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Gender and School Success in the Latino Diaspora

Abstract

More and more Latinos are moving to areas of the US where few Latinos have settled before - a migration that has been called "the new Latino diaspora" (Hamann, 1999; Villenas, 1997). This paper describes an isolated community of about two hundred Latinos, located in a small rural Northern New England town that I call Havertown. When I knew them in the mid-1990s, almost all community members were Mexican immigrants or Mexican Americans who had lived in or passed through South Texas, whose families had at some recent point been involved in migrant agricultural labor, and who came from rural working-class backgrounds. Over the prior ten years they had been recruited to Havertown to work at a local meat processing plant.

Comments

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Gender and School Success in the Latino Diaspora

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More and more Latinos are moving to areas of the US where few Latinos have settled before—a migration that has been called "the new Latino diaspora" (Hamann, 1999; Villenas, 1997). This paper describes an isolated community of about two hundred Latinos, located in a small rural Northern New England town that I call Havertown.¹ When I knew them in the mid-1990s, almost all community members were Mexican immigrants or Mexican Americans who had lived in or passed through South Texas, whose families had at some recent point been involved in migrant agricultural labor, and who came from rural working-class backgrounds. Over the prior ten years they had been recruited to Havertown to work at a local meat processing plant.

Based on fieldwork conducted between 1995 and 1997, this chapter explores the social identities that Havertown Latino adolescents adopted in school and at home. All Havertown Latinos found themselves in a culturally alien setting. They lived many hours away from any sizable Latino population, and only a few had access to Spanish language media through satellite dishes. Latino adolescents in Havertown experienced cultural isolation and cultural conflict particularly acutely, because they spent substantial time in school with Anglo teachers and students. At their stage of life, as adolescents, they were also confronting questions of identity. This chapter describes how they struggled to identify themselves, and to deal with others' identifications of them, in a culturally alien setting.

Havertown Latino adolescents seemed to face a choice between adapting to the mainstream Anglo values embodied in school practices and maintaining their identities as Mexicans. Some important theories of cultural identity and school success might describe this as an either/or choice—either the Latino adolescents in Havertown would "act white" and conform to mainstream Anglo expectations or they would maintain their minority cultural identities and resist the schools' mainstream expectations (e.g., Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Others, however,

have described how some minority adolescents manage "accommodation without assimilation," where students conform to mainstream expectations enough to do well in school but also preserve their own cultural identities (Gibson, 1988, 1997; Hall, 1995). In Havertown, different Latino adolescents fit each of these patterns. The adolescent males mostly identified with working-class Mexican role models and rejected the mainstream Anglo expectations of the school. But the adolescent females adopted some of the mainstream Anglo values they encountered at school and managed to accommodate without assimilating.

This chapter first describes, and then tries to explain, the gender difference among Havertown Latino adolescents. My analysis follows the lead of Mahler (1998), Mehan (e.g., Mehan, Hubbard & Villanueva, 1994), Suárez-Orozco (e.g., Suárez-Orozco, 1998; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995) and Trueba (e.g., Trueba, Rodriguez, Zou & Cintrón, 1993), who argue that, although social forces limit many US Latinos' options, anthropologists must not deny them agency. Instead of describing life as happening to US Latinos, these authors recommend that we explore the *adaptive strategies* many Latinos use to negotiate social barriers. This chapter follows their lead by exploring the divergent adaptive strategies that male and female Latino adolescents adopted in Havertown.

The divergence between male and female strategies shows the need for more complex theories of cultural identification and school success. Some accounts (e.g., Ogbu & Simon, 1998) try to predict minority adolescents' responses to school with reference to structural variables like the "voluntary" or "involuntary" nature of the minority group's incorporation into the nation. Others have recently reported, however, that particular groups of minority adolescents often adopt identities contrary to Ogbu's predictions, due to local contextual factors (cf. Gibson, 1997). Mehan, Hubbard and Villanueva (1994), for example, describe how a special

school program allowed many "involuntary" Latino and African American minority adolescents to accommodate without assimilating and succeed in school. Levinson (1997) describes how some marginalized adolescents with indigenous ancestry became integrated into groups of successful students at a Mexican secondary school. The Latino adolescents in Havertown also challenged Ogbu's monolithic predictions, because males and females from the same social and ethnic background (and often from the same families) adopted strategies that he predicts should characterize different minority groups. This chapter shows how these divergent strategies emerge in the context of a particular configuration of social, cultural, and economic conditions in Havertown.

So this chapter argues that we need to develop more complex accounts of minority adolescents' cultural identification and school success, if we want to explain the complex dynamics of schooling and cultural identity in Latino diaspora communities like Havertown. All adolescents make decisions about identity, school and their futures based on partial knowledge, while remaining constrained by larger cultural and social forces. But this process can be particularly challenging for adolescents in the Latino diaspora. The first section provides ethnographic background on the Havertown Latino community, focusing on Latinos' experiences as culturally alien. The second section describes the differences between a typical Latino and a typical Latina adolescent, focusing on their reactions to school. The third section offers provisional explanations for why male and female Latino adolescents use different strategies to adapt to school in Havertown. The conclusion stresses the need for more complex configurations of individual, cultural and social variables in our theories of cultural identification and school success.

Ethnographic background

In conducting our study of Havertown Latino adolescents, three undergraduate Latino research assistants and I observed classes and bilingual tutoring sessions at four Havertown schools over two academic years. We interviewed both teachers and students, and we visited Spanish-speaking families in their homes. My assistants also socialized informally with Latino adolescents on a regular basis. Our research took place in a small rural Northern New England town several hours from any sizable Latino community. About 200 Latinos, mostly from Mexico or Southern Texas, lived in Havertown in the mid-1990s. A few residents came from Guatemala, El Salvador, or Puerto Rico, but the majority were Mexican or Mexican American. Virtually all of the Latino adults in Havertown had come to work at a local meat processing plant. Turnover was very high, as families regularly left town for other jobs or to return south. Because of the constant arrival of new Spanish-dominant workers (cf. Solé, 1975; 1987), the primary language of almost all the adults and most of the children remained Spanish. At any given time during our study period, about 50 Latino children were enrolled in the local schools—comprising about 3% of the total school population. On average there were four or five Latinos, out of about 150 students, in each grade. All Latino students attended mainstream classes, but many were pulled out of one or two classes a day in order to work in the ESL room. Each of the four local schools had an ESL room with a permanent staff member.

