followed by educational aspirations, expectations and behavior during the transition.

Aspirations during High School

In the T2 interview, youth were asked a series of questions about what their aspirations and expectations had been in high school, including:

> "How did you decide that you were going to go to work/go to college? Did you always know that this is what you would do after high school? If yes, how did you know this?
> a. *If they are not in college:* Was college an option?
> b. Has anyone else in your family been to college?"

Of the 32 youth who participated in the interview, 23 (72%) discussed what their educational or career aspirations had been during high school in response to these questions or other related questions (see Appendix A for survey questions). Of those who mentioned their past aspirations, 18 (56%) explicitly stated a desire to go to college. Three students (9%) aspired to go into the military, and nine (28%) mentioned aspiring to have a career. Seven students (22%) aspired to a specific career, such as being a teacher, working in computer graphics, or becoming a mortician. Two students (6%) specified wanting to be a "professional" or to have a "career," but they were unsure what type of career they wanted.

Aspirations to go to College during High School

Of the 32 participants who participated in the interview at Time 2, 97% ($n=31$) answered the survey question at Time 1 regarding educational aspirations while they were in high school.

Students generally aspired to complete a graduate degree, and the mean aspiration was 5.16 ($SD=$ .17), on a scale where 5 is equivalent to earning a Master's Degree (see Table 2).

The mean aspiration of the 32 interview participants was significantly higher than that the mean aspiration of the T1 participants who did not participate in the follow-up transition interview ($M= 4.54$; $SD =1.18$), $t (136) = 2.78$, $p < .05$, indicating that there may be differences between youth who participated in T2 and those who did not. Aspirations to go to college were based on a variety of factors, such as specific experiences in high school, academic performance in high school, family expectations, and values about school. Other students described a desire to please their families or a desire to prove themselves to their families or others.

Table 2

Participants' Aspirations and Expectations in High School

	High school aspirations n (%)	High school expectations n (%)
PhD or professional degree	16 (50)	6 (19)
Master's degree	5 (16)	5 (16)
Bachelor's degree	9 (29)	17 (53)
Associate's degree	1 (3)	4 (13)
High school degree	0 (0)	0 (0)
Less than high school	0 (0)	0 (0)
Total	31 (97)	32 (100)

Some students' aspirations were based on specific experiences in high school, such as learning a particular subject area. Francisco[1] said "'cause when I learned that computer graphics, that inspired me, more like man I wanna go to school but I wanna continue on what I learn here, make it into a career." Other students, such as Joshua, were enticed by college recruiters. After recruiters came to his school, Joshua "used to have dreams about it and I could see myself going to that school." Other students knew that they would go to college based on their performance in high school, such as Sonia, who said "I did so good in high school, I wanted to go to college."

Many students described their family as influential in their aspirations. For example, Francisco said that his grandmother was influential in what he is doing today because:

> She always, like when I was little, to watch how she used to work. The way her thinking when she was doing, always making the right choices. Not only for her, but for everybody, for the four people she was with. Making the right choices for all them, not only for herself. That's what I'm thinking too. When I make a decision, I want to make it so I can make her proud and my rest of my family, but they're not here.

Francisco's aspirations to go to school for computer graphics was based on affiliative achievement (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001), a form of motivation achievement in Latino youth which is grounded in the desire to care for family and to compensate their immigrant parents for their sacrifices in attempting to create a better life for their children. Francisco's aspirations were grounded in his desire to make the right decisions for his family and to make them proud.

Other students' aspirations were also focused on their families, but their aim was to prove their family wrong. For example, Ashley said that she:

> wanted to show [my family] that I wanted to come to college, finish high school and come to college, 'cause, even though they thought I would never come to college, they always knew, or they always thought that I would never graduate high school.

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[1] In order to protect confidentiality, pseudonyms are used throughout when referring to participants.

She was pushed by a desire to show that she was better than her family's low expectations of her.

A theme emerged in the interviews regarding the value of school as a motivation for educational aspirations and expectations. Participants felt that school was important in order to obtain opportunities, such as well paying jobs. Blanca stated: "school is really important for me." She went even further, stating that "I think it's important for people to go to school." Not only does she feel that school will help her, but she feels that school is the right decision for people generally. Alejandro echoed Blanca's feelings, stating that "I know college is much better than just working. And I'll get better opportunities." Francisco took this a step farther and said that "if you don't have a diploma, you won't even find a regular paying job."

In addition to participants' own values about school, participants discussed the value that their family members placed on school. Blanca's stepmom "talks to [her] about school and she tells [her] that it's really important to go to school." Alejandro stated that his dad believes that "having an education is important, in matter where you're working." Eva's family, and in particular one brother, instilled in her the value of school:

> Mi familia, uno de mis hermanos, el siempre me indicó y me enseñó lo que significaba el estudio, lo importante que es.

> My family, one of my brothers, he always explained to me and taught me the significance of education, how important it is.[2]

The values that students had towards school, along with the values that their families instilled in them, influenced their educational aspirations to go to college.

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[2] For participants who were interviewed in Spanish, their quote is first provided in Spanish followed by the English translation.

Career Aspirations during High School

Nine participants (28%) stated career aspirations in the interviews. The careers they aspired to included careers in computers, as a mortician, as a nurse, as an airplane pilot, as a professional basketball player, and working in the music industry. These careers range from talent-based careers (e.g., basketball player) to careers requiring college degrees (e.g., working in computer graphics or nursing). While some participants had expectations of entering one particular career, others had vague or less certain aspirations. For example, Lupe aspired to become a professional, but did not specify what type of professional. Javier was uncertain what career he wanted, and he changed his mind numerous times. When asked "Did you always know what you wanted to do after high school?" he replied: "Like I always knew but I wasn't sure … There were so many things I wanted to do but I couldn't decide. . . I was thinking about fireman, then it was a photographer, then it was computer graphics."

Military Aspirations during High School

Three students (9%) aspired to enter the military after high school. Two of the three students stated that they wanted to enter the military so that the military would pay for their college education. For example, Alejandro said that he "thought about a little while for, um, the army, or the air force," and that he wanted to join "for the college grants. I mean that would be very simple."

Uncertain Aspirations during High school

Other students were unsure of whether or not they wanted to go to college, such as Ashley, who responded to "Did you always know when you were in high school that you would go to college?" with:

No, no. It's funny 'cause, I wanted to have like, undecided decisions, I had undecided

things, so I was thinking, I would go and I wouldn't, I wanted to in a way, but I know, the teachers used to say, it's fun, they encouraged the students to go to college. . . but I wasn't into that, there is something I got to do with my life.

Another student, Blanca, said that in high school: "I was like, oh yeah, I'm going to college but I really don't want to. I was like, I don't want to go to school right now but like when I was a senior I just . . . I wasn't in the mood."

<div align="center">Expectations during High School</div>

Of the 32 youth, 21 (66%) stated an explicit expectation in the interview to go to college while they were in high school, and six participants (19%) explicitly stated that they did not expect to go to college. Four participants (13%) stated an expectation to have a career, such as being a teacher, a professional basketball player, or working with computers. Five participants (16%) expected to work in a job, such as working in a factory or doing retail work. Three participants (9%) expected to join the military. Only three participants did not state an academic, career or work expectation during high school.

College Expectations in High School

Thirty-one youth (96%) had previously answered the survey question in high school about academic expectations. Participants generally expected to complete at least a Bachelor's degree, and the mean response was a 4.41 ($SD =.96$), on a scale where 4.0 indicates an expectation to get a Bachelor's degree, and 5.0 indicates an expectation to get a Master's degree (see Table 2). The mean expectation of the 32 T2 participants was significantly higher than the mean expectation of the T1 participants who did not participate in the follow-up transition interview ($M= 3.91$; $SD =1.04$), $t (137) = 2.46$, $p < .05$, indicating that youth who participated in the interview may have been somewhat different than those youth who participated in the survey but not the interview. During the transition, participants discussed their high school academic

expectations with more nuanced details, including why they expected to go to college and what types of colleges they expected to attend. Some students, such as Mayra and Eva, had always expected they would go to college. Eva said, "Pues eso desde pequeñita, porque yo siempre decía que yo iba a entrar a la Universidad. [Well this since when I was young, because I always said that I would go to the University."] Mayra's expectations for college were based on her parents' expectations: "Well I knew off the bat that I was gonna go to college cuz hey . . . I mean it was no question about it. You know it was like my parents said you have to go. You have to go." Other students had expectations about the kind of colleges they could attend, such as Sonia, who said:

> Yeah. For our school, you really didn't see college recruiters. Unless it's for sports or something. But for academics or anything, everybody knew if you're from [name of high school] you knew where you were going . . . If you're really smart, you're going to Northeastern. If you're so-so, you're gonna go to Wright. Only two places you can actually go.

Thus, according to Sonia, students from this high school typically attend one of two colleges because of their high school's reputation and the messages received by students about their caliber. Both of these higher educational institutions are located close to the neighborhood where participants resided during high school. Northeastern Illinois University is a non-selective 4-year university, while Wright College is a 2-year community college.

Career Expectations in High School

Four participants (13%) stated that they had the expectation of having a career at some point after they graduated from high school. Expected careers included working with computers, becoming an educator and playing professional basketball.

Expectations to Work after High School

Six participants (19%) expected to work at a job after high school, such as working at a factory or working in retail. Francelyn said, "I thought I'd be working full-time at a factory or something like Walgreen's or something." Marisol said, "I kind of expected myself to be working at a store." Laura "thought [she'd] be working," and did not expect to be in school.

Youths' expectations to work generally stemmed from a need to earn money and help support their families, and from a sense of the value of work. For example, Francelyn expected to work because her mom made minimum wage and "needed help." Laura expected to work after high school:

> Because I wanna support myself, so that's why I wanted to work. That way, I could buy my clothes, my shoes, that's what influenced me to work. If you want what you want, you gotta work. So that's what influenced me to work.

Nelson believed it was important to work because "the truth is if you don't work, you ain't gonna get nothing." Joshua also believed that in order to achieve his goals he would need to work:

> I'm am the type of person that likes name-brand clothes, name-brand shoes and I like a nice car but I realized that to have that you have to work at it. Money just doesn't come to you. I mean it's not even about money it's just about having, being secure in life.

Military Expectations in High School

Three students (9%) did not expect to go to college or to work, but rather expected to go into the military after high school graduation. Javier stated that in high school he did not plan to be working as a cashier, which was his current job. Instead, he "thought a lot about being in the military."

Aspirations during the Transition

Between the time that they graduated high school and when the interview took place, many participants changed their future educational and occupational aspirations. On average, participants had lower academic aspirations but more concrete and specific career aspirations.

Academic Aspirations in the Transition from High School

Over the course of the transition, many youth lowered their academic aspirations (see Table 3 below). Aspirations during high school and aspirations one year later were compared using a paired sample t test for the 22 participants (69%) who responded to the educational aspirations question in high school (M=5.27; SD =.88) and stated an educational aspiration during the transition (M=4.59; SD=1.04). Consistent with the study hypothesis, aspirations were significantly lower in the transition, $t(21)$= 3.11, p=.04. Reasons for youths' lowered aspirations are detailed in the "*Barriers*" section below.

Table 3

Participants' Aspirations and Expectations in the Transition

	Transition aspirations *n* (%)	Transition expectations *n* (%)
PhD or professional degree	6 (19)	4 (13)
Master's degree	5 (16)	3 (9)
Bachelor's degree	9 (29)	15 (47)
Associate's degree	3 (9)	6 (19)
High school degree	0 (0)	1 (3)
Less than high school	0 (0)	0 (0)
Total	23 (72)	29 (91)

At the time of the interview, 12 participants (38%) were not in college. Some of these participants had never gone to college, while others started but were unable to continue. All twelve participants had hopes of beginning or returning to college. Twenty-eight participants (88%) stated aspirations or expectations to complete an Associate's or Bachelor's degree. Seven (22%) participants aspired to go to graduate school or to get a graduate degree, such as Blanca, who wanted to major in psychology and get a PhD. All youth were either currently enrolled in school, expected to be enrolled in school or aspired to be enrolled in school.

Career Aspirations in the Transition from High School

Twenty-five (78%) participants articulated an aspiration to have a specific career or one of a few careers. The careers varied, and they included nursing, accounting, social work, professional sports, psychology, fashion design, architecture, and working in the music industry. Participants chose their career aspirations because of a passion for a certain occupation and/or expectations about the financial benefits of the occupation. For example, Maribel wanted to own a funeral home because "I like dead bodies, I like [guts], I like blood and I like to see organs." Oscar describes music as his "energy," and because of that he wants to have a career in the music industry. Marisol wanted to be the director of a preschool because working with children is "fun," and also because she wanted to be "financially situated." Francelyn and Sonia echoed the idea that their careers would bring them financial stability. Francelyn wanted to be a doctor because it was a "cushy job," and Sonia wanted to be an accountant because she wanted to "dress nicely in a suit."

Expectations in the Transition

In the transition from high school, participants' expectations focused on academic and career or occupational expectations. Additionally, the expectations of others emerged as an important theme that colored participants' own expectations.

<u>Academic Expectations</u>

Consistent with the study hypothesis, between the time that they graduated high school and when the interview took place, participants had generally lowered their academic expectations. The 29 participants (91%) who responded to the educational expectations question in high school (M=4.41; SD=.95) and stated an educational expectation during the interview lowered their educational expectations during the transition (M=4.09; SD=.98), t(28)=2.08, p=.00.

