

Growing Up “Gringo”  
How Immigrant and Second Generation Youth Navigate Their  
Transitions to Adulthood in a Small Town, New Immigrant Destination

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## **ABSTRACT**

ALEXIS SILVER: Growing Up “Gringo”: How Immigrant and Second Generation Youth Navigate Their Transitions to Adulthood in a Small Town, New Immigrant Destination

(Under the Direction of Jacqueline M. Hagan and Ted Mouw)

My dissertation examines incorporation patterns for immigrant and second generation Latina/o youths in a small town, new immigrant destination in the rural South. Previous studies have explored the pathway to adulthood for children of immigrants coming of age in metropolitan areas and traditional migrant destinations, but scholars know little about this process for adolescents in small towns and new migrant destinations. This ethnographic study was conducted between 2007 and 2011 in a small community in central North Carolina where half of the population is Hispanic, and 75 percent of the adult Hispanic population is foreign-born. Between 1990 and 2008, North Carolina saw a 508 percent increase in its population of children of immigrants. Recognizing the importance of this demographic shift, my research engages directly with a North Carolina community that has been transformed by Latina/o immigration. My research examines the influences of immigration status and gender on the incorporation of Latina/o children of immigrants. Additionally, I explore race relations within a high school and examine how race and ethnicity influence students’ access to formal and informal opportunity structures within the school.

To all of the youths who shared their stories with me, and to all of the teachers and coaches who helped them believe in a brighter future.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **FRAMEWORK, MOTIVATIONS, AND OBJECTIVES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The vice principal of the school walked to the podium and began to address the graduating seniors in both English and Spanish. He urged the students, ‘Enjoy this moment as it is the only high school graduation that you will ever have. It is also the last graduation that some of you will have at all. Some of you will be going on to college. Some of you will be going to join the army. Some of you will be going to work. Whatever you do, make sure that you take pride in whatever path you decide to take.’

*~Field notes: June 13, 2009*

All of the speakers at the graduation ceremony spoke with pride about the diversity in the school. The continual touting of diversity throughout the ceremony stood out in sharp contrast to the political climate for immigrants, and particularly undocumented immigrants, in North Carolina. Coming of age in the South where the word “immigrant” often hit newspapers and nightly news broadcasts along with the word “illegal,” children of immigrants could not avoid hearing stereotypes of Hispanic<sup>1</sup> immigrants as illegals, criminals, and economic burdens. For Latino/a adolescents and

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with publications by the Pew Hispanic Center, I use the terms “Latina/o” and “Hispanic” interchangeably. I use the terms “second generation immigrants” to refer to children born in the United States to immigrant parents. I use the terms “immigrant children” and “1.5 generation immigrants” to refer to adolescents who are immigrants themselves but who have grown up in the United States since they were children under the age of thirteen. I use the term “children of immigrants” to refer to all children of immigrant parents, regardless of whether they themselves are immigrants or U.S.-born. I also use the terms “African American” and “black” interchangeably. When I refer to a respondent through a hyphenated descriptor such as “Mexican-American,” I am using this hyphenated descriptor to indicate that this person was born in the United States to Mexican immigrant parents. When I refer to the “child population” of the U.S., this population includes all individuals younger than 18 years old.

young adults, the state and national contexts of the immigration debate set the historic time period in which they were forging their pathways into adulthood.

Previous studies have explored the pathway to adulthood for children of immigrants coming of age in metropolitan areas and traditional migrant destinations, but scholars know little about this process in small towns and non-traditional immigrant destinations. Findings from my dissertation suggest that youths can benefit from close knit community bonds and small school size even in within a political climate that is increasingly inhospitable to immigrants. By conducting research with white, black, and Latina/o youths in a new immigrant destination, I use various comparative lenses to explore the incorporation of immigrant and second generation youths in a small town high school. The questions motivating my study are:

- 1) Do pathways of incorporation in a new destination align with incorporation theories described in studies of traditional urban destinations?
- 2) How does immigration status influence the transition to adulthood in a small town, new immigrant setting?
- 3) How does the context of a small town setting influence the opportunity structures available to immigrant and second generation youths of distinct genders?
- 4) How do youths of different races and ethnicities utilize formal and informal resources within the school system in the new immigrant south?

My research makes three major contributions to the literature about immigration and youth. First, it expands the scope of the second generation incorporation literature that has been dominated by research in traditional migrant-receiving urban areas. Second, it highlights the importance of examining differences of documentation status and gender in studies about immigrant and second generation adolescents. Finally, my research

shines a comparative lens on the structural incorporation of immigrant and African American students in a minority-majority school in the American South.

Throughout the four-year study period from April 2007 to June 2011, I conducted a multisite participatory ethnography by volunteering in the high school and at the Latino Outreach Center in the community of Allen Creek<sup>2</sup>. As I am committed to reciprocity in my research, it was important to me that I give back to the community. My time spent volunteering, however, offered invaluable insight into the social worlds of my research participants and the institutions and people with whom they interacted on a daily basis. I conducted 78 in-depth interviews with youths and key adult informants between April 2007 and June 2011. In addition to my community-based ethnographic research and in-depth interviews, I also regularly read local and regional newspapers and government documents in order to contextualize the lived experiences of my research participants within the larger political climate surrounding immigration in North Carolina.

## **BACKGROUND LITERATURE**

Children of immigrants are among the fastest growing demographic groups in the country (Hernandez, Denton, and Blanchard 2011). Because children of immigrants are largely born to non-white immigrant parents, they will transform the demographic make-up of the U.S. as they age into adulthood and begin to have children themselves.

According to the 2010 Census, virtually all of the growth in the child population of the United States can be attributed to growth within the Hispanic population (Frey 2011).

Since 2000, Hispanics added 4.8 million children the population while the population of

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<sup>2</sup> In order to protect the anonymity of the research participants, all proper names, unless they are public officials at the state level, are pseudonyms.

white children declined by 4.3 million and the population of black children declined by 2.5 million. Although North Carolina saw gains in its child population among all three groups, Hispanic children added the most to the population with a growth of 187,000 children, as compared to 31,201 in the white population and 24,991 in the black population. Recognizing the importance of this demographic shift, my research engages directly with a North Carolina community that has been transformed by Latina/o immigration.

Fears about the demographic shift in the U.S. have prompted alarmist discourses in the popular press warning about the “invasion,” or “flood” of Latina/o immigrants who threaten the national identity of the United States, and political policies have responded by increasing restrictions on non-citizen immigrants (Chavez 2008; Santa Ana 2002). Immigrants and their children are increasingly populating new migrant destinations in non-traditional destination states (Kochhar, Suro, and Tafoya 2005; Suro and Singer 2002; Singer 2004; Kandel and Cromartie 2004) where they must confront reactive policies and resentment from populations unaccustomed to immigrant populations (Hagan, Rodriguez and Mullis forthcoming; Bada et al. 2008).

The “New South” (Lippard and Gallagher 2011, Mohl 2003, Smith and Furuseth 2006), or the Southeast region of the United States witnessed the most rapid rate of growth of Latina/os in the country in the 1990s, and this growth continued through the first decade of the new millennium (Fortuny 2010). Recognizing that immigrant incorporation might occur differently in new destinations, many scholars began to research Latin American immigration to the South (Hagan, Rodriguez, and Mullis *forthcoming*; Jackson 2011; Kasarda and Johnson 2006; Kandel and Cromartie 2004;

Kandel and Parrado 2004, 2005; Lippard and Gallagher 2011; Gill 2010; Marrow 2011; Massey 2008; McClain et al. 2006, 2007; Mohl 2003; Mouw and Chavez 2011; Odem and Lacy 2009; Selby, Dixon and Hapke 2001; Schmid 2003; Smith and Furuseth 2006). The bulk of the research on the New South has focused on adult immigrants (for exceptions see Bohon, Macpherson and Atilas 2005; Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor 2010; Kandel and Parrado 2006; Ferreira, Fuglini and Potochnick 2010). While there has been a substantial amount of research surrounding immigrant and second generation adolescents, the vast majority of the literature addressing youth has been conducted in urban areas in traditional migrant-receiving states (Abrego, 2008; Coronado, 2008; Diaz-Strong and Meiners, 2007; Kasinitz et al., 2010; Martínez-Calderón 2009; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Seif, 2004; Smith 2002, 2006, 2008; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

As small towns and rural areas have very different social conditions than large urban cities, immigrant and second generation youths in new destinations may face very distinct pressures and social structures than their urban peers. Because migrants with low levels of traditional human capital have historically migrated to large cities plagued by violence, gangs and drugs, much the literature about immigration and youth has shown children of lower-income immigrants of Latin American and Caribbean descent to be at-risk of “downward assimilation” into an urban underclass (Hirschman 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou, 1993). According to these studies, children of Latina/o and Caribbean immigrants react to discrimination and alienation in large urban schools and impoverished neighborhoods. As a result, they are more likely to drop out of school

and become involved in gang activity instead of striving to become upwardly mobile in an increasingly competitive labor market.

There is some evidence that Latina/o immigrants and their children face more discrimination in new destinations than in traditional migrant states (Marrow 2011; Perreira, Fuglini and Potochotnik 2010), but preliminary studies indicate that Latina/o students in new destination schools in the South are more academically engaged than their peers in more traditional destination states (Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor 2010; Perreira, Fuglini and Potochotnik 2010). Researchers have explained Latina/o success in Southern schools by pointing to supportive school atmospheres (Kandel and Parrado 2006), higher proportions of immigrant students who have a heightened sense of family obligation to succeed (Perreira, Fuglini and Potochotnik 2010), and less segregation in ethnic enclaves than in traditional migrant destinations (Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor 2010). Because there are so few studies of immigrant and second generation youth in new migrant destinations, however, the mechanisms influencing the incorporation of new Latina/o students are not well understood.

Many new immigrant destinations are also in non-urban areas (Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Kochhar, Suro, and Tafoya 2005) where youths may be able to avoid neighborhood violence and may experience less pressure to join gangs. Of course, gangs and drugs exist in rural areas as well as urban areas, but their influence over rural communities is not as pervasive as it is in rough, inner city neighborhoods (Weisheit, Falcone and Wells 1999; Weisheit and Wells 2004). In fact, immigrants in rural areas have specifically noted safety and tranquility as reasons that they enjoy living in these areas as opposed to urban areas (Kandel and Parrado 2006; Marrow 2011; Torres, Popke

and Hapke 2006). Without the pressures of urban poverty, children of immigrants in rural and small town schools may be less likely to develop oppositional identities.

As the economy increasingly necessitates not only high school education, but also higher education for access to upwardly mobile jobs, academic engagement in elementary and secondary school are of pivotal importance in propelling children of immigrants on toward higher education and successful incorporation into U.S. society. Immigrant and second generation youth make up increasingly large proportions of the U.S. population, and the paths that these adolescents take out of high school will not only influence themselves and their immediate families, but will also impact the future of the country. Twenty-three percent of children in the U.S. live in immigrant families (Hernandez, Denton, and Blanchard 2011: 104), and approximately fifty-six percent of these children are Hispanic (Fortuny 2010: 2). Twenty-one percent of all children of immigrants in the country live in new-growth states, yet the vast majority of research about children of immigrants continues to be focused on traditional migrant-receiving states with a particular emphasis on California (Abrego 2008; Coronado 2008; Diaz-Strong and Meiners 2007; Martínez-Calderón 2009; Perez 2009; Pérez Huber 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993; Seif 2004). As new destinations account for increasing shares of the population of children from immigrant families in the U.S., it is increasingly important that we understand the incorporation patterns and processes of immigrant and second generation youth in these underexplored areas. This is the focus of my dissertation.



## **RESEARCH SITE, RESEARCH DESIGN AND STUDY SAMPLE**

### *Research Site*

This study was conducted in a small community that I call Allen Creek in central North Carolina. Between 1990 and 2008, North Carolina saw a 508 percent increase in its population of children of immigrants (Fortuny 2010). Of the 800,900 Hispanics in North Carolina, 317,588 of them are children under the age of eighteen (Frey 2011). Hispanics represent 8.4 percent of the state's population in total, but over 50 percent of the population of approximately 8,000 in Allen Creek. Although the town of Allen Creek is located in a rural county, most of the immigrants were drawn to the area because of its industrial base. While opportunities for manufacturing were dwindling in other regions of the U.S. throughout the 1990s, they were expanding in the Southeast.

Migrants arrived in North Carolina in the 1990s to take advantage of expanding opportunities in food processing, textiles manufacturing, and construction (Griffith 2008; Kochhar, Suro and Tafoya 2005; Mohl 2003). Allen Creek specifically drew migrants because of its proximity to several chicken processing plants, textile mills, and plastics manufacturing plants. Poultry processing plants, in particular, were greatly in need of an increased labor supply in the 1990s (Kandel and Parrado 2004; Kandel and Parrado 2005). Consumer demands for poultry increased as health concerns associated with eating meat began to emerge in the popular press. Additionally, the poultry industry integrated vertically linking growing, feeding, processing and production in proximate facilities. Local labor markets in sparsely populated rural towns, such as Allen Creek, were unable to fill the demand for laborers so immigrants began to move to non-traditional destinations and rural areas to fill the labor needs of expanding industries.

Food processing companies in the south actively sought immigrant laborers. Companies based in Alabama and North Carolina advertised jobs on billboards in Mexico, and some provided incentives for employee referrals for friends and families (Mohl 2003).

Migration to Allen Creek had a major impact on the community, nearly doubling the town's population. Prior to 1990, Allen Creek had a much smaller population of about 5,000 residents and was comprised almost exclusively of whites and blacks.

### *Research Design and Sample*

I approached my research from a symbolic interactionist perspective (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969), focusing on social interactions among adolescents of different races and ethnicities and between youths and adults in Allen Creek. Although I observed various locations throughout the community including restaurants, town halls, and residential neighborhoods, my primary locations of ethnographic observation were Allen Creek High School and the town's nonprofit Latino Outreach Center. Within these contexts, I examined how a small school and a small town setting influenced the formal and informal opportunity structures available to youths within the community.

Throughout four years of ethnographic research in the public high school and the community, I engaged in participant observation while tutoring high school students, assisting at the Latino Outreach Center, attending high school soccer games, playing in pick up soccer games, teaching salsa lessons to teenagers, attending county commissioners' meetings, mentoring one student's senior project, and occasionally going

out for dinner with community members. I volunteered as an AVID<sup>3</sup> tutor in the high school twice a week during the 2009-2010 academic year and once a week during the 2010-2011 academic year. I volunteered at the Latino Outreach Center one day per week from April-July of 2007, one day per week from March-June 2008, and again one day per week from April-August of 2010. Additionally, I conducted 78 in-depth interviews with participants whom I met either at these field sites or through individuals I met at these field sites. I used snowball sampling, a frequently used method to access vulnerable populations such as undocumented immigrants (Chavez 1998; Hagan 1994; Hagan, Lowe and Quingla *forthcoming*) in order to diversify my sample beyond the contacts I made at the high school and the Latino Outreach Center. I relied on my extensive field research to gain a better understanding of the community and to contextualize my in-depth interviews.

Throughout my field research, I conducted numerous “informal interviews” (Lofland et al. 2006), wrote field notes on my observations, and coded my interviews and field notes. Additionally, I regularly read local and regional newspaper articles to gather data on the county, the town and its people, and the state of North Carolina in general. I relied on both inductive and deductive reasoning as I allowed my observations to guide my inquiries while simultaneously analyzing my data within the context of previous research on immigrant and second generation incorporation. Responding to previous studies conducted with youths in urban areas, I formulated my questions to ascertain if the theories of downward assimilation developed in urban areas applied to rural new destinations. From this initial starting point, I used grounded theory (Charmaz 2000) to

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<sup>3</sup> AVID is an educational program designed to propel students in the academic middle toward college. For more information on the program, which is available in schools in 45 states, see [www.avid.org](http://www.avid.org).

build hypotheses about the opportunity structures available to youths in this new destination community.

I developed my theoretical coding schema based on emergent themes that arose in my field notes and interviews. Theoretical concepts such as *small town social capital*, for example, emerged from coding multiple stories about respondents who discussed getting assistance to attend college, find work, get legal assistance, or find housing from teachers, coaches or community adults. The concept of *dual exclusion* emerged from substantive coding of interviews of respondents who discussed feeling “stuck,” between two countries “invisible,” or “missing.” Parallel themes of inclusion and exclusion arose repeatedly among the respondents.

Due to the perceived risks associated with filling out large scale or government surveys ethnographic and interview methods are a frequently used method to access vulnerable populations (Chavez 1998; Hagan 1994). Because vulnerable populations are less likely to fill out large surveys, undocumented residents are consistently undercounted in surveys such as the census (Fernandez and Robinson 1994). As a Spanish-speaking and trusted individual within the community, I was able to establish rapport and trust with the study participants. In addition to better access, I chose in-depth interview and ethnographic field methods because they are best suited to answering the questions of the study. How students navigate their transitions out of the protective walls of their high schools and how they feel as they struggle with their life choices are qualitative questions that can be better explained through in-depth interview questions than multiple choice surveys.

I conducted 38 interviews with Latina/o youths from Allen Creek and 23 interviews with white and black youths who were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five at the time of the interview. The sample was approximately evenly split between genders. Interviews were conducted in various locations including people's mobile homes, houses, homes of trusted adults such as teachers and coaches, parks, and fast food restaurants. I always asked that the respondents chose a location where they felt comfortable. Additionally, I gave the respondents the option of speaking in English or Spanish. Only two respondents chose to conduct their interviews mostly in Spanish, while two others mixed Spanish and English. In all four cases, their language choices were more reflective of comfort than necessity. I interviewed 20 undocumented 1.5 generation youth and 18 documented children of immigrants. By interviewing second generation U.S. born children of immigrants, I was able to draw comparisons between citizen children of immigrants and their undocumented peers. By interviewing thirteen white and eleven black youths, I was able to draw comparisons by race. In addition to the young adult sample, I also interviewed five high school teachers, the vice principal of the high school, the high school college advisor, the high school soccer coach, one former county commissioner, two school board members involved in the Migrant Education Program, three parents, and the youth coordinator and the current and former directors of the Hispanic Outreach Center. My interviews with adults in the community allowed me greater insight into the perspectives of the adults who played such influential roles in shaping the life trajectories of the youths as they transitioned out of high school and on to the next phases of their lives.

## **TRAJECTORIES OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL IN STUDY SAMPLE**

I initiated this study aiming to see how pathways of incorporation in small towns in rural areas differed from the incorporation processes described in urban areas. Specifically, I wanted to examine how a small town environment and small school influenced the transition to early adulthood for immigrant and second generation youths. Table 1 provides an overview of the life course trajectories for the young adults in this study after high school graduation. Although the numbers in each cell are too small to make generalizations, particularly for the white and black individuals, there are some patterns that begin to emerge. First, the vast majority of the documented Latina/o respondents (78 percent) went onto either two or four year colleges or universities after graduation. Second, ten of the twenty undocumented youth (50 percent) enrolled either full time or part time in two or four year colleges either in the U.S. or in their country of origin. Although I was aiming to examine high school graduates as opposed to high school dropouts, I was not specifically seeking high achievers. Given the bleak outlook of the incorporation of Latina/o youths from low-income immigrant families in the literature (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001), I would not have expected as high of a percentage of the respondents to go on to institutions of higher education. Despite these encouraging outcomes, legal status continued to constrain the opportunities of many of the undocumented youth within my sample. Moreover, the undocumented youth who had gone onto college remained uncertain about their opportunities after they graduated.

In addition to distinctions by legal status, there were also distinctions by gender. Among the Latina/o subsample, there was more variety among the women than the men in terms of their pathways out of high school. Within this sample, the Latinas that had

started their own families had become involved with older men who were able to provide for them. Although I cannot comment extensively on the trajectories of the black or white respondents, these individuals nonetheless provided invaluable comparative perspectives about their relationships with teachers and community members. I discuss the influences of legal status, gender, and intergroup relations more extensively in the following chapters.

**Table 1: Trajectories out of High School (N=61)**

	<b>In College or college graduate</b>	<b>Working (not in college)</b>	<b>Taking College Classes and working</b>	<b>Working, taking college classes, started a family</b>	<b>Working and started a family (no college)</b>	<b>Returned to country of origin for college (2004)</b>
<b>Documented Latina Females (9)</b>	<b>7</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Documented Latino Males (9)</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>				
<b>Undocumented Latina Females (11)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>Undocumented Latino Males (9)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>Black Females (5)</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>		
<b>Black Males (6)</b>	<b>6</b>					
<b>White Females (7)</b>	<b>6</b>				<b>1</b>	
<b>White Males (5)</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>1</b>			

## **OVERVIEW OF PAPERS**

My first paper (chapter two) specifically focuses on undocumented youths and the struggles that they face as they emerge into the early stages of adulthood after high school graduation. I juxtapose a hostile political environment at the state level and inertia at the federal level with the more supportive personal networks surrounding the youths. In some cases the undocumented youths in my study were able to circumvent substantial legal and financial barriers impeding their paths toward higher education and upwardly mobile job opportunities by relying on the extensive support of teachers, coaches and community members. Even with the care and guidance of school and community mentors, however, the youths experienced emotional distress due to their legal exclusion, and felt stuck between two nations without having full membership in either.

By highlighting the influences of a supportive small town environment on the opportunities and experiences of the undocumented youths in the sample, this paper establishes a theoretical framework that continues through the dissertation. Although each paper addresses a different topic, themes of close-knit social networks and small town support weave through all three papers. Children of immigrants in this community easily formed connections with teachers, coaches, and other adults. Absent the pressures of urban violence, youths had fewer pressures to downwardly assimilate. Moreover, their connections to influential adult advisors facilitated opportunities for adolescents to engage in academic pursuits and beneficial extracurricular activities. This social support enabled youths to show remarkable resilience in the face of a hostile political climate in North Carolina.



In the second paper (chapter three), I examine how gender influences the social and educational incorporation of children of immigrants in a small town setting. I discuss gendered pressures both at home and at school for children of immigrants transitioning to adulthood. Unlike adolescent male children of immigrants in large urban cities who often report being perceived as social problems and potential criminals in high schools (Lopez 2002, 2003; Waters 1996), the Latino male youths in this community were not necessarily viewed in this way, nor were they immediately treated with mistrust by teachers and administrators in their school. Although they were aware of stereotypes of Latino males as thugs and gang members, they did not feel constrained by these discriminatory images. Instead of trying to manage and control the male children of immigrants, adults in the community often reached out to them and encouraged them to engage after school activities that augmented their social and human capital.

Although the female children of immigrants were also encouraged by their teachers and mentors to engage in afterschool and extracurricular activities, their parents often expected them to return home directly after school. While research about children of immigrants in urban areas has shown that strict parental monitoring can keep female children of immigrants safe and focused on school (Smith 2002, 2006; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001), overly protective parenting practices for girls in this small and safe community limited their opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities and forge beneficial relationships with influential adults in the community. When parents saw value in their daughters' afterschool activities and encouraged participation in clubs and sports, the adolescent women were able to use the activities and relationships with influential adult mentors to help propel them toward higher education. When daughters

and immigrant parents clashed over participation in extracurricular activities and romantic relationships, however, daughters of immigrants sought avenues to gain independence. Because adolescent females did not see the need for such strict parenting, they occasionally rebelled against their parents by moving in with boyfriends, thereby putting themselves at risk of prematurely falling into relationships and pregnancies that in some cases impeded their educational aspirations.

In the third paper (chapter four), I expand my focus to include youths of all races and ethnicities. Building on research about race relations and immigrant incorporation in the South, I examine differences between intergroup interactions within the school and community. I explore the ways in which legacies of institutionalized racism and structural segregation continued to shadow interracial and interethnic interactions in the school, and I discuss strategies that schools and teachers use to help facilitate academic opportunities for immigrant and second generation students. My findings indicate that although Latina/os and African Americans noted discrimination, they also benefited from a supportive school environment and caring teachers. In spite of a school culture that celebrated diversity and achievement for all students, Latina/o students were given more opportunities than African American students to participate in identity-based clubs and tended to develop closer relationships with teachers. Because teachers and administrators viewed Latina/o students as newcomers, they felt more of an obligation to help guide and parent the Latina/o students than the black students.

In the final chapter, I highlight my theoretical contributions and suggest directions for future research.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Although I designed my study to access a wide variety of individuals, I was specifically seeking high school students on track for graduation. Because my sample does not include high school dropouts, my findings may paint an overly optimistic picture of immigrant and second generation incorporation in a small high school. I was not, however, specifically seeking high achievers. Several respondents in my sample struggled to graduate from high school, and many were stuck in menial jobs after high school graduation. The youths in the AVID program, moreover, were initially identified as being in the academic middle and in need of more support. I do not claim, however, that my sample is representative of all youth in the rural, small town South or even in Allen Creek. Due to my long term engagement in the community, however, I am confident that my sample is in no way outstanding or abnormal.

I should also address my role as the researcher of this study. I am a white woman from the Northeast, and as such was in no way a natural insider within the community or the target population of this study. My long-term engagement within the community as a volunteer, however, enabled me to gain the trust of my respondents and allowed me to view the Southern community of Allen Creek through their eyes. Moreover, the fact that I spoke Spanish and salsa danced further facilitated trust with the Latina/o sample. My position as an outsider was also beneficial to me in that I was able to note cultural or regional particularities that I might have taken for granted if I were raised within the community I studied (Emerson et al. 1995). Still, I do not discount that researchers coming from different perspectives and backgrounds would be able to add new elements to this study that I as an outsider might not have perceived.

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **AGING INTO EXCLUSION AND SOCIAL TRANSPARENCY: UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT YOUTH AND THE TRANSITION TO ADULthood**

#### **ABSTRACT**

This ethnographic study, conducted between 2007 and 2011, examines the various pathways that undocumented Latina/o immigrant youths take upon graduation from high school in a new migrant destination. This research expands the scope of the 1.5 and second generation incorporation literature that remains dominated by research in traditional migrant-receiving urban areas. Contextualizing the transition to adulthood within a small Southern town, I focus my ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews with 78 community members on the distinct opportunity structures available to youths in a small town setting. In spite of a reactive political climate on a local level and inertia regarding immigration policy reform on a federal level, undocumented youths in this North Carolina community benefit from extremely supportive teachers, coaches, family employers and other community members. The findings of this study demonstrate how small towns can facilitate networks of social support. Despite the opportunities created by small town social capital, however, the undocumented youths in this sample remained acutely aware of their legal exclusion.

## INTRODUCTION

I really didn't know any of that kind of legality information until I got into high school and then I started thinking about college and that's when I really found out that I wasn't really considered a citizen here. And I was like, oh, that really hit me and I was like, well, how am I gonna get into college? How am I gonna pay for this? Are they going to deny me because of my citizenship? It's crazy. I think about it all the time because now I'm going to be a senior and I really have to think about how am I going to do this? ~Dalia, 17 year old undocumented Mexican immigrant

Just as Dalia's comment suggests, lack of legal status dramatically constrains the opportunities available to undocumented youths after high school. Coming of age in a small town with a densely connected and supportive social network, however, creates opportunities for youths to take advantage of the guidance and generosity of neighbors, teachers, and fellow community members. Dalia did not know that she was an undocumented immigrant until she began high school. The news impacted her immensely and she struggled emotionally as she confronted a future of obstacles and uncertainty. With the support of teachers and her school's Latino Achievement Club, however, she was able to enroll in a private four year college with a scholarship. Nevertheless, she feared that the scholarship would not be renewed after two years and she was unable to imagine her prospects beyond college. Dalia's story was a familiar one in Allen Creek, North Carolina.