All Latinos experienced some culture shock at being transplanted into a community so devoid of Latinos. One newly arrived adolescent Latina refused to leave the ESL room at the high school for over a week, because she could not face the unfamiliar Anglo world of the school. Several adolescents and adults told me that they would only go into town in a group of Latinos, for fear of the alien Anglo world. Even Latino adolescents who had lived in Havertown

a while, and spoke excellent English, worked to blend into the Anglo town—as illustrated by the following fieldnote.

Levania [one of my research assistants] has (finally) earned the trust of Esperanza, it seems. She has been invited to Esperanza's house for dinner twice now, and Esperanza asks for her when she's not in Peggy's room [the ESL pullout room at the high school]. Today Levaria described a recent attempt to reinforce Esperanza's ethnic pride. After school they were driving into town, listening and moving to loud Mexican music on the stereo. As soon as they came within earshot of town, Esperanza hurriedly turned off the music and remarked that she hated to have people see her listening to Mexican music like that. (L&Gnts.596.P3)

Unfortunately, this adolescent's desire to downplay her Latina identity makes sense in light of some Anglos' attitudes. I interviewed Havertown Anglos, and many of them held inaccurate stereotypes of Latinos—as exotic, as dirty, as violent, as having huge families, or as all being illegal immigrants. In the schools and the town I heard occasional mutterings about how "Proposition 187 had the right idea." One Latina adolescent, who was known for dressing and grooming herself very carefully, told us about an event in which Anglo boys behind her in class whispered: "sure does smell like cow shit around here," apparently alluding to the smell of the meatpacking plant. In addition to these sorts of degrading stereotypes and comments, Havertown Latinos occasionally endured physical threats as well. Two Latinos were once driving through a nearby town (one known as the KKK capital of Northern New England), where they were harassed while buying something in a convenience store, chased in a car, and threatened with a gun just because they looked "ethnic" (a term used by some local, working-class whites for anyone non-white, including Jews—who are known to have curly hair and big noses). Police, unfortunately, more often contributed to the problem than helped with it. One of my research assistants, who fits Anglo stereotypes about what Latinos look like, was stopped more than once by Havertown police in a spot where I have never had any trouble.

More common than this sort of overtly hostile act, however, were thoughtless ones. For

instance, once in an elementary school unit about Hawai'i we observed an Anglo student say, "I could be a Hawai'ian." The teacher responded by pointing to the one Latino and one black student in the class and saying: "no, you're too white, these are the only two who could be Hawai'ians." One day another teacher decided to go around the class and have each student say what his or her parents did. We could see the Latino students squirming uncomfortably long before their turns, because they were ashamed to compare their parents' occupations to the others'. While such incidents were in our experience uncommon in Havertown schools, they could nonetheless have serious effects.

In general, Havertown Latinos were marked as different, and they did suffer for it. But Latino adults and children overwhelmingly reported less discrimination in Havertown than they had experienced elsewhere in the US. In areas of the US densely populated by Latinos, Anglo resentment of Latinos can be strong (Trujillo, 1996). One can see this in recent initiatives like Propositions 187 and 227 in California, and in the national English-only movement. In less Latino-dense areas, however, Anglos often feel less threatened. Stull, Broadway, and Erickson (1992) describe a Latino diaspora community similar to Havertown, where Anglos do not see Latinos as serious competition for resources. In such communities Latinos do what local Anglos see as dirty but necessary work, which local Anglos would not do themselves. Meier and Stewart (1991) also report that Latinos face less discrimination in schools where they do not stand out as the primary minority or working-class group and there were too few Latinos in Havertown for them to become the main target of stereotyping. On the whole, despite some racism and thoughtlessness, Havertown Anglos saw the Latinos as hard-working and had some sympathy for the difficult conditions they worked under.

In fact, Anglo sympathy sometimes reached such proportions that it was a problem.

When Anglos' good intentions become patronizing, as they sometimes did in Havertown, Villenas (1997) describes it as "benevolent racism." By the end of our fieldwork, Havertown Latinos had become a "charity magnet," as one local Anglo described it, with many Anglo groups vying to do things for them—from health care to food and clothing donations to tutoring to legal assistance. Some Latinos appreciated this help. They appreciated outsiders' willingness to help expose the unsafe working conditions at the plant, and many Latinos joined with Anglo lawyers to sue the plant over wages unfairly withheld. Anglo charity made most of the Latinos uncomfortable, however, and they wanted to be left alone. A few Latinos, especially male adolescents, openly resented the implication that they needed charity.

Today the issue of unwanted charity boiled over. Yesterday Gerardo [one of my research assistants] had reported the boys' unhappiness about the recent article [the local paper had run another "exposé" on the plant, describing poor working conditions and housing for the Latinos]. Paco worried: "what do people think of us?" Then today, while we were at school, someone piled boxes of used clothes at the entrance to the trailer park [where Latino families live]. Jesús was furious, kicking the boxes and yelling that this was not a Goodwill collection site. He got Paco to borrow his father's car, and they drove the boxes to the Salvation Army—without ever looking at what was inside. (G&Rnts.497.P2)

Besides having to confront hurtful Anglo attitudes, Havertown Latinos' isolation and their precarious economic position also caused everyday difficulties. Life in their Havertown neighborhood was relatively sterile for the adolescents, especially for the Latinas. They reported that, in Texas and Mexico, they had many Spanish-speaking friends and easy access to Mexican movies, restaurants, and radio. In Havertown they did not even have easy access to the few activities available in town, because their neighborhood was miles out in the woods. Many male and female adolescents spent substantial time watching TV, both in English and (for those with satellite dishes) in Spanish. The male adolescents did spend substantial time outside their houses, tinkering with cars or playing basketball. Almost all the female adolescents stayed close to home and rarely went outside after dinner. This difference in gender roles is characteristic of

working-class Mexican families (Levinson, 1997; Rothenberg, 1995).

