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Don't Push Me Over the (Knowl)Edge: The Social Correlates of Latino High School Dropouts

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DON’T PUSH ME OVER THE (KNOWL)EDGE: A STUDY OF THE SOCIAL CORRELATES OF LATINO HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

by

ROBERT C. BASKERVILLE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY IN SOCIOLOGY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY, THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

DON’T PUSH ME OVER THE (KNOWL)EDGE: A STUDY OF THE SOCIAL CORRELATES OF LATINO HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

By Robert C Baskerville

Advisor: Juan Battle

According to the forecast of the US Census Bureau, Latinos are the largest, fastest-growing ethnic group within the United States today and will comprise the majority of the US labor force sometime during the mid-21st century. Yet today, the youth of this diverse segment of the population are plagued by alarmingly high high school dropout rates, about double that of African-Americans youth and triple that of white youth. This yawning disparity prompts the examination of the social conditions contributing to this social crisis. How do demographic, aspirational, school-level, and socioeconomic variables affect the decision that so many Latino youth make to drop out of high school?

Employing three waves from the Educational Longitudinal Study (2002, 2004 & 2006), this study seeks to add to the discussion of the causes of dropping out among Latinos by examining factors that influence high school persistence rates for a nationally representative sample of Latino youth.

This dissertation’s theoretical framework combines Bourdieu and Passeron’s theory of societal reproduction, labeling theory, and social motivation theory.

Variables from all three levels exerted some influence on dropout patterns among Latino youth. Attending a high school located in an urban center was especially significant in predicting the likelihood that a Latino in our sample would drop out of high school, despite the well-known personal costs.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Statement of the Problem

As the United States moves into the 21st century, two powerful social trends are set to converge that will propel the excessive Latino high school dropout rate to the top of the nation’s policy agenda. Like many other advanced economies against which it competes in the global marketplace, the United States has gone through a period of far-reaching transformation as information and communication technologies have made rapid inroads into U.S. industries and spurred the emergence of a knowledge economy where formal training and credentials are increasingly required to qualify for good-paying, middle-class jobs (Stehr, 1994). At the very time this has been happening, the demographic makeup of the U.S. population has also been undergoing dramatic change, exemplified by the explosive growth of the nation’s Latino population. In 1980, Latinos made up a mere 6.4% of the U.S. population; today, they are nearly 17% (U.S Census Bureau, 2013). As a result, Latinos now have the distinction of being the largest minority group in the United States. Yet of all minority groups, Latinos also have one of the highest high school dropout rates. The latest estimate of national high school dropout rates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics paints an alarming picture: nearly 1 out of every 4 Latinos in the United States today from the ages of 16-24 (22.5%) and 1 out of every 3 Latinos age 25 and older (34%) are high school dropouts.
1.1.2 Rationale

In a 2011 policy report about the state of Latino education, the Obama administration highlighted the long-term costs—not only for individual Latinos, but the nation as a whole—if the high school dropout rate among Latino youths is not reduced. Extrapolating from trend lines that indicate that with the retirement of the nation’s well-educated, mostly white baby-boomers the rise of Latino youth will be the main source of future domestic population growth. Federal officials project that by about mid-century Latinos will comprise more than half of the total U.S. labor force (Obama, 2011). The social and economic ramifications are clear should the dropout rates hold steady while the absolute size of the high school aged Latino population continues to grow. Not only will there be increasing number high school dropouts who will be unqualified for most of the better-paying, middle-class occupations that open up in the future, but U.S. businesses may find it necessary to search outside of the domestic labor force to find employees who meet their needs.

According to a recent Pew Hispanic Center report examining the educational progress of Latinos during the opening decade of the millennium, the academic performance of Latino high school students from 2000 to 2010 is a cause for celebration as well as concern (Fry, 2011). Even though the absolute number of Latino dropouts grew as result of an increase in the overall size of the high school-aged population, the percentage of Latino students who dropped out of one of the nation’s high schools during this period actually fell by half. High school dropout rates for Latinos declined from 28%, in 2000, to 14%, by 2010. In fact, this decline is part of a much broader, longer-running trend that extends at least as far back as 1972, when Latino dropout rates stood at a record high of 34%. (Chapman, Laird, Ifill & Ramani, 2011) Notwithstanding this steep decline, the report goes on to point out the current high school dropout rate for Latinos is
still considerably higher than that of most racial and ethnic groups. While 14% of Latino students dropped out of high school in 2012, the dropout rate among Black high school students, by contrast, was only 7%, and lower still, 5%, for white students (U.S. Department of Education, 2013; Chapman, Laird, Ifill & Ramani, 2011).

Numerous reports have shown that dropping out of high school without a diploma imposes lasting lifelong costs on individuals of all demographic backgrounds. (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Aud, KewalRamani & Frohlich, 2011) Insofar as educational credentials play a pivotal role in how one fares in today’s labor market, determining what jobs one qualifies for, and the salary and benefits one receives in return, perhaps the most direct measure of this cost is unemployment. Data show that high school dropouts suffer on all counts. For example, while the overall annual unemployment rate in the U.S. in 2008 was 5.4%, the rate of unemployment among all adult Latino high school dropouts was twice the national average (10.9%) (Aud, Fox & KewalRamani, 2010), and swelled to 27% among Latinos dropouts who were from the ages of 16-29 (Aud, KewalRamani & Frohlich, 2011).

Even when high school dropouts manage to find employment, research shows, their earnings are also likely to be significantly lower than the earnings of individuals with a formal educational credential. According to a recent report by the Department of Education, the median wage taken home for male Latino high school dropouts in 2007 was about $25,000—a third less than the $40,000 earned by the average Latino with a Bachelor’s degree. Moreover, female Latino dropouts earned even less than their male counterparts: their average median annual wage of $18,200 was the lowest of any major demographic group (Aud, Fox & KewalRamani, 2010).

High as the costs may be for the individual dropout, who suffers a life of job instability, lower earnings, and poorer health, the costs of dropping out of high school extend well beyond
the individual, imposing additional costs upon society as a whole. The earliest attempt to systematically calculate costs to the public for the individual decision to drop out was prepared by the educational economist Henry Levine in testimony he gave in 1972 before the United States Senate Select Committee On Equal Educational Opportunity. Tabulating such obvious costs as lost economic output, forgone taxes, increased welfare support, crime, and police and correctional services, he estimated that high school dropouts in the 1970s cost the nation somewhere on the order of 314 billion dollars a year (Levine et al., 1972). Using similar cost accounting procedures, in 1987 Catterall updated these early estimates and concluded that the cost to society was of similar magnitude (Catterall, 1987). To date, no comprehensive calculations of the social costs of the Latino high school dropout problem have been conducted. Extrapolations from current dropout rates, however, would easily put the costs at hundreds of billions dollars, if not more.

This dissertation takes up the central question on the minds educators and researchers, policymakers and politicians: What educational policies can be put into place to avoid this troubling scenario?

1.1.3 Contribution to the Field

The existing literature examining the problem of dropping out of high school has framed it as a problem that stems from low academic aspirations and expectations shaped by families and peer groups. So far as the academic motivations of dropouts arise in the private sphere, it might appear that there is little that public policy can do to bolster academic motivations because those areas of social life remain beyond the reach of effective government intervention. Contrary to this assumption, this study redirects attention to the way that current practices within
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

America’s high schools can and do influence the academic motivations of Latino high school students.

During the past several decades, researchers in the field of educational sociology have produced a body of influential research whose findings have become the basis for a package of educational reforms that, it is arguable, can be credited with bringing Latino dropout rates down to their current levels. Nevertheless, a limited amount of research has been conducted, since then, to assess the impact of those reforms.

If the literature review conducted for this study is any guide, the studies tend either to be based on observations of a small number of students (Slaughter-Defoe & Carlson, 1996; Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese & Garnier, 2001; Quiroz, 2001; Halxa, & Ortiz, 2011) or of nationally representative datasets that were gathered some time ago (Velez, 1989; Bohon, Johnson, Gorman, 2006). Given these facts, there is a dearth of nationally representative studies that determine how demographic, attitudinal, institutional, and socio-economic variables come together to influence the decision that many Latinos make to drop out of high school.

This study seeks to fill this hole by developing a model of Latino high school dropouts that will be tested against data from the 2002 Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS), which, conducted by the Department of Education, is the most recent nationally representative survey of America’s high school students. Upon its completion, this study will provide policymakers and educators with insights that may prove helpful in crafting new policies to further reduce Latino high school dropout rates.

1.2 Background
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.2.1—Theoretical Framework

1.2.1.1—Bourdieu’s Theory of Social and Cultural Reproduction

Understood in the broadest terms, the sociology of education investigates how educational systems interact with other institutions to pattern the academic achievements and attainments of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. To gain new insight into the forces that cause high numbers of Latinos to drop out of America’s high schools each year, this study draws on three theoretical frameworks that are anchored in Pierre Bourdieu and Claude Passeron’s theory of societal reproduction.

Against the commonplace view of the educational system as a lever of upward social mobility, Bourdieu and Passeron contend that the pedagogical practices of schools are integral to the perpetuation from one generation to the next of social inequality within modern capitalist economies.

The conceptual linchpin for their theory of societal reproduction, for which they construct a multi-dimensional model of societal stratification, is an expanded conception of the kinds of capital individuals use to advance their life projects. In his first systematic exposition in the essay “The Forms of Capital” (1986), Bourdieu contends that individual mobility turns on the possession of three interchangeable forms of capital: economic, social and cultural capital. In his view, individual mobility is not only determined by the amount of economic capital, or money, that is directly invested in a student’s education. It is also shaped by her social capital, defined as the social networks of which she is a part and through which she is able to mobilize additional resources as may be required. Moreover, access to social networks is closely tied to the individual’s possession of cultural capital: the set of attitudes, values, knowledge, tastes and
language acquired primarily from one’s family through which the individual signifies membership in these networks and is thus allowed to draw upon their resources.

Bourdieu’s ideas about cultural capital have had tremendous influence on studies of inequality by American researchers in the field of the sociology of education. Because the concept has often been shorn from the larger theory of societal reproduction, however, these studies often oversimplify the ways that cultural capital and schools are implicated in the reproduction of the existing macrosocial patterns within society (Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

In most studies, the educational system is typically seen to function as a sorting machine, dominated by society’s elites, who institute a system of curricular standards that are deeply rooted in their specific cultural lifestyle, and thereby give an advantage to children who are reared in families where the preferred forms of cultural capital are more abundant. A particular student’s academic performance will be better, all else being equal, the more familiar he is with the specific subject matter taught, the rules of proper academic discourse, and the deportment that teachers expect of “good” students, including decorous classroom behavior and an enthusiasm for learning. Because this sort of cultural capital is more abundant in better-off social classes, children from elite and middle class families do far better than children from lower-class families.

Studies that draw on Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital in this way tend to formulate theories that are concerned with the mismatch between the academic expectations of the educational system, on the one side, and the cultural capital that children acquire from the family, on the other. Student academic attitudes are typically treated as if their formation were shaped by forces outside of the educational system. In part, this simply reflects the primacy that Bourdieu gives to the role of the family in the formation of cultural capital. Nevertheless, what
often goes unanalyzed is the negative role that schooling has on the attitude of lower-class students as they experience what Bourdieu and Passeron designate as symbolic violence. So central is the role of symbolic violence within the schools to the reproduction of social order that the opening chapter of their work is “The Foundations of Symbolic Violence.”

According to Bourdieu and Passeron, symbolic violence entails three interrelated activities: curricular content, invidious tracking schemes, and the instructional activities of teachers (for further explication, see Chapter Two). This last form of symbolic violence, which they designate “pedagogic action,” occurs in face-to-face interactions between student and instructor. To clarify how the current study conceives this to work, we now turn attention to the next theoretical framework that we will draw on to explain the experiences of Latino dropouts.

1.2.1.2—Labeling Theory

With cultural conflicts erupting within American society during the first half of the 20th century several American theorists began developing a body of middle range theory, commonly known as labeling theory. The theory was a response in part to a growing numbers of immigrants groups that relocated to our shores. Labeling theory shed light on how the exercise of symbolic violence was linked to the process of societal stratification. Whereas Bourdieu casts his theory of cultural reproduction in terms of macro-level struggle over society’s economic surplus, labeling theory is anchored in George H. Mead’s interactionist theory of the self. Mead postulated that the self is a social construct, produced as the individual interacts with others and internalizes their assessments into a coherent self-image. Labeling theory applied that insight to outsider groups, groups whose behaviors were likely to lead to their self-marginalization, and explained how as society became more diverse and pluralistic dominant groups could exert greater social control over other cultural groups (Lemert, 1967: 7-9).
In 1938, Frank Tannenbaum adumbrated the core elements of labeling theory in his classic work *Crime and the Community*. Rejecting traditional criminological theories that see criminal behavior as a product of innate moral depravity, Tannenbaum contended, instead, that “criminal behavior” owes its genesis to a much deeper cultural conflict in which groups with different value systems struggle with one another to impose competing definitions of what is proper and lawful conduct for any given situation. Because more established groups generally wield greater influence over society’s agents of informal and formal social control, they invariably succeed in vilifying the more marginal groups, promulgating narratives of crime and vice that Tannenbaum designated the “dramatization of evil.” “The process of making the criminal,” he maintained, “is…the process of tagging, defining, identifying, segregating, describing, emphasizing [and] evoking the very traits that are complained of.” As the castigation of rookie criminals by the respectable elements of the community grows more frequent and sanctions by formal agents of social control more harsh, the definition of themselves as a criminal is gradually introjected into their self-image. Through this process, “the person becomes the thing he is accused of being” (Tannenbaum, 1938).

Edwin Lemert’s 1951 publication *Social Pathology* not only marked the first major attempt to formalize and systematize ideas that remained tacit in Tannenbaum’s initial statement of labeling theory, it also extended the applicability of labeling theory in two important ways. While Tannenbaum had pointed out that most theories of criminality tend to be rooted in the commonsense distinction that respectable elements of society draw between “normal” and “abnormal” behavior, Lemert noted that this dichotomy lies at the basis of a number of behaviors that were treated by contemporary agencies of social control as forms of deviance. Besides crime proper, deviance, for Lemert, included any “behavior which at a given time and place [was]
socially disapproved even though the same behavior may [have been] socially approved at other times and in other places” (Lemert, 22). Lemert explained other forms of deviance—blindness, defective speech, iconoclastic ideologies, prostitution, alcoholism and mental disorder—through labeling theory. This study similarly seeks to understand the process of dropping out through the insights of labeling theory.

Lemert’s second theoretical innovation in labeling theory explained how deviant identity is fully introjected into an individual’s self-conception. According to Lemert, there are two sociologically significant types of deviance that members of society engage in at any given time. The first—primary deviance—refers to the occasional act of transgression that almost all individuals commit in response to internal tensions that arise in situations where they are called upon to play two or more roles with conflicting normative demands. So far as these conflicts are only occasional the individual is not a true deviant. True deviance only emerges when members of certain social groups are regularly required to play roles with conflicting norms. To get relief from the unrelenting pressures that arise from these tensions, Lemert contends, these individuals embrace “secondary deviance.” Secondary deviance refers to the stage in the developmental process when individuals incorporate the label society imputes to them into their personal identity—that is to say, in their definition of “me.” (76). With respect to the individual, secondary deviance, or systematic deviance, occurs when the individual reorganizes her personality system to embrace a new role and its particular form of deviance. “Objective evidences of this change will be found in the symbolic appurtenances of the new role, in clothes, speech, posture, and mannerisms…” Moreover, Lemert contends that if the situations of cultural conflict are sufficiently widespread and society’s reactions to them are consistently negative, they can lead to the emergence of a full-blown deviant subculture (44-45).
Although all of the core elements of labeling theory had begun to enter the sociological lexicon as early as the 1930s, it was not until the 1963 publication of Howard Becker’s aptly titled *Outsiders*, that labeling theory would be given its first systematic exposition. Becker’s work was premised on postulates formulated by his predecessors: He rejected explanations that attribute deviance to the debased moral motivations of the individual, saw the internalization of social pejoratives as the mark of the true deviant, and analyzed the development of a deviant personality across a span of time as a “career.” What was perhaps most original about Becker’s ideas was his self-conscious effort to advance an idea of power that paralleled what Bourdieu would later explore when he wrote symbolic violence. Previous labeling theorists were hardly unaware that the ability to label groups as deviant was a reflection of differentials in power. Reflecting on why some acts of deviance garner condemnation while others do not, Lemert contended that the answer was to be “sought in the structuring of group relationships and the distribution of power within the community” (Lemert, 1953: 61). Nevertheless, because early labeling theorists treated the exercise of power as tangential to their empirical research, the paradigm became a target of criticism almost from the moment it gained influence within the sociological community. For example, Alvin Gouldner, the inveterate critic of the American sociology establishment, contended that the micro-level orientation adopted by labeling theorists necessarily directed their attention to low-level functionaries of the agencies of social control while ignoring the role of societal elites. Taking up this criticism in an essay that he authored for a new edition of the classic work, Becker argued that the symbolic dimension is integral to the exercise of power and violence as such. In addition to the naked exercise of physical force, Becker insists that “superordinate groups…maintain their power as much by controlling how
people define the world, its components, and its possibilities, as by the use of more primitive forms of control” (Becker, 1963: 204).

1.2.1.3—Social Motivation Theory

The psychological impact that negative labelling has on the academic performance of students has been explored most thoroughly through the framework of social motivation theory. Under the influence of the psychologists Julian Rotter (1954) and Albert Bandura (Bandura et al., 1961; Bandura, 1971), the analytic focus of learning theory shifted during the mid-20th century from the congenital traits and intra-psychic forces within the isolated individual to the social relationships in which learning takes place (Birch & Ladd, 1996; Graham, 1996).

Gradually, a number of researchers within educational psychology undertook research on school dropout patterns among Latinos and other students. They organized their work around four major premises.

First, the outcomes of formal academic learning are determined as much by the quality of relationships between students and teachers as by the aptitudes of individual students. Indeed, this is especially true of adolescence, as some research indicates that around this time students’ intrinsic motivations for learning decline (Harter, 1982; Gottfried et al., 2001). Other research indicates that the growth of autonomy from the family coincides with a need for supportive relations with other adults (Eccles & Midgley, 1988 & 1990).

Second, the ability of students to meet the demands of academic life depends on the development of social and emotional faculties as well as the cognitive abilities that have long been the focal point of teaching. Examples of these extra-cognitive traits include such things as a
willingness to adhere to school norms and roles, to share, help and cooperate with others, and to exercise self-control (Wentzel, 1996).

Third, the experiences that students undergo within the classroom are an independent factor in shaping student motivations. Those experiences rival, and for a time may even surpass, the influence of the family (Wentzel, 1996: 233). The impact of academic experiences on students is the inevitable outcome of the increased time spent in the classroom along with the growing importance that academic competence comes to assume for the positive sense of self-worth (Covington, 1990).

Finally, motivational theorists maintain that students have social and emotional needs whose fulfillment can only be realized through social relationships. The fulfillment of these needs, or, conversely, the failure to fulfill them, is integral in shaping student motivation—for better or worse. Among the needs that shape of motivation are social approval (Harter, 1996), competence, autonomy and relatedness, (Ryan & Powelson, 1991; Graham, 1996; Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl & McDougall, 1996). Taken together, the theory and research behind social motivation theory underscore the central role that student teacher relationships have on academic persistence among all students, including Latino students.

Given the importance of teachers, it should come as no surprise that the quality of interactions between students and teachers comes to assume a much a larger role, over time, in shaping the academic motivations and the long-term outcomes of high school students. One ought to expect that positive labeling is likely to encourage students to do well, while negative labeling will discourage students from exerting themselves in their academic work.
1.2.2— Literature Review

There is a voluminous body of literature that examines how the interplay of demographic, aspirational, school-level, and socioeconomic factors influence dropout patterns among Latino students. Much of that research, however, ignores the way that student interactions with school personnel may exacerbate the social characteristics that already make them vulnerable to dropping out. Research on Latino dropout rates requires further study of how particular subgroups within the Latino population, especially those from low-income backgrounds and
subcultural groups, may suffer the differential effects of recent educational policies designed to decrease dropouts but do not consider the particular backgrounds of students.

The formation of the academic aspirations and expectations of Latinos and other major racial/ethnic groups has been the focal point of several theoretical perspectives, which researchers have developed to explain the variability in persistence rates among American high school students (Kao & Tienda, 1998).

Research on Latino dropout patterns within the status attainment tradition has investigated demographic and socioeconomic variables that include the nation’s other major demographic groups. Family background and socio-economic status are the key determinants of variations in academic attitudes and ambitions with low academic aspirations and expectations primarily ascribed to the occupational status and level of education of one or both parents (Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom, et al., 1986; Barros, 1987).

Other studies within the status attainment tradition have sought to expand the comparative framework by examining whether academic attitudes vary according to specific Latino ethnic subgroups (Velez, 1989; Bohon et al., 2006). Inspired by the distinction Ogbug draws between “voluntary” and “involuntary” immigration, Velez (1989) and Bohon et al. (2006) found that there were salient differences in academic aspirations from one ethnic subgroup to the next, which link to variations in historical patterns of incorporation within the United States. Students of Puerto Rican and Mexican ancestry exhibited low academic expectations and aspirations, but Cubans students had higher academic expectations and aspirations, reflecting the hospitable climate that greeted their parents when they immigrated to the United States. Yet Velez’s findings that Cuban-Americans were also the most likely of the
three groups to drop out of high school illustrates the limitations of the status attainment tradition.

Hoping to overcome these limitations, alternative approaches to the study of Latino dropouts incorporate school-level variables into their models (Bidwell & Kasarda, 1980). The first alternative approach, commonly known as the institutional perspective (Borman & Dowling, 2010), examines the inequities in funding between schools that result from racial/ethnic segregation. It assumes that the low academic ambitions that Latinos exhibit may be moderated according to the amount of resources available for instructional activities. Perhaps the best-known of the studies in the institutionalist tradition is James Coleman’s 1965 *Equality of Educational Opportunity* study. Contrary to the expectations of many researchers and policy makers, he found that the family’s socioeconomic background was far more important than either the amount of resources expended by the school, or the composition of the student body, in predicting the odds that a person would drop out once the socioeconomic status of individual students were held constant (Coleman, 1965).

The other perspective, the school organization perspective, focuses on how dropout rates are affected by the climate that permeates the high schools that students attend (Bidwell & Kasarda, 1980). Key variables include: the academic rigor of the curriculum; the number of specialized learning tracks; the socioeconomic characteristics of the students body as a whole; individual student perceptions of safety, order, and discipline within the school; and affinity that faculty have for students (Coleman et al., 1982; Bryk & Lee, 1989; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Pittman, 1991). Research has shown that variations within these factors tend to divide along the sectoral line that separates public schools from private. Moreover, it was argued, lower dropout
rates and higher rates of academic achievement seemed to indicate that Catholic schools were far more effective than public schools at educating students from the nation’s inner cities.

1.3—Methodology

1.3.1—Procedure

Social scientists and policymakers have analyzed the ethnic disparities in dropout rates within the secondary school system in the United States. There has been reluctance, however, to examine the ways in which middle-class norms have been incorporated within pedagogical practices and how they may exacerbate the academic challenges of Latino students, especially those from more marginal populations.

To test our hypotheses about the role that cultural conflicts plays in dropping out of high school, this study will draw upon data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002). ELS:2002 is a clustered, two-stage stratified national sample with a total of 15,362 tenth-graders surveyed in the base year, 2002. The data collected from the students focused, in the main, on their perceptions of their educational experiences; it also included tests of their math and English abilities.

In addition to the base year survey, ELS:2002 consists of three follow-up surveys. The first follow-up survey, which was supplemented by a second math exam, was conducted in 2004, when the students, if progressing normally, would be preparing to graduate from high school. The second and third follow-up surveys, conducted in 2006 and 2012, respectively, allowed the study to assess the impact that high school completion status had on the students’ transition into post-secondary school and/or the labor market and the formation of the families. Aside from
students, ELS also collected data from parents (2002 & 2004), math and English instructors (2002), school principals, other key administrators (2002 & 2004), and any post-secondary institutions in which students subsequently enrolled (2006).

This dissertation will focus on Latino students in three of the four waves of the collected data: the Base year (2002), the First Follow-up Study (2004) and the Second Follow-up Study (2006). Preliminary analysis indicates that there are approximately 2,221 Latino students in the sample.

Logistic regression analysis will be employed to determine which of the independent variables included in our statistical model have the greatest impact on the decision of Latino student to drop out of high school.

This dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter Two will review the literature about the complex interplay of forces that prompt large numbers of Latinos to drop out of high school. In particular, it will examine findings from several alternative research paradigms that have sought to explain how these students’ academic motivations and expectations are shaped by social processes and institutions, which in turn affect the decision to complete their high school degrees or drop out of high school.

Chapter Three will delineate the specific methodology utilized in this dissertation.

Chapter Four presents the statistical findings from this study’s quantitative analysis. This chapter will discuss the demographic, aspirational, school-level, and socioeconomic variables that influence whether a Latino student obtains a high school diploma or drops out of high school.
2.1—Introduction

“Chapter One, Introduction and Background,” presented a broad overview of the Latino dropout crisis, noting the magnitude of dropouts today, the individual and social costs, and theoretical framework that the current study utilizes to shed light on its causes. As was made clear, existing research indicates that the decision to drop out of high school involves a host of dynamically related factors, involving different elements of society: the academic motivations of individual students; the micro-social classroom interactions between students and teachers; and the policies and practices that educational agencies use to categorize and manage different groups of students who attend schools within their jurisdictions. Given the complexity of these relations, one theoretical framework alone is insufficient to account for the processes that lead Latino students to disengage from and eventually drop out of high school.