Most previous research on immigrant youth has focused on documented or second generation youth in traditional urban migrant-receiving areas, and much of the research has painted a bleak picture of incorporation for Latina/o children of lower-income immigrants (Hirschman 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993). As

immigrants and their children increasingly populate small towns and rural areas in new immigrant destinations (Frey and Liaw 2005; Kochhar, Suro, and Tafoya 2005; Singer 2004), research is needed to address the incorporation patterns of immigrant and second generation youths in these new destination areas.

Because small towns and rural areas have lower rates of violent crime and gang activity than impoverished urban areas (Weisheit, Falcone and Wells 1999; Weisheit and Wells 2004), immigrant and second generation youths may experience very different contexts of reception than their urban counterparts. While communities in rural areas may be safer than inner city neighborhoods, immigrants in new rural destinations may also experience more discrimination than their urban counterparts (Fennelly 2008; Marrow 2011; Ferreira, Fuligni and Potochnick 2010; Saenz 2000; Zúñiga and Hernandez-Leon 2005). As U.S.-born populations in new destinations are less accustomed to immigrant populations, they may respond to new flows of immigrants by imposing reactive policies that restrict opportunities for undocumented immigrants. Alternatively, community members in rural areas may also welcome newcomers, as small town environments facilitate opportunities to interact with new immigrants in local stores, restaurants, churches and schools. Youths, in particular, may be well positioned to forge meaningful connections to teachers, coaches and classmates who come to know immigrant students as individuals. Small towns certainly offer both advantages and disadvantages to new immigrant populations, but as immigrant youths graduate in growing numbers from rural high schools, it becomes increasingly important that we better understand how these youths will incorporate themselves into their communities.

This study, conducted between 2007 and 2011, addresses a gap in the immigrant incorporation literature by focusing on undocumented youths transitioning to adulthood in a new migrant destination. According to Current Population Survey estimates, 1.5 of the 11.9 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. are children under the age of 18 (Passel and Cohn 2009). Undocumented youths have been largely understudied in the literature addressing immigrant incorporation (for notable exceptions see Abrego 2006, 2008; Coronado 2006; Diaz-Strong and Meiners 2007; Gonzales 2007, 2008; Martínez-Calderón 2009; Perez 2009; Rogers et al. 2008; Seif 2004, 2009), and conclusions about undocumented youths in rural areas cannot be drawn from research about undocumented youths in urban areas.

By conducting ethnographic field work and in-depth interviews, I examine how the local context influences the transition out of high school for adolescents in a small Southern town. The remainder of this paper is organized into four sections. In the first section, I review the relevant literature on the importance of neighborhood context and immigrant and second generation incorporation. In the second section, I introduce the research site, research design, and study sample. My findings fall into two sub-sections. First, I highlight three major narratives that exemplify the variability of incorporation outcomes. The first narrative emphasizes the ways in which small town social networks may be leveraged to access educational opportunities. The second narrative illustrates how legal barriers can impede educational mobility and constrain motivation even in situations where youth have significant social support. And finally, the third narrative highlights an alternate pathway of returning to an unfamiliar country of origin in order to pursue professional goals that would be near impossible without legal documentation.

The second sub-section of findings focuses on common themes of frustration and bi-national exclusion discussed by all of the respondents despite their various life trajectories. In the final section, I argue that the youth in this sample have benefited considerably from the positive influences of a strong small town social network. Even within the larger context of a very reactive political climate at the state level and a lack of immigration policy reform at the federal level, this tranquil community facilitates opportunities for youths to form strong connections with adult mentors who act as other-parents and cultural brokers to the youths. Without federal immigration reform, however, the youths continue to face uncertain futures and emotional hardships due to their lack of legal documentation.

## **BACKGROUND LITERATURE**

### *Immigrant Incorporation in a Small Town Context*

As the vast majority of literature about immigration and youth has been dominated by research in traditional migrant-receiving urban areas (Abrego 2008; Coronado 2008; Diaz-Strong and Meiners 2007; Kasinitz et al. 2010; Martínez-Calderón 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993; Seif 2004; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001), little is known about the transition to adulthood for youth in new destination areas and small towns. Throughout the last two decades many rural and small towns, particularly in the Southeast, have witnessed dramatic shifts in their populations. Communities that had previously been populated entirely by black and white native-born Americans saw large influxes of Latin American immigrants (Frey and Liaw 2005; Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Kochhar, Suro, and Tafoya 2005; Singer 2004; Stull, Broadway and Griffith 1995;

Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). Because migration to these destinations is so recent, theories based on urban studies in traditional destinations may be poorly suited to describe the incorporation processes of these immigrant and second generation adolescents. As immigrants and their children disperse into new destinations throughout the U.S., it is important that we recognize how rural contexts and small towns influence the opportunity structures available to immigrant youth.

Much of the discussion surrounding the transition to adulthood for first and second generation youth revolves around a discussion of segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993). Segmented assimilation theory has explained the downward assimilation of many lower-income children of immigrants, particularly of Latin American and Caribbean descent, by pointing to low levels of parental human capital and impoverished urban neighborhood influences. Absent the pressures of dangerous urban environments, however, predictions of downward assimilation become less plausible.

While gangs and drugs are certainly not unheard of in small towns (Rhyne and Yearwood 2005; Weisheit and Wells 2004), youths may be more likely to avoid negative peer pressures in areas where gang culture is not the dominant social force available to adolescents. Small towns often have strong social ties (Crockett, Shanahan and Jackson-Newsom 2000), high levels of social cohesion, strong community solidarity, and high densities of acquaintanceship that result in higher levels of normative behavior (Beggs, Haines, and Hulbert 1996; Boissevain 1974; Freudenburg 1986; Portes 1998). Residents of small towns and rural areas are more likely to take safety for granted (Freudenburg 1986), and violent and other crimes are less likely to occur in rural as opposed to urban

areas (Weisheit, Falcone and Wells 1999; Weisheit and Wells 2004). Indeed, immigrants in new rural destinations have noted safety, peacefulness, friendliness, and quality of life as reasons that they like living in these areas (Kandel and Parrado 2006; Marrow 2011; Torres, Popke and Hapke 2006). Due to safer neighborhoods and high levels of social cohesion and control, rural areas and small towns may be better at curbing the development of counter-cultures and violent gangs.

Small towns may be safer, but they may also be less receptive to outsiders. Social cohesion and close-knit social networks tend to discourage individualism and encroach upon the privacy of residents (Boissevain 1974). When transgression from social norms becomes small town gossip, new residents may be more aware of their status as outsiders. Rural and small-town environments have been associated with intolerance for diversity, and the South in particular has a history of racism, oppression, and violence toward blacks (Cobb 2005; Smith and Furuseth 2006; Reed 1986; Snipp 1996; Williams and Dill 1995). Although race relations in the South have improved since the Jim Crow era, racial inequalities persist in the economic, political and social structures in the South, and particularly in rural regions and small towns (Marrow 2011; Snipp 1996; Williams and Dill 1995).

Immigrants in new destinations have noted discrimination and prejudice as reasons that they feel uncomfortable in these communities (Fennelly 2008; Marrow 2011; Ferreira, Fuligni, and Potochnick 2010; Saenz 2000; Zúñiga and Hernandez-Leon 2005). For children of immigrants growing up in towns without previous exposure to individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds, their otherness may impede their successful social incorporation. The benefits of safe schools and communities, however, may outweigh the

disadvantages of small town living and may act as a safeguard against downward assimilation.

### *Social Membership and Undocumented Youth*

In spite of a safer community context, youths in rural areas and small towns still face considerable obstacles because of their legal exclusion. Previous research about undocumented immigrants has demonstrated the profound emotional and psychological influences of living in constant fear and uncertainty (Chavez 1998; Coronado 2008; Coutin 2003; Diaz-Strong and Meiners 2007; Dozier 1993; Hagan 1994). In addition to the pronounced psychological effects of undocumented status, undocumented immigrants are also subject to exclusionary policies and are denied personhood under the law (Coutin 2003). While undocumented immigrants physically live and work in U.S. communities, they remain legally unrecognized and are therefore placed into “spaces of nonexistence” where they have no membership (Coutin 2003). Although Coutin’s research addresses undocumented adult immigrants who are fleeing persecution in their home country of El Salvador, her findings may well apply to undocumented youths who also experience a dual exclusion from both their home and host countries.

Unlike undocumented adults, who have been described as inhabiting “spaces of nonexistence” (Coutin 2003) or living “shadowed” lives (Chavez 1998), undocumented youths may be less aware of their exclusion as children. Undocumented adolescents in the 1.5 generation are in unique positions of social and legal membership, as they arrived in the U.S. at young ages and often have very few memories of their home countries. Undocumented youths are afforded many of the same rights as their citizen peers,



including the right to attend primary and secondary school (*Plyler v Doe* 1982). As high school students, they take classes, play on sports teams, join clubs, and engage in romantic relationships with their citizen classmates. Structural constraints are minimized in high school, where legal status is often unknown and undocumented youths are largely treated the same as their documented peers. In fact, some undocumented youths may not even know that they lack legal documentation until after they graduate high school (Chavez 1998). Studies have shown, moreover, that undocumented youths can benefit from relationships with teachers who encourage them to develop their academic skills and become involved in student organizations (Gonzales 2008; Perez 2009, Pérez Huber 2009). School can be a very nurturing environment for youths, and many undocumented adolescents work hard in high school in the hopes of attending college and earning eventual citizenship (Abrego 2006; Coronado 2008; Seif 2004).

Because undocumented youths are often well integrated in their schools, they may not feel the impact of their undocumented status until they are on the brink of high school graduation. On the other hand, undocumented students know that their opportunities for higher education and work are extremely limited due to financial and legal constraints. Indeed, feelings of uncertainty about life after high school can influence the emotional well-being and incorporation patterns of undocumented youth even while they are in high school. Some undocumented youths report being afraid to talk to teachers and feeling uncomfortable in school (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001: 34-35), and others reject institutions such as schools before the schools get a chance to reject them (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Regardless of how undocumented youths deal with their legal

exclusion from American society, they are all susceptible to feelings of fear, frustration, and powerlessness as they transition to adulthood.

## **RESEARCH SITE, RESEARCH DESIGN AND STUDY SAMPLE**

### *North Carolina*

This study was conducted in a small town in North Carolina, one of the fastest growing destinations for Latina/o immigrants. Between 1990 and 2008, North Carolina witnessed the fastest growth of children of immigrants in the country, with a 508 percent rate of increase (Fortuny 2010). By 2010 the total Latina/o population had reached 800,000 comprising 8.4 percent of the state's population (US Census Bureau 2010). Textile and food processing plants were the main draws to the Southeast, and many immigrants came to fill the expanding labor demands of these markets (Griffith 2008; Kochhar, Suro and Tafoya 2005; Mohl 2003). Consumer demands for poultry increased as health concerns associated with eating meat began to emerge in the popular press, and the poultry industry integrated vertically, linking growing, feeding, processing and production in proximate facilities (Kandel and Parrado 2004; Kandel and Parrado 2005). Food processing plants were drawn to North Carolina and neighboring states because of an anti-union environment, and employer preference for flexible and cheap labor created a demand for immigrant workers (Mohl 2005; Walden 2008; Griffith 2006; López-Sanders 2009; Parrado 2008). As the word spread through social networks, immigrants began to travel to North Carolina from other states and countries to fill expanding labor opportunities in manufacturing and construction (Hagan, Lowe and Quingla *forthcoming*; Kandel and Parrado 2004; Kandel and Parrado 2005).

Along with an increase in immigration came an increase in anti-immigration legislation. With eight active memorandums of agreement to participate in the 287(g) program<sup>4</sup>, North Carolina is second in the country in its ability to train local law officers to enforce immigration law and begin deportation proceedings (Weissman et al. 2009). Specifically targeting undocumented immigrant youth, the state community college board passed a resolution barring undocumented immigrants from attending community colleges in 2008 (Stancill and Collins 2008). Responding to political pressure from civil rights groups and immigrant advocacy organizations, the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) commissioned a study from JBL Associates, Inc., an independent public policy research firm specializing in higher education. Citing the report's findings that undocumented students placed no economic burden on the community college system, the NCCCS reversed the ban on undocumented students in 2009 (Gonzales 2009). Although the new policy allows undocumented students to enroll as full time students in community colleges, it specifically states that undocumented students must pay out of state tuition and cannot supplant legal residents in overcrowded classes. The reversal of the ban marked the fifth time that the policy on undocumented students in the NCCCS had changed since 2000, reflecting the contentious political climate surrounding the immigrant population in North Carolina.

In January of 2011, North Carolina House Representative George Cleveland (District 14, Onslow County), introduced a bill to bar undocumented immigrants from attending the state's community colleges and universities (NC HB 11). If the bill were to

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<sup>4</sup> In 1996, the U.S. Congress added a section, 287(g), to the Immigration and Nationality Act. The 287(g) program authorizes the U.S. Immigration and Customs and Enforcement (ICE) to train local law enforcement agencies and officers to enforce immigration laws and act as immigration officers in their daily activities (Weismann et al., 2009; pp. 8 and 18).

pass, North Carolina would become the third state after South Carolina and Georgia to officially enact a law prohibiting college admission to undocumented immigrants<sup>5</sup> (Brown 2010; Yablon-Zug and Holley-Walker 2009). Without federal legislation offering undocumented adolescents and young adults a pathway to higher education and eventual citizenship, undocumented youths are subject to the capricious nature of state and local policies, which shift as readily as local opinion.

### *Allen Creek*

Witnessing the backlash against new immigrant populations at the state-level, I initiated this study to examine how interpersonal relationships among migrants and the established U.S.-born population were proceeding at the community level. I conducted ethnographic field work in Allen Creek, North Carolina, a small Southern town that was transformed by immigration in the 1990s. Latina/o immigrants moved to Allen Creek to take advantage of labor opportunities in textile and food manufacturing plants. Before 1990, Allen Creek's population was made up almost entirely of black and white residents. Since 1990, the population of Allen Creek has grown from 5,000 to approximately 8,000, and about half of the population is Latina/o. Migration to Allen Creek is visible not only in the school hallways and on the streets, but also in the several stores, restaurants, and grocery aisles specifically catering to the Latina/o population in the town. Allen Creek has a median household income of about \$30,000, which is lower than the national median income of \$51,425, as well as the North Carolina state median

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<sup>5</sup> Although North Carolina, Alabama and Virginia have all had policies restricting admission to institutions of higher education for undocumented students, South Carolina and Georgia are the only states to have passed legislation to legally bar undocumented students from attendance.

income of \$45,069 (American Fact Finder 2005-2009 ACS estimates). Recent economic downturns have forced some immigrant residents to travel far distances to seek employment, but there has not been a substantial out-migration from the town.

The public high school in Allen Creek is fairly representative of the local population, with its 800 students being split among Latina/o, black, and white students. The largest proportion of the local high school student body is Latina/o (41 percent), but both white and black students make up sizeable minorities at approximately 34 percent and 25 percent, respectively. There are no official statistics on the legal documentation status of the student body.

Although most students now speak with pride about the diversity of their student body, racial and ethnic relations within the town have not always been so peaceful. When immigrants began to arrive in Allen Creek, there was visible “white flight” from the school system as some parents moved to nearby towns or relocated their children to surrounding charter or private schools. Other residents organized large scale demonstrations to protest the population shift within their town. Like other small towns witnessing massive influxes of immigrants, a large percentage of residents were uncomfortable watching their communities change so dramatically. Previous research has documented similar reactions to initial waves of immigration (Cuadros 2006; Marrow 2011; Torres, Popke and Hapke 2006). While racial tensions persist in the community particularly between police officers and racial and ethnic minorities, public clashes and demonstrations are rare. Occasionally Latina/os complain about harassment from neighbors who become angry when they have outdoor family parties, and white community members fear emerging Latino gangs in the town. There have also been

threats of fights between black and Latino gangs in the community, but peers generally classify both black and Latino adolescent gang members as “wannabes” and gang violence is very rare within the town. For the most part, race relations are peaceful if distant, except in the school where interracial couples and friendships are common.

The decline in racial tensions occurred as residents and school officials in Allen Creek organized centers and programs to help integrate new immigrant residents and their children into the community. In the mid-1990s, community members started a Latino Outreach Center to assist immigrants with job hunts, legal issues, and food and housing concerns. The local schools implemented English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programs, and more recently the high school created one club to help Latina/o students access and apply for college and another that allows high school students to assist in after school programs at the elementary school with Spanish speaking children. As the Southern school has a history of segregation, the teachers and students were generally uncomfortable about the idea creating similar clubs for black students. They acknowledged, however, that these clubs were helpful to the Latina/o students who must leap linguistic and cultural barriers. Because the residents of Allen Creek have responded both reactively and proactively to the large migrant population, it was a natural choice as a site to conduct this study.

### *Research Design*

Between 2007 and 2011, I conducted participant observation ethnographic research and in-depth interviews with 79 respondents. Due to the perceived risks associated with filling out large scale or government surveys, ethnographic methods and

interviews are commonly used to access this vulnerable population (Chavez 1998; Hagan 1994). Over the course of four years, I tutored AVID college preparatory classes at the local high school, volunteered at the Latino Outreach Center, taught salsa dance lessons to teenagers, attended games and practices of the boys' and girls' soccer teams, went to county commissioners' meetings, attended special events such as weddings and graduations, mentored senior projects, and occasionally went out for dinner with community members. Through my extensive and varied participation in the community, I established trust with my research participants, thus ensuring that they would feel comfortable speaking to me about delicate topics of emotional wellbeing, legal status and family relationships.

I conducted 79 in-depth semi-structured interviews with individuals from Allen Creek. I also conducted numerous "informal interviews" (Lofland et al. 2006) with other students and community members during my field visits to the high school and Latino Outreach Center in town. I followed up with my in-depth interview sample through personal visits and over email correspondence throughout the duration of my study. I interviewed 38 Latina/o youths, 11 black youths, 13 white youths, and 17 adult community members who interacted closely with the youth of Allen Creek. The interviews were conducted in various locations including people's mobile homes, houses, homes of trusted adults such as teachers and coaches, parks, and fast food restaurants. I always asked that the respondents choose a location where they felt comfortable. Additionally, I gave the respondents the option of speaking in English or Spanish. Only two respondents chose to conduct their interviews mostly in Spanish, while two others

mixed Spanish and English. In all four cases, their language choices were more reflective of comfort than necessity.

Of the 38 interviews I conducted with Latina/o youths from Allen Creek, I interviewed 20 undocumented 1.5 generation youth, two legal residents who have temporary protected status (TPS) visas, and 16 citizen children of immigrants. By interviewing second generation children of immigrants, I was able to draw comparisons between documented children of immigrants and their undocumented peers. Due to my long term engagement with the community, I was able to contextualize the interview data with data from my ethnographic field notes and newspaper articles detailing the policies that were directly affecting undocumented immigrants in the state of North Carolina.

## **FINDINGS**

### *Multiple Pathways out of High School: Valentina, Diana, and Luis*

For undocumented students, high school graduation can be a moment of pride, but it can also signify the transition into a life of uncertainty and closed doors. In Allen Creek, many undocumented students joined their parents in manufacturing plants after high school graduation, and others continued to work fast food or domestic service jobs. Still others strived to find avenues into institutions of higher education. Those who were able to maneuver themselves into colleges could augment their human capital as they hoped and waited for legal policies to shift. The dense social network in Allen Creek did not offer a guaranteed path toward upward social mobility, but the small town context opened both formal and informal opportunity structures to undocumented youths.



Below I use the life stories of several respondents to illustrate the various pathways that undocumented youths took as they transitioned out of high school. Although each individual found his or her own way, they all shared a common sense of apprehension and knowledge that their futures were constrained by legal policies that excluded them from full societal membership. Each of their stories, moreover, was distinctly shaped by growing up in a rural community in a new migrant destination.

*Valentina:* When Valentina and her twin sister were ten, they were lost in Mexico by their smuggler, who was transporting them from Guatemala to the U.S. The girls lived in a police station for two months before their father managed to locate them and bring them to North Carolina, despite his own undocumented status. Three years later, Valentina's parents separated and Valentina found herself working as a waitress in two restaurants and as a grocery store clerk to make up for the loss of her father's income. While her mother worked part-time in a chicken plant, Valentina was the primary earner for her family by age fourteen. Because she barely had time to sleep, let alone study, her grades slipped. Despite her ailing grades, she had caring teachers who intervened and helped her gain access to the school's Latino Achievement Club (LAC), which helped students prepare for college and access scholarship money. She explained how she got into the club saying,

Well, freshman year I was about to quit... and I used to be absent like everyday. But I still passed the exams...And my teachers used to...tell me that I should do better. I would say that the only people that have been helping me are my teachers. I feel really good about that. And thanks to them, I'm improving. ~*Valentina, age 17*

Valentina credits her achievements to the care and intervention of her teachers. Recognizing that she would not be able to continue her hectic work schedule and keep up

with her coursework as well as the additional responsibilities of the LAC, one teacher asked Valentina if she wanted to move in with her. Because the social network in Allen Creek was so small and densely connected, Valentina had housing offers from two teachers. The close social ties within Allen Creek allowed for mutual trust between Valentina and her teachers, and she greatly benefited from her new living arrangement. In addition to having time to do her homework and improving her English, she also gained free time.

Comparing her school in Allen Creek to her much larger urban school in Guatemala, Valentina talked about the advantages of going to a small school by saying,

Here it's smaller. You get less competition so you get more. You get a chance to get a scholarship because here it's small and there's not much competition with each other, but if you go to a bigger school, there's a lot of people. And here you get to see more [of] your friends. And you know a lot of people – well, not a lot of people – you know everybody. And there, nobody would pay attention to you.  
~Valentina, age 17

Valentina credits the small town atmosphere not only for lessening the competition for resources, but also for facilitating connections with influential adults such as teachers and community members. She benefited immensely from these small town connections by moving in with a teacher. She also met an influential immigrants' rights activist in the community, whom she contacted to help her with her senior project in the unrelated subject of bird watching. Because of the influence of her senior project advisor, Valentina became active in campaigning for immigrants' rights and participated in local demonstrations urging educational access and citizenship for immigrant youth. Through her involvement with LAC, she acquired a full scholarship to a private four year college, where, she says, "they don't care about your immigration status, which is pretty cool."

Valentina's story highlights the importance of what Portes and Fernández-Kelly (2008) call "very significant others." Valentina's teachers and other community members played integral roles in her life and were able to help her in ways that her parents were not. All of my respondents stated that they knew their teachers very well, and most told stories about how coaches, teachers, counselors, or family friends played significant roles in their lives. Certainly, connections to helpful adults occur in cities as well (Smith 2008; Pérez Huber 2009; Portes and Fernández-Kelly 2008, Seif 2004), but small town atmospheres may be more conducive to forming these types of relationships due to their close-knit social networks (Beggs, Hulbert, and Haines 1996; Boissevain 1974; Freudenburg 1986; Portes 1998). Because of her close connections to her teachers, Valentina gained access to invaluable opportunities and began to feel a sense of membership in her community.

Valentina's story is not an isolated incident. Of the eighteen documented youths that I interviewed, sixteen of them were taking higher education classes or were enrolled full time in an institution of higher education. Of the twenty undocumented youths that I interviewed, ten were taking higher education classes or were enrolled full time in an institution of higher education. Nearly all of the Latina/o students mentioned how important caring teachers and mentors were in helping them select classes and graduate from high school.

Moreover, Valentina was not the only respondent in my sample to receive an offer to live with a teacher. Her twin sister also moved in with the same teacher a few months after Valentina, and another respondent in my sample received an offer to move in with her soccer coach and his wife when she was struggling with her previous decision to

move in with her boyfriend. Because the community of Allen Creek was small, connections between adolescents and adult mentors were common. While students in this small town high school may have had a harder time guarding their personal lives from their coaches and teachers, they were also able to get help from these trusted advisors when they needed it. Of course, not all of the students in the high school would naturally forge such strong bonds with teachers or coaches, but even students who were not academically engaged and struggled to graduate from high school noted connections to community adults that helped them both materially and emotionally.

*Diana:* Although Valentina secured a scholarship through LAC, scholarships and connections to influential adults may not be enough to guarantee upward mobility for undocumented youths. Diana arrived in the U.S. in 2002, at the age of 11. She migrated three years after her mother and five years after her father. Before arriving in the U.S., Diana spoke to her mother nearly every day on the phone, and her parents decided to bring the children once they had saved enough money for their journey. Diana described their life in Guatemala without her parents by saying,

Well, we had so many problems because our parents were here and we were there. And my brother, he was crazy there. Because I guess my dad wasn't there and he wanted to be with him. And my little sister, she always was crying for my mom, so they decided to bring us here.

~ *Diana, age 18*

Although the problems that the children were having in Guatemala were eventually resolved when the family reunited, they faced new issues of legality in the U.S. Despite Diana's lack of documentation, her mother encouraged her to apply for college. Diana's mother became friends with a woman whose house she cleaned, and her employer offered to pay community college tuition for the children. Diana's mother's employer took on the

role of a godmother to Diana and her siblings, and she helped them navigate the transition out of high school. Diana described her relationship with her godmother and her experience with the community college system in North Carolina by saying,

[My godmother] helped me out with my English and everything, and she told me that she was going to help me to go to college after high school. But then they changed the laws and that made it difficult for us. And since I couldn't apply for financial aid, the money was an obstacle, too. But my *madrina* [godmother], she's white. She told me that she was going to pay for school, so that made it easier for me... So I started school and then the last day of the week I started, they called me to the front office and... Oh my god. I felt something inside of me, like, something bad was going to happen. And I got there and that lady said, "I'm sorry but you can't keep coming to school anymore." They told me that I couldn't study there anymore because I didn't have a Social Security number or a green card. And after, I cried because all of my dreams and everything, they just disappeared. ~*Diana, age 18*

Like Valentina, Diana benefited from a close connection to a trusted adult within the community of Allen Creek. Although Diana's mother encouraged her to go to college, she lacked the cultural and financial capital to help her apply and pay for higher education. Diana's American godmother helped prepare Diana for college, and helped her leap the significant financial barrier by offering to pay for the cost of her books and tuition. This substantial assistance, however, was not enough to protect Diana from the community college board's decision to bar undocumented immigrants.

In spite of the reversal of the community college policy in 2009, the interruption in Diana's education was enough to redirect her life trajectory. She began working in an entry-level job in a textiles factory alongside her mother and sister and felt that by abandoning her job for school, she would be shirking her responsibilities in contributing to the household bills. Abstractly, she hoped that she would one day be able to return to school but she had not made any plans to do so.

Aspects of Diana's story reappeared in the stories of other undocumented immigrants hoping to attend college after graduation. Although Diana was the only student in my sample to get admitted and subsequently removed from community college, three other undocumented students from my sample in Diana's graduating class saw their plans of attending community college derailed once the policy banning undocumented students was enacted in 2008. Diana was also not the only undocumented adolescent in my sample to receive financial help from a family friend. When a soccer coach from the community befriended a family whose sons played in a middle school community soccer league, the mother asked him if he would act as her daughter's godfather. He agreed, and when she wanted to attend community college after her high school graduation in 2009, he paid her out-of-state tuition. Without financial help from scholarships secured through the assistance of LAC or from the direct support of godparents, other undocumented students did not dare to dream about attending college or university. Of the twenty undocumented individuals that I interviewed, ten began working full time after high school figuring that college was not a viable option for them because of their undocumented status.

*Luis:* Hearing about stories like Diana's, many undocumented students worried about where they would end up after high school graduation. Migration status weighed heavily on the minds of the undocumented students, and many considered returning to their countries of origin in order to pursue higher education. Although very few students from Allen Creek High School actually elected to return to their countries of origin, Luis decided that returning to Mexico was the best option for him. Of the twenty

undocumented adolescents I interviewed, seven of them seriously contemplated returning to their countries of origin but Luis was the only one who actually returned.