The absence of extended family took a particular toll on Havertown Latinos, because their former, rural Mexican (and/or South Texan) lives centered so much around activities beyond their nuclear family (Rothenberg, 1995; Valdés, 1996). Many families had one younger relative living with them, working at the plant, and a few had a brother's or sister's entire nuclear family nearby. But the vast majority had no relatives outside their own nuclear family, this side of Texas. Furthermore, in many of these families one parent and some siblings would be gone for several months out of the year—either to migrant labor sites or back to Texas or Mexico to deal with family responsibilities. Few of the families had overcome the loss of proximate family networks by reaching out to other Latino families in the neighborhood. Most said that the family cannot be replaced, and in any case most adults spent almost all their time and energy working. There was, in addition, considerable fragmentation and even some mutual suspicion in the community, especially over attitudes toward the plant's owner (some saw the plant as providing steady work, while others resented the working conditions and wanted to unionize). Among the adolescents, individuals usually had one or two good Latino friends—but these friends could not fill the void left by an extended family and a supportive Latino community.

Also contributing to the burdens noted above, the transience of Latino families took a toll on both adolescents and others. Stull, Broadway, and Erickson (1992) report that the turnover of workers in this sort of meatpacking job can be 6-8% a *month*, and turnover in Havertown approached that at times—especially during the recurring financial and regulatory crises at the plant. Even members of families that had stayed for several years often speculated that they would be leaving soon, and this expectation disrupted their commitments to school and friends. As Anderson (1991) and Chavez (1994) would put it, even these more settled Latino families

often did not "imagine" Havertown as their "community." Many families also left temporarily, often during the school year, in order to visit relatives or explore job opportunities elsewhere. In the spring, when the migrant agricultural jobs had begun in Texas, many families moved south temporarily. This disrupted children's schooling, because even a child who had been successful from September to April could not complete a grade without the last six weeks of school. In some years this spring migration so reduced numbers that the ESL staff feared that the superintendent might visit their rooms and get the impression that they were overstaffed.

Another result of Latino families' transience is that the adolescents (and probably others as well) seemed particularly sensitive to loss and were sometimes suspicious of others' commitment to them. While they felt that they could rely on members of their family, some Latino adolescents hesitated to develop friendships with other families, because they expected that these others might leave soon. For instance, after an auspicious beginning to our work in Havertown, when the Latino adolescent males had begun to accept one of my male research assistants, this assistant overslept one morning and was fifteen minutes late for school. According to the ESL teacher, the Latino students concluded right away that he was "ditching" them, and it took quite a while to restore their confidence in him. On another occasion, my female research assistant had promised to accompany a Latina to the school fashion show one evening. But she could not get a ride and missed the appointment. This Latina adolescent literally never forgave her, having concluded that she was unreliable.

All Latinos that we spoke with sometimes felt alien, stereotyped and transient in Havertown. But the situation was particularly hard for the adolescents. Like their parents, Havertown Latino adolescents confronted mainstream American culture daily in school. In addition, their identities as Mexicans were in most cases not as firmly established as their

parents', and as adolescents they worried about their identities on a regular basis. Thus, the adolescents faced even more than the (substantial) difficulties of being economically marginal and culturally alien in an otherwise homogeneous town. They also faced the problem of establishing their own identities in a context that too often offered fragmented models of Mexicanness and alluring but sometimes hostile models of mainstream Americanness. Others have described this difficult situation, in which many US Latino adolescents find that they *no son de aquí ni de allá* (Goldfarb, 1996)—in which they no longer feel fully Mexican, but are still marginal in mainstream Anglo society (Griffith & Kissam, 1995; Rothenberg, 1995; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Valdés, 1996).

Given the difficulties and the unfamiliarity of life in Havertown, one might expect that Latino adolescents would have faced the either/or choice described above: either rejecting the Anglo values of the school and community as "acting white," or assimilating to those Anglo values and rejecting their Latino identities. It turns out that the adolescent male Latinos did primarily adopt the first of these options. But the adolescent females manage to accommodate without assimilating—they adopted Anglo values enough to succeed in school, but they also maintained their identities as Latinas. The next sections describe this gender difference, first quantitatively and then with case studies of two typical adolescents. The subsequent section offers a provisional explanation for the gender difference.

Gender differences

To establish that this gender difference did in fact exist, I collected and analyzed quantitative data on the fifty-seven Latino students who enrolled at Havertown High for at least two semesters between 1992-1997. Because of school rules about privacy, outside researchers

do not have access to individual student records. So two ESL teachers generated these data, after removing all identifying information. First, they compiled a list of the fifty-seven Latino students and checked their records on these students. Then they met and came to consensus, assigning each student a score on eleven variables. They gave me the resulting data matrix, without student names. Table 1 presents the variables.

===== Insert Table 1 here =====

Table 2 presents the results of a multiple regression analysis on the resulting matrix, using the ten other variables to predict school success.²

===== Insert Table 2 here =====

In these data, only three variables were independently³ related to school success: females were more likely to succeed than males; students with good attitudes toward school were more likely to succeed; and students whose families did not move them around during the school year were more likely to succeed (with "success," of course, defined using the school's criteria).

The correlations between attitude and success and migrancy and success make sense. Attitude might be either a cause or a consequence of school success, but either way one would expect the two variables to be related. The correlation between family migrancy and school success also makes sense. These data do not distinguish between several possible explanations: it could be that students who often leave school during the academic year decide school is not worth the effort and so do not work hard; it could be that pulling children out of school during

the year causes them to miss important school lessons, which makes failure more likely; it could be that teachers have stereotypes of more migrant children and more often fail them; or it could be that parents of failing children notice their lack of success and decide that it makes no difference if they pull their children out during the year. The first two of these explanations seem the most plausible, but it would require more data to make firm conclusions.

These quantitative results also confirm our ethnographic observations of a gender difference. The Latinas value school more and succeed more, according to the school's standards. Unlike the other two significant results, however, this one does not have an obvious explanation. The next two sections describe the gender difference in more detail, by presenting two typical Havertown Latino adolescents and the strategies that they adopted for establishing their identities in Havertown.