Qualitative data from the interview helps to illuminate the nature of participants' expectations during the transition. Although participants had varying academic expectations, all but one youth (n=31; 97%) was either currently enrolled in college (n=20; 63%) or expected to be enrolled in college (n=11; 34%). Some students' academic expectations included completion of a specific degree, ranging from an Associate's Degree to a Doctoral level degree, while other students expected only "to go to college" without specific mention of completion of a degree.

Many youth also held high expectations for the rewards that would come from graduating from college, including that school would lead to success and opportunities, and that school would help them and their family. For example, Efrain expected that he would have a "good job" and a "good life" because of his plan to graduate from college. Many youth expected to be the first in their family to graduate from college. For example, Oscar stated "I always knew I was gonna go to school, I just had to. I'd be amongst the first in my family to get a degree."

Many participants expected that they would complete a degree, such as Nelson, who was not currently enrolled in school but believed that by age 24 "I'm gonna go through college and I'm gonna be able to do what it is that I wanted to do." Joshua left his four-year college due to financial reasons and was currently enrolled at a two-year college taking general classes. However, he expected that he would get a bachelor's degree. Some youth also planned to get a graduate degree, such as Eva, who did not think she would be able to achieve her goals with only a B.A. in psychology:

> Pues yo ya me veo graduada. Me veo graduada de psicología. Me veo trabajando y dentro de mis planes esta que yo se que solo con el bachillerato en psicología no se puede conseguir un o un buen trabajo o quizás en lo que yo quiero estudiar o lo que yo quiero para mi vida no es suficiente con el bachillerato en psicología y tenía que estar también pensando en sacar una maestría o un doctorado en psicología también.

> [Well I see myself graduating. I see myself graduating in psychology. I see myself working and given my plans I know that with only a Bachelor's in psychology you cannot get a good job or maybe in what I want to study or what I want with my life a bachelor's will not be sufficient and I have to also think about getting a master's or a doctorate in psychology.]

Other participants had less certain academic expectations, such as Javier, who when asked what he would be doing at age 24 responded: "I have no idea. Because I haven't decided what I'm going to study." While almost all youth expected success in college and to obtain degrees, one participant (3%) expected that she would fail college, and that college was not for her. Still others (n=13; 41%) planned to change their college status, by transferring from a two-year to a four-year college, becoming a part-time rather than a full-time student, stopping school, or restarting school.

Expectations of Others

An important factor related to participants' expectations and aspirations was the expectations of other important people in their lives. Many participants stated that their parents had expectations of them that colored their aspirations, expectations or behavior:

"my mom, actually she wanted me to go [to college]. So I went" (Camila).

"my family is the type of family where it's like if you do something, they have high expectations for you. Not just that, it's like they want you to succeed and if you don't everybody feels let down" (Joshua).

Some participants struggled with competing expectations of important others regarding their decision to go to college, such as Sonia. While her father "doesn't like the idea of school. He thinks it's a waste of time . . . He thinks I should be working full-time and he thinks I should get a better job," she also feels a commitment to live up to the expectations of her high school teachers:

I did so good in high school, I wanted to go to college. Even my teachers they knew that . . . I came back one day, and they were like 'so have you finished college yet?' It's like they have so much faith in me, I can't let them down.

Other participants had similar experiences as Sonia. They struggled with important people in their lives disagreeing with their choices in the transition. For example, Nelson stated that:

Others think that I should be doing something other than just working at a grocery store. Some think that I should've stayed in school, I mean stay in the high school program, the high school basketball program and coach because I'm very sociable and I know I could interact with players and other staff in those programs. And others feel that I should be doing something other than just work at Dominicks.

Similarly, Ashley had a strong opinion about what she would like to do in the future, but her father had an opposing opinion: "Like I told him I want to be studying fashion design regardless, he's like 'no, that's not good. Study nursing or a doctor or whatever or a lawyer.'"

Career Expectations in the Transition

Nine students (28%) stated career expectations during the transition. Their expected occupations included graphic design, social work, nursing and law enforcement. For some

participants, they expected to be in the careers to which they aspired. However, other participants

expected to be working in a different occupation on the way to their desired career.

Mayra's expectations aligned with her aspirations, and she had specific and concrete

information about her expected career. She expected to be a social worker and predicted that her

expected career would provide her with job stability but low pay:

> And the thing with social work is that I know for a fact that I will always have a job . . .
> Another thing with social work is that people say they are over worked and underpaid but
> it's not about the money, too.

Francisco aspired to be an architect, but he expected that in five years he would be

working as a graphic designer, a step on the way to his dream job:

> I picture my life like, almost finished with school, college. And then have a very good job
> that will help me to keep on with my dream job which is architect. . .
> Interviewer: What kind of work would you think about?
> Francisco: Like graphic designer. And then that job might help me out with the career I
> want.

Likewise, Angela expected in five years to be working at an occupation on the way to her

eventual desired career:

> I think I'll be a cop because actually that's what I wanna do first. . . yeah. I wanna be a
> cop then I wanna go for FBI agent. So I'll… How I picture myself is, being a cop and
> still going to school.

Career expectations in the transition varied from being identical to career aspirations to

being a step on the way to those aspirations. However, they were generally specific and focused

on the ultimate goal of achieving participants' aspired careers.

In sum, aspirations and expectations during high school predominantly focused on the

desire and expectation to go to college or obtain graduate degrees, although some participants

also had career and work aspirations and expectations. Aspirations to go to college stemmed

from specific experiences in high school, parental expectations, and values about school. Work

expectations stemmed both from the need to work to earn money and support family members and from values about the importance of work.

Participants' aspirations and expectations decreased one year later, from obtaining a Master's degree to earning a Bachelor's degree. This decrease was generally due to the many barriers that youth faced in the transition, which will be discussed in detail below. Additionally, over the course of the transition, career aspirations and expectations became more prevalent and concrete.

What are youths' plans to fulfill their expectations and aspirations?

High School Behavior Geared Towards College

Youth's retrospective accounts about their experiences in high school showed that, for the most part, their behavior in high school reflected their desires to continue their education in the future. Most youth took concrete steps to prepare themselves to apply to and succeed in college. However, a few participants took actions in high school that made it more difficult for them to succeed, such as cutting class or joining crews or gangs.

There was a great deal of variability among youth's performance in high school. The mean high school GPA among participants was 2.83 (SD=.72), ranging from 1.80 to 4.32. The mean total number of classes cut during senior year was 48.00 (SD=45.70), ranging from 3 to 158. The mean total days absent in senior year was 17.56 (SD= 13.21), ranging from 1 to 60. It is clear from these numbers that youths' behavior during high school varied tremendously, from youth who were excelling in classes and almost never missed a class to those who were having significant academic difficulty and missing a great deal of school.

Some participants reported taking college preparatory classes. Twelve youth (37.5%) stated that they took honors or Advanced Placement (AP) classes, and five (16%) took part in

College Excel, a program where high school students take courses at local colleges. Four

students (13%) mentioned participating in other college preparatory programs, such as Gear Up,

a federally funded program that works to prepare Chicago Public School students for an

undergraduate education, and ASPIRA, a non-profit organization that helps Latino/a students

apply to college. Many students also took steps to apply to college, including completing

applications, visiting schools, and making college decisions. Daniel stated that he "went to

Wright College and . . . took the entrance exam and all that." Joshua said that "actually, with the

college excel program once that ended, it was done, that's it. Everything else was all solely on

me. So after high school when I got out, a couple days after graduation I went to go register at

Devry." Eva also took steps to apply to college:

> Yo había metido aplicaciones en UIC, metí aplicaciones a DePaul y a varia universidades
> . . . Fui al campus y empezamos a verlo y todo y entonces me gusto.

> [I submitted applications to UIC, submitted applications to DePaul and to various
> universities. I went to campus and started to see it and everything and then I liked it]

Although many students took steps to prepare for college, others behaved in ways that

made it more difficult for them to achieve their goals. Some students cut class often, joined

"crews" or gangs, or only took classes in the regular academic track. Some students had

difficulty in classes or failed classes, and others described themselves as being an "average"

student at their high school. Although Javier aspired and expected to complete a Bachelor's

degree, he had a 2.28 GPA in his senior year of high school. When asked 'what type of student

were you [in high school], he responded:

> Average. . . C's and B's."
> Interviewer: C's and B's. Okay. You always went to class? Did you cut?"
> Participant: "Sometimes. Not all the time. But I spent more time in the classroom than
> out.

Another student, Ashley, aspired to complete a Ph.D. or professional degree and expected to earn a Bachelor's degree. However, she described a pattern of cutting class that developed after her freshman year of high school:

> I didn't cut, I didn't have no cuts my freshmen year. After I started knowing people they're like come on, come on let's go and this and that and I'm like I can't cut. So after that I start cutting I most likely broke the record they said, they said I broke the record of 300 and something cuts.

Overall, most participants behaved during high school in ways that prepared them for their aspirations and expectations to go to college, such as taking AP and honors classes or participating college preparatory programs. However, other students behaved in ways that did not support their aspirations or expectations. They earned poor grades in high school, cut class and joined gangs.

<u>High School Behavior Geared Towards Work</u>

Although many students were focused on academics during high school, almost half of participants (n=13; 41%) worked during high school. Students varied in how much they worked during high school. Some students worked only over the summer, but others worked upwards of 30 hours per week for the entire year, which demonstrates the economic circumstances of many participants.

Some youth also participated in training programs for specific jobs during high school. For example, two students participated in training programs to become Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN's) or Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA's), and five students participated in Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC).

Participants worked at a variety of jobs in high school, including in construction, at retail stores and in the medical field. For example, Sonia worked as a package handler at UPS and describes her schedule in high school as "All I could do was 6:30 in the morning and then

straight after school to college courses and then go to work." In a typical day, she arrived at school early in the morning to participate in ROTC, took classes at her high school and then at a local college, and worked in the evenings. Francisco said that "ever since I started working, like before I was even permitted to work, when I was going to construction, I used to help my grandmother, give her money and help her with the bills, all that." Similar to Francisco, many participants worked in order to make money for themselves or for their family. Few students worked in an area related to their career aspirations or expectations, and no students described participating in internships in fields that they wanted to pursue.

Youth's Behavior in the Transition towards Fulfilling Aspirations and Expectations

During the transition from high school, 20 participants (63%) reported working, and 24 (75%) reported attending college at some point since high school graduation. However, participants experienced many changes in work and school status over the course of the transition.

Academic Behavior in the Transition

Most participants reported either currently being in college or attending college at some point. Nineteen (60%) were currently enrolled in college, and five (16%) were enrolled in college at some point but either dropped out or took a temporary break from college.

Of the participants attending college, many described their academic behavior, including their study habits and their grades. Students varied in their study habits and in their academic performance, from working hard and performing well at college to procrastinating or failing classes. For example, Ashley describes that she is:

> always on the bus studying, doing research on the computers, or something. [My mom's] like, how come you don't go out, don't you have friends? I'm like yeah I do have friends. . . but we are the type, me and [name of female friend] we, she at the house, she

>   comes to visit me, I usually go visit her. . .we see TV, we do research, work, I help her
>   with her homework.

Ashley's priority is her academic work, and she was earning A's, B's and one C on her report

card. Blanca describes that she is working hard and "learning a lot" in college, but that she

struggles with procrastinating and has difficulty keeping up with homework. Other participants,

such as Joshua, struggled with the workload in college. Joshua failed one class and pulled his

GPA up to a 3.0, but then allowed it to drop to a 2.5.

Overall, participants varied widely in their academic behavior. Of those enrolled in

college, most put a great deal of effort into their course work. However, not all students were

successfully negotiating the college experience. Many students reported struggling with college

courses or receiving failing grades in classes.

Work Behavior in the Transition

Most adolescents (n=20; 63%) worked during the transition, regardless of whether or not

they were in school. Jobs included working at a local grocery story as a "utility clerk," working

as a package handler at UPS, conducting surveys in malls, working as a cashier, working as a

CNA, and "working at a warehouse, keeping inventory." Of those who were not working, four

participants (13%) were currently looking for a job, and Oscar described job searching

"drastically." Participants' performance at work varied, from those who got "a great review" at

work (Joshua), to those who were looking for a new job due to not getting along with their boss

and customers (Alex). Four participants (13%) worked in jobs related to their desired career.

Gabriela and Maribel both aspired to be nurses, and they were working as CNAs at the time of

the interview. Anthony aspired to run his family business, where he was working as a

salesperson at the time of the interview, and Marisol aspired to be a teacher and was working at a

tutoring center as a receptionist and tutor. Other students worked in order to help their family pay

the bills, and in order to pay for college classes. Sonia and Francelyn worked at UPS which provided them with tuition waivers in exchange for working. Angela was working so that she could pay her way through school in order to help her family.

Regardless of whether or not they were in school, most youth were working at the time of the study. Youth had a variety of jobs, ranging from those related to their career aspirations to unrelated jobs. Youth's reasons for work varied as well. While some youth were using their jobs as a springboard towards their desired career, others worked in order to support themselves or help their families financially.

What are the gaps between expectations and aspirations? What are the gaps between aspiration/expectations and behavior?

