Middle-Income Latinos in Middle-Class Communities: A Study on Parental Involvement Dynamics

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MIDDLE-INCOME LATINOS IN MIDDLE-CLASS COMMUNITIES: A STUDY ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT DYNAMICS

BY

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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

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ABSTRACT

The academic underperformance of students of Latino backgrounds is a serious cause for concern in the United States, especially considering the significant portion of the total U.S. population that Latinos constitute. Since parental involvement is known as a powerful resource in helping all students succeed academically, it can be used as a way to counter the achievement gap that Latinos are currently facing. However, middle-class Latinos, who are also plagued by this gap in academic achievement, are continuously overlooked throughout the educational literature. The current study lays focus on this group by centering on the perspectives of middle-income Latino parents living in a middle-class community. Twenty-one participants meeting this criteria were engaged in a semi-structured, interview-based method of inquiry. Accounts of their involvement in the educational development of their children were documented.

Findings from the current study showed that participants followed trajectories similar to the childrearing of other middle-income parents not of Latinos background; however, much earlier than traditionally thought, parents in the current study interacted with their children in intellectually equal terms, gauged their opinions, and prompted independent thinking. Participants in the current study also laid focus on the importance in the emotional wellbeing and social development of their children and the role of family in childrearing, both of which are common themes found in the literature among lower-income Latinos. It is the general recommendation of this study that, while middle class Latino parents share commonalities with non-Latino middle class parents and lower-income Latino parents, they be consciously thought of in group specific ways. These and other implications for future research and policy recommendations are discussed in further detail.

Keywords: parental involvement, childrearing, Latino/ Hispanic, middle class
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This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Alexis Valentina Inoa. All I do, I do with you in mind. Daddy loves you!
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The academic underperformance of students of Latino backgrounds is a cause for serious concern in the United States, especially since Latinos make up a significant portion of the total U.S. population. For instance, Latinos comprised 16.4 percent of the total population in 2010 (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011) and one in five children is currently of Latino origin (Cárdenas & Kerby, 2012). Yet, between 1975 and 2008, the bachelor’s degree completion rate of Latino young adults saw minor change in comparison to other major ethnic groups. Specifically, White and Black Americans saw a respective 13 percent and 10 percent increase in their completion rates compared to a 3 percent increase for Latinos. Only Latinos experienced a downward trend during any ten-year period when the college completion rates of Latinos declined between 1985 and 1995 (Gándara, 2010).

The academic underachievement of Latinos, however, is not only exclusive to higher education. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), using data from the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP),\(^1\) showed the persistent gap in achievement between White and Latino students across grade level. In grade 12, 33 percent of white students were at or above proficient in math compared to 12 percent for Latino students, while in reading, a similar trend persisted with 47 percent of white students and 23 percent of Latinos students at or above proficiency. Similarly, at 4\(^{th}\) and 8\(^{th}\) grade, white students were over twice as likely to score proficient in both reading and math when compared to their Latino

\(^1\) The NAEP is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of American student achievement in core subjects.
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The need to improve Latino students’ educational outcomes at all levels is critical considering the current U.S. labor market’s demand for employees with post high school degrees. Between 1979 and 2012, working individuals with a bachelor’s degree or higher saw significant increases in earnings of 17.4 percent for males and 28.5 percent for females (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Furthermore, those who were high school graduates but had no college experience saw a sharp decline in wages of 19.1 percent if they were males or a minimal increase of 2.7 percent when female (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). These figures demonstrate the importance of educational achievement and the attainment of a post-secondary degree for those who wish to enter the labor market and realize competitive wages. However, the underachievement rates of Latinos at all educational levels foreshadows their inability to compete for these better wages, a major issue considering that Latinos are projected to rise to one-third of the total U.S. population by 2050 (Cárdenas, Ajinkya, & Léger, 2011), and as such, will make up a major part of the U.S. labor force.

Since parental involvement constitutes a powerful resource that stands to help all students succeed academically, it can also be used as a way to counter the achievement gap that Latinos are currently facing. This measure may also better prepare Latinos to enter work force. However, Duran & Perez (2013) explain that studies on Latinos’ parental involvement have traditionally looked at deficit models of involvement, describing the involvement of Latino parents as minimal or nonexistent (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Moles, 1993; Nicholau & Ramos, 1990). However, other studies within the last decade have opted to look at more inclusive models, such as those analyzing the disconnect between schools and homes (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 2005) and the
actual ways in which Latino families are involved in the education and development of their children (Fuligni, 2007; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Yet, while studies such as these have moved towards inclusive approaches of parent involvement methods, one prominent Latino group is still constantly overlooked throughout the educational literature.

Struggles of Middle-Class Latinos

While Latinos may be considered predominantly of low-income, examples to the contrary do exist. For instance, some members of the Latino ethnic group have been part of higher social and economic classes for decades, while others are gaining entrance into the middle-class for the first time. Historically, there is the 45-year old Cuban enclave in South Florida, which is now home to both a middle class and groups with significant amounts of wealth (Camayd-Freixas, 2006). Between 1980 and 1990, U.S. Census Bureau data indicated that both U.S. and foreign born Latinos – mostly of Mexican origin – constitute a large and growing portion of Southern California’s middle class; in Los Angeles alone, Latinos made up more than one in four middle-class individuals by 1990 (Rodriguez, 1996). Recently, a middle-class Latino population from various national origins (i.e. Mexico, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Colombia) has also been identified in New Hampshire (Camayd-Freixas, 2006).

While middle-class Latinos are a recognizable segment of the total U.S. population, the majority of studies on the academic achievement of Latinos focus on low-income groups. This is specifically troublesome considering that middle-income Latinos are struggling academically. According to data published by the College Board (2004), not only have middle-class Latino students performed significantly worse than their White counterparts on the SAT college admissions test, but low-income White students have also performed nearly as well as upper-middle-income Latino students on this assessment (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 81). For
instance, Latinos with an income above $70,000 scored 63 points below White students of their same income level, and only 25 points higher than White students from families with incomes below $35,000 (College Board, 2004).

While the College Board’s (2004) results show the performance gap between Latino and White students within and across socioeconomic categories, other studies have further shown downward generational mobility among Latinos. In their cross generational study of Mexican Americans living in the U.S. for over 35 years, Telles and Ortiz (2008) discovered that even though these families advanced financially from first to second generation, economic progress ceased at the second generational level and poverty rates remained high through subsequent generations. Likewise, educational attainment peaked for the second generation children of immigrants and declined for third and fourth generations. Hence, whereas Latino families have realized upward social and economic mobility, these advancements have been short-lived as Latino families have not been able to realize continuous and long-term economic and educational progress.

The underachievement of Latino students across socioeconomic lines can be attributed to numerous factors. According to Gándara & Contreras (2009), some of these factors include differences in income, wealth, family size, and quality of parental education. Gándara & Contreras (2009) explain that low-income Latinos are poorer than low-income Whites (p. 81), and that due to larger nuclear families, they will also have lower per capita income (Martin, J. A., Hamilton, B. E., Sutton, P. D., Ventura, S. J., Menacker, F., & Munson, M. L. 2005). Furthermore, because Latinos have been historically of low-income, many middle-income

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2 First generation refers to immigrants, with subsequent generations defined as those born post immigration. Thus, someone who is second generation will often be the U.S. born child of immigrant parents.
Latinos will have less family wealth to rely on, and may in fact need to share their own income with extended family members of lower-income classes (Patillo-McCoy, 1999). Additionally, data on the educational attainment of parents of U.S. public school students found Latino parents to be far behind White parents at all educational levels (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2005). Latinos have also been more likely to attend segregated and often disproportionately low-income schools (Orfield & Lee, 2005), and on average, may have attended less selective colleges than their White counterparts (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 83).

Discrimination is yet another factor found to negatively impact middle-class Latinos. In her study of Mexican-Americans earning incomes well above the national median, Agius Vallejo (2012) stated that nearly all respondents “recounted occasions where they had been subjected to ethnic, gender, or immigrant stereotypes” (p. 178) and reaffirmed how simply growing up in the middle class does not shield a person from discrimination, especially for those who are of dark skin or who have Latino surnames. Some of the implications of discrimination were feelings of degradation during social interactions. Also, upon entering the middle-class, some respondents expressed “That they were incorporating as middle-class minorities, rather than as middle-class Whites,” (p. 178) while those who had grown up middle class reported having to deal with pejorative stereotypes.

Overall, the economic and educational challenges that Latino parents face in comparison to White parents of their same socioeconomic status may hinder their ability to impart similar levels of educational support on their children. Despite these challenges, however, Latino parents continue to participate in the educational advancement of their children. For instance, not only have they made personal sacrifices for their children (López, 2001), but they have also been
actively involved in their children’s educational (Ramirez, 2003) and social (Guilamo-Ramos, V., Dittus, P., Jaccard, J., Johansson, M., Bouris, A., & Acosta, N., 2007) development. Such parent attitudes and behaviors may prove beneficial to the educational advancement Latino children since the parental involvement literature has overwhelmingly demonstrated that parents who are involved in their children’s schooling often have children who achieve higher educational outcomes (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Problem Statement

As the Latino population continues to grow, more Latinos will aspire to become middle-class citizens and college graduates. For this reason, countering the underachievement crisis that currently plagues Latinos at all socioeconomic levels is crucial if the United States is to remain globally competitive. Existing literature has offered much regarding the achievement of poor and working class Latinos living in low-income communities; however, the entrance of Latinos into higher socioeconomic classes does not translate to an end to their educational and economic struggles. In consideration of the struggles that middle-class Latino families face, and the need for Latinos to progress academically at all socioeconomic levels, the literature on the educational underachievement of Latinos should include the experiences of those who are middle-income and living in middle-class communities. Understanding the undercurrents of parental involvement among middle-class Latinos is also consequential to the body of literature since positive relationships have often been found between student academic achievement and parental involvement (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005; Sirvani, 2007), including across diverse populations (St. Clair & Jackson, 2006; Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2006; Sirvani, 2007).
Positive Links between Parental Involvement and Educational Outcomes

In much of the literature, parental involvement has been found to positively relate to student academic achievement (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Jeynes, 2005a). For instance, parental involvement has been related to increased achievement in mathematics (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Sirvani, 2007) and reading (Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005), higher grade point averages and standardized test scores (Desimone, 1999; Domina, 2005; Jeynes, 2005b), as well as increased student participation in school (Simon, 2001), and decreased dropout rates (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Also, students whose parents are involved in their education have demonstrated more positive attitudes towards school and more time spent on school assignments (Trusty, 1996) as well as lower retention rates or placements in special education classes (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). Increased parent involvement has further been related to early social competence (Hill & Craft, 2003) and increased social capital or parent-acquired skills and information (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006), both of which can positively affect academic success.

The benefits of parental involvement to student academic achievement are evident throughout different student populations. For example, positive relationships between parental involvement and academic achievement have persisted among English Language Learner (ELL) students (St. Clair & Jackson, 2006), members of racial and ethnic minority groups (Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2006; Sirvani, 2007), elementary school students (Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005; Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2006; St. Clair & Jackson, 2006), as well as middle school and high school students (Jeynes, 2005a; Yan & Lin, 2005; Sirvani, 2007). Similar results linking involvement to achievement have also been found in studies focusing on Latino families, even
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though these studies focus on dominantly lower-SES samples (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Eamon, 2005).

Parental Involvement and Middle-Class Latinos

While much remains unknown of the parental involvement practices of middle-class Latinos, literature on middle class White students and their parents allows for some insight of what may be expected. For instance, middle-class parents have possessed a level of entitlement (Lareau, 1989) in selecting schools they feel meet the needs of their children (Diamond & Gomez, 2004); they have also been known to influence schools for the benefit of their own children even when it meant negatively affecting other low-income and minority students and their families (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009). Additionally, social capital, understood as parent’s skills, knowledge, and information resulting from parent school involvement, has also been higher for members of the middle-class (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006), and middle-class parents have been more likely to act as a collective and to obtain assistance from professionals when compared to parents from lower socioeconomic classes (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). As a result, parents in the middle-class present their children with more resources such as tutoring, enrichment opportunities, and curriculum extensions outside schools (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Furthermore, in middle-class communities, childrearing among middle-income parents have commonly aligned with particular norms and practices such as allowing children constant participation in extracurricular activities and welcoming children’s thoughts and opinions in every day conversation (Lareau, 2003). Middle-class parents have also been known to employ subtle and indirect forms of control over their children (Weininger & Lareau, 2009) as opposed to authoritative forms of parenting.
While all the aforementioned factors may influence the educational involvement of middle-income parents, it is unclear whether they will translate to middle-class Latino parents in similar ways. Latino parents may share certain commonalities with their non-Latino counterparts from comparable social classes, especially those who were raised in the middle-class (Telles & Ortiz, 2008); however, the multiple economic and educational struggles that Latinos have historically faced, leading to differences in available income, wealth, and educational experiences (Gándara & Contreras, 2009) may also impact their educational involvement and childrearing practices. As the Latino population continues to grow and Latino parents continue to establish a presence in middle-class communities, understanding these differences may help establish a way to combat the widespread underachievement afflicting this growing segment of the U.S. population.

One clear measure that can be taken to support the educational advancement and equality of middle-class Latinos is to better understand how parents are involved in the education of their children. Latinos face potential benefits and burdens tied to their participation in the middle-class, from increased social capital (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006) when compared to lower-socioeconomic classes, to competitive pressure and “over-involvement” of their parents (Levine, 2006) which may yield counterproductive results. Even the individualistic nature of middle-class parents (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009) may cause those who are most influential at their children’s schools to promote measures which benefit their own children at the risk of students whose parents may not have the same level of influence.

Research Questions

An ever increasing Latino population and the problem of underachievement at all socioeconomic levels that it faces establishes a need to arrive at pragmatic solutions. Based on
Latino parents’ active involvement in the education of their children, and what the literature has shown regarding the benefits of parental involvement on academic achievement, the involvement dynamics of Latinos at all socioeconomic levels is of consequence to the educational literature. Furthermore, while middle-class Latinos have faced issues or problems similar to their poorer Latino counterparts, their experiences become an important part of the parental involvement literature because …. This study looks to find answers to fundamental questions related to the parental involvement dynamics of this prominent ethnic group.

1. In which ways are middle class Latino parents involved in their children’s education and how do they explain their levels and forms of involvement?

2. What do Latino parents understand to be the most significant obstacles to their children’s academic success and how, if at all, do they respond to these obstacles?

Research Design

Through a semi-structured, interview-based method of inquiry, this narrative study looks to enrich the existing literature by presenting the experiences of middle-income Latino parents living in a middle-class community, with special emphasis on documenting these parents’ involvement in the educational development of their children. Inductive reasoning was used following Maxwell’s (2005) recommendation when engaging an “understudied phenomena” (p. 80). Conceptual frameworks found throughout the literature also helped to guide the research. Specifically, literature on middle-class parental involvement (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003) and childrearing (Lereau, 2003; Levine, 2006), as well as the childrearing practices of Latino parents overall (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007) and the known experiences that they have reported when engaging their children’s schools (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Auerbach, 2002; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez,
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2003; Jones, 2003; Agius Vallejo, 2012; Gándara & Contreras, 2009) are all part of this study’s research design. However, frameworks found in the literature were only used to establish research questions and at the end of the data analysis process once inductive analysis was exhausted fully. Through this study’s semi-structured method of inquiry, the preceding research questions will be answered using the told experiences of the parents interviewed.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The parental involvement literature presents many examples where acts of involvement positively relate to academic achievement measures. These examples are found across many demographical parameters showing the importance of all children to have parents who are involved in their education. For instance, benefits of parental involvement to educational success have been found across race and ethnicity (St. Clair & Jackson, 2006; Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2006), socioeconomic lines (Weininger & Lareau, 2009; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012), and student grade levels (Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005; Sirvani, 2007). Thus, parental involvement within middle-class Latino families will be important to the educational progress of their children, as this is often the case among all groups regardless of student or family demographics.

At the same time, while involvement and achievement have generally related to each other positively across demographic lines, involvement dynamics found between groups are not always identical. How parents are involved and the relationships between acts of involvement and achievement measures have well differed across student age and grade level (Hill & Tyson, 2009), socioeconomic status (Diamond & Gomez, 2004), and family cultural norms (Lareau, 2003). As a result, even though overall trends between involvement and achievement may be consequential to understanding the educational participation of middle-income Latino parents in middle-class communities, undercurrents found among different participant groups are also important to consider.

Parental Involvement and Student Academic Outcomes

As parental involvement is most often measured against student academic outcomes, most studies have found positive relationships between involvement and achievement among different participant groups. These relationships help build a web of recurring themes which are
reflected in three particular meta-analyses, all of which used standardized test scores, course grade point averages, and grade point averages overall as their primary outcome variables.

The first study is that of Jeynes (2012), who looking at fifty-one studies, examined the relationship between parental involvement programs – “school-sponsored initiatives that are designed to require or encourage parental participation in their children’s education” (p.707) and the academic achievement of pre-kindergarten to 12th grade school children. The second belongs to Hill and Tyson (2009), who focusing on middle school students across fifty individual studies, looked at the relationships between different types of parental involvement and student academic performance outcomes. Lastly, Fan and Chen (2001) examined twenty-five quantitative studies in an effort to better understand the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement.

In these three meta-analyses, results showed positive links between parent involvement practices and student achievement outcomes, with a small number of examples to the contrary. In Jeynes (2012), parent involvement programs overall were significantly related to the academic achievement of pre-elementary, elementary, and secondary school children. Among early adolescents, Hill and Tyson (2009) found that all types of parental involvement, except for parent help with homework, positively associated to achievement, with academic socialization having the strongest positive relationship. And across the twenty-five quantitative studies that Fan and Chen (2001) analyzed, a meaningful effect was found between parental involvement and academic achievement where achievement and parental aspirations and expectations provided the strongest relationship. Fan and Chen (2001) further found parental home supervision to have the weakest relationship to achievement. Thus, considering the results from all three meta-analyses, involvement often relates positively to achievement at all levels of k-12 education;
however, types of involvement that reflect authoritarian parental practices often show no relationship to achievement, or may even have a negative relationship to achievement, especially for students who have reached adolescence.

Looking at individual studies, similar trends to those found in Jeynes (2012), Hill & Tyson (2009), and Fan & Chen (2001) prevail. Specifically, positive relationships between involvement and achievement heavily dominate the literature overall – mostly in the academic fields of mathematics and literacy – while some limited cases showing either no relationship or a negative relationship between involvement and achievement prevail as well.

Results showing positive relationships between types of involvement and math achievement outcomes are prominent in the literature. For instance, the effective implementation of practices that encouraged family at-home support in children’s mathematics learning (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005), and parents receiving academic updates from their children’s schools (Sirvani, 2007) have positively related to mathematics achievement measures. Furthermore, children’s home environments have positively affected their attitudes towards mathematics (Balli, 1998); parents’ beliefs and expectations for their children in mathematics have predicted student achievement in both elementary and middle school mathematics (Gill & Reynolds, 1999); and students whose parents attended training and information workshops and obtained materials to help their preschool children at home (Starkey & Klein, 2000) and elementary students at home (Westat and Policy Studies Associates, 2001) have made greater gains in mathematics achievement than did students whose parents did not attend these workshops.

Positive relationships between parental involvement and student achievement in reading has also helped to establish what we know about parental involvement. For instance, parental involvement has been positively and significantly related to children’s reading motivation
Loera, Rueda, and Nakamoto (2011), and students most at risk in reading have realized significant achievement results when their parents received training for a parent-tutoring reading program (Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005). Loera, Rueda, and Nakamoto (2011) further present studies which have shown positive links between literacy and parental involvement such that active forms of involvement, such as reading to children and providing at-home reading materials, positively associated with children’s later reading achievement and academic engagement (Davis-Kean & Eccles, 2003; Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002). Additionally, Rasinski and Stevenson (2005) presented various studies showing parental involvement, from early childhood through adolescent education, benefiting children’s learning and school success, especially in literacy (Chavkin, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1994; Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992; Rasinski, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

Generally throughout the constant parental involvement literature, multiple examples of involvement relating positively to achievement, especially in the core subjects of math and reading, have been realized. However, some studies have shown either a negative relationship or no relationship between certain types of involvement and achievement, as consistent in the meta-analyses of Jeynes (2012), Hill & Tyson (2009), and Fan & Chen (2001). For instance, parental involvement in Latino children’s schooling has been found not to be significantly related to reading motivation (Loera, Rueda, & Nakamoto, 2011). Similar results have also been found across grade level. In one study, even though parents of elementary school children correctly implemented two separate parent tutoring reading programs, neither program had a significant effect on the reading achievement of their children (Powell-Smith, Stoner, Shinn, & Good III, 2000). Furthermore, at the middle-school level, increasing family involvement has not related to student achievement in mathematics (Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1997).
Other studies have further shown negative relationships between parental involvement and academic achievement. For example, in a study of pathways between parenting practices and children’s motivational orientation toward school work, Bronstein, Ginsburg, and Herrera (2005) found that mothers who closely monitored homework completion may have negatively influenced their children’s level of responsibility over their own learning as well as their outlook towards school work. They also demonstrated that critical and punitive reactions to low grades by parents might have helped increase discouragement in their children, and that even parents who offered or provided rewards for grades may have further fostered more extrinsic motivational orientation in their children.