Having lived in the U.S. since he was four years old, going back home to Mexico was not a decision Luis took lightly. Luis was very involved in the community of Allen Creek and he served as a liaison between his parents and the surrounding English-speaking community. Luis had been translating for his parents for as long as he could remember, and he even volunteered as a translator in the courthouse as a child. After graduating from high school, Luis worked in the U.S. for three years before moving to Mexico at the age of twenty-two. When I interviewed him in Mexico, he told me that he listened to country music as he drove down to the U.S./Mexico border. Recalling the experience he said, “Seventy percent of me died when I crossed that border.” I asked Luis why he decided to leave if he felt so attached to the U.S. and he responded,

After I graduated high school, it just seemed like everywhere I turned it was like, ‘are you legal?’ and of course at this point I wasn’t legal – well, I’m still not legal. So...I decided that I should be in the country where I was legal, or could develop better... So I just figured I did not want to build a career in a place where I was always watching my back.

*~Luis, age 25*

After he graduated high school, Luis became very aware of his legal status. Although he helped coach high school soccer and, with the help of a recommendation from the head soccer coach at the high school, secured a good job as a coordinator for a youth soccer league, he knew that he did not belong legally. Luis did not see the value of earning a higher degree if he would not be able to capitalize on his education after graduation. Even though he felt integrated into his community, his lack of legal status began to feel oppressive. He described the painful decision to return to Mexico saying,

I felt American. I felt like I belonged, but there were documents that said that I wasn't American, so I decided to come and be (pause) what I am. I didn't have a chance to do what I wanted to do in the U.S. You know, I didn't have a chance to go in the military because I wasn't legal. I did not go to school because I didn't want to go to school for four years and then get out and find out I wasn't legal and there's no way to fix my legal status, and all the studying that I did was for nothing. So I decided that if I was going to go to university I would be better off here. ~Luis, age 25

Knowing that his chances for maximizing his human capital were limited in the U.S., Luis decided to move to Mexico because he wanted to continue his education and work toward an upwardly mobile career. Neither of Luis's parents had completed elementary school, but they had high aspirations for their son and they agreed that he should find a way to attend college. Although Luis had grown up in the U.S. since he was four, he had family connections in Mexico and most importantly, his parents were planning on returning. For him, moving to Mexico was an extremely emotional decision, but he was able to make the move knowing that his parents would eventually join him.

Once in Mexico, Luis enrolled in university and then graduate school. He became a lawyer for an American call center in Mexico City, where he used English every day. He maintained his ties to friends from his hometown via Facebook, continued to read his local North Carolina county newspaper regularly, and kept apprised of the immigration laws in North Carolina and the U.S. Although he had advanced socio-economically, he continued to have mixed emotions about his decision to return to Mexico. He said that his greatest dream was to return to Allen Creek to teach and coach soccer at the high school.

### *Exclusionary Existences: Shared Experiences of Undocumented Status*

One common theme repeated by all of the undocumented respondents who continued to live in the U.S. was their inability to plan for the future. The documented



youths I interviewed all spoke of various career paths that they hoped to pursue after high school, but the undocumented youths were often hesitant to make any statements about their future ambitions as they were clouded by uncertainty. Luis was so plagued by his inability to chart his life pathway in the U.S. that he returned to Mexico. For other undocumented youths who had grown up in the U.S., however, returning to an unfamiliar country of origin was not an option, particularly if they had no familial connections there. When I asked Eduardo (age 17), a recent high school graduate who had moved to the U.S. at the age of eight, what he thought he would be doing even one year from the date of the interview, he responded, “We can’t even be certain about what’s gonna happen in the next month!...Like me going to [community college], like that [policy] came up and we just had to deal with it. Look for alternatives.”

Unlike Eduardo, Luis could make plans while living in Mexico, but he knew that his greatest dream of returning to Allen Creek to teach high school was in the hands of the U.S. government. He recognized, however, that his home state of North Carolina was becoming increasingly inhospitable to undocumented immigrants. Fortunately, he felt at least moderately content with his life in Mexico. In many ways, he had done incredibly well for himself, rising out of poverty and capitalizing on his bilingualism to become a lawyer. His gain, however, represented a loss of a capable U.S. resident who was motivated to achieve and was very involved in his community. His achievements, moreover, came at a large emotional cost.

Although Luis had come to terms with his decision to return to Mexico, he and all of the other undocumented respondents in my sample frequently referred to the emotional hardships and frustrations associated with their legal status. When I asked Luis if he was

happy about his decision to return to Mexico he alluded to his ambivalence saying, “I mean, I’m happy, but I feel like half of me is missing. When I’m in the U.S., I feel like the other half of me is missing. So, I can never quite be happy having to decide between one place or the other.” Luis felt torn between two places. Because of his legal status, he could not live a transnational life, traveling back and forth between Mexico and the U.S. He chose to live in Mexico, but he yearned for his friends, his community, the culture, and the food he left in the U.S.

Echoing this sentiment of feeling trapped between two countries and not belonging in either, Eduardo said,

I would [like to stay in North Carolina] because that’s where I grew up...Even though we’re Mexican and Hispanic...we have nothing to do in our country ‘cause this country is the country that’s given us everything; food, shelter, education, everything. You don’t have anything there. It’s like, (motions with his hands spread wide apart) here’s your life, here’s where you born. You got nothing to do with Mexico...You have everything to stay, but you can’t stay here because you’re not legally here. You’re no one here. You’re just transparent. They don’t see you.  
~Eduardo, age 17

Far from feeling a sense of membership in either country, Eduardo described his own existence as “transparent.” He did not even feel recognized as a person. Extending what Coutin (2003) described as a legal “space of nonexistence,” both Luis and Eduardo alluded to a subtractive or negative space by saying that they felt like a part of themselves was “missing” or “transparent.” Eduardo felt invisible in the U.S., but he did not see a place for himself in his birth country of Mexico either.

Having grown up in the U.S., undocumented youths felt attached to their communities, and yet they were acutely aware of their legal exclusion. As a result of confronting legal barriers in the country where they felt at home and facing a feeling of

exile in a country that they could barely remember, undocumented youths who had grown up in the U.S. often felt nationless. Even in the supportive community of Allen Creek, undocumented immigrant youths felt frozen in time and space, with limited hopes for the future and without a sense of belonging.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Undocumented youths in this small community faced distinct opportunities and challenges than their urban peers. The findings of this study suggest that small town social capital and safe neighborhoods can help undocumented youths feel well-integrated in their communities and facilitate positive attitudes toward school. Even though the undocumented Latina/os in this community were distinctly aware of their legal status, most spoke very fondly of their town. Youths who had moved from urban areas in other states often spoke about the safety and peacefulness of Allen Creek, and one second generation youth who had experienced gang violence in his previous home of Los Angeles commented, “I like small towns. I feel safer. I feel like it’s a better environment to grow up in and actually get smart, you know? You can actually concentrate” (Vicente, age 17). Absent the pressures of urban violence, youths growing up in rural areas may have fewer pressures to downwardly assimilate into an underclass. Additionally, they may have more opportunities to forge beneficial relationships with adult advisors and mentors.

While reactive policies in the new destination state of North Carolina greatly hindered the opportunities for many undocumented adolescents, the small town environment also offered undocumented students opportunities to maneuver past

roadblocks. Since small town immigrants in this setting had more contact with people of various races, ethnicities and classes than many of their urban counterparts, who are often isolated in inner city ethnic enclaves, immigrant youths witnessed their friends and classmates take a variety of pathways out of high school. Teachers and coaches in this small town school knew their students by name and reputation, and often intervened to offer help and guidance. Valentina's involvement in LAC helped her find scholarship funds and her teachers offered her extensive guidance and even a supportive home which allowed her to focus on her studies. In the case of Eduardo, his Latino soccer coach used his connections to get him into a four year university with scholarship money after the application deadline. In the case of Diana, however, her small town connection to a generous benefactor did not help her circumvent the policy banning undocumented students from community college. Thus, while small town communities may be safer and more conducive to facilitating educational opportunities, supportive social networks are not always enough to combat reactive political climates at the state and federal levels.

Confronted with legal barriers that impeded their educational and occupational pursuits, undocumented immigrant youths struggled with feelings of severe frustration, anger, and depression. Despite his great fortune of attending a four year college on a scholarship, for example, Eduardo felt "transparent" and acutely insecure about his future in a country where he resided without legal status. When Diana spoke of getting kicked out of community college, she described feeling as though all of her dreams just "disappeared." Coming from a community with great social support and caring mentors, the youths in my sample showed incredible resilience when faced with federal and state policies that clearly marked them as outsiders. Still, even the most supportive

neighborhood could not shelter the youths from feelings of depression and isolation brought on by exclusionary immigration policies that shaped their life trajectories after high school.

The findings of this study suggest that as immigrants and their children continue to disperse into new destinations, including rural areas and small towns, incorporation theories need to adapt to these new areas. While segmented assimilation theory has painted a bleak picture of incorporation of children of lower-income Latina/o immigrants, the results of this study showed far more variation in the transition out of high school for children of Latina/o immigrants in this setting. Many students went onto institutions of higher education, while others got stalled in menial jobs because of their migration status. Even undocumented youths that were able to enroll in college, however, continued to struggle against legal barriers that became increasingly salient as they aged into adulthood.

Without comprehensive federal immigration reform, undocumented youths had to contend with unstable local and state policies. Bolstered by arguments for equal opportunity and economic benefits, many of the youths in this community and throughout the country anxiously awaited the outcome of the December 18, 2010 Senate vote on the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. When the DREAM Act failed to pass, undocumented youths received another crushing blow to their hopes of gaining legal membership in the U.S. Neither the Democratic nor Republican Senators from North Carolina voted to support the passage of the DREAM Act, and the lack of support on both sides of the political aisle opened the door for North Carolina state representatives to propose policies to legally ban undocumented youths

from North Carolina colleges and universities (NC HB 11). Closing the door to institutions of higher education could result in disastrous results for undocumented youths even in supportive communities such as Allen Creek. Without hope of attaining higher education, undocumented youths could become discouraged, rebellious and more likely to disrupt the learning environment throughout their high schools. Moreover, these students would be blocked from achieving their true potential.

Although federal policies affect the life chances of undocumented youths throughout the country, local policies and social environments differ dramatically from one place to another. Immigrants and their children are increasingly settling in non-traditional migrant destinations throughout the country. In order to better understand how second generation and immigrant youths become incorporated in new destinations, more studies should be conducted in non-traditional migrant destinations. In the absence of federal immigration reform, more research is needed to inform the mounting local policies and ordinances addressing immigrant populations in new destinations.

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **GENDERED REFLECTIONS: CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS NEGOTIATE THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD**

#### **ABSTRACT**

Theories of adolescent immigrant and second generation incorporation often gloss over distinctions in gendered pressures, expectations, and behaviors. This paper focuses on the distinct pressures facing male and female adolescents from Latin American immigrant families as they transition to adulthood in a small Southern town. Over a four-year period, I engaged in ethnographic field work in a high school and a community-based Latino Outreach Center. In addition, I conducted 78 in-depth interviews with a diverse group of young adults and a subset of adult key informants in the community. Findings from this study indicate that adolescents from immigrant families confront distinct gendered pressures both at home and at school. Although attitudes of teachers and immigrant parents in this community are similar to the reported attitudes of teachers and parents in urban studies, the small town atmosphere described here provides a unique social context which facilitates interactions with teachers, coaches and community adults. These interactions, in turn, allowed many of the youths I interviewed to overcome racial and gender stereotypes.

## INTRODUCTION

Some of the [Latina] girls got pregnant, and a few went back [to school] and still graduated with us but most of them just dropped out. And some of my [male] friends, I think they just decided to drop out and start working. It was kind of frustrating because some of them, they were only half a semester away from graduating and it wasn't like they were suffering on their grades. It was just um, money-wise, from their house I guess. ~*Julio, 21 year old Mexican-American male*

Julio's comments reflect the distinct gendered pressures facing male and female children of lower-income Latina/o immigrants in the small Southern town of Allen Creek. Many of Julio's Latina friends struggled to balance family and school. Conversely, his male Latino friends faced pressures to join the paid workforce and help contribute to their household economies.

Children of immigrants typically confront linked expectations and preconceptions of race, ethnicity and gender as they carve their pathways into adulthood in the United States. Previous studies have demonstrated how family pressures and discrimination can differentially influence male and female children of Latina/o immigrants in urban areas (Lopez 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 2005; Stanton-Salazar 2001; Smith 2002, 2006; Valenzuela 1999; Waters 1996). However, to my knowledge, no prior studies have explored the influence of rural and small town environments on the gendered expectations of adolescent children of immigrants. This paper contributes to the literature on adolescent immigrant incorporation by focusing on the distinct pressures facing male and female adolescents from Latin American immigrant families as they transition to adulthood in a small Southern town.

I collected my data between 2007 and 2011 in a small North Carolina town with a large Latin American immigrant population. Building on theories of social psychology, I

examine how youths respond to specific gendered expectations of their parents, peers, and teachers. I employ the concept of “social mirrors,” or the idea that individuals perceive how they are being viewed through the eyes of others around them (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001) to illustrate the social psychological influences on the incorporation of immigrant and second generation youths. Specifically, I examine how children of immigrants respond to various interlinked expectations of gender and ethnicity both at home and at school. I also explore the influences of the social and family networks in which children of immigrants are embedded as they transition to adulthood. Using participant-observation ethnography and in-depth interview methods, I examine how teachers, community members and parents place gendered expectations on the young Latina and Latino adolescents in the community.

My findings indicate that young 1.5 and second generation Latinas and Latinos face very different expectations from one another that have thus far been downplayed in much of the literature addressing immigrant and second generation youth (for notable exceptions see Lopez 2002, 2003; Smith 2002, 2006; Suárez-Orozco and Qin 2006; Waters 1996). While youths in my study face similar gendered pressures as their urban peers, the intimacy of the small town environment facilitates different opportunities for incorporation. The small school and community setting allows youths to more easily make connections to teachers. Teachers come to know the youths as individuals instead of grouping them together as one entity, resulting in more complex perceptions of gender and ethnicity at school. Thus, while Latina/o adolescents in this sample are aware of the dominant expectations about young Latina/os in the U.S. and at times note experiences

with discrimination, their close relationships with teachers, coaches and community members also provide them with more positive social mirrors.

The remainder of this paper is organized into four sections. I divide the literature review into subsections addressing adolescent immigrant and second generation incorporation, gendered stereotypes, and gendered expectations within the home and at school. Next, I describe my research design, research site, and study sample. Within my findings section, I examine the process of gendered incorporation by focusing on three themes that arose repeatedly in my ethnographic observations and interviews. First, I describe adolescents' perceptions of gendered and racialized social mirrors. Next, I focus on gendered experiences with extracurricular activities. Finally, I examine how Latina and Latino youths respond to distinct parental expectations about work and family as they transition into the early stages of adulthood. I conclude by discussing the benefits of small town connections to influential adults in allowing children of immigrants to overcome gender and ethnic stereotypes.

## **BACKGROUND LITERATURE**

### *Second Generation Incorporation and the Transition to Adulthood*

As high schools throughout the nation enroll ever larger numbers of students from immigrant families (Capps et al. 2005), their incorporation into U.S. society becomes an increasingly important matter of public concern. Segmented assimilation theory has dominated the academic discussion of incorporation for children of immigrants in urban areas, but there has been very little attention placed on youths in new destination areas. Segmented assimilation theory highlights the important influences of discrimination,



community context, and parental human capital in shaping the incorporation experiences of children of immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Rumbaut 2005). According to segmented assimilation theory, immigrants and their children may follow a variety of pathways of incorporation into their host societies depending on interwoven factors that facilitate either upward or downward mobility.

While Portes, Zhou and Rumbaut acknowledge avenues for upward mobility both through more traditional routes of straight line assimilation (Gordon 1964) as well as reliance on ethnic social networks and ties to the parental immigrant generation, they also highlight a dangerous trend of downward assimilation into a “rainbow underclass” of urban minorities (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Downward assimilation is particularly plausible, they argue, for lower-income Latino, and particularly Mexican, second and third generation immigrants who face racism, discrimination, and chaotic urban neighborhood environments.

According to the segmented assimilation theory, children of lower income immigrants often rebel against what they perceive to be hopeless surroundings by forming countercultures of resistance and rejecting both their parents’ hard working immigrant lifestyles as well as the institutions of school and mainstream labor markets. Instead of following pathways of intergenerational mobility characteristic of previous waves of immigrants, more recent research indicates that lower-income second and third generation immigrants, particularly of Mexican, Central American and Caribbean descent, are more likely to have lower GPAs, drop out of school, become involved in gangs, and be incarcerated than their Asian-origin immigrant or second generation peers

(Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Latina/os drop out of school at higher rates than other major ethnic and racial groups (Bean and Stevens 2003; Glick and White 2003; Perreira, Harris and Lee 2006; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 2005; Stanton-Salazar 2011; Valenzuela 1999), and segmented assimilation theory attempts to explain this ethnic disparity by pointing to unique challenges facing Latina/o youth. These challenges include discrimination, increasingly inhospitable labor markets, impoverished and dangerous urban neighborhoods, and limited human and social capital in their families. Proponents of the theory posit that many children of lower-income Latin American and Caribbean immigrants react to these challenges by rejecting school as a tool for upward mobility and forming an underclass with little hope for intergeneration mobility or advancement.

Although segmented assimilation theory does a good job of examining ethnic and national differences in incorporation patterns, it relies on research conducted exclusively in urban areas and minimizes important gender distinctions in the incorporation process. Absent the pressures of urban poverty and pervasive neighborhood violence, adolescent children of lower income Latina/o immigrants may be less likely to follow a path of “downward assimilation.” Small towns and rural areas have lower rates of violent crime and gang activity than poor urban areas (Weisheit, Falcone and Wells 1999; Weisheit and Wells 2004), and despite their frequent experiences with discrimination, immigrants often cite peacefulness and tranquility as reasons that they enjoy living in small rural communities (Fennelly 2008; Marrow 2011; Perreira et al. 2010; Saenz 2000; Zúñiga and Hernandez-Leon 2005). Small schools may engender closer student-teacher relationships, and students may be less likely to reject education or form countercultures of resistance

in these areas (Biddle and Berliner 2002; Finn and Achilles 1999; Greenwald, Hedges and Laine 1996; Smith and Glass 1979; Zahorik 1999). Clearly, community context has the potential to drastically impact the incorporation of immigrant and second generation youth.

### *Gendered Stereotypes*

Although segmented assimilation has largely defined the theoretical canon surrounding the incorporation of adolescents from immigrant families, critics point out that the theory applies primarily to males (Lutz and Crist 2009, Waldinger and Feliciano 2004). Females, critics argue, are less susceptible to delinquent behaviors because they experience stricter upbringings and less peer pressure to reject school or engage in risky behavior.

Researchers that examine intersecting pressures of gender, race, and ethnicity often frame their studies from the theoretical grounding of segmented assimilation theory and as a result focus primarily on males. Several studies of second generation immigrants, for example, find that second generation adolescent males, particularly of African, Latin American or Caribbean descent, are often perceived to be involved with gangs even when they are not (Lopez 2002, 2003; Mayeda et al. 2001; Waters 1996). Research argues that male adolescent children of immigrants face more discrimination and hostility in their daily lives than their female peers, and are therefore more likely to rebel against their teachers, the police, and other mainstream social institutions (Lopez 2002, 2003; Smith 2006). Interlinked perceptions of gender, ethnicity, and life stage place

male second generation and immigrant youths in a position where they are often perceived as physically threatening and problematic.

Responding to negative stereotypes, male children of immigrants may act out against the societal structures that are racializing and problematizing them. In much the same way that segmented assimilation theory points to discrimination as creating the conditions which foster counter cultures of resistance, Smith's discusses an "American rapper or Mexican pandillero" ideology that glorifies violence in his 2006 study of small town Mexican immigrants in New York City. Smith argues that this "rapper or pandillero" identity in some senses aligns with the masculine and dominant "ranchero" image of Mexican immigrant fathers, and offers young Mexican-American men a way of asserting dominance over a societal structure that has in many ways disenfranchised and excluded men of color from achieving societal respect through upward career mobility.

Certainly, the idea that individuals' behavior is shaped by the expectations of others is not a new idea. Pioneering social psychologists discussed concepts of the "looking glass self" (Cooley 1902) or the "generalized other" (Mead 1934) to explain that humans are socialized into behaving according to social norms as learned through interaction with others. Children, for example, learn how to behave according to normative expectations by acting out various roles in games and by responding to reactions to their behavior from adults and peers surrounding them. In their study of children of immigrants in Boston and San Francisco, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001), expand on these ideas by employing the concept of a "social mirror." The social mirror is essentially a composite message of all of the information about themselves or similar people that individuals are exposed to everyday at home, at school, in their

neighborhoods, and through the media. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco operationalize the concept of the social mirror by asking young adolescent and preteen children of immigrants to finish the sentence, “Most Americans think [people from the child’s country of origin] are \_\_\_\_\_,” and a full 65 percent of the sample responded with negative words, like “bad.” (p. 97). For Mexicans specifically, that number was even higher at 75 percent. They argue that children of immigrants are very aware of the context of reception and of the social mirror that the surrounding society is reflecting back at them.

The idea of a social mirror helps to theoretically explain why lower income children of Latino immigrants might form countercultures and downwardly assimilate, almost out of rebellion against a society that is rejecting them. Just as children of immigrants are aware of the dominant societal views regarding their ethnicity, they are also aware of social perceptions about their expected gendered behavior. Studies have demonstrated how discrimination toward second generation males has impeded their social mobility and alienated them from schools, but research about the discrimination faced by Latina children of immigrants is not as well developed.

Like black women who have historically been portrayed as family-oriented “mammies,” aggressive “matriarchs,” lazy “welfare-moms” or seductive and promiscuous “Jezebels” (Collins 1990), Latina women must also contend with stereotypes that generally place them into one of two categories: the selfless mother and caretaker or the sexy, seductive vixen (Alexander 2005, Chavez 2008, Niemann 2004). These images of Latina women date back to colonialism but extend today both in the U.S. and in Latin America. These two images have often been linked in the public

discourse resulting in the perception of Latina women as loose welfare queens (Lopez 2003: 32-34) or as breeders who are migrating to give birth to “anchor babies” (Chavez 2008). In other words, just as black women have had to contend with the interlinking systems of oppression within a dominant white, patriarchal culture, so too have Latina women.

### *Gendered Expectations at Home and at School*

Dominant stereotypes about Latina women can influence how teachers and administrators treat Latina students. In her examination of female high school students in California, for example, Julie Bettie finds that school administrators often attributed the flirting, heavy make-up, and what was perceived to be suggestive clothing by Latina students to cultural expressions of gender regardless of the fact that the vast majority of the Latina students were born and raised in the U.S. (Bettie 2000, 2003). In this sense, the young women were perceived as unassimilated and still foreign. Bettie also finds that despite high rates of sexual activity across all groups, Mexican-Americans were perceived by their white peers and some teachers as having looser sexual morals because they more often kept their babies when they got pregnant and could thereby make no claims of sexual purity. Although lower class white students were also perceived as being more sexually active than their middle class white peers, their whiteness was not perceived as a cause of their sexuality in the same way that Mexican heritage was perceived as the cause of loose sexual morals among the lower class Mexican-American students.

Although Latina women in school may be perceived as more sexually active than their white peers, Latin American immigrant parents often regard U.S. American culture as being more sexually permissive than their country of origin cultures, and they try to prevent their daughters from adopting U.S.-American attitudes about sex and relationships (Smith 2002, 2006; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001). Parental expectations for daughters among Latin American immigrants align with stereotypes for Latina women as nurturing mother figures who embody “marianismo,” or a family-oriented ideal of a pure and loving caretaker (Niemann 2004). Social expectations and perceptions of Latinas outside of the home, thereby, stood in stark contrast to the views that Latina/o immigrant parents held for their daughters.

Studies have shown that teachers would comment on the appearance and dress of Latina students even while also encouraging their academic pursuits (Lopez 2002, 2003). In her study of second generation Dominican students in a New York City public school, for example, Lopez (2002) found that teachers were more lenient with females than males as they allowed the women to wear hats as an expression of fashion, but did not offer young men this option despite a gender-neutral dress code barring hats for all students. While Lopez points to this leniency as a marker of a friendlier and more encouraging school environment for females than males, she does not acknowledge the over-emphasis placed on fashion for second generation Latina females. Thus while teachers and authority figures, other than parents, are generally more lenient with and less threatened by Latina than Latino youths, adolescent Latinas must also confront stereotypes specific to their ethnicity, class and gender. Young Latinas from immigrant families have to

overcome stereotypes of hyper-sexuality in order to be taken seriously as students and leaders within their schools.

Although the context of reception in public spaces and schools seems more hostile for males than for females, immigrant parents tend to be far stricter with their daughters than their sons (Lopez 2002, 2003; Smith 2002, 2006; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001; Waters 1996). While young male children of immigrants may have more freedom and independence in their home lives, studies have shown that they have less freedom in their urban schools where their behavior is strictly monitored and regulated (Lopez 2002, 2003). Perceived discrimination and hyper-monitoring from teachers, coupled with independence after school can make male children of immigrants vulnerable to negative peer pressure and gang affiliation in urban environments.

In contrast to their male peers, female children of immigrants are less likely to engage in risky or criminal behavior (Khoury et al. 1999; Rumbaut 2005) and are more likely to do better in school (Brandon 1991; Gibson 1988; Lopez 2002, 2003; Qin-Hilliard 2003; Suárez-Orozco 2001; Suárez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard 2006; Waters 1996). Research generally explains the gender gap in educational achievement by pointing to differential treatment of youth both at school and at home. Both Smith (2002, 2006) and Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) talk about “lockdown” or “shut-in” girls, who are essentially only allowed to leave their houses to go to school. Although the authors acknowledge familial tension that arises as a result of these strict rules, they generally point to positive outcomes of protective parenting. Because girls are inside the home helping with household chores, they argue, they are less likely to get into trouble and may have more time to focus on their schoolwork.



Smith's (2002, 2006) and Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco's (2001) findings are consistent with the findings from other studies that show daughters of immigrants exceeding their male counterparts academically (Lopez 2002, 2003; Waters 1996). In addition to the strict upbringings discussed by Smith, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, and Waters, other studies discuss how daughters of immigrants are more likely than their brothers to be socialized to be obedient (Waldinger and Feliciano 2004) and may feel less social pressure to rebel against their teachers (Lopez 2003; Smith 2002; Waters 1996). Because young women often find the school atmosphere more amenable to the way they were socialized, they may have an easier time achieving and meeting teachers' expectations. Although Lopez (2003) acknowledges that girls benefit from their relationships with teachers in school, she is careful to point out that the school system often oppresses girls by encouraging them to act "obedient," "ladylike," and "silent" (p. 54). Still, unlike the young men who develop negative feelings about school as a result of discouragement and zero tolerance policies toward prohibited behavior, young women maintain positive associations with the benefits of education.

In many ways, previous research indicates that school environments for young women compliment the protective practices of immigrant parents. Young women are rewarded for obedient behavior with good grades (Lopez 2003; Waters 1996) and are better able to fulfill their end of the "immigrant bargain" (Smith 2006) by succeeding in school and rewarding their parents for the sacrifices they have made. Urban studies have shown that young women have better educational outcomes than their male counterparts due to parents' stricter monitoring and regulations (Brandon 1991; Gibson 1988; Lopez 2002, 2003; Qin-Hilliard 2003; Smith 2002; Suárez-Orozco 2001; Suárez-Orozco and

Qin-Hilliard 2006; Valenzuela 1999; Waters 1996). In rural areas and small towns where neighborhood violence is uncommon, protective parenting practices for young women may not be as beneficial. If young women are expected to always be in the home, they may be missing out on valuable opportunities to stay after school for tutoring or extracurricular activities.