Gaps in High School

In high school, of the 32 youth who participated in the interview, 31 (97%) answered both the survey questions about educational aspirations and expectations. Among these youth, the mean aspiration was 5.16 (SD=.97), and the mean expectation was 4.42 (SD=.96). Findings supported the hypothesis that there would be a gap between aspirations and expectations such that participants had higher aspirations than expectations during high school, $t(30)$= 5.34, p=.00.

Although there was a statistically significant difference between expectations and aspirations in high school, in the interview most participants who discussed both their aspirations and expectations in high school did not indicate a difference between their academic expectations in high school and their academic aspirations while in high school. Only three participants explained the difference between their aspirations and their expectations in high school. Efrain aspired to graduate from college when he was in high school, but when his grandmother got sick, he expected to go to Boston to take care of her instead of going to college.

Angela reported that she aspired to attend a specific competitive four-year college while in high school, but that by the end of high school she was planning on going straight to work rather than to college. Likewise, Laura hoped to attend college after high school, but by the end of high school she was uncertain if she would be able to due to her undocumented immigration status.

Gaps between aspirations and behavior and expectations and behavior were small for most participants. Most students took serious steps throughout high school to reach their aspirations, such as enrolling in Honors or AP classes, participating in College Excel, doing well in their classes, or beginning training programs to reach their career goals.

<div align="center">Gaps in the Transition</div>

During the transition from high school, 21 participants (66%) indicated both their academic aspirations and their academic expectations. The difference between the mean aspiration (M=4.71; SD=0.99) and the mean academic expectation (M=4.12; SD=1.12) was statistically significant, $t(20)$=3.07, p=.00, supporting the hypothesis that participants would have higher aspirations than expectations during the transition.

The qualitative data indicated that although participants had gaps between their aspirations and expectations in high school, these gaps became more pronounced and important in the transition. For example, Francisco was an undocumented immigrant from Nicaragua. When he was in high school, he aspired to go to college, "cause when I learned . . . computer graphics, that inspired me, more like man I wanna go to school but I wanna continue on what I learn here, make it into a career." His expectations in high school matched his aspirations; he planned to continue his education after graduation. He had a 2.7 GPA in high school and he took classes in the "regular" academic track. However, when he graduated from high school, he was unable to immediately enroll in college. Instead he had to "[wait] for my green card since I'm not

from here . . . so I can continue with school, cause I need that so they could give me financial aid." In the meantime he worked at a theater doing "kitchen duties," and "learning how to make stuff, burgers, pizza, all that stuff." Despite his current position, he aspired to go to college, complete a degree and become an architect, and he expected that he would begin college, earn his Bachelor's degree, work as a graphic designer, and eventually become an architect.

Alejandro immigrated illegally with his family to the U.S. from Mexico when he was in the 8th grade, and he was still undocumented at the time of his interview. In high school, he had vague expectations of going to college or of joining the military, but was unable to do either due to his undocumented status. Individuals who are undocumented in the U.S. may attend college, but they are ineligible to attain federal financial aid to fund higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). He stated that "senior year when I was getting closer to graduating, I was thinking about [college] next September," and that he "thought about a little while for, um, the army, or the air force, but no." His behavior in high school reflected his desire to go to college, as he took honors classes as well as both of the AP courses offered at his high school. However, due to his undocumented status, he was unable to go to college and instead "work[ed] at a warehouse, keeping inventory" during the transition. However, he continued to have aspirations of going to college: "I mean, I know people who went to college and are going to college, so basically I wanna do as well as they do, and go to college." He maintained his expectations of going to college, and in fact his expectations became more specific "The way I see it is probably that um, community college two years, and from there, I could try to get my Bachelors." However, while his aspirations and expectations remained high, he feared that he would not accomplish his goals. He stated that "I don't want five years to go and meet [other kids in my

high school class] and say hey, you graduated from college, oh I'm still working at the warehouse, I don't wanna do that."

Sonia also had gaps between her aspirations, expectations and behaviors in high school and in the transition. When Sonia was in high school, she aspired to go to college. She took honors and college classes in high school, and her GPA was a 3.43. When she graduated from high school, she planned to go straight to college, and she expected that her employer, UPS, would pay for her college credits. However, due to logistical problems, UPS was unable to pay for her college on time, and she was unable to enroll in school in the fall. At the time of the interview, she was taking three classes at a community college and getting B's and C's. Additionally, although she took honors English in high school, she was forced to drop a remedial English class in community college because she was going to fail it. However, despite Sonia's difficulties getting started at college and completing the work, her expectations and aspirations remained high. She still expected to transfer to a four-year college and to earn a B.A. She aspired to complete a degree in accounting and to get a job where she would "dress nicely in a suit" and be financially stable.

Although many students faced barriers in the transition from high school that threw them off-course to achieve their goals, most still retained their high aspirations and expectations. The nature of the barriers and how they impacted expectations and aspirations is explored further in the *Barriers* section below.

What is the nature of youth's educational and occupational

possible selves (i.e., positive, negative, balanced)?

Valence of Possible Selves

According to Possible Selves Theory (Marcus & Nurius, 1986), positive possible selves include aspirations and expectations and negative possible selves include fears. Balanced possible selves include both fears and aspirations. In this study, many youth had balanced possible selves, where their aspirations, expectations and behavior were colored by fears about the future or by negative modeling, the idea of trying to avoid the mistakes of others in their lives.

Many participants were inspired to go to college both because there were specific aspects of college they were excited about and because they feared what would happen if they did not attend college. Sonia had an aspiration to go to school because she "liked the atmosphere" and "the idea of going to school, and people in a rush to drink coffee." She thought "it's so cool. It was like, I wanted to be there." But her aspiration was balanced by the fear of "staying home and being a lump" if she did not go to college. Further, she aspired to "go into accounting," which was balanced by her fear of working as a bus or truck driver, the position her parents want her to attain:

> [My parents'] highest goal for, oh god I don't even wanna believe it. But their highest goal is to become a bus driver, a truck driver. . . that's the goal they have for me!. . . But I don't want that, I don't want that. I want to dress nicely in a suit, you know. That's how I see me making money.

Camila had the fear of seeing "everybody going to college and I didn't want to stay behind," balanced with the aspiration of "I wanna do something for myself." She didn't want "to be flipping burgers or something," and instead she wanted "a good job." Ashley said that she:

> wanted to study my career that I want to, so I could do something in my life, 'cause I don't want to be just at home or just at work doing nothing, doing the same thing over and over again, so I wanted to do something different. So I decided to come to college.

Alejandro, who was currently working at a warehouse said that he "[doesn't] want to do that for the rest of my life. So I need to go to college." He also was shaped by an aspiration to do

as well as his friends from high school, who were currently attending college. Nelson's desire to change jobs was motivated by the aspiration to have a change, but also the fear of being in the same job forever. He stated, "I feel like I need something else, there's a change. I need to be at a different position or do something else because sometimes it's hard to see myself bagging groceries or pushing carts for the rest of my life."

Many participants described using negative modeling as a motivation. Their goals involved avoiding outcomes that other people in their lives experienced. Mayra describes that her sister and her friend "tell me, don't do this, don't do that because look what happened to me. So through their faults I know that to do." Her behavior is shaped by trying to avoid what she perceives to be the negative outcomes that they faced, such as getting married very young and not going to school. Joshua's aspirations for college were also shaped by negative modeling. His aspiration to go to college came both from the enticing speeches of college representatives who visited his high school, "but also because I am the only one from all my cousins to graduate from high school, there are a lot of dropouts in my family." He wanted to avoid dropping out of high school like so many others in his family. He further elaborated that "watching the mistakes they do or watching just the decisions they make and that influenced what I do." Oscar wanted to go to college, "for my future, for my children." He also wanted to avoid putting his children "through the position that my parents unfortunately had to put me through. So I wanna be able to become a provider for my children. Be able to have a nice family." Oscar's aspirations to have a nice family and to be a provider for his children were balanced with the fear of having to raise his children the way he was raised. Similarly, Francelyn wanted to be a doctor because she wants to have a "cushy job," and because "neither of my parents finished high school, and I saw that they were only working factory jobs and everything I sort of didn't want to do that my whole

life." Her aspirations were based on her desire for a nice lifestyle, in addition to her desire to avoid working a factory job like her parents.

While many youth had balanced possible selves, a few had solely positive possible selves. Blanca's goal is "to major in psychology and . . . get a Ph.D." Jaime is "shooting for law school right now," but they did not address any fears about the future. None of the participants had negative possible selves, where they stated more fears than aspirations or expectations about the future.

<div align="center">Specificity of Possible Selves</div>

Participants varied in how specific their possible selves were. Some participants had clear career goals, including the steps necessary to accomplish them, while other participants had a much more vague sense of what they hoped to do. Maribel had specific aspirations that "by age 28, my goal is to have another degree in mortuary science and have my own funeral home." She planned on finishing her degree in nursing and then going back to school to get a degree in mortuary science. Marisol also had a clear career goal: to "run my own preschool, early childhood business." She worked at a preschool during high school, and she was currently enrolled in college and getting a degree in elementary education.

Other students had more vague possible selves. Alejandro wanted to go to college, get a "better job" and go "another step." While he aspired to graduate college and obtain a good job, his desires were not specific and focused towards one career or course of study. Camila also had vague aspirations. She doesn't want "to stay behind," and she wants to "do something for myself." She wants a "good job and I think about the future. That's what I want. I want not to be flipping burgers or something. But I'll do something for myself." However, she did not know "what I'm gonna be working in or anything like that. That doesn't come to mind right now. If I

would finish school it maybe would be teaching students." Similarly, Daniel wanted to go to college "to better myself" and because "it's not like before. It's not like I can get a real good job coming out of high school. Everybody wants college now." However, he was still debating between three very different careers: professional baseball, social work and criminal justice. Similarly, Oscar had vague career aspirations. He was "still trying to decide if I'm gonna go into education or I'm gonna pursue the music industry." His two proposed career paths were very different, and his goals of what he would do in either were vague. Lupe also had vague aspirations to "tener una vida bonita [have a nice life]." However, she was not sure what type of career to pursue, other than that she wanted a job where she was "ayudando a la gente, ayundando a gente pobre o gente con enfermedades o ayudando a la comunidad [helping people, helping poor people or sick people or helping the community]."

In general, possible selves became more specific over the course of the transition. Although many students had vague aspirations to "go to college" while they were in high school, their aspirations became more specific during the transition regarding which college they would like to attend or continue attending, and what degrees they hoped to earn. Participants also had more specific career plans during the transition.

What barriers are related to youth's possible selves, and
what sources of social support are related to youth's possible selves?

Barriers to Youth's Possible Selves in High School

Although all participants in this study aspired to attend college while they were in high school, youth encountered many barriers in high school that influenced their aspirations and expectations for the future, in addition to their behavior during the transition. Barriers are defined as anything material or abstract that impedes or hinders the transition from high school. Barriers

in high school included the inner-city school environment, financial barriers, and barriers due to

immigration.

<div align="center">Inner-City School Environment</div>

Many participants discussed aspects of their inner-city high school that made it difficult

for them to apply to college and realize their academic goals, including lack of support, lack of

academic rigor and overcrowding.

Lack of support. Participants described a lack of support from their college counselors or

from teachers. Daniel describes the "students, teachers, faculty, everybody" at his high school

having "a I don't care attitude." For example, he felt that his teachers looked down on him and

didn't "respect students for our intelligence." He also reported that his counselor did not help

him in the college application process. In fact, she discouraged him from applying to a specific

school: "She told me don't waste your time because of my GPA." His GPA was a 2.0. Because

of this information and because "there was no direction," Daniel did not apply to college, and

during the transition took "a year off. Just to relax."

Lack of academic rigor. Francelyn felt that the high school she attended was not

academically rigorous enough. She said that:

> the teachers, they didn't focus too much on education . . . they didn't have as high of a
> standard … Children would miss like almost the whole semester of school and teacher
> would give them a passing grade if they tried like the last two weeks.

She also complained of the school being overcrowded, and that the fights that took place inside

the school in the hallways were "insane." Joshua echoed the sentiment that the high school was

not rigorous enough:

> one of the things that didn't prepare me for college in high school was like the teachers,
> like some of them were very loose, like 'uh, just turn it in tomorrow. . . they are really
> lenient. There are some teachers who are like, 'you know what, I'll just pass you . . .

There were some kids who didn't do nothing all year and just passed. That's probably the reason for the low test scores. The leniency of the teachers.

Javier said that "there were some teachers who didn't like to teach much and let you do whatever you want in class. There were some teachers who tried to help you and made you do work in class but some seemed not to care too much."

Overcrowded. Sonia reflected the idea that the high school was extremely overcrowded. In fact, some students were so disruptive that she wanted them to drop out:

I was like 'yeah, come on, let's drop out right from the beginning, come on, drop out.'
Interviewer: "You wanted people to drop out?"
Sonia: "Yes! 'Cause that meant it was room for us. That's how we seen it. All the students that were bad and negative and weren't even there for a positive point, I thought they should've dropped out a long time ago. If you're not there to learn anything, why are you there to being with? Some students should have dropped out a long time ago. I don't know why they stayed, just to make a mess? If you're gonna go mess, go to night school, that's what I thought of it. It was like, you prevent you have one child trying to interrupt the whole class and it interrupts everybody from learning. Everybody gets into that mood of learning, and then all of a sudden you have a jack ass screaming out something, and you get mad . . . I mean teachers would have to be pushing, they have to go stop, they have to get the security guards.