The overall literature on parental involvement shows that while involvement often yields positive results in relating to student academic achievement, predicting these positive relationships is not an exact science. To further exemplify, studies have shown that as youth near adolescence, less authoritative forms of involvement are most beneficial (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001), yet positive relationships have been observed between the math achievement of high school students and parents receiving academic monitoring sheets (Sirvani, 2007). However, inconsistencies in empirical results of involvement’s relationship to achievement is only one level of variance found throughout the literature.

Dissecting the Parental Involvement Literature

While parental involvement can be a prominent tool in raising the educational achievement of students, there is much divergence in the literature, from what defines involvement to the different populations and theoretical frameworks covered. For instance, practices of parental involvement often include many different parent actions and behaviors found within the subcategories of school-based and home-based involvement (Epstein, 1987).
These actions will include meeting with teacher and parent groups, checking and helping students with their homework, and employing community resources. The literature also focuses on diverse populations, ranging across social and economic classes (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Weininger & Lareau, 2009), racial and ethnic groups (Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2006; Sirvani, 2007), and student grade and age levels (Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Even the use and application of various theoretical frameworks differs among prominent researchers (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Jeynes, 2011; Hill & Tyson, 2009).

High levels of divergence within the parental involvement literature calls for a critical view of that literature, as does the population of interest in the current study. Middle-income Latinos living in middle-class communities can be considered a hybrid population, or one that associates with members of several cultural, social, and economic classes. For instance, members of this group may be influenced by other middle-income individuals of various races and ethnicities, while still having strong ties to family members and friends living in poorer communities; they may also be influenced by their own experiences as previous members of poor and working class communities themselves. As a result, when considering a population like that of middle-income Latinos living in middle-class communities, a clear understanding of the many ways that parent involvement types and behaviors have differed throughout the literature, especially across demographic lines, is required.

Parent Involvement Typology and Divergences

Specifying and defining types of parent involvement is important when determining relationships between involvement and achievement measures. One reason is that involvement types may associate to school related outcomes differently across grade level. According to Hill and Tyson (2009), research has demonstrated that the strength of the relation between parental
involvement and achievement declines between elementary and middle school (Singh, K., Bickley, P, Trivette, P., Keith, T. Z., Keith, P. B., & Anderson, E., 1995), yet other aspects of involvement may increase in significance across these same time periods (Chao, Kanatsu, Stanoff, Padmawidjaja, & Aque, 2009) and beyond. Singh et al. (1995) looked at the effects of different parental involvement components on the academic achievement of 8th graders. These components were “parental aspirations for children's education, parent-child communication about school, home structure, and parental participation in school-related activities” (p. 299). Results showed that while the educational aspirations of parents did have a powerful influence on achievement, the other three factors showed either a small negative effect or no effect at all. The authors concluded that different components of parent involvement had differential effects on student achievement, explaining that involvement may affect academic achievement more in elementary school than in middle school. However, Chao et al. (2009) explain that so few studies focus on parental involvement during middle school and high school that it is unclear whether trends showing a decrease in parental involvement after elementary school are actually due to declines in only specific types of involvement. The authors contend that some involvement types may actually increase during later academic years, such as involvement which may increase adolescents’ chances of college acceptance during high school. Thus, both Singh (1995) and Chao et al. (2009), like Hill and Tyson (2011), show how types of involvement may relate to academic achievement measures differently across grade level.

Another study promoting the importance of typology is Jeynes’ (2011) critique of parental involvement research which asks for reconsideration of how involvement is viewed and used in future studies. Jeynes (2011) initially states that involvement has been traditionally
conceptualized as “a set of deliberate, overt actions (Kelly, 2004)” such as parents frequently attending school functions, helping their children with their homework, and maintaining certain household rules. Then, using his own meta-analyses (2003, 2005, 2007) as support, he goes on to challenge the use of traditional concepts stating that “the most powerful aspects of parental involvement are frequently subtle, such as maintaining high expectations of one’s children, communicating with children, and parental style.” Jeynes (2011) calls in how parent involvement is viewed, and a change to the types of involvement employed in future studies.

Since some traditional forms of involvement have related positively to academic achievement measures (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Sirvani, 2007; Loera, Rueda, & Nakamoto, 2011), Jeynes’ (2011) stance does not foreshadow an end to the use of traditional frameworks, like Epstein’s (1987). Furthermore, Jeynes’ own work on parent involvement programs (2012) has found positive links between traditional involvement types and student achievement. For example, parents reading with their children, checking homework, and communicating and partnering with teachers were components of the parent involvement programs that predicted achievement in students (Jeynes, 2012). All four components have direct links to Epstein’s (1986, 1987) parental involvement framework. However, the need to redefine parental involvement strategies, and think about which types work at which grade levels is being promoted by Jeynes (2011) as was also the case in Hill & Tyson’s (2009) meta-analysis. As a result, the literature has shown that it is important to understand the dynamics of different types of parental involvement across grade levels, regardless of whether it is through traditional forms or alternative ones; whether they solely describe practices or also beliefs (i.e. expectations) and childrearing practices (i.e. parenting styles).
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Parental Involvement across Age and Grade Level

The literature on parental involvement, most of which focuses on academic achievement outcomes, has found some consistent differences across student age and grade level. During earlier academic years, parent involvement programs and parent-child literacy practices delineate the types of involvement that may promote student academic achievement across various races/ethnicities and SES levels (St. Clair & Jackson, 2006; Reutzel et al., 2006; Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005). However, while positive results also persist in middle school and high school, dynamics between parent involvement and student outcomes change (Sirvani, 2007; Jeynes, 2005a; Yan & Lin, 2005). In later grades, not only are results increasingly mixed, but there are also some between group differences across race/ethnicity and SES, as will be discussed in the subsequent section.

Focusing on the earlier years of a child’s educational career, St. Clair & Jackson (2006) looked at Kindergarten English Language Learner (ELL) students living in a rural Midwest area, 97 percent of whom were Latino. They found that students whose parents enrolled in a parental involvement training program scored significantly higher on language measures than non-participating students. Parents in the training program took part in adult education, parent education, and parent-child literacy activities (St. Clair & Jackson, 2006). Another study (Reutzel et al., 2006) evaluated a first-grade, parental involvement program consisting of at-home literacy support. The study was conducted among mostly African-American, Latino, and Asian youth, most of whom were on free or reduced lunch and attended high poverty, low performing elementary schools. Results from the study supported the parental involvement program since experimental group students outperformed their counterparts in reading as determined through the use of pre- and post-test results. Similarly, Rasinski and Stevenson
(2005) studied the effects of an at-home fluency reading program. Their 1st grade participants, most of whom were Caucasian, resided in a suburban community. Rasinski and Stevenson (2005) established that lower-achieving students in the experimental group significantly outperformed those in the control group.

At the high school level, Sirvani (2007) found improvements in the mathematics-schoolwork achievement of students whose parents monitored their homework and received bi-weekly reports of student grades; most of the students participating in this study were either African-American or Latino high school freshman and on reduced or free school lunch. In a previous study conducted among African-American 12th graders, Jeynes (2005b), using NELS data, found certain parent involvement types had a positive impact on academic achievement. Involvement types included parents attending school functions, having school-related communication with students, having high-expectations of their children’s success, and checking homework (Jeynes, 2005b). Like Jeynes (2005b), Yan and Lin (2005) used NELS data to study the relationship between different forms of parent involvement and academic achievement. They studied the relationships between three determinants of involvement – family obligations, family norms, and parent information networks – and the academic math achievement of Caucasian, African-American, Latino, and Asian 12th grade students. The results outlined both differences and similarities across race and ethnicity where parent involvement as a form of social capital was a significant indicator of math achievement among Caucasian students; close relationships between parents and their children positively influenced math achievement for all minority groups (except for Latinos); and educational expectations proved to have the strongest positive effect on math achievement regardless of racial or ethnic background.
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Parental Involvement across Race/Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status

While grade- and age-level differences clearly exist in the relationships between parent involvement and student outcomes, divergences across race/ethnicity and SES levels have also been documented. (Some prominent studies, like Weininger & Lareau (2009) have focused solely on SES-level variance.) The following studies serve as exemplars of how parent involvement and childrearing practices may follow trajectories consistent among members of a particular social class.

Diamond & Gomez (2004) focused most of their study on the previous interview data of eight middle class African-American parents (Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, & Mintz, 1988) and ten working-class African-American parents (Diamond, 2000). All interviews focused on these parents’ involvement in their children’s educational experiences in the city of Chicago. In their study, the authors found that middle class African Americans, due to their economic, human, social, and cultural capital, were more likely to choose the schools their children attended, and as a result, tailor their children’s educational experience. Differences were also apparent between the two groups: middle-class parents felt more entitled regarding the selection of schools; they tended to assess their children’s schools more favorably; and they were more likely to be supportive towards these schools.

Weininger & Lareau’s (2009) study shows variance in childrearing practices across SES levels. They drew from one of Lareau’s prior qualitative studies (2003) of 88 children, ages 8 to 10 years old. The study sample enrolled a relatively even number of White and African American children with a small number of Asians and Latino. In this study, Weininger & Lareau (2009) found that middle-class parents often employed subtle, indirect forms of control over their children, and would place them in settings that stimulated their curiosity and self-control.
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Working-class and poor parents, by contrast, tended to value conformity to external authority for their children. Their children were also less subject to adult authority and much of their leisure time was self-managed, away from adults and their requirements; a measure which allowed them to exercise more initiative and make their own decisions.

Additionally, Lareau & Weininger’s (2008) quantitative analysis portion of their mixed-methods study serves as yet another example of how parent involvement and childrearing practices may vary across socioeconomic lines. (Their qualitative section focuses on the prior sample previously discussed.) Looking at data from the Child Development Supplement (CDS) and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID)\(^3\), and borrowing from a qualitative data set of working- and middle-class families with children between the ages of 8 and 10 years of age (Lareau, 2003), analyses showed children’s participation in organized leisure to be closely linked to various dimensions of socioeconomic status. These results were also consistent with those of Hofferth and Sandberg (2001) and Lareau (2003).

Social Capital and Childrearing Practices

The literature, in discussing differences in parent involvement across SES levels and race/ethnicity, also focuses on the topics of social capital and childrearing practices. Both topics have become instrumental in understanding how different populations operate within their communities.

Coleman (1988) introduces the concept of social capital through three forms: (1) obligations and expectations, (2) information channels, and (3) social norms. The notion of social capital as obligations and expectations is that “people are always doing things for each other” (p.

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\(^3\) The PSID is a longitudinal study started in 1968 that continuously gathered information on a representative sample of the US population and which was updated in 1997 to reflect population changes caused by immigration.
one party does something for the other with the idea that it will be reciprocated in the future. The second form of social capital is information existing in social relations. Coleman (1988) explains that acquiring information is costly since it requires attention, “which is always in scarce supply” (p. 104), but that social relations can facilitate the attaining of pertinent information. Lastly, Coleman (1988) describes social norms as a powerful yet fragile form of social capital, where norms promote particular behaviors aligning with the interests of the collective. Those whose actions and interests align with these norms are rewarded, while those who deviate from them may be penalized.

Researchers have drawn on Coleman’s (1988) work extensively when discussing parent involvement as a form of social capital. Social capital has also been categorized as increases in parents’ skills and information resulting from parental school involvement (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006); as well as access to resources (i.e. books and study aids) and sources of social control (i.e. school-home agreements on behavior expectations and educational values). Increases in these latter forms of social capital allow students to access additional supports and resources including: tutoring, enrichments opportunities, or curriculum extensions outside their schools (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006) which can positively influence their academic achievement.

While the literature has shown that parent involvement can produce social capital for parents and students, its attainment is not always equitable. McNeal (1999) stated that “the potential benefit of social capital is likely relative and dependent upon the parent’s position in the social hierarchy” (p. 120). Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau’s (2003) ethnographic study focusing on the parent networks dimension of social capital support McNeal’s (1999) statement. In the study, middle-class parents were more likely than their working-class and poor
counterparts to act in a collective and to employ the support of professionals when challenging the judgments of school officials. In another study, Desimone (1999) found that school-level volunteering by parents was a significant predictor of academic achievement among middle income and White children, stating that economic constraints would hinder the ability of low income and minority parents to volunteer to a similar degree.

Childrearing practices, like parental involvement as a form of social capital, has also shown difference across socioeconomic lines. In her book on how class, race, and family dynamics all influence an individual’s childhood into adulthood, Lareau (2003) posits that social class influences critical aspects of family life such as time use, language use, and kin ties, even when family members themselves are not necessarily conscious of the existence of social class. Lareau (2003) presents concerted cultivation as a guided, or orchestrated, establishment of norms and practices that parents impart on their children. This childrearing model includes continual participation by children in extracurricular activities and a welcoming of children’s thoughts and opinions in everyday conversations by parents. Parents linked to the concerted cultivation paradigm may also engage in conversation-style communication with their children, even at an age when their children are not yet able to speak, assisting their children to later assume roles as conversational partners, even among adults. As a result, children may benefit from an extensive vocabulary at an earlier age, and from a future ability to negotiate with adults in useful and meaningful manners, especially at institutions like schools. The accomplishment of natural growth, by contrast, often has parents setting clear boundaries for their children. Rather than prompting their children’s feelings, opinions, and thoughts, these parents often give directives. Even though children engaged in this type of upbringing may not develop similar benefits in their linguistic ability or their ability to communicate, nor might they participate in
extracurricular activities to the same degree as those encountering a concerted cultivation-type childhood, they will spend more time playing with friends and relatives and have a higher level of autonomy regarding their leisure.

Lareau (2003) further explains how middle-class parents often assume the concerted cultivation style of parenting due to economic freedoms that allow them to organize activities for their children. Working-class parents may have to focus their efforts on providing food, housing, safety, health, and order in their children’s lives, leading to the presence of aspects relative to the accomplishment of natural growth model. Neither parenting model, however, is ultimately placed above the other, even though important social institutions (like schools and places of employment) apply different social values to each of these practices. Lareau (2003) argues that concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth both offer intrinsic benefits and burdens for parents and their children (p. 241).

While some studies, in an attempt to better understand the effects of parent involvement on youth, have demonstrated that patterns of parent involvement can vary across both racial/ethnic and economic lines (Desimone, 1999; Catsambis, Garland, & Risk, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987; Muller & Kerbow, 1993), Lareau’s (2003) ethnographic study concludes that social class critically influences children’s life experiences more than the cultural factors at the race/ethnicity level. As a result, when focusing on the parental involvement of middle-class Latinos, although culture can play a role in the undercurrents of their involvement, Lareau (2003) would argue social status a stronger predictor. Based on Lareau’s (2003) findings, a study on the parental involvement of middle-class Latinos should be first guided by the middle class parental involvement literature, and then by findings relative to Latino parental involvement.
Parent Involvement of the Middle-Class

Literature on the educational involvement of middle class parents has provided mixed results in terms of the benefits of such involvement for children. Research has shown that middle-class parents are actively involved in their children’s schooling (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Lareau, 2003; Lareau & Weininger, 2008) and the involvement of these parents has been known to positively influence children’s academic performance as well as teacher perceptions (Domina, 2005; Jeynes, 2003). However, “over involvement” (Levine, 2006) and the pressure that these parents place on their children’s academic performance (Honore, 2008; Levine, 2006; Quart, 2006), has also been found to have some adverse effects. Some parents, recognizing the possibility of added pressures at a premature age, have opted to delay their children’s entry into Kindergarten to allow them additional time to develop before encountering the pressures of school-related expectations (Frey, 2005). Other middle-class parents, often at the elementary school level, have practiced “emotional safeguarding,” or what Warner (2010) describes as “a parental practice to protect children’s happiness… when children’s emotions become parents’ primary motivation for intervention” This later case has parents expecting schools to assist in the facilitation of their children’s happiness with school and in establishing a love of learning.

The literature has also shown the ability of some middle-class parents to influence their children’s schools, even though benefits resulting from parent interventions led to mixed results. For example, Cucchiara & Horvart’s (2009) study on middle-class parent involvement in two urban schools and its effect on the overall school community found that at both schools, middle-class parents were able to use their social, cultural, and economic capital to empower the schools by bringing additional resources, supporting school programs and projects, and acting as school
advocates. However, at one of the sites, these efforts were part of a collective or inclusive approach, and thus benefited all students and their families regardless of social class; while at the other, middle class parents’ individualistic approach negatively affected low-income and minority students and their families.

While literature on middle class parental involvement provides some mixed results, there is also a major gap in the literature. Specifically, the involvement practices of racially/ethnic and culturally diverse groups have not been documented, especially for members of the Latino ethnic group. Though Lareau (2003) did study both African-American and White middle class families, like much of the literature, her study was limited in discussing members of the Latino middle class. Not only are Latinos of consequence due to their ever growing presence in middle class communities, but Latinos also have specific cultural aspects of parental involvement that may set them aside from other racial/ethnic groups.

Latino Childrearing Practices

Understanding the parent involvement of Latinos at any socioeconomic level requires an understanding of the childrearing norms found among Latino families. These norms include the Latino cultural components of: *familismo*, *respeto*, *personalismo*, and *simpatia*.

In the literature on Latino parental involvement, *familismo* is defined as Latino attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms that help shape worldviews, personal and family decision making, and certain behaviors including parenting practices (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007). Coohey (2001) portrays *familismo* as the most important factor in shaping the lives of Latinos, and relates it not just to the immediate family (of the child), but to an “extended kinship network” that provides support to its members (Delgado, 1992; Zayas, 1992). In this way, *familismo* becomes a form of...
social capital for the members of Latino families who are able to elicit support from others within this family-based network.

*Simpatia* has been used to describe Latino families’ avoidance of controversy and conflict, and has been associated with being polite, agreeable, and respectful towards others (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007). Griffith, Joe, Chatman, and Simpson (1998) further associate *simpatia* with higher levels of conformity, empathy, dignity and respect towards other people, and say that those who personify *simpatia* will strive to achieve harmony in their interpersonal relations; some earlier studies have related aspects of *simpatia* to Latino families (Kagan, Knight, & Marinez-Romero, 1982; Kagan & Madsen, 1971; Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, & Betancourt, 1984), as has Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2007), most recently among urban Dominican and Puerto Rican families.

Relative to the components of *familismo* and *simpatia*, *personalismo* values the positive personal character and inner qualities of individuals. However, *personalismo* may also lead to the preference of dealing with ones’ own ethnic group (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007; Marin, 1989). This may result since choosing whom to interact with is often based on the specific personality traits of that person, and most will choose individuals whose personalities resonate with their own. As such, adoption of the *personalismo* component will lead to culture-based separation between Latinos and U.S. schools. Nevertheless, since interpersonal connectedness, cooperation, and mutual reciprocity (with others) has been related to feelings of warmth, trust, and respect (Flores, Eyre, & Millstein, 1998; Gloria & Peregoy, 1996; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007), if these three traits are established between Latino families and members of mainstream institutions, like schools, *personalismo* then may promote harmony among individuals of varied racial/ethnic orientations.
Respeto is understood as the idea of respecting one’s elders and figures of authority which may include teachers and other school personnel. According to Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2007), much in the literature relative to respeto has to do with the authoritarian and control oriented nature that is often associated with Latino parents (Florsheim, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 1996; Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey 1994); however, several studies have disagreed with this image of the Latino parent by presenting the “warmth and freedom” that characterizes some Latino families (Calzada & Eyberg, 2002; Fox & Solis-Camara, 1997; Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey; Vega, 1990).

While many examples of literature relating familismo, respeto, personalismo, and simpatia to Latino families will seem outdated (since most of the literature was published in the 1980s and 1990s), Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2007) found prevalence of all four components among themes surrounding his sample of urban Dominican and Puerto Rican mothers and their adolescent children. Additionally, Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2007) also revealed five parenting practices which may be prevalent among Latino families. These practices include: ensuring close monitoring of adolescents; maintaining warm and supportive relationships characterized by high levels of parent-adolescent interaction and sharing; explaining parental decisions and actions; making an effort to build and improve relationships; and differential parenting practices based on adolescents’ gender. Mothers within the study (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007) were also concerned that their children’s exposure to different cultural values may pose certain risks, showing that they valued their native culture and hoped that it would remain with their children as well.
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Generational Differences among Middle-Class Latinos

While the components of *familismo*, *respeto*, *personalismo*, and *simpatia* have been related to Latino families, differences have emerged between Latinos of different generations and family socioeconomic backgrounds. In Agius Vallejo’s (2012) study, middle-class Mexican Americans often originated from one of two socioeconomic backgrounds: those who were the first to enter the middle-class or those who grew up within the middle-class. Consequently, Latinos raised within lower socioeconomic classes established stronger ties to poorer kin; they were also more likely to become sources of social and financial support for these kin. This reality resonates with the different levels of wealth and family sizes between Latino and White Americans across all socioeconomic groups, where Latinos become consistently economically disadvantaged in comparison (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Agius Vallejo (2012) adds to this disadvantage not only the need to support poorer kin financially, but also to provide them with social support, which will take away from time available to support the education of their children.