In this study, elements of three distinct, but complementary theoretical traditions are synthesized into a unified framework through which the dynamics of the Latino high school dropout crisis will be analyzed and interpreted. Section 2.2, below, provides an exposition of this analysis’ three theoretical traditions—social and cultural capital, labeling, and social motivation theory. In section 2.3, a profile of the demographic factors that were examined for this study will be presented, followed by a review of seminal sociological studies on Latino high school dropouts. The concluding section, 2.4, outlines the key theoretical and ideological issues this study addresses. Together, these sections set the stage for the discussion of the research methods, empirical findings, and interpretation that follows in later chapters.
2.2—Theoretical Framework

2.2.1—Capital and the Reproduction of Educational Inequality

Understood in the broadest terms, the sociology of education investigates how society’s educational system interacts with other institutions to pattern the academic achievements and attainments of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. A number of theoretical perspectives, each distinguished by how they delineate the connections of schools to the family, the state, and the economy, attempt to explain how these interactions lead to persistent educational disparities among groups. To explore how those relationships lead so many Latinos to drop out of high school, this study is anchored in the theory of social and cultural reproduction that was formulated by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his collaborator Claude Passeron.

Though America’s public schools are widely seen as vehicles of social mobility, Bourdieu and Passeron contend, to the contrary, that in modern capitalist societies schools are the instrument through which society’s dominant classes reproduce their privileges by imposing their worldview, values and practices on subordinate groups (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1991: 178 & 187). Central to their theory is an innovative conception of the types of capital that individuals use to advance through the educational system.

Originally outlined in Bourdieu’s essay “The Forms of Capital” (1986), individual academic performances are shaped by the variegated stock of economic, social and cultural capital individuals acquire from their families and devote to educational pursuits.
Economic capital consists of the monetary assets that families invest while furnishing their children with an education. In most instances, those resources are directly invested in ensuring children have access to particular schools, whether it be for the rental or mortgage payments required to live in a district with well-regarded public schools, or for the tuition fees usually charged by private schools. In other instances, economic capital is expended on educational supplements offered by entities outside of the school but designed to bolster academic performance within it. Better-off families are especially likely to invest money in professional tutoring and college preparatory courses for their children or for the computers, books and cultural enrichment activities that may bolster their academic performance. In Bourdieu’s view, one of the advantages of investments of economic capital is that it can be converted into alternative forms of capital that are also instrumental to an individual’s academic achievement.

Cultural capital refers to the taken-for-granted cognitive categories, normative standards, and emotional dispositions that actuate and animate the practical activities and strategies individuals engage in while pursuing their life projects. Acquired through the process of socialization, each individual’s cultural capital varies according to the habitus of the family and socioeconomic class within which they are reared. As children incorporate these external relations within their individual personalities, families create three inheritable forms of cultural capital that affect their children’s educational achievements: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

The first, and earliest, form of capital an individual acquires is embodied cultural capital. It refers to modes of thought, patterns of feeling, and types of comportment that can only exist in and through the person of the individual actor. Within the field of education in particular,
cultural capital is comprised of a student’s basic aptitude for formal education, as well as the general rules of deportment that teachers expect of “good” students, such as adherence to the rules of proper academic discourse, the ability to appreciate works of culture, or basic rules of propriety. All else being equal, students who have such knowledge are much better equipped to perform within academic institutions.

In 2013, *The New York Times* published an article highlighting how one element of embodied cultural capital—linguistic ability—affects a person’s academic performance later on in life. According to academic research cited there, by the age of 3, children from professional households in the United States had heard 30 million more words than children from lower-class households. Furthermore, vocabulary tests administered in kindergarten showed that linguistic ability was a significant predictor of children’s level of reading comprehension in higher grades (Motoko, 2013). The results of these studies support Bourdieu and Passeron’s contention that “educationally profitable linguistic capital constitutes one of the best-hidden mediations through which the relationship between social origin and scholastic achievement is set up (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994: 115-116, emphasis in the original).

*Institutionalized cultural capital* refers to legal recognition of a person’s cultural capital, typically through an academic credential or a certificate from some other state-sanctioned training. This form of capital enables the person who possesses it to validate objectively that they have certain skills and competencies, thereby bolstering their ability to gain access to other institutional arenas, be they further academic training or a particular occupation in the labor market. Hence, not only does it serve as a measuring rod against which one’s cultural capital can be compared to others, institutionalized capital also enables a person to convert their embodied cultural capital into economic capital.
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*Social capital*, the last major form Bourdieu identifies, consists of both the actual and potential resources that individuals and families mobilize as recognized members of a specific group, social class, or broader social network. Typically, research seeking to explain high dropout rates among Latinos has focused attention on the degree to which groups use their social networks to mobilize resources needed to enforce the norms and values that lead to educational success. In their well-known explanation of why Catholic schools are more effective than public schools at educating at-risk minorities living in the inner-city, for example, Coleman and his colleagues argue that these schools have formed cohesive social networks with the surrounding communities through which students can be constrained to live up to high academic expectations (Coleman & Hoffman, 1987).

In contrast to studies of Latino dropout behavior that examine how social networks are used to mobilize indigenous resources, our analysis draws on an aspect of Bourdieu’s conception of social capital that often goes overlooked—specifically, his suggestion that the networks of more powerful elements undercut the educational performance of marginal groups. On the one hand, the very act of mobilizing resources on behalf of any group requires its members to make invidious distinctions, which, he concludes, “reaffirms the limits of the group, i.e. the limits beyond which the constitutive exchange…cannot take place” (1986: 52). Each member of the group serves as a custodian, as it were, who polices the cultural/symbolic boundaries that distinguish members of the in-group from those who belong to out-groups. On the other, the conversion of cultural capital into social capital is permanently institutionalized whenever more powerful groups have the legitimate authority to perform rites that either confer or deny social recognition to others.
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In “The Forms of Capital,” illustrations of this process focus on the traditional rites through which individuals are formally recognized as fellow members of the families of the nobility. Bourdieu and Passeron, however, contend that a similar mechanism is also at work within educational institutions. In the opening chapter of their monograph, “Foundations of a Theory of Symbolic Violence,” they suggest that both teachers and school administrators are endowed by societal elites with the pedagogical authority that all but guarantees that large numbers of students from subordinates groups will not attain the academic credential needed to pursue a college education and thereby obtain good-paying jobs. This occurs through the exercise of several forms of symbolic violence that have a disproportionate impact on these groups.

The first form of symbolic violence is enacted through the codification within the school’s curriculum of the cultural values, lifestyle, and worldview of elites. Over the course of their academic careers, students from marginal classes and groups are constantly bombarded by messages from their teachers that convey the idea that their own cultural practices and values are illegitimate. The result, they tells us, is “if not the explicit recognition of the dominant culture as legitimate culture, then at least an insidious awareness of the cultural unworthiness of their own acquirements” (Bourdieu & Passeron: 28). Poor academic performance of sizable segments of the Latinos and African-Americans school-age population are believed due to the devaluation of their original ethnic cultures.

Another, closely related form of symbolic violence is exercised as teachers and administrators use various tracking systems to classify students into educational subgroups, which are subsequently treated in a discrepant manner. Tracking students into any number of
special needs populations is frequently cited as a cause for low academic performance (Hawley, 2007).

A final form of symbolic violence is exercised through the face-to-face, micro-level interactions that take place between teacher and student in the classroom and hallways of the school. Unlike the more coercive pedagogic techniques employed in earlier societies, where corporal punishment was commonplace, Bourdieu and Passeron contend that today’s teacher mete out powerful emotional sanctions through their approbation or disapprobation of student behavior (Bourdieu & Passeron: 18). Apart from the other forms of symbolic violence, they suggest that these micro-aggressions that are only now beginning to be explored in the sociology of education have a decisive impact on student motivation (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990: 101 & 154-55).

While Bourdieu and Passeron’s theory of cultural and social reproduction provides the macrosociological framework with which the problem of Latino dropouts is investigated in the present study, below are two additional theoretical frameworks through which they will be linked to micro-level processes.

2.2.2—Labeling Theory

Within American sociology, interest in the way that the exercise of symbolic violence contributes to social stratification is the focal point of a line of research commonly known as labeling theory. Rooted in the theory of the self that was put forth by George H. Mead, exponents of labeling theory borrow on Mead’s theory of the social formation of identity and use it to explain the appearance and perpetuation of certain categories of people who are relegated to
permanent outcast status. Mead postulated that the self is a social construct, produced as the individual interacts with others through symbolically mediated communication and internalizes and synthesizes the assessments of others into a coherent self-image.

Beginning in the 1930s, a succession of theorist began applying Mead’s theory to explain the emergence of subcultural groups within the United States that came to be widely regarded as public nuisances, if not outright threats to the stability of the entire social order. Frank Tannenbaum articulated the basic idea of labeling theory in his 1938 publication *Crime and the Community*: “[t]he process of making the criminal is…the process of tagging, defining, identifying, segregating, describing, emphasizing [and] evoking the very traits that are complained of.” Through this process, “the person becomes the thing he is accused of being” (Tannenbaum, 1938). In other words, it was not an inherent moral failing that led individuals to become career criminals; rather, as Tannenbaum saw it, it was the harsh societal reaction to criminal wrongdoing and the subsequent internalization of this messages on the part of the offender that transformed a one-time offender into a career criminal.

Edwin Lemert’s 1951 publication *Social Pathology* introduced two important theoretical innovations into the paradigm—both expanding the range of behaviors and the span of the individual’s biography that were explicable through it. Extrapolating from Tannenbaum’s assertion that criminality rests on the distinction dominant groups draw between “normal” and “abnormal” behavior, Lemert notes that behaviors that society labels deviant are predicated on the same symbolic distinction. Deviance, for Lemert, is any “behavior which at a given time and place is socially disapproved even though the same behavior may be socially approved at other times and in other places” (Lemert, 22). Besides crime, he notes, other acts labelled as deviant
include blindness, defective speech, iconoclastic ideologies, prostitution, alcoholism, and mental disorders.

Lemert’s second theoretical innovation accounts for how a deviant identity is introjected into an individual’s self-conception. The social genesis of a true deviant entails a two-stage process, he argues. The first stage, “primary deviance,” consists of the initial violation of a norm along with the expressions of disapproval. Because everyone violates society’s norms, at one time or another, a one-time transgression of norms does not make a person a deviant. Rather, persons only become “true” deviants once they cross the threshold to “secondary deviance,” which he defines as the stage when individuals, after being repeatedly labeled as abnormal, incorporate the deviant label into their personal identities—that is to say, into their definition of “me” (76). In so doing, the individual’s “life and identity are organized around the facts of deviance” (quoted in Rist, 1977). Embracing a deviant personality is far more likely to occur in instances where people from different backgrounds are repeatedly brought into contact with one another and are thus continuously forced to orient themselves to differing normative expectations. If these situations of cultural conflict are sufficiently widespread, it may lead to the emergence of a full-blown subculture whose norms are at odds with those of the dominant group (44-45).

The 1963 publication of Howard Becker’s aptly titled Outsiders marks the first full systematic exposition of labeling theory. Organized around case studies of marijuana users and jazz musicians, Becker’s work is premised on tenets formulated by his predecessors and shows how these groups gradually assimilate social labels across a span of time that he likens to a “career.” What is perhaps most original about Becker’s ideas is his self-conscious effort to advance a notion of power that prefigures Bourdieu and Passeron’s beliefs about the role
symbolic violence plays in the reproduction of social order. Becker argues that the symbolic dimension is integral to the exercise of power and violence as such. While the exercise of naked physical force is usually reserved for exceptional instances, Becker insists that “superordinate groups…maintain their power as much by controlling how people define the world, its components, and its possibilities, as by the use of more primitive forms of control” (Becker, 1963: 204).

By the 1970s, growing concern about the academic difficulties many Latinos and African-Americans were experiencing in schools across the nation prompted researchers to use labeling theory to exam how interactions within schools were contributing to low academic performance. Using labeling theory to make sense of a number of studies that found that student performance was influenced by teacher expectations, Rist (1977) argues that teachers play a leading role “sorting, labeling, tracking, and channeling persons along various routes depending upon the assessment the institution has made of the individual.” It was increasingly recognized that academic performance is in part a manifestation of the self-fulfilling prophecies teachers make.

Many of those earlier studies focused on the impact of the visual information that teachers see while directly interacting with students in the classroom, which led many to conclude that ascriptive traits like race, gender, and other aspects of physical appearance shape teacher expectations, which in turn influence how students actually perform (Rist, 1971). Later studies increased attention to the way that disciplinary codes and administrative policies are used to classify minority students into groups, which are involuntarily pushed out of high school before obtaining their diploma (Riehl, 1999). Relatively minor infractions like talking in class, cursing, horseplay, and wearing certain styles of clothing, as well a more serious issues like poor
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attendance, class failure, grade retention, fighting, and gambling are used to label students as “troublemakers.” Those students are subject to treatment, which make school persistence even more difficult (Bowditch, 1993; Nolan, 2008).

2.2.3—Social Motivation Theory

Dropping out of high school marks the culmination of a long-term process of disengagement that researchers in the field of educational psychology have sought to explain using theories that focus on the social formation of academic motivation within the school. According to Eccles and Wigfield, the psychological aspects of academic motivation entail two questions that occur to students as they are asked to take on new academic demands and challenges while moving from one grade to the next: “Can I do the task?” and “Do I want to do the task?” (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002).

During the phase when psychology was emerging as a distinct discipline, most explanations for the way these questions were answered fixated on the congenital traits of the individual that were thought to be the key determinants of academic motivation and engagement (Birch & Ladd, 1996; Graham, 1996). Under the influence of the psychologists Julian Rotter and Albert Bandura, however, the analytic focus of the field shifted and researchers began to more closely examine how the social relationships in which students were embedded influenced their academic attainments and achievements. All behavior, Rotter insisted in the 1954 classic Social Learning and Clinical Psychology, is best understood as the product of social interaction between individuals, on the one side, and the social environment of which they are a part, on the other (Rotter, 1954). Using experimental methods, Bandura found evidence of the ways adult role models influenced child behavior, including childhood aggression (Bandura, Ross & Ross,
1961). He later extended and systematized the insights of Rotter and other psychologist into the first systematic statement of social learning theory, which he sketched in the 1971 monograph, *Social Learning Theory*. According to the model of learning delineated there, learning was a developmental process made up of several distinct stages through which the individual proceeds as the behavior of adults and peers are internalized and become a part of one’s behavioral repertoire (Bandura, 1971: 6-8).

In applying this model to the problems of student persistence, academic motivation is understood to be shaped by the continuous interaction between the aspirations and expectations transmitted by families, the continuously evolving emotional and cognitive faculties of students who are transitioning from childhood to adolescence, and the shifting social relationships that are anchored within the school system (Eccles, 2008). Over the years, a vast body of literature has explored how each of these factors influences patterns of persistence, using a myriad of constructs and methodologies to quantify and analyze them. In sticking to the main line of inquiry undertaken in the current study, the remainder of this review will be restricted to the impact that teachers have on the formation of student aspirations and expectations.

Numerous educational theorists and philosophers have argued that the formation of students’ academic motivation turns in no small part on the extent to which they feel that their teachers both respect and care for them as individuals (Sutton, 2005; National Research Council, 2004; Nodding, 1988; Bryk et al., 1993). The teacher’s primary role is to transmit information designed to expand student’s cognitive abilities, yet doing so requires that students develop a variety of extra-cognitive traits as well. Chief among these traits are a willingness to adhere to school norms and roles, to help, share, and cooperate with others, and to develop capacity for self-control (Wentzel, 1996).
Whether or not students eventually develop these traits is further complicated by the intrinsic connection between learning and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs. “The major or basic modes of behavior are learned in social situations and are inextricably fused with needs requiring for their satisfaction the mediation of others” (Rotter, 1954). While the satisfaction of some of those needs, for example, autonomy and competence, are the result of instructional practice, other research has shown that approval (Harter, 1996) and relatedness (Ryan & Powelson, 1991; Graham, 1996; Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl & McDougall, 1996) are more directly tied to the quality of relationships students have with their teachers.

Goodnow (1993) and Roeser (Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996) have shown feelings of belongingness in classrooms and schools and a sense of being part of a supportive learning community are correlated with increased academic engagement and school learning (see also Birch & Ladd, 1996; Wentzel, 1996; Connell & Klem, 2000; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; NRC, 2004). Indeed, a major advantage that Catholic schools have over public schools, some researchers assert, is that their internal structure enhances students’ sense of belonging in their classroom and school agendas (Slavin, 1995; Stevens & Slavin, 1995).

Several explanations have been proffered as to why the quality of student teacher relationships assumes such importance among high school students. As students advance from primary school to secondary school, a shift takes place in the basis of academic motivation. While the academic motivation of primary school students is driven by an intrinsic desire to satisfy intellectual curiosity, Harter suggests that in secondary schools it is supplanted by a more extrinsic form of motivations that is oriented to winning the approval of peers, as well as “the desire to obtain grades, to win teacher approval” (Harter, 1996). Eccles and Midgley contend that the reason that this is so is because even as they begin to assert their autonomy, adolescents
begin to rely more heavily on the support of adults other than their parents (Eccles & Midgley, 1988 & 1990).

Whatever the reasons, qualitative studies of the academic performance of minority students supports the hypothesis that African American and Latinos who experience discrimination at school will lose their sense of belonging (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Some studies have shown that negative stereotypes prompt teachers and other school personnel to convey the belief that certain groups of students lack the ability to do more challenging academic work (Brophy & Good, 1974; Aronson, Fried & Good, 2001; Aronson, 2002). Preferential treatment of certain groups of students during face-to-face interactions in class (Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996) as well as the tracking of others into groups that are labeled as low ability (Hawley, 2007) are examples of mechanisms by which teachers and schools communicate lowered expectations. Far more discouraging messages are communicated to students by “bad teachers” who engage in misbehavior, various acts that include humiliation, intimidation, condescension, or castigation (Banfield et al., 2006; see also Thweatt et al., 1998; Kearney et al., 1991, Kearney et al., 2002). In sum, social motivation theory makes clear how student who are the recipients of negative messages and pejorative labels are less likely to develop the confidence and resilience that is needed to avoid dropping out of high school.

2.3—Literature Review

A clear-eyed examination of dropout patterns among Latino high school students gives policymakers cause for celebration as well as concern. Celebration is because Thanks to a number of policy initiatives, dropout rates have fallen by more than half in about a 40 years.
Where the Latino dropout rate once stood at high of 34% in 1970, by 2010 it was just 14%. Indeed, according to the demographer Richard Fry, as many as 1 in 3 persons of Latino ancestry who drop out of high school are actually immigrants who spent little time in America’s secondary school system (Fry, 2003). Despite the long term decline, however, there is still cause for concern. Even among native-born Latinos the dropout rate is nearly twice the rate of African-Americans, and more than three times the rate of whites. With Latinos projected to become the largest single racial/ethnic group in the United States by midcentury, it is imperative that we devise new educational policies that will bring about further reductions in the decades ahead.

The poor performance of Latinos, relative to other minority groups and whites, has drawn increasing attention and stimulated the production of a body of scholarly research. In keeping with the belief in the racial and cultural superiority of whites, much of the earlier literature was predicated on the assumption that the comparatively low academic performance of Latinos was attributable to racial factors (Valencia, 1997) or cultural deficits (Valencia & Black, 2002). For a variety of reasons, however, this earlier approach has fallen into disrepute among contemporary researchers. Instead, the focal point of more recent research into the academic performance of Latino students has centered on the ways that social relationships shape student academic aspirations and expectations and influence the decision to drop out of high school.

Although they are closely related, aspirations and expectations involve different types of motivation. Throughout this study, the term “aspirations” is used to refer to the desire to obtain a diploma, which is motivated by a belief in the intrinsic value of an education. The term expectations, on the other hand, is used to refer to motivations that turn on the belief in one’s ability to obtain a diploma or the necessity of getting one to attain some extrinsic goal (see: Kao & Tienda, 1998; Bohon et al., 2006; Eccles, 2008). Despite the widespread agreement that both
these elements play an integral role in the decision to drop out, there is far less agreement about the precise mechanisms that underlie the “formation” of these aspirations and expectations (Kao & Tienda, 1998).

In surveying the literature on the formation of academic aspirations and expectations, most prior research can be usefully said to fall within two broad traditions, each distinguished by the particular set of social relationships that are identified as being most seminal in shaping the aspirations and expectations of Latino students and others. According to Kao and Tienda (1998), the first—and older—of these perspectives, is the status attainment perspective. Explanations using this model attribute the formation of individual student academic aspirations and expectations to influences transmitted through the particular socioeconomic group from early childhood. Fundamental differences in the attitudes that groups hold toward academic achievement explain subsequent variations in attainment that become clear as children from different socioeconomic groups transition to adulthood and either attend college or enter the workforce. Disagreements over how much emphasis should be placed on occupational or racial/ethnic membership has led to two different views.

One strand conceives of aspirations as an expression of a group’s belief about the intrinsic value of education and its importance to academic pursuits. Parents, older siblings, peers, and teachers shape the student’s aspirations, either directly through messages about the value of education or indirectly through modeling behavior that sends tacit messages about the degree to which they value an education. The other strand of the status attainment tradition contends that the formation of educational attitudes rests on rational expectations that are made in light of abilities and the possible payoffs from investing time, energy, and resources to obtain a credential.
Though they are seldom located in any explicit theoretical tradition, the bulk of quantitative studies on Latino dropout rates fall within the status attainment tradition (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Davalos et al., 1999; Eckstein and Wolpin, 1999; Schneider & Stevenson, 2000; Johnson, et al., 2001; Gándara, O’Hara & Gutiérrez, 2004; South, et al., 2005; Ream & Rumberger, 2009; Carbonaro and Workman 2013). Yet contradictory assessments of the influence that varying background factors have on dropping out reveal the limits of status attainment’s explanatory utility.

Although these factors are inextricably intertwined in everyday life, for the sake of clarity, the present study follows established research protocols and categorizes those elements into four analytic groupings: demographic, aspirational, school-level, and socioeconomic factors.

2.3.1—Demographic Factors

Much research on dropout patterns among Latino youth has focused on such demographic factors as gender, type of school, and locale, and geographic location.

**Female**

Findings from numerous studies have concluded that Latinas are at greater risk of dropping out than their male counterparts (Steinberg et al., 1984; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fernandez et al., 1989; Velez, 1989; Rumberger, 1993; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Stearns and Glennie, 2006). Explanations for this gender-based disparity have centered on the patterns of traditional family life that Latinos, irrespective of particular ethnicity, share, what Vega (1995) calls “familism”—values and behaviors that place the collective needs of the family over the needs of its individual members.
In studies that link gender to differences in dropout rates among males and females, researchers identify several concrete behaviors which they believe cause Latinas to exit school before obtaining their high school diploma. Among the most frequently cited, for example, is the increased risk of dropping out as a result of an early pregnancy. Rumberger (1983) concludes from an analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey that pregnancy has a significant relationship to dropping out. In separate studies based on the High School And Beyond (HS & B) survey, Ekstrom et al. (1986), Fernandez et al. (1989), and Velez (1989) subsequently confirmed this link. Indeed, for the past several decades, the pregnancy rates of Latinas, no matter what the ethnic subgroup, have been higher than those of whites and African-Americans (Landale et al., 2006).

Although the majority of studies link differences in dropout rates among Latino males and females to pregnancy, there are others that question the validity of this claim. For example, Fernandez et al. (1988) contend that responsibility for a newborn child is likely to impel males and females alike to drop out of high school. Barros (1987) cautions against drawing any firm inferences about the role pregnancy and family responsibility contribute to differences in the observed dropout rates of males and females, contending that HS & B does not provide reliable information about this matter. It is unclear, however, why he reaches this conclusion; the questionnaire administered to dropouts during the second wave does allow for pregnancy to be identified as a cause.

Apart from the risk of pregnancy, adherence to traditional family values is thought to lead to other behaviors that may also weaken Latinas’ commitment to the completion of high school. Even if it does not lead to a pregnancy, Velez asserts, early dating among Latinas may lead them to marry before completing high school. As was the case for pregnancy rates, longitudinal
analysis of marriage rates by Landale et al. (2008) indicates that the marriage rates of Latinos exceed those of whites by no less than 10 percentage points during the last three decades of the 20th century. Velez furthermore suggests that adherence to traditional gender roles means that Latinas may devote insufficient time to studying because they find themselves saddled with the responsibility of household chores.

Public

Another demographic variable that has drawn the attention of researchers is the type of school Latinos attend. Because of the decentralization of the authority over educational policy, federal constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, high rates of geographic mobility, and regional differences in educational philosophy, the system of secondary education that has emerged in the United States is quite diverse. Secondary schools fall into broad sectors, which can be analytically distinguished from one another by three features: 1) the source of their operating funds; 2) the role of choice in the recruitment of the student body; and 3) the locus of responsibility for decisions regarding fundamental instructional policies and practices (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997).

Recent policy innovations—such as public school choice, private-school vouchers, and the proliferation of publicly-funded but privately operated charter schools—have done much to blur the characteristics that distinguish today’s high schools from one another. Generally speaking, though, the overwhelming number of public high schools get their operating funds from taxpayer dollars, offer parents few or no choices as to the school their children attend, and adhere to educational policies that are set by a school board whose members are either directly elected by the public or appointed by elected officials. Private schools, on the other hand, get the
bulk of their operating funds from student tuition, are made up of students whose parents selected the school, and enjoy a much higher degree of autonomy in setting educational policy and practices.

Like most other major racial and ethnic groups in the United States, the overwhelming majority of Latino students—some 85%—attend public schools. Despite their common membership in the public sector, ethnic and racial patterns of residential settlement have meant that public high schools that Latinos attend have “different characteristics than the public high schools educating white or black students” (Fry, 2005, i). Unlike whites and Blacks, Latinos go to public high schools where the student body is much larger, the student-to-teacher ratio is much higher, and the proportion of poor students is much greater (Fry, 2005). These characteristics, research indicates, are among the ones that are most likely to put students at risk for dropping out. Indeed, according to a report by Balfanz and Letgers (2004), nearly 39% of Latinos attend a public high school where graduating is not the norm.