In contrast to the treatment of young Latina and Caribbean women in school, urban school policies toward young men tend to border on policing expected criminal behavior (Lopez 2002, 2003; Waters 1996) instead of allowing them the freedom and independence that they have become accustomed to in their home lives. Males face pervasive discrimination and are often perceived as threats, problems and potential gang members both in school and in public spaces. In dangerous urban neighborhoods, discrimination coupled with low levels of parental monitoring outside of schools has resulted in risky circumstances for sons of lower income of Latino immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Lopez 2002, 2003; Smith 2002, 2006). However, in small towns where schools operate less like prisons and gang culture is not as pervasive, male children of immigrants may be less likely to form oppositional identities.

## **RESEARCH SITE, RESEARCH DESIGN AND STUDY SAMPLE**

### *Research Site*

In order to examine how familial interactions and immigrant and second generation incorporation differed by gender, I relied on data collected from a four-year ethnographic study of youth transitioning out of high school in Allen Creek, a small rural North Carolina town with a large immigrant population. During the 1990s Allen Creek

underwent a substantial demographic shift when Latina/o immigrants moved from other states and countries to seek employment in textile and food manufacturing plants in the area (Griffith 2008; Kandel and Parrado 2005; Kochhar, Suro and Tafoya, 2005; Mohl 2003). Prior to 1990, Allen Creek's residents were primarily white and black. Since 1990, the population of Allen Creek has grown from approximately 5,000 to 8,000 residents, and over half of the population is Latina/o.

According to 2009 American Community Survey estimates, Allen Creek had a median household income of about \$30,000, which was much lower than the national median household income of \$51,425 as well as the North Carolina state median income of \$45,069. Approximately 21 percent of Allen Creek's families lived below the poverty line and about half of the population had a high school degree or higher. About 40 percent of the residents of Allen Creek were foreign born (American Fact Finder 2005-2009).

The town of Allen Creek is located in a rural county with over 1000 farms producing livestock and poultry. Despite being located in a rural county, Allen Creek has an industrial base including a poultry plant and nearby textile manufacturing plants and timber companies. The majority of the parents of the Latina/o youths that I interviewed worked in one of those three sectors at least initially upon moving to Allen Creek. There is one hospital in the county and a few smaller medical clinics. Most of the town's teenagers find work in fast food restaurants, grocery stores, on family farms, in manufacturing plants, or in local mechanic shops. The public high school in Allen Creek is a minority-majority school with its approximately 800 students being split among Latina/o, black, and white students. At 41 percent, Latino students are the largest

demographic group in the high school, but both white and black students make up sizeable minorities at about 34 and 25 percent, respectively.

### *Research Design and Sample*

I used ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews to elucidate the processes through which male and female children of immigrants experienced distinct gendered pressures. By speaking with youths about their experiences with relationships, educational pursuits, and after school activities, I examined how young 1.5 and second generation women and men responded to both their parents' expectations as well as the pressures of their peers and teachers. In-depth narratives and longitudinal participant observation were ideal for capturing the intimate details, feelings, and thought processes that youths grappled with as they transitioned into adulthood.

The interview sample included 38 Latina/o youths, 11 black youths and 13 white youths who were between the ages of 16 and 25 at the time of the interview. There were thirty-two women and twenty-nine men in the young adult sample. Although the primary focus of the study was on the youth from immigrant families, I relied on the non-Latina/o respondents to provide comparative perspectives and help parse out immigrant specific experiences from experiences that were common among all youth in the community. Additionally, I also interviewed five high school teachers, the vice principal, the high school college advisor, three parents, the high school soccer coach, one former county commissioner, two school board members involved with the Migrant Education Program, and the youth coordinator and the current and former directors of the Latino Outreach

Center. I conducted all but two of the interviews in English, and the interviewees always chose the location of the interview.

In addition to the formal in-depth interviews, I also engaged in participant observation within the community. During the study period of April 2007-June 2011, I interacted with the community in various capacities. I tutored AVID classes at the high school, I went to high school soccer games, played in pick up soccer games, taught salsa lessons to teenagers, and volunteered at the local Latino Outreach Center. By engaging in various activities in the community and the school, I was able to access a diverse sample and gain participant trust. Because of the small size of the community, most of my respondents knew each other, but they were not all friends and did not necessarily engage with each other socially outside of school.

My ethnographic fieldwork in various sites afforded me much greater insight into the community than if I had relied exclusively on in-depth interviews. Through my work in the school, I gained a greater understanding of how youths interacted with each other and with their teachers both during and in between classes. Through my work at the Latino Outreach Center, I witnessed Latina/o youths unite in a group that fostered community solidarity and community outreach. I also witnessed the legal complications that many Latina/os living in Allen Creek faced on a daily basis. For example, the mundane task of filling out applications for birth certificate corrections or passport applications for children became complicated legal struggles for Latina/o parents when one parent lived outside the U.S. and the other was undocumented. Undocumented immigrants would face fears of deportation when they came into the center to speak with police officers via translators about citations for driving without a license. My work in

the Latino Outreach Center also allowed me a more intimate view of the extreme poverty faced by many in the town who came in to get referrals for nearby food banks. While the majority of the Latino Outreach Center clients were Latina/o, white and black adults and families also came in seeking advice or help demonstrating that the outreach center was beneficial to all of the residents in the community.

I contextualized my interview data with field notes to ensure that I was getting an accurate representation of the community of Allen Creek, and I coded my field notes and interviews according to emergent themes that arose repeatedly. I formed my thematic coding schema both inductively and deductively. I allowed my observations to guide my inquiries while simultaneously analyzing my data within the context of previous research on second generation incorporation. When discussing perceptions of stereotypes and expectations of behaviors, for example, I coded the passages from my interviews as “social mirror-ethnicity,” “social mirror-gender,” and “social mirror-gender and ethnicity.” I then grouped the gendered social mirror codes with other discussions of gendered experiences under the “integrated memo” (Emerson et al. 1995) of “gender role expectations.” Due to my long term engagement with the community, I was able to follow the trajectories of the research participants as they graduated from high school and transitioned to the next phase of their lives. Post-secondary education transitions included higher education, employment, starting their own family or some combination of the three. My longitudinal and multifaceted engagement with the community allowed me more than a snapshot view of Allen Creek. I witnessed my research participants make life choices in real time. Their challenges included changing educational aspirations

and/or career plans, pressures from romantic partners, legal realities of being undocumented, and exposure to new opportunities through college.

## **FINDINGS**

As children of immigrants negotiated gender both at home and at school, they struggled with issues of discrimination, stereotyping and cultural conflict. Below, I illustrate how the small town atmosphere in Allen Creek influenced young Latinas and Latinos. While the youth in this community faced many of the same parental pressures and ethnic and gender stereotypes as their urban counterparts, the small town atmosphere shaped their experiences in very different ways.

Below I examine how the youths in my sample responded to gendered expectations both at home and at school. Looking into the social mirrors reflecting back at them from their parents, teachers and peers, young Latina/os understood how the surrounding society expected them to behave. As these expectations were culturally coded, however, they were forced to internalize multiple and often conflicting messages. The youths responded in a variety of ways depending on the social networks surrounding them. I organize my findings first by exploring Latina/o adolescent experiences with perceived discrimination and social mirroring. Next, I examine how participation in extracurricular activities differed by gender. Finally, I discuss how gendered pressures influenced the trajectories out of high school for children of immigrants in Allen Creek.

*Social Mirrors and Gendered Perceptions in the High School Context*

Responding to academic literature stating that young Latino males are often seen as thugs or gang members, I asked the youths in Allen Creek to describe their perceptions of school or community-based discrimination. Eduardo, a seventeen year old immigrant from Mexico responded,

I think that stereotypes are going away...It's still there but it's starting to fade. Especially because they're starting to look at people individually, not as a whole group. 'Cause like at school when they see me, like the coaches and teachers, they know that we're good kids. Then they see the kids with the saggy pants and stuff and they're more strict toward them.

*~Eduardo, 17 year old Mexican immigrant*

Eduardo alluded to a particular gendered and racialized stereotype of a thug with baggy pants, but he also talked about a recognition of different cliques in the high school, and he referred to his social group as the “good kids.” By talking about the good kids, he implicitly recognized another existing stereotype of the polite, cooperative, hardworking immigrant youth. Although, the racialized gang-affiliated stereotype existed in this community and he was aware of this stereotype, it seemed it was not the only social mirror available to male children of immigrants here. Other males made similar observations, pointing out and separating themselves from Latino youths whom they called the “wannabes,” due to their proclaimed affiliation with gangs. They felt that teachers and coaches differentiated between the Latino youths who started fights or cut class and the Latino youths who did not, regardless of whether or not their friendship ties overlapped. Thus, while Latino youths were aware of a societal stereotype painting them as underachieving, violent youths, they did not necessarily feel this stereotype being reflected onto them at the local level.



Female children of immigrants also alluded to specific racial and gendered stereotypes that they perceived in their school. While students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds commented that teachers became more frustrated with males in the classroom due to their more frequent talking or joking, female students also spoke about dress code distinctions that were only enforced for girls. When I asked Sofia, an 18 year old second generation child of Peruvian immigrants, if she felt that teachers treated the female and male students differently, she responded,

Oh yes. I've seen where some white girls will be wearing shorts, and they're very short, but when you have a Latina wearing them, oh they have to change their shorts because they have more curves, so they look tighter on her. But on the white girls, they look normal. And the black girls, they have that same sort of thing as the Latinas.

*~ Sofia, 18 year old Peruvian-American*

Although I asked Sofia only about distinctions surrounding the treatment of students of different genders, she responded immediately by talking about distinct treatment of female students of different races and ethnicities. She clearly perceived intersecting stereotypes of gender and ethnicity, and recognized this “intersectionality” (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1989) in the treatment of female students of color by the teachers and staff at the school. An African American student echoed these sentiments, stating that one of her teachers made flirtatious comments alluding to her dark “chocolate” skin tone at a dance.

Teachers also invoked particular gendered and racial stereotypes when discussing their interactions with students. Echoing comments made by Sofia above, one teacher, Mr. Walter, responded to my question asking about differences between the young Latina women and young Latino men by saying,

There's a lot of promiscuity, and a lot of times the girls are the aggressors. I mean, I look out the window, and I've seen some god awful displays, and it's the girls going after the boys. (pause) I do think that the girls seem to be a little bit better students than the boys though. They tend to mature faster... But Allen Creek is still old fashioned, so a lot of teachers try to help provide that extra structure that a lot of the kids have to have... I mean, if a girl comes in and she looks like a tramp, I pull them aside and say, you realize that you're demeaning yourself. And a lot of the female staff will do that, and I don't know they'd get that in another school. So you have an opportunity to say something, so I think that's a benefit to some of them. And they like it, I mean, a lot of them like it.

*~Mr. Walter, white teacher*

Mr. Walter alluded to a few stereotypes of girls commonly discussed in academic literature about children of immigrants. He talked about girls being better students than boys, but he also talked about the hypersexuality of his female students. He differed from teachers in Julie Bettie's (2003) study in that he wasn't dismissive of the students because of their foreign culture. Instead he saw it as his duty to stand in as an alternate parent to monitor not only the academic work, but also the social behavior of his students. His concern about female students' attire was clearly connected to their expressions of sexuality, which he found inappropriate for both their age and the school setting.

In sum, both teachers and students alluded to frequently cited stereotypes of Latino adolescents being thugs, problems or gang members. Latina adolescents were perceived as more cooperative students than their male counterparts, but also more sexual than their white peers. Students were aware of stereotypes about Latina/os and felt that their teachers viewed some of their peers through these stereotypical images, but they were also cognizant of the more individualized treatment from their teachers and administrators at school.

### *Extracurricular activities and the gender divide*

Immigrant parents' expectations for sons and daughters were far more defined than the gender expectations expressed by Allen Creek High School teachers. While immigrant parents had similar expectations for their sons and daughters during school hours, after the bell rang the social worlds of male and female children of immigrants were often completely different. A prevalent theme in the previous literature is the idea of girls being "shut-in" or on "lockdown" (Smith 2006, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001). While the aforementioned research was conducted in urban areas rife with gangs, drugs and violence, daughters of immigrants in Allen Creek also spoke of their parents wanting them at home, while commenting that expectations differed for their brothers.

Prior studies of children of immigrants indicate that girls often do better in school than their male counterparts because they are less likely to engage in at-risk behavior. However, my findings suggest that strict upbringings may negatively influence daughters of immigrants by limiting opportunities to develop skills in leadership or engage in activities that would augment their human capital. Yareli, a 19 year old Guatemalan immigrant and recent high school graduate struggled to appease both her mother, who wanted her to come home immediately after school, and her teachers and mentors, who encouraged her to participate in after school activities such as student government and the local Hispanic youth organization. Yareli explained that her mother did not understand her motivations for wanting to stay behind after classes. She said,

I would say, 'mom I have to stay after school for tutoring or to take part in a club,' and my mom wouldn't understand what that meant, and so she would get mad at me because she would say that I would be out of the house 'just to' but I wasn't out of the house 'just to', it was because it was important to me...Now my sister is in student government and she needs to

stay, but [my mom] understands it better now since I did that too.  
~Yareli, 19 year old Guatemalan immigrant

Like Yareli, Cristina, an 18 year old second generation Mexican-American, discussed the fights that she used to have with her mother about playing soccer. She said,

My mom has the mindset of, you're a girl, you're staying home and you're cooking, cleaning and doing what you're supposed to be doing. And if I did something wrong, she would always threaten me, 'You're not going to play anymore!' So she would really find anything to tell me I couldn't play anymore, but I kept playing. And I would cry because I would get so mad.  
~Cristina, 18 year old Mexican-American

Of course, U.S.-American parents can also have different expectations and rules for their sons and daughters, but only the Latina children of immigrants talked about regular after school activities causing familial tension. Additionally, parents, coaches, and community leaders confirmed this message. Immigrant mothers told me that they worried about their daughters getting hurt while playing sports. The soccer coach talked about the difficulties he had with immigrant parents not allowing their daughters to attend practices. And the youth coordinator at the Latino Outreach Center disclosed that one father yelled at her for keeping his daughter away from their home too much.

Although many young women struggled to explain their afterschool activities to their immigrant parents, other parents encouraged their children to participate in afterschool activities once they realized the potential benefits. Luz, a U.S.-born daughter of Salvadoran immigrants, joined the Latino Achievement Club in her school and often stayed after school for mentoring and participated in weekend events. The club, designed to inform Latina/os about higher education, opened Luz's eyes to the possibility of four year college. Although her parents were initially displeased that Luz was spending so

much time out of the house she explained that they eventually acquiesced to the idea saying,

I think my mom was always supportive because she thought that it was school related, but my father wasn't. Well, I shouldn't say that. My mom had to be convinced. I think that the Latino Achievement Club helped instill that in her and explain that to her. My mom would have to explain to my dad that I was staying after school for academic reasons and not to be with my boyfriend, and it wasn't easy because none of my siblings had ever stayed. I should say that my dad wasn't just worried for no reason. He was really hard on us and both of my sisters semi-ran away with their boyfriends, but then they came back home.  
~Luz, 21 year old Salvadoran-American

With the support of her mother, eventually her father, and the Latino Achievement Club, Luz applied to a very prestigious four year university and received a full scholarship. She credits her achievement to the academic rigor instilled in her by her father, and the support of her mother and the Latino Achievement Club. She acknowledges, however, that her parents needed to be convinced of the value of after-school activities in propelling her toward college. Knowing that her mother worked so hard to support her, she saw it as her duty to achieve and find stable employment. Once in college, new ideas and classes further awakened her academic curiosity. Luz moved beyond the "immigrant bargain" (Smith 2006) by finding motivation to achieve not only to repay her parents for their sacrifices, but for herself as well.

Unlike like the young women, whose after school activities often led to household arguments, none of the boys in the sample mentioned tension arising from school-sanctioned after school activities. In fact, one respondent, an 18 year old Mexican immigrant, described how his father spoke enthusiastically about his soccer-playing cousins, and in order to gain this recognition from his father, he started playing soccer as well. Many of the teenage boys I interviewed also spoke about going out to Latino night

clubs in neighboring communities even when they were in high school. For male children of immigrants, being out of the house did not cause familial tension in the same way that it did for female children of immigrants.

Even when young Latinos engaged in what has been labeled “at-risk” behavior in previous literature about assimilation (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, Greenman and Xie 2008), their behavior did not necessarily lead to conflicts with parents. In describing how many of his classmates would drink and stay out all night, Eduardo, a seventeen year old Mexican immigrant, said that oftentimes parents would not get mad but would instead feel proud. He said, “[Their dads would be] like, ‘that’s my son.’ He starts drinking, ‘Yeah, I’m proud of him. He’s my son. He can drink with me now – he’s a man.’” Of course, many immigrant parents would be angry about their children drinking underage or staying out all night, and two of the mothers of youths in my sample even moved their children to Allen Creek largely because their sons were getting involved with gangs in Chicago. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of parental reactions to male and female behavior indicates a very strong division between the expectations for sons and daughters of immigrants in Allen Creek.

While in high school, male children from immigrant families are often granted more freedom than their female counterparts. As a result, 1.5 and second generation males may be more vulnerable to connecting with peer groups that encourage delinquent or risky behavior, but they may also have more freedom to engage in beneficial activities that help them gain connections to influential adults and build valuable life skill sets. In contrast, females may be more protected from the temptations of risky behavior and

negative peer pressure, but they may also miss out on opportunities to expand their resumes and make important connections to teachers and coaches.

*Moving beyond high school and choosing between work, family, and college*

Decisions made in high school may have the power to influence life trajectories into adulthood. For instance, deciding to move in with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or to choose work over college may well redirect an individual's life plan. Children of immigrants made these decisions as they tried to reconcile their parents' expectations with input from teachers, peers, and significant others. Often they felt confused, depressed, and pulled in various directions by key people in their lives.

For Latina children of immigrants, dating was an issue that led to fights with parents. While this may not sound distinct from the arguments between mothers and teenage daughters of all races and ethnicities, for female children of immigrants, finding a boyfriend was often tantamount to giving up on their end of what Smith (2006) calls the "immigrant bargain." According to this bargain, children do well in school and go on to become upwardly mobile as a way of repaying their parents for all their sacrifices. While enforcing strict rules on daughters can often result in female children of immigrants succeeding in school (Smith 2002, 2006; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001), it can also backfire if the girls rebel against their parents. Importantly, not one of the male children of immigrants commented on familial conflict arising as a result of romantic relationships. Male children of immigrants were given much more independence to date and be out of the house than were their female counterparts. Female children of immigrants in Allen Creek, however, did not understand their parents' strict monitoring

given the safety of their small community. For them, boyfriends often signified a pathway to freedom and independence.

Emily, a 20 year old second generation Mexican-American described her conflicts with her parents and subsequent decision to move in with her boyfriend at the age of eighteen by saying,

I was practically the mom of my sisters. I was not able to go nowhere at all. Not even if I went with my friend's mom. I was not able to go out at all...I couldn't have a boyfriend... My dad is machista. That's the kind of person he is...I moved out to get rid of my parents. But now, I want to get rid of my boyfriend. It was a mistake moving out because I moved out from a place that I was pressured to a place where I'm pressured. He's the same way as my dad is. ~Emily, 20 year old Mexican-American

Emily regretted her decision to leave her parents, but could not go back home because she had a baby and lived with her boyfriend. Although she had recently started part time in a retail job, she remained financially dependent on her boyfriend. She maintained her ambitions of going to college to become a nurse, but she was unsure how she would balance the demands of work, school, motherhood, and a relationship. She hoped to resume school at least part time, but had not yet enrolled.

By identifying her father and boyfriend as "machista," Emily implied a distinct fissure between her idea of appropriate gendered behavior and what she perceived as the unassimilated and oppressive performance of male dominance by her father and her boyfriend. While she did not fault her mother as much, she commented that her mother never stood up for her. Nor did her mother ever, according to Emily, contradict her father. In describing the interactions that she had with her parents and the interactions that her parents had with each other, she distinctly separated herself from them. In her efforts to escape her parents, however, she entered into a parallel situation with her



boyfriend. As a young mother, furthermore, she had trouble envisioning a pathway out of her relationship.

Similar to Emily, Gabriela, an 18 year old 1.5 generation undocumented immigrant moved out of her house as a teenager in order to pursue a relationship. In retaliation to what she saw as her parents unfair regulations over her dating life, Gabriela moved out of her house when she was 17 years old so that she could continue to date her boyfriend. She described her decision to leave saying,

Well my parents didn't want guys in my life because they were like, 'the path you want to take is school. You want a career.' And I mean, they put it straight forward for me, they were like, 'You know, the Hispanic culture is not like that. You know, women do not go off and get studies and once they fall in love. That's the end for them.' And so I was like, okay, whatever. And that's what ended up happening, but I never believed it.  
~Gabriela, 18 year old Mexican immigrant

Gabriela often fought with her parents because she was out of the house so frequently. Before moving in with her boyfriend, Gabriela was the president of her class, captain of her soccer team, very active in the youth program at the Latino Outreach Center, and involved in several high school clubs. Her boyfriend, however, was the primary source of conflict between Gabriela and her parents.

Once Gabriela decided she could no longer handle fighting with her parents, she moved in with her boyfriend. Almost immediately, she gave up on most of her extracurricular activities in order to make time to cook for her boyfriend and care for their house. Although she still applied to college, and received a full four year scholarship as an international student, she chose to stay home with her boyfriend instead. She felt pressure from her boyfriend to play the role of the supportive and nurturing wife, in alignment with cultural stereotypes of *marianismo* (Niemann 2004). Moreover, having

moved out of her parents' house and into a home with her boyfriend, Gabriela's parents considered her married and encouraged her to make her relationship work. When she discussed her decision to give up her scholarship, she vacillated between expressing extreme regret and pride at her decision to stand alongside her boyfriend.

While Gabriela thought that she would be able to maintain her own ambitions while at the same time engaging in her relationship, she was not able to achieve that balance. She justified her decision to forgo college by pointing to her boyfriend's loyalty and support, but also acknowledged that she had given up everything to be with him. She was working in a textiles factory, and while she still hoped to attend college, she had not made any plans to do so.

Although Gabriela's decision to forgo her college scholarship was heartbreaking to many of her peers and mentors, she was not unlike other teenagers who have made mistakes on the road to adulthood. Research indicates that young adults of fewer resources tend to face harsher consequences for their actions than individuals of higher socioeconomic statuses (SES). In fact, higher SES individuals are given more opportunities to make mistakes and correct their pathways (Hays 2003: 198-200). Gabriela's socioeconomic and legal status confounded the impact of her decision to give up on college. Because Gabriela was undocumented, her scholarship options were extremely limited and her family could not afford to pay her tuition. Although Gabriela may eventually go to college, her migration status will make it much harder for her to fulfill her earlier ambitions.

While Gabriela severed her connections to many of her mentors, other children of immigrants capitalized on their connections to teachers and coaches as they struggled to

achieve academic success without the guidance of their parents. Like her peers, Patricia, an 18 year old immigrant from Honduras with a temporary protected status (TPS) visa, fought with her parents because she wanted to spend increasing amounts of time out of the house playing soccer and spending time with her boyfriend. She had ambitions of attending college, but her parents were unable to help guide her through the application process. She also struggled to obtain admission to college because four year schools were not granting her in-state tuition, and at the time of her application, two years schools in North Carolina were not admitting undocumented immigrants. Despite her TPS visa, community colleges viewed Patricia as undocumented. Patricia told me it was hard to continue to fight her way into college without the help of her parents. She explained,

[My parents] are people that think that a high school diploma, they're just happy with that. But not me. I know I have more chances of going higher and getting post secondary education. I think [my dad's] happy, and my mom is just expecting me not to continue studying. [She's expecting me to] maybe work and get married soon. So, that's what they're expecting.  
~Patricia, 18 year old Honduran immigrant

Even though Patricia's parents were unable to guide her into higher education, she managed to get into school with a great deal of help and much personal effort. With the help of her teachers, as well as a soccer coach who helped her find a lawyer, she managed to enroll in community college. She also got married at the age of 19, but she continued to take classes toward a degree in nursing. Patricia was one of the few young women in my sample who managed to balance a relationship with her educational goals. Because she had the support of her teachers and coaches, and perhaps most importantly her partner, she was able to overcome substantial legal and bureaucratic obstacles and find a way to access higher education.

While many immigrant parents encouraged their children to attend college, other parents pressured their children to go to work instead of pursuing higher education. Young men, in particular, often struggled with decisions of pursuing higher education or seeking work that would allow them to contribute to the household economy. In my sample, 1.5 and second generation males had a wide variety of interactions with their parents around the subject of work. Indeed, youths of both genders spoke about feeling encouragement from their parents to pursue higher education, and I witnessed many of my participants go on to attend college and bring much pride to their parents. In this sense, these interactions were consistent with Smith's idea of the "immigrant bargain" for both genders. In other cases, however, second generation and particularly undocumented 1.5 generation immigrants commented on parental pressures to not waste their time on higher education.

For males especially, some parents valued the immediate financial reward from work over the uncertain and delayed pay-off of college. Julio, a 22 year old Mexican-American, described his decision to forgo higher education saying,

My mom never pushed me to go. Not even to community college. So I always grew up with the idea of find a job, find a decent job in a factory or whatever, and do time in there so you can have seniority and later on get benefits so you can have a raise. And that was the only thing in the back of my mind. I started getting into debt with like buying a car just to go to work. I couldn't afford to go to school and even if I wanted to go to school, I still have to wait at least another year just so that I can get out of debt with like the new car and the credit cards that you get and everything. And that's just community college because I know I can't afford to just leave my job and go to a four year school. ~Julio, 22 year old Mexican-American

Unlike Emily and Gabriela, who were working for very low wages in retail and manufacturing industries, Julio was making a decent living in commercial plumbing.

When work was consistent, Julio was satisfied with his income, but the recession forced

him to take on side jobs and he often complained about the backbreaking manual labor. He maintained his dreams to go to school and become trained in law enforcement, but, at the time of this study, had not yet enrolled in school.

While Julio suffered as the oldest child of a mother who lacked the cultural capital to help her son apply to college, he later encouraged his younger brothers and sisters to go to college and even helped support them financially once they enrolled. Julio was proud that he at least managed to graduate from high school as he was one of only a handful of Latino students in his grade to do so. Julio spoke of watching his friends drop out of school saying,

Your parents start talking to you about dropping out, you know, really close to graduation day - a semester left - half a semester - and it's like, why are you going to bother to graduate? Why don't you go out and work? Why not start right now? ~*Julio, 22 year old Mexican-American*

While pressure to contribute to the household economy is not a story unique to immigrant families, it does play into an immigrant story of machismo and what Smith (2006) called the “ranchero” identity of the hardworking male provider. In comparing his own decision to go onto college instead of working like his friends, Eduardo, a seventeen year old 1.5 generation Mexican immigrant said,

In Hispanic culture, Gustavo is better than me because I'm going to college and he's already working and making money. They don't see beyond that. But after four years, I'm gonna be making way more money than he is. ~*Eduardo, 17 year old Mexican immigrant*

Although Eduardo's parents supported his decision to go to college and specifically encouraged him to focus on his studies and soccer instead of working while in high school, Eduardo was able to pick up on what he felt was the larger cultural context of the immigrant community in Allen Creek. He internalized the “ranchero” cultural script and

moved away from it because he had the support of his parents. Gustavo, however, pleased his own father by working immediately after high school, but he expressed extreme sadness that, unlike Eduardo, he was unable to pursue his dream of going to college.