Jesús

Jesús Villalobos was a seventeen-year-old Latino adolescent in Havertown. The Villalobos family tried to uphold the traditions of rural, working-class Mexico. Mrs. Villalobos arranged for all of her children to spend a couple of months a year back in Mexico, even if it meant missing school, in order to maintain connections with their traditions and their family. All four Villalobos children were born in Mexico, although the two youngest had lived most of their lives in the US when we knew them. All the children showed great respect for their parents. My assistants and I once observed Jesús, who at the time had a cast on his broken arm, leap up to take out the garbage for his mother when he saw her about to do it. The following fieldnote describes another such incident.

Today don José worked a sixteen-hour shift at the plant. During dinner word came down

from the plant that they needed him back to work another shift. Everyone knew that he would go back, but no one said anything. The kids looked at their food and shuffled their feet. Then Jesús leapt up, said he would take the shift, and insisted that José stay home and sleep. He'll be up all night, shoveling [feces] but he did not hesitate. Don José accepted the offer and fell into bed right after dinner. (Rnts.997.P2)

Jesús also encouraged his younger siblings to retain their connection to Mexican traditions. He regularly insisted, for instance, that everyone speak only Spanish in the house. Almost all Latino Havertown families spoke Spanish at home, though a fair number of children spoke better English than Spanish. Jesús was in the middle of the continuum—his Spanish was fluent and he spoke good conversational English, but he had not mastered academic English. Among the Havertown adolescents, Jesús was unusually adamant about speaking English only when necessary.

To a mainstream American, the most telling evidence of the Villalobos' Mexican values was their attitude toward money. The older children gave every dollar they earned (which sometimes came to a couple of hundred dollars a week) directly to their mother, for the maintenance of the family. If they wanted money to go out, they asked her for some. The whole family worked toward the goal of saving enough to buy a house in Mexico. Jesús' more Americanized friends thought he was crazy for giving all "his" money away, but to him the family was without hesitation the highest priority.

When asked why they came to Havertown, Jesús' parents cited, for one thing, the lack of drugs and gang violence. In South Texas, Jesús and his friends were in a gang. Jesús himself reported that he smoked and drank in Texas, but he engaged in these practices much less often in Havertown. Both children and adolescents reported that they felt safer in Havertown than in other US locations, and parents worried less about gangs and other bad influences their children might have fallen under. The primary reason for the Villalobos family to be in Havertown,

however, was work. As described comprehensively by Griffith and Kissam (1995), recent changes in farm mechanization and a partial breakdown in job-finding networks have disrupted the migration patterns of many agricultural workers. These workers value a *steady* job above all else, because they have too often experienced jobs where the work dries up and they get paid for only a few hours in a week. José Villalobos once told me, when I asked whether the jobs at the Havertown plant were good: "well, they're not good jobs, but there are lots of hours." From a mainstream American point of view, the Havertown jobs were exhausting, dirty, low-paying, and exploitative. Havertown Latinos recognized these problems, and they would have changed them if they could have done so without jeopardizing their income. But workers got steady work and ample overtime year-round, and these were most important to them.

José Villalobos was by training a mechanic, and Jesús was himself skilled at auto repair. They always had old cars in various states of repair in the trailer park, which served as sites of social interaction among the men and boys who came by to tinker with them. Jesús enthusiastically recounted stories of cars that he had fixed and automobile races in Mexico that he had participated in. He did not talk much about his aspirations, but he did confide to one of my assistants that he would like to be a mechanic like his father. His best friend had a cousin in Texas who completed a course in refrigeration and subsequently made good money as a technician. Jesús cited this as a precedent for how he might succeed using his mechanical skills.

In more imaginative moments, when asked about their aspirations, Jesús and his friends hoped to emulate a former plant employee who had been embellished into a legend: a Latino who came to the meat-packing plant and worked seven days a week, eighteen hours a day, spending no money on himself at all; after seven years, he had accumulated half a million dollars (this must be an exaggeration, although I know of one attested case of a family that saved about

\$100,000 over several years in Havertown); with this money he bought two pickup trucks, returned to northern Mexico, bought a ranch, and lived happily ever after.

Because of his blue-collar aspirations, Jesús did not see school as important to his future. He attended tenth grade (for the second time) on a somewhat regular basis, but he would often skip school when an open shift at the plant comes up. When he was in school, Jesús participated socially but not often academically. He was smart, and his work at the plant showed how diligent and reliable he could be. On one occasion, when challenged by one of my assistants, Jesús showed that he could do surprisingly well on English grammar worksheets for someone who failed most of his classes. But he did not apply himself in school. He said that the classes were "useless" and boring, and he felt that they had nothing to do with him. One can understand this boredom in some cases, as he had been forced to take the same classes over because of failing grades. Until high school he was able to pass his classes through a combination of resourcefulness and charm. But by high school he had fallen so far behind his classmates in academic English literacy skills and various types of content knowledge that teachers could no longer pass him through.

Both teachers and students nonetheless liked Jesús. Teachers liked him for his liveliness and good humor. Several told me that he would make an excellent politician or salesman, because of his interpersonal skills. Jesús also displayed a genuinely good spirit. We saw this especially in his actions toward the disabled special education students, whose room was next door to the ESL room. Most of us smiled and walked quickly past the special education students, feeling pity—or simply being self-conscious as they stared at us, eager for stimulation. But Jesús always had a minute to joke with them. With the ESL teacher's help, he regularly arranged to get out of study hall and play basketball in the gym with the special education

students. One day I saw him positively ebullient, because he was so looking forward to line dancing with them later in the day. I do not believe this emotion came from any particular love of dancing, but instead from the opportunity to do something different and the opportunity to help. Perhaps Jesús' greatest success with these students was the day he taught several of the disabled boys to burp at will. I have rarely seen anyone look so proud as he made those boys on that day.