For several decades, researchers have been engaged in a running debate over whether America’s public high schools have particular organizational traits that are causing so many Blacks and Latinos to drop out (Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Evans and Scwhab, 1995; Sander & Krautmann, 1995). Drawing on data from the 1980 HS & B, in 1982 a research team led by James Coleman ignited a firestorm of controversy within educational policy circles when they contended that Catholic and other private secondary institutions were more effective than their public counterparts at educating students—especially minority students living in the nation’s inner-city areas. Among outcomes that demonstrated the superiority of Catholic school education were plans to attend post-secondary education, feelings of educational efficacy, and, most important,
long-term improvement in student scores on achievement exams (Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982a; Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982b).

In response to criticism that other researchers raised about the research design employed in their original study, Coleman and his collaborators conducted a follow-up study shortly thereafter that included a much more extensive analysis of the impact that school sector had on dropout rates. Consistent with their earlier study, they found that minority students enrolled in private schools, in general, and Catholic schools, in particular, were far less likely to drop out than those in public schools or non-denominational private schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987).

Less controversial than their findings was the particular explanation advanced to explain these differences. Catholic schools, in contrast to their public counterparts, were part of a “functional community”: a school that was tightly integrated with the surrounding community through a shared value system and robust social networks, which allowed schools, parents, and communities to enforce high academic performance (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Emblematic of this cohesion was the Catholic school principal, who enjoyed unanimous support from parents to enforce disciplinary policies that ensured a safe and orderly atmosphere, which promoted levels of academic performance not found in public schools, where bureaucratic rules inhibited officials from doing much to prevent absenteeism, cutting classes, fighting other students, and engaging in confrontations with teachers (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987).

Subsequent studies, conducted throughout the 1980s and 1990s, continued to unearth statistical evidence from national surveys that confirmed the empirical findings of Coleman and his colleagues. Beginning in the mid-80s, for example, a research team of ever-changing members but headed by Anthony Bryk and Valerie Lee published a series of studies that
examined the so-called private school effect, all of which uncovered further evidence that students at private schools did indeed outperform their counterparts at public schools (Bryk, Holland, Lee & Carriedo, 1984; Lee & Bryk, 1989; Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993). What many of these researchers questioned, however, was the functional explanation that had been proposed by Coleman and his collaborators. Citing evidence showing that only 13% of the students who attended Catholic high schools lived in the surrounding parish, Bryk and Thum (1989), for example, instead attributed to it wholly internal school characteristics like committed and caring faculty, a unified curriculum, and a shared commitment to academic pursuits.

Around the same time, researchers affiliated with the Brookings Institution delivered a broadside against public schooling, marshalling data which seemed to show, yet again, a wide disparity in the academic performance students from different sectors of the secondary system (Chubb & Moe, 1990). They, too, offered a different interpretation for the disparity in academic outcomes: the cause, in their view, was that school bureaucracy had been captured by interest groups, which put their own professional interests above the academic interests of students (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

In more recent years, critics have identified two fundamental flaws in the research design of these early studies, flaws which, they maintain, overstate the advantages of private school. Firstly, some critics have argued that the supposed advantage of private schools is not due to the unique organizational traits of private high schools per se, as some maintain, but to a selection process that effectively allows private high schools to cherry pick the most academically prepared students. The apparent differences in achievement and attainment rates simply reflect prior academic advantages of these students, such critics contend, advantages that can be detected from the moment students enter kindergarten (Alexander & Pallas, 1985; Lee &
Burkham, 2002; Center on Education Policy, 2007). Indeed, in a report commissioned by the Center on Education Policy, the sociologist Harold Wenglinsky examined the 8th grade achievement scores of all students who were included in the NELS:88, and found that public school students had significantly lower achievement scores than students in all other sectors of the secondary system (Center on Education Policy, 2007).

In addition to criticizing Coleman’s research for failing to control for the level of academic preparation that distinguishes public and private school students, several critics also contend that studies did not adequately control for the differences in the family background of the students in each of these sectors. As Wenglinsky points out, there are other salient yet subtle differences in the family background that were overlooked by early studies that found a school effect such as parent’s educational expectations, level of parental involvement in the student’s academic life, and the amount of cultural capital parents pass on to their children through such things as museum attendance, music lessons, and other activities that are known to bolster academic outcomes (Center on Education Policy, 2007). Because of the close association in America between an individual’s racial and ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and area of residence, critics explain that public schools have a higher concentration of at-risk students (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006).

Urban

The third demographic factor that is regularly included in existing studies of the Latino dropout crisis focuses on the impact exerted by the particular locale in which schools operate. Typically, researchers employ three analytic categories into which localities across the nation are classified (i.e., urban, suburban, and rural), each of which are distinguished by their population density and functional position within the national and regional economy.
Interestingly, the approach of the new century was marked by a complete reversal with respect to the generation of high school dropouts by different types of locales. In 1975, the high school dropout rate among 16-24 year olds in rural communities was higher than that of suburban and central cities, at 16.8%; by 1993, dropout rates in rural America had dropped while the rates in central cities had climbed up to 16.8% (Paasch and Swaim, 1995).

According to Richard Fry, a senior analyst with the Pew Center on Hispanics, 85% of Latino students attend a public high school, 38.6% of which are located in central cities or the fringe of urban centers (34.3%) (Fry, 2005). The student body at the majority of these urban high schools exceeds 1,800 pupils, 40% of whom qualify for free, or reduced-cost lunch (Fry, 2005). When the unusually high student to teacher ratio is added to the risks associated with excessive size and high concentrations of poverty, it comes as no surprise that dropout rates reach their zenith at public high schools located in America’s central cities (Balfanz & Legters, 2001).

Despite clear proof that urban neighborhoods are the epicenter of the Latino dropout crisis, previous research that examined the impact of locale on dropout rates yielded results that were inconsistent (Fan & Chen, 1999), reflecting the association locale has with a number of factors that cannot be easily disentangled. While some studies find no statistically significant difference in the dropout rates directly attributable to locale (Alspaugh 1992; Fan & Chen, 1999; Jordan, Kostandini & Mykerezi, 2012), others have found evidence to support the claim that the risk differs by region (Rumsberger & Thomas, 2000; Lleras, 2005; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey and Crowley, 2006).

In the seminal 1964 monograph *Big School, Small School*, Barker and Gump were among the first analysts to bring attention to how the academic performance of large-sized schools that
arose in urban centers differed from their counterparts in other locales. Although they did not directly measure academic performance or graduation rates, they found variations in the size of schools were correlated with students’ sense of belonging, a factor that has been shown to be a predictor of the likelihood of dropping out (Goodnow, 1993; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996). Indeed, a subsequent analysis of the HS & B by Bryk and Thum (1989) found that school size was an important moderating variable for several behaviors like absenteeism, disciplinary problems, and curricular tracking, all of which increased a student’s chance of dropping out of high school.

Other studies, often using different datasets and analytic techniques, likewise confirm that urban locale is a significant predictor of the chance that Latino students will drop out. Other studies seek to gauge the influence that locale has on academic performance, and most find that urbanicity is a strong predictor of the likelihood that Latino and black students will drop out of high school. Using the National Educational Longitudinal study of 1988 (NELS), Rumberger and Thomas (2000) show that Latino students who attend heavily minority schools located in urban centers have higher turnover and dropout rates than students elsewhere. What remains unclear, in their view, is whether this is due to a lack of school resources or policies of deliberately pushing students out.

Drawing on Common Core Data and the NELS 1988 data, Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey and Crowley (2006) conducted an analysis of how dropout rates were related to variations in the amount of resources available to both schools and families living in different locales. They found that rural and urban locales were predictors of dropping out and lower achievement scores. Apart from differences in the amount of resources, they hypothesize that these differences reflect the particular types of educational activities that political leaders and school official choose to invest
in. They further suggest that rural families are less likely to make investments in their children’s education, a fact they believe may reflect the unique cultural values found in rural communities. Strange (2011) confirms the findings on urban locale in a quantitative study that examines more recent data from the 2004 American Community Survey. Being located in an urban center is a significant predictor of dropouts and lower rates of freshman graduation.

Despite the sizable body of evidence showing that urban high schools are not as effective at educating students as high schools located elsewhere (Rumberger and Thomas, 2000; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey and Crowley, 2006; Strange, 2011), there are researchers who contend that these observed differences in academic performance are largely illusory. Such differences, they believe, are due to a flawed methodology that does not adequately control for the high correlation of socioeconomic status with locale (Barros, 1987; Fan & Chen, 1999; Toutkoushian & Curtis, 2005; Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006; Lleras, 2008). Gándara and Contreras point out that the privations that are known to undercut the academic performance of student are concentrated in high poverty communities in the inner-city. They note under-educated and overworked parents too frequently cannot provide their children with adequate nutrition and healthcare or the intellectually stimulating and academically nurturing home environments that are found elsewhere (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

For Jordan, Kostandini and Mykerezi (2012), the association often found between the odds of dropping out and locale are due to more fundamental errors in conceptualization. The primary problem, in their judgment, is that tripartite schema of urban, suburban, and rural is too coarse to capture the underlying social dynamics that shape educational outcomes. Instead, they use an alternative coding, developed by the United States Department of Agriculture that classifies localities into one of 10 groups, depending on their population density and proximity to
metropolitan region. The statistical significance of locale disappears, they find, once such conceptual errors are rectified (Jordan, Kostandini & Mykerezi, 2012).

South

The impact that regional location of high schools exerts on the odds that a Latino student will end up dropping out of high school is the final demographic factor that will be explored in the present study. Prior investigations of dropout patterns show a constant interest in the regional dynamics of education, one that is doubtless due to the way that the history of segregation has shaped access to quality education. In fact, it was concern over the impact of educational segregation that prompted the 88th Congress to include in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 the first large-scale survey of the American secondary system, which became the basis for the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1965: iii).

Because the South has long been a hotbed of nativist, anti-immigrant sentiment, and still is today, it is reasonable to believe that high school dropout rates among Latinos would be especially high in the South. To the casual observer, support for this idea can be found in an NECS statistical profile of 2008 – 2009 graduation rates, which shows that there are striking differences in academic outcomes across the regions of the nation. While high schools that are located within the Northwest and Midwest regions of the nation report average graduation rates of 80% or higher, the average graduation rate for the states of the Deep South hovers in the 60% range (Chapman, C., Laird, J., Ifill, N., and KewalRamani, 2011). Not surprisingly, these regional differences in high school graduation rates are mirrored by concomitant differences in dropout rates. In 2009, secondary schools located in the states of the South produced 37.7% of the nation’s high school dropouts; those in the West produced 25.7%, while the Midwest and Northeast states produced 20.9% and 15.7%, respectively (Chapman, C., Laird, J., Ifill, N., and
KewalRamani, 2011, Table 6). Furthermore, though the NCES does not breakdown regional rates by race or ethnic group, the demographer Richard Fry notes that two-thirds of the public schools that Latinos attend are located in the very regions where dropout rates are highest: the western states of California (34.7%) and Arizona (4.1%), and the southern states of Texas (20.5%) and Florida (6.7%) (Fry, 2005).

Although dropouts are heavily concentrated in the South, existing studies nevertheless suggest that region has a limited effect—at most—on the odds that a Latino student will end up dropping out of high school. The first large-scale survey to examine the impact that regional location exerts on dropout patterns, Coleman’s 1965 report, *The Equality of Educational Opportunity*, concluded that dropout rates in the South were actually lower than other regions (Coleman et al., 1965: 21). Given that segregation had spawned a dual system of education, with separate schools for blacks and whites, the central objective was to determine whether there were any differences in the quality of schools each group attended, and if so, how these differences in turn affected academic performance. Based on a comparative analysis of statistical data, Coleman concluded that the quality of the schools was essentially the same across regions. In his judgment, moreover, the single-most important factor that contributed to differences in the academic performance of students was the composition of the student body (1965).

In an analysis of data that the NCES collected on students who attended high school in the 1980s for the *High School and Beyond (HS & B)* longitudinal study, for example, Ekstrom and colleagues (1986) found that the impact of regional location on the likelihood of dropping out of high school differed according to the racial/ethnic background of the student. They used path analysis to examine the linkage between dropping out and family educational support system, disciplinary behavior, school performance, and several demographic factors—including
region. They found that attending a school located in the South increased the likelihood that a white student would drop out of high school, and decreased the likelihood that an African-American would drop out. In the case of Latinos, however, it was determined that regional location did not have statistically significant bearing one way or the other (Ekstrom, et al., 1986).

Examining the same dataset, Barros noted that the South had the highest gross dropout rates of any region for each of the nation’s major racial groups, including Latinos. The use of multivariate techniques to analyze this regional disparity further revealed, however, that these gross differences were due to other socioeconomic and demographic factors (Barros, 1987: 38). The only locational factor that Barros determined was likely to increase the odds of dropping out was the local unemployment rate, which was positively associated with dropping out among females but not males.

Rumberger examined the impact that regional location has upon dropout patterns using data from the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey. In contrast to the previous studies above, he found that attending school in the South decreased the probability of dropping out among Latino males but not Latinas. Rumberger does not offer any specific reasons for why this is so, except to note, in passing, that the odds of dropping among males also correspond with fluctuations in labor market opportunities. In a subsequent review of the dropout literature, Rumberger (1987) reports that the percentage of Latino males who say economic reasons were behind their decision to dropout (40%) is double that of dropouts as a whole.

2.3.2—Aspirational Factors

_Academic Aspirations, Expectations and Family Background_
In addition to demographic factors, research within the status attainment tradition has sought to trace the way academic aspirations and expectations of Latino students are shaped by their family’s socioeconomic background. In 1983, Rumberger used the National Longitudinal Survey (NLS) of Youth Labor Market Experience to identify the factors associated with dropping out among a national sample of youths, ranging in age from 14 to 21, for all major ethnic groups in the United States, except Asians. He found that Latino students with higher educational aspirations were less likely to drop out of high school, though the association was much stronger in males than females. Indeed, for males, the aspiration to attain an occupation in one of the professions was among the strongest predictors of whether or not they would drop out.

Consistent with the importance that the status attainment approach gives to parental influence, Rumberger (1989) also found that persistence rates among Latinos were strongly correlated with family’s views about education, which were communicated through two channels. The first was found to operate through the cultural and intellectual milieu that is created within the household through the presence of newspapers, magazines, and membership in the local library. Students who came from households where these items were commonplace had a much lower chance of dropping out than those who came from households where they were scarce. The second channel operates through parental level of education. Interestingly, while mother’s level of education bore a significant relationship to persistence patterns among both Black and white student in his study, in the case of Latinos, it was the father’s level of education that exhibited a significant impact on the persistence patterns of children.

In 1986, Ekstrom et al. used path analysis to explore a range of factors that were shown by prior research to affect the likelihood that a Latino would drop out of high school. Like Rumberger, they found that many of the behavioral problems associated with dropping out were
moderated by the traits of the student’s family (Ekstrom et al., 1986). However, where
Rumberger found that father’s status was the key determinant of student attitudes towards
education, Ekstrom and her colleagues concluded that it is the mother’s lower educational
aspirations for the child that was the main determinant of the child’s academic persistence.

Velez (1989) published an analysis of high school dropouts that treated data on aspiration
as the focal point for intergroup comparisons between Latinos and whites, and intragroup
comparisons among Chicanos, Cubans and Puerto Ricans. His findings confirmed the general
finding of previous research, which had determined that a student’s academic aspirations and
expectations played a pivotal role in the decision to drop out. Among non-Hispanic whites and
Puerto Ricans and Chicanos, higher educational aspirations reduced the likelihood a student
would drop out, as might be expected. Aside from doing little to clarify which parent is most
important in shaping these aspirations or why, his findings included a peculiar twist that only
adds to the confusion over the mechanisms by which they are formed. While most research has
found that parent aspirations had a salutary effect on persistence rates, Velez’s determined that in
the case of Cubans, the opposite was true: the higher the educational ambitions of students, the
more likely they were to drop out.

To account for this inconsistency, he hypothesizes that Cuban mothers may have had
unrealistically high aspirations, or that their aspirations were so high the students may have felt
unbearable pressures, and eventually dropped out to seek relief (Velez, 1989). This finding
supports the claim by sociologists (Ebaugh, 1998) and educational psychologists (Eccles, 2008)
that certain individuals may decide to exit from a role if they believe they are no longer capable
of fulfilling its expectations.
Other studies that have investigated the educational conditions of Latino youth have followed the status attainment tradition by examining how student perceptions about the utility of coursework and a diploma influenced their decision to drop out. In a study that sought to assess whether persistence patterns were influenced by participation in vocational training courses that some high schools offer, Pittman (1991) used path analytic techniques to determine if dropping out bore any relation to student perceptions about the utility of their coursework. Consistent with common usage, utility was gauged by using survey questions from the HS & B, a nationally representative survey that includes data about how useful students felt their math, English and trade courses would be in the future. Contrary to widespread belief that academic expectations are shaped by rational calculations, he found that belief about the utility of coursework did not do much to reduce dropout rates.

Other studies that are framed within this strand of status attainment theory have come to the opposite conclusion, however. Drawing on data about workforce participation rates among a nationally representative cohort of high school students who participated in NLS from 1979-1982, Eckstein and Wolpin (1999) used econometric techniques to model the way those experiences and existing labor market opportunities shape perceptions about the value of a high school diploma and the decision to drop out. They found youths were most likely to likely to drop out if their work experiences lead them to conclude that the time and effort required to get a diploma would not do much to improve their chances of getting a better-paying job (Eckstein and Wolpin, 1999).
Peer Networks and Academic Aspirations

Apart from family background, researchers have also sought to investigate how the dropout patterns among Latino students are linked to their relationships with their peers. A long-held assumption of status-attainment theory is the idea that the family is the most important agent of socialization, from which students derive their fundamental beliefs about education. It is only at a later stage of life, according to this view, that the values of the peer group come to influence the educational expectations and aspirations of adolescents. Although previous research has linked dropping out to numerous acts that school authorities define as deviant (Coleman et al., 1982; Rumberger, 1982; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Velez, 1989), relatively little large-scale survey research had been undertaken until rather recently to determine how peer networks formed in school influence the formation of aspirations and expectations among Latino youth (Rumberger & Ream, 2008).

Viewed from a developmental perspective, the involvement of high school students in peer networks has long been assumed to be of importance because they coincide with the adolescent’s growing autonomy from the controls of the family (Rumberger & Ream, 2008; Eccles, 2008). The effects of peer networks in shaping adolescent behavior becomes so powerful, some scholars believe, that it supersedes the influence exerted by the family during earlier formative stages of childhood (Steinberg, 1996). However, the theoretical and empirical basis for the belief that the family is the primary agent of socialization, the sole influence over the child’s budding personality, has been cast into doubt by several theorist, none more powerfully than the psychologist Judith Harris, who formulated the group theory of socialization. According to group socialization theory, “experiences in childhood and adolescent peer groups, not experiences at home, account for environmental influences on personality development” (Harris, 1995).
Exposure to the collective values of peer networks can either reinforce the emphasis families place on academic performance, or conversely, they may lead to behaviors that put students at risk of dropping out.

Large-scale surveys of Latino high school students have identified at least three distinct mechanisms by which peer networks affect the formation of their academic aspirations and expectations and thus influence whether they will persist or drop out. One view, advanced by Davalos, Chavez and Guardiola (1999), posits that the ethnic identity in which peer networks are anchored mediates student involvement in school-based extracurricular activities and their sense of belonging to the school. In a quantitative study exploring these linkages, a sample of over 2,500 Mexican-American students was surveyed and divided into two groups who were distinguished by the degree to which they tended to identify with the cultural practices and unique traditions of Mexican American culture or with the dominant white American culture. While there was no unilinear relationship between the variables examined for this study, they found that involvement in extracurricular activities and level of white non-Hispanic ethnic identification were contributing factors in the retention of Mexican Americans student (Davalos, Chavez, Guardiola, 1999).

While the ethnic identity perspective outlined above is suggestive, one obvious question left unanswered in their study is why some Latino students become part of peer groups which are steeped in their ethnic traditions— in the first place— while many others do not? One possible answer to this question can be found in several studies that highlight the structural characteristics of peer networks when trying to account for how they influence the formation of the academic aspirations and expectations of their members and, by extension, the decision to drop out of high school. Carbonaro and Workman (2013) conducted an analysis that examined the impact that
peer networks exert on the odds of dropping out in which two distinctive elements of peer relationships are identified. Close friends, defined as peers with whom one has strong affective ties and regular interactions, are distinguished from distant friends, peers with whom one has weaker emotional bonds and spends less time. The rationale for drawing this distinction is based on a body of psychological theory which contends that these groups play different functions in the formation and maintenance of social identity. Close friends, they acknowledge, often provide much-needed emotional support to one another. On the other hand, they contend, it is the distant but more numerous acquaintances who serve as the reference group from which students take their normative orientation.

Drawing on data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, statistical techniques were used to compare the relative impact that close friends and distant acquaintances had on the odds of dropping out. Predictably, they found that students with more close friendships, the kind that serve as a source of emotional support during times of academic uncertainty, had a lower risk of dropping out. More surprisingly, however, they also found that the characteristics of more distant friends exerted a much greater influence on the likelihood of dropping out than do the characteristics of close friends. For them, this latter finding is consistent with social identity theory, one tenet of which is that “friends about whom students have less intimate information are more likely to serve as role models that define which behaviors are expected and/or permissible” (Carbonaro and Workman, 2013: 1266). If a student’s reference group is made up of large numbers of students who place little value on education, he will tend to low academic expectations and motivations.

A third explanation for how peer networks influence the formation of student academic aspirations and expectations was formulated in a recent study by Rumberger and Ream (2008)
who based their analysis on data from National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. Couched as a critical reappraisal of social capital theory, Ream and Rumberger anticipate the findings of by arguing that social capital, the resources that are constituted in and through membership in social networks, is not an unalloyed good. Certain peer networks are organized around behaviors and interests that lead to academic success, whereas others form around “anti-establishment” behaviors that are associated with dropping out. “For every “leading crowd,” they write, “there is also a “rebellious crowd,” and “where there are ‘jocks,’ there are also ‘burnouts’” (Ream & Rumberger, 2008:113). Among the group of Mexican-American and white high school students that they studied, the contemporary versions of these antipodal groups are “school-oriented kids” and “street-oriented kids.” It was their hypothesis that students who engaged in the types of behaviors that were consistent with the formation of high academic aspirations and expectations would be more likely to join the school-oriented networks than the street-oriented networks.

To test this hypothesis, two academically constructive behaviors were analyzed in relation to types of student networks and the consequent odds of dropping out: specifically, regularly doing homework and preparing for school, on the one side, and participating in school-based extracurricular activities like sports and arts, on the other. Not surprisingly, these activities are significant predictors of the kinds of networks students report being a part of. What is surprising, though, is the differential impact that having dropouts in one’s network has on the academic payoffs that come from these activities. Even when they have a dropout in their network, the odds that a white student will drop out are still significantly lowered by participating in school-based extracurricular activities. For Mexican Americans who have dropouts in their peer networks, however, the odds of dropping out are not lowered by engaging in such academically constructive activities (Ream and Rumberger, 2008).
Unfortunately, Ream and Rumberger conclude their analysis without asking the obvious question that their finding raises: Why does affiliation in street-oriented peer network undercut the chances of graduating for otherwise “good” Latino students, but not white students? This oversight appears especially curious in light of the fact that in a previous study of the dynamics of dropping out among Latinos, Rumberger concluded that the most promising direction for future research ought to examine processes and practices within the school itself. In other words, instead of looking at the character traits of individual Latino students, which he had earlier recommended, he now claimed research should focus on the ways that school policies cause Latino “students involuntarily to withdraw from school.” Among the policies cited in that earlier work as deserving further exploration were an assortment of rules that penalized Latino students for “low grades, poor attendance, misbehavior, or being over-age and can lead to suspensions, expulsions, or forced transfer” (Rumberger & Scott, 2000).

School Process, Teacher-Student Relationships and the Formation of Academic Aspirations and Expectations

Frustration with the limitations of the status attainment perspective prompted some researchers to widen their theoretical perspective and explore how the educational system itself contributed to the poor academic performance of students. Two lines of inquiry were advanced that mirrored Bourdieu and Passeron’s theory about the role that the educational system plays in the reproduction of social order.

The first line of inquiry, commonly known as the institutional perspective, focuses on the way that political struggles over educational policy come to produce disparities in the amount of resources that are invested in the schools that educate Latinos and African-Americans. Exemplified in the copious body of information about school facilities that was detailed in the
Coleman report, the effect that this unequal distribution has on the academic performance of Blacks and Latinos is an issue that is unresolved. Indeed, Coleman himself claimed that the family background of the individual students was a greater determinant of academic performance than policies that herded high concentrations of low-income minority students into America’s high schools or deprived their schools of an equitable share of the country’s educational resources (Coleman et al., 1965).

Since then, a number of researchers have revisited the question of whether, and to what extent, the inequitable distribution of educational funding contributes to low levels of academic achievement and attainment that are so common among Latinos and Blacks. In two major reviews of the hundreds of studies that address inequities in educational resources, the economist Eric Hanushek (1989 & 1997) has concluded that the association between academic performance and school expenditures is weak or inconsistent once pertinent background factors are controlled for. In his view, the academic performance of minority students does not show evidence of improvement when they attend schools that expend more money to hire more skilled teachers or to create smaller sized classes (Hanushek, 1999). Other researchers, using these same metanalytic techniques, have disputed this claim, and draw more liberal policy implications from it (Laine et al., 1996). Interestingly, in an impressive study that reanalyzed the original data from the Coleman report using HLM techniques, Borman and Dowling (2010) recently concluded that differences in the amount of resources between schools actually accounts for less than one percent of the variance in academic outcomes of the students in the sample.