By contrast, Latinos raised in the middle-class were often not subject to the same level of financial assistance to kin, even when these kin were impoverished. According to Agius Vallejo (2012), 3rd and 4th generation Mexican American who grew up with the middle-class more closely resembled middle-class individualism as commonly among White Americans. Differences persisted as Mexican Americans of the later generations often referred to themselves as “American” (p. 131) versus the 1.5 generation who identified as “Mexican” (p. 110). Later generations were also less likely to speak any Spanish. Those of earlier generations, however, not only spoke Spanish fluently, but saw this act as a reinforcement of their ethnic and class difference to White middle-class members and a reminder of their brand as “outsiders” (p. 114).
Whether the childrearing and involvement practices of middle-class Latinos converge towards practices traditionally linked to middle-class Whites or to those of low-income Latinos may thus be influenced by differences in their self-identity and other life patterns, as are wealth, income, and time constraints.

However, while 3rd and 4th generation Latinos with multi-generational membership in the middle class may have experienced high levels of assimilation, they will not necessarily personify the same childrearing and involvement behaviors of the White middle-class. Multiple factors still influence the lives of these Latinos. The color of their skin (Jiménez, 2010) or generational ethnic cultural practices (Vasquez, 2011) may tie them to their Latino origins (Agius Vallejo, 2012); some have also faced “immigrant stereotypes and discriminatory attacks by whites” (p. 132). While Agius Vallejo’s (2012) study focuses on Mexican-Americans, similar factors have been found among members of the Black middle class. Blacks have been found to be more at risk of downward mobility than Whites due to discrimination, lower commitments to affirmative action, ties to poorer kin, and less foundational establishments as members of the middle-class, (Patillo-McCoy, 2013), as well as the wealth gap between White families and Black families which have been shown to influence school decision making (Johnson, 2006).

As various studies have demonstrated, ethnic and racial minorities follow different trajectories across socioeconomic lines than do White American, as these dynamics can greatly influence the way they raise their children and become involved in their schooling. The literature presented some insights on the experiences of middle-class Latinos (Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Agius Vallejo, 2012; Gándara & Contreras, 2009), sometimes through the experiences of Blacks (Johnson, 2006; Patillo-McCoy, 1999, 2013). However, there is a gap in the educational literature on the parental involvement practices of middle-class Latinos. Though some studies
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have done well in explaining childrearing among middle-class minority groups (Lareau, 2003), there are many implications leading to a need to incorporate the experiences of middle-income Latinos in middle-class communities.

Limitation in the Parental Involvement Literature

Latino participation in middle-class communities is limited compared to the participation of Whites and Asian Americans; nevertheless, focusing attention on middle-income Latinos who currently reside within middle-class communities can be instrumental in increasing their future participation at this socioeconomic level and their retention of a middle-class status. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce (2006), about half of all White families and approximately 60 percent of Asian families in 2005 had incomes $60,000 or higher, while slightly less than 28 percent of Latino families earned comparable incomes (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Yet, Latino students across all socioeconomic lines academically underperform (as indicated by SAT scores) their White counterparts (The College Board, 2004). Thus, while one in four Latino families may be middle-income, their children are still victim to lower educational achievement similar to Latinos of lower SES groups.

There are many reasons to focus on the parental involvement of Latino families from middle income communities. Latinos are a large part of the U.S. population (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011) and are projected to become an even greater proportion (Cárdenas, Ajinkya, & Léger, 2011). Yet, their underachievement at all socioeconomic levels has been well documented (Gándara, 2010; Gándara & Contreras, 2009), as well as the many barriers that they and their families face (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). As the Latino ethnic group continues to expand, their continued rates of underachievement can bring the U.S. to an economic crisis.
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The benefits of parental involvement have been infinite (Jeynes, 2012; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001), especially across core subjects like mathematics and literacy (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005) and varied demographic groups such as ethnic and racial minorities (Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2006) and across grade levels. Sirvani, 2007; St. Clair & Jackson, 2006). While the literature has repeatedly shown that children whose parents are involved in their education academically outperform those whose parents are not, our knowledge of the parental involvement dynamic among middle-class Latinos is limited amidst the many factors that make this group important to the educational literature.

Theoretical Frameworks

Looking at the parental involvement dynamics of an understudied group requires the employment of frameworks that encapsulate a variety of involvement. While connections to specific theories of involvement can be hypothesized using results found among similar groups, it is also important to invite a general view of involvement as this may help shed light on new actions and dynamics not previously considered. For example, the parental involvement of middle-income Latino parents living in middle-class communities may, in part, relate to the childrearing (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007) and involvement (Duran & Perez, 2013) practices of Latino families, the involvement practices (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009) and childrearing (Lareau, 2003) of non-Latino middle-class families, or the barriers faced by low-income Latino parents (Hill, Tyson, & Bromell, 2009) and their children (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). However, undercurrents found among partially similar groups may not appropriately relate to all that is experienced by middle-class Latinos.

Epstein’s (1987) parental involvement frameworks are not only the most widely recognized throughout the literature (Hill and Tyson, 2009), but they also encompass different
involvement typologies which allow for a panoramic view of the parental involvement dynamic. These frameworks cover six parental involvement types under two categories, home-based and school-based involvement. Specifically, Epstein’s frameworks include: Parenting, defined as the establishment of home environments that support children as students; Communicating, which includes school-to-home and home-to-school communication relative to school programs and child progress; Volunteering, or parent help and support, often taking place at school sites; Learning at Home, which consists of home-based parental assistance with homework and other curriculum-related activities; Decision Making, or the involvement of parents in school decisions as leaders and representatives; and Collaborating with the Community, which encompasses identifying and integrating community resources and services in order to support school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein et al., 2009).

While considering each of Epstein’s six types of involvement allows for a wide range of what may be defined as parental involvement, it is not accurate to only consider these involvement types independently of the actions that they encompass. The specific acts of involvement found within each of Epstein’s six involvement typologies must also be independently considered. As Sheldon and Epstein (2005) remind us, there may be different activities for each of Epstein’s involvement and each type of involvement activity may result in different outcomes (Epstein, 1995). Thus, while volunteering in the classroom may have particular influences on the students, volunteering at a general school function or a district-level function may have a different effect, even though all three acts fit under the typology of volunteering. Consequential to understanding the overall influence that one of these acts may have on student educational progress, it is also important to understand the factors surrounding this act of involvement, such as considering the reasons parents decided to volunteer, what took
place during this event, and how the parent perceived the overall activity as well as how their children may have perceived it.

Also important to consider is the fact that all parents may not practice certain types of involvement due to impeding circumstances which may be beyond their control. As an example, parents who work multiple jobs will find it difficult to volunteer at their children’s schools, or parents with lower formal educational attainment may have difficulty assisting their children with homework when compared to their more privileged counterparts. This reality has also been depicted in parents who are unable to read or understand English being unable to communicate effectively with their children’s schools (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). While illiteracy or even language barriers may not be customary barriers in the lives of middle-class Latinos, other barriers like institutional racism may impede their ability to be involved in one of Epstein’s typologies, such as Collaborating with the Community.

Since middle-class Latinos in this study may have children enrolled in middle school or high school, academic socialization (Hill & Tyson, 2009) is another important framework to consider. Academic socialization refers to the communicating of parental expectations relative to education, as well as parents fostering educational and occupational aspirations, making preparations and plans for the future, promoting the value and utility of education, and discussing learning strategies with their children (Hill & Tyson, 2009). While this framework may be viewed as an extension of home-based involvement, it also promotes autonomy and decision making skills among students, and may be of additional consequence to any study focused on parental involvement.

While home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and academic socialization are central to this study’s understanding of the parental involvement dynamics of middle-class
Latinos, other frameworks are of consequence as well. The childrearing practices found under the models of *concerted cultivation* and *accomplishment of natural growth* (Lareau, 2003) are consequential, especially considering that these childrearing measures have related to socioeconomic class and that while middle-class Latino have ties to their current socioeconomic group, they may also be influenced lower socioeconomic classes (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Similarly, the theoretical frameworks of this study considers the Latino cultural components of *familismo, respeto, personalismo*, and *simpatia* (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007), as these too may influence the parental involvement dynamic of middle-income Latino parents and how they define the education of their children.
Chapter 3 – Methods

This study identified how middle-income Latino parents living in middle class communities are involved in the education of their children and how they viewed their involvement. It inquired about the obstacles to academic success that their children faced and the ways in which these parents responded to such obstacles. This was accomplished through in-depth interviewing as the primary method of data collection, an open-ended method of questioning, and open and inductive coding as primary forms of analysis. Furthermore, in its effort to obtain the perspectives of middle-income Latino parents, schools targeted for solicitation within this study were found within a community where large numbers of middle-income Latino families resided.

Greenview Township

The state in which Greenview Township is located, due to the size of the Latino population and state economic figures, was a model site for studying middle-income Latinos. According to the United States Census Bureau (2013), there were 8.9 million people in this state, 18.9 percent of whom identified as Latino; a figure slightly exceeding the national average of 17.1 percent. Furthermore, while the median value of owner-occupied housing units in this state was approximately 54 percent greater than the national benchmark, its residents earned 74 percent above the country’s median household income.

In the state, Greenview Township had a population of 27,191 of which 26.5 percent identified as Latino as of 2013. Additionally, the median household income in Greenview Township was $81,141 during this same year, well above the state average of $71,637. Since both the proportion of Latino residents and the median household income in Greenview Township were above state averages, and the state already surpassed national benchmarks in
both categories, Greenview Township was a fitting location for this study focused on the experiences of middle-income Latinos living in middle-class communities.

Greenview Public Schools

There were seven public schools in Greenview Township. These schools included one high school, one middle-school, and five elementary schools. According to 2011-2012 enrollment data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Canary Middle School and Greenview High School serviced a combined 2,070 students. Of the 834 students housed at Canary, approximately 42 percent were Latino; additionally, about 41 percent of the student population was on free or reduced school lunch. At Greenview High School, there were 1,236 students enrolled, with 42 percent identified as Latino, and 35 percent on either free or reduced school lunch.

The five elementary schools in Greenview serviced a combined 1,371 youths. At Red Apple Elementary School, approximately 42 percent of its student population identified as Latino with only 30 percent of the school population qualifying for free or reduced-price school lunch. Of the students who attended Green Street Elementary, 42 percent were Latino and just 31 percent were on free or reduced school lunch. Harvest Road Elementary had the largest student population (servicing 350 students); Latino students made up 40 percent of the study body at Harvest Road, while 37 percent of the students at the school were on free or reduced school lunch. Of the students who attended Pine Tree Elementary, about 42 percent were Latino and 36 percent were on free or reduced lunch. The only school where more than half of the students

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4 Student eligibility for free and reduced priced lunches at school is one way to measure poverty; students whose family incomes do not exceed 130 percent of the federal poverty guideline are eligible for free lunch while those whose family incomes do not exceed 180 percent are eligible for reduced priced lunches (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 59).
were on free or reduced lunch was Cherry Street Elementary School, where 54 percent of the total student population were Latino with 59 percent on free or reduced school lunch.

Recruitment of Participants

Information tables with recruitment flyers and signup sheets were set up at two community events. During recruitment, parents were told of my interest in interviewing middle income Latino parents, with socioeconomic status determined by their children not being on either free or reduced lunch at one of the Greenview public schools. Those interested in being part of the study provided their name and contact information on a sign-up sheet, and a meeting in a public place was later scheduled with them. Upon meeting with me, eligible parents still interested in participating were given the informed consent form and were invited to an interview lasting approximately 45 minutes.

There were 21 total participants who took part in this study. Each participant had at least one child currently attending one of the seven Greenview Township public schools. The sole sampling criterion for participants, aside from their self-identification as Latino or Latina, was that their children not receive free or reduced-priced school lunch. This measure was used as a proxy for family income. The primary language used during interviewing was English, yet Spanish was employed as needed during recruitment and interviewing.

Sampling Criteria

Differences in parental involvement practices have been found between the parents of elementary school children and those whose children attend secondary schools (Hill & Tyson, 2009). As a result, student grade level was held as a fixed variable in this study. While parents of elementary-school aged and secondary-school aged children were recruited and interviewed, results between the two groups were analyzed separately. Some parents who had children at both
MIDDLE-INCOME LATINOS IN MIDDLE-CLASS COMMUNITIES

age-groups, however, were able to discuss experiences at the elementary and secondary school level.

Native culture was also considered during participant recruitment and data analysis. In this study, of the approximately 27,000 town residents, 26.5 percent identified as Latino or Latina, with the largest groups being Dominican at 6.8 percent, Colombian at 5.9 percent, Puerto Rican at 4.5 percent, Mexican at 2 percent, and Cuban and Salvadorian at 1.2 percent respectively. Most of the respondents who were part of this study were Colombian. While Dominicans, among other Latino groups, did show interest in participating, some who approached the information tables did not meet the inclusion criteria (since their children were on either free or reduced school lunch), while others who did qualify for study did not attend their interview session even after stating their willingness to participate.

Along with categorizing participants based on their country of origin, they were also divided among the child gender demographic. Participants with children of both genders spoke to their experiences of involvement as it related to all of their children. Another variable was gender across participants such that the perspectives of both mothers and fathers were gathered.

Group Breakdown

Of the 21 participants, 15 were female and six were males. Two interviews were with couples so that both the mother and the father participated in the interview simultaneously. Thus, among all participants, there were 19 families. Of these 19 families, six were composed of only female children and three were composed of only male children, while 12 families had both male and female children. (See Table 1.) Additionally, none of the participants were recent immigrants considering that all had lived in the U.S. for at least 12 years. Furthermore, while some spoke

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5 U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.
only Spanish, all school-aged children of participants were fluent in English since they were all in monolingual, English classes.

Eighteen study participants were born in Colombia; one was born in the Dominican Republic; one was born in Costa Rica; and one was born in Ecuador. Fourteen of these participants were married, while seven were either divorced or separated. Furthermore, five participants had only one child, 13 had two children, one had three children, and two had four children. (See Table 1.)

The educational experiences of participants also varied as did their occupations. For instance, there were four degrees obtained at two-year colleges in the U.S. and one such degree obtained overseas, while four bachelor’s degrees were obtained at US institutions with six being obtained overseas. Additionally, four participants said they were business owners, 11 had professional careers, and the remaining six were labor workers. (See Table 1.)

In terms of upbringing, all participants were born overseas, most completing their primary and secondary schooling in their native countries. The educational level of participants’ parents did not surpass high school, except for one participant, Ana, whose mother majored in accounting and received her degree in the U.S. During their youth, participants’ parents were rarely involved in their schooling, and those that were involved were unable to remain actively involved past the very early primary grades due to their own lack of educational experience; and since some parents, as labor workers, either had to work in order to support the family, or had an extended number of children, these circumstances made it difficult for them to be involved in each child’s education.
Table 1. Participant Demographics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education Obtained (Country)</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Children Grade Level/ School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebeca</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>High School (United States)</td>
<td>Office Manager</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4th/ Harvest Road; 6th/ Canary Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (Colombia &amp; US)</td>
<td>Budget Manager</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7th/ Canary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (US)</td>
<td>Esthetician/ Medical Assistant</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8th/ Canary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>High School (Costa Rica)</td>
<td>Babysitter</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2nd/ Pine Tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Associate’s (Colombia)</td>
<td>Budget Manager</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8th/ Canary; 11th Greenview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (Colombia)</td>
<td>Business Owner</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4th &amp; 5th/ Harvest Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (Colombia)</td>
<td>Office Administrator</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4th/ Pine Tree; 11th Greenview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (Colombia)</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3rd/ Pine; 8th/ Canary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony (Married to Veronica)</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (Colombia)</td>
<td>Factory Worker</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3rd/ Pine; 8th/ Canary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (US)</td>
<td>Self-Employed</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3rd/ Red Apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>High School (Colombia)</td>
<td>Business Owner</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10th/ Greenview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Associates (US)</td>
<td>Medical Technician</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10th/ Greenview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>High School (Colombia)</td>
<td>Housekeeper</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10th/ Greenview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego (Married to Carmen)</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>High School (Colombia)</td>
<td>Painter</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10th/ Greenview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (Colombia)</td>
<td>Company Supervisor</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3rd/ Red Apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliana</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (US)</td>
<td>Office Administrator</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6th/ Canary; 9th/ Greenview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (US)</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1st/ Cherry Street; 8th/ Canary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liliana</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>High School (Colombia)</td>
<td>Health Aid</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4th/ Cherry Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>High School (US)</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1st/ Cherry Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramon</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Master’s (US)</td>
<td>Office Administrator</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1st/ Red Apple; 8th/ Canary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>College (Colombia)</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5th/ Cherry Street; 8th/ Canary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In their upbringing, it was often the case that participants’ fathers were labor workers, some of whom were field workers, and participants’ mothers were housewives. Most parents participating in this study saw the involvement of their parents compared to their own current involvement to involve very distinct dynamics and found it very difficult to compare the two. If any childrearing practices were learned from their parents, they related mostly to keeping good family ties and social values, but little was transferred in terms of being academic supports for one’s children.

Middle Class Qualification

All participants were middle-class as determined by scoring at or above 50 percent in an assessment (Table 2), which was the same as at least four points or higher out of a total of seven points possible for single parents, and five out of 10 points possible for those who were married. In order to evaluate the total score of a participant, questions were asked that either directly related to a specific category (i.e. “Is your child eligible for free or reduced lunch?”), or some categories may have been answered using the interview questions found on the Interview Script (i.e. “Tell me about your educational experience and current profession.”).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Qualification of Participant</th>
<th>Spousal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree = 1 Point (or) Master’s Degree = 2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational</td>
<td>Above “All Occupations” prestige score = 1 Point</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangible Possessions</td>
<td>Home Ownership = 1 Point</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>Above state average = 1 Point (or) Above township = 2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch Status</td>
<td>Child(ren) are not on free or reduced school lunch = 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using Nakao-Treas (1989) prestige scores, participant’s occupational titles were matched against the “All Occupations” score or 43.43 as well as the average score of all related occupations (see Table 3). One final measure of middle-class participation was also used at the end of the interview in cases where a score of 50 percent or higher had not yet been met. In such
cases, participants were provided a card showing household income ranges and were asked to choose the number that most closely resembles their household income (see Table 4).

Participants received one point if their selected range exceeded the state average and a total of two points if it exceeded the town average (which was higher than the state average).

Table 3. Average Prestige Score by Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Occupations</td>
<td>43.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Managerial and Specialty Occupations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Executive, Administrative, and Managerial Occupations</td>
<td>54.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Professional Specialty Occupations</td>
<td>63.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Technical, Sales, and Administrative Support Occupations</td>
<td>41.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Technicians and Related Support Occupations</td>
<td>54.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Sales Occupations</td>
<td>38.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Administrative Support Occupations, Including Clerical</td>
<td>40.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Service Occupations</td>
<td>32.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Private Household Occupations</td>
<td>25.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Service Occupations, Except Protective and Household</td>
<td>29.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Farming, Forestry, and Fishing Occupations</td>
<td>32.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Precision Production, Craft, and Repair Occupations</td>
<td>41.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Operators, Fabricators, Assemblers, and Laborers</td>
<td>31.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Machine Operators, Assemblers, and Inspectors</td>
<td>33.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Transportation and Material Moving Occupations</td>
<td>32.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Handlers, Equipment Cleaners, Helpers, and Laborers</td>
<td>26.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4. Household Income Estimate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below $9,999</td>
<td>$10,000-</td>
<td>$20,000-</td>
<td>$30,000-</td>
<td>$40,000-</td>
<td>$50,000-</td>
<td>$60,000-</td>
<td>$70,000-</td>
<td>$80,000-</td>
<td>$89,000-</td>
<td>$99,999 &amp; Above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$9,999-</td>
<td>$19,999</td>
<td>$29,999</td>
<td>$39,999</td>
<td>$49,999</td>
<td>$59,999</td>
<td>$69,999</td>
<td>$79,999</td>
<td>$89,999</td>
<td>$99,999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Data Collection

This study employed in-depth interviewing as its primary method of data collection. An open-ended method of inquiry was used as is common practice when conducting in-depth interviews. As explained by Bogdan & Bilken (2007), in-depth interviewing involves the researcher trying to understand how the perspectives of informants have come to existence. In
the same manner, this study looked to understand the perspectives of Latino parents regarding involvement in their children’s schooling; it also looked to understand how these perspectives developed throughout their lives and as a result of their personal experiences. The use of in-depth interviewing and open-ended questioning allowed respondents to use their own frame of reference when answering inquiries as opposed to answering a prearranged set of questions structured by the researcher (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007). In other words, respondents were able to offer an account of their personal thoughts and experiences as interpreted through their own lenses.

In addition to the use of in-depth interviewing and open-ended questioning, two principles often related to rigorous, high quality qualitative research were also used during data collection in this study. These principles, forwarded by Bogdan & Bilken (2007) include: (1) that each respondent be made to feel “relaxed and open” so as to be able to address the topic in a meaningful way, and (2) that the researcher be flexible enough to respond to the immediate situation in front of him rather than following a “predetermined set of procedures and stereotypes” (p. 108). The first principle was pursued by attempting to open the interview sessions with non-intrusive, casual questions that seek to establish common ground between the researcher and his informants; the latter was sought through the use of an inductive approach and deep listening by the researcher, as well as the use probing questions that appropriately advance participant responses and position respondent as experts.