Jesús also got along well with most of his classmates. Almost everyone knew him and appreciated his good humor. Despite his popularity, however, Jesús confided in private that he had no "real friends" among Anglos and that he did not feel popular. He spent most of his time in class daydreaming or fooling around, or in the ESL room with his few good Latino male friends. He did occasionally get into fights with Anglo boys—especially the "poor white trash" who, he claimed, hated Latinos. On one occasion Jesús instigated a fight at school with an Anglo boy who had said "when I grow up I'm going to help out you Latinos." Before starting the fight, Jesús' response was: "I don't need your help; I make more in a week at the plant than you make in a month flipping burgers."

We can sum up Jesús' attitude toward school with two anecdotes. On one occasion I was sitting in the ESL room, talking with the teacher. We heard some giggles among the special education students, and then Jesús suddenly appeared at the door, somewhat out of breath—and much to the teacher's surprise. He had been in a closed, teacher-supervised room. He said: "Paco didn't make it out." Note the presupposition that school is a place, like jail, to be escaped. Jesús also had a trademark exit: whenever he left a room, he flicked the lights on and off. In the ESL room, the flick lasted long enough that the teacher often had time to glare at him. I once observed him leave the main office, however, after a disciplinary meeting with the vice-

principal. Even there he dared to flick the lights, but very quickly. He was gone before anyone else looked up.

In assessing Jesús attitude toward school, we must be careful not to adopt the perspective of the school uncritically. He did not lack ability, nor was he a wayward, rebellious adolescent. He chose not to apply himself in school because he believed school success would not help him reach his goals and perhaps because he could not imagine the school conferring success on someone like him. He chose instead to make money for his family, and he hoped someday to get a better blue-collar job and to become the head of his own Mexican family. The school, however, provided only one model of a successful student—one who works hard on academic tasks for the sake of his or her own individual achievement. When we knew him, Jesús made no effort to fit this model. The school responded by labeling him as unsuccessful. Jesús responded in turn by adopting what the school considered mildly oppositional behavior. In this way Jesús made clear that, instead of being a "failure," he did not aspire to the mainstream model. At home Jesús showed where his real values were, by contributing to his family and spending time with his Latino friends.

Teresa

Like Jesús, Teresa Fuentes was the oldest in a family of four children. Teresa's family had been in Havertown for eight years, and she had spent most of her life in the US. Like the Villalobos family, the Fuentes family moved to Havertown for the work. They remained, however, partly for the schools—which they found superior to those in South Texas or rural Mexico. Teresa's father had heard of opportunities for work elsewhere in the US, but he remained at a difficult job largely so that his children could finish school in Havertown. Mr.

Fuentes was Mexican, and he came to Havertown after spending a few years in California and South Texas. He worked many hours at the plant, but when at home he expected a Mexican household. Teresa's mother was born in the US and was fully bilingual. She played an important role for many others in the community, occasionally serving as an intermediary between the Latinos and governmental or legal institutions.

Perhaps because of Mrs. Fuentes' American background, Teresa's family was not as committed to preserving Mexican traditions as Jesús'. (It was not generally the case, however, that adolescent Latinas came from more Americanized families than adolescent Latinos.) Teresa and her siblings did not work outside the home, but if they did they would likely have kept at least some of the money for themselves. Teresa's siblings sometimes demanded and got expensive pairs of sneakers and relatively expensive clothes. Note that these differences in values cannot explain the difference between Jesús and Teresa, however, because Teresa's brother, Tomás, behaved much like Jesús. Like Jesús, Tomás did not work hard in school and identified most closely with his Latino family and friends.

In her loyalty to the family, however, Teresa was more clearly Mexican. She almost always stayed home in the evenings and helped her mother with household tasks. On one occasion that we observed, she had the opportunity to participate in a fashion show at school. She was normally shy, but she was looking forward to this activity. One of the teachers told me that it was her "one opportunity to shine" publicly at school. That evening, before the show was to start, Teresa received word that her mother had been slightly injured at the plant and had gone to the hospital. Without hesitation, she left the show to care for her siblings. And, despite her normally scrupulous attendance, she willingly missed school the following two days in order to continue helping her mother.

In school and out, Teresa was quiet and diligent. She rarely spoke to new people, and even with my younger, Latina assistant she did not initiate conversation, for many months. At home, she spent most of her time in her room doing schoolwork or in the kitchen helping her mother. In school, she behaved as if she did not want to be noticed. Until our last year in Havertown she did not come to the ESL room at all, and she did not interact much with the other Latino students at school. The following fieldnote illustrates how she was perceived in school by other Latino students.

Today was María's second day in school after arriving from Mexico last week. Peggy [the bilingual aide] has been with her all day, translating forms and introducing her to students and teachers. She can carry on rudimentary conversations in English, but not much more. She seems to think that Teresa is an assimilated Latina, however. When Teresa entered Peggy's room today, María tried to talk to her in English. She can see that Teresa's Latina, and I think she heard Teresa speaking Spanish yesterday. But she's already decided that Teresa would rather speak English in school. (G&Rnts.297.P5)

Despite her preference for English in school, Teresa did not seem embarrassed at being Mexican. In fact, when a new ESL teacher created a more welcoming climate in the ESL room, she began to appear there and offered to help tutor some of her compatriots. On one occasion we also observed Teresa in the ESL room, deeply involved in a discussion with another Latina about life in the US with a strict Mexican father. They shared frustrations about the constraints this imposed, but they also agreed that they would likely marry Mexican or Mexican American men and that they would teach their children Spanish. So Teresa thought of herself as Latina, and she was not a pariah among her Latino classmates. There was one Latina in the high school whom the Latino boys accused of "acting white" and abandoning her people. This girl wore expensive catalogue clothes, had bought herself a new car with money she made working, and dated Anglo boys. Teresa did none of these things, and she was not actively ostracized. Others were suspicious of her academic success to some extent. But the isolation she experienced resulted

more from her position as a daughter in a Mexican home torn from its context and from her choice to devote herself to school.