If differences in school resources do not account for variations in dropout patterns and other academic outcomes on the part of Latinos, then what other school characteristics might be involved? To answer this question a group of researchers and theorists in the 1980s began to
fashion a new framework for studying the performance of schools. They started with a critique of the Coleman Report and similar studies for failing to distinguish “school from schooling” (Bidwell & Kasarda, 1980). For the exponents of this perspective, known as the social organization perspective, a school’s resources are to be distinguished from the instructional activities undertaken by teachers within the classroom (Bidwell and Kasarda, 1980; Bryk & Lee, 1989). School organization theorists direct attention to the ways in which school policies, more specifically, the allocation of resources and the promulgation of instructional practices, structure the interaction between teachers and students and thereby create the “school climate.” Among the features believed to create the school climate are such things as the diversity of the school curriculum, the creation of tracks based on student abilities, the pedagogic practices through which student performance are assessed, and the degree of order and safety within the school.

To determine how school climate affects academic performance, researchers working in this tradition pioneered the use of sophisticated statistical techniques to disentangle the effects of the school’s organization from the socioeconomic background of individual students. Using data from a number of the large-scale of surveys that had been conducted by federal agencies, these studies compare the odds of dropping out from public schools, where poor academic performance is often attributed to an anti-academic school climate—to the odds of dropping from Catholic schools, where the climate is felt to be much more conducive to academic pursuits. Unlike public schools, the climate of Catholic schools comes much closer to the “common school,” an ideal type school where students not only study a common core of academically oriented courses, but subscribe to a common set of values that create an atmosphere of order, respect for authority, and academic achievement.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Considered as a whole, the findings from studies that have examined the effects of school organization suggest that variations in the school climate are robust predictors of the odds of dropping out and other measures of high academic achievement. Though the particular constructs for modeling these features often differ, as a general matter these studies have found that the chances of dropping are lower in those school where students feel safe (Bryk & Thum, 1989; ); order is maintained (Coleman et al., 1982; Bryk & Lee, 1989; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Pittman, 1991); disciplinary policies are fair (Bryk & Lee, 1989; Bryk & Thum, 1989); and teachers are caring and respectful (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Lee & Bryk, 1989; Pittman, 1991).

While most of the constructs used to measure school climate are associated with reductions in the odds of dropping out among all students, irrespective of their particular socioeconomic or racial/ethnic identity, there is one construct for which the benefits are less certain—namely, the disciplinary dimension. Coleman et al. (1982: 75) and Lee and Bryk (1989: 185) both find that the effects disciplinary climate exerts on academic achievement vary according to the socioeconomic background of the student. This observation is echoed in Bryk and Thum’s summation of how school climate influences dropout patterns: “The single unexpected result is the pattern of associations with adult authority…fair and effective discipline is…associated with high base dropout rates and more disequalizing effects with regard to social class.” For some unexplained reason, in other words, the disciplinary policies of both public and Catholic schools appear to put low-income students at greater risk for dropping than students of higher socioeconomic background.

The question is why?

2.4—Contribution to the Field
To date, few quantitative studies have been conducted that examine the negative effects the disciplinary regime has on dropout rates among Latinos and minorities from lower-class backgrounds. The neglect of this line of inquiry among school organization theorist appears to be as much an act of bad theoretical faith as of the limitations on the data and methods employed in quantitative research. For doing otherwise would force educational theorists to confront a fundamental question that has been papered over by research that aims to establish the benefits of the “common school”: namely, whose culture will serve as the measuring rod that unifies diverse peer groups, faculty, and staff into a single normative community? The tacit answer to that question has always been the culture of the American middle class, the culture, that is to say, of the administrators who manage schools and the teachers who instruct the students. Instead of simply taking for granted that this is as it should be, however, the present study will use quantitative methods to explore another question whose implications is even more troubling: how does the middle-class culture embodied in these disciplinary regimes produce the dropout crisis among Latino youth?

Although school organization theorists tend to shy away from such questions, there is already evidence from large-scale surveys and ethnographic research that appears to indicate a deleterious effect. For example, after reanalyzing data from the Coleman Report, which includes a measure of teacher preference for middle-class children, Borman and Dowling (2010) conclude that performance gaps between students who attend the same school but are of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds is in part explained by teacher biases toward middle-class children.

Approaching the issue from a different vantage point, ethnographic studies suggest that these middle-class biases go much deeper than the classroom interactions that are central to the
student-teacher relationship, a finding that makes more sense when we recall Bourdieu’s claim that the teacher also plays a role as the enforcer of the cultural and social order within the school system. Florez-Gonzalez has shown in her ethnographic study of Latino students at a Chicago high school many middle class teachers are estranged from the “street-oriented” culture that lower class Latino students recreate in the school’s hallways and classrooms (Flores-González, 2002; see also Rumberger, 2011). Students in her study report that teachers are quick to label them as “good” students or “trouble makers,” which is likely based on information they transmit through their style of dress, speech, and comportment. Discerning real troublemakers from those who merely dress the part is more challenging than middle-class teachers may assume, for in reality, both types of students often belong to peer groups that are steeped in the same expressive culture. Indeed, when interacting with others in their peer group, at-risk students are likely to adopt a “cool pose” (Majors, 1993), a persona designed to convey the message that they are not to be “messed with” (Dance, 2000; Flores-González, 2002). More important, though, this labelling process is one of those acts of symbolic violence through which teachers directly shape the academic expectations and aspirations of Latino students—separate and apart from the influence of the family or the peer group.

Although school organization theory and social motivation theory have largely developed along separate disciplinary tracks, they share a common concern with the impact that student-teacher interactions have upon academic performance. Just as some lines of research have shown that the academic performance of student is higher when they believe their teachers care for them (Battisch et al., 1995; 1997), other research indicates that academic performance suffers, conversely, when students believe teachers do not care (Rist, 1970; Wentzel, 1996). Lack of care manifests itself in many forms; however, none is more powerful than the tendency of some
teachers and school support personnel to engage in behavior that students find offensive (Banfield, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006). Interactions inside the class and in the hallways turn offensive when instructors verbally abuse students, saying things that often leave students feeling humiliated, embarrassed, or insulted (Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991).

In one of the first studies that examined the dropout crisis through the school organization perspective, Bryk and Thum (1989) acknowledged, but quickly dismissed, data that suggested there might be “reason to worry that…[the] emphasis on order, discipline, and academic work might exacerbate absenteeism and dropping out.” Even though dropout rates have declined precipitously, it may well be time to reexamine these effects in light of data that suggest they are especially deleterious to Latinos. The present study will explore how the disciplinary policies through which the school climate is created, simultaneously sap the academic aspirations and expectations of Latino students, compounding a problem, it purports to solve.
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3.1—Introduction

The previous chapters reviewed key research findings produced by scholars and policy analysts who have sought to uncover the causes behind the unusually high dropout rates among Latino high school students here in the United States. Building on that body of research and analysis, those chapters also set forth the theoretical framework employed in this study to analyze the complex array of factors that influence Latinos to dropout. Chapter Three now turns to describe the methodology used in this study.

This dissertation uses statistical techniques to model how Latino dropout rates are affected by social factors that are measured by demographic, attitudinal, school-level, and socio-economic variables. Data used in the study are extracted from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS), the fourth in a series of U.S. Department of Education longitudinal studies of the U.S. educational system that have been conducted each decade since the 1970s. Mandated by federal statutes that were originally enacted during the Nixon administration, ELS is a panel study that tracks a representative cohort of American sophomores on the verge of exiting the secondary school system, either to enter the labor market, or to continue their schooling at the post-secondary level (U.S. Department of Education).

In constructing the model of Latino dropout rates used in this study, logistic regression analysis is employed to identify which of the independent variables exerts the strongest influence on the thousands of Latino students who decide each year to drop out of high school.
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In the presentation that follows below, discussion is organized into four different topical areas. Section 3.2, “Dataset,” provides an overview of the key design features of ELS, from the sampling methods by which respondents were selected and the assortment of data collected to the analytic opportunities the ELS has provided researchers. Section 3.3, “Analytic Samples” provides the rationale behind the selection of this study’s analytic samples. Section 3.4, “Measures” sets forth a detailed description of the outcome and predictor variables used in our model. The last section, 3.5, “Analytic Strategies,” elucidates the methods and analytic strategy behind the statistical model used here.

3.2—Dataset

The Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS) is a multi-year study of the outcomes of America’s secondary education system that was undertaken by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), one of four major research centers operated by the United States Department of Education under the aegis of the Institute of Education Sciences (Ingels, Pratt, Wilson, Burns, Currivan, Rogers, and Hubbard-Bednasz, 2007). Intended to serve as a comprehensive dataset with which to assess how current educational policies and practices affect the trajectories that America’s youth take after leaving high school, ELS is a nationally representative panel study that tracks a single cohort of 10th graders as they proceed through high school and into the labor market and/or post-secondary schools. ELS was initiated with a 2002 base-year survey, and three follow-up surveys were conducted in the years 2004, 2006 and 2012. Although the individual student is the primary focus of ELS, the research design captures data about personal characteristics that are known to influence student’s academic performance as well as the larger social milieu in which those personal character traits are molded, whether they are school, family, or the community at large.
In putting together the base-year survey, a two-stage stratified probability design was used to compile a sample of 10th graders who were representative of all the sophomores enrolled in the U.S secondary system in 2002. At the time these students had entered 10th grade, the system of secondary education here in the United States had become more variegated than ever, with more than 27,000 schools comprising a mix of public schools, charter schools, and parochial schools associated with religious organizations like the Catholic Church. The first stage of the sampling process resulted in a sampling frame that was constructed to ensure that the type of schools attended by students in the sample was proportionate to the share of the national population each type of schools actually serves. 1,221 schools were identified which met the criteria for participating in the study, and of these, 752 schools ultimately agreed to participate. Because the school environment varies according to administrative procedures, pedagogical practices, and staffing levels and quality, key administrative officers were asked to furnish information that could help researchers better understand how the school environment affects student performance. Information about the school environment that was gathered during the base year survey include such things as the background and teaching activities of math and English teachers, the holdings and technologies found in the school library and media resource center, and the quality of the facilities.

The second stage of the survey involved the random selection of about 26 sophomores from each of the schools that participated in the survey. All told, the total number of respondents in the base year sample of American sophomores in 2002 was 15,362. Data were gathered about the students’ demographic backgrounds, native language, school experiences and extracurricular activities, experiences in the labor forces and community, plans and goals for the future, and attitudes toward learning (Ingels, Pratt, Wilson, Burns, Currivan, Rogers, and Hubbard-Bednasz,
2007). Student participants also completed two assessment exams—one in math, the other in reading—that established baseline scores against which to measure subsequent changes.

In addition to information gathered from the student, a separate survey was also administered to a parent of each of the sophomores who participated in the survey. These surveys yielded information that might shed light on how parents influence the academic performance of children while they are enrolled in school and the educational and occupational pathways taken afterwards. Data gathered from parents included information about their aspirations for their child, the home environment and the kind of academic supports it provides, parent impressions of the child’s high school and their interactions with teachers and administrators, and the educational history of their child.

To obtain the data that are needed to understand how these demographic, attitudinal, institutional, and socio-economic factors influence student transitions to later stages of the life cycle, a series of follow-up surveys were administered. The first follow-up survey was administered in 2004, when most of the student in the base year sample were high school seniors. Students who continued to attend the high school they attended when the base year survey was first administered underwent a second assessment of their math abilities, while follow-up questionnaires were completed by students and administrators, and transcripts documenting each student’s academic performance during high school were obtained. Slightly different versions of the questionnaire were completed by those who no longer attended the school they were at during the base year, tailored according to whether they transferred to a new high school, graduated from high school early, were homeschooled, or dropped out of school altogether (Ingels, Pratt, Wilson, Burns, Currivan, Rogers, and Hubbard-Bednasz, 2007).
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The second follow-up survey, which was administered using web-based applications, was conducted in 2006, two years after the cohort was expected to have completed their high school education. Because young people are in the process of transitioning from roles associated with childhood to those associated with adulthood, the kind of information sought during this wave was very different from the information obtained previously. Data obtained from respondents focused on their access to and choices about postsecondary schooling; the labor-market experiences of those who did not pursue postsecondary education; and information related to family formation, community participation, and negative life events (Ingels, Pratt, Wilson, Burns, Currivan, Rogers, and Hubbard-Bednasz, 2007).

2012 marked the completion of the third and final follow-up that was scheduled as part of the original research design, though program administrators have indicated that it is possible that additional follow-ups surveys will be administered at some point in the future. At the time that the research for this dissertation was being conducted, the administration of the 2012 follow-up had only recently been completed, so the data had yet to be compiled and released to the public. A review of the questionnaire used in the 2012 follow-up indicates continued concern with the impact that secondary schooling exerts on the cohorts’ postsecondary education, labor-market trajectory, financial standing, and family formation.

Despite that a number of original respondents did not participate in subsequent waves, the representativeness of the first follow up survey was preserved through the use of “freshening” techniques that replaced them with new respondents selected from a nationally representative sample of students who did not participate in previous waves of the study. An example of a 2004 “freshened” respondent is someone who, in 2004, was a senior attending one of the 752 schools that made up the sampling frame but did not participate in the 2002 base year survey, whether
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because they lacked sufficient command of the English language, were enrolled in a grade other than the 10th grade in 2002, or were temporarily out of school.

Thanks to these freshening procedures and the general continuity of design with previous longitudinal surveys, ELS provides researchers and policymakers with a nationally representative sample of 2002 sophomores that supports several different modes of analysis. Along with tracing the individual over the life course through longitudinal analysis, ELS is also amenable to cross sectional analyses that compare different subgroups within the 2002 high school population, cross-cohort analyses that compare students who attended high school in the 2000 to those who attend high school in previous decades, and cross-national analyses that compare U.S. high schoolers to those in other nations.

3.3—Analytic Samples

As stated above, the ELS research design employs a two-stage stratified national probability sample of 752 schools that represent different sectors of the secondary educational system and from which 15,362 sophomores were selected for 2002 base year survey. Subsequently, most of these students were resurveyed in additional rounds of data collection that were conducted in 2004, 2006, and 2012.

In examining the specific research questions being investigated here, variables from the first two waves of the study were selected for closer examination—specifically, the Base-Year Study (ELS 2002), and the First Follow-up Study (ELS 2004). Because this study focuses on Latino high school students, this specific sub-sample was extracted from the larger dataset, yielding 2,221 cases at the initial stage of the analysis. Because the present study is focused of high school dropout among Latino secondary students, however, the number of cases included in
our statistical model of the correlates of high school dropout behavior decreased to 265. Though the size of the sub-sample Latino dropouts is fairly small, this sub-sample, which compromises 11.9% of the Latinos surveyed by ELS, mirrors the overall dropout rate among Latino high school students as a whole declined from 24% of Latino high school students in 2000, to just 14% in 2010 (Fry, 2013).

3.4—Measures

What follows is an enumeration of the current study’s variables. After the dependent variable the operational definitions of the independent predictors are presented. The independent variables in this statistical model translate the key research questions and theoretical constructs of this dissertation into four analytically distinct sets of predictors of the likelihood a Latino student will drop out of high school.

3.4.1—Dependent Variable

The goal of this dissertation is to examine the interaction between demographic, attitudinal, school-level, and socio-economic variables that ultimately influence Latino students to drop out of high school. For some time now, studies of intragenerational mobility within U.S. society have consistently shown that an individual’s level of education has a decisive impact on adult life chances, subsequently influencing a person’s earning power, social status, and overall well-being (Jencks, 1972). To get a sense of how Latinos will fare in the future, I chose the following variables as the focal point of this study.
In accordance with the established research procedures, the following dependent variable was selected:

1) “Dropout” is a dummy variable based on the ELS composite variable F1DOSTAT. This composite variable considers a respondent to be a dropout if they exited high school without obtaining a diploma, a certificate of graduation, or a GED. 2002 10th graders who dropped out of high school were identified through a review of high school transcripts that were collected and analyzed as part of the study, as well as through questions about high school completion status that were posed on the First Follow-up Survey (questions F1D41 and F1D45). F1DOSTAT places respondents into one of four categories: 1) 2002 10th grade students who “did not dropout or complete an alternative program of education”; 2) 2002 10th students who were dropouts; 3) 2002 10th graders who completed a GED or some other alternative program equivalent to a high school diploma; and 4) 2002 10th graders who were previously identified by themselves or the school as a dropout. In constructing the dummy variable “dropout,” those cases of the variable F1DOSTAT indicating that the students either graduated from high school, or completed a GED, were recoded into 0 = “did not dropout,” while the remaining cases were recoded into 1= “dropout.”

3.4.2—Independent Variable

The independent variables selected for use in this statistical model translated the key research questions and theoretical constructs of this dissertation into four analytically distinct
sets of predictors of the likelihood a Latino student will drop out of high school. The first set includes four demographic characteristics: gender, type of school, locale of school, and geographic location of the school.

3.4.2.1—Block I: Demographic Variables

Gender

Past research shows that females, across all Latino subgroups, have a higher risk of dropping out than their male counterparts (Steinberg et al., 1984; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fernandez et al., 1989; Velez, 1989; Rumberger, 1993; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Stearns and Glennie, 2006). Some research attributes the increase in risk to the fact that females must shoulder the burdens of an unplanned pregnancy (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fernandez et al., 1989; Velez, 1989). Other studies link it to the predominance within Latino families of traditional gender roles, which take away time needed for studying or encourage Latinas to cohabitate or marry while still in high school (Velez, 1989).

Findings from this line of research support the inclusion in Block I of the variable Female, a dummy variable, based on the original ELS variable BYSEX, which coded male = 1, and female = 2. In converting it to a dummy variable this study recoded 2 (female) = 1 and 1 (male) equals zero.

Public

By almost every measure, existing research has shown that the academic performance of students in public high schools is substantially lower than those in private school (Entwisle & Alexander, 1992; Peng & Lee, 1992; Bankston & Caldas, 1996; Roscigno, 1998). Catholic
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schools, especially, have been shown to be more effective at educating Latino and Black youths who reside in America’s inner city neighborhoods. Unlike their counterparts at public schools, these youth show a greater inclination to attend college, report feeling greater levels of educational efficacy, score higher on achievement exams (Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982a; Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982b), and are at much lower risk for dropping out a high school (Bryk & Thum, 1989).

Taken together, findings from this line of research supports the inclusion in Block I of the variable Public, a dummy variable, based on the original ELS variable BYSCTRL, which indicates whether the respondent attended a public high school or a private high school. Ranges for the original ELS variable runs from 1 = “public”; 2 = “Catholic”; 3 = “other private.” For the purpose of this study, however, the variable was recoded such that responses that indicated a student attended a public high school were recoded 1 = 1, while attendance at a Catholic school or other private school was recoded 2 or 3 = 0.

Urban

A considerable number of studies of Latino dropouts have examined the locale where a school is located, that is to say, whether it is located in an urban center, a suburban neighborhood, or a rural community. To date, however, the findings from these studies have yielded results that often contradict one another. Some studies have concluded that the locale of a high school has a determinant effect on high school dropout rates (Alspaugh 1992; Fan & Chen, 1999; Jordan, Kostandini & Mykerezi, 2012); others have not found any evidence to support the claim (Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Lleras, 2005; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey and Crowley, 2006).
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Perhaps one reason for this inconsistency is that the student body of urban high schools is comprised of large numbers of students at or near the poverty line, making it difficult to disentangle the academic risks related to poverty from those that might be related to locale. Nevertheless, because nearly 75% of Latino students in America today attend an urban school (Fry, 2005), it seems warranted to include a variable measuring the effects of urbanicity in our model of Latino high school dropouts.

“Urban,” a dummy variable based on the original ELS variable BYURBAN, indicates that the respondent attended a high school in one of the nation’s urban centers. Values for the original ELS variable range from 1 to 3, where 1 = “urban,” 2 = “suburban,” and 3 = “rural.” For the purpose of this study, however, the variable was recoded such that responses which indicated a student attended an urban high school were recoded 1 = 1, while the other two values, were recoded 2 or 3 = 0.

South

The impact that regional location exerts upon Latino dropout rates has been of long-standing interest to researchers and policymakers. With few exceptions, however, prior research has found that region has no statistically significant impact on the odds of dropping out among this population (Ekstrom et al., 1986: Barros, 1987). Indeed, the one study that did find a statistically significant relationship indicated that Latinos who attended school in the South were actually less likely to drop out than students in other regions (Rumberger, 1987).

Given that Latinos are heavily concentrated in southern and southwestern states where overall dropout rates are especially high (Fry, 2005), the existing literature provides warrant for the inclusion of a variable indicating the regional location of high schools in our model of Latino
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high school dropouts. “South,” a dummy variable based on the original ELS variable BYREGION, indicates that the respondent’s high school was located in the South. Values for the original ELS variable range from 1 = “Northeast”; 2 = “Midwest”; 3 = “South”; and 4 = “West.” For the purpose of this study South was recoded 3 = 1, while the other values were recoded 1, 2, 4 = 0.

3.4.2.2—Block II: Aspirations

A second set of variables, selected from the ELS 2002 Longitudinal Study for inclusion within Block II, incorporates aspirational factors into our regression model. This second set of independent variables includes measures that gauge the academic expectations and aspirations of students, their peers, parents, and teachers.

MeetFriends

Findings from previous studies of the impact of peer relationships on academic performance indicate that positive peer relationships are associated with higher academic performance (Liem & Martin, 2011). Levels of academic motivation (Berndt, Laychak, & Park, 1990; Furrer & Skinner, 2003), engagement (Ladd & Price, 1987; Ladd, 1990; Keefe & Berndt, 1996), and performance (DuBois, Felner, Brand, Adan, & Evans, 1992; Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Liem, Lau, & Nie, 2008) are higher among students who have positive peer relationships than those who do not. These studies support the inclusion of the aspirational variable “MeetFriends” in in Block II of our model of Latino dropouts.

“MeetFriends,” a dummy variable, which measures the degree to which students share an interpersonal connection with other students within their school, was constructed from the
original ELS variable BYS27E. The values of this variable are based on a Likert scale which ranges from 1 to 4, where: 1 = “strongly agree;” 2 = “agree;” 3 = “disagree;” and 4 = “strongly disagree.” Because we are primarily interested in testing the strength of a student’s peer networks, 1 and 2 were recoded as 1, while 3 and 4 was recoded 0.

In conducting research into the significance of academic attitudes and drive, it is standard practice to distinguish the abstract beliefs people have about education (academic aspirations), from their concrete assessments of whether the investment of time and energy required to obtain a diploma will lead to a substantial improvement in their jobs and economic prospects and income (academic expectations) (see: Kao & Tienda, 1998; Bohon et al., 2006; Eccles, 2008).

**Job skills**

Findings from several studies that have examined how academic expectations influence the odds of dropping out among Latino students have proven inconclusive thus far. Pittman’s (1991) findings indicate that belief in the utility of coursework had no bearing on the likelihood that Latinos would drop out of high school. On the other hand, Eckstein & Wolpin (1999) reached the opposite conclusion. Further exploration of this issue justifies the inclusion of the variable “Job Skills” in in Block II of our statistical model. “Job Skills” is a dummy variable based on the original ELS variable BYS27G, which is an ordinal variable based on student responses to the statement, “I go to school because I'm learning skills that I will need for a job.” BYS 27G uses a Likert scale with a four point range where: 1 = “strongly agree;” 2 = “agree;” 3 = “disagree;” and 4 = “strongly disagree.” Because we are primarily interested in whether higher expectations reduce the likelihood of dropping out, 1 was recoded as 1, while 2, 3 and 4 were recoded as 0.
Parent and Teachers’ Academic Expectations

Research on the academic attitudes of Latino students further shows that academic aspirations and expectations are heavily influenced by the expectations that parents and teachers have of students (Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom et al. 1986; Velez, 1989; Goldenberg et al., 2001; Bohon et al., 2006). Findings from this research support the inclusion in Block II of BYSHI. BYSHI is composite variable which was constructed from two original ELS variables that asked students whether their parents and teachers expected them to be successful in school. The original variables, BYS27H (“Parents expect success in school”), and BYS27I (“Teacher expects success in school”), both use a Likert scale that ranges from 1 to 4, where: 1 = “strongly agree;” 2 = “agree;” 3 = “disagree;” and 4 = “strongly disagree.” To get one single measure of the combined expectations of both parents and teachers, the average of BYS27H and BYS27I were calculated to yield the value associated with the composite variable BYS27HI.

Student’s Academic Expectations

With respect to the academic aspirations of students themselves, research has generally shown that Latino students with higher aspirations are less likely to drop out than those with lower aspirations (Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom et al. 1986;), though this may not hold true for particular subgroups within the Latino population (Velez, 1989). This line of research supports the inclusion in Block II of the variable BYS56. BYS56 is an ordinal level variable that ranks student responses to the statement, “How Far in School Student Thinks Will Get.” It is a Likert scale that runs a range from of 1-7, where: 1 = “Less than high school graduation;” 2 = “High school graduation or GED only;” 3 = “Attend or complete 2-year college/school;” 4 = “Attend
Parent’s Academic Aspirations

To determine whether the decision to drop out is influenced by student perceptions of the aspirations and expectations that their parents have of them, the variable BYS65ab was selected for inclusion into our model. BYS65ab is a composite variable constructed from two variables that asked students about the long-term educational aspirations they believe that fathers and mothers have of them. The original variables, BYS65A (“How far in school mother wants 10th grader to go”), and BYS65B (“How far in school father wants 10th grader to go”), both used a Likert scale with a 7 point range. A score of 1 = “Less than high school graduation;” 2 = “High school graduation or GED only;” 3 = “Attend or complete 2-year college/school;” 4 = “Attend college, 4-year degree incomplete;” 5 = “Graduate from college;” 6 = “Obtain Master's degree or equivalent;” 7 = “Obtain PhD, MD, or other advanced degree.” To get one single measure of the parental aspirations of both the mother and father, the average of BYS65A and BYS65b were calculated to yield the value of BYS65ab.