The distinct experiences of Eduardo and Gustavo illustrate the variability in the gendered pressures on Latino youths. Eduardo's awareness of the preferred or expected path out of high school, however, reflected his own understanding of a cultural social mirror. With the support of his parents, he followed the path into college that his U.S. teachers encouraged him to pursue. He struggled, however, in negotiating the larger cultural expectations to work that he perceived from his surrounding co-ethnic community.

Children of lower income immigrants often felt pressure to help contribute to the household economy. While this pressure did not fall exclusively on the sons of the family, more males than females spoke about feeling pressure to work. In contrast, more females discussed pressure to help in the home with younger siblings or domestic duties. Although success in education and socioeconomic mobility are theoretical ideals for both genders, there are distinct barriers to educational attainment for young Latinas and Latinos. For men, machismo, economic need, and cultural pressures to provide household income can supersede educational ambitions. For women, marianismo and cultural pressures to nurture romantic relationships can impede educational aspirations. Previous research has shown gender roles to be more defined in small and less developed communities of origin (Smith 2006). Like in other new rural immigrant destinations (Marrow 2011; Torres, Popke, Hapke 2006), many of the immigrants in Allen Creek had

migrated from small rural towns in their countries of origin where more traditional gender roles remained normative. Although some youths in Allen Creek were able to overcome cultural expectations for gender roles, others were not.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Youths from immigrant families navigated through bicultural messages about gender as they moved between the worlds of their immigrant parents and their U.S. high school. Because children of immigrants interacted so closely with teachers and other community members in Allen Creek, both male and female children of immigrants felt recognized as individuals and were often able to overcome interlinked stereotypes of gender and culture. Urban studies have shown that young men of color are often viewed as social problems and potential gang members (Lopez 2002, 2003; Mayeda et al. 2001; Waters 1996). In this small community, however, young male children of immigrants were not only perceived through this lens. Males were aware of the “thug” or “gang member” stereotype, but they also noted a social mirror of immigrant and second generation youths as polite and hard working. Similar to findings from urban studies, many female children of immigrants acknowledged that they were considered better students or received more attention from teachers, but they also spoke of a perception of promiscuity and sexuality. Nursing was by far the most often stated career goal of the female children of immigrants in my sample, which could be reflective of a stereotype of the nurturing, maternal Latina. It could also reflect a strong high school track of health professionals which exposed students to work in area nursing homes. While the social mirrors discussed in urban environments existed in this small community, my findings

indicate that the small town atmosphere contributed to a context in which these were not the only views reflecting back at the youth in this community.

Parental expectations for youths were similar to and perhaps even more pronounced than the gendered expectations described in previous urban studies (Smith 2002, 2006; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001). Because the majority of the immigrants in Allen Creek had very little formal education and many had migrated from rural and small towns in their countries of origin, many parents maintained strong gender roles that they imposed upon their children. Moreover, approximately 75 percent of the Latina/o community of Allen Creek was foreign-born according to 2005-2009 American Community Survey estimates. Thus, both parental and co-ethnic peer networks retained strong and recent cultural ties to origin communities.

Immigrant parents generally allowed sons more independence than daughters. While the freedom given to 1.5 and second generation males made them more vulnerable to at-risk behavior such as drinking, drug use, and interactions with delinquent peer groups, it also afforded them more opportunities to become involved in positive activities. Because they were not expected to return home immediately after school, adolescent boys from immigrant families were able to participate in extracurricular activities that made them more attractive to potential employers or colleges.

Parents were much stricter with daughters, who were generally expected to return home immediately after school. Although some 1.5 and second generation girls responded to their strict upbringings by focusing on school, others complained about missing opportunities to expand their interests and skills through extracurricular activities. Particularly in this small town community where connections to influential



adult advisors were so commonplace, sequestering girls inside the home at times impeded opportunities for gaining human capital through after school activities and engagement in clubs and sports. In my interviews with white and black females in Allen Creek, they would describe occasional conflicts with their parents about dating, but they did not fight with their parents about engaging in afterschool activities. Moving in with a boyfriend, thereby, was not a commonly used strategy for white or black females to gain independence from parents.

As the Latina/o youths in Allen Creek carved their pathways to adulthood, they had to choose what to keep from their heritage cultures and what to adopt from their U.S. surroundings. Of course, much of the incorporation process did not reflect choice so much as it reflected a natural adaptation that occurred as students spoke English and engaged with their peers in their U.S. high school. The concept of choice, however, became more applicable when discussing specific rules or requests that either had to be followed or defied.

Female children of immigrants in Allen Creek sometimes succeeded in convincing their parents of the value of after school activities. In these cases, the young women used their extracurricular activities and connections to teachers or mentors to gain entrance into higher education or get significant help in terms of graduating or seeking work. In less successful scenarios, young women rebelled against their parents and escaped into romantic relationships that put them at risk of giving up on their dreams of higher education and becoming teenage mothers. Although all of the young Latina women in my sample struggled with the strict rules enforced by their parents, the young women with boyfriends struggled the most. While higher education was one avenue out

of the “locked down” or “shut-in” atmosphere of their homes, starting their own households was another, and at times more attainable, pathway. The trajectories of the adolescent Latina youths in this community seemed to be based less on their parents’ human capital or a discriminatory context of reception, however, and more on their most immediate and influential social networks outside of their families.

Young men also struggled with decisions to defy or heed parental requests to fulfill their “macho” role as the provider. Despite having career ambitions that necessitated higher education, both Julio and Gustavo felt parental pressure to work instead of go to college. Eduardo on the other hand enrolled in college with the support of his parents. He remained acutely aware, however, that the surrounding co-ethnic community in Allen Creek disapproved of his choice because he was not contributing to his family’s household income.

Clearly, gendered expectations influence the life course trajectories of young Latina/os as they embark on their pathways to adulthood. Life course theory can help inform the discussion of interlinked pressures of gender and culture by illustrating how the “linked lives” (Elder 1994) of parents, children and siblings influence the transition to adulthood. The experiences of Julio, who was not able to go to college but later helped his younger siblings pursue their dreams of higher education, and Emily, who “was a mother to [her] younger sisters” illustrate gendered pressures that are particularly pertinent for the eldest children in immigrant families.

Because immigrant parents may lack the cultural capital to help their children navigate the transition out of high school, oldest children in immigrant families often take on gendered parental roles. In Julio’s case, he gave up on his own dreams of going to

college in order to help provide for his family and allow his younger siblings to pursue higher education. In Emily's case, she left her own home to avoid becoming another mother to her younger sisters and ended up raising her own child instead of going to college like she had planned.

Of course, immigrant parents' gendered expectations are not static and may change as they learn from their experiences with their older children. Furthermore, while many of the respondents in this study talked about "Hispanic culture" as a uniform entity, their own experiences with their parents often differed from the interactions between their friends and their friends' parents. Despite the variability in parenting practices, however, there were several similarities among the Latina/o immigrant parents. Parents were far stricter with their daughters than sons, and parents had clear ideas about how their children should fulfill specific gender roles.

Negotiating the expectations of parents, peers and teachers can place a significant amount of strain on youths who are trying to establish pathways for themselves as they form their identities and embark on their journeys into adulthood. Psychologist Eric Erickson (1963) saw adolescence as the life stage in which individuals form stable identities after trying on various roles and responding to various social pressures. Both Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) and Smith (2008) point to the benefits of multifaceted, rather than continuous, identities that allow children of immigrants to traverse multiple social landscapes. When youths can move smoothly from the social worlds of their immigrant parents into the social worlds of their peers and their school, they are best able to circumvent conflicts that can impede their life trajectories.

In the case of children of immigrants, social pressures from parents often conflicted with social pressures from peers, significant others, and teachers. When youths were able to resolve these conflicts and draw upon the strength and pride of their family background as well as connections to influential advisors within their social networks, they often formed identities that set them on a pathway of upward mobility. Luz, for example, benefited from having the staff of the Latino Achievement Club explain to her parents that her afterschool activities would help propel her toward college.

When youths faced significant conflict within the social networks surrounding them, however, they often fell into situations in which their identities were fractured. In cases where they could not align their own goals with the goals of the influential people in their lives, they found themselves embarking on pathways that diverged from their initial plans and dreams. Gabriela, for example, was unable to balance the pressures of her boyfriend with the pressures of her parents and her teachers at school. She struggled to justify, even to herself, her decision to move in with her boyfriend instead of going to college on a full scholarship. She focused on her role as a loyal and nurturing girlfriend, consistent with the idea of *marianismo*, to explain her choice.

Gabriela's story illustrates that the supportive social networks of small towns cannot always protect and nurture youths on their pathways to adulthood. The small town atmosphere, however, seemed to allow youths more avenues to connect with influential adult mentors who could assist them on their pathways to adulthood. In the case of Patricia, for example, her soccer coach found her a lawyer who helped her get into college despite her liminal legal status and her parents' expectations that she would get married instead of continue her education. The "linked lives" (Elder 1994; Crosnoe and

Elder 2004) of teachers, mentors, and students helped shape the life trajectories of youths. Of course, connections to influential adults can also occur in large cities (Portes and Fernandez-Kelly 2008; Seif 2004; Smith 2008), but the small size of the community and high school atmosphere really facilitated these connections.

While the findings of this study suggest that small town environments influence the gendered and racialized perceptions and opportunities given to youth, comparative studies of immigrant and second generation youth should be conducted in other small towns and rural areas in new immigrant destination states. As the vast majority of our knowledge about immigration and youth comes from urban areas, our research needs to expand to follow the dispersal of migrant populations in the U.S. Increasingly, immigrants and their children are populating non-traditional migrant destinations. As communities and schools create policies to incorporate these new populations, we need to better examine how schools reach out to parents and how youths balance the expectations of their parents with the expectations of their teachers and peers.

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**CHAPTER FOUR**

**FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS:  
INTERGROUP INTERACTIONS IN A  
DIVERSE HIGH SCHOOL IN THE NEW SOUTH**

**ABSTRACT**

Despite an emerging literature addressing racial and ethnic relations in the New South, relatively little research has addressed intergroup relations within Southern schools. The influx of Latin American immigrants into the South since the early 1990s has shifted race relations within the region. This study responds to literature addressing race relations in the “New South,” and expands the scope of this discussion by focusing specifically on youth in a small North Carolina high school. My findings indicate that while both Latina/o and African American respondents faced discrimination in the community, school atmospheres were more supportive. Latina/o students in particular benefited from close relationships with teachers and participation in identity-based clubs. Because Latina/o students were viewed as newcomers whose parents lacked the cultural capital to guide them through the U.S. school system, teachers made more of an effort to reach out to Latina/o students than black students.

## INTRODUCTION

“I don’t think that Hispanics should come here. I mean, I like my classmates, but the other Hispanics are trashing the town. It used to be so pretty and now they keep their cars in their front lawns, and some cars are just on cinder blocks and there was one house that didn’t even have a front lawn – they just had cement.”

Ms. Macy interrupted Leslie and said, “Oh, like white rednecks don’t park their cars in their front lawns or put them on cinderblocks?”

Leslie responded by saying, “Yeah, but that’s out in the country – like out in the boonies” (waving her hand to indicate the boonies far away).

“Where do you think we are?” Ms. Macy asked her.

*~ Excerpt from field notes, April 10, 2010.*

*Conversation between Leslie, a 16 year old white student and her teacher, a white North Carolina native.*

Although conversations about race and ethnicity were not always so negative, discussions about different racial and ethnic groups were common in the classrooms of Allen Creek High School. For students in the small Southern community of Allen Creek, North Carolina, interacting with peers of different races and ethnicities was a part of daily life. While discussions of race and ethnicity occasionally became tense, generally students joked about differences in their racial and ethnic origins. Moreover, while in the first year of my research, interracial couples were rare and frequently criticized by students of all races and ethnicities, they became more common and accepted throughout the duration of this four-year ethnographic study. These emergent patterns were reflective of the diversity of the student body which was comprised of approximately 41 percent Hispanic students, 34 percent white students and 25 percent black students. In many ways, Allen Creek represented a new South in which individuals of different races and ethnicities lived together peacefully and attended the same schools. Sustained

inequalities by race and ethnicity and tensions evident in conversations like the one opening this paper, however, recall an era of old South segregation that has yet to be overcome.

Although the “New South” has witnessed significant racial and ethnic diversification and a sizeable increase in its Latina/o population, (Kochhar, Suro, and Tafoya 2005; Suro and Singer 2002; Singer 2004; Kandel and Cromartie 2004) it continues to grapple with issues of race and ethnicity characteristic of the Old South. While social issues surrounding race and ethnicity are in no way unique to the South, the Southeast United States provides an interesting context in which to observe processes of immigrant incorporation. Southern legacies of racial intolerance and institutionalized segregation may impede the incorporation of new Latina/o immigrants to the region. There has been some evidence that Latina/o immigrants to the South face levels of discrimination reminiscent of the racially intolerant Old South (Gill 2010; Lovato 2008), but other studies indicate a positive context of reception, at least on the part of whites, that is in some cases more welcoming to new Latina/o immigrants than long established African American populations (Marrow 2011a).

Because schools provide the primary institution in which youths of different races and ethnicities interact, I designed this study to examine intergroup relations within a racially diverse public high school. By drawing on literature about ethnic and racial relations in the New South as well as literature about immigrant and second generation incorporation in schools, I expand the discussion of intergroup relations in the New South to the youth population. The majority of the literature about racial and ethnic interactions within the New South revolves around discussions of economic tensions, focusing

specifically on competition for jobs and resources between blacks and Latina/os (Cravey 1997; López Sanders 2009; Marrow 2008, 2011a, 2011b; McClain et al. 2006, 2007; Selby, Dixon and Hapke 2001; B. Smith 2006). Removing competition for wages and positions, high schools may provide atmospheres more conducive to positive intergroup interactions among youth. Competition for grades, access to resources, and access to teachers, however, can also result in strained race relations within schools (Tyson 2011).

This study responds to the academic discussion addressing race relations in the “New South,” and expands the scope of this discussion by focusing on youth in a new migrant destination school. Specifically, I examine how race and ethnicity influence the formal and informal opportunity structures available to students. In particular, I examine the influence of race and ethnicity on relationships with teachers and advisors as well as participation in clubs, extracurricular activities, and classes.

The remainder of this paper is split into four sections. First, I review the relevant literature about race relations in the New South generally, and then I focus on intergroup relations in Southern schools. Second, I discuss my research site, research design and study sample. My findings are divided into four sections addressing discrimination, ethnic identity formation, identity-based clubs, and relationships with teachers. I conclude by arguing that although school programs and leaders can promote positive intergroup relations, discomfort surrounding the idea of segregation prevents administrators and teachers from advocating for formal clubs in which students can discuss pressures about race, particularly for African American students.

## **BACKGROUND LITERATURE**

### *Race and Racism in the Old and New South*

Historically, the Southeast United States has had a racial binary population of blacks and whites, and the region has been known as a bastion of racism and oppression of blacks (Cobb 2005; Smith and Furuseth 2006; Reed 1986; Snipp 1996; Williams and Dill 1995). After *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the civil rights movement of the 1960s, however, race relations in the South began to change. Schools were integrated in the late 1960s through the early 1980s (Orfield and Yun 1999), and throughout the 1980s and 1990s many African Americans migrated from the North to the South (Stack 1996, Frey 2004). Adding to the diversity of the region, Latinos migrated in unprecedented numbers during the 1990s to take advantage of expanding opportunities in manufacturing and food processing while these opportunities were decreasing in traditional migrant destinations (Kochhar, Suro, and Tafoya 2005; Suro and Singer 2002; Singer 2004; Kandel and Cromartie 2004). While racial and ethnic diversity clearly increased in the South, how this diversification influenced race and ethnic relations within the region remains a matter of debate.

Typically, scholars assert that race relations in the South are shifting in one of three directions. First, and in the most ideal of the scenarios, the South is witnessing decreasing levels of racism and increasing cooperation and collaboration among groups of distinct racial and ethnic origins (Cobb 2005). In the second scenario, researchers find that the influx of Latina/os to the South has redirected racial prejudice away from blacks and toward Latina/os (Lovato 2008). And finally, and perhaps most frequently discussed, studies have shown that South is increasingly characterized by horizontal racism in which

blacks and Latinos experience intergroup tensions and conflict with one another (Cravey 1997; López-Sanders 2009; Marrow 2008, 2011a, 2011b; McClain et al. 2006, 2007; Selby, Dixon and Hapke 2001; B. Smith 2006). Of course, there are instances of all of three of the aforementioned scenarios occurring in the New South, but researchers often overlook the continued influences of discrimination by whites and the legacies of the Old South that continue to shadow relationships between blacks and whites, and between Latina/os and blacks in the region.

In scenario one, the New South is a South that has moved beyond its history of Jim Crow era segregation and institutionalized racism. In many ways, the contemporary South no longer resembles the racially segregated society of earlier decades, as blacks, whites and Latina/os intermingle with one another in schools and places of business. After the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and the 1964 Civil Rights Act, schools were forced to desegregate, and integration efforts in the South in many ways surpassed those efforts in the North (Orfield and Yun 1999). Because the proportion of blacks to whites was higher in the South than the North, whites and blacks were more likely to have contact with one another in the school systems in the South than in the North.

Following the Civil Rights Movement, opinions about race and discrimination in the South were also beginning to more closely resemble opinions about race in other regions of the country (Cobb 2005). Research using the General Social Surveys, indicated that sentiments of racial prejudice decreased more rapidly in the South than in other regions of the country between 1972 and 1984 (Firebaugh and Davis 1988). Even on opinion questions that indicated increases in racial prejudices, the South did not stand



out as the quintessential region of racial prejudice in the U.S. For example, non-Southern whites who felt that the nation had “gone too far in pushing civil rights,” had increased from 43-49 percent between 1998 and 2003, compared with the smaller increase (though still considerably higher percentage) of 55-57 percent in the South over the same time period (Cobb 2005: p. 321). The increase in diversity, coupled with declining racism led many to label the Southeast region of the United States the “New South” (Cobb 2005; Smith and Furuseth 2006). According to this narrative, the South was no longer the stronghold of racist attitudes standing in opposition to more progressive regions throughout the country.

Certainly, other regions of the country are not immune to issues of racism and interracial and ethnic tensions but the South is in a unique position of incorporating a very new population of Latina/os into a society that has historically been populated by a black and white population. Some argue that the influx of Latinos to the South has resulted in newly formed racial tensions, and that the Jim Crow laws of the past have reemerged as “Juan Crow” policies (Lovato 2008). In one North Carolina county, Spanish language posters warned all Hispanics, regardless of legal status, to avoid the police in order to protect themselves from harassment and arrest (Gill 2010: p. 45). In its most overt forms, discrimination against Latina/os in the South has emerged as reinvigorated hate groups, and white supremacist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan (Gill 2010: 8; Lacy and Odem 2009: 144). Most anti-immigrant sentiment in the South, however, has emerged as rhetoric promoting “tradition” and “heritage” (Gill 2010), or as public support for policies that exclude unauthorized immigrants from participating in state and local institutions (Gill 2010; Lacy and Odem 2009: 150). Anti-immigrant

policies have arisen in reaction to fears about the rapidly shifting demographics of the region as well as in response to widespread beliefs that incoming populations of Latinos will lead to increased crime (Gill 2010; Haddix 2008).

Despite having smaller absolute populations than traditional migrant receiving states, Southern states are implementing more aggressive anti-immigrant policies than other regions. New destinations and particularly rural areas in new destinations are less tolerant of new migrants in comparison to more established urban areas where there is a history of immigration (Bada et al. 2008; Hagan, Rodriguez and Mullis *forthcoming*). Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia have all implemented laws or policies banning undocumented students from community colleges or universities despite studies indicating that undocumented students fully cover the costs of their tuition (Gonzales 2009)<sup>6</sup>. The Southeast also leads the United States in implementing 287 (g), a program that “allows a state and local law enforcement entity to enter into a partnership with ICE...in order to receive delegated authority for immigration enforcement within their jurisdictions” (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement 1996). Because all of the anti-immigrant policies specifically target undocumented immigrants, these policies can be promoted as color blind policies advancing the safety and security of U.S.

communities and work places. The implementation of policies targeted at undocumented

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<sup>6</sup> Although North Carolina, Alabama and Virginia have all had policies restricting admission to institutions of higher education for undocumented students, South Carolina and Georgia are the only states to have passed legislation to legally bar undocumented students from attendance. The North Carolina Community College Board reversed its policy barring undocumented students after commissioning a study by JBL Associates, Inc., an independent public policy research firm specializing in higher education, which found that undocumented students placed no economic burden on the community college system. There is currently a proposed bill in the North Carolina General Assembly, however, with the purpose of banning postsecondary education for undocumented immigrants (NC HB11 “An Act Prohibiting Illegal Aliens from Attending North Carolina Community Colleges and Universities”)

immigrants, however, disproportionately influences Latina/o residents who are profiled due to their skin tone at traffic stops (Weissman et al. 2009) and in home and work place raids (Lovato 2008). Under policies that effectively encourage racial profiling, even documented Latina/os become identified as potential outsiders. In a climate of mounting anti-immigrant policies, the racial binary of the Old South becomes a national binary of U.S.-Americans versus foreigners wherein even citizens who happen to be Latina/o can feel threatened and discriminated against because of the color of their skin.

In scenario three, scholars focus on tensions emerging between blacks and Latina/os in the South and deemphasize discrimination by whites. Although many of the policies emerging in the New South can be characterized as “Juan Crow” policies (Lovato 2008), research also shows that Latina/os in the South have made considerable gains in the workplace and in schools, where they benefit from good relationships with white employers and teachers (Griffith 1993; Marrow 2008, 2011; Mohl 2003). The South, and particularly the rural South, has a long and rigid history of racial inequality which has historically placed African Americans at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder (Snipp 1996; Williams and Dill 1995). Because of class differences rooted in long-standing racial inequalities, whites in rural Southern regions are more likely than blacks to be employers in positions to offer work to Latina/o newcomers to the region (Marrow 2008, 2011a, 2011b). In her study of Latina/o immigration to North Carolina, Marrow finds that the class structure thereby facilitates more complimentary relationships between whites and Latina/os than it does between blacks and Latina/os. Like research in more traditional migrant receiving areas (Waldinger 2003), research in the South has documented white employers’ preferences for Latina/o immigrants based on beliefs that

Latina/o immigrants will work for less money and for longer hours than African Americans (Cisnel, Smith, and Mendoza 2003; López-Sanders 2009).

Most of the research about horizontal racism between blacks and Latina/os places the explanatory analysis for intergroup tensions on the class structure in the South that pits African Americans in direct competition with Hispanic immigrants. Because African Americans are placed in competition with new Latina/o immigrants, many African Americans fear being “leapfrogged” as the group that is rightfully “next in line” to reap the benefits of upward mobility and socioeconomic advancement (Marrow 2011a: 128). Often, fear of displacement in the workplace and on the socioeconomic ladder is expressed as antagonism toward Latina/o immigrants on the part of African Americans in the South, and interpreted as a hostile reception from black Southerners by Latina/o immigrants (Marrow 2008, 2011a, 2011b; McClain et al. 2006, 2007; Schmid 2003; B. Smith 2006).

Certainly, discussions of horizontal racism, or “hostility, antagonism, and conflict among disadvantaged minority groups” (Jackson 2011: 25), between African Americans and Latina/os in the South are an accurate reflection of the lived experiences of many within these populations, but group discourses about race and ethnicity are often predicated on stereotypes that are reinforced by state and corporate actors (Stuesse 2009: 93). Manufacturing and meat processing plants often separate workers of different races and ethnicities into different lines, thereby preventing them from finding commonalities in their workplace experiences and everyday lives (Stuesse 2009: 93, 103-104). Hiring practices and management techniques often create and exacerbate competition and negative stereotyping between groups.

Overemphasis of racial tensions between African Americans and Latina/os without careful analysis of the underlying roots of these tensions risks underemphasizing the social structures that continue to privilege and advantage whites. In her critique of the literature addressing race relations in the New South, Jackson warns, “horizontal racism is a very efficient premise in terms of obscuring power relations. The idea of fractured minority communities which puts subordinate racial groups into conflict with one another also keeps whites safely out of the firing line” (Jackson, 2011: 47). In essence, Jackson argues that scholars’ focus on horizontal racism neglects the role that whites play in creating a social structure that disenfranchises people of color and places them in competitive situations that create intergroup tensions.

#### *Race, Ethnicity and Schooling in the New South*

Despite huge population growths of school-aged Latina/o populations in the South, very little research addresses the experiences of Latina/o children and youth in Southern schools (for notable exceptions see Bohon, Macpherson and Atilas 2005; Cortina 2008; Kandel and Parrado 2006; Perreira, Fuligni and Potochnick 2010). According to 2010 Census statistics, the largest growth in child populations occurred among Hispanics at 4.8 million, with both white and black child populations showing declining numbers (Frey 2011). Hispanics currently make up 23 percent of the total child population in the U.S., up from 12 percent in 2000. The most prominent gains in child populations occurred in the Intermountain West, Texas, and the Southeast, with North Carolina and Georgia both showing growth rates over 10 percent (Frey 2011:5). Growing numbers of Latina/o students without a growing impetus to better serve Latino students, however, could be a source of concern for schools. In new destinations where school

districts have historically had no English language learners, schools may struggle to obtain and retain Spanish speaking instructors and councilors (Bohon, Macpherson and Atilas 2005; General Accounting Office 2004; Kandel and Parrado 2006; Perreira, Chapman and Livas-Stein 2006).

While research specifically addressing immigration and youth in Southern school systems is scant, preliminary evidence suggests that incorporation processes and interracial interactions may be connected to the region. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Ad Health), Moody (2001) finds that students in Southern schools display the highest levels of friendship segregation by race and ethnicity. As demographics in the region rapidly shift, how Latinos influence interracial and interethnic interactions in the South is yet to be determined. There is reason to believe, however, that growing Latino populations may be a positive step toward desegregation. On a national level, students in schools with more than two dominant racial groups displayed more interethnic and interracial friendship ties and less friendship segregation (Moody 2001: 708). Moody hypothesizes, in fact, that Hispanics may connect black and white students, as Hispanics display friendship ties that include both black and white peers at much higher rates than either blacks or whites report friendships with peers of other races or ethnicities.

In Southern schools previously populated only by black and white students, however, Latina/o youths may have difficulty incorporating themselves into communities unaccustomed to Latina/o populations (Bohon, Macpherson and Atilas 2005; Griffith 2008). In a comparative study of four new destination areas, Griffith (2008) found that schools in the South were less accommodating to new immigrants than were schools in

the North. In a different study of educational incorporation of Latina/os in Georgia, moreover, one Latino immigrant parent stated, “In Georgia there are Black people and White people. They don’t know what to do. You’re not White, so they either treat you like you’re Black, or they just ignore you” (Bohon, Macpherson and Atilas 2005: 52). For immigrants in Georgia, the black/white divide was plainly evident, and many lacked a clear sense of where they as Latina/os should fit in. Bohon et al. (2005) noted that even young children discussed feeling ignored by their teachers due their outsider status, and children and their parents both felt alienated from schools throughout Georgia.

In contrast, studies conducted in the new destination of North Carolina show advantages for Latina/o students, despite higher levels of discrimination and fewer bilingual and bicultural resources and teachers (Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor 2010; Perreira, Fuglini and Potochotnik 2010). There are various explanations as to why Latina/os in the South are progressing academically. One explanation of Latina/o achievement in school is that teachers and administrators in North Carolina make efforts to reach out to Hispanic students and their parents through “family centered approaches” including bilingual school signs and mailings, as well as parental outreach provided in Spanish (Kandel and Parrado 2006; Marrow 2011a). Other researchers posit that because Latina/o students in new destinations are more likely to be immigrants than Latina/o students in traditional destinations, they are more likely to display stronger ethnic identification and feel compelled to succeed in school out of a sense of “familism” or obligation to their families (Perreira, Fuglini and Potochotnik 2010). Census and American Community Survey statistics, however, do not indicate an immigrant advantage, at least on a national level (Pew Hispanic Research Center 2011; Fry 2010).