Establishing trust between the researcher and informants was not only critical to gathering accurate data, but was also a challenge considering that both parties entered data collection as strangers. In order to counter this issue, interviewing always commenced with “small talk” (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 103) or the establishment of common ground between
the researcher and the participant. This line of questioning, also known as soft-ball questioning, aims to establish a feeling of commonality between informants and the researcher, and progresses into questioning directly related to the study’s subject matter. Close-ended questioning proceeded in order to gather important background information about respondents. Lastly, segments of open-ended questions were used in gathering the understanding of informant perspectives related their involvement in the education of their children. However, interviews followed a loose structure, allowing close- and open-ended questions to be used simultaneously.

The time participants spent in the middle class, as well as their educational and career experiences were the focus of close-ended questioning, as was the number of children that they had and their grade levels. This information is important to understand the previous and current lifestyles of participants and their families. Answers to close-ended items also revealed fundamental differences between participants. These differences may influence their parental involvement beliefs and practices. It is through open-ended questioning, however, that these beliefs and practices were sought. The overall purpose of open-ended items was to guide participants into narrating their experiences and perceptions of their involved in the education of their children. Topics that were explored through the use of open-ended items included involvement strategies that were most beneficial and those that were most challenging, as well as the ways in which participants were involved in the education of their children and the factors leading to their type of involvement.

Lastly, conceptual frameworks found throughout the literature were used to help guide the research. However, this was only done after the inductive analysis process was fully exhausted. Frameworks found through the review of the literature informed this study’s interview protocol. Specifically, some of the questions asked of participants derived from themes
found in the literature, including inquiries focused on types and levels of *home-based* and *school-based* involvement, parent-child discussions and family pastimes, and child engagement in extracurricular activities. While these and other inquiries followed certain themes found in the literature on parental involvement and childrearing, specific codes were not created using the literature. Rather, coding derived from what existed in the data and these findings were later compared with themes from the literature.

**Data Management and Analysis**

Data collection in this study was open, unstructured, and participant-driven. Data management, defined as required operations so that data collection, storage, and retrieval have both a systematic and coherent process, aims at ensuring three objectives: (1) that high-quality data is accessible, (2) that forms of analyses employed in the study are documented, and (3) that both data and analyses are retained post study-completion (Huberman & Miles, 1994). This method of managing data facilitates data analysis, makes the researcher accountable of the evidence collected, and adds validity to the study.

In order to ensure that data management in this study was aligned with the above definition and objectives, three segments of Levine’s (1985) storage and retrieval system were used: formatting, indexing, and cross-referral analysis. Information gathered in this study was formatted as raw data resulting from interview transcripts, field notes, and memos. Indexing was accomplished through the use of coding families and codebooks across the three data forms. This process, where varied sources of data are being indexed, resulted in the reorganization of codes under one collective system, facilitating cross-referral analysis. Yet, while formatting, indexing, and cross-referral analysis seem to follow a particular order of operation, one segment did not depend on the completion of another. Rather, indexing and cross-referral analysis was used as
data was gathered, with preliminary results being allowed to influence the continuous data collection process.

While Levine’s (1985) system was created commensurate to physical data, all raw data was transferred and stored using Microsoft Word. Audio recordings were conducted using Samsung Note 4’s interview voice recorder program and manually transcribed by the researcher. Within 24 hours, interview transcripts had been fully reviewed and edited for accuracy, and any related field notes and memos were labeled and included with the transcript. Using codebooks, raw data was organized and analyzed in Microsoft Word. All data was stored as Microsoft Word files and there were password protected and kept in 2 USB flash drives, with the second device used as a backup. Audio recordings were deleted once all related data had been saved within the flash drives; these drives will be kept long after the completion of the study following Huberman & Miles’ (1994) recommendation.

Field Notes and Reflective Memos

Field notes included audio recorded descriptions of the setting, the overall mood of the interview, and the tone and notable mannerisms of the respondent. This information was recorded before and after interview sessions as needed; however, additional notes were also recorded during interviewing when appropriate. This included instances when the interviewer was heard saying, “You’re nodding your head right now. Tell me what you’re thinking.” or “That is an interesting picture. Could you tell me a little about it?” Recording field notes in this manner (rather than by writing them on a notepad) enabled the researcher to maintain eye contact with respondents and provide them undivided attention. Reflections of the researcher’s conceptual meaning of data (Huberman & Miles, 1994) was also gathered throughout all phases
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of study (data collection, management, and analysis). These memos were written on a small notepad later to be transcribed and stored using the computer software previously detailed.

Coding Systems

Using Lofland’s structure of activities to identify items (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), information was organized by the categories of *actors, activities, relationships, settings, ways of participation,* and *meaning.* An additional category, *roles,* was also incorporated. These coding families and how they may interact with one another is detailed in Figure 1, which has been developed for this study. Actors’ roles – whether chosen or assigned – relate to the activities they took part in and their relationships with other actors. At the same time, activities and relationships might further influence the roles that actors play.

As an example, parents may choose to play the role of academic agents for their children, but may alter this practice based on how related activities and their relationships develop over time. Autonomous students may reject parent intervention in their academics (Hill & Tyson, 2009), leading to a shift in the parent-student relationship, and an eventual shift in the role parents have chosen. As another example, during parent-teacher conferences, teachers may play the role of informants to parents’ roles as receptors of information; however, this relationship may shift if information gained by parents at home is considered useful by both actors in
influencing student progress in the classroom. In both examples, an activity’s progress influences the roles that actors will play in the future as well as the relationships between actors. As a result, actors, relationships, and activities operate as segments in a two-way cycle.

Not to be mistaken with the roles of actors, ways to participate covers the actions that actors employ within the roles they play. These behaviors may influence activities as well as the relationships between actors. For instance, during parent-teacher conferences parents may choose to speak, ask questions, listen, or engage in reciprocal conversation, among many other forms of participation. This may influence their relationship with teachers as well as the outcome of this and future conferences. As another example, while parents may play the role of academic agents during academic assistance in the home, these parents may choose to participate within their role by tutoring their children, checking their homework, asking them questions about school, or giving them moral support. Once again, how this activity and the relationship between agents develops can be influenced by the ways in which parents choose to participate.

Activities also occur within particular settings or spaces in which actors are able to exercise roles and behaviors (or ways of participating). As an example, actors may feel more or less in control depending on the setting. Since a parent-teacher conference may occur in the classroom, in a meeting room in the presence of administrators, or over-the-phone, each setting may have a different influence over the actors involved and the ways in which they choose to participate.

The six coding families detailed above were internalized and defined through the lenses of respondents who make meanings not only of each independent family, but of the interactions that exist between families. This meaning is a seventh coding family, composed of the ways in which respondents internalize relationships, situations, and related dynamics. While discussing
events and relationships within events, the coding family of meaning was created using respondents’ level of certainty in what they are explaining and agreement in what happens within these events.

While one coding system related to participants’ interpretations of events and relationships between actors, another system focused on participants’ responses to open-ended and close-ended questions. This second system was continually used as interview transcripts, field notes, and memos were analyzed throughout data collection, eventually resulting in a system that included all options available for each code, examples illustrating the kinds of units sought after, and criteria delineating the characteristics that must be present within a unit prior to its specific coding (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Certain steps were followed in creating coding categories from the data acquired during the interviews. First, all transcripts were read prior to coding in order to check for accuracy and coherence in the raw data. A second review of the transcripts followed with open, inductive coding. Emerging categories were then labeled and defined within codebooks. These categories were verified during subsequent reviews of the data. Once open coding was finalized, deductive coding proceeded so as to uncover instances of congruency among participant responses. An initial read of the transcripts focused on comparing responses and identifying patterns between responses, leading to a consolidation of the data into those categories established during open coding. A subsequent read of the data focused solely on key patterns and relationships found between responses so as to verify their prevalence and the way in which they were defined. The final phase of the coding process was to reach the overall findings of the analysis and to identify illustrative quotes and examples as offered by participants.

Role of the Researcher
Researchers’ personal histories and experiences may influence the way in which they define, gather, interpret, and analyze their data. As explained by Bogdan and Bilken (2007), qualitative researchers must be concerned with the effect that they may have on the data they collect (LeCompte, 1987), and as a course of action, must consider how their own subjectivity and interaction with informants can further influence this data. As a result, measures to assure the transparency of potential researcher biases were employed in this study’s design.

A researcher’s biography is an influential factor in the design and execution of any study and effort must be taken into consideration to monitor and record the ways in which it may influence interactions, data collection, and interpretation. For instance, as an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, I entered this country at an early age and was raised as a member of the poor, working class. My socioeconomic progress over time led me to believe that upward mobility can be acquired through hard work and determination. My parents’ involvement in my education also caused validity issues. Their involvement aligned more with the cultural component of respeto. They also faced language barriers, and likely faced issues due to cultural differences when engaging school personnel. Additionally, during this study, I was the father of a kindergarten student previously attending an urban, public school and who had recently moved to a small suburban school district where she attended the town’s only public elementary school. I felt that teaching professionals at the urban school were well aware of the cultural differences within the community yet lacked the skills to ensure the academic progress of their students, while at the suburban school, my initial impression was that teaching professionals were mostly concerned with academics, while not being very culturally and socially sensitive. My experiences growing up, my parents’ involvement in my education, and my involvement in the
education of my child have all shaped my outlook on parental involvement and have helped build the lens through which I collected and analyzed the data in this study.

My experiences as a student and educator similarly influenced the ways in which I thought about and approached the topic under study. For instance, during this study, I was a product of urban public education, an ex-middle school teacher, and a current adjunct professor working with a large Latino student base. First, my educational experience in an urban public school district was the foundation to my academic success and upward social mobility. As a result, I saw education as a great equalizer which may have once again diverged from my informants’ views of education. Furthermore, as a middle-school teacher, I recalled wanting my students’ parents to become more involved in their children’s education. And in my position as an adjunct professor, I had worked with Latino college students from various countries of origin and ages. My experiences as a middle-school teacher and college professor, as well as my earlier experiences as a student, were filled with both conscious and subconscious understandings of education, parental involvement, and the Latino community, all of which further established a lens that is not based on empirical data but on my subjective experiences.

Nevertheless, some biases may have also derive from empirical data. My review of the literature on parental involvement and the childrearing practices of Latino parents led to the expectation that my subjects would most likely follow similar trajectories as members of other groups previously studied. For instance, Latino families have promoted the cultural components of *familismo, respeto, personalismo, and simpatia* (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007), and Latino parents have reported negative outcomes after engaging their children’s schools, including reporting feeling disconnected from the school culture, not understanding the schools’ implied expectations (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005), and being treated as incompetent (Trumbull,
Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003) or inferior (Auerbach, 2002; Jones, 2003) by teachers. While these results may be true for some Latinos, participant responses should uncover the results of this study, not prior findings from the related literature.

Validity and Reliability

In an effort to minimize the effects of researcher bias, reflective memos were written throughout all phases of data collection and analysis, but especially during two specific instances. Following each interview, memos were written about my overall thoughts and experience interacting with the informant. These records also presented my perception of the interview session and of what was said and how it was delivered by the informant. Issues or successes that I perceived during the interview were also included. The second consequential instance when memos were written was while reading each transcript for the first time. Like those created post interviewing, these memos detailed my interpretation of the data prior to any structured analysis and recording of results.

After annotation, all memos were transcribed and coded. Outcomes from memo coding were later compared to the results gained during the subsequent stages of open and deductive coding and data grouping. This measure of creating and coding memos prior to structured data analysis allowed me to match my personal interpretation of the data against all preliminary results. In doing so, validity checks were facilitated and caution was taken that the results of this study are not products of my own lens as the researcher, but of the information derived from my informants’ responses. While it may be impossible to eliminate all researcher bias, writing and coding memos helped minimize the effects that my personal experiences may have had on what is being reported in this study, while facilitating my ability to identify instances where validity may be threatened during the stages of data analysis and reporting.
Chapter 4 – Results

In order to understand the perspectives of middle-income Latinos from middle class communities, participants were asked a series of questions and commented on their personal experiences as parents. Their combined responses delivered a deeper understanding of how Latino parents are involved in the education of their children and how these parents view their involvement. Additionally, obstacles that interfere with the academic success of their children were further discussed by participants, including the ways in which they responded to such barriers.

The parents in this study practiced *school-based* involvement throughout their children’s academic careers, such as meeting with teachers and attending parent orientations. However, some forms of *school-based* involvement, such as attending school-wide events and parent orientations, diminished as their children entered middle school. A similar occurrence was found with *home-based* involvement in the form of help with homework. These findings were consistent with the educational literature such that *school-based* and *home-based* forms of parental involvement often decrease as elementary school aged children near adolescence (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Mostly, parents in this study were involved in the education of their children through acts that support *academic socialization* (Hill & Tyson, 2009) and practiced childrearing practices aligning with *concerted cultivation* (Lareau, 2003). However, unlike the educational literature, involvement in the form of *academic socialization* came earlier than during the early stages of adolescence. In fact, acts of *academic socialization*, such as discussing and researching future educational and career goals with their children, were reported as early as 3rd grade.
Another finding in this study was parents becoming active both inside and outside their children’s schools when academic troubles arose. This was found both at the elementary and secondary school levels. In such cases, parents became advocates for their children and employed resources that could help them overcome academic obstacles. These findings aligned with Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau’s (2003) study which found middle-class parents more likely than their working-class and poor counterparts to employ the support of professionals when challenging the judgments of school officials; however, unlike Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau (2003), parents in this study only rarely acted as a collective when challenging their children’s schools. This later finding was possibly due to long working hours and time constraints, consistent with middle-class Latinos as discussed by Gándara & Contreras (2009).

Regarding academic obstacles, technology and the American educational system were listed as hindering academic success among children. However, respondents most often spoke of either learning disabilities or particular character traits of their children as impeding their academic success. Factors thought to negatively influence a child’s academic progress almost always rested with the child and not with outside sources such as the schools, teachers, or other students. This is why most parents, when dealing with the academic underachievement of their children, often employed actions and resources that would help assist their children interpersonally. These measures included academic tutoring and visits with a therapist.

Parents in this study also viewed their involvement as important to the development of children first socially and then academically. While many discussed school-based and home-based involvement as essential, most defined their participation in the lives of their children as that of emotional supports, preparing their children to become valued members of society. The general consensus among parents in this study was the hope that their children grow up to be
MIDDLE-INCOME LATINOS IN MIDDLE-CLASS COMMUNITIES

model citizens, content with their lives, and able to work with others. Such interests closely align with the known Latino childrearing practices of *familismo*, *respeto*, *personalismo*, and *simpatia* (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007).

Another primary finding was the relationships between actors, including those between parents and various others such as their children, teachers and administrators, and other parents. Using the Organizational Chart of Relationships between Coding Families, dynamics between actors were compared within the relationships that they held and the roles that they played. When interacting with their children, parents often played the roles of guides and supports and their children employed high levels of autonomy in decisions dealing with their futures and current pastimes. In dealing with teachers and administrators, parents were overall satisfied with their interactions except in a few cases when parents felt their children’s school did not do a good job addressing the needs of their children. Lastly, relationships between parents were overall negative when dealing with parent-teacher organizations. Few parent relationships were discussed as positive, and those described as positive often were among other Latino parents.

Along with these findings, this study also uncovered two barriers to the involvement of some middle class Latino parents. Both legal status and language proficiency were discussed as topics of concern among some respondents. While these barriers are often associated with lower income Latinos (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005), this study shows that legal status issues and language barriers can exist among Latinos across social classes. This is similar to Gándara & Contreras’ (2009) claim, who explained that across socioeconomic status, Latinos face income and wealth inequalities, larger family sizes, and lower educational quality when compared to their non-Latino counterparts. Overall, when considering middle class Latinos, trends in the educational
literature among both non-Latino middle class parents and low income Latino parents are of consequence.

Parental Involvement and Childrearing

When assessing how parents are involved in the education of their children, *home-based* and *school-based* involvement (Epstein, 1986, 1987) are most commonly used (Hill & Tyson, 2009). These types of involvement include *parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making,* and *collaborating with the community.* Hill & Tyson (2009) also added *academic socialization* as another type of involvement where parents and their children have open dialogue related to their children’s educational and occupational aspirations. Along with types of parental involvement, childrearing practices can assist in understanding how parents participate in the education of their children. In this study, acts under *concerted cultivation,* which are often associated with childrearing among middle class parents (Lareau, 2003), have been identified as common.

Overall, most parents in this study practiced *school-based* and *home-based* involvement early in the elementary school years, while acts under *academic socialization,* which have been said to be practiced during the secondary school years (Hill & Tyson, 2009), have been discussed as common practice as early as the 3rd grade. Furthermore, parents in this study employed strategies similar to those related to *concerted cultivation.* For instance, many parents kept their children involved in extracurricular activities, even when few activities were available at their children’s schools. They also provided their children a high level of autonomy in deciding which activities to partake in and which careers to pursue. In addition, most parents in this study had conversations with their children where their children’s thoughts and opinions have been both welcomed and respected.
School-based Involvement

Middle class Latino parents in this study were involved at their children’s schools in three specific ways. They attended quarterly parent-teacher conferences throughout the academic year and parent orientation at the beginning of the school year; and when their children struggled academically, they called for extra meetings with school personnel, becoming advocates for their children, and seeking help both inside and outside their children’s school. These three forms of involvement were consistent across grade levels, yet to a lesser degree at the middle-school and high school level, while other forms of school-based involvement, such as volunteering at their children’s schools and attending school-wide events, were practiced exclusively at the elementary school level.

Attending Parent Teacher Conferences

Most parents spoke about attending the parent-teacher conferences scheduled quarterly at all Greenview public schools. Many parents also spoke about the progress reports that they received prior to attending these meetings. Such was the case with Elizabeth who spoke about meetings with her son Esteban’s and her daughter Emilia’s teachers,

Interviewer: So about how many times a year have you meet with their teachers?

Elizabeth: Every three months.

Interviewer: Every three months for report cards?

Elizabeth: Yes, well a report goes home and the same week we go there, for the meeting, and they give us a time that benefits us.

Like Elizabeth, other parents checked their children’s progress online before attending the parent teacher conference. For example, Sylvia discussed meeting with her son Samuel’s teacher during these quarterly visits and explained,
Sylvia: Oh, I review things, for example, here in Greenview, they have a webpage where parents can go and look at the progress of their children.

Interviewer: Tell me a bit about that.

Sylvia: What can I say, I check that a lot. I look at his homework... every time there is an email from the teachers I get it... I am able to check his grades so that when I meet with his teachers I already know what is going on, it is not a surprise.

Interviewer: And how often do you meet with his teachers?

Sylvia: About three times a year, when there is a meeting.

Parent teacher conferences, as discussed by Elizabeth and Sylvia, were the most frequently attended school events among all parents interviewed.

This form of school-based involvement was discussed among parents with children both at the elementary school level and at the middle school level. The only exception were parents of high school students who did not discuss meeting with their children’s teachers regularly. Rather, parents of high school level children, like Victor, and Carmen and Diego, would discuss academic progress with their children directly and would use the online monitoring system to review their progress,

With [Vincente] you don’t need to check his homework, with him you don’t need to tell him to do his work, you just ask him... I used to meet with teachers a lot more when he was younger, but now can just see his grades on line together, and we talk about it.

As was also the case with Carmen and Diego, Victor’s monitoring of his son Vincent’s academic progress took place at home and relied on the online grading system provided at Greenview.

Attending Parent Orientation

Similar to conferencing with teachers, parents in this study often discussed open house at their children’s schools, which took place at the beginning of each school year. Attendance at this event once again extended to both elementary school and middle school. Ramon’s son Ricardo was in 2nd grade at Red Apple Elementary; like others with children at the elementary
school level, Ramon found this event valuable since he was able to meet his son’s teacher and get acquainted with her system of teaching,

I believe that going at the beginning of the year to meet my son’s teacher is the most important thing. I mean I had met the teacher the year before, but at the beginning of the year you get to see the classroom and what he will be doing, and you know the expectations that the teacher has, you don’t really get to talk to the teacher one-on-one because there are other parents there, but you do get a lot of information about the school year.

At the middle school level and high school level, Sylvia discussed a similar experience,

Sylvia: Always when the year starts they have a meeting, they have their open house, and parents can go and… meet the teachers, and they explain to you what they are going to do the whole school year… not a lot of parents go, but I am always there.

Interviewer: And this is at your son and daughter’s schools? Both of them?

Sylvia: Yes, in the middle school and in the high school, they always do that in the beginning of the year, there is always an open house.

Thus, like Ramon at the elementary school level, Sylvia also found herself attending her children’s schools during parent orientation at both Canary Middle School and Greenview High School. While this practice was not mentioned among other parents with high school aged children, it was common practice among all parents with children in elementary school and many of the parents of middle school aged children.