3.4.2.3—Block III: School-level and Variables

As powerful as aspirations and expectations may be in shaping student educational achievements, there is body of research that suggests that they are mediated by particular characteristics of the schools they attend. The more hospitable the school environment is perceived to be the higher students’ educational expectations and GPAs, and the lower the likelihood they will exhibit behavioral problems or drop out altogether (Coleman et al., 1982;
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Bryk & Lee, 1989; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Pittman, 1991). Findings from this line of research support the inclusion in Block III of two school-level variables that are also known to influence the decision to drop out of high school, namely, the quality of the relationships students have with their teachers as well as the atmosphere within the classroom.

**Teacher-Student Rapport**

Both theory and empirical research suggest that the quality of relationships with teachers has a strong effect on student perceptions of the school climate. Wentzel (1996) reports students who perceived their teachers to be caring had higher levels of motivation than students who found teachers to be uncaring. This finding echoes the conclusion of researchers who have used large-scale survey methods to study how dropout patterns are influenced by student perceptions of the degree of care and respect they receive from their teachers (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Lee & Bryk, 1989; Pittman, 1991).

To gauge the impact that the student-teacher bond has on the decision to drop out among the Latino students in our sample, several variables, which measure student perceptions of the degree to which their instructors care about them, were selected from ELS 2002 for inclusion in Block III. The first of these variables is Teacher-student rapport, a composite variable constructed from 4 separate ordinal variables that measure slightly different aspects of a student’s affective ties to teachers.

The first of these original ELS variables, BYS20A, asks the student to indicate how “well they get along with teachers.” The second variable, BYS20E, asks the student to indicate if they think “the teaching is good.” The third variable, BYS20F, asks the student to indicate whether
“teachers are interested in students.” The fourth and last of these variable, BYS20G, asks the student to indicate if “teachers praise effort.”

The measurement of each of these variables is based on a Likert scale which ranges from 1 to 4, where: 1 = “strongly agree;” 2 = “agree;” 3 = “disagree;” and 4 = “strongly disagree.” To get one single measure of the strength of a student’s overall emotional bond with her teachers, the average of BYS20A, BYS20E, BYS20F and BYS20G were calculated to yield the value of the variable BYS20AEFG.

**Respectful Interactions with Teachers in Class**

Just as some lines of research have shown that the academic performance of student is higher when they believe their teachers care for them, other research indicates, conversely, that academic performance suffers when students believe teachers do not care. Student motivations ebb when teachers engage in behavior that students find offensive (Banfield, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006). Teaching turns especially offensive when instructors verbally abuse students through humiliation, intimidation, condescension, or castigation (Banfield et al., 2006; see also Kearney et al., 1991; Thweatt et al., 1998; Kearney et al., 2002). This line of research supports the inclusion in Block III of the dummy variable NOTPUTDOWN. NOTPUTDOWN is based on the 2002 ELS variable BYS20H, which asks the student to indicate how “often [the student] feels put down by teachers” when in class. BYS20H uses a Likert scale that ranges from 1 to 4, where: 1 = “strongly agree;” 2 = “agree;” 3 = “disagree;” and 4 = “strongly disagree.” Because we were especially interested in how respectful interactions influence dropout behavior, NOTPUTDOWN recodes 4 as 1, while values 2, 3, and 4 were recoded as 0.
Feelings of Safety

Existing research also indicates that students must feel safe, if the atmosphere within the classroom is going to be conducive to learning. School organization theorists have used several large-scale data sets to assess the impact that perceptions of safety, discipline, and order contribute to school climate, specifically focusing on the differences in the school climate of public and Catholic schools (Coleman et al., 1982; Bryk & Lee, 1989; Bryk & Thum 1989; Pittman, 1991). They found that Latino and Black students from inner-city neighborhoods who attended Catholic high schools were far more likely than their public school counterparts to indicate that their schools climate was orderly and safe. Moreover, their research further indicated that this aspect of school climate was a strong predictor of the odds of dropping out.

Findings from this line of research support the inclusion within Block III of the dummy variable “Safe.” Safe is based on the 2002 ELS variable BYS20J, an ordinal level variable that asks the students to indicate the extent to which they agree with the following statement: “I don’t feel safe at this school.” Possible responses range across a 4 point scale, where 1 = “strongly agree;” 2 = “agree;” 3 = “disagree;” and 4 = “strongly disagree.” Because our research is focused on factors that make a classroom conducive to learning, our study recodes 4 as 1, while 2, 3, and 1 are recoded as 0.

Discipline Uniformly Enforced

A large body of research, stretching back several decades, has connected poor academic outcomes and increased risk of dropping out among Latinos to disruptive classroom behavior (Weishew & Peng, 1993; Broidy, Nagin, Trembley, Bates, Brame, & Dodge, 2003; Beebe-Frankenberger, Bocian, MacMillan, & Gresham, 2004). Disruptive behaviors encompass a
variety of actions through which students either express hostility and aggression towards others or withdrawal from active participation in classroom activities altogether (Burgess, Wojewlawowicz, Rubin, Rose-Krasnor, & Booth-LaForce, 2006). Unfortunately, research also indicates that disruptive behaviors are especially prevalent in the urban schools, where the bulk of today’s Latinos are enrolled (Lippman & McArthur, 1996; Brown-Wright, Tyler, Graves, Thomas, Stevens-Watkins, Mulder, 2013). Indeed, these findings were confirmed by large-scale survey research, which found that the risk of dropping out among minorities was lower in those schools where the student body was less disruptive (Coleman et al., 1982; Bryk & Lee, 1989; Bryk & Thum 1989; Pittman, 1991).

This research supports the inclusion of several variables from the 2002 ELS that measure student perceptions of the effectiveness of teacher classroom management techniques. The first variable, “Discipline Uniformly Enforced,” is a dummy variable constructed from the ELS 2002 variable BYS20L, which measures respondent perceptions of whether the teacher enforces discipline within the classroom in a consistent manner. BYS20L uses a Likert scale with a 4 point range—where: 1 = “strongly agree;” 2 = “agree;” 3 = “disagree;” and 4 = “strongly disagree”—which allows students to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statement: “Misbehaving students often get away with it.” Because we are primarily interested in whether the teacher is able to maintain control over the class, 3 and 4 were recoded as 1, while 1 and 2 were recoded as 0.

**Classroom Order**

Inconsistent enforcement of the rules that govern class conduct is closely linked to the frequency with which class instruction is disrupted. To measure student perceptions of whether
their classes were free of disruptions, the next variable included in Block III is the dummy variable “Classroom Order,” which was constructed from the ELS 2002 variable BYS20K, an ordinal variable that ranks student responses to the following statement: “Disruptions get in the way of learning.” This variable uses a Likert scale with a 4 point range, where 1 = “strongly agree;” 2 = “agree;” 3 = “disagree;” and 4 = “strongly disagree.” Because we are interested in whether the class is free of disruptions, 3 and 4 were recoded as 1, while 1 and 2 were recoded as 0.

School Rules Well Publicized

Past research has linked student perceptions of their school’s climate directly to the instructor management of the classroom (Ratzburger, 2010), which thereby influences whether students will acquire the competencies required for diplomas. Effective classroom management is based upon an array of skills besides competent instruction, several studies of teacher effectiveness have shown. Key among them are the promulgation of a clear set of rules regarding academic expectations and fair, even-handed application of discipline when those expectations are violated (Stronge, 2002). These findings have been confirmed by large-scale survey research, which has found dropout rates of Latinos are reduced when students report order is maintained (Coleman et al., 1982; Bryk & Lee, 1989; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Pittman, 1991), and disciplinary policies are fair (Bryk & Lee, 1989; Bryk & Thum, 1989).

The findings from this line of research justify the inclusion of two final variables in Block III of our model of Latino high school dropouts. “School Rules Well Publicized” is a dummy variable that measures whether students are aware of the general rules of conduct that teachers in their school expect them to adhere to while in the classroom. “School Rules Well
Publicized” is based on the ELS 2002 variable BYS20K, which ranks a student’s response to the following statement: “Everyone knows what the school rules are.” This variable uses a Likert scale with a 4 point range, where: 1 = “strongly agree;” 2 = “agree;” 3 = “disagree;” and 4 = “strongly disagree.” The dummy variable “School Rules Well Publicized” recodes 1 as 1, and 2, 3 and 4 as 0.

**Punishments are Uniform**

The final variable included in Block III is “Punishments are Uniform,” a dummy variable that measures student perceptions of whether disciplinary actions are administered in a fair and even-handed manner. The variable from ELS:2002 upon which “Punishments are Uniform” is based is BYS21C, an ordinal variable that ranks a student’s response to the following statement: “Punishment is the same no matter who you are.” This variable uses a Likert scale with a 4 point range, where: 1 = “strongly agree;” 2 = “agree;” 3 = “disagree;” and 4 = “strongly disagree.” The dummy variable “Punishments are Uniform” recodes 1 and 2 as 1, while values 3 and 4 are recoded as 0.

**3.4.2.4—Block IV: SES**

Findings from previous research consistently indicate that the dropout rates of Latinos are strongly correlated to variations in the socioeconomic status of their families (Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Barros, 1987; Bryk & Lee, 1989; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Rumberger & Scott, 1999; Bohon et al. 2006). Because socioeconomic status is a composite that combines a family’s annual income, parental education, and occupation into a single measure of their position in system of stratification, explanations of how socioeconomic status affects student performance often vary. Some explanations link family resources to differences in the intellectual climate.
within households (Rumberger, 1983; Velez, 1989); others to the extent to which parents
monitor their child’s academic performance (Ekstrom, et al. 1986), or to the occupational models
parents provide for their children (Kao & Tienda, 1999).

This line of research supports the inclusion in Block IV of the variable SES1, an original
ELS composite variable comprising the occupation, wealth, education, place of residence, and
income of the student’s parents.

3.5—Analytic Strategy

For this study, logistic regression analysis will be used to identify the independent
variables best able to predict whether a Latino high school will drop out of high school before
obtaining a diploma.

Block I enters demographic variable into a logistical regression equation to gauge the
influence that membership in particular subgroups of the Latino population exert on the
dependent variable “Dropout.” Derived from data gathered from ELS 2002, variables in this
Block include the variable female, which Velez (1989) found among Latinos to have a strong
association with the tendency to drop out of high school. Additional demographic variables
include the type of schools today’s students attend, which Lleras (2008) found was a contributing
factor to the decision to drop out of high school.

In Block II, variables from ELS 2002 measuring the educational aspirations and
expectations of students, as well those of their parents and teachers, are added to the regression
equation. Existing research suggests that student aspirations are initially shaped by the views
parents have about education.
Blocks III will exam the impact of school-level variables. In the ELS:2002 data, this category includes variables about the quality of the student-teacher bond, as well as the ability of the teacher to create a classroom environment that is conducive to learning.

Literature on school-level factors affecting the dropout rates of Latinos and other minorities highlights the importance of teacher-student relationships, which are seen as a key determinant in student’s perceptions of the school climate. Latino students who attend schools where the school climate is felt to be orderly and teachers are perceived to be caring have been found to have much lower odds of dropping out.

The final Block, Block IV, enters data about the socio-economic status of students’ parents.
4.1—Introduction

This chapter investigates the following research question: How do demographic, attitudinal, school-level, and socio-economic variables influence the process by which Latino students disengage from the nation’s educational system and eventually drop out of high school?

In seeking to answer this question, this dissertation utilizes data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS). Initiated in 2002, ELS tracks a cohort of 10th grade students as they prepared to exit from high school and entered into the labor market or post-secondary schools. In the base year survey, a nationally-representative sample of 10th grade students was surveyed, as were their parents and their math and English teachers. Throughout this chapter, the term Latinos refers to the 2,217 Latino students who were selected to participate in the ELS survey, and thus constitute the population under discussion. If a smaller number of students responded to one of the questions on the survey, the number of respondents is noted by n=.

Analysis of the data from the ELS survey was carried out in three discrete stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated in order to get an overview of the characteristics of the sample. Next, correlation analyses were undertaken to gauge the magnitude and direction of the statistical relationships among the variables. The final stage of the analysis entailed the use of logistic regression analysis to estimate the relative influence that our demographic, attitudinal, school-level, and socio-economic variables have on the dependent variable “Dropout.”
4.2—Univariate Analysis

Table 4.1 presents descriptive statistics of the means, standard deviations, ranges, and descriptions of variables for the cohort of Latino students who participated in the 2002 ELS survey. As such, the table allows for the analysis of the distribution of the individual variables that make up the Block of high school dropouts that will be tested in this dissertation study. Table 4.1 provides a synopsis of the 2,117 Latino students who make up our analytic sample.

4.2.1 Dependent Variable. “Dropout” is a dummy variable that is constructed from the ELS variable F1DOSTAT, a composite variable that identifies those 2002 10th graders who dropped out of high school without obtaining a diploma, a certificate of graduation, or a GED. Of the 2,217 Latino students who make up our analytic sample, 13%, or 288 students, dropped out of high school.

4.2.2—Independent Variables

4.2.2.1 Demographic Variables.

After reviewing the literature on high school dropouts, four demographic variables were selected for inclusion in the Block of dropouts being tested in this study.

The first, ‘Female,” is a dummy variable that allows us to determine if any association exists between the decision to drop out and a student’s gender. Fifty-one percent of the students identified themselves as females (n=1080).

The three remaining demographic variables classify students according to their membership within demographic groups that form around the type of schools students attend. As indicated by the variable “Public,” ninety-five percent of the students in the cohort under study
attended a public school. Irrespective of the particular auspices under which the school operated, 45% of the cohort attended schools located in urban areas, while 26% attended schools that were located in Southern states.

4.2.2.2—Aspirational Variables

Five variables related to the formation of student educational aspirations and expectations were selected from the ELS survey for inclusion in our Block of high school dropouts. All variables included in our Block are dummy variables based on ordinal variables that researchers created to measure the relative intensity of social factors that have been shown by previous research to have an impact on student educational aspirations and expectations.

As indicated by the dummy variable “Meet Friends,” seventy-nine percent of Latino students (n=2106) indicated that school is a good place to meet friends. This variable was constructed from the ELS variable BYS27E, which uses a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 4, to measure the extent to which they go to school “because it’s a place to meet [their] friends.” Scores of 1 and 2, which indicate that students agree with this statement, were recoded as 1, while scores of 3 and 4, which indicate disagreement with this statement, were recoded as 0.

Forty-four percent of Latino students indicate that they go to school because it gives them an opportunity to learn skills that are needed to obtain a job. This variable was constructed from the ELS variable BYS27G, which uses a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 4, to measure the extent to which they go to school because they are learning skills they will need for a job. A Scores of 1, which indicates strong agreement with this statement, were recoded as 1, while scores 2, 3 and 4, which indicate a weaker agreement, or disagreement altogether, were recoded as 0.
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On a scale of 1-4, a mean score of 1.87 was calculated for those students in the analytic sample who indicated an extent to which parent and teacher expectations factored into their decision to go to school. “Parents’ and teachers’ Expectations” is a composite variable that was calculated by finding the mean score on two ordinal-level variables that NCES researchers used to gauge the extent to which school attendance is motivated by parent and teacher belief it is critical to student success. The underlying variables use a 4 point Likert scale, with 1 indicating that students are strongly motivated to attend school because of parent and teacher expectations, while a score of 4 indicates that attending school has little to do with those expectations. The mean score of 1.87 for Latino students (n=2215) indicates that parent and teacher expectations have a fairly strong impact on the decision to go to school.

On scale of 1-7, the average ranking for Latinos (n=1872) on the survey question asking “How far in school do you think you will get?” was 4.87. A score of 5 indicates that the respondent expects to graduate from a four-year college. Hence, the mean score indicates that the typical person in the analytic sample planned to attend a four-year school but a smaller number actually expected to earn a bachelor’s degree.

With respect to parent educational aspirations, the mean value for the analytic sample was 4.84. “Parent’s Educational Aspirations” is a composite variable combining the rank that students gave to the question asking them how far their fathers and mothers, respectively, expected them to go in school. A score of 5 indicates that they believe their parents expect to graduate from a four-year college. Hence, the mean score indicates that the parents of the typical respondent in the analytic sample expected them to attend a four-year school but a smaller number of parents actually expect to earn a bachelor’s degree.
4.2.2.3—School-Level Variables

After reviewing the literature, seven school-level variables, which have been shown to be related to the formation of student’s aspirations and expectations, were selected for inclusion in the Block of high school dropouts being tested in this dissertation.

On a scale of 1-4, a mean score of 2.17 was calculated for those students in the analytic sample who responded to a series of statements about teachers found in the ELS survey. The resulting variable “Teacher-student Rapport” is a composite variable that averages the scores students gave in response to the four following statements, with a score of 1 indicating strong agreement, while a score of 4 indicates strong disagreement: 1) “Students get along well with teachers” (BYS20A); 2) “The teaching is good” (BYS20E); 3) “Teachers are interested in students” (BYS20F); and 4) “When I work hard on schoolwork, my teachers praise my effort” (BYS20G). The mean score of 2.17 indicates that the typical Latino student (n=2134) agrees, by and large, with these statements and thus has a good rapport with her teachers.

As indicated by the dummy variable “Respectful Interactions with Teachers in Class,” 27% of respondents in the analytic sample report that their interactions with teachers in the classroom are respectful.

Thirty-one percent of Latino students indicated that they feel safe at the school they currently attend.

Forty-six percent of students indicated that discipline is uniformly enforced at their schools and that misbehavior on the part of students is punished.
Fifty percent of students indicated that order is maintained in classes at their schools and that disruptions do not get in the way of learning.

Twenty percent of students indicated that the rules governing student conduct at their schools are widely known.

Sixty-nine percent of students report that punishments handed down for misbehavior are uniform.
### Table 4.1 Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges and Descriptions of Variables for Latino High School Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>ELS Variable Label &amp; Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>2217</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>Has student dropped out by first follow-up year (F1DOSTAT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2217</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>Gender dummy variable – R is female (BYSEX)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>2217</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>School type dummy variable (BYSCTRL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2217</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>School urbanicity dummy variable (BYURBAN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>2217</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>School region dummy variable (BYREGION)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspirations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MeetFriends</td>
<td>2106</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>School is a place to meet friends (BYS27E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Skills</td>
<td>2108</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>Learns skills for job in school (BYS27G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ &amp; Teachers’ Academic Expectations</td>
<td>2215</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>Teachers and parents expect success in school (composite of BYS27HI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s Academic Expectations</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>How far in school student thinks will get (BYS56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Academic Aspirations</td>
<td>1708</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>How far in school parents want 10th grader to go (BYS65AB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School-level Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-student Rapport</td>
<td>2134</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>Composite of teacher attitudes and treatment of students (BYS20AEFG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful Interactions with Teachers in Class</td>
<td>2101</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>In class does not feel put down by teachers (BYS20H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of Safety</td>
<td>2091</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>Does feel safe at this school (BYS20J)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## CHAPTERS FOUR: RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline Uniformly Enforced</td>
<td>2107</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>Misbehaving students often get away with it (BYS20L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Order</td>
<td>2109</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>Disruptions do not get in way of learning (BYS20K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Rules Well Publicized</td>
<td>2117</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>Everyone knows what school rules are (BYS21A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishments are Uniform</td>
<td>2086</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>Punishment the same no matter who you are (BYS21C)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Socio-Economic Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent’s Socioeconomic Status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2217</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>Socioeconomic status composite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BYSES1
4.3—Bivariate Analysis

Table 4.2 presents the results from Pearson’s Correlations that were performed to determine whether the continuous dependent variables have a statistically significant association with the dependent variable “Dropout.” Pearson’s $r$, or the correlation coefficient, provides an estimate of the strength and direction of the linear relationship a particular continuous independent variable has with the dependent variable. With respect to the population of Latino high school student being analyzed in this study, the Pearson’s Correlations revealed the following:

“Parent’s & Teachers’ Educational Expectations” had a weak negative impact on both “Student’s Educational Expectations” and “Parent’s Educational Aspirations,” and a weak positive impact on “Parent’s Educational Aspirations.” The correlations were significant at the .001 level. “Parent’s & Teacher’s Educational Expectations” also had a weak positive impact on “Parent’s Socioeconomic Status.” The correlation was significant at the .05 level.

“Student’s Educational Expectations” had a weak positive impact on “Parent’s Educational Aspirations” and on “Parent’s Socioeconomic Status.” It also had a weak negative impact on “Teacher-student Rapport.” All these correlations were statistically significant at the .001 level.

“Parent’s Educational Aspirations” had a weak negative impact on “Teacher-student Rapport,” and a weak positive impact on “Parent’s Socioeconomic Status.” The correlations were statistically significant at the .001 level. “Teacher-student Rapport” had a weak positive impact on “Parent’s Socioeconomic Status,” but that relationship was not statistically significant at any level at all.
### Table 4.2 Pearson’s Correlation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Parents’ &amp; Teachers’ Educational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Student’s Educational Expectations</td>
<td>-.205***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Parents Educational Aspirations</td>
<td>-.097***</td>
<td>.387***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Teacher-student Rapport</td>
<td>.285***</td>
<td>-.124***</td>
<td>-.070***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Parent’s Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td>.038*</td>
<td>.200***</td>
<td>.232***</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p=.05   ***p=.001

### 4.4—Multivariate Analysis

A primary objective of this dissertation study is to examine the multivariate influence that the selected set of demographic, aspirational, familial and institutional variables has on the decision many Latino students make to drop out of high school. To that end, logistic regression analysis was conducted to determine which variables were useful in predicting the likelihood of dropping out of high school among Latinos as a whole as well as among Latino males and female separately.

#### 4.4.1—All Latinos

Table 4.3 presents “Logistic Regression Analysis of Dropout Status in the Latino Student.” The four Blocks—Block I, Block II, Block III and Block IV—in Table 4.3 show logistic regressions predicting the likelihood of Latino students dropping out versus not dropping out of high school across demographic, aspirational, school-level, and socioeconomic status variables for all the respondents in our analytic sample, irrespective of gender.
In Block I, three of the variables have a statistically significant relationship to the tendency to drop out of high school. Enrollment in a public school increases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 7.396, while enrollment in a school located in the South decreases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by 41.6%. Both of these variables are statistically significant at the .05 level. Enrollment in a high school located in an urban setting increases the likelihood that Latino students will drop out increased by a factor of 2.729; this relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level. None of the other variables in Block I exhibit a statistically significant impact on the likelihood that a student will drop out of high school.

Block II, which introduces aspirational variables into our equation, indicates that the likelihood a Latino student will drop out of high school is associated with several variables, though at several different levels of significance. To begin with, being a female student increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school by a factor of 1.425. Attending a public school, as opposed to a private or charter school, increases the likelihood a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 4.741. Attending a school in the South, on the other hand, decreases the likelihood a Latino student will drop out of high school by 48%. All of these demographic variables are statistically significant at the .10 level, as is the aspirational variable, which measures the impact that feeling school is a good place to meet friends. Feeling that school is a good place to meet friends increases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 1.553.

Latino students who believe that parents and teachers expect that attending high school will lead to success increases the likelihood they will drop out of high school by a factor of 1.537. This relationship is statistically significant at the .01 level.
Several variables in Block II are statistically significant at the .001 level. Attending an urban school increases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.996. The expectation of attending a four-year college, but not necessarily graduating, decreases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by 35.7%. Similarly, the belief that parents aspire for them to attend a four-year college, but not necessarily graduate, decreases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by 97.2%. The remaining variables in Block II are not statistically significant.

Block III introduces several school-level variables into our equation of the tendency for Latino students to drop out of high school. Being female increases the likelihood a student will drop out of high school by a factor of 1.417, while attending a public school increases the likelihood a Latino male student will drop out of high school by a factor of 4.886. Attending a school located in the South decreases the likelihood of dropping out of high school among Latino students by 39.6%. These demographic variables are statistically significant at the .10 level. One aspirational and one school-level variable are statistically significant at this level as well. Latino students who believe that their parents and teachers expect that attending high school will lead to success increases the likelihood that they will drop out of high school by a factor of 1.314. Student perceptions that the punishment for violations of academic rules is uniform decreases the likelihood that Latino students will drop out of high school by 29.8%.

Attending school in the South decreases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by 39.6%. This variable is statistically significant at the .05 level.
Student perceptions that they have a good rapport with their teachers increases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 1.834. This variable is statistically significant at the .01 level.

Three variables in Block III are statically significant at the .001 level. Attending a public school increases the likelihood a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.808. Student’s academic expectations decrease the likelihood a Latino student will drop out of high school by 34.6%. The belief that school rules are well publicized and known by everyone increases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.370. None of the other variables in Block III are statistically significant at this level.

Block IV introduces the socioeconomic status variable into our equation of high school drop outs. Analysis indicates that there are two demographic variables that are statistically significant. Attending a school located in the South is statistically significant at the .01 level, and it decreases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by 38.2%. Attending an urban school, on the other hand, increases the likelihood a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.718. This variable is statistically significant at the .001 level.

Two of the aspirational variables in the Block have a statistically significant relationship to dropping out of high school. Latino students who believe that parents and teachers expect that attending high school will lead to success increases the likelihood a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 1.346. This variable is statistically significant at the .10 level. Student academic expectations increase the likelihood a Latino student will drop out of high school by 33.8%. This variable is statistically significant at the .001 level.
Three of the school-level variables in Block IV have a statistically significant relationship to dropping out of high school. Student’s perceptions that violations of academic rules are punished uniformly decreases the likelihood that Latino students will drop out of high school by 34.7%. This variable is statistically significant at the .05 level. The belief that school rules are well publicized and known by everyone increases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.410. Student perceptions that they have a good rapport with their teachers increase the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 1.962. Both of these variables are statistically significant at the .001 level.