Sonia felt that because of the disruptive students, "I don't think we got taught what we were supposed to get taught." When she started college she failed her grammar class, because "I got taught nothing about grammar. And I'm like, okay. And my professor said you should know this already. I'm like how am I supposed to know this?" Lupe echoed the idea that she was not taught the necessary things to prepare her for college. She said: "Tal vez no me estaban enseñando lo necesario para prepararme para una educación como college." [Perhaps they did not teach me what was necessary to prepare me for an education like college."]

The environment at participants' inner city high school served as a barrier to youth behaving in ways that matched their aspirations. Although youth generally wanted to attend college, the lack of academic rigor at their high school made it less likely that they would get

into competitive colleges and succeed at college-level courses. The lack of support from teachers and staff, combined with lack of attention due to overcrowding, made it more difficult for them to apply to college and make good decisions about the transition.

Financial Barriers

A few students also encountered financial barriers during high school. Students' financial problems ranged from having difficulty balancing their jobs with their schoolwork to having difficulty paying for college applications. For example, because he needed to make money for his family, Francisco worked as a manager of a fast-food restaurant during high school, and he frequently worked until 11:00 PM when he had to be at school the next morning at 7:00 a.m. Although he aspired to a career in computer graphics or as an architect, he was unable to work or have an internship in either of those fields. Francelyn did not apply to her top choice college because she did not think she would get in, and because she "didn't get the waiver for UIC and … would have had to pay $40."

Financial barriers made it more difficult for participants to actualize their possible selves. Instead of being able to focus solely on achieving their educational and occupational goals, they were required to put their time and energy into making money to help support themselves and their families. Financial barriers also made it more difficult for participants to pay for the college application process, making it less likely that they could realize their dreams of going to college.

Immigration

A few students faced barriers due to being new immigrants to the United States. For example, Eva had difficulty with the college application process, which was so different than in her native Honduras:

> Porque desde el principio yo nunca pensé que fuera . . . yo se lo digo a la gente . . . nunca pensé que fuera tan difícil entrar a la Universidad aquí. Tienes que hacer tanto papeleo,

llenar tantas formas, aplicaciones, que si te escogen o no. Es muy diferente en mi país. Entonces yo necesitaba garrar bastantes consejos para poder entrar.

[Because from the beginning I never thought that it would be . . . this is what I tell people . . . I never thought that it would be so difficult to enter college here. You have to do so much paperwork, complete so many forms, applications, that they might admit you or not. It is very different in my country. So I had to get a lot of advice to be able to enroll.]

Additionally, many of the undocumented participants in the study were not informed about ways for them to pay for college by their high school counselors or teachers. When informed by the interviewer that there are ways for undocumented youth to get scholarships or to find other ways to pay for school, youth were often surprised. For example, although Alejandro wanted to go to college and had a 3.36 GPA in AP and honors classes in high school, he did not apply to any colleges because he did not know that there were any grants available to undocumented youth.

Barriers due to immigration made it more difficult for youth to behave in ways that matched their aspirations and expectations. Although they desired to go to college, being an immigrant to the U.S. made it difficult for them to achieve their goals, either because they had to learn to navigate a different educational system, or because they had come into the country illegally and had difficulty finding funding sources to enable them to continue their education.

<div align="center">Support for Youth's Possible Selves in High School</div>

Although many participants encountered difficulties or barriers during high school, the majority of youth mentioned at least one source of social support that made it easier for youth to actualize their possible selves during the transition. Participants reported both social and institutional support. These forms of support enabled participants to behave in ways that helped them fulfill their aspirations and expectations.

<div align="center">Social Support</div>

Participants described certain teachers and counselors in high school as helping them behave in ways that matched their goals. For example, Mayra wanted to attend college, and her teachers helped her through the application process:

> You know, they don't just let you make decisions 'a lo loco," you know like on your own. You have help. That's the good thing about it; you have help. And they help you fill out parts of the application. They help you do your essays. It's not . . . you're not blinded. You know what you're doing . . . What I liked about it was that the teachers and other faculty noticed and they helped you.

Other students mentioned specific teachers and other staff who helped them meet their goals. For example, Eva describes her counselor who wrote her letters of recommendation and helped her get involved in various activities, such as College Excel. Ashley described her counselor helping to facilitate her application to community college by helping her get the proper signatures for her application.

<u>Institutional Support in High School</u>

Some students took particular courses that they found helpful in achieving their academic or occupational goals during the transition from high school. For example, Javier took a class in high school where he learned to write a check and open a checking account that he found helpful in his job during the transition. Many of the youth who participated in College Excel found it helpful in making the transition to college and adjusting to college-level coursework. For example, Eduardo stated that College Excel was the best experience he had during high school. He took courses at a four-year college that he liked so much he decided to attend full-time after high school. Eva also found College Excel beneficial, because she was able to take courses in high school that counted both as high school and college credits:

> Y esos creditos le sirven a uno, dentro de High School y creditos para la Universidad. Entonces tomé 8 creditos para college y esos fueron en computación de Microsoft Word. Y entonces eso también me ayudó mucho.

> [And those credits served both in high school and as University credits. So I took 8 college credits and those were in computation in Microsoft Word. So this also helped me a lot.]

Other students described different aspects of high school that were helpful, such as attending college fairs and participating in other college preparatory programs, such as Gear Up.

Overall, social support and institutional support in high school helped participants make their possible selves more concrete and specific by engaging in goal-directed behavior.

<div align="center">Barriers to Youth's Possible Selves During the Transition</div>

In addition to the difficulties that students faced while in high school, many students experienced barriers in the transition from high school that made it hard for them to achieve their goals. Because participants were generally much more focused on their educational possible selves than their occupational possible selves, barriers tended to reflect roadblocks to reaching

their desired educational level. Barriers included financial barriers, barriers due to immigration status, academic barriers, and barriers due to lack of support. Youth often experienced more than one barrier, and the barriers were often interrelated.

<u>Financial Barriers</u>

Many students experienced financial barriers in the transition that served as obstacles to achieving their possible selves. These included needing to work full- or part-time while going to school, not getting financial aid, or being unable to afford the expense of going to college. Natalia was enrolled in college but had to leave after one semester because it was too difficult for her grandmother to pay for her and her sister to be in school at the same time:

> Este semestre no pudimos entrar porque no hemos pagado lo del pasado. Como *** mi abuelita y ya esta mayor, no puede trabajar y somos dos. Esta barata la universidad porque es una de las más baratas. Pero para ella es un poco difícil, más aparte los libros.

> This semester we were unable to go to school because we could not pay the past one. Because my grandma is old, she can't work, and we are two. The college is inexpensive because it's one of the cheapest ones. But, for her is it a little difficult, and on top of that the books.

Because Natalia and her sister were both undocumented, they were unable to take advantage of government financial aid, and the burden of paying for college out-of-pocket was too much for her grandmother. Mayra aspired to graduate from college as quickly as possible, but was unable to take summer courses because:

> financial aid doesn't cover that . . . And you know it sucks that I can't go . . . neither one of my parents are working. I can't go to them like, hey can you give me $300 for class, or $20 for books. It's not like that. If they had it they would give it to me . . . And it's like I wanna go to school so bad. I wanted to get some of my generals, like math and sciences and I couldn't go to summer school because of that.

Clearly, Mayra's financial barriers impact her ability to get through college quickly and to graduate in a timely fashion. Joshua experienced similar financial barriers. Although he attended a four-year college, he had to drop out because "it was the cost that was getting too much for

me." Due to the cost, he revised his plan, and chose to attend "a community college to take basic courses and get back into Devry." He still struggles with balancing work and community college:

> Putting in long hours can be difficult sometimes and then going to school in the morning, that's very difficult . . . sometimes my days go really fast. 'Cause I'm at school and then after school I just go straight to work."

Sonia took college courses in high school through a program where her employer paid for her college courses. However, due to a problem in her employer's accounting system, Sonia wound up owing money to her college and had to take a semester off because her employer only "pays once a year," and therefore was unable to work out her debt to the college until the new fiscal year. Even once she returned to school, the need to work while going to school made her life difficult:

> It's like, you work very hard, you work really hard, both jobs. You work at school, you work there, and then you're so exhausted you just wanna sleep. It's like sleep is the only thing I have in my life. It's like so boring, but I'm supposed to be having fun! I feel like I'm having none of that.

Alejandro also struggled with a financial barrier. He wanted to attend college after graduating from high school, but was unable to because he needed "to work and the money. I mean, my mom and dad they can't really afford to pay me to go . . . I had to help them."

Financial barriers made it more difficult for participants to actualize their possible selves. Often they were unable to start or continue going to college, or they were required to work while attending college in order to support themselves. These circumstances made it more difficult for participants to stay on the path towards graduating college and towards their aspired careers. Some of the participants who struggled most with financial barriers were undocumented immigrants. Barriers due to undocumented status is explored further below.

Immigrant Status

Another barrier faced by some participants was not being documented in the U.S. Some youth wanted to join the army, work or go to college, but were unable to due to being undocumented. For example, Alejandro thought about joining the military, but could not because of his "illegal status in the U.S." Isabel stated that both she and her mother would like to work, but are unable to due to being undocumented. Francisco worked at a movie theater at the time of the interview, but was unable to pay for college because he was waiting to receive his green card.

Immigration status created a huge barrier to participants behaving in ways that matched their aspirations and expectations. Although youth had aspirations of completing college, joining the military and entering professional careers, they were severely limited by their undocumented status. Due to being undocumented, participants were unable to join the military, they had to pay more money for school, and they had to find jobs that would hire undocumented workers or not work at all.

Academic Barriers

Many participants also faced academic barriers in the transition, such as poor academic performance and lack of knowledge about college. Many of these barriers can be traced back to the barriers youth experienced in high school due to the lack of resources in their inner-city school. For example, Mayra described college as "overwhelming" and like "a punch in the face." She expected that because she was in Honors classes she would be "ready for college," but she found it was "not even like that at all." It was "a lot harder and a lot stressful. I'm not gonna lie, there's been times I broke down." Camila reflected the same sentiments. Because she didn't "learn much" in high school, and particularly in math classes:

> it affects me because in college I had to take three classes and I did horrible. I had to repeat 090 and then 091 [remedial courses] had to drop it and I haven't taken it. And I'm just avoiding it which is just not a good thing at all. But since I didn't learn it then, I'm struggling with it now. It's become very difficult.

Camila describes having to take remedial classes in college and drop them due to a lack of preparation in high school. At the time of the interview, she was unsure if she would be able to continue in college due to her academic performance.

Academic barriers seemed to occur when participants' preparation was not adequate to fulfill their aspirations. Although youth had hopes of going to college and succeeding, their inner-city high school did not prepare them for the rigors of a college environment. Youth were unable to meet the demands of a college environment. These struggles and failures caused some youth to reconsider their goals and expectations.

<u>Lack of Support</u>

Some participants experienced lack of support, either from family members, from faculty or from co-workers that made it more difficult for them to achieve their possible selves. Eva experienced a lack of support at her college. Her college "no se les da el verdadero apoyo que debería [does not give the right support that it should]." Andrea was in design school and wanted to get a B.A. in design, but she dropped out due to financial difficulties because of her undocumented status and because she felt that her advisor and the school administration were unsupportive and did not care about her. She stated that: "nadie me hizo caso, nadie [nobody paid attention to me, nobody]." Because she perceived a lack of support, she did not achieve her goal of completing her B.A. Instead, she dropped out and worked at a dry cleaner's at the time of the interview.

Alex struggled with his job at a health food store because of the lack of organization, coupled with the lack of support from his manager and co-workers:

> It's just that no one there is really organized so it's kinda hard to please your customers when no one knows what's going on. So it's like . . . we have so many different departments, and you know I can't memorize everything in those departments. And if

someone is busy in that department, I can't just say go to them and then they'll start yelling at me, like 'why don't you know this stuff? You work here!' And that's stressful. Or I'll tell them one thing and then the manager will say another thing. Cause they kinda leave you ignorant. And then you look stupid and it's like, great.

Sonia experienced a lack of support from her father because of their conflicting views about her future. While she aspired to go to college and become an accountant, her father wanted her to get a job, such as a truck or bus driver. He was unsupportive of her desire to go to college. Although Sonia was in college, the conflict with her father made it more stressful for her to achieve her aspirations. Ashley had a similar experience with a father whose expectations were different than her own:

He's a controlling dad. Sometimes we cannot make our own choices because he is mostly likely there to make them for us. It's just like really hard. Like I told him I want to be studying fashion design regardless, he's like no, that's not good study nursing, or a doctor or whatever or a lawyer. I'm like, I'm not into that. I don't want to study something I don't want because I know I'm not going to go through it.

Overall, many youth experienced barriers in the transition from high school that made it difficult for them to achieve their goals, and particularly their educational goals. The most common barriers were financial, followed by immigration barriers, academic barriers and a sense of a lack of support. These barriers made it more difficult for youth to behave in ways that would enable them to reach their goals of graduating from college and having the careers that they desired. These barriers explain the increasing gaps between aspirations, expectations and behavior during the transition.

<div align="center">The Role of Support in Youth's Possible Selves in the Transition</div>

Although many participants faced barriers to reaching their goals in the transition, most experienced various forms of support during the transition, including social support from family, unrelated adults, and peers, financial support, and institutional support at college. These sources of support made it easier for youth to work towards actualizing their possible selves. Youth

primarily spoke about support for attending and succeeding in college, but some youth also described support for finding and maintaining employment in the transition.