In our last year of observations, Teresa began applying to colleges. She had a very good academic record, and both parents and teachers expected her to attend college. I had the opportunity to accompany her and several other Latino students from Havertown on a college tour that one of my assistants and the ESL teacher arranged. All these students would be the first in their families to go to college, and they seemed overwhelmed by the college environment. They were strikingly quiet and wide-eyed during all the tours. At one institution we had lunch in the cafeteria. Teresa seemed awed by the diversity of food choices and the atmosphere. She said: "this is very different from lunch at Havertown High." This was the only thing I heard her say the entire day. When back in Havertown the next day, however, she did tell my assistant that she had been particularly impressed with one of the schools we had visited and that she now wanted to go there. Before this visit, she had planned to apply only to nearby junior colleges, but she ended up applying to this more prestigious school. I am happy to report that Teresa was accepted and now attends this college.

In the degree of her academic success, Teresa was unusual. But most adolescent Havertown Latinas, unlike their brothers, adopted the mainstream model of academic success in school. Most did not aspire to be mainstream Americans in all aspects of their lives. Like the immigrants described by Gibson (1988, 1997), Mehan, Hubbard and Villanueva (1994) and others, Havertown Latinas worked to maintain dual identities—as Latinas at home and as successful students in school. Most of the Latinas managed to balance these two identities. But why did the male and female Latino adolescents choose such different strategies? The next section sketches a provisional answer to this question.

A multiple-factor account

Why did the Latinas value school more? I have searched the literature, and discussed this finding with various ethnographers of US Latinos, without hearing of such a striking gender difference in school success as this—although Levinson (1997) and Pugach (1998) do report the same gender difference in less extreme form. An adequate explanation for this pattern, we must cite the particular configuration of factors that came together in Havertown. Influences from the home culture, the particular community context, and the economic situation all influenced Latino adolescents' aspirations and attitudes toward school. This section describes these factors and how they fit together.

In general, gender roles are more differentiated among rural Mexicans than among mainstream Anglos (Rothenberg, 1995). Male Mexican adolescents also enjoy considerably more freedom than their sisters (Levinson, 1997). The separation between male and female adolescents in Havertown was very sharp: male and female ethnographers spent months building close relationships with same-gender Latinos but hardly knew members of the opposite gender. Siblings of opposite genders sometimes had relatively close relationships within the house, but most often they ignored each other in public. In Havertown, male adolescents congregated outside the house and had few responsibilities until they were old enough to earn money. Females mostly stayed inside the house and were responsible for many household chores. Virtually all the Latina adolescents went inside in the late afternoon to help prepare dinner, and even the adventurous generally went in at the first sign of their fathers coming home. This sharp differentiation in gender roles that they inherited from rural, working-class Mexican culture makes possible, but does not in itself explain, the gender difference in adaptive strategies among

Havertown Latino adolescents.

Levinson (1997, 1998) reports that adolescent females in Mexico often take on more responsibility in school and sometimes take school more seriously than the adolescent males, and Pugach (1998) found a similar difference in her work on the US-Mexican border. Because of gender segregation in working-class Mexican culture, girls and boys face different choices: girls choose between school and early marriage, while boys more often choose between school and early employment. Levinson (1998) reports that working-class Mexican fathers often discourage their daughters from interacting with boys and that mothers often encourage their daughters to pursue school success as a way to earn some independence from domestic relations. On the other hand, working-class Mexican parents sometimes encourage or allow their sons to work and help support the family. Thus Levinson does sometimes observe a gender difference in attitudes toward school and school success among working-class Mexican adolescents—although it is not as extreme as the one I observed in Havertown. Nonetheless, the gender segregation and different life options that underlie this gender difference in Mexico may also have played a role among Havertown Latinos.

These factors cannot fully explain the gender difference among Havertown adolescents, however. Levinson (1998) reports that many of the male adolescents he spoke with in Mexico valued school, worked for school success and aspired to the sorts of non-manual labor that an education would make possible for them. These male students looked down on other boys who dropped out of school to work. So—although the segregated gender roles that Havertown Latinos brought from working-class Mexican culture, and the fact that adolescent Latinas often face a choice between school and early marriage, may help explain the Havertown Latinas' commitment to and success in school—these cultural gender roles do not explain the rejection of

school among adolescent males in Havertown. For that we must consider other factors, like their socioeconomic position as working-class immigrants and the role models they observed in Havertown

Levinson (1998) does report that, when the Mexican economic crisis hit in the mid-1990s, some male adolescents in Mexico stopped aspiring to school success because they saw fewer and fewer white-collar jobs available. This introduces a second factor, in addition to cultural gender roles, that helps explain the gender difference in school success among Havertown Latino adolescents. Students' appraisal of economic opportunities can affect their decisions about whether it makes sense to work hard in school. In Havertown, male Latino adolescents did often talk as if it would be unrealistic for them to aspire to white-collar jobs. They sounded in some ways like the working-class "lads" described by Willis (1981). Like Willis' lads, some Havertown Latino adolescent males participated in "anti-school cultures"—sets of values and practices opposed to mainstream society and its schools. Both the English working-class boys and the working-class Latino adolescents in Havertown disparaged non-physical work as unmasculine and aspired to jobs that involve physical exertion and some danger. They also engaged in activities, like "having a laugh," that reinforced group solidarity and rejected school authority, activities that Willis argues can make a life of physical labor bearable. Male Havertown Latinos often had values similar to those Willis describes: loyalty to family and the need to help support the family took precedence over individual success; and work was considered a way to make money, not a calling (cf. Also Rothenberg, 1995; Valdés, 1996). I am suggesting, then, that the male Latino adolescents did not work hard in school partly for the same reasons as other working-class adolescent males—they decided that people like themselves would likely not be allowed to succeed in middle-class institutions, and they found

the option of life as a working-class male more attractive.

But why would adolescent males and females from the same Latino families in Havertown develop different expectations about their economic prospects? At least two different factors play a role here, one involving socio-economic structure and the other involving the Anglo role models available in the particular context of Havertown. At the level of social structure, Tienda (1989) describes how some jobs in the US economy have become "reserved" for Mexicans. That is, both Mexicans and others in the work force come to think of certain manual jobs as Mexican work, and Mexicans have come to dominate the labor pool for those jobs. Tienda describes how the stereotypical Mexican jobs are manual labor most often done by men. Mexican women do some manual labor, but they also do clerical, sales, and service-sector work much more often than Mexican men. In Havertown, then, the male adolescents in particular might have decided that they were unlikely to get white-collar work because of social stereotypes that portray Mexican men as manual laborers. Like Willis' (1981) lads, of course, the male Latinos in Havertown did not see manual labor as undesirable. On the contrary, they denigrated non-physical labor as effeminate. But male Latino adolescents in Havertown perceived their upward mobility as limited, and did not see school as a viable vehicle for advancement.