Studies have found that both school-based and home-based involvement decreases as students enter middle school and high school (Chao, Kanatsu, Stanoff, Padmawidjaja, & Aque; 2009). In the current study, parent attendance at school open houses in the later grades was mixed. For example, while Sylvia’s attendance at these events did not decrease as her daughter Sylvana progressed as a high school student, Victor and Juliana did express a decrease in their attendance at this event as their children entered middle school. For instance, Juliana explained,

Juliana: They used to send announcements inviting parents to the meetings that they do, actually, I don’t go, when my kids were younger I did, but now I do not so much… that meeting that they do when the schools start, what is the name of that?
Interviewer: Open house?

Juliana: Yes, open house, I don’t go to that anymore, I don’t go because I feel like it’s the same old stuff over and over.

Even though Juliana and Victor were dedicated users of the district’s online grading system, which Juliana even explained she learned how to use during a parent orientation, both parents found themselves decreasing their attendance at their children’s school as their children entered middle school and high school.

*Extra Meetings with School Personnel*

Parent teacher conferences and parent orientations were not the only forms of school-based involvement activities that parents attended. Many parents took the initiative to meet with administrators and other school personnel, including one parent who did so without any pre-occurring issue at the school. This was the case of Peter and his daughter Patricia,

Peter: We [were] concerned because my daughter is a lazy reader, she doesn’t like to read, we were concerned about her reading levels, and, so we had a couple of meetings with the teacher, she was friendly, had some suggestions, it was a pleasant experience… her grades are fine, A’s and B’s, but um, the work is too easy, I don’t think that it is challenging enough.

Interviewer: Have you had any interaction with the principal or the administration?

Peter: The principal, once, but not as much of the teacher, no.

Interviewer: Do you remember why you interacted with the principal?

Peter: When we went to the school to meet him? I took the initiative to meet the principal.

Peter felt that even though his daughter earned good grades, there was more the school could have done to advance her academically. He also took the initiative to meet the principal so as to be acquainted with him.
While Peter engaged school personnel without prompting by the school itself, parents taking the initiative to meet with school personnel were most common among those whose children were having academic problems at the school. This included Ana who set up a meeting with the classroom teacher to discuss her daughter’s reading difficulty; Wendy who wanted her sons in basic skills reading after hearing about this program from a friend; Juliana who set up a meeting to discuss her son’s ADHD and how it was affecting his school performance; and Maria who set meetings with the school psychologist to discuss her daughter’s learning problems.

During such situations, parents became advocates for their children. Some parents also searched for resources both inside and outside their children’s schools that could help their children advance academically. For instance, Maria, in dealing with her daughter Melinda’s academic struggles, explained,

I had to like really push [the principal]... I also had a meeting with the school psychologist, and I really had to push her, like call her a lot of times to see what was going on with [Melinda’s] case, finally I got tired and I got in touch with the principal and I told him listen this is what is going on and I need your help to keep pushing this up cause I need answers... we thought she had ADD, so I also took her to the pediatrician and he referred her to the neurologist... and she told me that she doesn’t have ADD, she has a lot of memory, she has an excellent memory, she’s very smart, the only thing that they had to change was the way that they were giving her classes, she has to be more interactive, like not talking too much because that makes her lose her concentration very easily, so I pointed this out to the teacher and I think she is doing her best to have her more motivated and more interactive classes and she’s changing a lot.

Like Maria, other parents whose children were facing academic difficulty, became adamant about helping their children, calling meetings at their children’s schools, confronting school personnel, and seeking assistance from outside resources.

_Diminished Involvement at School Sites_

Regarding _school-based_ involvement, some parents also discussed a decrease in their level of involvement once their children were older. For instance, while some parents attended
school-wide events and volunteered at their children’s schools as chaperones and during fundraising efforts, these were mostly exercised among parents of elementary school aged children. For instance, Nancy, whose daughter Natalia was in 1st grade, would often volunteer at her daughter’s classroom or chaperone during school trips. Similarly, Barbara would join fundraising efforts at her son’s school and would attend school related functions like Field Day and Cultural Day. When asked how she had been involved at Cherry Street Elementary in the past, Barbara explained,

Too much, too much [laughing]… I have helped with pizza, I’ve done collections, I’ve sold empanadas which I make, I’ve done work with the raffle tickets selling them [to] my family members and my friends, we have collected funding for our children, we have done, now for the 5th grade, we have done many activities.

Such levels of involvement, like those of Nancy and Barbara, were common among other parents of elementary school aged children, and especially among non-working mothers.

Similar levels of involvement were rarely found among parents of middle school and high school students. Victor’s son Vincent was in 11th grade at Greenview High School. In talking about him and his wife’s involvement when Vincent attended Red Apple Elementary, he explained,

We did go there a lot, we went to more meetings there than in the middle school and the high school, because they were really young and I was always interested in what it was that they did with them, during the meetings they were always very willing to explain to us what it was that they were doing, how they were doing it, what was the process that they used with their studies, with the kids, they always explained those things to us, so I went to the meeting there more than in any other place, and now that he is older, now I don’t go as much.

Like Victor, Carmen showed a similar change when discussing her and her husband’s level of school-based involvement in elementary school compared to middle school and high school,
Carmen: For example, when they were going to graduate from 5th grade, we would get together, each one of us would bring a different kind of food, we would do activities together.

Interviewer: What activities would you do?

Carmen: Well, as an example, the day of, um, Halloween, everyone would dress up, and we would go outside, and everyone would like model their costumes, and the parents would record the event or take pictures, some would bring food, others would bring water and things like that, and they would do sporting events for example like one day afterschool they had an event where they invited the parents and we played with the children.

As Carmen continued to share her experiences with school-based involvement, such examples ceased when she began talking about her children entering middle-school and high school.

Home-based Involvement

The parents in this study were involved in their children’s education at home by helping them with their homework, providing them with enrichment activities, and monitoring their academic achievement through a district provided on-line grading system. The first of these forms of involvement were specific to the elementary school years, while monitoring student academics was reported up until the early high school years.

*Help with Homework*

Most parents of students in early grades, up until about 3rd grade, often assisted their children with their homework. These parents were often the primary academic supports for their children. For instance, parents like Maria, Karen, Veronica and Anthony, Nancy, and Ramon discussed helping their elementary school aged children in subjects like reading and math. This is exemplified by Nancy while discussing helping her daughter Natalia with her homework,

Nancy: I sit down with her every night.

Interviewer: Talk to me about that, how is it when you help her with her homework?
Nancy: Well she usually, I’ll be in the kitchen and she will sit at the kitchen table or I will sit next to her, and I let her do whatever she knows… and if she needs help I’ll help her, and once she’s done with one and doing the other I am checking what she did, and I correct her, whatever’s wrong.

Interviewer: Okay, so for at least for parts of it, she’s able to work independently.

Nancy: Yeah, well, her cup of tea is math, so she can do her whole math homework on her own, and rarely do I ever have to help her, but then I help her with, they have to write a paragraph everyday, and they have to do spelling everyday, so I help her with things like that, like she’ll tell me the sentence and then she’ll write it out, and I’ll make sure about the spelling and things like that.

Like Nancy, parents of other elementary school aged children maintained a similar level of home-based involvement.

Helping their children with their homework was almost exclusively practiced among parents with younger children. Veronica and Anthony were the only parents who, in addition to helping their younger daughter, Vanessa, who was in 3rd grade, with her homework, also felt capable of helping their daughter Vilma with her 8th grade school work. Anthony explained,

We have the advantage that, my wife and I are professionals, or at least we were in Colombia, and, we have a level of education that is high, and as a result it has been very easy for us to help them, for example, my older daughter knows that she has a lot of support in math, sciences, and, the first thing that they do when they have homework is that they say dad I have this problem with this homework and we sit down and do the homework together, every night we work on that.

This case was specific to Anthony who, in his country of Colombia, worked as a university professor of chemistry. Not many of the other parents had such strong academic backgrounds, and were not able to provide personal assistance to their children with their homework pass the early elementary school years.

Enrichment Activities
After help with homework, some parents in this study discussed taking their young children on various educational outings, including visits to the local library, museums, and other cultural activities. For instance, Peter had recently visited a cultural event with his daughter Patricia,

This weekend she went to an Indian powwow in… she was there with her mother and with my mother-in-law, and I may take her to the museum, whatever museums they are, the aquarium, things that will, that will teach her something, artwork, and so on.

Peter also talked about visiting the Greenview public library with Patricia, which was the most popular enrichment activity practiced by parents in this study. Yet, like providing help with homework, this activity was once again practiced mostly with younger children. This sentiment was similarly expressed by Victor, who in discussing his use of the local library with the education of his son Vincent and Valeria, explained,

When we were in Red Apple Elementary, the library always gave [Vincent and Valeria] classes on reading or some other things like once they taught [Vincent] how to read the language for people who cannot see, or for people who cannot talk I mean, and that’s how it was, they would teach different things like that and he would socialize with other children… we used to go to the library but now they are in high school, we don’t really go anymore, even if they have a project for school, they use the internet here at home.

As was the case with other parents in this study, Victor, like Wendy and Peter, discussed their home-based involvement of providing academic enrichment activities for their younger, elementary school aged children, a trend that ceased when discussing children at the middle school and high school level.

**Monitoring Academic Achievement**

Another trend found among participants in this study was the monitoring of students’ academic achievement from home. Specifically, technology served as a facilitator to home-based involvement as many parents monitored their children’s grades from home through the internet.
This was common practice among parents whose children attended middle school and high school, including Juliana, Sylvia, and Teresa. For instance, Juliana often discussed her sons’ academic progress with him at home using this online system,

…here we have access to the Internet, so I’m able to see their grades, and the emails, I get the email so one can go into [the homework system], every year they do that, they take out the current teachers, and then they put the new teachers that they have for that year, and you’re able to see what is going on in the class, so that way you know what they have and things like that… I will check his grades and that way we can see how he is doing and we talk about it.

Sylvia, in discussing the online grading system, similarly stated,

I check that a lot, I am able to look at the homework that he has, every time there is an email get it from the teachers… I check it every night… I can go in to check what he got as a grade.

Even Teresa, who at times spoke negatively about the effects of technology on student learning, saw the district’s online grading system as a utility in monitoring her son Tomas’ grades,

I can say that one good thing about technology is that I can check [his] grades, and that way I am on top of him… even if I cannot speak to his teachers regularly… because of work or because I don’t have enough time, I just see how he is doing on the computer and I sit down with him and we talk about it.

Parents of other middle school and high school students mentioned this same online grading system. This system was often associated with a level of ease in parents’ abilities to monitor their children’s academic progress; many parents also explained how they often sat with their children and spoke to them about their academic progress while looking through this system.

Academic Socialization

The type of involvement that seemed to be the most practiced among Latino parents in this study, especially across grade levels, was academic socialization. From an early age, parents reported speaking with their children about their educational and career plans, providing their children with autonomy over these future choices. In many instances, parents were proactive
towards the choices of their children, assisting them in researching how they could achieve these goals. Parents of older children also discussed topics like education in America with their children, where both parents and their children entered into profound discussions about American society and flaws in the educational system that their children were currently engaged in.

*Educational and Career Plans*

Parents in this study often talked to their children about their future career goals and what they needed to do to achieve these goals. Most of these parents also used the internet to research career interests with their children, and afforded their children high levels of autonomy during these conversations. This practice was found among most parents, including those with elementary school aged children like Wendy, Veronica and Anthony, Diana, Ramon, and Barbara, as well as those with older children, such as Rebeca, Ana, Victor, Juliana, and Sylvia.

At the elementary school level, Diana spoke about discussing the future educational and career goals of her son Donald, who was a 3rd grade student at Red Apple Elementary,

Interviewer: Do you know what he wants to do when he is older?

Diana: No, not yet, he says soccer like all kids… now he wants to be a soccer player, but we tell him, well you know like parents have to focus their children, so we tell him that not everyone has the same ability, that capacity, or that luck, to become a famous soccer player, so we asked him to start looking at other things that he might like.

Interviewer: And has he started looking at anything?

Diana: Well he likes science, so we looked at some things together on the computer one day, I showed him some options like what an engineer does, or a doctor, it was more for fun, he didn’t really pick anything, but he liked looking at those things.

At the middle school level, Ana spoke to her daughter, Andrea, about her future plans, which included going to college in either New York or California and studying to be a lawyer,
Ana: I put it in her mind, you have to do something, you have to be somebody, you have to study... she has it pretty clear what she wants to do, how she’s going to do it, basically her whole life, she’s working towards her plan, of course I help her.

Interviewer: How do you do that? How do you help with her plan?

Ana: Like, I say to her you have to pick something that it will be a nice career so you can be good for life... so we went to websites and she’s really good at doing research... so okay, she said, I like social studies, I want to do something with social studies, so she already knows what she wants to be, how she’s going to do it, the car that she wants, the school that she wants to go to.

Common among parents in this study was talking to their children about their future educational and career goals, and conducting research with their children regarding these goals. Additionally, parents guided their children in the decisions they made. For instance, Diana explained to her son, Donald, that he had to find a career to become interested in aside from becoming a soccer player, or Ana telling her daughter Andrea the importance of choosing a career that would assure her the financial freedom necessary to have a “good life.” However, the items that were researched centered on the interests and strengths of the children themselves, such as Donald doing well in science, or Andrea’s interest in social studies.

The American Educational System

Critique of the American educational system was another way that parents practiced academic socialization with their children. Juan, Victor, and Carmen expressed their dissatisfaction with the American educational system and how they discussed this dissatisfaction with their children. In the case of Carmen, her and her children researched alternative educational systems from around the world and had comparative discussions about these systems and the American system that their children were currently engaged in.

Well for example, we will be on the computer, on the Internet, and we will look at a school from Spain, students study outside, they do science, it’s as if they were playing, and my kids they say, oh to that school I would go to that school for the rest of my life, and so we will talk about that, and it may be that schools like that do exist, but they are
very few, I know that in South America there are some, but not all the systems are in that same or have that same ideology, but that is unfortunate because they say that if school was like that they would go to school all their lives, for example they would say like mom today there is school I’m so excited, oh how happy I would be if I could hear them say that, that would be great, and they are not bad students, but they are happy, they are excited, when it snows and there is no school, because, I don’t know, it seems to me that that is like a kind of prison.

Issues with education in America were originally brought to Carmen’s attention by her daughter Carol, which led them to research alternative systems of education. In the case of Juan and Victor, they seemed to have their own critiques of the American educational system, which they brought to their children’s attention, and from which dialogues with their children emerged.

While not all parents shared the same sentiment regarding the American educational system, including Veronica and Anthony, who praised the American system in comparison to education in Colombia, this form of socialization about academic, career, and world-related topics was common among many respondents. Furthermore, not only did parents with children in middle school and high school promote this type of relationship, but even those with children in the later elementary school grades had open discussions with their children regarding education, society, and life. For instance, even though their discussions did not directly relate to the educational system in America, Rebeca did have open discussions about life situations with Rubi who was in the 4th grade, as did Diana with Donald, who was also in 4th grade. Specifically, when Rebeca’s daughter asked where babies come from, Rebeca felt obligated to answer the question sincerely,

My daughter has thoughts that are so… very high, so with her I do not talk with lies, for example, I talk to her about sex, I talk to her about drugs, everything the way it is, for example… her question was how are babies made, well I told her, you know that the man and the woman, well, she says, mom, I already know that part… I mean, you see her and ask if she has the capacity, but yes, everything she understands it, and she even sits with me and asks… those are her thoughts.
MIDDLE-INCOME LATINOS IN MIDDLE-CLASS COMMUNITIES

In Rebeca’s case, she found herself speaking to her daughter, Rubi, about sex and later talked about a similar discussion that she had with her daughter about marital relationships. Similarly, Diana had spoken to Donald about the value of happiness over money when choosing his educational and career goals.

What these findings show among the parents in this study is their willingness to discuss advanced and potentially controversial topics with their children at various grade levels. Similarly, it presents their children with a level of autonomy that allows them to engage these topics with their parents as equal participants. Such is the case with Carmen’s daughter, Carol, who brought her thoughts regarding the American educational system to her mother’s attention, or Rebeca’s daughter, Rubi, who asked her mother questions related to sex and marital relationships.

Concerted Cultivation

Another primary finding among the participants in this study was how childrearing closely aligned to concerted cultivation. Most children discussed throughout this study have been involved in various extracurricular activities. When schools did not offer activities for their children to be involved in, parents enrolled their children in community and private based activities. Additionally, there were high levels of autonomy among these children. Children often chose the activities that they became involved in, even those whose parents had preferred activities for them. However, not being involved in anything was not an option that most parents afforded their children. Early forms of autonomy also showed in the conversations that parents had with their young children and the topics that they covered.

Extracurricular Activities
In cases where schools did not offer any extracurricular activities for students, parents in this study were able to find activities for their children to participate in outside their schools. For example, none of the elementary schools in Greenview had extracurricular activities in the form of sports or the arts. The only offering that elementary schools had in place was an early care and aftercare program provided by a private company which parents had to pay for.

A frequent complaint among parents of elementary school aged children was the lack of extracurricular activities available to their children at these schools. For instance, Ramon talked about the lack of trips at Red Apple; Peter talked about the lack of after school activities at this same school; and Barbara shared similar sentiments concerning both extracurricular activities and field trips at Cherry Street. According to Barbara,

[Bryan] is going to Canary [next school year], and so there they will do activities, but at the elementary school, no, there are not a lot of activities for the kids… [Also] the children almost don’t have any trips, and so I think, well personally with my son, he didn’t have not even one trip this year, like for recreation, for me, I think it is like motivation for them, like [the students] give so much, and they learn, so I think that they should have a little bit more recreation for them.

Like Barbara, parents with children attending one of the elementary schools in Greenview, felt that the schools did not provide enough in terms of extracurricular activities and other incentives.

It also seemed that involvement in some form of extracurricular activity was a requirement of parents in this study. Even when considering the lack of activities offered at the elementary school level, almost all children were enrolled in some type of afterschool activity. Of all children discussed in this study, there was only one child not enrolled in any extracurricular activities the time of interviewing, Maria’s daughter, Melinda. However, less than a year prior, Melinda had been involved in ballet at a private dance school. All other parents, like
Rebeca, Elizabeth, Veronica and Anthony, Peter, Diana, Karen, Nancy, Ramon, and Barbara had enrolled their young children in at least one after school activity.

Some parents also made changes in their personal lives in order to assure their children involvement in activities after school. In the case of Barbara, getting her children involved in activities like karate and soccer was the reason that she obtained her driver’s license and overcame her fear of interacting with native English speakers.

In the beginning I did not involve myself so much with the community… I thought that everything was English and that I would not be able to really interact with anyone… [And] I didn’t drive… at first I had them in karate so not to just have them here at home not doing anything, but then they moved the academy and I saw them here bored… I saw the papers that came here about other activities, and I told myself well if I walk them I can take them, and then I learned to drive for them.

Other children, like Anthony and Veronica’s daughters, would be involved year round in different activities. Anthony explained that,

With the PAL [Vanessa and Vilma] have a lot of options every season, it starts in the summer, in the summer they do cheerleading, later they are in basketball, and right now they are in ballet.

For many parents like Barbara, and like Anthony and Veronica, organizations within the Greenview community were major assets since they helped their younger children join various activities, often through a community based athletic leagues, or at the local PAL or YMCA.

Additionally, all students discussed in this study who were at the middle school and high school level were involved in at least one activity, whether within a community based organizations or at the schools themselves. As an example, Ramon’s daughter, Roxana, who was in 8th grade at Canary, practiced the flute and played basketball at the middle school, while Karen’s son, Kevin, also an 8th grader at Canary, played soccer for a community based team.
Involvement in extracurricular activities continued with more ease as students entered middle school and high school at Greenview. The major difference between the younger children and those older students were the school offerings. Canary Middle School provided its students with a wide range of extracurricular activities, such as arts enrichment programs, sports, and special interest clubs. Greenview High School provided the same types of activities, and it also had an elite program in the arts that was recognized throughout the nation. Teresa, in expressing her content with the level of offerings at the middle school and high school, explained,

I like that they have a lot of things for the students to get involved in other than their regular curriculum, like clubs, my son got involved in band, which he liked… now that he is in high school he is doing piano, which he seems to thrive in, and he has done track too.

This content with the middle school and high school, and its contrast with the lack of offerings at the elementary schools was an ongoing theme among parents. Some parents even commented on both, expressing the difference that they saw. One such example was Victor in talking about his son Vincent:

In Red Apple there weren’t that many things, he used to do the saxophone in the summer, but at the school during the regular year there just wasn’t anything really offered… [And] in Canary, he was still into music, he even gave classes to the younger kids… [But] when he went to high school, there he did get into sports, he was in… marching band, he was in the soccer team, he got into the track team… when he got to the high school because I loved all of those opportunities that they gave the kids.

However, regardless of the amount of extracurricular activities that were available at their schools, all parents in this study found ways to get their children involved in some form of after school activity.

There was also a high level of autonomy offered to students in deciding which extracurricular activities they would engage in. At the middle school level, virtually all students had chosen which pastimes to engage in. Such is the case of Sylvia’s son, Samuel, who decided
to play football after years of playing soccer, even though both Sylvia and the soccer coach did not agree with the change. Sylvia explained,

Well right now he talking about Football, but more than anything it is because of his friends… I spoke to him and I said Samuel are you sure you want to play football? I told him about both, you can’t play both, because both, well they are at the same time, and… forget about it, there is not going to be enough time to do homework or anything, yes, I want to go he said... we are going to let him, he already spoke to the coach and the coach told him the same thing, the coach told him he did not agree because the coach that he has is a Chilean man and he worries about the kids, you know what I mean? I do not agree either but if that is what he wants.