<u>Social Support from Family, Unrelated Adults and Peers</u>

Many participants described obtaining support from family, friends or other important adults who helped them achieve their goals in the transition from high school. Eva describes family as:

> una de las influencias más grandes que uno puede tener. La familia te puede tanto dar ayudo or they can give you support, o puede ser también la otra parte que te pueden bajar totalmente. En mi caso, gracias a Dios, pues ellos me dieron apoyo y me ayudaron mucho y me siguen ayundando en . . . Y ellos también me han ayudado moralmente, me ayudan mucho.

> [one of the greatest influences that a person can have. Family can help you or they can give you support, or on the other hand that they totally bring you down. In my case, thank God, well they gave me support and they helped me a lot and they keep helping me . . . and they also helped me morally, they help me a lot].

For Eva, family is a big influence and source of support. They helped her accomplish her goals of going to college, and they continue to support her while she is in school.

Other participants described unrelated adults as being important in achieving their possible selves. Daniel describes his high school football coach as an important supportive person in his life. He is a major factor in Daniel's decision to return to college, and he helped him take steps to apply to college.

> Like my football coach, he's mad that I didn't go to college. Every time he sees me, like when I go by the school, he'll see me. He asks what are you doing? Why aren't you not in college? So he's the one that's helping me go to Triton and try to get the information for baseball and all that.

Sonia describes having a supportive supervisor at her job at UPS. He gives her advice:

> About how to handle this job, like he says I know it gets really heavy and depressing but you have to always remember that at the end of the night it does end . . . You go home, be with your family, appreciate things. And I do and so I think if I don't have him around, I wouldn't, if I didn't have him, I woulda quit a long time ago. He's the only reason I

stayed . . . He's a good person. He works with you and not against you. Like, one of my supervisors, we're in a union, and we're not supposed to have our supervisors working with us. He refuses to do that. He works with us. If he sees us and we're almost dying, he's not gonna just sit there and just let us die, where our other supervisors would. He'll go in there and he'll load with you, he'll load with you and say you did a good job.

Sonia's supervisor is so supportive of her that she is willing to continue working at her job, which pays for her college courses, despite not liking it.

Participants also described family members or friends as helping them make connections and attain jobs. For example, Javier said that he found out about his job "through a friend. She gave me the name of a company that will find you a job. They called me and I started working." Marisol applied to "practically every store possible and I wasn't getting a job." She contacted her teacher to see if his organization was hiring. He "basically got me the job" working as a receptionist at a tutoring center. This job is related to Marisol's aspiration to become a teacher, and her teacher's help made it more likely that she would be able to achieve this goal. Nelson describes getting his job with the help of his mother and older sister. His older sister was "able to look into this job, into Dominicks, and she asked me if I wanted to apply and I said yes." Although Nelson's job is not directly related to his aspirations to attend college, he feels that it is a "stepping stone" for him towards reaching his goals, and that it will "benefit him."

Overall, youth used social support from their family and unrelated adults to help them work to achieve their educational and occupational goals, and to help them make a smoother transition from high school into college or the workforce.

Financial Support

Some participants described financial support, such as receiving financial aid or scholarship money, or earning money at work, that enabled them to live comfortably or attend college. Jaime had an easier time attending his four-year college because of two scholarships that

he received due to his participation in a college preparatory program in high school. Marisol described her job as helping her to attend school because "I pick my most expensive class and then they pay for it." Sonia and Francelyn also worked at a company that paid for their college classes. Eva describes not needing much money from her family because "me dieron financial aid. [they give me financial aid]." Camila describes her job as helpful because "I get paid and I get to help my mom out." Youth with financial support were able to put more time and effort into achieving their goals, rather than being forced to focus on making ends meet.

Institutional Support in College

Participants mentioned aspects of their college institution that made it easier for them to apply to college or to do well in college. Because attending college and completing college were central aspirations for many of the youth, institutional supports at college facilitated youth working towards achieving their possible selves. Colleges varied in the types of institutional support they provided. Some colleges had representatives who guided students through the application process, while other colleges had tutoring services or writing labs available to their students.

Joshua described his application process as being facilitated by a "representative" who would come "out to your home with a laptop and they give you a little slideshow, a little power point presentation," and an "advisor" that the school assigned to him:

> guide me through the whole process . . . of course there were fees associated but you know … They guided me through financial aid, the FAFSA. They actually guided my mom through it too because she had to fill out a portion of it too.

Participants also described college resources that were helpful for them, such as tutoring centers or writing labs. For example, Joshua described tutoring as "an important tool because I'm not very good with math and the class I was failing was math so I went to tutoring to get a better

understanding of it." Likewise, Camila says that "there's help at college, that'll help you with that writing . . .There's a writing lab. It's where you make an appointment and they review the paper you wrote and they make corrections." Blanca attends a college where there is a tutor that students can go to during class. She says, "I sometimes go to him during class. Like the teacher might tell me oh if you need help with this or that you can go to the tutor that's available." Ashley goes to a college with a great deal of institutional support, which helps both with academics and with career decision-making:

> let's say you miss a class or something, they always have, they teach you whatever, depending on the chapter you are, Math or English, if you don't understand anything, they help you out, you have supervisors or something, teachers, that help you with your homework or they give you extra classes, there's clubs that if you are undecided of your career, they help you, they teach you a lot of careers.

The institutional support at Ashley's school enables her to do well in community college despite the fact that she came into college less prepared than some other students.

In summary, participants received social, financial and institutional support that helped them work towards actualizing their possible selves. These support systems encouraged participants to work towards their goals and assisted them in accomplishing tasks on the path towards their aspirations. Support ranged from concrete financial support to emotional encouragement, but all support functioned to increase the likelihood that youth would be able to reach their aspirations.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

<u>Educational Possible Selves during High School</u>

<u>College Aspirations in High School</u>

During high school, the vast majority of youth aspired to go to college and graduate, and most youth aspired to get a graduate degree. Aspirations to go to college were based on a variety of factors, such as specific positive experiences in high school (e.g. taking an interesting class), academic performance, parental expectations, affiliative achievement (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995), and values about school. It is not surprising that so many youth aspired to go to college when they were in high school, given their school district's focus on building college aspirations. Additionally, most participants (78%) in this study were first and second generation immigrants to the United States. Research has found that immigrant youth often feel an obligation to succeed in school to pay their parents back for the tremendous sacrifices they have made to allow their children to have opportunities (Suarez-Orozco, 1989; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Additionally, studies have found that Latino parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992), and particularly Latino immigrant parents (Fuligni, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001), highly value education and have high educational aspirations and expectations for their children. Additionally, the idea that college is valued in Latino families is supported by research indicating that Latino high school graduates are actually more likely to enroll in college than their non-Latino counterparts (Fry, 2002).

Although Possible Selves Theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986) is able to explain some of the study findings regarding aspirations in this study, it does not include many important elements of the experience of youth in this investigation. Possible Selves Theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986)

explains that past experiences and performance shape possible selves, accounting for aspirations being impacted by positive experiences and performance in high school. However, Possible Selves Theory does not address the roles of affiliative achievement (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995), parental expectations and personal and familial values about school, which were important factors in shaping aspirations among participants. Past research (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Fuligni, Tseng & Lam, 1999; Sánchez, Esparza, Colón & Davis, 2009) indicates the importance of family for Latino students, and that the desire to give back to their parents influences their aspirations. The current research supports the idea that for low-income Latino youth, goals for the future are based not only on their own desires and past accomplishments, but on the desires and needs of their families.

Additionally, Possible Selves Theory does not address how values influence aspirations. However, values about school and work were an important influence on youth's aspirations in this study. Participants were motivated by their belief that going to college was important, and that a college education would lead to success. Additionally, youth were influenced by their family's values, including their emphasis on the importance of school in order to be successful. There is extremely limited past research on the impact of family values on Latino students' success. However, Duran and Weffer (1992) found that in a sample of Mexican high school students in a large Midwestern city, family educational values influenced academic achievement by making it more likely that students would enroll in a math and science enrichment program.

Going to College as an End-Goal. Although most participants aspired to go to college after high school, many youth seemed to think of college as an end of its own, stating goals of going to college but not goals of graduating from college. This finding supports the limited previous literature about the educational possible selves of predominantly low-income, urban

Latino students. In Yowell's (2000) study of ninth grade low-income Latino youth, although most students aspired to go to college, they thought of their educational possible selves ending at 18, indicating that they planned to attend college, but had not considered the time necessary to finish college. Because participants in Yowell's study were only in 9th grade, it is conceivable that older high school students would have more specific and concrete possible selves. However, when participants in the present study reflected back to the end of high school, their possible selves were still focused on attending, rather than graduating from college. These somewhat limited aspirations may reflect the fact that their high school emphasized going to college, rather than graduating from college. Additionally, the aspirations to attend college, rather than to graduate from college may reflect youth's lack of role models of successful college completion. On average, participants' parents had not completed high school, let alone college. Only two (6%) participants indicated that their mothers graduated from a four-year college, and one (3%) participant indicated that his mother had a graduate degree. Only one (3%) participant indicated that his father graduated from a four-year college, and no participants indicated that their fathers had graduate degrees. Because most participants' parents were not even high school graduates, youth may have lacked role models to help them plan for college completion. Additionally, simply attending college alone was a huge accomplishment for youth and their families.

Although it may be normative for adolescents to not think far out into the future, it also limits their ability to plan ahead. If youth think only about gaining admission and enrolling in college, they may not make plans for paying for college long-term, and for juggling college with their other responsibilities, such as family and work. Additionally, they may not consider the academic preparation they need in order to succeed in college once they are there.

College Expectations in High School

During high school, not only did the large majority of youth aspire to attend college, but they also expected to go on to college. Some participants had always expected that they would attend college, while others developed their expectations during high school. Those who always expected to go to college were generally influenced by their parents' expectations for them. Others did not always have this expectation, but changed their expectations due to encouragement from high school teachers or reflection on their academic performance in high school. In addition, some youth had expectations about the types of colleges they could expect to attend based on the quality of their school. This implicit expectation that youth from this particular high school could only hope to go to specific non-competitive colleges very close to their neighborhood seems to have posed a large barrier to youth's aspirations and expectations. This idea seems to have been perpetuated both by college counselors at their high school, and by the types of colleges that recruited at their high school. This trend supports the research of Roderick et al. (2008), who found that two-thirds of Chicago Public School students went to colleges that were not a good match for them, and the majority went to schools that they were overqualified for based on their GPA and ACT scores. It is unfortunate that youth in this study felt constricted to these schools in particular because the schools have extremely low graduation rates. For example, the two most commonly attended schools were Northeastern Illinois University and City Colleges of Chicago—Wilbur Wright college. Northeastern Illinois has a staggeringly low six-year graduation rate of 18%, with a 13% graduation rate for Latino students. Wilbur Wright college has an even lower graduation rate of 9%, with a rate of 8% for Latino students (US Department of Education, 2009).

Career Aspirations and Expectations

In the same vein, few youth stated career aspirations or expectations during high school. It seems that students were so focused on getting into college and attending college that they did not think about what they would do after college, or how college would prepare them for their careers. Of the participants who indicated career aspirations during the interview, aspirations ranged from careers that required graduate degrees (e.g. architect), to careers that required no degrees (e.g. fireman, photographer, athlete). Individual participants were still deciding between quite disparate career tracks, such as whether to become a fireman, a photographer, or a graphic designer.

Additionally, youth's ideas about eventual careers seemed naïve and often seemed based more on stereotypes about what makes a "good job" rather than an actual interest in the job. For example, one participant described that going to the military would be a "simple" path to getting a college degree. Another youth described wanting to become a doctor because it is a "cushy job." These youth do not appear to understand the benefits and drawbacks of various careers and the difficult road to accomplish their goals.

It appears that participants were prepared in high school to enter college, but were not necessarily prepared to graduate college or to think about and plan for a career. Previous research supports that idea that youth are sometimes prepared for their "next step," but not to launch a career (Phillips, Blustein, Jobin-Davis, & Finkelberg White, 2002). In their qualitative study of 17 work-bound high school juniors, Phillips et al. found that while some youth thought about the final career they wanted to achieve, others were focused solely on the first job they would have after high school. Previous literature also indicates that low-income Latino youth may not have a

clear understanding of the differences between various careers (Kao & Tienda, 1998), which may help to explain the wide range of aspirations.

This lack of preparation may be due to lacking role models in desirable careers, or due to a lack of information in high school about career opportunities. Previous research (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002) has found that career role models are associated with career maturity among adolescents. Career maturity includes having a career plan, having information about the education and training necessary for the desired career, and knowing the steps it would take to reach the career goal. It is possible that given the relative poverty of the communities in which youth lived that they did not have role models in their desired careers. Previous research has indicated that parents of low-income Latino youth may not have the knowledge to guide their children through the education system in the U.S. (Behnke et al., 2004; Bohon et al., 2005). It may be difficult for parents who are unfamiliar with the system to serve as educational or career role models for their children, and it may be difficult for parents in impoverished neighborhoods to connect their children with appropriate career role models.