So cultural gender roles and perceived economic opportunities both play a role in explaining the gender difference among Havertown Latino adolescents. But even these two factors together do not suffice as an explanation. Mehan, Hubbard and Villanueva (1994), among others, describe groups of Latino adolescents in the US that share similar working-class Mexican culture and that face the same stereotypical expectations for Mexican men that Tienda (1989) describes, but who do not show the same gender differences in school success.⁴ We need

one more factor, particular to the Havertown context, to give a more complete explanation for the gender difference there. Latinos in Havertown entered schools where Anglo students also showed a striking gender difference in school success. Anglo adolescents in Havertown had different attitudes toward school and different rates of school success, depending on their gender. Teachers at Havertown High often complained that upper-track classes were overwhelmingly female, and they worried about how to reach the boys. In one recent year, all top ten students at the high school were female. This was not considered particularly unusual, although the administration was sufficiently disturbed that they moved student number eleven, a boy, into a "tie" for tenth. In high school classrooms, girls were much more often attentive and conscientious, while even upper-middle-class boys showed less interest in school. Teachers explained this male tendency partly as a pragmatic issue: boys imagined that in the future they would do physical labor, or take over their father's business, and they did not need to go to college for this; girls, on the other hand, realized that even secretaries and medical assistants need some educational credentials. I agree with the teachers that perceived economic opportunities did seem to play a role in the Anglo gender difference, although the gender difference in these schools was more extreme than I have seen elsewhere.

Adolescent Latinas in Havertown, then, saw Anglo females working hard, succeeding in school, and expecting to succeed in life after school. They observed the surrounding Anglo culture, in which women had greater chances for advancement through education than they do in Mexico. And because they faced less discrimination in Havertown than in other parts of the US, many were able to see school as a route to escape from the constraints of their current lives. With a peer model of Anglo females who worked hard and hoped to succeed through education, they could see themselves doing the same. Like Latino adolescents elsewhere in the U.S.

(Griffith and Kissam, 1995; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 1995), and in Mexico (Levinson, 1998), these girls and their families hoped that they will not have to do the same sorts of difficult labor as their parents. Because of lowered discrimination and positive female models, Havertown Latinas often saw school as a way to accomplish this. Most of them managed to do so by becoming Americanized to some degree, but without breaking their connection to their parents and their Mexican culture.

Male Latino adolescents, however, did not have the same positive Anglo model available as their sisters. Local Anglo males were more often concerned with toughness than school success. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) describe how Anglo adolescents' ambivalence toward school sometimes rubs off on second-generation Latinos. In Havertown we might have observed a similar pattern, but only among adolescent males. Like their Anglo counterparts, the Latino males saw opportunities for making substantial money in the near term through physical labor. They were drawn both to the idea of having their own money and a car (or, ideally, a pickup truck) and to the idea of making money to help their family. So most of the adolescent males rejected the school's values and affiliated with "oppositional" US adolescent practices or with traditional Mexican working-class ones.

Several factors, then, predisposed male and female Latino adolescents in Havertown toward different strategies with respect to school. Sharply differentiated cultural gender roles, perceived and actual economic opportunities, and the availability of gender-segregated Anglo role models all contributed to the gender difference among Havertown Latino adolescents. As described by MacLeod (1987), these more structural factors were mediated through the adolescents' aspirations. That is, based on their perceptions of and experiences with these more structural factors, Havertown Latino adolescents adjusted their aspirations and their life-

strategies. Thus we observed that, like Jesús, Latino adolescent males in Havertown generally did not work hard in school. Those few that did hid their good grades, and bragged about their occasional failures, to avoid being stigmatized as a "school-boy." We observed no similar peer pressure among the girls. Some girls, in fact, enjoyed lording their academic success over their brothers. (Teresa and her sisters once had a pool going over how many classes their brother would fail that term. Teresa's parents allowed this, and even concurred occasionally when the girls called their brother "the dumb one." Her brother responded by trying to be "cool"—drinking, acquiring (relatively tame) gang paraphernalia, etc.)

The gender difference in attitudes toward school and in school success is related to the groups that adolescents identify with. As described above, the girls identified with successful Anglo role models in school and identified with Mexican role models at home. Many of the boys were instead drawn to "oppositional" identities, like those described by Fordham and Ogbu (1986). These involved gang signs and paraphernalia, even though the boys rarely participated in dangerous gang activity. Insofar as these boys adopted "oppositional" identities, they rejected the mainstream Anglo values represented by the school. As described above in the case of Jesús, they did this partly to show that they freely chose not to live up to mainstream expectations in school and thus that their "failure" did not result from incompetence. Like Jesús, most adolescent males remained integrated in their families and planned to pursue the kind of work their fathers did. This aspect of their behavior might have appeared "oppositional" from an Anglo perspective, insofar as it led them to ignore school activities. But in fact they were simply identifying themselves as working-class Latinos. Jesús took pride in his family, and in being a man as defined by traditional Mexican culture. He aspired to be like other working-class Mexican heads-of-household that he saw around him. He did not have to succeed in secondary

school to reach this goal.⁵

On the other hand, most of the female Latina adolescents were like Teresa in that they partly identified with mainstream Anglo values. Many of them aspired to success in school and a career. This involved some rejection of their parents' values, as the Latinas imagined themselves learning about and succeeding in the Anglo world (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). This could lead to isolation, both within and outside the Latino community, for Latinas like Teresa. Most girls nonetheless still identified as Latinas. They planned to remain close to their families, and they expected to marry Latinos themselves. Teresa and others also reported that they planned to succeed primarily so that they could help their families.