Yet, affording high levels of autonomy was not only characteristic to parents of middle school students. Though to a slightly lesser extent, elementary aged students were also given high levels of autonomy.

*Early Forms of Autonomy*

Most children, including some who were in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade were given high levels of autonomy in deciding which extracurricular activities they would be involved in. For instance, Wendy’s son, William, who was in 4th grade and Barbara’s son, Bryan, who was in 5th grade both decided which sporting activities they would be involved in, even though Wendy and Barbara were the ones who had initially peeked their interest by offering specific activities. In Anthony’s case, he was content with the fact that that his daughters’ interests aligned with his own interests. However, he also expressed his willingness to let his daughters choose which activities to be involved in even if they did not align with his wishes:

Even though here it is very normal that a girl plays those things… maybe because the boys in my time, we were the ones playing soccer… the girls didn’t play soccer… it is always like too rough, I don’t know, you may think that it is something discriminatory, or to say that baseball is only for boys, you know, but we have liked, not that we induce them directly to that, but lucky for us they have chosen things that are more feminine, like ballet, they love it, they like basketball, now my older daughter is getting into volleyball, the other one is in music… yes it has been their choice in the sports, in choosing what they want to do, but if they say, for example, soccer, if they get into that I guess you would have to respect that… You can sign them up for what you want, but what happens if they don’t like it, you cannot force them either.
As was typically the case with parents, Wendy, Barbara, and Veronica and Anthony often allowed a certain level of autonomy to their children when making decisions about their current pastimes, and would respect their choices over their own interests.

In addition to autonomy over their pastimes, some elementary school children were given the same over their future career goals and interests. This was the case with both of Elizabeth’s children, Emilia, who wants to be a dentist, and Esteban, who wants to be a lawyer and one day president. Wendy spoke of her sons similarly, including her younger son William, saying, “I have always talked to them and I have told them that whatever they choose I am going to support them and help them to do it.” Barbara’s younger son, Bryan, Dina’s son, Donald, and Veronica and Anthony’s younger daughter, Vanessa, all had spoken to their parents openly about their future careers as well, and while these parents advised their children and guided their choices, none made choices for them.

Most parents welcomed dialogue with their children about their interests, sometimes followed by researching their career choices, even when these choices, once again, did not align with their own personal wishes for their children. As an example, Veronica and Anthony’s daughter, Vanessa, showed interest in becoming a teacher. Both Anthony and Vanessa felt that Vanessa had chosen that career due to her young age, and would probably change her mind as she got older; however, they did not try to discourage her from looking into that career option, 

Veronica: The little one, well right now [laughter] she says she wants to be a teacher, and we’ve told her, baby, that is probably because you are in elementary school now.

Anthony: They see teachers as their idols.

Interviewer: So did she look into other things?
Anthony: No, we don’t want to discourage her, we talked to her about being a teacher and if that is what she wants to do it is okay, but we think that she will change her mind.

This was similar to Diana, who approached her son, Donald’s interest of becoming a soccer player by advising him to look at alternatives in case his first option did not materialize.

While some parents are more direct, like Diana, and others tend to wait and see how their children’s interests develop over time, like Veronica and Anthony, what most of these parents have in common is the expectation that their children be the ones to choose which careers to pursue. Thus, instead of telling Donald careers that Diana thinks are good career, she is more interested in him being able to find what he likes, just like Veronica and Anthony do not want to discourage their daughter, Vanessa, from becoming a teacher, but seem to be awaiting her interests to shift as she becomes older.

Older children, including Ana’s daughter, Andrea, were also given high levels of autonomy when deciding their future career goals. When speaking of her daughter, Andrea, who was in the 8th grade, Ana stated,

She says that she’s going to leave soon… she wants to live in New York City, she loves New York City or California that are two places that she wants to go, she said that she has in mind already the type of car that she wants, she wants the, the little car, what’s the name [a Beatle]… She wants that one, a little yellow car, she wants to be a lawyer and that’s it… She’s pretty independent, she’s a pretty independent girl so she, she has her future planned and she knows exactly how she will do it, and she saves money for the car, I say to her, I say, whatever you save I will give you the same amount so you can buy the car she says no, I want my car with my own money.

Even though Ana wishes Andrea would decide to study closer to home, she is fully aware of the decisions that Andrea is in route to make, and seems inclined to allow her pursue these goals. In addition, Ana has sat with her daughter and researched most of these interests on the internet to prepare her for what it is that she will need to do to achieve them.
Veronica and Anthony’s older daughter, Vilma, was similar to Ana since she was given the opportunity by her parents to look into career fields of her choosing,

Vilma, which is the one that is a bit more advanced, she has always identified with science… she would talk to me about mixing substances, or combining new substances… in my country I studied chemistry… I thought it was strange that she would lean that way, without me telling her anything, without forcing anything upon her… and the other thing is that she is leaning towards studying orthodontics.

Even though Vilma’s father, Anthony, was a chemistry professor in Colombia, he seemed willing to let Vilma shift her interest to orthodontics or any field that was of interest to her, while he and his wife still guided her towards studying and becoming a professional in some career.

Barriers to Student Academic Achievement

According to the parents interviewed in this study, barriers to the academic achievement of their children often included either a learning disability or adverse behavior of their children. Parents dealing with a known learning disability often became advocates for their children and employed various resources to help them. Parents who spoke of adverse behaviors, often attributed these behaviors to their children’s personalities. While some would try to curb these behaviors by exercising forms of discipline in the home, others felt that they could not change their children’s personalities and as such were limited in what they could do.

Outside factors that parents said influenced the academic progress of their children also included the influence that technology had on their reading, and the American educational system’s influence on their academic motivation. Technology was also discussed by some parents as negatively influencing their children’s interest in reading and their ability to socialize, while the American educational system was considered by some as a negative influence on their children’s individualism and future happiness. Both technology and the educational system were mostly discussed among parents of older children.
Parents discussing other barriers to the academic achievement of their children provided responses that varied considerably. For example, Wendy said that new teachers with new teaching techniques made it difficult for her son to do well in his classes. Ramon expressed that there is a lack of teachers and other school personnel from diverse backgrounds making students, along with their parents, feel a cultural disconnect between themselves and the working professionals at the district. Additionally, Elizabeth said that the added cost of extra academic help for her daughter was the biggest issue. Juliana expressed that the influence of negative peers at Canary Middle School was a bad influence her son’s academic progress. Lastly, Barbara thought that the lack of trips and other incentives left little in terms of motivation for children at Cherry Street to do well in school.

Learning Disabilities and Students Behavior

While results were mixed when speaking about the academic barriers affecting their children, some parents did mention either a learning disability or adverse student behavior as culprits. For instance, Sylvia and Karen spoke about their sons’ behaviors, specifically the fact that they talked a lot in class. Karen, in speaking about her son Kevin explained,

Kevin, well I think it is both of them, they are very friendly, they like to talk in class, buy Kevin has always been a little bit more talkative in class, 6th grade was, when he transferred from Cherry Street to the middle school, he did a lot of talking, maybe like about once a week I would get a phone call home.

Parents, Rebeca and Maria, explained that lack of concentration, including the learning disability of Rebeca’s daughter. In talking about Rubi, Rebecca explained,

What happens is that my daughter has a learning problem… [Also] she wants to be first in everything, for example, they put her to read something and she sometimes responds without reading well… I am not sure if she get nervous or something, and everything gets blocked.
Rebeca, Maria, Sylvia, and Karen were the only parents who discussed either a learning disability or behavior as a barrier to the academic achievement of their children.

The Influence of Technology

Negative influences of technology was also a barrier to student academic achievement as discussed by some parents. Parents stated that technology not only negatively influenced student achievement, but it also affected children’s social development. For instance, parents, Wendy, Victor, Teresa, Diana, and Barbara, all expressed concerns about the negative influence that technology can have on their children. Wendy said that technology was the reason her son didn’t like to read and would get bored of reading after 5 minutes. Summarizing the ideas shared by these parents, Teresa explained that,

[Today’s children] don’t understand that real living takes for you go out there and work hard, and achieve things, you can’t just sit at home and do this [pretending to play with a video game controller] or be like this [pretending to text] with your friends all the time, you have to let them know that that’s not life, there is a time and place for everything, but you know, you are ultimately going to have responsibilities, and that’s what I think, us parents, if we don’t do our jobs, then our kids are just going to be idiots and they are just sit around and do nothing.

Thus, Wendy, like Victor, Teresa, Diana, and Barbara, all were critical of their children being overly exposed to technology.

Victor, among others, also discussed the steps that he took in order to assure that his son benefitted from in-person relationships,

Another thing that we do with him, and that he likes, is that every Friday the living room becomes a play area, every Friday, since middle school… there is a group of them that like to spend time together, that like to be together… they can come here and they eat here, we order a pizza or something like that, and they spend time here in the living room together playing games, especially in the winter, and that is something that we have always had him do, to have real friends here in the house, not virtual friends like he does a lot, for example right now he is probably connected over the computer with a friend.
Victor had set up a game day when his son’s friends were allowed to visit their home and spend time together. Like Victor, many parents in this study guarded against the influences that technology could have on their children by taking similar steps, including family outings and time shared in the home free of electronic devices, or limiting the use of these devices.

Technology was also said to have negatively influenced the act of reading among some children. For example, Wendy cited reading at home as common practice when their children were younger, but explained that this practice faded over time due to their preferred interest in technology. Wendy exemplified this pattern by talking about her troubles getting her younger son to read,

"Sometimes I cannot really help much with his homework but in aftercare they help him, and I also try to have him read, but right now with the technology it is very difficult to force them to read because they always want to be looking at the iPad or looking at the television or games, so it is very difficult, he reads for five minutes and that’s it, after five minutes he is tired of reading."

Even when taking their children to the library, Wendy explained that they would no longer be interested in reading books, but would rather go and listen to music or rent movies.

The American Educational System

Like technology, the American Educational System was also discussed by some parents as a barrier to the academic achievement of their children. For instance, Juan and Carmen felt that education in America did not do enough to stimulate students’ personal interests and did not help to develop the whole child. Victor shared similar sentiments regarding his son, Vincent, who was interested in computers but felt that he would not be able to engage what he likes until he entered college:

"His school right now, I think schools in general, but it does not allow children to practice their passion, what they are really interested in… he thought about a university in …, I
forget the name, but he said he wanted to go there because that school… teaches what he likes, with the technology, they will teach him what he wants.

Like Victor, Juan and Carmen felt that American schools could do more in providing students an atmosphere where they could be themselves and engage in their personal interests. These parents felt that the system was either too academically centered, too rigorous, or did not focus enough on the individual interests of the children. Similar thoughts were shared by Barbara who explained that not having any field trips at Cherry Street Elementary led students, including her son, Bryan, to feel unmotivated. For Barbara, trips or recreational activities throughout the year would have served as incentives for Cherry Street students to do well academically.

Relationships and Parent Interactions

Interactions between parents and their children often resulted in parents becoming guides for their children and supporting their children when needed. Yet, these parents still afforded their children high levels of autonomy considering their current pastimes and future careers.

Relationships between parents and school personnel were often positive. Nevertheless, in cases where parents felt that schools were not appropriately supporting their children, these parents were ready and willing to confront teachers and administrators on their children’s behalf.

Between-parent relationships were mostly negative when they centered around the parent-teacher organizations, even though some positive relationships among Latino parents were discussed.

Parent-Child Relationships

Parents often played the roles of guides and supports to their children while their children were allowed high levels of autonomy in decisions regarding their futures and current pastimes. Additionally, both parents and their children seemed comfortable interacting with each other within these roles, as some children were reported to confide in their parents.
and Ana, provided examples of the type of interaction common among many parents in this study.

As previously detailed, Rebeca would speak to Rubi, who was in 4th grade, about topics that Rebeca felt were advanced for Rubi’s age, including drugs, sex, and marital relationships. However, Rebeca chose to speak to her about such topics honestly considering Rubi’s high level of thinking; she felt that she could not speak to Rubi with lies. Similarly, Ana allowed her daughter Andrea, who was in 8th grade, to make decisions about her future. For instance, Andrea had already decided that she was going to move out of her mother’s house as soon as she graduated high school; she knew where she was going to live, and what she was going to study. While Ana did not agree with all of the decisions that Andrea had made for herself, as her mother, she did not discourage Andrea from pursuing these interests, but rather assisted her in researching how to accomplish them in the future.

Rebeca and Ana, as was the case with other parents in this study, had high level discussions with their daughters, acted as guides and advised them on their decisions, and supported these decisions even when they did not agree with them. As actors, parents in this study and their children seemed comfortable when interacting with each other.

Two similar examples included Barbara and Carmen and her husband, Diego, who built relationships with their children that would allow them to talk to each other about their school day. Barbara, discussing her interactions with her daughter, Beverly, explained,

Sometimes she gets in the car and I look at her and say oh you didn’t really have a good day today at school, tell me why, because you see I know her, and then she tells me no mom it’s that this happened or that happened, and I tell her, don’t worry we’ll talk to the teacher, to see if she can help you, to give you extra work, we’ll figure it out.
These types of interactions were also practiced among other members of the family, at times in a communal setting like the dinner table. Such was the case of Carmen and Diego, as explained by Diego during his interview:

Almost always one gets home after work and my wife will ask me in front of my children, how was work honey, and I will talk about it, I will say, oh this happened to me today or that, and having that conversation about our day and the things that happened, if there is something that they want to share to the conversation they can, they can talk about their day, and between all of us we give each other our opinion or advice, we just talk together like that about our day… We are very united… if something happens to one then we all know about it or we can all tell, no matter what, we know something is not right because we know each other very well… I think that understanding them, listening to them is very important, and the support that they feel, that confidence, that they can count on us, that we are there for whatever… it is very important.

This level of conversation between parents and their children was almost unanimous throughout the parents in this study, and shows how parents in this study acted as supports to their children, and helped make their homes a safe-place for children to interact and speak openly.

Parent-Teacher or Principal Relationships

Parent satisfaction with their children’s schools was high overall. Specifically, parents were satisfied with their children’s teachers and administrators. For example, Rebeca said that she had not had any problems with any of the teachers at Harvest Road Elementary, and that even though she had never interacted with the principal there, she was satisfied with the work he had done so far. Sylvia, Victor, Diana, and Ramon were all satisfied with the teachers at Red Apple Elementary as well. Maria, Elizabeth, Wendy, Veronica, and Anthony felt the same way about the teachers in Pine Tree Elementary, as did Juan about those at Green Street Elementary. Carmen and Diego, as well as Karen, Nancy, and Barbara, were also very pleased with Cherry Street Elementary, and the professionals that worked there, even in light of the negative experience that Barbara faced in dealing with the school PTA, and which Karen reiterated.

Parents with children at the Canary Middle School and Greenview High School shared similar
sentiments towards the teachers and administrators who worked at these schools. Even though they did not speak about their relationships with teachers and administrators in as much depth as did parents at the elementary schools level, they were satisfied overall with the service that these individuals provided their children. Of the 21 parents interviewed in this study, only Ana and Peter seemed dissatisfied with schools at Greenville, though Peter was the only parent that was exclusively dissatisfied, since Ana did mention some positives.

What parents seemed to like most about the teachers and administrators at Greenview schools were that they seemed to care about their students and would be generally engaged in the education and development of the children. Veronica, in talking about a prior principal at Pine Street Elementary, said:

He was always outside everyday, even if it was cold or snowing, and he always welcomed everyone, he would greet you with a smile and welcome your child to the school every morning, and… he interacted a lot with the parents... you could tell that he liked what he did.

Similarly, Veronica discussed one of his older daughter’s teacher’s at Pine Street, adding that:

Vilma had this one teacher, Ms. Roberts, who was very demanding… but [she was] a very good teacher… she took a lot of care of them, told them to bring a good snack if they were going somewhere, bring a little towel so that you can sit and not sit on the floor, bring your sweater… she was a little bit older the lady but also because of that she would take care of them.

Barbara, another parent, also talked about the prior principal at Cherry Street Elementary, who was in charge of the school when her daughter, who now attends Canary Middle School, went there.

Mr. Lee… he was older, but he really did keep a good balance in the school between parents, students, he always tried… he made sure that everyone would be one family and you could tell he cared about the students, he was very dedicated… you noticed that.
Karen, also speaking about Mr. Lee, said that she was amazed at the fact that he knew the names of every child at the school, and that he would greet his students by names every morning regardless of the weather or season.

**Satisfaction with Schools**

Primarily, satisfaction among parents towards Greenview Public Schools rested on their approval of the supporting staff, such as teachers and administrators. Many were also satisfied with what their children learned and the academic level that the schools provided, though these topics did not get as wide a response as did teachers and administrators. Another school related positive shared by some parents included the fact that schools at Greenview were multicultural, housing students from diverse backgrounds. According to most parents, the cultural makeup included White, Filipino, and Latino families, among other cultural groups, teaching their children to be inclusive of others, and making them better citizens.

**Negative Relationships with School Personnel**

Some parents had negative experiences with staff members and members of the administration at some of the elementary schools in Greenview. For instance, even though Maria liked the principal at Red Apple Elementary, she did feel that, at times, she had to be aggressive with the principal and the school psychologist in order to get things done for her daughter. When asked about her relationship with the principal, she stated,

> It’s been good but I had to like really push him, for example… we found out that it was really really hard for Melinda to finish her homeworks… she was having the same behavior at school… [So] I also had a meeting with the school psychologist, and I really had to push her, like call her a lot of times to see what was going on with her case, finally I got tired and I got in touch with the principal and I told him listen this is what is going on and I need your help to keep pushing this up cause I need answers.

A similar experience occurred at the middle school with Juliana when she felt that her son’s school was not being proactive about his ADHD,
The last time that I went [to the school for a meeting] I was really upset… I told them… you are the school, tell me what you want to do, tell me or give me a solution to the problem… he has the right to an education, you are the ones that have to find a way to help him… it has been more difficult the last six months… there were two teachers that, they do things that just don’t make sense, for example… they start telling him things… that no teacher should… I mean you know he has a problem, [and] you start telling him things that make him act out.

Such discontent, as shared by Maria and Juliana, was common among the participants in this study, especially when considering parents’ experiences with the PTA and the issue of overcrowding schools, which were presented by various parents from different schools. Nevertheless, when parents like Maria and Juliana, were discontent with members of the school staff, they became actively involved, called meetings, and shared their discontent with members of the school, including members of the administration.

Relationships between Parents

Many parents were also involved with the PTA, yet every parent who had worked with members of their school’s PTA has been turned off by the experience. Not one parent spoke of their PTA in only positive terms, as some did about teachers and administrators at the district. Some parents who said they were at one point involved with the PTA at their children’s schools felt unwelcomed among members of the PTA. This was true for parents Ana, Peter, Elizabeth, Karen, and Barbara. For instance, Ana was involved in the PTA at Red Apple Elementary for about 3 years, and left dissatisfied when she felt that they did not value her input regarding the year book. Additionally, Peter felt the same way about the PTA at Red Apple Elementary, calling it a clique:

I volunteer for some of the activities that they have there, but the decisions are being made between two and three parents, even as a volunteer I have to keep asking them do you need my help, use me, I am here because I want to be useful, so tell me what you need me to do, so, it is kind of different from when my daughter was in Redfield Township, I was very involved in the PTA, not to say that it wasn’t without politics, but it was a different experience than the one I am having now in the public system.
Additionally, Elizabeth felt like an outsider when interacting with the PTA at Harvest Road Elementary since there were no other Spanish-speaking members there.

None, however, were more critical of the PTA than Barbara. At Cherry Street Elementary, Barbara faced a similar situation as did Ana and Peter, but this was magnified considering that Barbara had been an active parent member at Cherry Street for over 10 years:

I was not satisfied because the PTA did not manage things very well [this year]. I felt discontent because I have been working [with the PTA] for years… In the beginning… when my daughter was there, there was a lot more equality, everyone was more united with everything, but this past year, I did see a total difference… [Now] I think that the PTA really chooses those from their own group and they take out those who do not belong, even if we are involved, even in we work for the kids, they push us to the side, there was a lot of rivalry in that sense, I feel in that sense disillusioned… it is a cultural separation. I do think that is cultural.

Barbara then proceeded to show me two yearbooks; one yearbook was from her daughter’s graduation five years ago, and the other was the current yearbook in which her son was a graduating student,

This year I noticed it more… this year you can notice it more… you can see here the difference between the two books from when my daughter finished 5th grade and when my son finished 5th grade… there were donations and we gave, look this is a donation from the church and you cannot even see it, you cannot even see what church that is, and there are things here that parents paid for and you can’t really see it, there were a lot of things that I did not, that we didn’t like, for example, they said that we had the right to buy a page or half a page for our children, but at no time did they tell us that, at no time did we get a letter or an announcement, and so one feels sad because one would like their children to have half a page too, we want them to feel good and proud too, but at no time did the president tell us, oh you have to donate something so that you can have half a page, there were only a few people who were notified of that, and you will see the difference… I think that this really does influence our community, it really hurts our community because we end up feeling separated from what is going on.