It is also possible that youth did not state long-term career goals in high school because they were more concerned about their immediate future. Many youth worked during high school and expected to have to work in the transition in order to make money to support themselves or their families. They may have been focused on finding jobs for the transition rather than finding long-term careers. It is also possible that youth had not formulated career goals in high school due to perceived barriers to achieving them. According to Lent, Brown and Gail's (1994) social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice and performance, perceived barriers mediate the relationship between career interests and career goals. It is possible that youth had careers interests, but due to perceived barriers, they never formulated career goals. Other

research (McWhirter, 1997) has demonstrated that there are ethnic and gender differences in perceived barriers to occupational goals, with Mexican American students perceiving more barriers than Euro-American students, and women perceiving more barriers that men. Perceived barriers among Mexican Americans in McWhirter's study included anticipating ethnic and gender discrimination in the workplace, expecting family problems and family attitudes to impact career decisions, and fears of not being smart enough, not getting into college and not fitting in. It is possible that participants in the current study may have anticipated similar barriers, particularly financial ones, and therefore may not have developed concrete career expectations.

Regardless of why youth did not state career aspirations and expectations in high school, it is clear that a lack of career aspirations and expectations in high school makes it more difficult to make career-related decisions in the transition. Without hopes about a future career, youth cannot make educated decisions about whether to go to college or about what type of school would prepare them for their eventual career choice. For example, students who aspire to professional degrees might be better suited by attending four-year colleges, while students who aspire to work in other fields might be best suited by a two-year community college or technical college that is more affordable or that directly prepares them for a specific line of work. Having some hopes or expectations about careers might assist youth in planning a successful transition from high school.

<div align="center">High School Behavior</div>

High School Behavior Geared Towards College

For the most part, students' behavior in high school reflected their desires to continue their education in the future. Most students took concrete steps to prepare themselves to apply to

and succeed in college, such as taking honors or AP classes, taking part in College Excel or other college preparatory programs, completing college applications, visiting schools and making college decisions. These findings are in contrast with past research (MacLeod, 1987; Yowell, 2002; Roderick, 2003), which has suggested that low-income ethnic minority youth have unrealistically high aspirations and do not behave in a way that would enable them to reach their aspirations. It is possible that our findings are different due to the fact that the youth in our study were resilient enough to still be in high school during their senior year in a school where the graduation rate was only 53% (Valdez & Espino, 2003). Our findings may also reflect a sampling bias given that those who participated in the interview may have been different than those who did not. As was mentioned previously, interview participants had higher expectations and aspirations in high school than other survey participants. They may have also differed on other characteristics, such as home stability, which would have made them more likely to be able to be contacted and to participate in the interview.

It is also possible that our findings reflect a different definition of "behavior." Most other studies have used exclusively quantitative data, such as GPAs or dropout rates, as outcomes (Yowell, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2007; Messersmith and Schulenberg, 2008), while this study used more nuanced qualitative data to examine high school behavior, such as taking college preparatory classes, attending college fairs, filling out college applications and applying for financial aid.

High School Behavior Geared Towards Work

In addition to focusing on academics in high school, almost half of participants described working for pay. This trend seems to reflect the fact that most youth in the study were low-income and needed to work in order to support themselves and their families. Jobs included

working retail, managing a fast food store, tutoring, and working at a grocery store. Students

varied in how much work they did during high school, from working over the summer to

working almost full-time during the school year. The national average of youth employment is

29% employment at any given point during the school year. Youth in this study appeared to be

employed at a much higher rate than the national average. However, using the National

Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY) data, Ruhm (1997) found that 73% of high school seniors

reported working at least one week during the academic year, and 61% were employed for at

least one week over the summer. It is possible that youth in this study were in fact employed

more than the national average, or it is possible that they were employed for short periods of time

throughout the year but that the majority were not employed for the entire year.

Although youth may have learned important skills from their jobs, the need to balance

multiple responsibilities while in high school may have made it more difficult for them to

achieve their educational aspirations and expectations. Additionally, past research indicates that

Latino youth see college as a means to occupational success (Yowell, 2002), and that often youth

do not continue to college because they can get jobs straight out of high school (Bohon et al.,

2005). Although college aspirations in this sample did not seem to be primarily based on

occupational goals, it is possible that youth who were already earning money in high school

might be less motivated to take the steps necessary to succeed in college. There is mixed

evidence in the literature as to whether employment has a positive or negative impact on youth's

academic outcomes (for review see Ruhm, 1997). Interestingly, Ruhm's (1997) study using

NLSY data found that hours worked during senior year are positively correlated with future

earnings, fringe benefits, occupational status and high school graduation. However, Ruhm found

that for females, senior year employment predicted lower educational attainment and lower rates

of college graduation. It seems that working during high school may have the potential to be a positive force for youth in the long-term, but may lead to less educational attainment. Additionally, it is possible that the nature of the employment and the reasons for employment may impact the long-term effects. This is an area where further research is necessary.

<u>Educational and Occupational Possible Selves in the Transition</u>

In the year following high school graduation, many participants had changed their future educational and occupational aspirations. On average, participants had lower academic aspirations but more concrete and specific career aspirations. These aspirations may be lower because participants had already encountered barriers that made it more difficult for them to envision reaching their goals. At the time of the interview, 12 (38%) participants who had aspired to go to college were not in school. Some of these participants never went to college, while others started but were unable to continue. Other participants lowered their academic aspirations because they had decided on careers that required less education, such as nursing, accounting and fashion design. Although aspirations were somewhat lower, all youth were either currently enrolled in school, expected to be enrolled in school or aspired to be enrolled in school.

Meanwhile, youth seemed to have shifted their focus from thinking almost exclusively about their educational goals to a more balanced focus between educational and career goals. This shift may reflect that participants had begun thinking about their "next step" (Phillips et al., 2002), which at this point had changed from going to college to finding a specific career path. Twenty-five (78%) participants stated an aspiration to have a specific career or one of a few careers. The careers varied, and they included nursing, accounting, social work, professional sports, psychology, fashion design, architecture, and working in the music industry. Participants

chose their career aspirations based on a variety of factors, including a passion for a certain occupation and expectations about the financial benefits of the occupation.

<div align="center">Behavior in the Transition</div>

During the transition from high school, 20 (63%) participants reported working, and 24 (75%) reported attending college at some point since high school graduation. However, participants experienced many changes in work and school status over the course of the transition, such as dropping out of college, transferring from a four-year to a community college, or being laid off from a job. Of those enrolled in college, most put a great deal of effort into their course-work. However, not all students were successfully negotiating the college experience. Many students reported struggling with college work or receiving failing grades in classes, and some students reported struggling even with remedial classes. Participants were often shocked by the level of college classes, and by their lack of preparation for college. Given the fact that students took honors, AP and college classes in high school, it is surprising that youth were having so much trouble with their college courses. This may indicate that at the inner-city high school participants attended, AP and honors classes were not at the level they should have been. It may also reflect the fact that the college classes that many participants took while in high school were in subjects, such as typing, that were very different than the types of classes necessary to major in a particular subject and graduate from college. These findings support previous evidence that in general, Latino students are not as academically prepared for college as White students (Swail, Cabrera & Lee, 2004; ACT, 2009). In Swail et al.'s (2004) analysis of the NELS 1988 data, 59% of Latinos were characterized as not qualified for postsecondary education, compared to 60% of African Americans and 41% of White students. Similarly, there is evidence that Latino youth are less likely than Caucasian, Asian American/Pacific Islander or

American/Alaskan native youth to have met the ACT college readiness benchmark score of 18 (ACT, 2009). Additionally, in a study of a Chicago-area community college, 35% of Latino students were admitted needing remedial education, compared to 8% of White and 45% of Black students (Weissman et al., 1998). It is likely that the Latino youth in this study may have been underprepared in high school, leading to academic struggles in college.

Although changes in school and work status were common, most students worked during the transition, regardless of whether or not they were in school. Jobs included retail, manual labor, tutoring, and working at a grocery store. Of those who were not working, four (13%) participants were currently looking for a job. Surprisingly, only four (13%) participants worked in jobs related to their desired career (e.g. working as a CNA on the way to becoming a nurse, working at a tutoring center on the way to becoming a teacher). Participants needed to work in order to support themselves, help their family pay bills, and to finance their college education. Perhaps because they needed to earn money, youth did not participate in the types of unpaid internships or career-related jobs that might make it easier for them to find a job in their desired careers. Although participants were only one year out of high school, it would be helpful for them to be able to begin career-related activities. Research demonstrates that internships can expand future employment opportunities (Taylor, 1988) and are correlated with finding a first job faster, increased monetary compensation and greater overall job satisfaction (Gault, Redington & Schlager, 2000). Helping high school graduates and college students find meaningful and valuable employment opportunities is an important area that lacks sufficient programs or infrastructure (Hymon-Parker, 1998; Carpenter, 2003). It would be useful to further explore this gap in future studies, in order to enable youth to make money to support themselves while also working towards a career in a desired area.

<u>Gaps in High School</u>

Participants had higher aspirations than expectations in high school. Although this difference was statistically significant based on the survey question, most participants in the interview did not indicate a difference between their academic expectations in high school and their academic aspirations while in high school. In fact, most participants reported having aspirations, expectations and behavior that aligned during high school. Most students took serious steps throughout high school to reach their aspirations, such as enrolling in Honors or AP classes, participating in College Excel, doing well in their classes, or beginning training programs to reach their career goals. It is possible that a gap did in fact exist between aspirations, expectations and behavior in high school, but that participants did not remember it a year later when they were interviewed. However, it is also possible that the way the question was phrased on the survey elicited a difference in answers when in fact there was none. By asking participants first what they hoped to achieve, and then what they actually thought they could, perhaps the survey questions primed youth to think that the answers to the two questions should be different. Future researchers should take care to phrase questions in a way so that it is clear that for some people, aspirations and expectations may be identical, while for others there may be a difference. For example, researchers could preface the question about expectations with: "Many people do not get as much education as they would like, while other people do. How far do you think you will actually go in school?"

<u>Gaps in the Transition</u>

In general, participants in the interview who discussed their academic aspirations and expectations had higher aspirations than expectations. The qualitative data indicated that although in high school participants had gaps between their aspirations and expectations, these

gaps became more pronounced and important in the transition. Many participants faced major barriers in the transition (e.g. financial barriers and undocumented status) that made it extremely difficult for them to work towards their goals.

Surprisingly, rather than readjust their goals in response to the challenges they faced, many participants retained their high aspirations. However, they generally lowered their expectations, and their behavior often did not match either their expectations or aspirations. This finding supports previous literature indicating a gap between aspirations and expectations, and aspirations and expectation and behavior, among low-income Latino youth (Hafner et al., 1990; Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2008; Roderick et al., 2008; Yowell, 2002), but it is in contrast to literature indicating that people internalize barriers and in response lower their aspirations and expectations (Constantine, 1998; Jackson et al., 2006). Perhaps this gap indicates that youth have bought into the American Dream Ideology to such an extent that although they find it extremely difficult to go to college, they maintain their aspirations to do so (Bohon et al., 2005; Graham et al., 1998; Ogbu, 1993; Taylor & Graham, 2007; Yowell, 2002). This can be problematic because if youth set their aspirations unrealistically high and fail to reach them, they may attribute the failure to themselves, rather than to the systemic factors that made it nearly impossible for them to reach their goals. If youth attribute their failure to internal characteristics rather than external factors, their self-esteem may be lowered (McFarland & Ross, 1982; Major, Quinton & Schmader, 2003).

<center>Nature of Possible Selves</center>

In this study, many students had balanced possible selves, where their aspirations, expectations and behavior were colored by fears about the future or by negative modeling. Many students were inspired to go to college both because there were specific aspects of college they

were excited about and because they feared what would happen if they did not go to college, such as working in low-status, low-wage, and uninteresting jobs, and being left behind by their friends and high school classmates. According to Oyserman and Markus (1990), balanced selves are most advantageous because they provide motivation for both approach and avoidance behaviors.

According to Markus and Nurius (1986), feared selves often stem from negative modeling, or the desire to avoid the negative outcomes of others. Many participants in this study described using negative modeling as a motivation. Their goals involved avoiding outcomes that other people in their lives experienced, such as dropping out of high school, getting married very early and not going to college. Some youth also wanted to avoid raising their children in the poverty they experienced, and in the types of neighborhoods where they grew up.

Although many youth had balanced possible selves, a few had solely positive possible selves. They had aspirations for the future not balanced with any fears. The youth with positive possible selves were currently attending four-year colleges full-time and had high college GPAs. Their positive possible selves may reflect their relatively smooth transition from high school with few barriers. According to Oyserman and Markus (1990), positive possible selves can be sufficient for motivation unless there is a competing possible self. For example, if youth are focused exclusively on doing well in college and getting jobs, their positive possible selves may be sufficient motivation. However, if at the same time they have competing possible selves with a different focus, such as "being a boyfriend," or "being a mother," their positive possible selves may not have sufficient motivational power.

None of the participants had negative possible selves, where they stated more fears than aspirations or expectations about the future. This may be due to the fact that all participants in

this study were high school graduates in a school where only 53% of students graduate. Many youth also took honors and AP classes in high school, and participated in college preparatory programs. Due to their status as "successful" students in their high school, they may have been encouraged by family or by school personnel to have high aspirations for the future. It is possible that students who dropped out of high school or were unable to graduate may have had more negative possible selves because they may have had fears about the future without high goals or expectations. This finding fits with previous literature demonstrating that non-delinquent youth are likely to have more positive possible selves than delinquent youth (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Given the relative success of the youth in this study, it makes sense that their possible selves would generally be positive or balanced.