Conclusions

Male and female Latino adolescents in Havertown adopted different strategies for adjusting to a culturally alien environment. Both groups were caught between two cultures, but they reacted in different ways. Most of the male adolescents reacted to mainstream Anglo stereotypes by celebrating their difference, much like the working-class African American adolescents described by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and the English 'lads' described by Willis (1981). These Latinos identified primarily with working-class Mexican men and not with the mainstream Anglo values practiced in school. They aspired to hard work and to becoming the heads of their own Mexican families. Most of the female adolescents, on the other hand, adopted more Anglo identities in school. They mingled more readily with Anglo teachers and students and focused on their own academic success. But these Latinas were not fully assimilated. At home they maintained Mexican identities. So they had dual identities, acting partly Anglo in school and largely Mexican at home—a phenomenon also described by Gibson (1988, 1997),

Hall (1995) and others..

Both genders' strategies helped Latino adolescents adapt to Havertown. The males both experienced and presented themselves as different from the mainstream Anglo norm—even though their strategy resembled working-class Anglo males' in some ways. Many boys enjoyed opposing the mainstream institution of school—although for some their opposition created unpleasant conflict with parents or teachers, and for a few it created internal conflict because of competing desires to assimilate or succeed professionally. They nonetheless retained a positive sense of what they wanted to be: Mexican or Mexican American men who preserved important aspects of their culture. The female adolescents adapted by conforming to mainstream values and practices while in school and to Mexican values at home. They hoped to retain this dual identity throughout their lives in the US—to succeed in the mainstream world, but to maintain their cultural traditions at home.

Each of these strategies has costs and benefits. The Latino adolescent males will likely forego academic success and thus will not be able to compete for most high-status jobs. I do not mean to *blame* the Latinos for this choice, in two respects. First, their choices are constrained by ideologies and economic discrimination (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). Second, because they will retain a strong connection to their cultural tradition, their choice makes sense. In contemporary US society, with the disintegration of families and the resulting pathologies, there is much to be said for a tradition that preserves family and community. Most of the Latinas will attain academic success, which will give them greater professional opportunities. But if they pursue opportunities that require more mainstream lifestyles, they will risk losing more of their cultural tradition. We will have to wait another generation to see whether these Latinas will be able to maintain dual identities and pass them on to their children.

I have tried to show how this gender difference in attitudes toward school and school success results from a configuration of factors, a configuration that is in part specific to the Havertown context and that ties both to the heritage Latino newcomers bring with them to Havertown and to the way they are received by the host community. If this sort of more complex, contextualized account turns out to be generally required to explain minority students' cultural identification and school success, we will have to replace more decontextualized single-factor accounts. As Erickson (1987) argues, both cultural (e.g., Cazden, John & Hymes, 1972) and sociohistorical (e.g., Ogbu & Simon, 1998) factors play an important role in explaining minority adolescents' behavior in school. And as Mehan, Hubbard and Villanueva (1994) argue, both sociocultural structures and student aspirations (MacLeod, 1985) play a role. The Havertown example illustrates how we must identify particular configurations of these factors to account for particular cases.

In planning educational policies to meet the challenges of schooling in the new Latino diaspora, then, we must not homogenize Latino needs, aspirations and beliefs. Students from similar structural positions may have different needs, depending on particular aspects of the context. In order to identify promising policies, we must first explore the particular configuration of factors in each context within which Latino adolescents make decisions. Because ethnography is often required to understand these contextualized configurations, in many cases ethnography should precede policy.

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NUMBER	VARIABLE NAME	POTENTIAL VALUES
1	Gender	1: male 2: female
2	Age at arrival	1: in elementary school 2: in seventh grade or above
3	Length of stay	1: one year or less 2: two years or less 3: more than two years
4	Attitude to school	1: school not valued at all 2: values school rarely 3: values school sometimes 4: values school often 5: fully committed to school
5	Success in school	1: dropped out 2: multiple failing grades 3: C's and D's 4: B's and C's 5: A's and B's
6	Family migrancy	1: move constantly 2: move some during school year 3: do not move during school year
7	Family literacy	1: parents illiterate 2: read basics only if necessary 3: read occasionally 4: read sometimes for pleasure 5: print-rich environment
8	Family aspirations	1: expect no school success 2: expect attendance 3: hope for high sch. graduation 4: expect some college 5: expect college degree
9	Generation in US	1: student was born in Mexico 2: student was born in US
10	English on arrival	1: Spanish monolingual 2: some conversational English 3: verbally close to fluent 4: some English literacy 5: fully literate in English
11	English on departure	1: Spanish monolingual 2: some conversational English 3: verbally close to fluent 4: some English literacy 5: fully literate in English

Table 1. Definition of variables.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	COEFFICIENT (STANDARD ERROR)
gender (female)	.514** (.160)
attitude to school	.690** (.087)
family migrancy	.316* (.129)
family literacy	.056 (.068)
family aspirations	-.132 (.110)
generation in US	.028 (.208)
English on arrival	-.090 (.084)
English on departure	.023 (.104)
age at arrival	-.317 (.175)
length of stay	.118 (.129)

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

Table 2. Multiple regression coefficients, using ten variables to predict school success.

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Endnotes

¹All names and many identifying details have been changed, to hide the identities of the people we worked with. For the same reason, some of the people and events described are composites of several actual people or events.

²For the overall regression, $F=20.5436$ ($p \leq .0000$) and $R^2=.7933$.

³In other words, the analysis controls for other correlations that might confound the results. For instance, it is not the case that girls in this sample more often succeed in school because most of these girls happen to come from less migrant families. The correlation between gender and school success is independent of the other variables.

⁴The case described by Mehan et al. also contains one other important difference—an educational program that helps Latinos of both genders succeed in school. Innovative educational policies appear to make a difference in some contexts.

⁵I do not mean to imply that working-class Latinos in general do not value education. Most studies report that they do (e.g., Griffith & Kissam, 1995; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Valdés, 1996), and most Havertown parents did as well. We observed two types of exceptions: families that needed their adolescent children to make money (most of these families hoped that in the next generation children would have more opportunities for education); and a few parents who genuinely did not see the use of more advanced schooling. But even when parents valued education, they could not always convince their male adolescent children of its importance. I am trying to articulate why, under the circumstances, these adolescent males' attitudes might make sense.