Other studies assert that Latina/o students in the South benefit from being exposed to the English language and cultural practices of their U.S.-born non-Latina/o peers, in contrast to being isolated in highly segregated schools as is often the case in traditional migrant settlement areas (Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor 2010). Increased interaction with youths of different ethnic, linguistic and racial backgrounds may benefit Latina/o youth by augmenting their social and cultural capital. Finally, other researchers posit that Latina/o students are aware of employer preference for Latina/os over African Americans in the South and are therefore more motivated to do well in school in an effort to reap eventual payoffs in the workplace (Bohon, Macpherson and Atilas 2005). Given the low level jobs filled by the majority of new Latina/o immigrants to the South, however, academic achievement would not be necessary for securing a job in a manufacturing or food processing plant where most of the regional employer preference for Latina/os has been documented.

Because of their racial minority status and similar class positions, African Americans become the natural comparison group for incoming Latina/o immigrants. Research indicates that Latina/o students in the South are beginning to surpass African American students in academic performance and end of grade tests (Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor 2010; Marrow 2011a). These studies, however, do not hypothesize as to why Latino students are gaining academically in ways that their African American classmates are not. As Marrow's study focuses primarily on adult relationships in the South, she does not examine the mechanisms behind the reported educational achievement gaps. She uses perceived achievement gaps to illustrate another area where resentment is expressed by African Americans toward Latina/os in response to social "leapfrogging" at the school



level (Marrow 2011a: 126-127). In Kandel and Parrado's (2006) study, school administrators note participation of Latina/o parents in their children's education as exceeding that of African American parents, but they do not expand on the impacts or causes of this observation (2006: 127). Without more thorough analysis of the underlying causes of racial achievement gaps, comparisons to African American populations remain under-examined and may be misinterpreted as placing fault upon African American students.

Research has shown school programs and structures to have a big influence on intergroup relations within schools (Lewis-Charp, Yu and Friedleander 2004, Rosenbloom and Way 2004; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2008). In schools with high levels of diversity and limited tracking, students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds interact with one another in classrooms, clubs and on sport fields (Lewis-Charp, Yu and Friedleander 2004). In schools where students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds are segregated through tracking or other structural boundaries such as linguistic barriers or racially exclusive clubs and sports teams, more segregation and antagonism develops among groups (Lewis-Charp, Yu and Friedleander 2004, Rosenbloom and Way 2004; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2008; Tyson 2011). As the vast majority of research into immigrant and second generation incorporation in schools occurs in urban areas, much of the literature focuses on the dangers of negative peer influences and oppositional cultures arising as a result of unsupportive school atmospheres.

The literature about second and third generation countercultures of resistance builds upon a vast literature attempting to explain the underachievement of African

American youth (Fordham and Ogbu 1986; McWhorter 2000; Ogbu 1987, 2003). Reacting to alienation and discrimination, many second and third generation immigrant youths in urban areas have been shown to develop oppositional identities and reject cultures of academic achievement (Matute-Bianchi 1991; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993; Suárez-Orozco 1987). In their study of second generation youth and their various pathways of incorporation in U.S. society, for example, Portes and Rumbaut suggest that children of immigrants become upwardly or downwardly mobile according to “the different ways in which second generation youths approach...challenges and the resources that they bring to the encounter” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; 62). Instead of focusing on the people, institutions, and neighborhoods that students encounter, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) treat the context of reception almost as a constant, though allowing for some variability around the amount of discrimination faced by different ethnic groups.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) place the onus for upward or downward mobility largely on the adolescents and their immigrant parents. Tellingly, Portes and Rumbaut attribute higher academic achievement on the part of second generation Asians to “the character of the ethnic communities...[and] the normative patterns [of self-discipline and personal demeanor] that can be readily instilled by southeast Asian refugee families and communities on their young” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 261). Although Portes and Rumbaut recommend that we reexamine our institutions to better serve expanding minority populations, they focus much of their explanation of ethnic and racial disparities on the human and social capital of immigrant families instead of on schools and communities.

Studies that focus more closely on the schooling of youths point out that educational institutions often impede the development of youth by disregarding students' ethnic, racial and cultural identities (Cortina 2008; Valenzuela 1999). If students feel that their teachers do not recognize or respect their cultural backgrounds or them as individuals, teachers will be far less likely to engage their students in positive educational exchanges (Lopez 2003; Valenzuela 1999). Relationships between students and teachers are of pivotal importance, and students generally need to feel that they are cared for, respected and recognized by their teachers in order to invest in school (Gibson et al. 2004; Stanton-Salazar 1995; Suárez-Orozco, Qin, and Amthor 2008; Valenzuela 1999). When teacher-student relationships transcend classroom instruction and students and teachers relate on more personal levels, students are more likely to become academically engaged.

Research has consistently shown that connections to ethnic and racial identities can be associated with higher engagement in school (Chavous et al. 2003; Fuligni, Witkow, and Garcia 2005; Oyserman, Harrison, and Bybee 2001; Perreira, Fuligni and Potochnick 2010; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Tatum 1997). In answer to the question entitling her book, "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum explains that black adolescents seek a supportive and empathetic community in which they are able to express their frustrations with discrimination and marginalization (Tatum 1997: 59-60). Tatum found that formal institutionalized versions of the cafeteria table were remarkably beneficial to black students bussed into a majority white middle school in a Boston suburb (1997: 71-73). The middle school instituted a program in which bussed-in students attended mandatory

meetings where they discussed their anxieties about class work and exams as well as their experiences with racism and isolation. Although students were resistant at first, the daily meetings with staff created a positive peer environment of achievement based on mutual experiences in the classroom and school setting, and the academic performance of the students improved markedly. Similarly, Migrant Student Associations (MSAs) targeting immigrants as well as second and third generation students have proven beneficial for students who use this club as a kind of “school within a school,” or a nurturing organization in which educational, cultural and social experiences are promoted (Gibson et al. 2004). Because students are free to express themselves in a culturally safe environment in either English or Spanish, MSAs enriched the educational experiences of immigrant and U.S.-born second and third plus generation youths.

Establishing trust and close connections with teachers is important because students can leverage these relationships as forms of social support which can help them gain access to jobs or academic opportunities later in life. If students feel isolated, alienated, and misunderstood in their school setting they will be unlikely to reap the benefits of their educations, and may be more likely to form oppositional cultures. Small school settings may better facilitate connections to teachers increasing the likelihood that students will feel recognized as individuals instead of getting lost in a mass of students (Crosnoe, Kirkpatrick and Elder 2004; Elliot 1998; Finn and Achilles 1990; Finn et al 2001; Glass et al. 1982; Nye, Hedges and Konstantopoulos 1999).

Immigrants in new destinations often attend schools in non-urban areas where immigrant populations moved to fill expanding labor opportunities (Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Kandel and Parrado 2006). How these new areas influence the

incorporation of new immigrant and second generation student populations is an empirical question in need of further investigation. Preliminary research suggests some positive outcomes for Latina/o students (Marrow 2011a; Perreira, Fuligni, and Potochnick 2010), but there is simultaneous concern that the gains made by Latina/os are not mirrored in African American student populations (Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor 2010). The emerging racial/ethnic gap between black and Latina/o students suggests that the remnants of the Old South have endured in the relationship between blacks and non-blacks in the New South.

## **RESEARCH SITE, RESEARCH DESIGN AND STUDY SAMPLE**

### *Research Site*

This research took place in Allen Creek, North Carolina over a four-year period between 2007 and 2011. Located in a rural county in central North Carolina, the town of Allen Creek attracted many Latin American immigrants during the 1990s due to its proximity to several poultry processing plants, textile mills and plastics manufacturing plants. As labor opportunities in manufacturing were constricting in other areas of the U.S., the expanding labor opportunities of Allen Creek were typical of the job opportunities drawing migrants to the Southeast during the 1990s (Griffith 2008; Kochhar, Suro and Tafoya 2005; Mohl 2003). North Carolina's Latina/o population grew by 508 percent between 1990 and 2008, to a total population of 800,000 or 8.4 percent of the total population (Fortuny et al. 2010). In Allen Creek, over 50 percent of the town's approximately 8,000 residents are Latina/o, up over 10 percent from 2000 estimates. Approximately 75 percent of Allen Creek's Hispanic population is foreign born

(American Fact Finder 2005-2009 ACS estimates). Prior to 1990, the town was populated almost exclusively by black and white residents.

At the time of this study, the public high school in Allen Creek had approximately 800 students, and the teachers and staff of Allen Creek High School were primarily white. Of the fifty-seven teachers, seven were African American and only one was Latino. Allen Creek High School was a minority-majority school where Latina/o students comprised roughly 41 percent of the student population, white students made up approximately 34 percent of the population, and black students made up approximately 25 percent of the population. In order to better serve the Latina/o population, in 2006 the school hired a Latino vice principal and a Latina receptionist and interpreter to facilitate communication with Spanish speaking parents and students. Although the tracking system in the school decreased the diversity within the classrooms somewhat, with white students being disproportionately represented in AP classes, nearly all of the classes enrolled black, white, and Latina/o students. In fact, the most segregated classes were not the AP classes but the Agriculture classes where the students were primarily white.

In 2010, approximately 75 percent of the Allen Creek High School student body beginning in ninth grade graduated in four years. Although dropout rates were highest among Latina/os, graduation rates increased approximately eight percentage points between 2005 and 2010 for graduates who completed high school in four years, and over ten percentage points in the same time frame for graduates who completed high school within five years. The school has made efforts to combat dropout rates by implementing a support group for teenage mothers and expectant mothers (implemented in 2010), a support group for students experiencing emotional problems and troubled home lives

(implemented in 2010), and an AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) program for students in need of more academic mentoring (implemented in 2006). AVID is a nationwide program designed to increase academic performance and motivation among the least served students in the “academic middle.” In Allen Creek High School, the students enrolled in AVID received grades within the D to B range, and almost none of their parents had college educations. Of the school’s approximately 800 students, about 100 were enrolled in the AVID program. In the 2008-2009 school year, white students ranked highest on both end of year and end of course exams, followed by Hispanic students and then black students. This pattern remained in the 2009-2010 school year for the end of grade tests, but African American students scored one percentage point higher than Hispanic students on the end of course tests. Thus, although Latina/os dropped out at higher rates than their black or white classmates, they were also making academic strides, ranking second in most end of year and end of course tests between 2008 and 2010.

Approximately one half of all students enrolled in Allen Creek High School received free or reduced price lunch. The large proportion of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch reflected the low income level within the town. According to American Community Survey estimates for 2005-2009, Allen Creek had a median household income of about \$30,000, which was considerably lower than the North Carolina state median income of \$45,069. Approximately 21 percent of families within Allen Creek lived below the poverty line and about half of the population had a high school degree or higher.

### *Research Design and Sample*

I began conducting ethnographic field research in April of 2007 by attending after school events, such as soccer games and practices, teaching salsa lessons to teenagers in the community, and volunteering in the Latino Outreach Center in the community. Through this initial fieldwork I made contacts within the community and began to examine intergroup interactions among community members and students in Allen Creek. I began conducting in-depth interviews in April of 2008. In the fall of 2009, I started to volunteer as a tutor in an AVID class twice a week. I observed one AVID class closely over the course of my study, and I occasionally visited other classes. Of the 22 students in the AVID class I observed, 11 were Latina/o, six were African American, one was biracial (African American and white), and four were white. In this capacity, I spoke to the youths about their class work and plans for the future. Through my work within the school, I was given the opportunity to observe how the students interacted with one another both between and during classes, and I was also able to observe interactions between students and teachers. By drawing on contacts that I had within the school, on the soccer teams, and in the Latino Outreach Center, I accessed a diverse sample of research participants. From these initial contacts, I used snowball sampling to diversify the sample and gain more respondents.

The in-depth interview sample was comprised of 38 Latina/o young adults, 11 African American young adults, 13 white young adults, five teachers, the vice principal, the high school college advisor, the soccer coach, two school board members involved in the Migrant Education Program, three parents, the youth coordinator at the Latino Outreach Center, the current and former directors of the Latino Outreach Center and one



former county commissioner. All of the young adult interviews were conducted with individuals between the ages of 16 and 25 at the time of the initial interview. In-depth semi-structured interviews lasted from 45 minutes to two and a half hours, with most lasting approximately one hour. I always asked the interviewees to choose the location for the interview to ensure that they would feel comfortable speaking with me. Interviews were conducted in people's homes, restaurants, and in parks. After the initial interview, I followed up with my respondents through visits, "informal interviews," (Lofland et al. 2006) and email correspondence. Thus, I was able to follow the trajectories of my respondents as they moved through institutions of higher education, various jobs, and in some cases got married and had children.

As I conducted ethnographic observations in the school, I would take note of how the students interacted with one another, where they sat, and how the classrooms and hallways were decorated. Hallways were lined with information about colleges, financial aid application deadlines, and information about students accepted into particular colleges. Classrooms were decorated with posters relevant to the subject of study. In my interviews with the adolescents, I would ask about relationships with teachers, social cliques, work, classes, and extracurricular activities. I began every interview by saying, "Tell me a little bit about your school," and all but five of the individuals interviewed commented almost immediately by proudly discussing the diversity within the school. I would then probe further about the diversity by asking the respondents about intergroup interactions within their classes, on their sports teams, at parties and in the community. I would also ask who their friends were, how they made their friends, and how they met

their romantic partners. Of the five that did not start by discussing diversity, one talked about social segregation and the others mentioned small school size.

I coded my field notes and interviews to reflect common themes that emerged. Based on descriptions of friendship circles and seating arrangements in classrooms, for example, I would code certain parts of interviews and field notes *racial segregation*. When I would note interracial or interethnic relationships, interracial or interethnic collaboration within a club, consistent and close interactions between white teachers and black or Latina/o students, or particular efforts on the part of teachers to address racial or ethnic diversity, I would write a code for *interracial collaboration: black-white*, or *interracial collaboration: Latina/o-black*, etc. If there were a comment made about someone being racist, I would code this interaction or comment as *racial tension*, and I would clarify if it was *joking* or *serious*. Jokes about race and racism were common among the youth, so this code emerged in an effort to differentiate between very heated instances of intergroup conflict and more benign exchanges that were nonetheless meaningful. Viewing all of the coded field notes and interviews together allowed for direct comparisons of intergroup exchanges among the different groups. Through my long term and multifaceted engagement in Allen Creek, I was able to crosscheck and contextualize my interviews with other interviews and with my field notes.

## **FINDINGS**

Relations among students of different races and ethnicities within the school were generally friendly, but cliques and seating arrangements within the classrooms and cafeteria tended to reflect segregation by race and ethnicity. Access to culturally specific

clubs and organizations of support was more available for Latina/o students than black students. Despite racial and ethnic achievement gaps between whites and Latina/o and African American students, both students and teachers felt there was more of a need to provide clubs and additional outreach to Latina/o students and families than African American students and families. Because the parents of the Latina/o students at Allen Creek High School were primarily immigrants with limited linguistic and social capital, school personnel viewed the clubs for Latina/os as a necessary support structure for these students. I organize my findings first by exploring experiences with discrimination, and second by exploring experiences with inclusion via friendship ties, participation in extracurricular activities, and connections to teachers.

### *Vertical Oppression and Old South Racism*

Leslie walks into AVID announcing in her Southern accent, “Oh my gosh, there are a bunch of Hispanics in the hallway singing, ‘I’m proud not to be an American where at least I know I’m not free,’ and it is so funny.”

Her teacher, Ms. Macy, looks up from her desk and says, “Well, I wonder what that means.”

Mani chimes in saying, “Yeah, they’re singing that for Mexican Independence Day.”

*~Excerpt from field notes describing a conversation between Leslie [a 16 year old white student], Mani [a 16 year old Mexican-American student], and Ms. Macy [their white teacher]. September 20, 2010*

In singing an adapted version of “God Bless the U.S.A.” for Mexican Independence Day, the Latina/o youths expressed feelings of exclusion from the U.S., but they also displayed a particular regional knowledge by singing a country music song from Tennessee-based artist Lee Greenwood. Although students primarily reported

getting along with their classmates, and teachers generally noted that students were collegial if somewhat socially segregated, Latina/os in the school also noted discrimination.

Particularly among urban to rural migrants within the U.S., Latina/os would discuss experiences with discrimination in Allen Creek. For example, Mr. García, the vice principal of Allen Creek High School noted a heightened awareness of his ethnicity upon moving to Allen Creek from Orlando. When I asked him about the differences of living in Allen Creek as compared to the other places he had lived, he volunteered,

“One thing that has been a revelation for me here in this town is that this is the first time in my life that I have thought of myself as Hispanic.”

When I asked him how he classified himself before, he responded,

As a person. Here I’m treated differently. Some places where you go, and the police, those types of things. My wife and I have been pulled over here more times in three years than I have been pulled over my whole life in Orlando. Once my wife got pulled over and she had just moved here so she had a Florida license. So instead of giving her a warning or something, he gave her a \$150 ticket for not having a North Carolina license. That kind of stuff...

I probed further, asking if the police pulled him over a lot even though they knew that he was the Vice Principal of the school, and he quickly responded,

Oh, yeah. I get pulled over all the time... And there’s a couple of restaurants that I feel very uncomfortable in. The bowling alley sometimes too. I get a lot of stares. Sometimes when you go into certain stores you get a little look. Cause they don’t know the difference. They think I’m Mexican. My parents are Puerto Rican.

*~Mr. García, Vice Principal of Allen Creek High School*

Mr. García noted high levels of discrimination in Allen Creek despite his prestigious position within the school. He even went as far as saying that he had never felt Hispanic prior to moving to North Carolina. Earlier in the interview, he had commented on the

safety and minimal influence of gangs within the town as reasons that he liked his job and the town, but his own experience with the police was much more negative in Allen Creek than it had been in either Orlando or Chicago where he had lived previously. He stood out as different in the community of Allen Creek, where Latina/os were generally less integrated into the community. Despite his prominent position in the high school, he felt that the primarily white police force did not view him as an insider and instead targeted him in attempts to uncover some type of wrong-doing on his part.

Mr. García's account of his interactions with the police and other community members reflected Lovato's (2008) "Juan Crow" image of the New South. Discrimination in the community, however, was not focused exclusively on the Latina/os. African Americans would also frequently comment that police would follow them around or pull them over while driving, and black adolescent males would often complain that the parents of their white female classmates discriminated against them. Darius, a 17 year old African American male talked about the different attitudes regarding interracial dating inside of the school and outside in the community saying,

Well, there are a lot of [interracial relationships] around school and it's accepted, but outside of school it's not really accepted. Like, it's frowned upon heavily. If a white girl is going out with a black guy, the white girl's parent isn't really going to accept that. For what reason I have no idea. I still wonder about that to this day ... Because when people say that their parents don't accept that then really, you know, it's like, 'Why?' I mean, that racist stuff, that's over with. I mean some girls, their parents think that black males are more sexually active and all we really want is sex and all that, and that's not the case. Not at all. That's a big stereotype. The parents just don't like it. It's mainly black male, white female. Occasionally black and Hispanic, but no one really cares about that as much. Black and white, you really hear about that the most.  
~Darius, 17 year old African American male

Although many Latinas told me about their parents not wanting them to engage in relationships with African American males, the African American males perceived this type of discrimination much more from the parents of white females, perhaps because language barriers protected them from understanding some of the discussions among Latinas regarding this topic.

The stereotype of the sexually aggressive black male goes back to slavery and persisted and strengthened in the postbellum period in the South (Fredrickson 1971; Sommerville 1995; Williamson 1984). The black men at Allen Creek High School continued to face this stereotype from parents of both their white and Latina female classmates. Parental disapproval surrounding relationships, however, were not exclusively focused on men of color. One Latina female also complained to me that the mother of her white boyfriend was displeased with their coupling because she wanted her son to date white girls. Parental opinions about interracial and interethnic relationships in Allen Creek indicated that race relations in the New South maintained strains of continuity from the region's historical past. Darias's perception that interracial relationships were accepted within the school, however, was echoed by many other students particularly in the last two years of my study, thereby indicating that this stereotype may be fading with the times.

Because Allen Creek High School was an integrated public high school with large populations of black, white, and Latina/o students, youths of different races in the community interacted with each other more than their parents. Segregation on the bleachers during football games and graduation was obvious as parents divided themselves in particular sections by race and ethnicity. The high school, moreover, was

the primary space of intergroup interaction for both parents and youths, as its feeder schools remained largely segregated by race.

In the beginning of 2011, when the county was debating rezoning school districts for the elementary and middle schools that fed into the high school, many white parents loudly fought against the idea. Mr. García, the vice principal of Allen Creek High School explained how white parents used coded language to voice their concerns by saying,

I mean you're talking about a [high] school that didn't get integrated until like the 70s and so, you know, you have parents and grandparents that still remember that... We just went through this rezoning thing where they were trying to rezone the school districts and it did not fly because the parents said that it was "tradition" instead of I don't want my kids going to school with colored kids, whether they're brown or black.

*~Mr. García, Vice Principal of Allen Creek High School*

The white parents' concerns, at least according to Mr. García, illustrated what Bonilla-Silva (2003) describes as an increasing trend of coded language replacing overt racism, and echoed comments about "heritage" noted in Gill's (2010) study of new Latina/o immigrants in North Carolina. Fears about rezoning school districts implied firm legacies of school segregation, but parents spoke in such a way to "avoid direct racial discourse but effectively safeguard racial privilege" (Bonilla Silva and Forman 2000: 52). Instead of using overt racism to maintain positions of privilege, white parents spoke indirectly about race and ethnicity by using words like "tradition."

In summary, white intergroup relations within the school were generally friendly there was visible discrimination within the school and in the community. Despite continued vertical oppression shadowing intergroup interactions within the community of Allen Creek, there was also evidence of increased interracial collaboration and efforts on the part of white residents to positively affect the incorporation of new Latin American

migrants to the town. Latina/o students would comment that they received help from white adults in terms of job opportunities or mentorship relationships, and indeed the Latino Outreach Center in town was staffed exclusively by white and Latina/o employees and volunteers.<sup>7</sup> Although both Latina/os and African Americans discussed discrimination, they also noted interracial and interethnic friendships and expressed appreciation for the friendly small town atmosphere.

### *Latina/o Inclusion and Ethnic Identity Formation*

Although youths occasionally mentioned feeling excluded or discriminated against by classmates in school, Latina/o students' experiences at Allen Creek High School were more often characterized by inclusion. Friendship ties and formal clubs and organizations facilitated opportunities for Latina/o students to simultaneously embrace their ethnic identities and enhance their attachment to the community. Unlike Mr. García who became more aware of his ethnicity in Allen Creek due to his experiences with discrimination, students frequently noted positive school-based interactions which made them aware, sometimes for the first time, of their ethnicities. Interactions with peers in class and on sports teams, for example, led some Latina/o youths to connect to their ethnic identities in ways they had not before. One Colombian-American young man, Jack, and one Mexican young woman, Dalia, both gratefully described how going to Allen Creek High School opened their eyes to their heritage cultures.

Despite being the son of a Colombian woman who worked in the chicken plant, Jack had never considered himself Hispanic. He was also the son of a Special Forces

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<sup>7</sup> There was also some evidence of coalition building between Latina/os and African Americans, at least at a state level, as the Reverend William Barber, President of the North Carolina NAACP, was one of the most vocal advocates for access to higher education for undocumented students.



Officer in the U.S. Army, so he had grown up moving from state to state. He described how going to high school in Allen Creek allowed him to connect to his culture in a way that he never had before by saying,

Coming to Allen Creek High was a big transition for me because I had been to schools that had been over 95 percent Black or over 95 percent white so coming to a school that had a large Hispanic population was different. In the white school I was in, I was just white. My ethnic heritage had no bearing on what I was. For me, my blood is red, it's not Colombian. But I didn't put enough weight on the lifestyle that I encountered when I visited my Colombian family for holidays. Then going to a black school and being someone of mixed race, that was a benefit in some areas. Being white at all was a negative in most areas, so it was a benefit because I wasn't white. It was in Southern Georgia and it was a very dangerous school. 2,700 students, 90 percent black, and that year they had just mixed up the lines in the county. When they mixed new students, they mixed gangs, because every high school used to have its own gang. So it was a really dangerous lifestyle. So it did benefit me by not being full white. Actually that's the first experience in my life that I had heard that I wasn't white. Some kids came up to me in the hall and said you're not full white are you? And I looked at my arm and said, "uhhh, I'm not black." And he said, "No dog, you're not full white." And I said, "No, I'm Colombian." And he could tell that just from looking at me and that made my life a lot easier. Getting to Allen Creek High it affected me through the soccer team, mostly because the soccer team was so Hispanic and they were so proud of it that I couldn't hide from it. And if it even seemed like I was, you know, they called me out on it. They'd be like, "You know, you're Colombian. Don't act any other way." And I never thought I was, but they wanted to make sure. So my experience at Allen Creek High definitely highlighted the fact that I am biracial. I never thought I was before, but it made me realize that I had to make a point of not hiding it. And in turn, they made going to the family outings, and the pig roasts and the non-stop dance revolutions, they made that a lot more enjoyable, because I saw them for what they were, and I saw that they were a tradition. And the way that they spoke Spanish even, it made me take a little more pride in the uniqueness of the Colombian culture.

*~Jack, 21 year old of mixed Colombian and white American heritage*

Jack's experience with race was more fluid than the majority of Latina/o students in Allen Creek High. Like Mr. García, he became more aware of his ethnicity once he moved to Allen Creek, but his experience was one of inclusion and not exclusion. Unlike

in his school in Georgia where being “not full white” was a benefit, in Allen Creek his Colombian heritage did not offer him protection from gangs, nor was it symbolic of an oppositional identity against whites. Instead, he learned to celebrate and appreciate his cultural heritage as something that made him unique. Having a co-ethnic community allowed him to view himself through their eyes, and he gained a sense of pride about his ethnicity. Although the students on the soccer team had national backgrounds from various countries, they united as a team. The small school size, moreover, did not facilitate ethnic factions among Latina/os who were largely viewed as a uniform group by their black and white peers. Jack learned the words to Spanish-language songs while on the team bus going to away soccer games, and he began to reexamine his own ethnic heritage realizing that it was a part of his history and his identity.

Like Jack, Dalia grew up without a strong ethnic identity. Despite being born in Mexico and not having legal documentation to be in the U.S., she felt unattached both culturally and linguistically to her Mexican heritage. Her parents brought her with them to live in North Carolina when she was six months old, and she had never been back to Mexico. Although Allen Creek High School was very diverse, its feeder schools were largely segregated by race and ethnicity. Dalia explained that the majority of her friends from her primarily white elementary and middle schools did not go with her to Allen Creek High School, so she was forced to make new friends upon entering high school. She explained how meeting new friends also introduced her to her Mexican heritage by saying,

In middle school, where I went, we weren’t really diverse. Like, me and my cousin were the only Hispanic kids in our class and there were maybe four or three black people in our class so it was mostly white, so usually I would just hang out with white people. So when I got here, it was kind of

weird because most of them went off to boarding schools and private high schools.... And I guess here there's more Hispanics. And in middle school I really didn't, like, explore my culture as much. Here having so many Hispanic friends [now], I can explore my culture more and I feel like I can use more Spanish. I think that's how it came to be that I had more Hispanic friends... I didn't talk a lot of Spanish and my Spanish is still rough because like, my mom, she grew up speaking English and Spanish is her second language. And with my dad, he speaks Spanish and English too so at our house, we mostly speak English. So I was just accustomed to speaking English. So here now, with all my Hispanic friends, I'm getting more into speaking Spanish, and we have Spanish jokes now, and to me that explored more like, 'Oh, this is more how I should be speaking sometimes. Why don't I take up more Spanish classes to learn?' That's actually what encouraged me to take more Spanish classes and actually learn how to speak better and announce better and write better and read better. That really influenced me.