Participants varied in the specificity of their possible selves. Some participants had clear career goals, including the steps necessary to accomplish them, while others had a much more vague sense of what they hoped to do. This difference may reflect the fact that some youth had role models for their aspired educational goals and careers, while others did not. This finding supports Flouri and Buchanan's (2002) study findings that youth who have career role models have more career maturity. Regardless of how specific their possible selves were initially, possible selves generally became more specific over the course of the transition, with participants having more concrete plans about what careers they aspired to and what type of education they would need to get in order to reach their career goals. Possible Selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986) predicts that possible selves will become more specific as time passes. For youth in this study, increased specificity seemed to be based on new information that they learned in the transition, combined with the fact that they had already been required to make decisions about their future, and that they anticipated other imminent decisions.

The Role of High School Barriers in Youth's Aspirations & Expectations

One explanation for the gaps between aspirations and expectations in high school and behavior during the transition are the multiple barriers that participants encountered, both during high school and during the transition. Barriers in high school included the environment at the inner-city high school that participants attended and inadequate financial resources.

The term "inner-city school" refers to an urban school which tends to be public and serve largely poor, students of color (Brunetti, 2006). Many of the students in inner-city schools come from neighborhoods with a high concentration of poverty, which are characterized by poor living conditions, high crime, high unemployment, serious gang activity, and drug dealing (Zhou, 2003). Moreover, inner-city high school students have higher rates of academic failure and greater school behavioral problems than their peers living in other areas (Bemak, Chung, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005). These findings are not surprising given that inner-city schools often suffer from severe lack of resources, such as quality teachers and financial resources (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Valdés, 1998).

Many participants discussed aspects of their inner-city high school that made it difficult for them to apply to college, including lack of support, a chaotic environment, a lack of school resources, lenient teachers or teachers with emotional problems, overcrowding, a lack of structure, and a culture that encouraged students to cut class.

A number of youth described a lack of support from their college counselors or from teachers, and some students felt that teachers did not respect students. Participants described college counselors who were overworked and did not help them make educated college decisions. This finding supports previous literature that teacher often feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities and that they lack time to perform at an optimal level (Collinson & Cook, 2001).

In addition, undocumented youth in this study reported that they were not informed by their college counselors of scholarship or other possibilities for financing their education. Previous research (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007) suggests that undocumented youth often do not confide in teachers or college counselors about their immigration status. Given that youth may not open up to school personnel about this major barrier, it is vital that schools make information available to all students about financial resources for undocumented students.

In addition to a lack of support from school personnel, many youth felt that their high school lacked academic rigor, and that their classes did not prepare them for success in college. They described teachers who passed students even if they came to class only occasionally, and that the way the school day was set up promoted cutting class. Students who went on to college learned that they were behind where they were supposed to be, and that they had not learned even the most basic skills in high school, such as grammar, writing and math. They described their high school as overcrowded and some of the students as seriously disrupting the learning process in class. Additionally, students were distracted by the frequent violent fights in the hallways and the gang activity in and around the school.

In addition to the problems related to their living in a low-income neighborhood, some students encountered additional financial barriers during high school. Students' financial problems ranged from having difficulty balancing their jobs with their schoolwork to having difficulty paying for college applications. This is not surprising, given that 30% of Latino children under 18 live in poverty, compared to 9% percent of non-Hispanic White children (Therrian & Ramirez, 2001).

These youth reflect concerns that are common in inner-city schools (Devine, 1996; Valdés, 1998; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). It is important for legislators, school

administrators and educators to understand that students are aware of the problems in their schools and that they perceive these problems as impacting their ability to achieve their goals, including going to college and succeeding in college. A number of youth in this study described their teachers as being too lenient and not having high enough standards. Previous research demonstrates that teacher expectations are positively correlated with college attendance (Roderick et al., 2008). It is important that teachers are educated about the impact of the expectations they set in their classrooms. Additionally, it is important to note that youth who are preoccupied by needing to earn money to support themselves may have more difficulty graduating from high school and getting prepared for college.

<p style="text-align:center">The Role of Social Support in High School for Possible Selves</p>

Although many students encountered barriers during high school, the majority of students mentioned having at least one source of social or institutional support in high school. These supports enabled participants to behave in ways that helped them fulfill their aspirations and expectations.

Participants described certain high school teachers and counselors who helped them make the transition from high school more easily. Because of these professionals, youth were better able to behave in ways that matched their goals. Teachers and counselors helped them write essays and complete other parts of college applications, wrote letters of recommendation, and helped youth get involved in college preparatory programs. Previous research has also found that teachers and counselors can help facilitate the college application process (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007). In fact, in Roderick et al.'s (2008) study of Chicago public school students, the single most consistent predictor of whether students took steps towards college enrollment was the college-going culture of the school, defined by how much teachers reported that they and

their colleagues pushed students to go to college, worked to ensure that students would be prepared, and were involved in supporting students in completing their college applications.

Some students were also able to use institutional resources in high school to help them achieve their goals. These resources included particular classes, college fairs, the College Excel program, and job training including ROTC and CNA training programs. Although there is no research on the specific college or work preparation programs that youth in this study participated in, there is evidence that a school culture of going to college is a predictor of college enrollment behaviors (Roderick et al., 1998), and it seems clear that getting trained in a specific career or to be in the military during high school would ease the transition process.

<u>Support or Barrier?</u>

In addition to the clear barriers that participants faced in high school, some things that were ostensibly supposed to help students may have served as barriers as well. For example, although many students participated in College Excel and reported finding it helpful, the courses offered through College Excel included typing and accounting. While typing is a useful skill to learn, most four-year colleges do not offer similar class, and many colleges will not take transfer credit for these courses. Additionally, although many students took honors or AP courses, the caliber of the classes was such that often those same students had to take remedial classes in the same subject at their community or four-year college. This findings supports Lichten's (2007) research showing that AP courses are not all equal. In fact, only 39% of all students "pass" their AP tests, and the pass rates are much lower for African American (10%) and Mexican American students (16% with the exception of the Spanish language AP exam).

Although many students struggled with elements of their inner-city high school, most students sought and found supportive adults at school and institutional resources to assist them in

making the transition from high school. It is vital to encourage and train teachers and administrators to serve as mentors for students in low-resource schools. Schools should also continue to offer programs such as College Excel and job training programs, but schools must ensure that these programs are of high quality and will prepare students for college or careers.

<u>The Role of Barriers during the Transition in Youth's Possible Selves</u>

In addition to the difficulties that students faced while in high school, many youth experienced barriers in the transition from high school that made it difficult for them to achieve their goals. Barriers included financial barriers, barriers due to immigration status, academic barriers, and barriers due to lack of support. This finding supports the limited literature which has found barriers in the high school to college (Bohon et al., 2005; Weissman et al., 1998) and high school to work (Wentling & Waight, 2001) transition, including financial barriers, discrimination and a lack of fitting into the new setting. However, these previous studies have interviewed students in high school (Bohon et al., 2005) high school personnel (Wentling & Waight, 2001) or used focus groups (Weissman, Bulakowski & Jumisko, 1998) with college students to assess the specific barriers of attending a particular college. The present study adds to the literature due to the use of in-depth interviews with youth who were surveyed in high school and interviewed one year into the transition regardless of their work or school status. Youth in this study expanded on the types of barriers found previously in the literature, and they were able to speak in depth about the impact of those barriers on their aspirations and expectations.

Many participants experienced financial barriers in the transition, including needing to work full- or part-time while going to school, not getting financial aid, or being unable to afford the expense of going to college. Youth described never attending college, dropping out of college, transferring from a four-year to a two-year college or not being able to take summer

classes as consequences of their inability to pay for the expenses of classes and books. This finding helps to explain previous literature which has found that low-income youth may experience more disruptions in the transition than middle class youth (Blustein et al., 2002; Creed et al., 2003; Rojewski & Kim, 2003). Additionally, some youth needed to work in order to support themselves or their families, and therefore were unable to attend college. These results are not surprising given that participants came from low-income communities. By in large, youth in this study were not properly informed about the various possibilities for financial aid, including both governmental and other financial resources. With some exceptions, students were not guided through the process in a way that would enable them to benefit from these systems. This is particularly unfortunate given past research that Latino students in particular are more likely to apply to college given strong teacher support (Roderick et al., 2008). Many undocumented youth did not know about the possibilities for non-governmental financial aid, and other participants were hesitant to take out student loans, believing that in order to attend college they needed to save up the money first. As Roderick et al. found (2008), applying for and getting financial aid is a large barrier to college attendance for low-income youth in Chicago Public Schools. It is imperative that schools inform students about their financial options, and help work with them to find the best payment options possible, so that students have the financial resources corresponding to the goals that the schools push for them.

As discussed previously, many participants also faced academic barriers in the transition, such as poor academic performance and lack of knowledge about college. Participants described college as overwhelming, and that they were not as ready for college as they expected to be. Youth felt that they had not learned enough in high school to prepare them for the rigors of college courses. This finding lends additional weight to the finding that youth had difficulty

learning in their inner-city high school. If youth who took honors, AP and college courses during high school are still struggling in college, it is possible that there is a discrepancy between the type of honors and AP classes they took and those offered at other types of high schools. It is also possible that some of the youth who took honors or AP classes performed poorly in those classes or not taken them seriously, which would make them unprepared for their college courses. The finding that these youth struggle academically in college fits with previous research showing that Latino students are not as academically prepared for college as White students (Swail, Cabrera & Lee, 2004; ACT, 2009), and that Latino students in the Chicago area are more likely than White students to be admitted needing remedial education (Weissman et al., 1998).

Some participants also experienced a lack of support in the transition, either from their family members, from professors, from advisors or from co-workers. These youth felt that influential people in their lives did not support their choices or made it more difficult for them to achieve their goals. Some parents had aspirations for their children that conflicted with the youth's own aspirations. Participants also encountered people at their workplaces or at their schools who were unresponsive, unpleasant, or who made the transition more difficult for them. Youth who experienced a lack of support sometimes wound up acting in ways contrary to their aspirations, such as quitting college because advisors were unresponsive and unsupportive. This finding supports previous literature which has found that social support is important for academic outcomes, and that a lack of social support leads to less optimal outcomes (Rosenfeld, Richman & Bowen, 2002). These findings emphasizes the importance of creating support systems for youth, both in college and in their work settings, so that they feel that they are able to achieve their goals. The idea that Latino students may feel a lack of support in the transition is supported by previous research demonstrating that Latino students were more likely to feel that

they did not fit in at their four-year colleges, and that they experienced high levels of

discrimination and harassment in college (Weissman, Bulakowski & Jumisko, 1998).

<div align="center">The Role of Support in the Transition for Youth's Possible Selves</div>

Although many participants faced barriers in the transition, most experienced some

support as well. Support included social support from family, teachers, and others, financial

support, and institutional support at college. This support enabled participants to continue

working to achieve their goals and expectations for the future.

Many participants described their family as a source of support. Family members often

encouraged youth to achieve their goals and were available to help youth when they had

problems. Many families supported youth financially at least somewhat during the transition, and

most participants were living at home at the time of the interview. Youth described both

immediate and extended family as supportive. Many youth relied on aunts, uncles, cousins and

grandparents to talk to about problems, and for financial support, including a place to live. Youth

also relied on family members to help them find employment by referring them to jobs. This

finding supports previous literature demonstrating the importance of family in Latino cultures

(Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Fuligni, Tseng & Lam, 1999; Sánchez et al., 2009).

Youth also described supervisors, and college faculty members who were supportive and

made it easier for them to work at their jobs. Some bosses counseled participants about their

future. Others helped participants manage their finances, and still others allowed youth to work

flexible schedules so that they could attend college at the same time. Faculty members helped

youth find tutors and succeed academically. This finding supports previous literature indicating

that interacting with and forming relationships with faculty members is positively associated

with academic achievement in Latino students (Anaya & Cole, 2001).

Some youth described supportive non-familial adults and friends who helped them make a successful transition. Non-familial adults, such as priests and high school coaches, helped participants apply to college and make a smooth transition once they began. Friends assisted with giving rides home from school, doing homework together and processing any negative events. Previous research suggests that having important non-parental adults or mentors in one's life can be a protective factor, increasing the likelihood of favorable outcomes related to education (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Sánchez, Esparza & Colón, 2008), work (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005), coping skills (Rhodes, Contreras, & Mangelsdorf, 1994), other aspects of psychological wellbeing (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Rhodes, Ebert & Fischer, 1992) and health (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005), and reducing the likelihood of problem behaviors (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer & Notaro, 2002)

Some students also described financial support, such as receiving financial aid or scholarship money, or earning money at work that enabled them to live comfortably or attend college. Participants received scholarships from participating in college preparatory programs, being a member of the military, and from certain employers that helped subsidize the cost of school. Youth who worked found it helpful to earn money to help their families financially, and to finance their education, if they were in school. This finding supports the previous literature that financial aid helps to alleviate stress for Latino students caused by the lack of funds to finance college or by the familial obligations to send money home (Longerbeam, Sedlacek, & Alatorre, 2004).

A number of participants also mentioned aspects of their college institution that made it easier for them to apply to college or to do well in college. For example, some colleges had tutoring services or writing labs available to their students, in addition to career advisors and

clubs designed to support Latinos. This finding supports previous research that tutoring programs and other supportive programs can improve retention and academic outcomes of high-risk students (Abrams & Jernigan, 1984; Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, & Goodwin, 1998; Dale, 1995; Newman & Newman, 1999) Additionally, some colleges had representatives who guided participants through the application and financial aid process. However, while youth reported that these representatives were helpful, it appears that only for-profit schools send representatives to prospective students' homes, and it is possible that these representatives may not offer an accurate picture of the college they are representing.