Barbara showed me a section of the yearbook where the events that occurred this academic school year at Cherry Street Elementary were being reported. On one page were two girls, of the same non-Latino family Barbara explained, who won a contest where students had to design the
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cover of the yearbook. These girls had a picture together which covered one entire page. Then she showed a small picture, covering less than one-eighth of a page, of a Latino girl who had cut her hair and donated it to cancer patients.

When asked if she and other parents had spoken out about the recent incidents that transpired at the school, she explained,

Barbara: Yes, I have spoken with many parents, but many parents do not want to say anything because of the difference that they still have kids who are in the school, they do not want to have any more problems, and you do have to understand them, they just do not want to have any problems or to have others take it the wrong way, so, there are a lot of people that unfortunately, we just stay quiet.

Interviewer: At no point no one has tried to talk to the administration at the school?

Barbara: We did talk, but, it was two parents, and the principal did attend to us, gave us solutions, but, unfortunately the same thing kept happening, for me the same thing kept happening, they did not really keep in mind anything that we had said, and I can really talk about that from personal experience because I have really worked for my children, I have given them a lot of time.

While these examples were the most critical presentation of group separation among parents, Barbara was not alone. Parents from other schools, as previously detailed, shared similar sentiments. Furthermore, in almost every case, PTA leaders and active members were mostly, if not entirely, non-Latino parents. The only Latino-run PTA was at Cherry Street Elementary about five years prior to this study.

Barriers to Parental Involvement

In this study, both legal status and language proficiency were said to have played a critical role in parents’ ability to become involved in the education of their children. While all parents interviewed supported what may be considered a middle-income lifestyle, many had to work long hours in order to uphold this lifestyle. Some parents also lived in double-income households, limiting the time that either parent had to dedicate to their children. Since parental
involvement has been found to relate positively to student academic achievement (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2005a; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999), barriers that limit parents’ ability to spend time with their children and involvement themselves in their children’s education, may help lead to lowered academic outcomes.

In addition to legal status and language proficiency, financial limitation was another barrier that parents in this study faced. Even though none of the study participants directly discussed money as a barrier to their involvement, some parents, especially those whose children were in elementary school, complained about the costs associated with having to pay for their children’s extracurricular activities and academic help outside of their schools. This included Ana who had her daughter in private art classes, Maria, who enrolled her daughter in ballet, and Elizabeth, who paid for extra academic help for her daughter Emilia. All three parents shared the sentiment that such activities were expensive for them and that they would have liked their children’s elementary schools to have extracurricular activities available.

Legal Status and Lower Quality Jobs

One barrier to their involvement as parents was the fact that some respondents were, or may have been, undocumented immigrants. Among other impacts, their legal status affected the jobs that they were able to obtain, which, in turn, affected what they could afford to enroll their children in, insofar as extracurricular activities, academic help, and enrichment activities. Lower quality jobs also influenced the amount of time that these parents were able to set aside for their children since their jobs often required more than a 40-hour work week. Such was the case with Juliana’s husband who worked alongside undocumented workers, and who himself may have been undocumented at one point.
During her interview, Juliana discussed her husband’s inability to find a job that would allow him reasonable working hours and the ability to spend time with his children after school. Additionally, even though Juliana was herself a legal U.S. resident, she also had to work a full time job to help her husband provide for their family. The fact that they both worked, and that her husband had to work more than 40 hours a week at his job, limited the amount of time that they could afford to their children in terms of involvement.

During a conversation with Ramon, who was greatly involved with the Latino population in Greenview, he explained the issue of legal status and Greenview as he saw it,

Ramon: I think that the main limitation overall really is the legal status that they have, I think that is a bigger issue, more than the language itself.

Interviewer: But Greenview is an area where home values and income is higher than the state average, how is it, in your opinion, that such a large number of undocumented people are able to live in that area? Are they renting?

Ramon: Many rent, and where they rent, there are a number of people living that surpasses the amount of people that should live in that house, considering the space that it provides… [Some may have also purchased a home] through a family member or someone who they know and are close to, they help them with that, but the problem that they have to do extra activities to be able to support [their family], like if they have to pay the mortgage at their house, many of those parents who live there, they have a part time on top of their full time job.

These thoughts shared by Ramon aligned to the lives of other participants, including Carmen and Diego, as well as Veronica and Anthony. For instance, Carmen and Diego had listed both language and legal status as barriers to their parental involvement. Carmen, when asked about the challenges that they faced as parents, explained,

Well for me, it is still the language, because I still have a lot to go, I do not take out enough time from my schedule to sit down and study, and, the other thing, well I think, would be not being legal in this country, that is a barrier too, I mean not that much, because many times we are above that, but in certain occasions yes, one finds himself with that barrier.
Veronica and Anthony discussed the long working hours that they both had to endure at one point, and which Anthony still endured as the primary financial support for the family. While in Colombia, Anthony has been a university professor for nine years, and his wife was a working professional. However, in the U.S., Anthony worked as a labor worker in a factory for over 20 years, a position that his wife also held for various years. When asked why neither had validated their degrees or sought to obtain a degree in the U.S. in order to obtain better employment, they hinted at legal status, along with English language proficiency.

It is unclear how many participants in this study were undocumented; understandably, not many participants discussed legal status during interviewing. Nevertheless, parents like Carmen and Diego, Veronica and her husband, and possibly even Carmen and Anthony, shared experiences that call into question their ability to obtain higher quality jobs, even though they may have qualified for such types of employment.

Additionally, Latino parents living in middle class communities, especially if they are undocumented, may need to work additional hours to maintain the lifestyles that their families are engaged in. Yet, even with longer working hours, they may still not be able to afford their children paid academic or enrichment services, and because of longer working hours, the time that they have available to be involved in the education of their children will be limited.

Elizabeth, who worked in her husband’s company as a housekeeper, spoke about the long hours of work that her and her husband were often engaged in, and explained that either her mother-in-law or her two older children’s father would take care of them while she was working. Nevertheless, Elizabeth found paying for additional tutoring services for her daughter Emilia costly and as a result, began using her daughter’s tutor on an as-needed basis.
Further illuminating the time constraints that long working hours created, Maria, in speaking about her daughter, Melinda, explained:

I don’t have that much time because of my job to be like inside the school and stuff… Since we have been living here I have tried to improve that day by day, so like having her feel like even though she doesn’t see me until like 8 o’clock in the night, but she sees me in the morning, and we have contact in the afternoon, and she’s up after I come from work, so she can have like, she can feel like I know what’s going on.

Thus, while time was an issue, parents like Maria found ways to share daily life with their children, even if it meant being with them in the morning before school or assuring that their bedtime was after they arrived home from work. Similar instances that dealt with the effects long working hours had on time spent with their children were also shared by parents Sylvia, Wendy, Teresa, and Diana. Like Melinda, Veronica, Carmen and Diego, and Veronica and Anthony. Working long hours was a necessity for the wellbeing of their family, yet it caused limitations in the amount of time that parents were able to spend on parental involvement activities.

Language Proficiency

Another issue, along with legal status and lower quality jobs, was language proficiency, as shared by various parents in this study. For instance, even those who studied English oversees, like Diana, explained how the English she learned in Colombia differed greatly from the English spoken in the U.S.,

I know that we are in a country where English is the main language, but, unfortunately, not all of us speak it, all of us are starting from zero, at least the majority, I studied it in Colombia, but being here I realized that I never studied English apparently, because I really felt that I was starting from zero all over again when I got here.

Like Rebeca, Diana, Elizabeth, Wendy, Barbara, Veronica and Anthony saw their English proficiency as limitations to their abilities to be involved in the education of their children as they would have ideally liked to be. For example, when talking about helping her daughter with her homework, Elizabeth said:
Oh yes, yes I do try [to help her with her homework] every single day, to review it and I try to help them as much as I can, but the greatest problem that my daughter has had has been literature, reading, and it is very difficult for you to help a child with reading when you do not know how to read the language and understand it... In math I can help her a lot but she needs to be able to read well the problems in math in order to be able to understand them.

Anthony shared similar sentiments when talking about helping his daughters with their homework:

[I help them] in Spanish… if there is something that I would have liked, it has to do with the way that I teach my daughters… teaching them in English is very difficult, there are a few things that I can say… [For example] we can give explanations about math, but math can be understood well in English and in Spanish, they are the same, but getting them to understand me explain other things to them in Spanish has been very interesting… I would have liked to have been able to learn enough English in order to have been able to help them in English with their homework.

Thus, even though Anthony felt prepared to help his daughters with their math homework in Spanish, his level of ease changed when his children needed help with other subjects that required the use of English. Both Anthony and Elizabeth, like other parents, found their lack of fluency in English a barrier to their ability to help their children with their homework.

The Middle-Class Latino Parent

The educational literature has shown that parents are often more involved in ways that align to home-based and school-based involvement during the earlier academic school years (Hill & Tyson, 2009). While middle-class Latino parents behave in a similar manner, their involvement at these levels are influenced by the barriers they face. Lack of English proficiency may affect their ability to help their children with their homework at an early age, and issues of legal status may lead some not to engage teachers and administrators to levels similar to others parents with legal resident status. Thus, the current study shows that language, legal status, and even cultural differences, are issues Latinos face across multiple socioeconomic levels.
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Amidst such barriers, the literature has shown Latino parents make personal sacrifices for their children (López, 2001) and remain actively involved in their children’s educational (Ramirez, 2003) and social (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007) development. In this study, Latino parents remained involved in the education of their children in traditional ways, including home-based and school-based involvement, but they also exercised power at their children’s schools, utilized resources such as help from professional like psychologists and academic tutors, and problem solved with their children in order to combat their educational issues. This study, as is the case with those previous, shows Latino parents proactively helping their children succeed academically and educationally.

In this study, involvement in the form of Academic socialization (Hill & Tyson, 2009) showed up earlier than expressed in the educational literature. Also prevalent was a heightened level of autonomy among young children and practices aligning with concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003). These findings show that Latinos follow trajectories similar to the childrearing of other middle-class parents. However, much earlier than traditionally thought, parents in this study interacted with their children in intellectually equal terms, gauged their opinions, and promoted independent thinking. At the same time, these parents guided their children and exercised certain levels of control over them. For instance, many promoted the childrearing practices of familismo, respeto, personalismo, and simpatia (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007). However, force was rarely used in childrearing, whereas open conversation, leading by example, and allowing children to reach their own realizations were overall common practices.

Given this study’s findings, I offer three parental involvement frameworks that policymakers might utilize in understanding middle-class Latino parents. These frameworks include (1) understanding that the barriers middle-class Latino parents face are not so different
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from Latinos from other socioeconomic levels. Many of the resources and considerations afforded low-income Latinos can still be of major benefit to those of higher socioeconomic classes. Furthermore, (2) the interests of middle-class Latinos are the same as most middle-class parents as found in the educational literature. Middle class Latino parents long to see their children achieve academic success and social stability. With this hope in mind, they proactively help their children realize these goals. Lastly, (3) middle-class Latino parents are interested in educating the whole child. While academic progress is important, raising a model citizen – who is culturally and socially aware of those around them – is their primary concern.

Reflective Field Notes

I recorded my reflections as field notes as a validity strategy and to allow me to better understand my own stance as a researcher. In doing so, I was better aware of how my personal experiences and perspectives may have influenced the way that I approached my topic during the phases of data collection and analysis. At first, I recorded thoughts related to my personal and professional experiences as a university professor working with middle-income Latinos. Later, I began to include earlier experiences that I had had working with lower-income Latinos in the social services sector and as a parent of the elementary school children that I taught. As a result, I began to see much overlap between these lower-income Latinos and my respondents.

Prior to this realization, I thought that barriers common among my respondents would focus on time constraints due to busy work schedules and issues related to parent-school relationships. While busy work schedules were found, I did not expect that so many respondents would work two jobs or form double-income homes. In fact, some respondents heavily relied on extended family members (often their parents) to care for their children while they worked long hours. There were other barriers among respondents that also surprised me, including lack of
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English language proficiency, undocumented resident statuses, and cultural differences between families and schools. These realizations helped form the coding categories of English language proficiency and legal status issues, and parent-child conversations focused on discontent with the American educational system. Early on, I thought that my respondents would relate most to the Latinos that I instructed at the university level. On the contrary, none of my participants were enrolled in school, including those with professional degrees earned in their native countries but not yet validated in the U.S.

My reflective field notes informed my approach towards my respondents and my data analysis process. Due to the fact that my interview questions were open-ended from the onset, I did not find the need to significantly alter either my topic or my interview questions or methods. However, I did expand on topics dealing with issues I previously thought only common among lower-income Latinos. For instance, when respondents began talking about their difficulties communicating in English, I proceeded to ask them to exemplify such barriers and the effects that they had. I did not add any questioning specific to these newly found themes since I did not want to lead my respondents, nor did I want my personal histories influencing my questioning; nevertheless, I did probe my respondents further when they raised such topics.

In the end, my reflections helped me to differentiate between the barriers and dynamics that I felt middle-class Latinos would have as opposed to those that were actually being reported by my study’s participants. At the same time, my reflections also helped me separate what I knew, based on my past experiences, from the conclusions that I was drawing from my respondents’ comments. Even though similarities were found between the Latinos from lower-income communities that I had previously come in contact with and my respondents, for validity issues, I did not want to use my past experiences to validate what my respondents were reporting.
Thus, my reflections were used as a way to assure that my conclusions were derived as objectively as possible.
Chapter 5 – Conclusion

The academic underperformance of Latino students (Gándara, 2010) is a major cause for concern considering that Latinos are a significant part of the total U.S. population and are ever-increasing in numbers. Latinos were 16.4 percent of the total population in 2010, and today, one in five children is of Latino origin (Cárdenas & Kerby, 2012; Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011); additionally, Latinos are projected to rise to one-third of the total U.S. population by 2050 (Cárdenas, Ajinkya, & Léger, 2011). Considering their actual and projected population numbers, and as demand for employees with professional degrees increases across the U.S. labor market (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013), the educational outcomes of Latino students at all levels of education will continue to be critical.

Educational achievement in the form of college degree attainment is also critical to the welfare of individuals living in the U.S. Between 1979 and 2012, working individuals with a bachelor’s degree saw increases in earnings of 17.4 percent for males and 28.5 percent for females, while those who were high school graduates but had no college experience saw a decline in wages of 19.1 percent for males and a minimal increase of 2.7 percent if female (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Thus, in order for individuals to keep pace with today’s labor market, they must achieve academic success at the post-secondary school level.

Currently, Latino students are not keeping pace with their peers in terms of academic achievement. The bachelor’s degree completion rate of Latino young adults has seen little change when compared to members of other major ethnic groups. Between 1975 and 2008, for instance, Latinos realized a 3 percent increase in their bachelor’s degree attainment rate. During the same period, this figure was 10 percent for Black Americans and 12 percent for White Americans (Gándara, 2010). Gaps in achievement have also been found at the secondary school
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level. In 2013, 12 percent of 12th grade Latinos placed at or above proficient in math and 23 percent placed at or above proficient in reading. For 12th grade White students, these figure were 33 percent and 47 percent respectively. Similar trends were also found at the 4th and 8th grade levels (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, various years).

Given the positive relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2005a; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999), promoting and supporting the involvement of Latino parents in the education of their children might be one way to help combat the achievement gap that Latino youth are facing. This measure may also lead to an increase in the labor market competitiveness of Latinos for years to come.

While there is research on Latino parental involvement (Duran & Perez, 2013) and childrearing (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007), most research is monolithic as it focuses on poor and working class Latinos. A lack of focus exists on Latino sub-populations across socioeconomic lines. Specifically, one Latino group has been continuously overlooked throughout the literature, namely those of the middle-class. Nevertheless, Latinos have been part of the higher social and economic classes, while others continue entering these classes for the first time (Camayd-Freixas, 2006; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Telles and Ortiz, 2008). Their presence in the middle class challenges the view that issues faced by Latino enclaves are strictly those of high poverty, high crime rates, and low levels of involvement. Since middle-class Latino youth and young adults also face a similar gap in academic achievement as those from lower socioeconomic groups (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), they too are consequential to the educational literature.
Considering that the educational literature has shown positive relationships between student academic achievement and parental involvement (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005; Sirvani, 2007) among diverse populations (Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2006; Sirvani, 2007; St. Clair & Jackson, 2006), educational leaders may want to focus on increasing parental involvement as a means of raising student academic achievement. Among Latino students, the experiences of those who are middle-income living in middle-class communities can also find its place in the educational literature, and this information can become a resource for educational leaders who serve such students. The current study is one step towards this realization, with the hope that educational leaders, by understanding the dynamics surrounding parental involvement and childrearing among middle-class Latino parents, may begin to impart changes that help narrow the achievement gap among middle-class Latino students.

Latino Parents at Greenview Township

In the current study, there were 21 participants across 19 families interviewed. All participants were parents of children attending one of seven public schools in Greenview Township, a community where the household income was above the state and national averages and in which over a quarter of the population was Latino. In order for participants to qualify for this study, they had to identify as Latino, reside in Greenview Township, and have at least one child currently attending public school at Greenview without qualifying for free- or reduced-priced lunch. Additional requirements, including educational and occupational status, family assets, and income, were also used to assure the middle-class status of participants.

This study centered on the perspectives of participants, with special attention paid to the ways in which these parents were involved in the education of their children and how they viewed their involvement. Obstacles to academic success faced by their children and how these
obstacles were approached were also discussed. Data were collected and analyzed using in-depth interviewing, an open-ended method of questioning, and open and inductive coding.

Analytic Induction during Data Collection and Analysis

In the current study, themes that were consistent among multiple respondents were coded for and analyzed. These themes thus emerged from the participants during data collection, and not from the relevant literature. However, many of these same themes corresponded with what had already been found within the literature on parental involvement and childrearing. This was not wholly surprising given that this study’s interview protocol was, by and large, informed by the extant evidence on middle class and Latin American immigrant parents’ approaches to childrearing and educational involvement.

Findings in the current study did, nevertheless, add to the existing body of knowledge in parental involvement. For instance, while scholars (Lareau, 2003) have proposed that childrearing practices are mostly motivated by socioeconomic status, the experiences of Latino parents in my study related in many ways to the experiences of poor and working class Latinos (though not entirely). Also, there were high levels of socialization and dialogue between respondents and their children, similar to what we know about academic socialization (Hill & Tyson, 2009) and concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003); however, the topics discussed between parents and their children were new to the literature. This study found that middle class Latino parents may openly speak to their children about flaws in the American educational system, as well as the importance of being happy with oneself over academic and even financial success. Another difference between the literature and the current study is the age at which these types of conversations began. The literature has shown this level of socialization to commence at the middle school level (Hill & Tyson, 2009), while those in the current study reported socializing
with their children about such advanced topics as early as 3rd grade. These findings, among others, are discussed in the subsequent sections.

Traditional Forms of Parental Involvement

The actions and behaviors of the parents in this study aligned with those found within the parental involvement subcategories of school-based and home-based involvement (Epstein, 1987). These actions and behaviors included meeting with teachers and parent groups, monitoring student academic achievement, employing community resources, and providing help with homework. In line with the educational literature (Hill & Tyson, 2009), the school-based and home-based involvement practices of most parents in this study were found during the elementary school years, and decreased as their children neared the end of elementary school. For instance, even though there were various traditional acts of school-based and home-based involvement practiced early on, only two such acts were found at the middle school and high school level. These included the monitoring of student academic achievement from home – made possible by an online reporting tool in place at middle school and high school – and attending open-houses and parent teacher conferences at their children’s schools. However, while all parents with elementary-school aged children visited their children’s schools, and some parents at the middle school level did as well, this practice was virtually non-existent among the parents of high school students.

Another type of parental involvement, academic socialization, began in the current study earlier than the literature suggested (Hill & Tyson, 2009). In the educational literature, academic socialization was reported as children began entering middle school. In the current study, however, some parents of 3rd grade students described eliciting the opinions of their children regarding their current pastimes and future career goals. They also discussed the utility
of education and possible career paths during these early years. As children got older, however, *academic socialization* during parent-child interactions became evermore prominent, a pattern that closely aligns with trends documented in the research literature (Hill & Tyson, 2009). In the current study, parents of high school aged children continued to discuss topics such as current pastimes and future career goals with their children; however, during these later grades, they also discussed more controversial topics such as displeasure with the American educational system and the negative influence of technology as a form of communication absent physical, social interaction. Overall, parents in the current study, regardless of their children’s age, spoke to them about education-related topics openly, and welcomed their children’s thoughts and opinions during such dialogue.

Middle Class Latino Parents

The educational literature on parental involvement and childrearing rarely details the experiences of middle-class Latino parents. Thus, to better understand parental involvement and childrearing among middle-class Latinos, the experiences of similar groups that are better represented in the educational literature have been considered. In this case, parental involvement and childrearing among middle-income parents from other racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as the experiences of Latinos from lower socioeconomic statuses, have been compared with findings from the current study. The results of these comparisons have led to both overlaps and divergences between the middle-class Latino parents from this study and parents from other groups.