*~Dalia, 17 year old Mexican immigrant*

Dalia discovered her ethnic heritage through her interactions with co-ethnic peers in Allen Creek High School. Through friendship ties with other Latina/o students in her school, she began to feel pride in her heritage, linking it to academic pursuits as well as social interactions.

### *Identity-based clubs and the legacies of black-white segregation*

Even students who had more heightened awareness of their ethnic identities than Jack and Dalia were given opportunities to celebrate their heritage, discuss important issues facing the Latina/o population in the U.S. today, and utilize their bicultural and bilingual skills through formal school organizations and clubs. Responding to high dropout rates among their Latina/o student population, Allen Creek High School partnered with a nearby university to implement a Latino Achievement Club (LAC). The club helped promising Latina/o students stay in school and apply to college. Collaborating with undergraduate students in a nearby university, approximately sixty-

five high school students (between twenty and twenty-five per grade) went through a three year mentorship program in which they prepared for SATs, learned about the college application process, and took an early college course focusing specifically on issues related to immigration and Latina/os in the U.S. In addition to promoting a climate of academic achievement among the youths, the program specifically linked this achievement to Latina/o identity, promoting pride among the students.

In the 2011 the graduating LAC class elected Mani, an 18 year old Mexican-American to speak on their behalf at the club's graduation ceremony. He spoke to the audience and his classmates saying,

We are an inspiration to the millions of Latinos that don't have a chance to get higher education. Being Latino does not equate to being a day laborer, working in a chicken plant, or in landscaping. Being Latino means having the initiative to go further. We are the Latino Achievement Club, and we are a success. ~*Mani, 18 year old Mexican-American*

Taking pride in his ethnic heritage, though noting the socioeconomic inequalities of his surrounding society, Mani celebrated LAC and all of the opportunities that it had given his classmates and himself. In this nurturing environment, he and his classmates were able to discuss issues related to their ethnicity and migration history in an academic setting, and they were able to gain considerable assistance in the college application process. Other students referred to LAC as a "familia" and one parent even commented, "If it weren't for LAC, I think I would have lost my daughter because of all the high school drama, but LAC gave her a place to belong." For these students, LAC was like a "school within a school" (Gibson et al. 2004) that nurtured the social and academic development of its members.

For Latina/o students who were not members of LAC, they had other opportunities to join clubs that offered them unique opportunities to use their bicultural and bilingual skills. One such club was the Action Inspiration Motivation (AIM) club which is a part of the North Carolina Migrant Education Program<sup>8</sup>, funded through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The ESL teacher at Allen Creek High School started a chapter of the AIM club in 2002 with the mission of helping students advance academically and build self-esteem. Although the AIM club was open to all students, the members acted as tutors and translators at an elementary school in Allen Creek. As the Latina/o students were the only able translators, the club was exclusively comprised of Latina/o students.

While the students were acting as translators within the school and at parent-teacher conferences, they also gained valuable professional experience and made social connections which helped them on the job market. One AIM member got offered a job to teach Spanish at the elementary school. When I asked him how he got that job offer, he replied,

Well, the principal really likes me because I went there and my little sister went there too, so sometimes I would go and drop her off or pick her up. And then I volunteer there with the AIM club, translating for parent-teacher conferences, and I'm really good at that so she likes me a lot.  
~Ovidio, 19 year old Mexican-American

Although Ovidio chose to go to college instead of accepting the position, he received praise and encouragement from a well-respected person in the community, and he learned

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<sup>8</sup> The mission of the North Carolina Migrant Education Program is to help migrant students and youth meet high academic challenges by overcoming the obstacles created by frequent moves, educational disruption, cultural and language differences, and health-related problems. The NC MEP is federally funded as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and is regulated by Title I, Part C. <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg8.html>

about what it was like to work in a school. He planned on pursuing a career in secondary science education, and he believed that his experience with the AIM club helped to mold his professional goals. By connecting students with community members and institutions, the AIM club acted as a mechanism to integrate students into the community.

Although culturally-specific clubs were beneficial to the Latina/o students, they were by no means the only ways in which Latina/o students involved themselves in the school or community. Latina/os were represented as members and leaders of clubs and organizations throughout the school, including student government, school plays, and Homecoming Court. In 2005, the first Hispanic student was elected president of her class. Since then Latina/o representation in student government steadily grew. In 2010, the President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer of the senior class were all Latina/o. In 2011, the class representatives were black, white, and Latina. Black, Latina/o and white students all held positions in student government, Homecoming court, school plays and other clubs. The presence of Latina/o clubs within the school did not diminish opportunities for inclusion in other school activities. Instead, the clubs for Latina/o students facilitated opportunities for the Latina/o youths to interact in positive ways with the school and with the community.

As I conducted interviews and interacted with the students and teachers within the school, I would ask repeatedly if there were clubs for African American students, such as a Black Student Union. Some people commented that Upward Bound, a federally funded educational program designed to assist lower income students in attending college, was primarily utilized by African American students. Others mentioned that the AVID program included African American students. And several respondents mentioned sports,

and particularly football, as the main source of support for the black students at Allen Creek High School. Only sometimes did these individuals acknowledge that this support would only be available to black males who played football. Most respondents, however, did not see a particular need for clubs that specifically targeted African American students or celebrated African American identity. This opinion was expressed not only by whites and Latina/os, but also by African Americans.

Despite a general opinion that clubs catering to African American students were unnecessary, and perhaps even reminiscent of segregation, some respondents did express doubts about the distinct opportunities given to black and Latina/o students. When I asked Ashlyn, a 17 year old African American woman what she thought about the lack of clubs for black students, she said,

I've thought about that like, how come they do have the Latino Achievement Club because they help them, and they can get scholarships to college and I always wondered how come they don't do that for black people because we're minorities too, you know? And I always thought that would be something interesting to do because we do need help.

When I asked her if she had discussed this with her friends, she said,

No, because I always thought, like, maybe it's just me. Because Latinos are having it harder than black people right now or any other culture because if they're undocumented, they're trying to say that they can't get into college. And the only college that they might get into is a community college, so then I look at it like maybe they do need help, and maybe that's something I overlooked.

*~Ashlyn, 17 year old African American.*

While Ashlyn expressed a desire to have more opportunities offered to black students, she specifically commented on the resources given to the Latina/o students, and not on the cultural space provided for them. Although students primarily sat with students of their same race and ethnicity in classrooms and in the cafeteria, and they often discussed

issues of race within these informal groups, they did not see a need for an official or structured space or club such as a Black Student Union or Association.

Some students and teachers called upon a cultural memory of segregation to express their discomfort with the idea of separate clubs. When I asked Braden, a 17 year old African American male, about his opinion on the lack of clubs for black students, he responded,

I kind of feel like, I don't want to say I'm completely against having clubs for certain groups of people, but I just feel like, instead of separating people by the color of their skin or their race, I just think that if someone wants to be in a certain club that they should be able to be. I mean, you can all relate and have equal opportunity. It really doesn't matter whether you're black, white, Hispanic, or whatever, if you're in a club together, you pretty much have the same mind set. I mean of course certain races are going to have things in common obviously, but I don't know.

*~Braden, 17 year old African American male*

For Braden, and others, the idea of separating students according to race or ethnicity seemed to recall an era of segregation.

Without a formal space in which to discuss issues of racism or discrimination, conversations about race emerged in the form of joking within the hallways and in the classrooms. Most of the discussions and arguments surrounding race resulted in response to off-hand comments or teasing among the students. One day as class was beginning, a white student commented, "I must be part black since I'm so loud." Her black classmate responded by saying, "That's racist, I'm black and you're way louder than me." "But, you're not a black woman," she replied. Both students got distracted by other conversations and the subject was dropped (field notes: March 21, 2011). Another day a black student was closing a window in the classroom at the start of the class period, and his black classmate shouted at him, "Get your cotton-pickin' hands off that window!" He



paused for a minute and said, “Wait, is that racist?” “How can it be racist if you’re both black?” a white student responded. The teacher noted that it was time for class to begin and the conversation ended (field notes: November 16, 2009). Passing remarks such as these tended to hang in the air without eliciting constructive dialogues about race. Even teachers did not necessarily see these interactions as indicative of unresolved issues surrounding race relations.

Despite sustained achievement gaps between white and black students, the idea of having a club specifically focusing on black students was not a subject that was ever raised in discussions among teachers or administrators. When I asked one African American teacher if she was aware of any clubs similar to the AIM Club that were primarily used by African American students, she responded,

Um, not that I can think of. I think that AIM club is good because it gives the Latinos a chance to get their feet wet and learn that they can participate in the community first within their own space and then with everybody, so I think that’s good, but I think that clubs should be open to all students. I don’t like the separation.

I probed further, asking if she thought it would be beneficial to have a black students’ union or something like that, and she said,

I don’t know. I’ve never really thought about it. I mean, I guess I could see both sides, but I don’t know if I think it would be beneficial or not. I honestly have never thought about it. I think that anybody should be able to join any club honestly, so I’m not sure if it would be beneficial. All the clubs are mixed so the students are always intermixing with each other so it’s good to be able to learn about other people. I have all types of students in the Future Business Leaders of America club and I think that’s a good thing because the students recognize that anyone can make it.

*~Ms. Bartlet, African American teacher*

Having grown up in the segregated South and in Allen Creek specifically, Ms. Bartlet was uncomfortable with the idea of separation by race. She did not see the Latina/o clubs as separating the students by race, but instead distinguished the Latina/o students as newcomers who were learning to “participate in the community first within their own space and then with everybody.” Although many of the Latina/o students had been born or raised within the community, Ms. Bartlet’s perception of them as newcomers was a sentiment shared by many because the vast majority of the Latina/o parents in Allen Creek were immigrants.

### *Relationships with Teachers*

Because the Latina/o parents were generally lower income immigrants, and very few of them had formal educations beyond the primary school level, the Latina/o students relied heavily on help from teachers, coaches and mentors to get assistance with schoolwork, college applications, and even personal problems at school. Faculty and staff, moreover, felt an obligation to help guide and nurture students whose parents lacked the cultural capital to help them navigate the educational process. Often these relationships went beyond classrooms and sports fields, and teachers and coaches would offer to take their Latina/o students to visit colleges or invite them to their homes to celebrate Thanksgiving. Because the parents of the Latina/o students worked or were otherwise unable to drive their children due to obligations to look after younger children, fear of getting caught without a driver’s license, or unfamiliarity with the college system, the teachers found themselves driving Latina/o students more frequently than white or black students. Moreover, because the Latina/o students’ parents did not celebrate U.S.

Thanksgiving, it was their cultural distinction that gave the teachers an opportunity to invite the Latina/o students to share a Thanksgiving meal with them. In three instances that I heard about over the course of my research, moreover, teachers even opened their homes to Latina/o students whose parents had been deported or who had left their homes because of familial conflicts. These close and almost parental relationships arose far more among teachers and Latina/o students than among teachers and students of other races, although one white teacher also took on a white foster child who was a student at the high school.

When I asked teachers and college advisors how these relationships developed, they were not always able to articulate how this happened. In describing her relationships to the seniors in Allen Creek High, for example, Ms. Connor, the college advisor, commented that she worked with roughly equal numbers of black, white, and Latina/o students. The students with whom she worked closest, however, were Latina/o. She described her job by saying,

I have to say the biggest highlight of my job thus far is working with a particular student who, when I met him at open house and said, I'm here to talk about college, he said, "Oh I'm not going to college." Didn't even want to talk to me, and I was like, "Well, before you leave, you have to give me three reasons why." And he was like, "Okay." So he kept walking by and I was like, "Do you have those reasons? Do you have those reasons?" and finally he was like, "I'm undocumented, I'm broke, and I'm going to work in the chicken plant. Those are my three reasons." And I was like, okay, see you on Monday. So I've gone to his soccer games and I've seen him since, and I've been reaching out to him and the Tuesday before Thanksgiving break he came and poked his head sheepishly around the corner and said, "Can I talk to you about college?" And I was just like, "YES!" All of this talking and maybe berating since August has finally come to fruition. ~Ms. Connor, white college advisor

Teachers and mentors in the school would often go out of their way to reach out to Latina/o students, partially because they were so aware of the obstacles confronting them.

Ms. Connor reached out to this young man by attending his soccer games and continually encouraging him to speak with her about his opportunities precisely because she knew that his parents could not advise him about his options for college. In turn, the student felt comfortable going to her and asking her about his options for school.

Even when teachers offered opportunities to all of the students in the class, it was often the Latina/o and white students who would sign up. In describing a trip that she took to East Carolina University with 20 students, Ms. Connor described the self-segregation between the white and Latina/o students on the bus and on the tour. When I asked her if there were only white and Latina/o students on the visit, she responded by saying,

Yeah, actually. I don't know how that happened except, I had a signup sheet and had made a bunch of announcements and it was first come, first serve, and I think they just came – like they got their groups of friends and signed up and then when there were 20 signatures it was done. It was full. So I think it might have been because of that.

*~Ms. Connor, white college advisor*

Although most of the teachers supported and genuinely cared about all of their students, they also did not necessarily feel the same obligation to reach out to black students in the same way that they reached out the Latina/o students. Often teachers would ask Latina/o students how particular holidays were celebrated in their countries of origin, or they would put up posters of Latina/o authors in English classrooms. Because of their shared national origins, the teachers did not see the same need for these types of inclusive practices addressing their black students. Instead, they tended to view their students through a color blind lens and would talk about teaching individual students instead of particular races.

Although some black students described their teachers as their “academic mothers or fathers,” close mentorships tended to form more easily between the majority white teaching staff and the Latina/o and white student populations. With the Latina/o students, teachers would purposefully reach out to the students in ways that often went well beyond their job descriptions. With the white students, these relationships tended to happen more naturally as teachers and students from the small community would meet in church or have longstanding family relationships. As Michelle, a 19 year old white woman commented, “Well, one of the teachers, we went to church together, and then I had her AP class and I just felt like I could go to her for anything. And I felt that way with all of my teachers. I kind of viewed them as an extension of my family.” Michelle’s comment is similar to findings from Elder and Conger’s (2000) study of farm families in rural Iowa. Elder and Conger found that children growing up in long established farm families were more likely than their peers to have connections to civic organizations and churches, and were therefore more likely to succeed in school due to connections to influential adults and supportive social networks. Because churches and community spaces in Allen Creek were often segregated by race, relationships with black students did not develop as naturally as they did with the white students. A social distance remained between blacks and whites in the community, and this distance resonated within the school as well.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Like previous studies of new immigrant destinations in the South, the community of Allen Creek grappled with issues of interracial and interethnic tension. Latina/os

commented repeatedly about negative interactions with the police, reflecting a climate similar to the one portrayed in Lovato's (2008) description of the "Juan Crow" South. African Americans, however, would also complain about discrimination from police indicating that the vertical oppression and discrimination of the Old South had not been replaced by discrimination against Latina/os, but had simply expanded to include Latina/os.

Previous research regarding the incorporation of Latina/o immigrants in the South has noted horizontal racism and antagonism between Latina/o immigrants and African Americans (Cravey 1997; López Sanders 2009; Marrow 2008, 2011a, 2011b; McClain et al. 2006; Mohl 2003; Selby, Dixon and Hapke 2001; Schmid 2003). In her study of immigrant incorporation and race relations in rural North Carolina, Marrow (2011a) notes that the color line is approaching what Gans (1999) and others (Lee and Bean 2004, 2007, 2010; Sears and Savalei 2006; Yancey 2003) have predicted would become a black-nonblack color line because of what Latina/o immigrants to the region perceive as the greater permeability between themselves and the surrounding white population. Perhaps because I did not focus on workplace interactions, I did not find the Latina/o residents of Allen Creek to focus on friction with black residents. Instead I noted a strong ethnic identity, consistent with the large number of immigrant Latina/os, and a perception of discrimination primarily from white police officers and, to a lesser extent, some white community members who did not want their children to attend integrated schools.

Antagonist relationships, however, were primarily discussed in the context of the community and not inside the walls of the school. Interactions among students at times reflected social segregation, but were generally friendly and congenial both within the

classrooms and in the hallways. Although I noted equal amounts of interactions and interracial relationships among Latina/o students and black and white students, I found that teachers would often make more of an effort to reach out to the Latina/o students than to the black students in their classes. There were also more clubs specifically catering to Latina/o students than black students.

As described in previous literature (Gibson et al. 2004; Tatum 1997), clubs for Latina/o students were beneficial for the students. Latina/o students were able to utilize their bicultural and bilingual skills, and they were given the opportunity to discuss their status as immigrants and children of immigrants in nurturing, safe and supportive environments. Teachers and administrators generally accepted the presence of these clubs because they needed bilingual help and translation services to communicate with immigrant parents of elementary school students, and because they viewed the Latina/o students as newcomers. Because the immigrant parents of the Latina/o students were not generally well integrated in the community of Allen Creek, teachers understood that they did not have the linguistic skills or social or cultural capital to help guide their children through the secondary school system and beyond. It was precisely because they viewed the Latina/o students as different, foreign, or new that they encouraged the clubs that specifically reached out to support the Latina/o students.

On the other hand, teachers and administrators were very uncomfortable with the idea of creating clubs specifically catering to African American students. Several students and teachers commented that they were not in favor of separating students, recalling a not so distant past of school segregation. Both students and teachers commented that clubs should be based on interests and should be open to anyone who had those interests. Their

perspectives align with what Charles Gallagher (2003) refers to as the “color-blind perspective.” Gallagher explains, “By constructing a picture of society where racial harmony is the norm, the color-blind perspective functions to make white privilege invisible while removing from public discussion the need to maintain any social programs that are race-based (Gallagher 2003: p. 5). Despite enduring racial achievement gaps and evidence of the efficacy of racial identity-based clubs (Tatum 1997), neither students nor teachers were comfortable with the idea of race-based programs or clubs for African American students specifically.

Colorblind programs addressing underserved students, such as AVID, were effective in assisting black, Latina/o, and white students who were struggling academically, but clubs specifically targeting African American students could function in cooperation with these clubs to enrich the educational and social experiences of African American students. As previous studies have shown, culturally or racially specific clubs for minorities can be effective in providing a supportive atmosphere in which students can share their experiences with alienation and discrimination. Tatum also comments that black students can often become frustrated with the white majority because they have not made an effort to understand their culture. Although African Americans must learn about whites, through unavoidable images of the white majority in the media, whites have not been similarly required to learn about African Americans (Tatum 1997, pp. 24-25). Acknowledging the cultural and linguistic differences of the Latin American students, teachers at Allen Creek High School have made efforts to reach out to the Latina/o population and learn about their culture. They have not, however, felt



as much of a need to do that with their African American students due to their shared national background and colorblind perspective.

In his analysis of changing race relations in the U.S., Gans (1999, p. 378) posits that the “racial hierarchy of the Deep South will probably continue to bear many direct marks of slavery.” In many ways, the racial class hierarchies in the South and the discomfort surrounding the idea of forming black student unions or black student associations in Allen Creek displayed the legacies of the Jim Crow era South. Community interactions between white police officers and people of color, either black or Latina/o, remained strained within the community. Within the school, however, teachers and administrators have made substantial efforts to minimize intergroup tensions.

School policies have been successful in responding to growing populations of Latina/o students. Importantly, the high school has adapted to this new population over time. At first, the school implemented an English as a Second Language (ESL) program but did not provide many additional resources. Gradually, they have incorporated Spanish language materials, parental outreach programs in Spanish, clubs for Latina/o students, Spanish classes for native speakers, and after much resistance, soccer teams. The incorporation of clubs, programs and resources has allowed Latina/o students to find a place of belonging within the school and community. Furthermore, having a Latina/o Vice Principal has demonstrated a recognition of the growing Latina/o population within the town and high school. Although there is still only one Latino teacher, the school’s proactive responses to the growing Latina/o student population have resulted in progressively better graduation rates, rising academic achievement levels among Latina/o

students, and growing Latina/o representation in student government and other prestigious school organizations.

Perhaps because of the legacies of segregation, teachers and administrators have been less comfortable with the idea of creating resources specifically targeting African American youth. Although the high school had an African American principal from 2007 through the 2009-2010 academic year, she was replaced by a white principal in the fall of 2010. In one of his first campus-wide programs, the new principal screened the documentary “Papers”<sup>9</sup> to inform the entire student body about the struggles of being undocumented. Students were split into discussion groups afterwards to further analyze and discuss the documentary. While efforts such as these demonstrate to the Latina/o student population that the administration recognizes their plight and cares about their struggles, without the same efforts being demonstrated for all groups, these actions may serve to antagonize intergroup relations.

The legacies of segregation and institutionalized racism in the South will not fade away unless continued efforts are made to address educational achievement gaps, economic disparities and social distance between blacks and whites. Because the influx of Latina/o students in North Carolina schools is so recent, educators in Allen Creek and elsewhere (Marrow 2011a; Perreira, Fuglini and Potochnick 2010) have made substantial efforts to incorporate this population and expand their opportunities for achievement. Although policies toward undocumented Latina/os within communities and at a state level are increasingly hostile and restrictive, interpersonal relationships and resources in schools seem to facilitate the advancement of Latina/o students. In the case of small town

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<sup>9</sup> “Papers” is a documentary by Director Anne Galisky of Graham Street Productions about undocumented students and the struggles that they face as they turn 18 and have to confront life without legal status. ([www.papersthemovie.com](http://www.papersthemovie.com))

rural schools, similar nurturing occurs between white teachers and students who know each other from church or long-term family relationships. Because of fear, inertia, or discomfort surrounding interactions between black and white populations, however, efforts similar to those being made to enhance opportunities for Latina/o students have not been made to propel the African American student population toward socioeconomic and educational equality. Instead, schools throughout North Carolina continue to be crippled by segregation via tracking which disproportionately places African American students in lower level classes (Tyson 2011). Although programs such as AVID are helping achievement levels of underserved student populations, efforts to better integrate classrooms while simultaneously providing culturally or racially specific resources to help nurture and facilitate incorporation experiences would best serve all of the students. In order to further examine the hypotheses emerging from this qualitative study, future studies comparing clubs targeting black and Latina/o immigrant and second generation students and teacher–student relationships in schools should be conducted both in the South and in other new destination areas.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### LUZ'S STORY

We knew before we came here [to North Carolina] why we were leaving [Los Angeles]. My mom had already started considering moving out because for the two weeks before we moved, almost every night for these two weeks, a policeman was getting killed on our street and my mom realized that it was bad because these people weren't even scared of authority. And then the other reason is that someone that my mom used to work with in California started a catering business here in North Carolina. They grew up together in El Salvador, and he needed a good cook to help him with the catering business here. And he knew that my mom was thinking of moving because she didn't want to raise her children in a setting like that. ~Luz, 18 year old Salvadoran-American

Luz described her family's decision to migrate from California to North Carolina in 1991 by highlighting the gang violence of her neighborhood in Los Angeles and a job opportunity that arose for her mother. Previous research has described migration streams to North Carolina and its neighboring southeastern states in the context of expanding labor opportunities in the 1990s (Griffith 2008; Kandel and Parrado 2004, 2005; Kochhar, Suro and Tafoya 2005; Mohl 2003), and Luz's family's migration fits into this narrative as her family moved to North Carolina to take advantage of emerging labor opportunities in the region. As soon as they arrived in North Carolina, Luz's mother began working in a food truck that catered to workers in the surrounding poultry plants and construction sites. Luz's family's migration, however, was not just another labor

migration facilitated by social network connections. For Luz's parents, the safety of her children was a primary factor motivating their decision to leave California.

Growing up in East Los Angeles, gang violence was something that Luz was all too familiar with. She saw murdered police officers just outside her apartment complex, and personally fell victim to gang violence more than once while walking home from school. Moving to North Carolina at the age of nine was a major life change for Luz. She found herself surrounded with English-speaking white peers, and for the first time in her life, she was forced to speak English. She relied on the support of caring teachers to learn the language and she began to flourish academically.

Luz graduated from high school and earned a full scholarship at a prestigious four year university. In 2011, she was 21 years old and a junior in college. As an international studies major, she continued to thrive in university. She established leadership positions in several student organizations, was awarded two competitive summer fellowships to do undergraduate social science research abroad and two awards for academic excellence, and she worked in a paid internship position at a policy center in North Carolina.

When I asked Luz if she thought her life would have turned out differently had she remained in California, she responded that she was sure it would have been different but she was unsure how. She pointed out that because there were so many more Latina/os in California, she would have met or at least seen more successful Latina/os than she had been exposed to in North Carolina. She also recounted her experiences with the Latino gangs in her California neighborhoods and admitted that she would have been exposed to more "bad Latinos" as well. After pausing to think about it, she told me that she thought her strict upbringing was primarily responsible for her success. She credited

her parents for ensuring that she and her brothers and sisters did well in school and strove toward prestigious and upwardly mobile careers. Indeed, her brother told me that his father would yell at him if he brought home anything lower than an A on any assignment.

Perhaps Luz was right. Perhaps her own work ethic as well as her parents' high expectations would have propelled her toward academic achievement regardless of where she grew up, but there is no doubt that her experience in Allen Creek facilitated connections to teachers and clubs that helped her navigate her journey through high school and college. When she was in high school, her older sisters and parents pressured her to work in order to contribute to the household income. She learned that the local elementary school was seeking someone to oversee afterschool activities for the largely Latina/o student body, facilitate communication between teachers and parents through translation, and speak with parents about school involvement. Because the woman in charge of hiring for the position remembered Luz as her hard-working and likable fourth grade student, she immediately accepted her for the job once Luz expressed interest. Luz gained valuable skills in her after-school job in leadership, communication, and both verbal and written translation. Once she graduated from high school and went onto college, she passed the job onto her younger brother.

Attending a four year university was not a foregone conclusion for Luz. She developed ambitions to attend college early on in high school, but she always assumed that she would go to community college like her older sisters. Despite her parents' high academic expectations, they did not discuss four year university as a feasible or affordable option for their five children. When Luz joined the Latino Achievement Club in her sophomore year of high school, she learned about scholarship opportunities and

began to dream for the first time about attending a university. She spoke at length about LAC, saying,

LAC helped give me that structure, and helped me look for scholarships and everything. Because I knew that my mom could not afford to send me to college. LAC really instilled in me that I could go to a four year college, and I started to see that it was possible. My mentor guided me through that process. A lot of us in the Latino community don't have that support because a lot of our parents haven't gone to college.

Lacking the guidance of her parents, Luz relied on the support of her mentor in LAC to help her prepare and apply for college.

Although her parents did not understand initially why she was involved in the program that often met after school and on weekends, the leaders of LAC were able to help Luz convince her parents of the academic merits of LAC. Once her parents understood that Luz was not staying out of her house simply to spend time with friends or a boyfriend, they supported her engagement with the club. When she was applying for college, she relied on the help of her LAC mentor as well as teachers unaffiliated with LAC to read over her application essays. With the help of her teachers and mentors, Luz did incredibly well in high school and she earned a full scholarship to a four year university.

Luz is very smart, ambitious and responsible, and she may well have experienced a similar life trajectory had she remained in L.A. Her experience in North Carolina, however, offered her several opportunities that she had not had living in the large urban environment where she grew up. First and foremost, Luz was finally living in a community in which she did not experience or witness violence regularly. She did not hear the all too familiar sounds of gun shots, yelling, or fighting once she moved to North Carolina. Second, she learned English out of necessity and with the help of caring

teachers who helped nurture and support her. Third, she capitalized on her personal connections to teachers to get her first job and to get help with the college application process. Finally, she had the structural support of LAC which helped her in the college application process and encouraged her to link her ethnicity to a culture of achievement. All of these factors contributed to an environment in which Luz was able to excel as she transitioned out of high school and into the early stages of adulthood. Although Luz was exceptionally intelligent and driven, the elements that facilitated her upward mobility were common to the experiences of many of the Latina/o students in Allen Creek High School.