Support or Barriers?

Although youth described financial resources that made it easier for them to pay for college or support themselves, there were also disadvantages to these "resources." For example, a few youth reported working as package handlers at UPS because UPS paid for their college classes. Although the college reimbursement truly assisted youth in attending college, it came at the expense of working at a physically taxing and dangerous job. Similarly, youth who joined the military had their college education financed, but at the expense of putting themselves in grave danger. Even among youth who worked at relatively risk-free jobs, the fact that they had to work while being in college made it so that they had to juggle multiple responsibilities rather than being able to focus exclusively on their education.

<div align="center">Strengths and Limitations of the Current Study</div>

This study has several strengths and limitations that should be noted. This study is one of only a few studies (Colón, 2007; Roderick et al., 2008) to examine the experiences of Latino youth in the transition from high school. Additionally, this study is one of the first to examine possible selves in Latino youth, and it addresses some of the limitations of Possible Selves

Theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986) in explaining the behavior of low-income Latino youth. This study utilizes a mixed-methods design, which allows for hypothesis testing in addition to a deeper exploration of the lived experience of youth. The mixed methods design of the study allowed me to explore *why* there was a gap between youth's educational aspirations and expectations.

Although this study will help to illuminate several understudied areas, there are a number of limitations that should be acknowledged. First, due to the timing of the interview, all qualitative data about high school was based on retrospective report. It is possible that youth's recollections of their high school experiences may have been shaped by their experiences after high school. Second, because participants were not asked in the qualitative interviews specifically about their aspirations and expectations in high school, youth spoke about them in varying degrees of detail. Similarly, although frequencies are reported in this study to demonstrate the commonality of certain themes, the same questions were not asked of all participants. A participant who did not independently bring up a particular theme may have still experienced. Thus, the frequencies may reflect an underestimate of the participants who might have reported that theme in a more structured interview. Third, participants in this study may not reflect the population of their high school, because youth were recruited for the study during their senior year in a school with a high dropout rate. Additionally, youth who participated in T2 were those who agreed to participate in additional research and who were able to be contacted one year after the survey. These youth are likely to be different in important ways than the youth who did not decide to participate or who could not be reached. In fact, the youth who participated in the interviews had higher educational aspirations and expectations than the youth who did *not* participate in the interviews. Lastly, although this study attempts to examine the

possible selves of youth, the interview was not originally designed to assess possible selves. In a possible selves interview, youth would have been specifically asked about all of their academic and occupational aspirations, expectations and fears for the future. Instead, youth were asked more general questions, and many of them responded with relevant answers.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Research</div>

Further research should be conducted to further illuminate the causes and effects of gaps between aspirations, expectations and behavior in the transition from high school. This research suggests that there may be many moderators of a successful transition from high school. For example, youth in this study described social support, access to financial resources and participation in college preparatory programs as important facilitators in the transition from high school. Future researchers should consider measuring these variables and examining whether they moderate successful enrollment in college or fulfillment of career aspirations. Additionally, most of the youth in this study possessed balanced possible selves, and youth varied in the specificity of their possible selves. These youth may be a special group due to the fact that they graduated from high school in a school where that is the exception. Future research should examine the development of balanced and specific possible selves in high school as a mediator to a successful transition.

Future research should also explore how different types of motivations affect outcomes differentially. Youth in this study developed aspirations to go to college and to get good jobs based primarily on their own values and their family values about school and work, affiliative achievement and negative modeling. While possible selves theory postulates that negative modeling would influence aspirations, it does not address values and affiliative achievement.

Future research on possible selves should examine how different sources of motivation, such as values and affiliative achievement, differentially impact educational and career outcomes.

Another area that needs further exploration is the impact of work on career and educational outcomes. Many youth in this study worked throughout high school and in college. Youth in this study described work both as a financial facilitator and barrier. Additionally, past research is mixed as to the impact of employment during high school on future outcomes (Ruhm, 2007). It is important to examine potential moderators of these different outcomes, such as type of employment and reasons for employment.

Additionally, most of the research to date on Latino youth's expectations and aspirations is on urban, low-income youth (Roderick et al, 2008; Yowell, 2002). It is vital that research is conducted with Latino working-class and middle-class youth, in order to disentangle the effects of ethnicity versus class on these important constructs. There are important cultural differences between groups of Latino ethnic groups with roots in vastly different countries. It would be useful to study the differential experiences of these groups in the transition from high school.

<center>Recommendations for Future Practice</center>

Based on past research and the findings of the current study, recommendations are made for educators and policymakers. First, high schools counselors and teachers should assist students in thinking about possible career paths or jobs that they would enjoy, and educational goals should be based on desired outcomes. This could be accomplished by bringing in speakers who have a variety of careers, or by conducting class research projects about desired careers. Teachers should encourage youth to learn the specific details about a desired career, including the personal qualities that would make a person appropriate for that career in addition to the education and financial investment necessary to achieve that career. Second, in order to increase

accuracy and specificity of expectations, high school faculty and staff should emphasize the goal of *graduating* from college, rather than only *going to college.* This would involve teaching youth about the many steps necessary to earn a college degree, the average time to graduation, and the fact that it is important to attend a college where most students graduate.

Third, educators should increase youths' preparation for navigating college, including information about possible majors and educational paths and how to finance a college education. Youth must be informed about the great deal of college options available and about the vast differences between different schools. One necessary step towards reaching this goal would be hiring enough college counselors so that each student could have multiple individual meetings with a counselor starting in sophomore or junior year. Fourth, schools should make undocumented students aware of funding sources outside the federal government, such as scholarships and other loan options. Although the options for undocumented students are few, they should be made aware of any potential resources. Students should also be informed of the laws regarding acceptance and financing of undocumented students. In order for these recommendations to be possible, schools will need increased funding to hire more college counselors and to organize efforts to educate students about life after high school. Finally, in order to make a real impact on the ability of low-income Latino youth to successfully attend and graduate from college, it is vital to make governmental financial aid more accessible, both to U.S. citizens and residents and to undocumented youth. The FAFSA application could be substantially improved to make it more user-friendly, and college counselors could guide youth through the financial aid process.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

This study uses a possible selves framework to examine the future aspirations and expectations of Latino youth in the transition from high school. A mixed-methods design was used to explore the nature of youth's educational and occupational aspirations and expectations, including the gaps between expectations and aspirations and the gaps between expectations and behavior, and to examine the role of barriers and social support in youth's aspirations and expectations. Thirty-two Latino adolescents completed a quantitative survey while seniors in high school and then participated in one-on-one qualitative interviews one year later during their transition from high school.

Results supported the hypotheses that there was a gap between participants' expectations and aspirations at T1 and T2, and that participants' aspirations and expectations were lower at T2 than T1. Qualitative data analyses were conducted in order to explore the nature of participants' aspirations and expectations and the role of barriers and social support in aspirations and expectations during the transition. New themes also emerged, such as the role of values and expectations of others, in the development of possible selves. Results suggest important changes to possible selves theory in order to make it relevant for low-income Latino youth in the transition from high school. These results contribute to the sparse research on the gap between aspirations and expectation in Latino youth, and help to explain the role of barriers experienced during the transition from high school in future aspirations and expectations.

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Appendix A

<div align="center">Study 2 Interview Questions</div>

<div align="center">**Urban Youth's Transition Study: Interview**</div>

Participant # _____   Location: _____   Date:_____

Interviewer: _____

Current Situation: Work   College   Both

Time Started _____ Time Ended _____

A) Introductory Questions: I am going to start by asking you, generally, about your life.

1. How do you define yourself, ethnically? OR If someone were to ask you, what would you say your race or ethnicity is?

2. Can you tell me about what you are doing now in your life (e.g., going to school, working, volunteering)? (*inquire about job responsibilities, job title, major, etc.*)

    a. Are you involved in any extracurricular activities (*could be on-campus or outside of school (e.g., church activities))*?

    b. What is your typical day like (*ask everyone, including those who "aren't doing anything"*)?

3. Where are you living (e.g., living at home, living independently)?
    a. Who are you living with (*make sure they tell you who every individual is)*?

I am interested in understanding different aspects of your life, so let me ask you…
4. Are you in a romantic relationship?
    a. If so, how long have you been dating this person?
    b. How serious are the two of you?
    c. Are there any plans for making a commitment?

B) Pre-transition Influences: Now I am going to ask you about influences and experiences in high school that led you to where you are now.

1. Tell me about what your experiences were like at Kelvyn Park?
    a. What kind of student were you?
    b. What was it like being a student there?

      c. In what kind of academic track were you? (*regular, remedial, honors)*
      d. Were you involved in extracurricular activities? If so, which activities?
      e. How did you feel about KPHS?
      f. Did you enjoy being a student there? Why or why not?

2. How do you make decisions in general? (e.g., do you mostly rely on feelings? Think decisions through slowly and carefully? Decide quickly & jump in? Talk to a lot of other people before deciding?)

3. How did you decide that you were going to go to work/go to college? Did you always know that that is what you would do after high school? If yes, how did you know this?

      a. *If they are not in college*: Was college an option?
      b. Has anyone else in your family been to college?

4. Are there any individuals who influenced your decision to go to work and/or to go to college? (*probe about family, school, friends individually*)

5. What experiences while you were in high school influenced your decision to work, go to college or do both?
      a. What experiences in your family influenced what you are doing today?

6. Do you feel that you were prepared for work/college or your current situation? Why or why not?
      a. What experiences in high school prepared you?
      b. What experiences didn't prepare you?

7. Other than your parents or whoever raised you, do you have a mentor who you go to for support and guidance? A mentor is not a girlfriend/boyfriend. He or she is someone has more experience than you, and who as taken a special interest in you. This person may be a teacher, a relative, a neighbor, or someone else whom you look up to for support or guidance.

Pause and see if participant has someone in their life like this. If they answer yes, proceed. If no, skip to #8.

OK. Usually a mentor has certain characteristics. Tell me if this person has the following characteristics: (*for each characteristic, let participant tell you yes/no. If participant says no to 2 out of 4 characteristics, then skip to #8. Otherwise, proceed*).
a. you can count on this person to be there for you,
b. he or she believes in and cares deeply about you

c. he or she inspires you to do your best
d. knowing him or her has really affected what you do and the choices you make

If participant identifies someone, ask the following questions:
a. Who is this person (their relationship to person – e.g., aunt)?
b. How old is this person?
c. Gender?
d. Race/ethnicity?
e. Educational level?
f. Occupation?
g. How long have you known this person?
h. How often do you see/talk to this person?
i. How is this person there for you (*how support is provided*)?

8. In the survey you filled out last year, you indicated that (_____name of individual) is an important person who has supported you?
    a. How did this person support you and influence where you are today in your life?

9. Tell me what you did in order to apply for your job or apply for school.
    a. Did anyone help you? How?

C) Transition experience: For this next section, I am going to ask you specifically about what you are doing now.

1. What is your opinion about work/school so far? (*For those who are doing neither*: What is your opinion about your situation right now?)

2. How do you feel about the decision you made to go to work/ go to school? Why/Explain?

3. How are you doing at your job/school? (*school* – what is your GPA so far? What are your grades like? *Work* - Have you been evaluated at work? If so, how did the evaluation go?)

4. If you can imagine when you were back in high school, are you doing what you expected to be doing now in your life? Why or why not?

5. What has been difficult for you at school/work? What has been helpful?

6. Do you have anyone who you go to about any problems at work/school? If so, who?
   a. How does this person support you?

7. Do you feel like you fit in (belong) at your work setting/school? Why or why not? (*For those who are doing neither*: Do you feel like you fit in with your peers?)

8. Are your current activities affecting your family?   How so?
   a. How do you balance all your family, school, and/or work demands?

9. In what ways, if any, are you lending support to your family (e.g., financial, caretaking, cultural/language brokering)?

10. What do different individuals (family, peers, other adults) in your life think about what you are doing (going to school/working)? Are they supportive? How so?

11. What have your friends from Kelvyn Park been up to since they graduated?

D) Future: For this last part, I am going to ask you questions about your future.

1. Let's fast forward to 5 years from now. *To help them visualize, ask:* How old are you going to be? At that age, how do you picture your life will be?

   a. What will you be doing at that time? (e.g., going to school, what kind of work) What do you hope to be doing?

   b. *For those who are in school or interested in going to school*: Will you have completed your associates degree? Bachelor's degree? (*try to get at their educational and career goals*)

   c. What will your life be like outside of work? (e.g., will they have a family, be in a romantic relationship?)

   d. Where will you live? Who will live with you? (*probe to see if they see themselves as living independently or not*)

   e. How will you spend your free time?

E. Conclusion: And finally…

1. Are there any other things that you want to say that you think are relevant and we haven't talked about?

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me.

END AUDIOTAPE

Ask…
-Are you interested in seeing the results of this project when we write this up (it will be at least a year)? If so, what is your mailing address?

_____

_____

-When we analyze the interviews, we will be interested in showing some of the participants what we are finding so far? Would you be interested in being contacted so that we can meet with you to talk to you about what we are finding in the interviews? Yes/No

NOTES ABOUT THE INTERVIEW