In Block IV, parent’s socioeconomic status has a statistically significant relationship to dropping out at the .01 level, decreasing the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by 39.9%.
### Table 4.3.1 Logistic Regression Analysis of Dropout Status in the Latino Student Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Block 1</th>
<th>Block 2</th>
<th>Block 3</th>
<th>Block 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>1.021</td>
<td>.354†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>2.001*</td>
<td>.911</td>
<td>7.396</td>
<td>1.556†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1.004***</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>2.729</td>
<td>1.097***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>.538*</td>
<td>.236</td>
<td>.584</td>
<td>-.478†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Friends</td>
<td>.440†</td>
<td>.264</td>
<td>1.553</td>
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<td>.273†</td>
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<td>-.425***</td>
</tr>
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<td>School-Level</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.207</td>
<td>1.834</td>
<td>.674***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Feelings of Safety</td>
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<td>.220</td>
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<td>Discipline Enforced</td>
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<td>.738</td>
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<td>Classroom Order</td>
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<td>.880***</td>
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<td>.169</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>.224</td>
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4.4.2—Latino Males
Table 4.4 presents “Logistic Regression Analysis of Dropout in the Latino Male Student Sample.” The four Blocks—Block I, Block II, Block III and Block IV—in Table 4.4 show logistic regressions predicting the likelihood of Latino students dropping out of high school versus not dropping out of high school, across demographic, aspirational, school-level and socioeconomic status variables for the male Latino respondents in our analytic sample.

In Block I, which contains only demographic variables, there are two variables that show a statistically significant relationship with dropping out of high school. Enrollment in a high school located in the South decreases the likelihood that a Latino male will drop out of high school by 46.6%. Enrollment in a high school located in an urban setting increases the likelihood that Latino male students will drop out increased by a factor of 2.729; this relationship is statistically significant at the .001 level. None of the other variables in Block I exhibit a statistically significant impact on the likelihood that a student will drop out of high school.

Block II introduces aspirational variables into our Block of high school drop outs; two demographic variables and two aspirational variables have a statistically significant relationship with dropping out of high school. Attending a school located in an urban center increases the likelihood a Latino male will drop out of high school by a factor of 4.638; this variable is statistically significant at the .001 level. Attending school in the South, on the other hand, decreases the likelihood that a Latino male will drop out of high school by 50.8%; this variable is statistically significant at the .10 level.

Both of the aspirational variables are statistically significant at the .01 level. Latino males who believe that their parents and teachers expect that attending high school will lead to success increases the likelihood that a student will drop out of high school. For every 1 unit increase in this belief, the likelihood that a Latino male will drop out of high school increases by
a factor of 1.948. On the other hand, the academic expectations of males students is associated with a decrease in the likelihood of dropping out of high school: for every one unit increase in level of schooling a student expects to attain, the likelihood of dropping out of high school decreases by 22%. None of the other variables in Block II are statistically significant.

Block III introduces school-level variables into our equation of dropping out of high school. There are a total of eight variables in this Block that are associated with dropping out of high school. Attending an urban school, which is statistically significant at the .001 level, increases the likelihood that a Latino male will drop out by a factor of 6.037. On the other hand, attending a school located in the South decreases the likelihood a student will drop out of high school by 56.3%.

Two aspirational variables are associated with dropping out of high school among Latino males. Latino males who believe that their parents and teachers expect that attending high school will lead to success increases the likelihood that a student will drop out of high school. For every 1 unit increase in this belief, the likelihood that a Latino male will drop out of high school increases by a factor of 1.843. On the other hand, for every one unit increase in level of schooling a male student expects to attain, the likelihood of dropping out of high school decreases by 22.1%. Both of these variables are statistically significant at the .05 level.

Four school-level variables are associated with dropping out among male Latino students. The perception among Latino males that their interactions with teachers in the classroom are respectful increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school by a factor of 2.152. The belief that school rules are well publicized and known by everyone increases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.112. Both of these variables are statistically significant at the .10 level.
The feeling that the school they attend is safe increases the likelihood that a Latino male will drop out of high school by factor of 2.152. This variable is statistically significant at the .05 level. On the other hand, the perception that violations of academic rules are punished uniformly decreases the likelihood that Latino male students will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.112. This variable is statistically significant at the .10 level. None of the other variables in Block III is statistically significant.

Block IV introduces a socioeconomic status variable into the Block. There are a total of eight variables in this Block that are associated with Latino males dropping out of high school. Two demographic variables are associated with dropping out. Attending a school located in an urban center increases the likelihood that a Latino male will drop out of high school by a factor of 5.935; this variable is statistically significant at the .001 level. On the other hand, attending a school located in the South decreases the likelihood that a Latino male will drop out of high school by 55.6%. This variable is statistically significant at the .05 level.

Two aspirational variables are associated with dropping out of high school among Latino males in Block IV. Latino males who believe that their parents and teachers expect that attending high school will lead to success increases the likelihood that a student will drop out of high school. For every 1 unit increase in this belief, the likelihood that a Latino male will drop out of high school increases by a factor of 1.898. On the other hand, the academic expectations of males students is associated with a decrease in the likelihood of dropping out of high school: for every one unit increase in level of schooling a student expects to attain, the likelihood of dropping out of high school decreases by 20.9%. This relationship is statistically significant at the .05 level.
In Block IV, there are three school-level variables associated with dropping out of high school among Latino males. The feeling that the school they attend is safe increases the likelihood that a Latino male will drop out of high school by factor of 2.293. This variable is statistically significant at the .05 level. The belief that school rules are well publicized and known by everyone increases the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.198. On the other hand, the perception that violations of academic rules are punished uniformly decreases the likelihood that Latino male students will drop out of high school by 48.9%. All three of these variables are statistically significant at the .05 level.

In Block IV, parent’s socioeconomic status has a statistically significant relationship to dropping out at the .01 level, decreasing the likelihood that a Latino male student will drop out of high school by 48.2%.
### Table 4.4 1 Logistic Regression Analysis of Dropout Status in the Latino Male Student Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Dropout (N=654)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Block 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
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<td>.931</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1.628***</td>
<td>.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Meet Friends</td>
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<td>.399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Skills</td>
<td>.290*</td>
<td>.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s &amp; Teacher’s</td>
<td>.667**</td>
<td>.238</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student’s Academic Expectations</td>
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<td>.101</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent’s Aspirations</td>
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<td>.089</td>
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<tr>
<td>School-Level</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher-student Rapport</td>
<td>.302</td>
<td>.326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful Interactions With Teachers in Class</td>
<td>.693†</td>
<td>.385</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>.319</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom Order</td>
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<td>School Rules Well Publicized</td>
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<td>.397</td>
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<tr>
<td>Punishments are Uniform</td>
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<td>.327</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>.200</td>
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</table>

† p≤.10  *p≤.05  **p≤.01  ***p≤.001

### 4.4.3—Latino Females

Table 4.5 presents “Logistic Regression Analysis of Dropout in the Latino Female Student Sample.” The four Blocks—Block I, Block II, Block III, and Block IV—in Table 4.4 show logistic regressions predicting the likelihood of Latino students dropping out versus not
CHAPTERS FOUR: RESULTS

dropping out of high school across demographic, aspirational, school-level, and socioeconomic status variables for the male Latino respondents in our analytic sample.

In Block I, which only contain demographic variables, there are two variables that show a statistically significant relationship with dropping out of high school among females. Attending a school located in an urban center increases the likelihood that a Latina female will drop out of high school by a factor of 1.717; this variable is statistically significant at the .05 level. On the other hand, attending a school located in the South decreases the likelihood that a Latina female will drop out of high school by 39%; this variable is statistically significant at the .10 level. No other variable in Block I is statistically significant.

Block II introduces aspirational variables into our Block of dropping out among Latina female high school students. Four variables in this equation of dropping out are statistically significant. Attending a school located in an urban center increases the likelihood a Latina female will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.393. The academic expectations of females students is associated with a decrease in the likelihood of dropping out of high school: for every one unit increase in level of schooling a student expects to attain, the likelihood of dropping out of high school decreases by 43%. Both of these variables are statistically significant at the .001 level.

The belief that school is a place to meet friends increases the likelihood a Latina female will drop out of high school by a factor of 1.732. The belief that school is a place to learn skills for a job increases the likelihood a Latina student will drop out of high school by a factor of 1.619. Both of these variables are statistically significant at the .10 level. None of the other variables in this Block are statistically significant.

Block III introduces school-level variables into our model of dropping out among Latina high school students. There are five variables in this Block that are statistically significant.
Attending a school located in an urban center increases the likelihood that a Latina will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.106; this variable is statistically significant at the .05 level.

The academic expectations of female students are associated with a decrease in the likelihood of a Latina dropping out of high school: for every unit increase in level of schooling a Latina experiences, her likelihood of dropping out decreases by 42.5%; this variable is statistically significant at the .001 level.

Three school-level variables included in Block III are associated with dropping out of high school among Latinas. The perception that they have a good rapport with their teachers increases the likelihood that a Latina student will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.576. This variable is statistically significant at the .001 level. The belief that school rules are well publicized and known by everyone increases the likelihood that a Latina female student will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.762. This variable is statistically significant at the .01 level. On the other hand, the perception that the violation of academic rules is punished uniformly decreases the likelihood that Latinas will drop out of high school by 46.3%. This variable is statistically significant at the .05 level. None of the other variables in Block III are statistically significant.

Block IV introduces a socioeconomic status variable into our model of dropping out of high school among Latina females. There are seven variables in this Block that are statistically significant. Attending a school located in an urban center increases the likelihood that a Latina female will drop out of high school by a factor of 1.980; this variable is statistically significant at the .05 level.
The academic expectations of female students is associated with a decrease in the likelihood of a Latina dropping out of high school: for every one unit increase in level of schooling a Latina expects to attain, the likelihood of dropping out of high school decreases by 41%; this variable is statistically significant at the .001 level.

In Block IV, three school-level variables are associated with the likelihood a Latina will drop out of high school. The perception that they have a good rapport with their teachers increases the likelihood that a Latina student will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.776. The belief that school rules are well publicized and known by everyone increases the likelihood that a Latina female student will drop out of high school by a factor of 2.825. Both of these variables are statistically significant at the .001 level.

Among Latinas, the belief that order is maintained in the classroom and that there are few disruptions in the learning process, increases the likelihood that a Latina will drop out of high school by a factor of 1.597.
### Table 4.5 Logistic Regression Analysis of Dropout in the Latina Female Student Sample

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<tr>
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<th>Block 2</th>
<th>Block 3</th>
<th>Block 4</th>
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<td>196879</td>
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<td>.562***</td>
<td>.554***</td>
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<td>-.167</td>
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<td>.537</td>
<td>-.577†</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.509</td>
<td>.412</td>
</tr>
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<td>.322</td>
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<td>1.039***</td>
</tr>
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<td>.856</td>
<td>.156</td>
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<td>.322</td>
<td>2.762</td>
<td>1.039***</td>
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<td>-.562***</td>
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<td>.221</td>
<td>.635</td>
<td>-.455*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

|  |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Constant**          | -21.432*** | -19.701*** | -20.867*** | -21.11*** |
| $\chi^2$              | 15.046**  | 64.691*** | 96.999***  | 101.397*** |
| -2LL                   | 465.156   | 415.511   | 383.203    | 378.805   |
| Pseudo R²             | .042      | .175      | .256       | .267      |

† p≤.10  *p≤.05  **p≤.01  ***p≤.001
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1—Introduction

In the preceding chapters, an exposition was presented of the logistical regression analysis that examines the impact that structural, attitudinal, school-level, and socioeconomic variables have on the dropout rates of today’s Latino high school students. As shown in Chapter Four, each of these four basic types of variables is associated, to one degree or the other, with the odds Latino students in our sample dropped out of high school. In the discussion that follows, the first section below compares our findings to findings from previous research that correspond to the variables included in our model of high school dropout. Note is made of those instances where previous findings are corroborated, while tentative explanations are advanced to explain instances where they were refuted. In the second, concluding section, we assess which of the competing theories of cultural and social capital presented in Chapter Two best fits our finding that among today’s Latino high school students urban locale is the strongest predictor of dropping out of high school.

5.2—Demographic Variables

Four demographic variables were included in our statistical model of Latino high school dropouts, the first of which, gender, relates to the attributes of the individual student in our sample, while the others—type of school, locale, regional location—relate to the characteristics of the schools they attended. Although data from decades of research have shown that each of these demographic variables bear some association with the decision to drop out of high school, debate continues over the relative contribution of each—particularly, the role of type of control:
that is to say, whether a school is located in the public or the private sector (Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002).

**Gender**

Unlike many previous studies that have sought to explain the high rate of high school dropouts among Latino youth (Steinberg et al., 1984; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fernandez et al., 1989; Velez, 1989; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Rumberger, 1993; Stearns and Glennie, 2006), the results from this study found no association between dropping out of high school and a student’s gender. In other words, the odds that a female would drop out of high school were the same, all other things being equal, as that of the males in our sample.

An overarching reason that may explain the discrepancy between our findings and those of previous studies is that the specific factors that in the past put Latinas at greater risk have lost some of their salience. While the base year survey of the ELS, which we used here, was 2002, all other data sets were gathered sometime during the last quarter of the 20th century: the most recent in 1998 (Stearns and Glennie, 2006); four others in the 1980s (Fernandez et al., 1989; Rumberger, 1993; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999); and one in 1976 (Steinberg et al., 1984). The factors that put Latinas of prior generations at risk for dropping out from high school have diminished since then, often as a result of national public policy.

In the studies cited above, pregnancy and early family formation is identified as the leading factor that drives Latinas to drop out of high school. At about the time that data from earlier studies were gathered, the national birthrate for females ages 15-19 had peaked to the highest point since the federal governments began tracking this information in the 1930s. 644,708 infants were born to teenagers 15-19 in 1970, a trend which troubled politicians and policymakers throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Hamilton & Ventura, 2013). Contemporary
research showed that pregnant teenagers were more apt than others to drop out of high school (Waite, & Moore, 1978; Camp, 1980; Center for Human Resource Research, 1980; Fernandez et al., 1989). Under the administration of the George H. W. Bush, a number of national initiatives, starting with the Adolescent Family Life program, sought to bring these rates down (Title XX of the Public Health Service Act of 1991). Although the strategic focus of these anti-pregnancy initiatives changed as control of the White House shifted from one political party to the next (Solomon-Fears, Carmen, 2013), the net result was a marked decline in pregnancies among teenagers across racial and ethnic groups. According to a recent study by the National Center for Health Statistics, in 2005 birthrates among Latinas were 25% lower than they had been in 1992 (Hamilton & Ventura, 2013). Analysts suggest that a combination of factors contributed to this decline, from the increased use of birth control to the push for abstinence to fears that sex might lead to HIV infections. Whatever the reason, the dramatic decline in pregnancy rates over the past three decades means that Latinas, today, are much less susceptible to dropping out of high school because of an unplanned pregnancy.

Public

Contrary to the findings of many prominent researchers and policy analysts, this study found that attending a public high school does not have a statistically significant impact on the odds that a Latino student is likely to drop out of high school. Spurred by a series of studies by Coleman and his colleagues that concluded that private high schools and Catholic high schools, in particular, had dramatically higher rates of academic performance and graduation than their public schools counterparts, most investigations have found that Latino and Black students who attend public school are more likely to drop out of high school than those who attend private
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

schools (Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Evans and Scwhab, 1995; Sander & Krautmann, 1995).

An examination of the data sets upon which the above studies were based suggests that the most likely reason for this discrepancy is that the data on which those earlier findings were based is rather dated. While the base year survey data for this study was gathered in 2002, all of the previous studies (Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Evans and Scwhab, 1995; Sander & Krautmann, 1995) are based on data that is now more than three decades old, data originally gathered as part of the High School and Beyond longitudinal survey that the U.S. Department of Education initiated in 1980.

Since then, the institutional landscape of the nation’s secondary school system has undergone considerable change, driven by federal and state policymakers who adopted several key reforms advocated by these earlier works. Galvanized by Ronald Regan’s National Commission on Excellence, the landmark report *A Nation at Risk* warned that the nation’s dysfunctional secondary system could hinder its ability to compete in the international economy. The last three decades have seen the United States undertake a host of educational reforms designed to remake the administrative apparatus of the public schools along the lines of Catholic schools. Two policy goals championed by the most influential of these studies were pursued by federal and state lawmakers: tightening administrative order within schools and revamping the public secondary school system in accordance with free market policies. The first of these policy goals was accomplished through the enactment of state laws that encouraged the establishment of privately operated but publicly supported charter schools, along with a regime of standardized testing, educational vouchers and school choice programs, and more rigorous licensure
requirements for teachers mandated under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Having overcome the opposition of various groups, today the administrative apparatus for controlling public secondary school systems around the nation more closely resembles that of private schools than at any time in the past.

In addition to these market-inspired reforms, parallel efforts were made to impose a stricter disciplinary regime within the nation’s public schools, prompted by previous research had found that disruptive student behavior was closely associated with various academic problems (Coleman & Kilgore, 1987). The legislative foundation for this new get-tough regime was established under the Clinton Administration with the enactment of the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 (IAS). In addition to provisions that mandated high stakes testing and authorized the creation of charter schools, the IAS included the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994. This provision, which sought to assuage a public that had grown alarmed by a spate of mass-shooting at suburban high schools and regular gun-play at urban schools (Nolan, 2011: 30), aimed to eliminate gun violence by requiring the expulsion for no less than a year of anyone found to possess a weapon (Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2014).

In accordance with these federal laws, zero-tolerance policies were soon adopted by numerous school systems across the nation during the 1990s. “The National Center of Education Statistics report, Violence in America’s Public Schools: 1996-1997, found that 94% of all schools have zero tolerance policies for weapons or firearms, 87% for alcohol, while 79% report mandatory suspensions or expulsions for violence or tobacco” (Skiba, 2000). Moreover, many school districts expanded the list punishable infractions, with some school districts going as far as to expel students for fighting, threats, or swearing (Skiba, 2000:2).
Some reform advocates might have welcomed these changes, seeing them as a prelude to major improvements in the academic effectiveness of public schools, as previous research has suggested that attendance at a Catholic school is especially beneficial to the academic performance and persistence rates of Black and Latino students from America’s central cities (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Evans and Schwab, 1995; Sander & Krautmann, 1995). Researchers who have monitored the impact of these reforms have contended, for some time, however, that the disciplinary rules were being applied in a racially discriminatory manner and thus compounded the educational challenges Blacks and Latinos already faced. For example, researchers with Harvard University’s Civil Rights Project concluded that zero tolerance policies are “more likely to exist in predominately black and Latino school districts” (The Civil Rights Project, Advancement Project, 2000). Data compiled and analyzed by government researchers with the Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights corroborated this claim in early 2014, prompting the Obama administration to issue new guidelines for applying disciplinary action shortly thereafter (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Although the lack of association between attending a public high school and the odds of dropping out among Latinos suggests that the rise of the zero-tolerance policy regime within recent times has succeeded in creating an atmosphere more conducive to learning, the policy has actually been quite damaging. As we argue below, the association between public schools and dropping out is mediated through locale and region.

**Urban**

This study found that the variable Urban is the single most powerful predictor of the chances that a Latino student in our sample would drop out of high school. Situating our
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

findings in relation to previous research is not an easy task, as previous research comparing the influence that locale has on dropout rates has yielded results that are inconsistent (Fan & Chen, 1999). Although some studies have concluded that there is no statistically significant difference in the dropout rates of high schools in different locales (Alspaugh 1992; Fan & Chen, 1999; Rumsberger & Thomas, 2000; Jordan, Kostandini & Mykerezi, 2012), others have found that risk differs by region, with students in urban areas more likely, and in other cases less likely, to drop out than their counterparts in one or both of the other locales. (Lleras, 2005; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey and Crowley, 2006).

There are several possible reasons why our findings diverge from the findings yielded by previous research. One stems from the way our model classified the high schools in our sample into different locales. Following standard practice, most of the aforementioned studies classify high schools into one of three categories that the Census Bureau currently uses: urban, suburban, or rural. For the purposes of the analysis here, however, suburban and rural were collapsed into a single category, and thus our analysis compares urban to non-urban. In so doing, it is possible that our model overestimates the influence that urban locale exerts on the odds of dropping out, as it groups, into a single category, localities that have very different population densities, economic activities, and cultural lifestyles. For analysts like Jordan, Kostandini and Mykerezi (2012), these categories are too coarse to capture the underlying social dynamics, and they instead use an alternative set of geographic codes, developed by the United States Department of Agriculture that classify localities into one of 10 groups, depending on their population density and proximity to metropolitan region.

Aside from faulty conceptualization, another possible reason for this discrepancy arises from the confluence between two sociodemographic trends: the particular residential patterns of
Latinos, on the one side, and the adoption of zero-tolerance regimes by school districts across America, on the other. That urban locale is so strongly associated with dropping out among Latinos partly reflects that the high schools they attend are highly concentrated in urban areas. According to Richard Fry, a senior analyst with the Pew Center on Hispanics, 85% of Latino students attend a public high school where the composition of the student body is disproportionately Latino—together the majority of those schools are located in central cities (38.6%), or the fringe of urban centers (34.3%) (Fry, 2005). Urban high schools are infamous for the challenges they pose to the maintenance of order; however, the particular characteristics of the schools attended by Latinos pose even greater challenges than the typical urban high school. The student body at the majority of these schools exceeds 1,800 pupils—more than 40% of whom qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch—while the teacher-to-student ratio is even higher than that of urban high schools elsewhere (Fry, 2005).

The trend toward greater concentration of Latinos into poor, mega-high schools dovetailed with the adoption of harsh zero-tolerance disciplinary policies during the 1990s, a policy pushed by big-city mayors who sought to make the school climate more conducive to learning by ridding schools of suspected gang-members and other troublemakers. Interestingly, Jordan, Kostandini and Mykerezi found significant differences in dropout rates between regions once peer effects were taken into account, the most significant of which was membership in a youth gang (2013: 18). “According to a 2005 national survey, 24 percent of students ages twelve to eighteen reported that gangs were present in their school, with the figure jumping to 39 percent for students attending urban public schools” (Rumsberger, 2011: 176). Indeed, it is the cities, historically speaking, that have been the biggest incubators of gangs, their growth and spread a byproduct of urbanization (Howell and Moore, 2010). That urban high schools would be
most likely to institute zero-tolerance policies is clear from a geographic analysis of gang presence published by the National Gang Center. While 85 percent of law enforcement agencies in larger cities reported some form of gang activities within their jurisdiction in early 2014, the percentage declines from 50 percent to 30 percent and, finally, to 14 percent in smaller cities, suburban, and rural counties, respectively (National Gang Center, 2014).

South

Contrary to our expectations, the findings for this study indicate that odds of a Latino students dropping out are reduced, if their high school is located in the South. With one exception, our findings are at odds with the findings of previous research on the influence that region exerts on dropout patterns. Although descriptive statistics show that dropouts tend to be heavily concentrated in the South, the conclusion of several studies is that among Latino students this regional disparity in dropouts disappears once differences in the background of students are properly controlled for (Barros, 1987; Ekstrom et al., 1987; Fan & Chen, 1999). On the other hand, our findings partially corroborate the conclusion of Rumberger, who concluded that attending a high school in the South reduced the odds of dropping out among males, though not females (Rumberger, 1983).

Several reasons might explain why our findings depart from most of the previous findings. The first is that the reworking of the regional categories ended up hampering the ability of our model to discern the underlying regional dynamic. For simplicity’s sake, the four original regional categories used by the Census Bureau—North, South, East and West—were recombined in our model of dropouts into two categories, South and non-South. It should be noted, in this connection, that the category non-South yokes together the West—the region in the nation which not only had the highest percentage of Latinos in 2000 but the highest rates of drop outs—with
the East and Midwest, regions that had the lowest percentages of Latinos and the lowest dropout rates.

Another possible reason is that since the 1980s—the decades during which the data sets upon which the previous studies were based—the South may have seen a net out-migration of Latinos from the South to other regions of the nation, thus reducing the odds of dropping out relative to other regions. However plausible this may sounds, a preliminary analysis of regional population shifts actually shows that the percentage of Latinos residing in the South has actually risen by 6% in the past three decades, going from 30.6% in 1980 to 36.1% in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1980, 1990, 2000 & 2010).

The final and more likely reason for the observed differences in regional dropout rates, stems from differences in the degree to which the regions have undergone urbanization. Urbanization is doubtless an uneven process, occurring much earlier, unfolding more rapidly, and spreading more extensively in some region than others. Indeed, the South, according to the latest analysis by the Census Bureau, has the lowest rate of urbanization of all regions in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Hence, it is likely that high schools in southern states have been much slower than other regions, where gang activity is far higher, to adopt the highly alienating security regimes that push Latinos out of high school.

5.3—Aspirational Variables

Five aspirational variables were selected for inclusion in our statistical model of Latino high school dropouts, each of which can be distinguished by the particular relationship through which it is mediated, influencing whether a student has a sufficient level of academic motivation to graduate or dropout. The first variable measures how the odds of dropping out are affected by
school-based peer networks; the second, by perceptions of the economic utility of a high school
degree; and the last three, by the expectations and aspirations of students, parents, and teachers.
Generally speaking, this study found that academic expectations and aspirations do have an
impact on the likelihood of dropping out, though, as we shall see, not always in the direction one
might expect. In the subsections that follow our findings are juxtaposed with findings from
previous research. In addition, we sought to assess the impact of several factors that previous
research has identified as having a significant influence on the formation of aspirations: the
academic aspirations of parents, the academic expectations of both parents and teachers, and
friendship with peers (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Schneider & Stevenson, 2000; Gándara, O’Hara &
Gutiérrez, 2004).