### **THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION**

Throughout the previous chapters, I highlight the importance of the small town and small school context in facilitating close connections between youths and teachers and other community adults. Although the dense social network in Allen Creek at times made youths, and others in the community, feel as though their lives were being examined under a microscope, the small town environment also offered the young adults many advantages as they navigated their pathways to adulthood. Among the attributes of Allen Creek that facilitated the incorporation of immigrant and second generation youths were: *small town social capital*, *safe residential neighborhoods*, and *a small supportive school with a diverse student body and ethnicity-based achievement clubs*. Both formal and informal institutional integration allowed the Latina/o youths in Allen Creek to feel recognized as individuals while simultaneously finding solidarity both within and beyond their co-ethnic community.



### *Small town social capital*

Allen Creek is similar to other small towns in the rural South (as described by Cuadros 2006; Kandel and Parrado 2006; Marrow 2011; Torres, Popke and Hapke 2006), and distinct from large metropolitan cities, in that residents got to know their neighbors as they encountered the same people regularly in their small community. These interactions were magnified in the case of the youths who mixed with one another in classrooms and on sports fields on a daily basis. The school, however, was also relevant in the larger context of the town as residents of all ages intermingled at the high school during sporting events and homecoming parades through town.

Because of the slow-paced atmosphere and isolated location of the town, residents regularly interacted with one another in only a handful of institutional sites. The high school in many ways acted as the institutional center of the community. Town residents would come out to view Friday night football games and, in many cases, parents would reminisce about their times on the field while young children dreamt about getting a chance to one day throw a winning touch-down pass. For a long time, football was one of the primary areas in which black and white residents interacted with one another, although this mixing was limited as the bleachers were largely segregated. The vice principal described the seating arrangement by saying,

When we have the football games, it looks still segregated. If you were to go to the visitor's side and look, you'll notice that all the white people sit in the middle and the black people sit on the sides. The older generation, they still sit like that – kind of like an oreo. ~*Mr. Garcia, Vice-Principal*

There were very few Latino students who played football, so their parents were not generally represented in the stands. During larger events like Homecoming and

graduation, however, more Latina/o parents sat adjacent to the black parents on the outside stands while the center sections of bleachers tended to be filled by white parents. Students of all races and ethnicities sat wherever there was space.

In addition to drawing parents and community members to the school for Friday night football games and Homecoming celebrations, the school also interacted with the surrounding community by relying on community members to mentor seniors in their graduation projects. Each senior had to complete an intensive senior project in which they relied on the mentorship and guidance of a community member unaffiliated with the school. Projects ranged from apprenticeships in law offices, observations at physical therapy clinics at the hospital, dance showcases and cooking lessons, to volunteer positions at one of the elementary schools. This institutional connection between the school and the community facilitated social connections between students and adults within the community of Allen Creek.

Other institutions in town, such as churches and the Latino Outreach Center also had youth groups that tied adolescents to the community and connected the youths to influential adults through community service and leadership events. Youths within the community of Allen Creek called upon their social connections to community adults and former teachers to seek advice, get jobs, solicit help with college applications, and even to ask for assistance with the costs of college tuition. The small and intimate community helped maintain social connections as youths were bound to run into former teachers or employers either at the school or at one of the few local grocery stores, restaurants, or the Walmart.

The Walmart, however, was also mentioned in the context of exclusion for young Latina/os and blacks within Allen Creek. Luz, for example, talked about feeling people stare at her or follow her in the Walmart because they assumed that she might steal something. Similarly, Ashlyn, an 18 year old black woman, told me that the black people in Allen Creek felt that they could relate to the Latina/os because they were also looked down upon and followed around in stores, like the Walmart, to make sure that they wouldn't steal. In this way, both blacks and Latina/os alluded to feeling like outsiders in their small town community despite the close knit nature of the town.

Luz further discussed her feelings of exclusion by comparing her suburban, and highly educated, college town with both her home town and particularly with its surrounding communities where she did not know people. She claimed to never feel examined for her Latina appearance in her college town. When she went to flea markets in the rural counties surrounding her home town, however, Luz would wear her college tee-shirts in the hopes that the vendors would not look down on her. She explained that she wanted people to know that she went to college instead of assuming that she was stupid because of the color of her skin. She also bought her parents tee-shirts that said the name of her university followed by the word "mom" or "dad". She wanted people to know that their children went to college. Indeed, their children's academic success was a point of pride for their parents, but it was also celebrated by their former teachers, mentors and coaches. Teachers, coaches and administrators from the high school kept up with the children's achievements through younger siblings and through university publications about them which trickled down to the staff of Allen Creek High School through siblings or other social contacts. Thus, while the community of Allen Creek was

in no way a utopia of racial and ethnic harmony, it afforded youth valuable opportunities to make sustainable connections to supportive and caring mentors, particularly within the small high school.

### *Safe Residential Neighborhoods*

In addition to the small and secluded nature of the town, another reason that youths were able to form close bonds with one another and make social contacts that stretched beyond their immediate social circles was the relatively safe environment. Youths did not fear violence every time they left their homes, as many youths did in the urban cities where they grew up before moving to Allen Creek. Although gangs existed, most youths referred to gang members as “wannabes” or “poseurs” who were not particularly threatening. Youths knew who among their present and former classmates were involved with gangs or drugs, and other residents spoke about drug trafficking within the town. The existence of gangs and drugs, however, primarily took place behind closed doors and youths did not generally feel pressure to join gangs. Youths who had lived in urban areas, moreover, commented that drugs were far more pervasive and apparent in their previous cities of residence than in Allen Creek.

Violence on the streets or in public facilities was uncommon in Allen Creek. Despite rare fights within the hallways afterschool or during the lunch period, the school was generally a safe space for all of the students. Fights in the high school, moreover, were met with swift disciplinary action. Thus, students did not have to fear harassment or abuse in their school. Most students spoke about feeling safe in their school, and many cited safety and a lack of fights or gangs within their school as primary reasons that they

liked their school. Churches and community centers also offered the youths within the town other safe spaces of inclusion and institutional incorporation. Latina/os specifically found sites of incorporation within the Latino Outreach Center and in several Spanish language church services offered at the Catholic Church, as well as Baptist and Evangelical Christian Churches. For Latina/os, churches offered a safe institutional space where they could form community bonds and coethnic friendships. Feelings of safety and security, however, were threatened from time to time when police check points sprung up near churches, near the schools, or in residential neighborhoods populated by Latina/os.

The police presence within the community was cited by both Latina/o and black youths as the primary institutional force of discrimination within the community. Latina/o and black youths and adults would talk about getting pulled over or followed by the police, and Latina/os specifically would discuss police check points as purposefully trying to target or intimidate the Latina/o population. There were also a couple of restaurants that were widely known to discriminate against black and Latina/o customers. Although youths occasionally discussed feeling discriminated against in school, they more often discussed discrimination by police or isolated individuals within the community. For the most part, teachers and coaches within the school were supportive of their students and the school was a place of inclusion and safety for students of all races and ethnicities.

#### *Small and Supportive School Environment*

Nearly all of my respondents reported benefitting in some way from the close and personal relationships that they forged with the teachers in their high school. Even

students who struggled academically formed relationships with teachers who knew their names and personalities. Because students felt recognized as individuals, they felt comfortable going to teachers for advice or assistance with problems or concerns that went beyond academic matters. Students would seek out teachers, administrators and coaches to get advice about how to deal with problems at home, fights with friends or romantic partners, or other personal or financial concerns. They would also go to teachers for food if they were hungry, and in a few instances teachers offered homes to students who could not remain in their own homes due to familial conflicts or parental deportations. For many students in Allen Creek High School, teachers, administrators and coaches acted as an extension of their family units. Because the school was so small, teachers were easily able to form close connections with individual students.

Students of different races and ethnicities tended to develop different relationships with teachers based on external circumstances which structured their interactions. White students in town, for example, would often encounter teachers at local church services and might have social connections to teachers through their parents. For Latina/o students, teachers would often adopt an “other parent” role, driving students to college meetings or interviews, and inviting students to their homes for U.S. holidays like Thanksgiving. Teachers recognized that the parents of their Latina/o students were not as familiar with the school system in the United States as the parents of their black and white students, and they saw it as their responsibility to offer additional help and guidance to their Latina/o students. Because black students did not attend the same churches as their white teachers, they lacked this external connection to their teachers. Moreover, the teachers did not view the black students as needing the extra support

provided to the Latina/o students because their parents were not foreign. Although black students also spoke about close relationships with teachers and coaches, these relationships were not as easily facilitated by family or social connections. Moreover, a history of segregation, unequal access to positions of power, and subsequent social distancing between blacks and whites in the South stunted the development of close relationships between blacks and whites in the community.

Relationships between students and teachers were particularly strengthened when they formed within a school-based institutional organization such as the AVID program or the AIM or LAC student clubs. Through AVID, students developed multi-year connections with one teacher who mentored an AVID class throughout their years in high school. These teachers would form mentorship relationships with each AVID student, coaching them through academic learning and note-taking techniques all the way through the college application process. Throughout this process, teachers would bond with each student while learning about each of their personalities and backgrounds. In the AVID class that I primarily observed for two years, several of the students described their AVID teacher, Ms. Macy, as being like a “mom” or an “academic mom” to them. Ms. Macy felt similarly about her students. One Valentine’s Day, for example, Ms. Macy gave each of her AVID students a Valentine card and candy saying, “I love you \_\_\_\_\_” to each student as she handed him or her a Valentine. In the best case scenarios, these close relationships with teachers allowed students to reach their maximum potential academically. Even when students struggled in the classroom, however, they benefitted from having the support of teachers who cared about their personal wellbeing.

While AVID was open to students of all races and ethnicities, the school also offered *ethnicity-based clubs* that specifically catered to the Latina/o population. Both the AIM Club and LAC celebrated Latina/o heritage and linked Latina/o ethnicity to academic achievement and community engagement. The AIM Club drew upon the bilingual and bicultural capabilities of the Latina/o students by utilizing these skills for much needed translation services in the elementary and middle schools. These activities were mutually beneficial for the school system and the students. The schools were able to better engage the parents of their Latina/o students and the Latina/o high school students gained valuable work experience and connected with professionals within the community. In some instances, experiences with the AIM Club led to job offers or internship opportunities for students. Moreover, the Latina/o students became aware that their bilingual and bicultural skills were a professional asset.

Like the AIM Club, LAC also offered Latina/o students an institutionalized space in which to celebrate their heritage and draw strength from their shared backgrounds to motivate them towards academic achievement. Students in LAC took an early college course in which they discussed academic readings specifically addressing issues of immigration and the treatment of Latina/os in the United States. Because the students were given the opportunity to examine personally relevant issues in a safe, structured, and supportive environment, they more easily engaged with the material and challenged each other to flourish academically. Through this club, the students created a culture that linked their ethnic background to academic engagement and upward mobility. They relied upon each other, and their teachers and mentors in the program, to find the confidence, guidance and support which helped them navigate high school and the



college application process. Like Luz said at the start of this chapter, she never dreamed of attending a four year university until she entered LAC and found out it was possible.

Academic clubs were not the only organizations that offered students opportunities to form institutional connections to their school and community. Sports also fostered bonds between youths and their school and community. Because the town of Allen Creek was so small, high school sports were a central focus of the entire community. As in many other small Southern towns, football in Allen Creek was the most celebrated sport within the community and Friday night football games acted as social events not only for students, but also for community members of all ages.

Although the focus on football in many ways alienated the Latina/os within the community, more Latina/o youths came out to watch the football games than the soccer games. Still, tensions arose surrounding the use of the football field, which was shared by the boys' soccer team in the fall and the girls' soccer team in the spring. In describing his struggle to initiate the soccer program at the high school, the head soccer coach explained that the administration repeatedly gave him unjust excuses for not wanting to start the team. He stated,

It was really just race and ethnic politics, and cultural politics in the sense that this was really the football culture at the school and in the community that was saying no to the program. And the question was always out there: Was that football culture also infused with ethnic prejudice? I can't answer that, but I know that athletically speaking, they didn't want the program and they still don't. ~Coach Ramos

Coach Ramos suspected that the opposition to the soccer program was infused with prejudice, but he stopped short of saying that outright. However, when Gabe, a white student who graduated from Allen Creek High School in 2001, asked the principal why the school would not create a soccer program, Gabe remembers the principal telling him,

“Gabe, that’s a Mexican sport. There will not be a soccer team at Allen Creek High.”

Although Coach Ramos was eventually successfully in creating a thriving soccer program at the high school, his teams have continued to struggle against the pervasive football culture within the community.

Both the boys’ and girls’ soccer teams were repeatedly kicked off the field or restricted to certain parts of the field during practices to prevent them from ruining the field. Tellingly, the football team did not face similar time or space restrictions. When the school upgraded the scoreboard on the main field, shared by the football and soccer teams, the large bold lettering on the top of the scoreboard read, “Allen Creek Football.” Coach Ramos believed that this was an intentional slight to the soccer program, and some of the players thought that it was discriminatory against the Latina/os. Because of the prominence of football within the community of Allen Creek, the culture of athletics was one area in which racial and ethnic tensions occasionally emerged. The creation of the soccer program, however, also gave Latina/os another institutionalized space in which they could carve their place of membership within the school and celebrate their ethnicity.

Although the soccer program was not exclusively comprised of Latina/os, both the girls’ and boys’ teams were majority Latina/o. They would often use Spanish on the field and sing Spanish songs on the bus. Even the white and black players on the teams would talk about learning Spanish from their teammates, and learning to appreciate the food that they sampled at their Latina/o teammates’ homes. Although the football team remained primarily comprised of black and white students, the 2010 team also included three Latino players. Thus, while athletics occasionally provoked heated discussions

surrounding racial and ethnic politics, sports also created institutionalized spaces of belonging for Latina/os and encouraged cultural exchanges between students of different races and ethnicities in the community of Allen Creek.

Connections to the school endured even after graduation as former students would return to visit their teachers or attend Friday night football games. Other sports also drew graduates back to the school as former soccer players for both the boys' and girls' teams would return to help coach, operate the score board, or run the balls on the sidelines during games. In this way, the school acted as a social nucleus of the town and offered residents of all races and ethnicities a place to interact with one another.

Despite nearly all of the students and teachers touting diversity as the school's major strength, there were times when racial and ethnic conflicts emerged between groups in the hallways or after school. Although friendships and particularly romantic relationships frequently bridged racial and ethnic lines, social cliques by race and ethnicity were apparent in the cafeteria and in the groupings of students in separate areas of the hallways. Rarely, students from separate groups would get into verbal or physical fights in the school when a student from one clique would provoke another. Even less frequently, police were brought into these fights if they were deemed gang-related. In 2009, for example, a temporary replacement School Resource Officer (SRO) arrested several Latino boys suspected of belonging to a gang on school grounds. The boys were arrested for minor offenses before the school's administration was consulted, and the incident resulted in a backlash from parents and concerned community members. This particular SRO however, was replaced with a permanent officer who had undergone more extensive training for the position. Although this isolated incident mirrored descriptions

of racial and ethnic minority boys being treated as problems or potential criminals in urban high schools (Lopez 2002, 2003; Waters 1996), generally both black and Latino boys discussed individual connections with teachers and did not complain about being stereotyped as potential gang members based on the color of their skin.

The diversity of the school was one of the reasons that students felt included and represented. Because students of each race and ethnicity made up sizeable proportions of the student population, none of the groups were overwhelmed by any of the other demographic groups. Students of all races and ethnicities were represented in student government, AP classes, theatrical productions, Homecoming Court, in clubs, and on sports teams. As the demographic make-up of the school continues to shift to a Latina/o-dominant student body, however, only time will tell if each group continues to find representation and membership within the school.

### **INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN THE SMALL TOWN SOUTH**

In general, the small community of Allen Creek facilitated opportunities for youths to form supportive and beneficial relationships with adults including teachers; coaches; AVID, AIM, and LAC leaders and mentors; immigrant advocates in the Latino Outreach Center; and other community adults whom the youths encountered in their neighborhoods, through their parents' jobs, or through school-related projects. Moreover, the demographic make-up of the school allowed black, white and Latina/o students to feel represented as no one group was overwhelmed by the others.

Despite the strong individual-level connections made between youths and influential adults, external factors at times obstructed upwardly mobile pathways out of

high school that the youths strived to achieve with the help of their adult mentors. For black youths within the community, the legacies of segregation and the continued social distance between blacks and whites in the community obstructed the formation of supportive clubs in which black youths could discuss their unique experiences with discrimination and simultaneously create a culture of academic achievement. Although Latina/o students benefited from membership in ethnicity-based clubs both within the school in the community-based Latino Outreach Center, they struggled to negotiate the expectations of their families and the expectations of their teachers. At times, these struggles were gendered as young women fought against what they perceived to be overly strict regulations by their parents, or young men strove to distance themselves from stereotypes of Latino thugs or gangsters. Because the community and school were so small, however, young Latina/os were often able to combat stereotypes as teachers and other community adults came to know them as individuals and worked with their parents to maximize their opportunities.

Finally, documentation status stood apart as the primary factor impeding an upwardly mobile pathway out of high school and into the early stages of adulthood. Despite receiving considerable support and guidance from teachers, many undocumented and non-citizen youths became discouraged once they realized the restrictions facing them after high school graduation. Without access to federal financial aid or public scholarships, undocumented youths began to doubt the feasibility of college access. Even students who found ways to surmount the considerable financial obstacles had to confront constantly shifting policies which intermittently barred or allowed their entrance into community college. As of 2011, undocumented students were allowed entrance into

community colleges and universities at out-of-state rates, but proposals to close the academic doors to these students had once again been introduced in the North Carolina General Assembly. Policies restricting educational opportunities for undocumented youths categorized these youths as outsiders in the state that many would consider the only home they have ever known.

Imagining a life beyond college was nearly impossible for undocumented youths who witnessed state and local policies become increasingly hostile, as federal policy remained inert. Responding to pressure from anti-immigrant groups, the county in 2011 rescinded a 2009 resolution to bar participation in the 287(g) program. Under the new decision, the sheriff gained sole authority to decide if the county should partner with ICE to enforce immigration laws and begin deportation proceedings for individuals arrested on local charges. Although the 287(g) program is intended to detain dangerous criminals, a North Carolina study raised concerns that the program led to racial profiling of Hispanics who were getting pulled over or stopped for minor traffic violations (Weissman et al. 2009). Additionally, the study found that the program eroded trust between local police and Hispanic Communities in North Carolina, as Hispanic residents hesitated to report crimes for fear of deportation.

As youths aged through the secondary school system, they became more aware of the policies structuring and restricting their opportunities beyond high school. For the undocumented youths, many lost hope and many more expressed extreme frustration at the crippling impacts of their documentation status. Going through the small and supportive school system in Allen Creek offered these youths a feeling of membership and security as they grew up. Confronting increasingly hostile local and state

immigration policies, however, undocumented and non-citizen youths began to experience feelings of exclusion, depression, and crippling uncertainty as they neared the end of high school. Without federal immigration reform, and particularly without the passage of the DREAM Act, the undocumented youths' life pathways remained vulnerable to the constantly shifting political climate of their local surroundings.

How the context of the small town South influences the incorporation of Latina/o children of immigrants remains an empirical question in need of further investigation. Findings from this study suggest that the influences of small communities and schools can facilitate opportunities for valuable connections to supportive adult advisors. Although the migration history of Allen Creek is similar to other Southern towns that witnessed influxes of Latino migration during the 1990s, further research with youth populations needs to be conducted to determine if the findings of this study are unique to this community.

The representative diversity of Allen Creek High School is unusual, and even in Allen Creek it may be fleeting. As the Latina/o population expands, the balance between the three major demographic groups will shift and intergroup relations may shift as well. As the Latina/o population continues to swell, policies may become increasingly hostile. Without federal action addressing immigration at a national level, local and state policies can obstruct the plans and dreams of children of immigrants as they find themselves caught in a web of constantly shifting policies and attitudes. Even citizen children of immigrants can find their lives catapulted into chaos if a parent or family member without documentation loses his/her job or gets deported. As new Latina/o destinations become established Latina/o destinations and the demographic make-up of the youth

population within the country continues to shift toward a Latina/o majority, how these youths become incorporated into the fabric of the United States is an increasingly important area of investigation. Future studies should examine structures of immigrant and second generation incorporation in other rural, small town, suburban and urban schools and communities in new destinations. Understanding community context is essential to creating school and community policies that facilitate upward mobility and harmonious racial and ethnic relations among shifting populations in towns and cities throughout the country.



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## **APPENDIX**

### **PATHWAYS OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL**

Alonso – Undocumented Latino from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2010. Working full time in a local McDonalds.

Ana – Undocumented Latina from Guatemala – Graduated high school in 2010. Moved to Massachusetts with an older sibling. Working full time as a waitress.

Arturo – Undocumented Latino from Mexico. Graduated high school in 2007. Got married and had a baby. Enrolled in a four year university and working in construction.

Carmen – Undocumented Latina from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2007. Working full time as an assistant in a nearby dentist's office, making plaster molds.

Dalia – Undocumented Latina from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled full time in a four year college in North Carolina. She plans to major in ...

Diana – Undocumented Latina from Guatemala – Graduated high school in 2008. Working full time in a nearby textiles factory.

Eduardo – Undocumented Latino from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2008. Enrolled full time in a nearby four year college, studying engineering.

Enrique – Undocumented Latino from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2008. Working full time as a mechanic in a local shop.

Gabriela – Undocumented Latina from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2009. Working full time in a textiles factory.

Gustavo – Undocumented Latino from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2007. Working full time as welder. Maintains a base in Allen Creek but works on long term contracts primarily out of state.

Itzal – Undocumented Latina from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2009. Moved in with her boyfriend and had a child. She is a full-time mother. (check w Brenda/Tania about this)

Juan – Undocumented Latino from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2010. Working full time in construction, largely on long-term contracts out of state.

Krisali – Undocumented Latina from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled full time in a four year college.

Lisette – Undocumented Latina from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2009. Enrolled full time at community college approximately three hours from Allen Creek.

Lucas – Undocumented Latino from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2009. Enrolled full time in a four year college studying business.

Luis – Undocumented Latino from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2004. Finished college and a graduate program in Mexico City and is now living and working as a lawyer in a call center in Mexico City. He got married and had a baby.

Mariano – Undocumented Latino from Guatemala – Graduated high school in 2010. Took a gap year to lobby for the passage of the DREAM Act in Washington D.C. and took a class in community organizing at an IVY League university before enrolling in a prestigious four year university in North Carolina.

Mariela – Undocumented Latina from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2008. Working full time at a local hardware store. Taking classes in early childhood education at a local community college.

Sol – Undocumented Latina from Colombia – Graduated high school in 2009. Working as a nanny, moved in with her boyfriend.

Valentina – Undocumented Latina from Guatemala – Graduated high school in 2009. Enrolled in a four year college. Studying nursing.

Yesenia – Undocumented Latina from Guatemala – Graduated high school in 2008. Working full time in a nearby McDonalds.

Armando – U.S.-born Latino of Mexican descent – Graduated high school in 2008. Enrolled in a four year university majoring in Marketing within a minor in Supply Chain Management.

Carlos – U.S.-born Latino of Mexican descent– Graduated high school in 2008. Enrolled in a 2-year community college before transferring to a four year university.

Cristina – U.S.-born Latina of Mexican descent – Graduated high school in 2010. Enrolled in a four year university studying nursing.

Doug – U.S.-born of Colombian and white-American descent – Graduated high school in 2006. Graduated from a four year university and joined the army.

Emily – U.S.-born Latina of Mexican descent – Graduated high school in 2008. Moved in with her boyfriend and had a baby. She is working at a local retail store and taking classes in nursing at a nearby community college.

Erica – U.S.-born Latina of Mexican descent – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in a four year university.

Gisela – U.S.-born Latina of Mexican descent – Graduated high school in 2007. Taking classes in early education at a community college while working in a local pharmacy.

Hernando – U.S.-born Latino of Mexican descent – Graduated high school in 2008. Enrolled in a four year university studying Computer Information Systems and Finance.

Isabel – naturalized Latina from Guatemala – Graduated high school in 2007. Working as a research assistant in a medical clinic after graduating from a four year university. She hopes to become a physical therapist.

Julio – U.S.-born Latino of Mexican descent – Graduated high school in 2006. Working full time as a commercial and residential plumber.

Lidia – U.S.-born Latina of Mexican descent – Graduated high school in 2009. Enrolled in a four-year university studying Spanish and Psychology, with a minor in African American Studies.

Luz – U.S.-born Latina of Salvadoran descent – Graduated high school in 2009. Enrolled in a four year university studying international studies.

Malena – U.S.-born Latina of Mexican descent – Graduated high school in 2009. Enrolled in a four year college and hoping to work toward a career in the FBI.

Mani – U.S.-born Latino of Mexican descent – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in a four year university. Hoping to study international relations and business.

Ovidio – U.S.-born Latino of Mexican descent – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in a four year university and hoping to eventually teach middle school science.

Patricia – Latina born in Honduras with a temporary protected status visa – Graduated high school in 2009. Married at age 19, and taking nursing classes at a community college while working at a local retail store.

Pedro – U.S.-born Latino of Mexican descent – Graduated high school in 2004. Graduated from a four year university and a master's program and is now working locally as a social worker.

Sofia – U.S.-born Latina of Peruvian and Bolivian descent – Graduated high school in 2010. Enrolled in a four year university.

Vicente – U.S.-born Latino of Salvadoran descent – Graduated high school in 2008. Enrolled in a four year university studying environmental science.

Victor – U.S.-born Latino from Mexico – Graduated high school in 2007. Working as a soccer coach while taking classes at a community college.

Allison – white woman – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in a four year college.

Amy – white woman – Graduated high school in 2008. Enrolled in a four year university studying psychology.

Craig – white man – Graduated high school in 2004. Working as a dance instructor.

Jason – white man – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in a four year university while maintaining his job working in a textiles factory. Hopes to become a physical therapist.

James – white man – Graduated high school in 2007. Graduated from a four year university in 2011. Enrolled in Law School.

Julie – white woman – Graduated high school in 2008. Enrolled in a four year university and hoping to become a lawyer.

Leslie – white woman – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in a four year university.

Lila – white woman – graduated high school in 2009. Enrolled in a four year university studying Spanish and business.

Lizzy – white woman – Graduated high school in 2008. Enrolled in a four year university studying sports medicine and a member of the Hispanic Student Organization on campus.

Mary – white woman – Graduated high school in 2007. Married with a child, working as a waitress and in a local church.

Michelle – white woman – Graduated high school in 2007. Enrolled in a four year university studying education.

Reed – white man – Graduated high school in 2011. Joined the Marines.

Steve – white man – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in community college.

Amanda – black woman – Graduate high school in 2002. Working in a local fast food restaurant.

Ashlyn – black woman – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in community college and hoping to transfer to a four year college after two years.

Austin – black man – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in a four year university. Planning on studying business.

Braden – black man – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in a four year university hoping to eventually work in sports management.

Darius – black man – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in a four year university hoping to eventually work in sports management.

Janelle – black woman – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in a four year university. Hoping to study art and psychology.

Laurie – black woman – Graduated high school in 2008. Enrolled in a four year university studying music and Spanish.

Marcus – black man – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in a four year college.

Raymond – black man – Graduated high school in 2011. Enrolled in a four year college. Hoping to study education.

Robert – black man – Graduated high school in 2008. Enrolled in a four year university studying sociology and African American studies.

Sheray – black woman – Graduated high school in 2006. Married with two children. Working in a pharmacy as a pharmacy assistant.