Meet Friends

This study found that school-based peer networks had no discernible impact—either
positive or negative—on the odds that a Latino student in our sample would drop out of high
school. Initial indications of significance were found when aspirational variables were entered
into our model in Block 2; however, the impact of friendship networks disappeared once
additional control variables for school factors and socioeconomic status were added.

On its face, such a finding would appear to challenge, if not refute, previous analyses that
have examined how school-based peer networks influence academic persistence. Indeed,
previous research consistently concluded that dropout behavior is shaped by the broader peer
networks in which Latino students are embedded, shaping their level of attachment to high
school as well as their degree of participation in school-based activities (Davalos et al., 1999;
Johnson, et al., 2001; South, et al., 2005; Ream & Rumberger, 2009). Nevertheless, careful
comparison with previous studies reveals several reasons why our findings should not be treated as the final word on this topic.

To start at the conceptual level, comparisons with previous research suggests that the use of a single variable to measure peer networks, as was done here, may overlook several important structural features of peer networks that determine the degree to which the potential to influence dropout behavior is actually realized. For example, in their recent analysis of dropout behavior, Carbonaro and Workman (2013) distinguish between two different types of peer relationships. Close friends, defined as peers with whom one has strong affective ties and regular interactions, are distinguished from distant friends, peers with whom one has weaker emotional bonds and spends less time. Predictably, they found that students with more close friendships, the kind that serve as a source of emotional support during times of academic uncertainty, have a lower risk of dropping out. More surprisingly, however, they also found that the characteristics of more distant friends have a greater influence on the likelihood of dropping out than do the characteristics of close friends. For them, this latter finding is consistent with social identity theory, one tenet of which is that “friends about whom students have less intimate information are more likely to serve as role models that define which behaviors are expected and/or permissible” (Carbonaro and Workman, 2013: 1266).

Other structural characteristics of networks have been highlighted in studies that also examine Latino dropout behavior. Drawing on social network theory, South, Haynie and Bose (2005) incorporated three characteristics of networks into their analysis: 1) network size, the number of students in a given network; 2) network density, the number of actual ties out of the total number of possible ties; and finally 3) network centrality, a student’s relative position within the peer network. Each of these structural characteristics, especially a student’s position
within the peer network, was found to have a significant impact on dropping out. Were these structural features incorporated into our conceptualization of student networks, it is quite possible that our model would have yielded different results.

Aside from structural characteristics, the findings of previous research suggest that the impact of peer networks is also mediated by several other factors which this study did not take into consideration.

In a study of how social networks impact students attachment to and engagement with school, Ream and Rumberger conclude that the orientation of friends, as well as the activities they engage in as a group, have a significant impact on the odds of dropping out among Mexican-American students. Challenging the tendency to conceptualize social networks as a wholly positive resource, they argue that the odds of dropping out depend on whether peer networks are oriented to “school-related activities,” on the one side, or more “street-oriented” activities, on the other side. Mexican-American students are more likely to gravitate to street-oriented peer groups, they conclude because their parents often lack the money or time needed to participate in school-related activities, or rely upon their high-school aged children to care for younger siblings while at work.

Evidence that further corroborates the impact of the orientation of peer networks among Latino dropouts—specifically male Latino dropouts—is presented by Staff and Kraeger. In a study that examined the relationship between violence and social standing within the peer networks of low-income males, they found that students who participate in more violent, street-oriented subcultures are at increased risk of dropping out of high school (Staff and Kraeger, 2008). Whether dropout behavior is most influenced by close friends or distant associates,
figures from law enforcement surveys showing that Latinos make up the largest percentage of
gangs in larger cities, smaller cities, and suburban counties suggest that our model may be
distorted by a failure to include information about peer orientation (National Gang Center, 2014).

Lack of information about the specific kind of school related activities in which students
are involved is a final factor which may account for the discrepancy between our findings and
those presented in previous studies. Even when students are embedded in peer networks that are
oriented to school, the impact of such participation on the dropout behavior of Latino students
varies, research shows, according to the specific type of activity. Distinguishing unstructured
school-related activities like homework and school preparation from school-based extracurricular
activities like sports and arts, Ream and Rumberger (2008) found a differential impact on high
school dropout rates among Latinos. Students regularly prepared for school or participating in
school-based athletics tended to be embedded in peer networks that placed a higher value on
education and were therefore less likely to drop out of school. These findings echo those from an
earlier study conducted by Davalos, Chavez and Guardiola (1999). They likewise found that
participation in school-based extracurricular activities generally tended to have a positive impact
on student persistence. The benefits, however, were much higher for athletic participation than
participation in band.

In addition to the structural characteristics of networks, and the orientation of peers, the
exclusion of information about the type of activities engaged in by peer networks is likely to
account for the divergence between our findings and previous findings.

Job Skills
In contrast to theoretical predictions and empirical evidence of previous studies, the findings from this study did not detect any correlation between the odds of dropping out of high school and a student’s belief about whether their studies would equip them with marketable job skills. The impact that student perceptions of the “utility value” of high school studies have on persistence has been examined by researchers working across several disciplines, the sociology of education, educational psychology, and the economics of education. Although the analytic approach frequently differs from one field to the next, the results have led to a common conclusion: students are less likely to drop out when they believe their coursework will equip them with the skills they need to get a job (Battistich et al., 1983; Rumberger, 1983; Velez, 1989; Pittman, 1991; Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999). Unlike these studies, however, our findings indicate that this association vanishes once differences in other factors known to influence dropping out among Latino students are controlled.

There are several reasons which are likely to account for the discrepancy between our findings and the previous body of research. While all the aforementioned studies share a common interest in how student perceptions of the “utility value” of coursework influence degree attainment and persistence, closer inspection reveals important differences in how such value is defined and measured. In contrast to this study and others like it from the field of sociology, the economists Eckstein and Wolpin (1999) use econometric modeling to impute a dollar value to a high school diploma. This quantitative measure is incommensurable with the more subjective perception of educational value that sociologist obtain from survey questionnaires, but even survey questions contain subtle variations in wording, which has an important bearing on findings.
In reviewing conflicting theories about the formation of minority aspirations, Kao and Tienda (1998) note that, depending on how they are framed, some questions are better suited to measuring students’ abstract attitudes about the value of an education, while others at measuring concrete attitudes about the actual payoff from an education. This distinction between abstract and concrete attitudes might also account for why our findings diverge from previous sociological studies of how educational attitudes impact Latino dropout behavior. Among the studies drawn here, those by Rumberger (1983), Velez (1989) and Battistich et al. (1995) rely on a more abstract conception of educational attitudes in modeling how educational attitudes affect dropout behavior among Latinos. The model constructed by Pittman (1991), on the other hand, uses a variable that gauges how useful students believe their coursework is in building their marketable skills. Interestingly, Pittman’s findings, which directly measure the utility of coursework, provide some verification for this explanation: “the level of participation in vocational courses,” which gives primacy to the building of concrete skills, “does not exert a strong influence on students’ desire to remain in school” (1991:291).

Though different conceptualizations of the utility of a diploma may play some role in the discrepant findings, it is also possible they are a reflection of real changes in the labor market prospects and occupational roles that have taken place since these earlier studies were conducted. Indeed, a sea change has occurred in the American economy since the 1980s. The changes can be characterized as a wholesale shift from industrial production to information processing. In a comparative analysis that examined dropout rates during the 1980s across racial and ethnic groups, Barros postulated that local labor market conditions were likely to exert some influence on persistence rates, though insufficient data prohibited any conclusive finding. In an analysis of data on North Carolina students gathered during the late 1990s, Stearns and Glennie (2006)
uncovered stronger evidence that job opportunities tend to lure older high school students out of school to work full-time. Their explanation linking dropout rates to labor market opportunities was echoed in a Pew Research report hailing the steep, steady decline in Latino dropout rates: “It is possible that the rise in high school completion … by Latino youths has been driven, at least in part, by their declining fortunes in the job market” (Fry & Taylor, 2013). Although the annualized labor force participation rates of Latinos has increased by around five percentage points between 1980 (64%) and 2004 (69.1%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014), the widespread view is that employment prospects have gotten tougher for high school dropouts. Hence, even if Latino youth do not believe their coursework will equip them with more marketable skills, poor labor market prospects are doubtless deterring even the most discouraged from simply dropping out.

*Student, Parents and Teacher Aspirations and Expectations*

Considered as a whole, the findings of this study confirm the conclusion of previous investigations that have examined the impact that the aspirations and expectations of students, parents, and teachers exert on dropout rates (Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Velez, 1989; Eckstein and Wolpin, 1999). The existing body of literature indicates that there is an inverse relationship between the attitudes students, parents and teachers hold toward education, on the one hand, and the odds that a Latino student will drop out of school, on the other. Plainly stated, more positive attitudes about the value of education in general and the ability of students to meet academic objectives are likely to reduce the chances that a Latino student will drop out of high school.
According to Eckstein and Wolpin’s analysis of dropout rates and the opportunity structure of local labor markets, students with low academic expectations are more likely to drop out of school than students with high academic expectation, especially when the benefits of gainful employment are perceived to outweigh the costs of staying in high school and attaining the diploma. Nevertheless, they acknowledge that econometric techniques to measure these factors lack precision.

Sociologists, using data from longitudinal surveys conducted over several decades by the National Center for Education Statistics have found that higher academic expectations and aspirations on the part of students, parents, and teachers also tend to reduce the odds of dropping out. Even though research has shown that there is a complex interaction between the aspirations and expectations of parents, teachers, and students, most of these studies have examined them in isolation, downplaying their influence upon each other.

Using the dataset compiled as part of the High School and Beyond longitudinal survey, Eckstrom and her colleagues examined the impact that aspirations and expectations had on student persistence rates. Though mother’s educational aspirations was the only variable included in their statistical model, they nevertheless found that dropping out of high school was less likely when mothers had high educational aspirations for their children (Eckstrom et al., 1986). Given that Latino immigration has been long dominated by Mexicans (Lopez et al., 2013), a group with a particularly patriarchal family structure, it is possible that the inclusion of father’s educational aspirations might have led to different findings.

Several years prior to the Ekstrem study, Rumberger reached a similar conclusion following an investigation that used the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Labor Market
Experience (NLS) to model the factors that influenced white, Black and Hispanic males and females to drop out of high school. Because the NLS did not gather any data about parental aspirations or expectations, Rumberger used parent’s socioeconomic status as a proxy for these variables. Nevertheless, after controlling for differences in parents’ socioeconomic status, he found for Latino males and females a significant reduction in the odds of dropping out as their general educational aspirations increased. Furthermore, he also found that the likelihood of dropping out declined, even further, among Latino males who aspired to some sort of professional/managerial position in mature adulthood.

Drawing on the same dataset that Ekstrom et al. had used several years earlier, Velez compared a host of factors that had been shown to influence the likelihood of dropping out. Velez differentiated non-Hispanic white from Hispanic youth, as well as subgroups within Hispanic population from one another. In addition to confirming the impact that a mother’s aspirations exerted on persistence patterns, his findings further indicated that the odds of dropping out were also influenced by the personal educational aspirations of individual students as well as their close friends. Perhaps more interesting, however, he also found that the impact exerted by these factors varied considerably from one Latino subgroup to the next.

Although the findings from this study generally accord with previous findings, there are two significant points of especially noteworthy divergence. For one, our model indicates that the influence parent aspirations exert on the odds of dropping out is much weaker today than previous studies have found in the recent past. Indeed, the significance of parent aspirations seems to vanish altogether once differences in the odds of dropping out are properly controlled. Several reasons, which must await full exploration until sometime in the future, are likely to account for this discrepancy. One is that functional roles that mothers once performed within
Latino families are likely to have considerably changed as newly arrived immigrant have sought to adapt to the economic imperatives of contemporary U.S. life. The narrow focus on how a mother’s aspirations influence the behavior of high school students—displayed in all the aforementioned studies—presupposes that the principal role that mothers perform in Latino families is childrearing. During the 1980s, the time when the data used in these studies were collected, most Latino families exhibited a high degree of “familism”—values and behaviors that place the collective needs of the family over the needs of its individual members (Vega, 1995). According to the structural analysis of Latino families conducted by Landale, Oropesa, and Bradatan (2006), however, familism has begun to wane, especially among Latinos of Mexican background.

A second reason that may account for the discrepancy between our findings and those of previous research is that the decline of parental influence is often accompanied, analysts contend, by an increase in the influence of teachers. Indeed, empirical evidence supporting this hypothesis can be found in the increasing significance that our model yields for the variable that measures the combined expectations of parents and teachers. While the influence of parent expectations the chances of dropping out steadily weakens as additional variables are added to our model, parent and teacher combined expectations exert a consistently moderate influence, which suggests that parent’s expectations are being mediated by the expectations of teachers. The social implications of this can be better seen when we recall that previous examinations of the “private school effect” indicate that more communal schools—where students and teachers share a much closer working relationship than is ordinarily found in public schools—exhibit higher, more broadly distributed achievement levels (Bryk et al. 1993; Lee and Smith 1993; Lee et al. 1997). Consistent with our belief that new regime of control are inhospitable to Latino students, our
findings show, moreover, that teacher’s expectations are associated with an increase in the likelihood of dropping out of high school among Latinos.

5.4—School-Level Variables

In order to get a better sense of exactly how the processes within schools affect the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out of high school, our model included seven school-level variables that previous research has shown to be associated with dropping out of high school. As was indicated in the review of the literature presented in Chapter Two, these variables operationalize two specific aspects of high schools for assessing the impact that zero-tolerance policies have on the formation of academic motivations of Latino students and their ability to persist through high school.

Atmosphere of Order and Safety

Unlike much of the previous research that has analyzed how school climate affects academic achievement and attainment, the findings from this research found little evidence to support the widespread belief that an atmosphere of safety and order is likely to reduce the odds that a Latino student will drop out of high school. Of the five school-level variables included in our model, three—viz., the degree of safety in the school, the degree of order within classrooms, and the consistency with which rules are enforced—bore no statistically significant relationship to dropping out among Latinos students. Moreover, of the two school-level variables in our model that were statistically significant, only one—“Uniformity of Punishments,” which measured whether students believed all violators of school rules were similarly punished—was correlated to a reduction in the odds that a Latino student would drop out. The other statistically significant variable, “School Rules Well Publicized,” which measured whether students believed
the student body was familiar with their school’s code of conduct, was found in all iterations of our general model to be correlated with an increase in the odds that a student dropped out of high school.

These findings are at odds with previous findings, as well as with zero-tolerance policies designed to shore up internal order with in the public schools. In those high schools where order and safety is high, most previous research has found there is a concomitant reduction in the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out (Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982b; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Pittman, 1991; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005), though some research was unable to confirm the claim (Rumberger & Scott, 2000).

Intent on exploring whether high school dropout rates were influenced by differences in the organizational characteristics of public and private schools, early research yielded evidence that indicated that the disciplinary policies followed by schools influenced academic achievement and attainment. Conducted by a research team headed by James Coleman, the analysis of data from the High School and Beyond longitudinal survey led them to conclude that higher levels of academic performance were not directly affected by disciplinary procedures. The effects of a safe, orderly climate were mediated through the behavior of individual students, leading to reductions in absenteeism rates, cutting classes, fighting other students, and confrontations with teachers (Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982b). Subsequent research conducted by other analysts echoed the finding. Positive feelings about the general climate of the school (Pittman, 1991), feelings of safety (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005), and the fairness and efficacy of the disciplinary process (Bryk & Thum, 1989) were all found by previous research to be associated with a decrease in the likelihood of dropping out.
Several reasons might explain why the findings of this study do not agree with those of previous studies. With regard to apparent student indifference to variations in the levels safety and order within schools, one distinct possibility is that disorder, crime, and violence are so widespread in the areas where the majority of mega-high schools are located that all students, both completers and dropouts alike, have developed coping mechanism for violence. Why would inner-city kids, who must cope with disorder and violence when they are off school grounds, suddenly become vulnerable once they arrive at school? Another possible reason is that the zero-tolerance regimes instituted in their schools are now so effective that conflict and disorder have been eliminated almost entirely. One possible explanation for this can be found in ethnographic studies confirming Lawrence Kohlberg’s (1958) contention that high school students are entering a stage in their moral development where they are beginning to apply abstract principles to assess questions of right and wrong. Viewed from this perspective, fairness and even-handedness are apt to be key criteria that students use to evaluate a school’s disciplinary procedures. It is plausible that those who feel they are treated fairly are less alienated from school and thus more likely to retain a level of motivation needed to obtain high school diplomas.

Although this result was contrary to our expectation, it makes sense when it is recalled that dropping out of high school is not a sudden, one-time event but the culmination of an academic career beset by many academic difficulties and setbacks, including many disciplinary actions (Rumberger, 2002). After constant run-ins with high school disciplinary machinery, it is likely that those students who drop out would also be most familiar with a school’s code of conduct.
Just as interesting as the findings from our general model of dropouts are those findings that tested whether our variables had the same impact on male and female odds of dropping out. Prior research has found that some factors involved with dropping out are common to both genders and others not (Rumberger, 2011). In the case of two variables related to school climate included in our model, the impact was the same for male and female alike. As was true of our general model, in none of the gender-specific models did the perception that the classroom was orderly have a statistically significant relationship to whether a student obtained a degree or dropped out. As was also true of our general model, the belief that the student body was familiar with the school’s rules of conduct was associated with an increase in the likelihood of dropping out of high school for both males and females. The most likely reason for this is that both male and female dropouts tend to run afoul of school rules of conduct more often than students who graduate and therefore know the rules of conduct better than others.

The power of the three remaining school climate variables to predict whether male and female Latinos will drop out of high school shows striking differences among males and females, suggesting that the disciplinary regime is having a disparate impact on males and females. For example, our findings indicate that while feelings of safety actually have no bearing on whether a female drops out or not, it is associated with an increase in the likelihood that a male will drop out. For a plausible explanation as to why feelings of safety are associated with such different outcomes, all one needs to do is to look at a report assessing the impact of zero-tolerance policies that was released by the U.S. Department Education’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in 2014. Even though the percentage of males and females in the school age population in the United States is nearly equal—49% and 51%, respectively—OCR figures show that males make up the overwhelming majority of those who are sanctioned for violating a school’s code of conduct.
More specifically, they make up 64% of in-school suspensions; 66% of one-time, out-of-school suspensions; 69% of multiple school suspensions; and 74% of expulsions (Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education). Although these data are not broken down by grade, high school males are almost certain to be more heavily scrutinized and accosted by the members of the security apparatus. Being the target of such surveillance is likely to make them aware that the school is very safe at the very time it is likely to make them the chief victims of its punitive, zero-tolerance policies.

Out of the five school climate variables included in our model, the final two sought to assess student perceptions of the fairness of school disciplinary procedures and policies. Although the predictive power of each of these variables differs from one gender to the next, it is interesting to note that they are the only two school climate variables addressing safety and order that are associated with a decrease in the likelihood that a student will drop out of high school. The belief that student misbehavior seldom goes unpunished has no impact on the odds that males will drop out, while it is associated with a decrease in the likelihood of dropping out among females. Just the opposite is the case with respect to student beliefs that the punishment for infractions of school rules are uniformly applied to all students: it has no impact on the likelihood that females will drop out, but among males it is associated with a decrease in the likelihood of dropping out. More important than the differential impact these variables have on males and females is that they both suggest that creating a fairer disciplinary regime will increase the chances that Latino students will attain their high school diplomas.

*Student-Teacher Relations*
In addition to a set of variables relating to student perceptions of the overall school climate, our model of Latino high school dropout behavior included another set that sought to assess the impact that relationships with teachers had on the likelihood of dropping out. As we saw in the literature review conducted in Chapter Two, debates over exactly how school climate affects student performance and persistence have led to increased interest in the emotional and normative bonds that underlie student-teacher relations. Numerous educational theorists and philosophers have argued that the formation of student academic motivations turn, in no small degree, on the degree to which they feel that their instructors both respect and care about them as individuals (Nodding, 1988; Bryk et al., 1993; National Research Council, 2004; Sutton, 2005).

In some sense, our variables operationalize these two social ingredients of the effective teacher-student relationship. In her highly influential critique of Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, the developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan elucidates how these elements differ from one another, arguing that respect entails treating someone in accordance with a universal set of rules of conduct, while care entails attending to the concrete needs of the particular individual. The first of these variables, “Teacher-student Rapport,” is a composite variable that combines in a single measure student perceptions of how well they get along with teachers, the level of interest teachers display toward students, how much teachers praise students, and the overall quality of the teaching (this last has little to do with respect per se). The second variable, “Respectful Interactions with Teachers in Classroom,” measures student perceptions of the degree to which instructors treat them with respect and refrain from overt acts of disrespect.

Our findings on the impact that teacher-student relations have on the likelihood that a Latino student would drop out of high school run counter to the findings of previous research—
not only those that found these relations had a positive impact but, paradoxically enough, those that found it had any impact at all. Specifically, our findings indicate that students who felt they were treated respectfully by their instructors, or had formed a positive emotional bond with them, actually had a greater likelihood of dropping out than those that did not. Although a definitive answer to this paradox must await further research, one possible explanation is that the causal connection posited by our hypothesis actually works in reverse at the high school level. That is to say, it may be the case that in the extremely large urban high school that Latinos usually attend, instructors, who find themselves forced, under these conditions, to carefully ration their time, may be more attentive to the needs of at-risk students than students who show no signs they may drop out. If that is so, we would expect dropouts to report having more salutary relations with teachers than graduates.

As Kathleen Nolan has shown in her ethnography *Police in the Hallways*—a detailed study of the implementation of zero-tolerance policies in New York City schools during the Giuliani and Bloomberg administrations—several interlocking forms of symbolic violence are employed that work together to push growing numbers of students to drop out of urban high school (Nolan, 2011). Upon entering urban high schools, students must navigate their way through a gauntlet of police officers who enforce a code of conduct that has been deliberately revamped to resemble the quality of life statutes the New York City Police Department instituted under the Giuliani administration (Nolan, 2011). “Classroom misbehavior, cutting class, disruption, hat wearing, gambling and fighting” are all offenses for which students can be expelled. As Florez-Gonzalez has shown in her ethnographic study of Latino students at a Chicago high school, more “street oriented” students, a small segment of whom are genuine “gang bangers,” recreate the life of the streets in a school’s hallways and classrooms (Flores-
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

González, 2002; see also Rumberger, 2011). To better adapt to the perils of the street culture, one commonly used survival strategy, especially prevalent among male students, is to adopt a persona that is intentionally designed to convey the message that they are not to be “messed with” (Majors, 1993; Dance, 2000; Flores-González, 2002). Though school personnel may be quick to designate a student as a deviant gang member, “the label ‘youth gang’ is a metaphor for a number of behaviors, including truancy, school failure, kids’ disenfranchisement from parents and the mainstream community, drug use, drug selling, street violence and teenage pregnancy and parenthood” (Fliesher, 1999). Where such strategies come to be widely embraced, it all but guarantees that the school will institute a regime of control that is bound to alienate Latino males, especially, increasing the odds some will dropout at the same time that females remain unaffected. Conversely, at those schools were gang activity is lower, so too will the chances of dropping out be lower.

Under these circumstances, many school personnel, especially those who hail from more middle-class backgrounds that are sometimes worlds apart from the culture of students from urban centers, have trouble distinguishing the culture of the hood from that of street gangs. To some degree, the students themselves bear responsibility for this mix-up.

These zero-tolerance security measures serve to place students, especially male students, under a cloak of suspicion from the moment they enter school, subjecting them to routine forms of distrust, disrespect, and humiliation.

Socioeconomic variable
The strong association that past research has found between a student’s socioeconomic background and the odds of dropping out was confirmed by the present study’s statistical tests (Rumberger, 1983; Ekstrom et al, 1986; Barros, 1987; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Velez, 1989.). Next to attending an urban high school, our findings indicate that parental socioeconomic status is the most powerful predictor of the likelihood that a Latino student will drop out.

Be that as it may, these findings do little to clarify exactly how a parent’s socioeconomic status influences dropout rates. Some research suggests that parent socioeconomic background is the pivotal factor in determining the quality of the school that students will attend. Families whose incomes are high enough to pay the rental or mortgage fees in neighborhoods with better schools or to pay the tuition required to put their child in private school are far more likely to enroll their child in one of the nation’s better schools. Higher incomes also mean that better off families may have the money to pay for tutoring services and cultural enrichment programs to boost their child’s academic performance. On the other hand, other researchers suggest that better off parents provide a model of educational success, which may in turn influence their child’s attitudes about education.

5.4—Summary

Disparities in educational attainment and achievement have been a long-standing focus of contemporary educational research. This dissertation focused on the nature and extent of dropping out among America’s Latino youths.

This study has sought to answer a fundamental question: how do demographic, aspirational, and school-level variables influence the odds that a Latino student in our sample would drop out of high school.
A respondent was deemed to be a dropout if they exited high school without obtaining a diploma, a certificate of graduation, or a GED. Attendance at a high school located in an urban center was the most powerful predictor of the likelihood that a student would eventually drop out of high school, more powerful than even the socioeconomic background of parents. Contrary to the widespread belief that the formation of a student’s academic aspirations and motivations are due solely to family influences, the major finding of the present study is that the organizational characteristics of the high school may well be the most powerful force in shaping the decision to drop out among Latino students today. More specifically, because our model controls for student perceptions about the level of safety and order within the school, fairness of disciplinary procedures, and quality of relationships with teachers, greater attention must be given to other organizational characteristics that typify today’s urban high schools. While these aforementioned organizational characteristics were the only ones included in our model of dropping out, there is reason to believe that the zero-tolerance disciplinary regimes, which have arisen in so many urban high schools, may well be forcing students from disesteemed subcultural groups to drop out unnecessarily.

Until recently, there has been a fixation among researchers with the way that the aspirations and expectations of students contribute to their performance. With a few notable exceptions, much of the existing literature treats these aspirations and expectations as if they were simply a product of forces external to the school environment itself. Researchers working in the tradition of labeling theory and social motivation theory, however, have advocated for further research into the independent role that schools play in the formation of student aspirations and motivations. By investigating the impact school-level processes have on dropout patterns, this study has taken a first step to fulfilling that charge.
6.1—Introduction

Disconcerted by the high number of Latinos students who drop out of America’s high school each year, the aim of this dissertation is to determine the impact that demographic, aspirational, school-level and socioeconomic variables have upon chances that Latino students will drop out of high school before obtaining a diploma.

Data employed in the present study were drawn from the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) 2002 Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS). ELS is a nationally representative panel study that tracks a single cohort of American 10th-graders as they proceeded through high school, and on into the labor market or post-secondary schools.

Logistic regression analysis was used to identify the independent variables that had the greatest influence on the decisions of the 265 Latinos in the ELS sample who dropped out of high school sometime between 2002 and 2004.

This study found that demographic variables pertaining to a school’s structural position within the nation secondary educational system were by far the most powerful predictors of the odds of dropping out. Urban location was the most powerful predictor that both male and female Latino student would drop out of high school. The second most powerful predictor, but one only applying to males, was southern location, which was associated with a decrease in the odds of dropping out. Neither attending a public high school, nor being a female, was found to be significant in predicting dropout behavior.
Only two of the five aspirational variables in our model consistently showed a significant association with dropout behavior. The variable measuring student academic expectations predicted a decrease in the odds of dropping out among males and females alike, while the variable measuring parent-teacher expectations was associated with an increase in the odds of dropping out among males alone.

Five school-level variables had a statistically significant association with dropout behavior. The school-level variable measuring students’ perceptions about the degree to which a school’s rules were well-publicized was significant in predicting whether males or females would drop out. The four other school-level variables showed complex interaction effects with student gender. Among males, the perception that interactions with teachers were respectful was associated with an increase in the odds of dropping out, while the perception that punishments were uniformly applied was associated with a decrease in dropping out. Among females, the perception that they enjoyed a positive rapport with teachers was associated with dropping out, while the perception that discipline was uniformly enforced was associated with a decrease in dropping out.

Drawing on Bourdieu and Passeron’s theory of social reproduction, which contends that the school plays an integral role in reproducing the social order through acts of symbolic violence directed at students, we believe that these peculiar dropout patterns result from the rise of zero-tolerance regimes within the public secondary education system.
6.2—Limitations

Although this study adds original insights to existing research on Latino high school dropouts, there are a number of limitations that must be addressed before future research is undertaken. Some of the more serious limitations are discussed below: starting with limitations that arise from the way high school dropouts were conceptualized; turning, next, to limitations that are due to our strict reliance on quantitative methodology; and then closing by looking at some observational limitations.

Conceptual Limitations

Though statistics show that dropping out is a serious problem among Latino students, our ability to construct a cogent model was hindered by conceptual problems, which this dissertation was unable to resolve before completion. The chief conceptual limitation is due to the peculiar way that dropouts are defined. Under the research protocols of ELS, dropouts were defined as students who participated in the base year survey, but were “out of school” for reasons other than that they had already received a credential, or were convalescing from an illness or accident when the first follow-up survey was conducted. Researchers interested in studying the ways that zero-tolerance disciplinary policy contribute to the dropout crisis will find themselves hampered by this definition because it conflates students who voluntarily withdraw from school with those who are involuntarily forced out by long-term suspensions or permanent expulsion. The locus of agency for exiting from school is different for these two groups: “Students drop out of school, schools discharge students” (Riehl, 1991:231; Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002). Consequently, it
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is difficult to disentangle the forces that lead some Latino students to drop out, from those that lead others to be pushed out.

Since official school transcripts are among the data collected from schools during the follow-up survey, it is not clear why ELS did not create a separate category distinguishing one group of non-completers from the other. After the logistic regression analysis was completed, frequencies were tabulated from questions that appeared on the follow-up questionnaire, which was administered to dropouts during the second wave of the study. Included among the possible reasons students could give for leaving high school were the choices of a suspension or expulsion from school. The results were stunning: of the 845 dropouts identified in the first follow-up wave, more than 20% of respondents said they were forced out as a result of disciplinary action taken by a school authorities (suspensions = 112, expulsions = 68). Even if the NCES does not see fit to create categories by which dropouts can be distinguished from “pushed outs,” future researchers would be well advised to use this often overlooked information when constructing statistical models of Latino dropout behavior.

Methodological Limitations

Another set of limitations derives from drawbacks which are intrinsic to the quantitative methodology that this dissertation employs. Perhaps the most serious limitation of this study is that it can only uncover associations between dropping out and the variables which were included in our statistical model. However, correlation—the change in the value of one variable in conjunction with a change in the value of another, is not definitive proof of causation—a change in the value of one variable as result of the direct influence of another (Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002). Hence, while the logistic regression methods employed enabled us to identify
which social factors are correlated with Latino dropout behavior, our findings did not explain the
causal mechanisms that lead any particular student to dropout.

A second limitation of the quantitative methodology owes to the dated nature of the
survey data. Although the ELS data set is much newer than the data sets upon which much of the
existing literature is based, more than a decade has passed since the base year survey was
administered in 2002. Numerous changes that are sure to affect the performance of individual
students, as well as their schools, have occurred since then—chief among them are the spread of
social media technologies, which have reshaped the dynamics of the peer group relation, and
changes that have taken place within the secondary educational system since the Obama
administration spearheaded the enactment of ED Recovery Act of 2009.

Selectivity bias constitutes yet another limitation that stems from our reliance on a
quantitative approach. Statistical models often appear more powerful than they otherwise might
when the researchers select a small handful of independent variables from a much larger pool. In
the case of the ELS data set, there are literally several thousand variables from which the 17
independent variables in our model were chosen. Although previous research does provide some
guidance in selecting variables, the selection process is necessarily arbitrary and is almost certain
to exclude a whole host of variables that are relevant to the decision to drop out of high school.
Thus it is quite likely that selection bias made the variables in our models appear to be more
powerful than they really are.

A final methodological limitation stems from the fact that our study is based on cross-
sectional data that were first gathered when students were already in the 10th grade, the closing
stages in an educational endeavor that began many years prior. It is widely recognized
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throughout the research community that education is a cumulative process that cuts across an individual’s entire life course. Hence, from this perspective, it is impossible to understand fully what leads a person to drop out of high school without also having knowledge of the prior academic experiences that shaped academic aptitudes and attitudes. Indeed, previous research has found that prior academic achievement, grade retention, and even disciplinary incidents in primary school are powerful predictors of the odds of dropping out from high school years later.

Limitations of Operationalization

A second set of limitations that impairs this study arises from the way that the variables are operationalized—the way, that is to say, they are translated into concrete data that can be measured and analyzed. For example, the variable which our model used to identify whether a student was of Latino background is based on a single global category. As a corollary all Latinos are treated as if they were members of a single homogeneous ethnic group. ELS, however, gives researchers the option of using an alternative variable, one that classifies students according to the particular ethnic subgroups within the Latino population to which they belong. Indeed, Velez (1989) recommends the use of such a variable, whenever possible, on the grounds that the ethnic subgroups who make up the Latino population not only underwent different experiences as they sought to assimilate within American society, but they often have very different views about the economic and occupational benefits of a formal education. Failure to use this alternative variable means that our model runs the risk of distorting the impact that parent aspirations exert on students’ academic aspirations and achievements.

Distortions of our findings are also likely to follow from the variable that our model of dropouts used to categorize high schools according to their degree of “urbanicity.” In our model,
we include the urban variable that was employed during the base year survey, when the locale of a school was classified into one of three categories: urban, suburban, or rural. Apparently recognizing that that schema runs the risk of oversimplifying population dynamics, in the 2006 follow-up survey the NCES opted to use an expanded locale coding system. Schools were now classified as being located in either a city, suburban, town, or rural area; in addition, cities and suburbs were further divided into three distinctive groups based on their size (small, medium, and large), while towns and rural areas were further subdivided into three distinctive groups based on their proximity to urbanized areas (urban fringe, distant, remote) (Ingels et al., 2007). Use of a more complex systems for classifying locale, Jordan, Kostandini and Mykerezi (2012) contend, allows for the construction of statistical models of dropout behavior that are more sensitive to the effects of population density and metropolitan influence. Unfortunately, our model may well misrepresent those influences, given the use of the cruder, simpler location variable in our model.

The particular group of school-level variables included in our model provides a final example of limitation that arise from the particular way they are operationalized. Our model of dropping out includes several variables that measure student perceptions of the academic climate within school. Schools, however, have many other characteristics that, existing research has shown, also have a powerful impact on academic performance and rates of persistence. For example, the social composition of the student body—which our model does not operationalize—has been found to exert an influence on academic behavior over and beyond the background characteristics of single individual students (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002). The financial resources that schools expend on their operations are another factor some researchers (Hedges et al., 1994), though not all (Hanushek, 1989; 1997), believe
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has a powerful influence on whether students will be at risk for dropping out. Moreover, the politically charged process by which school boards and administrators determine how resources are allocated, Roscigno and his colleagues contend, is another school-level variable that is likely to affect dropout behavior (Roscigno et al., 2006).

Observational Limitations

In addition to the conceptual, methodological, and operational limitations discussed above, our analysis of the cause of Latino dropout behavior was hindered by two observational limitations.

To begin with, since the sole source of data for this study came from questionnaires, our interpretation of the results of the findings draws on a number of highly speculative inferences about the nature of student interactions with teachers and administrators and how they affect their level of academic motivation. In this regard, it should be noted that Bourdieu and Passeron’s ideas about the role of schools in the reproduction of social order—chiefly through their exercise of symbolic power—were based on micro-level studies of what they call the “relation of pedagogic communication” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1992). Our postulate, in fine, was that school personnel subject certain students to acts of symbolic violence, which end up sapping them of the drive to persist in high school and obtain a diploma.

Humiliation, intimidation, condescension, and castigation are potent forms of symbolic violence, some researchers contend, by which “bad” teachers send messages to students that undercut their confidence in their own academic abilities (Banfield et al., 2006). Statistical measures of the association between dropping out, on the one side, and student perceptions about the climate within the school, on the other, were used to draw inferences as to whether
relationships with teachers and administrators were good or bad. While tenable, those inferences are poor substitutes for data obtainable through the direct observation of interactions with classroom instructors. Without more data about explicit and tacit messages students receive from their teachers and administrators, any inferences we draw about how these messages contribute to Latino dropout behavior will remain speculative, at best. Therefore, the statistical analysis presented here must be supplemented by data gathered through direct observation.

Inadequate information about the scope of zero-tolerance policies is a second observational limitation that restricts our findings. Although we posited widespread adoption of zero-tolerance policies in urban high schools to be the chief culprit behind the Latino dropout crisis, the absence of several critical pieces of data prevented us from putting this hypothesis to a rigorous empirical test. For one, this study did not ascertain how many of the high schools that produce Latino dropouts actually have disciplinary regimes based on zero-tolerance policies. In addition, there is a considerable amount of elasticity in the punishment that may be prescribed under zero-tolerance policies, and thus further information needs to be gathered on the number of students who are actually pushed out of high school as a result of long-term suspensions or expulsions.

Even with these limitations, the research described in this dissertation as well as its implications are important, pertinent, and far reaching. In the following section, these aspects will be discussed.
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6.3—Implications

There are 3.1 million Latina/o students enrolled in public high schools across the United States (Hussar & Bailey, 2011). With Latino dropout rates having declined by nearly 50% over the past decades, hitting a low of 12.7% in 2012, most Latinos are likely to graduate. Yet the Latino dropout rate is so much higher than the rates of other major racial and ethnic groups that any examination into conduits and barriers to their academic success is both timely and important. This dissertation is but one voice in that chorus of scholarship examining this phenomenon. These implications will be discussed at four different levels: policy, practical, micro, and macro level.

Policy Implications

Urban locale is so strongly associated with dropping out among the Latino population that federal, state, and local official would do well to continue the reassessment and revamping of zero-tolerance policies that have been gaining momentum across the country. As the 2012-2013 academic year was getting underway, the state of California, home to the largest Latino high school population in the country (Fry, 2005), enacted legislation that aimed to rein in the excesses of zero-tolerance policies. Among other things, the bills include clauses that give local school officials greater discretion in imposing penalties for some offenses and authority to experiment with alternative approaches like restorative justice and conflict resolution (Baron, 2012; Lawrence, 2013).

Given the critical role that the federal laws have played in the proliferation of zero-tolerance policies, parallel reform efforts must be undertaken by national leaders and policymakers. Earlier this year, the Obama administration took some tentative steps to curtail the
disparate impact this disciplinary regime is having on Black and Latino students, issuing a
lengthy guidance letter to school districts that spells out their legal obligation to administer
discipline in a non-discriminatory fashion (U.S. Departments of Justice & Education, 2014).

While this is certainly a step in the right direction, additional steps must be taken to
prevent Latino and Black students from being unfairly pushed out of our nation’s high schools.
To begin with, the administration ought to pass legislation that requires school districts to
compile records of all disciplinary proceedings and to file annual disciplinary reports with the
U.S. Department of Education. The guidance letter reminds districts that they are legally required
under Title VI of Civil Rights Act of 1964, to surrender pertinent records to federal officials
upon request (U.S. Departments of Justice & Education, 2014). Yet it is also apparent that this
reminder was necessitated by the many school districts that fail to comply with the provision.
Aside from assuring these data are readily available should federal officials need them for civil
rights proceedings against school districts, annual filings would serve as another important
source of data for educational researchers interested in assessing the impact of zero-tolerance
policies on high school performance.

In addition to more closely monitoring the impact that zero-tolerance policies have on
Latino dropout behavior, the federal government ought to develop alternatives to the system of
punitive sanctions underlying it. Currently, the disciplinary regime at most schools is based on a
hierarchical model wherein students are targets of enforcement policies carried out by teachers
and other school personnel. Because they play no role in either creating or enforcing rules,
students experience acute feelings of alienation and estrangement. On the other hand,
disciplinary regimes that are based on the principle of restorative justice give students a much
greater hand in the disciplinary process, making them active agents in the process. The federal
government ought to enact legislation that encourages school districts to experiment with these alternative disciplinary approaches and provide them with the financial and technical aid necessary to pilot and test them.

Practical Implications

While waiting for these legislative reforms, superintendents of school districts and principals of individual schools ought to adopt practical reforms that soften the most objectionable aspects of the present disciplinary regime. For example, it is common practice for schools to subject students to a comprehensive search of their belongings upon entering the school building each morning. With the number of students who must be searched numbering several hundred, if not over 1000, students are forced to wait on long lines, for a considerable amount of time, before entering the school building, often encircled by large contingents of police officers and school safety agents. In New York City, for example, 93,000 students at 89 of the city’s 404 high schools must pass through metal detectors every day before entering school (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007). Subjected to this type of treatment, day in and day out, before a single class has even begun, is bound to deplete the academic motivation of high school students throughout the nation. Hence, consideration ought to be given to using a staggered system for conducting morning searches, one where the student body would be broken up into smaller groups that report for the morning search at different intervals. In addition, the school should consider staging the morning search in a large capacity area within the school, like the gymnasium, instead of having students standing around outdoors in unpleasant weather conditions.
A final practical reform school administrators can make would be to reduce some of the behaviors that are considered violations of school codes of conduct. Many urban school districts across the nation prohibit students from bringing cell phones to school, even though parents prefer that their adolescent children have such devices so they can contact them if need be. Indeed the occurrence of shootings within schools is one of the key reasons for this preference. Cell phones are expensive, and the requirement that students surrender them before entering the school building often provokes a confrontation with security agents that ends with students being charged with an infraction of the behavioral code. Interestingly, the guidance letter on disciplinary policy that was recently issued by the Obama administration explicitly cites bans on cellular phones as an example of the policy that can have a disparate impact on black and Latino students. Schools that insist on enforcing this policy exemplify what sociologists would call cultural lag, social problems that arise when society’s mores failed to change with technological innovations. Instead of insisting on this outdated ban, school districts should explore simply the use of mobile phone jamming devices on school grounds. Not only would this render cell phones inoperable, jamming devices could be instantaneously turned off in the event that a school emergency necessitated communication with parties off-campus.

School administrators must also revisit rules that proscribe students from wearing certain types of clothing. According to the Education Commission of the States, a nonpartisan think tank that tracks state educational policy, by 2008, 22 states had authorized school districts to promulgate dress codes or uniform policies, while similar authority was extended through legal rulings in another 4 states (Colasanti, 2008). The rationale for such policies was first propounded in 1996 when the Clinton administration distributed a Manual on School Uniforms to every school district in the country. Decreasing violence and theft, as well as preventing the display of
gang colors and insignia while at school, were the top reasons given for the enactment of these policies (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Interestingly, the Obama White House warned that dress codes that prohibit particular styles of clothing that are associated with certain racial/ethnic groups could “constitute unlawful intentional discrimination” (U. S. Departments of Justice & Education, 2014). There is reason to believe that male Latino high school students are especially likely to be penalized by such policies, as they are sure to wear items of clothing that school personnel are likely to associate with gangs.

*Macrostructural Implications*

If these practical reforms by district superintendents and principals are to be effective, they must be accompanied by structural reforms, which can only be brought about by state and municipal political leaders. Following the enactment of Gun Free School Act Of 1994, states and municipalities across the country began to shift responsibility for ensuring school safety from educators, to police officials. Indeed, the number of police officers assigned to serve in schools grew by 40% between 1997 and 2007 (Ferriss, 2013).

Although supporters believe the large contingent of police in America’s schools enhances the level of safety and security, there is a good deal of empirical evidence to suggest that they actually play a pivotal role in pushing students out of high school. Critics contend that police officers are apt to bring the confrontational style and aggressive tactics used on the streets into the classrooms and hallways of schools (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007; Nolan, 2011). Officers with the Los Angeles Unified School District, for example, issued about 10,000 tickets a year to students between 2009 and 2011 (Ferriss, 2013). The issuance of such tickets is an unnecessarily
punitive measure that not only forces students to miss valuable school time to attend court proceedings but increases the chance they will become ensnared in the judicial system.

To totally eliminate the most objectionable features of the disciplinary regime in urban schools, state and municipal elected officials must give authority for the enforcement of school discipline back to professional educators and restrict the use of law enforcement officials to acts of criminality that are best dealt by the criminal courts. In New York City, the security force used to control the student body is larger than the entire police department of Washington DC, Detroit, Baltimore, Dallas, Phoenix, San Francisco, Boston, San Diego, Memphis, and Las Vegas (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007). If the experiences of other urban school districts across the nation are any guide, the number of security agents can be reduced considerably without compromising the order and safety of high schools. The student body of The Los Angeles Unified School District is about half the size of New York City’s (694,288), yet its school security force is about a quarter of the size of its larger cousin (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007). Reducing the size of the security force would not only create a less alienating school environment, it would also free up resources that could be used to fund improvements and instructional activities. Where necessary, state and municipal elected officials will have to revisit and rework legislative statutes that previously ceded authority over school discipline to law enforcement authorities.

*Microstructural Implications*

Classroom instructors do not simply transmit socially-valued knowledge to their students; they also transmit messages about how society values students. Although it is seldom acknowledged in our public discourse, where so much of the blame for poor academic performance is pinned on students, the fact is many teachers are neither willing nor able to
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develop a nurturing relationship with students who belong to stigmatized, racial/ethnic groups whom educators regard with apathy or antipathy when off school grounds.

Caring relationships, many educational researchers suggest, are a precondition to effective teaching, providing the emotional fuel that drives high levels of academic motivation. Developing the competency to form and maintain caring relationships with students who are often from very different cultural backgrounds may require instructors to participate in classes designed to enhance their understanding of the unique cultural framework through which they view themselves and the social worlds. Beyond that, high schools and individual teachers must also develop pedagogic approaches within the classroom that make the development of these bonds as important as the transmission of course content. Perhaps the most effective way for instructors to do this within the classroom is to use material from their personal lives, where possible, to illustrate some of the key ideas and objectives that define their lesson plan. In addition, school administrators ought to consider sponsoring activities that will allow teachers and students to develop healthy bonds with one another, for example, by attending cultural events like plays and museum exhibitions together.

6.4—Future Research

To address the many questions that this research project must leave unanswered, researchers who are struggling to understand the social factors that contribute to Latino dropouts would do well to use the findings and limitations delineated above as a springboard for further research. To begin with, any future research must carefully differentiate students who drop out due to factors outside of school from those who are pushed out of high school by administrative policies. Data culled from questionnaires administered to dropouts could be used to identify the
various forces that factor into decisions to exit high school before obtaining a diploma. Such information could be further collated with related data appearing on transcripts in the follow-up wave.

Another line of inquiry that warrants further analysis in the future is whether membership in certain Latino ethnic subgroups is associated with particular risk factors that increase the odds that a student will drop out. Given the well-known cultural and socioeconomic differences among Latinos of different ethnic subgroups, this line of inquiry might allow researchers to develop risk profiles that are reflective of the unique challenges faced by different Latino ethnic subgroups along with intervention strategies tailored for each subgroup. Immigration status is one especially salient factor that distinguishes Latino ethnic subgroups from one another, and is likely to create particular set of that will increase the chances that a Latino of immigrant background will drop out of secondary schooling here in the U.S. Among the things that future research must further investigate is how the likelihood of dropping out is affected by differences in the degree of fluency with the English language that separates native-born Latinos from more recent immigrants, the structure of family relations at the time a Latino student of immigrant background begins to attend school in the United States, the particular age at which they enrolled in U.S. educational system, the differences in the curriculum of foreign and US system, and the conditions that prompted their family to immigrate to the U.S. in the first place. Moreover, future research also needs to examine how Latinos of immigrant background are affected by the curricular policies and specialized programming of the schools that they attend. Bilingual instruction is just one of several kinds of specialized programs that some—but not all—high schools may offer to Latinos of immigrant background.
Although this study did explore how the socioeconomic background of the family influences the odds that a given student will drop out of high school, there are at least two other economic factors warrant further exploration in the future. The first of these factors concerns how labor market conditions affect the odds of dropping out among Latino high school students. More than one commentator has suggested that the long-term decline in dropout rates that has occurred among the Latino population since the 1970s is attributable—at least in part—to the disappearance of industrial jobs that once offered high school dropouts the prospect of making good money even though they may not have completed high school. However, the model of the Latino high school dropouts constructed for the purposes of this dissertation failed to include any data on the labor market conditions. To fully grasp how economic forces affect the decision to drop out, future research must systematically examine how the quality and availability of jobs within the local labor markets into which dropouts will enter after exiting from high school.

Another economic factor which must be further explored in future research is how the economic status of teachers influences their treatment of students within the classroom. According to Bourdieu and Passeron’s theory of social reproduction, differences in the economic background of students and teachers plays a crucial, though seldom acknowledged, role in symbolic conflicts that, they believe, are responsible for pushing students out of high school. Focusing on the system of schooling in France, they assert that that country’s system of schooling is relatively closed, and that instructors who serve in the classroom are recruited almost exclusively from middle class families. These instructors, in turn, use the norms of the middle class to evaluate the performance and behavior of students, and thus inhibit the ability of students from more marginal populations from advancing through each of the successive stages in the educational system.
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In contrast to the educational system of France, however, the American system of schooling is far more open, and thus class background of American instructors is something that needs further investigation. While the statistical model of dropping out which is employed in the present study did not attempt to operationalize the class background of high school instructors, to begin to do so, future investigations can draw on information from the teacher questionnaire that NCES administered during the base year survey, which includes five pertinent variables: 1) teacher’s race/ethnicity; 2) year of birth; 3) affinity for the teaching profession; 4) whether they have received instruction in teaching Limited English Proficient students; 5) and whether they are a full-time, part-time or long-term temporary teacher. However, such data only yields limited insight into the actual attitudes of instructors in the United States, and will have to be supplemented with data that must be gathered by using other research methods.

Another issue that warrants further examination in the future is exactly why parent’s influence on the academic aspirations of students seems to wane during the high school years. Developmental theorists have linked this phenomenon to the growing importance that teachers come to play as student attempt to assert autonomy from their parents at the same time as they look to other adults to build relationships with. Others, most notably the psychologists Jean Harris, have challenge the primacy that families were assumed to exert on the formation of student’s academic attitudes. Equally important, she asserts, are the peer groups that children begin to participate in early childhood. Although these explanations may not be mutually exclusive, only further research will allow us to identify the concrete mechanisms by which parental aspirations are displaced in the course of time.

In addition to the issues identified above, future research must give greater attention to the actual nature of the disciplinary regimes that have been implemented in America’s high schools.
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Although the ELS: 2002 data set was the sole source of information for this quantitative study, the National Center for Education Statistics has conducted a number of complementary longitudinal surveys that contain data that might allow more detailed analysis of zero-tolerance policies on high school dropouts. Crucial data about the level of safety within the nation’s schools has been gathered as part of the School Survey On Crime And Safety, a nationally representative survey that includes information about the occurrence of crimes (including gang-related crime), disciplinary actions that were administered, security and safety measures that are implemented, and size of school safety forces. Another longitudinal survey that could be drawn on in future research about zero-tolerance policies is the Common Core Data (CCD). Compiled annually, CCD includes information about school expenditures that could shed additional light on the proportion of school resources that are allocated to security staff and measures.

To complement this line of analysis, future research must also explore the impact that the use of academic tracking systems has upon the process that prompts students to drop out of high school. In reaction to criticisms of academic tracking, a sizable number of schools have put into place curricular policies which eschewed the use of tracking policies. These schools are one source of information that may be drawn upon in future research that looks to further examine the way that school-level processes impact dropout rates.

Even if more sophisticated models of Latino dropout were constructed from additional longitudinal surveys, reliance on quantitative approaches would restrict us to identifying correlations, not establishing causation. In the hope of gaining a grasp on the underlying causal mechanism at work, future research could make use of participant observations to directly study the way in which interactions within high schools engender dropouts among Latinos.
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