For instance, while literature on parental involvement in the middle class has shown parents possess high levels of entitlement (Diamond & Gomez, 2004), an ability to influence their children’s schools (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009), and high levels of social capital (Hill &
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Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006), parents in the current study demonstrated partial levels of entitlement and limits in their ability to influence change and in their levels of social capital. By contrast, parents within the study were able to gather resources to benefit their children (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006) and did report childrearing strategies that aligned with concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003), two phenomena that have been found within the literature on parental involvement in the middle class.

Findings from the literature on parental involvement among low-income Latino parents also overlapped with the experiences of parents within the current study. These similarities included: parental focus on the interests of their children (Orozco, 2008), the central use of family in childrearing (Arredondo & Rodriguez, 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004), and the importance of native language and culture retention (Orozco, 2008). Also common among both groups were the childrearing practices of familismo, personalismo, and simpatia (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007) as well as the presence of certain barriers to parental involvement – such as working multiple jobs, having minimal English language proficiency, and lacking familiarity with the American educational system (Ceballo et al., 2010; Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2010).

As noted, middle-class Latino parents in this study shared some characteristics with parents from non-Latino middle class families. At the same time, many of their approaches to childrearing were also similar to those of lower income Latino parents. These overlaps and differences show why educational researchers and policy makers should set middle class Latino parents apart from other middle-class racial and ethnic groups, and why they should be consciously thought of in group-specific ways. In order to understand middle-class Latino
parents as their own interest group, the differences and similarities between them and other
groups more commonly found within the educational literature is elaborated.

Parent Involvement in the Middle Class

Results were mixed regarding the parental involvement literature of middle-class parents
and the findings in this study. The literature indicates that middle-class parents possess a certain
level of entitlement (Lareau, 1989) in selecting schools they felt met their children’s needs
(Diamond & Gomez, 2004); on the contrary, parents in the current study only showed levels of
entitlement when their children were struggling academically and they felt that teachers and
other school personnel were not doing their due diligence to help their children. In all other
instances, even when finding faults within their children’s schools, parents in this study were
passive and often conflict-avoidant.

The educational literature also indicates that middle class parents influence schools for
the benefit of their children above the interests of other students and their families of low-income
and minority status (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009). Additionally, social capital such as parents’
skills, knowledge, and information resulting from parent school involvement is higher for
members of the middle-class (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006). The parents in this
study, however, rarely exercised forms of social capital in order to influence the schools of their
children. By contrast, some of these parents reported that parents of other cultural backgrounds
had influenced change at their children’s schools and that this change had adversely affected
other Latino children and their families in addition to their own.

While there were clear differences in the parental involvement practices of parents in the
current study and those found within the educational literature, some similarities persisted as
well. For instance, in this study and in its related literature, middle-class parents have been able
to present their children with more resources including tutoring, enrichment opportunities, and
curriculum extensions outside schools (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy,
2011; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006). They have done this by acting as a collective
and obtaining assistance from professionals (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003); one slight
difference, however, was that parents in the current study only reported acting as a collective
among other parents of Latino backgrounds.

Participants in the current study also followed childrearing trajectories similar to other,
non-Latino, middle-class parents. Specifically, they practiced childrearing that aligned to
concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003) by promoting the continual participation of their children in
extracurricular activities and welcoming their children’s thoughts and opinions in everyday
conversations. Middle-class parents also employ subtle and indirect forms of control over their
children (Weininger & Lareau, 2009) as opposed to authoritative forms of parenting, another
attribute found among the Latino parents under study.

As Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2007) have pointed out, studies have suggested more
similarities than differences between Latino and White parents (Fox & Solís-Cámara, 1997;
Lindahl & Malik, N.M., 1999; Medora, Wilson, & Larson, 2001), especially among those of
comparable socioeconomic levels (Solís-Cámara & Fox, 1996; Uno, Florsheim, & Uchino,
1998). Results from the current study and its relation to the educational literature has shown that
middle-class Latino parents share characteristics in involvement and childrearing with other non-
Latino middle class parents, including those of White or Asian backgrounds; however, and as
forwarded by Gándara & Contreras (2009), the multiple economic and educational struggles that
Latinos have faced historically have at times led to differences in available income, wealth, and
educational experiences. As a result, Latino parents are likely to have lower levels of social,
cultural, and economic capital available to them when compared to their White and Asian peers. These trends were supported in the current study and may have led to the earlier noted differences that exist between middle-class Latino parents and their non-Latino counterparts. These same trends may also be related to similarities between Latino parents in the current study and those of lower socioeconomic classes discussed in the educational literature.

Parental Involvement among Low-Income Latino Parents

The importance of family to childrearing and to the development of the whole child have been central themes found both in the educational literature focusing on low-income Latino families and among families in the current study. According to Orozco (2008), low-income Latino parents have been known to focus on what is in the best interest of their children, with special emphasis on the family playing a central role in childrearing (Arredondo & Rodriguez, 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Parents in the current study did the same by advocating for their children when they felt that their schools were not helping their children in their educational progress. They also focused on the emotional wellbeing and social development of their children over their academic progress, especially in cases where children were unhappy with their schools and the educational system that they were a part of. Additionally, many parents within the study talked about the importance of the family, specifically themselves and their spouse, in helping to raise their children and instill values necessary for their future wellbeing and happiness.

Literature on parental involvement and childrearing among low-income Latino parents has also shown that parents value their children’s retention of their native language and culture (Orozco, 2008). Similar trends were found among the parents in the current study. While interacting with their children, most parents promoted the use of Spanish by their children at home, including those parents who were fluent in English. Many parents also talked about the
importance of their children retaining their native culture, some of whom added that they wanted their children to also learn about the other cultures around them.

The childrearing practices of *familismo* and *personalismo*, which were reported by Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2007) among Latino mothers from the South Bronx, an area where the median household income is well below the New York state average (United States Census Bureau, 2013), also prevailed among parents in the current study. Aside from wanting their children to grow up bilingual, to be aware of their culture, and to be accepting of other cultures, parents in this study also promoted the importance of family ties, model citizenship, and positive relationships with others. Academic achievement and obtaining a high paying career were often secondary to these goals.

The childrearing practice of *simpatia* (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007) was also promoted by parents in the current study, not only during conversations with their children, but also through the actions of these parents. In the current study, Latino parents became highly proactive only when they felt that the academic wellbeing of their children was being compromised. In all other cases, including in cases of perceived injustice, these parents remained passive and free from controversy and conflict as is common within the practice of *simpatia*. As an example, when interacting with other parents, specifically members of the PTA, among whom experiences were overall negative, Latino parents in the current study often yielded to PTA majority leaders and preferred to step away from these negative interactions.

Barriers affecting middle-class Latinos in the current study also followed similar trajectories as those reported in the educational literature among Latinos of lower socioeconomic statuses. For instance, according to Ceballo, Maurizi, Suarez, and Aretakis (2014), barriers preventing poor, Latino parents from practicing traditional forms of *school-based* involvement
included demanding job schedules, lack of English language proficiency, and lack of familiarity with the American educational system (Ceballo et al., 2010; Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2010). In the current study, participants reported having multiple jobs, demanding work schedules, or living in double-income households where both the mother and the father worked. Many parents in this study also mentioned lack of English proficiency as a barrier to overall involvement at school as well as at home in their ability to help their children with their homework. Lastly, since virtually all primary and secondary educational experiences of study participants were gained overseas, one may concur that they lacked the same level of familiarity with the American educational system of parents raised in the U.S.

The Achievement Gap at the Middle-Income Level

Participants identified the following barriers to student learning: learning disabilities, student behaviors, the negative influences of technology, and aspects of the American educational system that worked against motivating students and nurturing their interests. However, other reasons why Latino students may trail their non-Latino counterparts in academic achievement include the barriers that Latino parents and families face, which can negatively impact their ability to support their children to similar levels. These barriers include: legal status, economic constraints, long working hours, a lack of English language proficiency, and cultural mismatch between parents and their children’s schools. While Latino parents are involved in the education of their children in many different ways, the barrier that they face as a group limits their ability to be involved in ways that are more traditional.

Much of the educational literature on the relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement focuses on school-based and home-based involvement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Latino parents are less likely to engage in these traditional forms of involvement
considering the aforementioned barriers, yet these may also be the forms of involvement that relate most to student achievement outcomes. While there is value in the group-specific ways that Latino parents are involved in the education of their children (i.e. academic socialization at a young age), schools should find ways to help support traditional forms of involvement since these may translate into the positive outcomes in achievement that Latino students currently lack.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Based on the educational literature and findings in the current study, middle-class Latinos share some commonalities as well as differences with lower income Latinos and with middle-class White and Asian parents. As such, middle class Latinos should be considered a distinct group and should be responded to accordingly when implementing policies that positively influence their academic progress. The policy recommendations that follow revolve around five overarching goals for schools, especially those in middle-class communities with families from diverse cultural backgrounds. These goals include: (1) continuously educating parents about the educational systems that schools have in place, (2) educating educational leaders and their staff about how best to engage all parents, (3) finding ways to bring parents of different cultural backgrounds together, (4) establishing PTA’s that are culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of all parents, (5) and providing convenient means of communication between parents and schools.

Educating Parents about the American Educational System

In the current study, parents and their children had conversations where they critiqued the American educational system, while both the current study and the educational literature (Gándara & Contreras, 2009) found that educational experiences of Latino parents may differ significantly from traditional American education. Policymakers may want to promote ways in
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which all parents can understand the structure and goals of education at their children’s schools and how their children’s schools connect to the overall educational system in the U.S. In establishing harmony between parents, schools, and the American educational system, all stakeholders will be better able to positively influence the educational wellbeing of youth and young adults. Additionally, parents who either feel disconnected from their children’s school or those who view the American educational system as ineffective, may potentially change their outlook and begin to view schools and education in the U.S. more favorably.

In order to educate parents at the elementary school level, administrators and staff can hold quarterly informational workshops with parents in order to explain how everyday classes connect to an overall educational purpose, and what grade level proficiency looks like by quarter. These workshops can be held prior to report card dissemination so that parents better understand the grades that their children receive, and how teachers arrived at those grades. Workshops can also be held in conjunction with the PTA to assure that as many parents as possible attend. Teachers participating in these workshops, especially those presenting the curriculum to the attendees, could also receive professional development hours as an incentive. Additionally, for parents who cannot attend these workshops, brief literature giving an overall explanation of the curriculum and some examples of curriculum content can either be sent home or made available online. Parents seeking further information or clarification can be invited to meet with school personnel at their convenience or during parent-teacher conferences. As an added convenience measure, literature on the school’s curriculum should be translated into the native languages of parents. School districts may want to consider obtaining professional translations of all content that is shared with parents in cases that schools cannot support this measure.
Parents whose children attend middle school and high school may become increasingly concerned with their children’s social development and with nurturing their individualism and personal interests. This has been found both within the current study and in the educational literature, with levels of *academic socialization* increasing as children get older. Similar workshops and conversations about *school-based* curricula can focus less on content and more on how differentiated instruction is used to assure that all children learn. These workshops can also focus on the utility of education in preparing students for college and for future career success. Dialogue between teachers and parents about the functionality of a school’s curriculum in the development of the whole child may provide parents unfamiliar with the American educational system a newfound appreciation and a higher level of trust in that system. Once again, similar to initiatives at the elementary school level, information from these workshops should be provided to all parents in written format, which can be sent home or made available electronically, and all material should be translated into the native languages of parents.

At all educational levels, presenting curricular information to parents along with what curriculum can offer their children long-term can provide parents a concrete image of the utility of an American education. Information offered to parents about school curriculums does not need to be overly detailed in order for it to be effective, nor should it result in an overload of added responsibilities for school staff. In the earlier grades, since parents are more prone to help their children with their homework (Hill & Tyson, 2009), schools may want to outline the skills that their students are going to learn during a given period, along with a few sample problems and resources for further practice. At the middle school and high school levels, during which time parents are more likely to interact with their children about their future life plans and career interests (Hill & Tyson, 2009), information can focus on the utility of the curriculum in reaching
future academic and career goals. Efforts by schools at informing parents in these ways may lead to added parental involvement, congruency between what parents understand schools are doing for their children and what schools are actually doing, and an increase in parents’ abilities to help their children in ways that can directly influence school academic performance.

Getting to Know the Populations Schools Serve

As detailed previously, the middle-class Latino parents in the current study shared commonalities and differences with what the literature has found among low-income Latino parents and middle-income White and Asian parents. Similar trends may be found among Latino groups as well. For instance, Latinos in the current study may share both similarities and differences from other middle-class Latino groups, including the 45-year old Cuban enclave of South Florida (Camayd-Freixas, 2006), Latinos who make up Southern California’s middle class, the Mexican Americans identified by Telles and Ortiz (2008) who have lived in the U.S. for over 35 years, or the Latino population of various national origins that has been identified in New Hampshire (Camayd-Freixas, 2006). Latino communities across the U.S., as is also the case with other communities of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds, are dynamic and specific. For this reason, while there may be a need to educate some parents about the American educational system, schools should also make an effort to get to know the populations that they serve.

In order to get to know their communities better, certain policies can be enacted by schools. For instance, school leaders can reach out to community leaders to obtain a better understanding of the cultural and social makeup of their communities, and thus of the children that they serve and their families. School level administrators may also want to attend town hall meetings or review the minutes from these meetings so as to obtain similar information. They may also consider having an evaluator interview parents or conduct survey research. Another
source of information can be the school staff members themselves since they are in constant contact with students and may also interact with parents regularly. During staff meetings, all professionals at a given school can discuss what they understand to be the needs of their surrounding community, and they can brainstorm how these needs may influence the educational progress of their students and the levels and types of involvement of parents. Overall, by combining sources of information, schools may begin to establish an accurate picture of the population that they are serving, and with this information, school personnel may begin to assess how best to engage students and parents at their schools.

To exemplify how this process may develop in a given school district, consider the current study. Obtaining this type of information at Greenview, either through community leaders, town hall meetings, survey research, or the experiences of teachers, may lead to the understanding that Latino parents at Greenview – whose children made up well over one-third of the total student population – face issues of legal status, English language proficiency, and long working hours. While schools may not be able to directly help parents combat these issues, by confirming their existence, schools personnel may be in a better position to enact positive changes for the benefit of their students.

For instance, these schools may decide to send home more written information since they know that children whose parents are undocumented may not feel comfortable frequently visiting their children’s schools. They may also want to provide more information in Spanish considering the language disparity between some parents and school staff. Additionally, teachers and administrators may begin to understand why some parents, given their work schedules, are unable to provide schools and their children higher levels of school-based involvement; schools may once again decide to send information home, and they may also build a higher level of
understanding and tolerance among their staff towards the families that they serve. With these measures, schools will be better equipped to build a school-level community that is inclusive of all families, and as a result, they may be able to influence positive change in student academics through the strategic incorporation and involvement of parents.

Bringing Parents of Different Cultural Backgrounds Together

In the educational literature, middle-class parents have worked as a collective in order to empower their children’s schools by bringing in additional resources (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). Of the many attributes that parents in this study shared with non-Latino middle-class parents, this attribute was not present. In fact, parents at Greenview were often not united across different cultures. If schools are successful in bringing parents of different cultures together, these parents may begin to realize that their interests do closely align, and as a result, they may begin to work as a collective to impart positive changes at their children’s schools.

Additionally, measures promoting the inclusion of families from diverse cultural backgrounds may help parents view their children’s schools as safe places where they feel welcomed and can become involved. Schools that are unable to unite their parents, by contrast, may find parents of culturally dominant groups influencing change that benefits their own children at the expense of other children whose parents do not have the same level of influence, a trend that has been found both in the educational literature (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009) and in the current study.

One way for policy makers to bring parents of different cultures together is through school-sponsored programs and events that are culturally sensitive and that cater to the interests of all students and their families. An example would be Cultural Day, which in the current study, allowed parents from different cultural backgrounds to meet and to get to know more about each other’s traditions and cultural foods. Such events, by being inclusive of all families and
celebrating the differences between them, can help build a school culture where members of different backgrounds feel welcomed and appreciated, and where they are given the opportunity to show their interest and appreciation for others as well. Other initiatives can include infusing student’s native cultures in the curriculum by having teachers assign cultural projects that parents can assist their children with, having cultural groups perform at school functions, and acknowledging cultural events and holidays throughout the school year such national days of independence or major sporting events that students and their families engage themselves in.

In order for parents to come together regardless of cultural differences, school must themselves be culturally inclusive. This can be achieved by having all school-based involvement information translated in the native languages of parents and by making this information easily accessible to all parents. In the current study, many parents with extended work schedules found communication that was web-based to be most convenient. Additionally, schools can further promote parent participation by asking parents who already participate in school related functions to invite others whom they associate with.

Schools and districts may also hire qualified staff members of various cultural backgrounds, including those similar to students and their families. In doing so, policy makers may be able to increase cultural awareness in schools. They may also enable communication and understanding between parents and other members of the school staff as some staff members may now be able to serve as cultural and linguistic translators.

The hiring of culturally diverse staff members can be supported by holding career fairs at school districts when positions become available, with added consideration to applicants who speak the languages that are most representative of the parents at the district. Additionally, job posting and interviews may promote cultural awareness and the acceptance of all cultures by
celebrating strengths found among culturally diverse members. A new gym teacher may be asked to promote sports that are popular among the student population and their families; new history teachers may incorporate lessons associated with those nations that represent the cultural backgrounds of students; and in literature classes, short stories and novels by authors from diverse cultural backgrounds may be incorporated in the curriculum.

In order to hire and retain culturally diverse staff, a school culture must be created that is accepting and welcoming of others. As such, schools and senior staff members must be willing to work with new staff who are culturally distinct. Schools may identify senior staff leaders who will promote cultural diversity and acceptance at their schools. These leaders may be placed in charge of mentoring the new staff members, and having them feel welcomed within the school community. Schools and districts will also want to assure that school mission statements and goals express the importance and acceptance of cultural diversity. Current staff members may further be made aware of the benefits associated with establishing culturally diverse institutions by being offered workshops showing them how to employ these benefits.

Establishing Culturally Sensitive Parent Teacher Associations

Bringing parents together can also be achieved through empowering all parents to become active participants at their children’s schools. One place where such efforts can begin is within the PTA. In the current study, there was much turmoil between middle-class Latino parents and PTA leaders at their children’s schools, with instances of cultural separation reported. Separation of this sort not only goes against national PTA standards (PTA, 2009), but it may also be associated with lower levels of student academic achievement since culturally diverse PTAs have been found to positively influenced the academic achievement of all students (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, Parents’ motivations for involvement in their children’s
education, 2005). Middle-class parents have also been known to work as a collective in order to empower their children’s schools (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). Thus, it is in the best interest of PTA leaders who want to impart positive changes at their schools to work towards the inclusion of all parents regardless of differences in their cultural backgrounds.

PTA organizations within schools that are interested in bringing parents from diverse cultures together are advised to work towards excelling in the first and fourth national PTA standards (PTA, 2009). In order to achieve student academic success, the first national standard asks that all families be welcomed to the school community. The fourth standard deals with speaking up for every child, the assurance that all families know how to advocate effectively and constructively for their children, and that these families understand how their school systems work. In order to excel on these standards, the national PTA asks its cohorts to train family volunteers from different neighborhoods and backgrounds to help other families become engaged at their children’s schools and to help these families exercise their rights under state and federal education laws. Another requirement of the national PTA standards is to identify the unique experiences and skills of all parents so that they may be offered volunteer opportunities specific to their strengths. PTAs are also asked to assure that all families are respected regardless of race, ethnicity, and religion, and that all parents have equal access to school-sponsored programs and events. As a final measure, sponsored workshops are asked to be offered in the languages of all parents (PTA, 2009).

As added resources, school PTAs should rely on the educational literature on best practices when building inclusive organizations (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007) as well as programs like Tellin’ Stories, which aims at connecting people from diverse backgrounds (PTA, 2009). It is further recommended that PTAs faithfully employ the standards found in the
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“PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships: An Implementation Guide” and utilize the various resources found within this body of literature. In doing so, PTA leaders will find that the incorporation of all families at their schools, regardless of demographically based differences, is key to the success of the PTA and of overall student achievement.

Policymakers may also consider adding cultural chairs with voting rights within PTA bylaws. They may further want to promote active searchers for parent members and leaders from diverse cultural backgrounds, with recruitment taking place during open house, parent teacher conferences, school and PTA sponsored events (i.e. Cultural Day), and through school newsletters and websites. Parent and teacher leaders of different cultural backgrounds may also be used to disseminate the national PTA standards in the languages that parents dominate. Summarized versions of these standards and related initiatives may be published in written format on school websites and newsletters and may become part of everyday dialogue among stakeholders.

Providing Convenient Means of Communication between Parents and Schools

In the current study, communication with their children’s schools was another barrier that parents faced. Since many parents worked long hours or lived in double-income households, they were limited in the amount of time that they could dedicate to their children or to becoming involved at their children’s schools. A similar trend has been found in the educational literature, where middle-class Latinos have been known to work longer hours than their White and Asian counterparts in order to achieve similar lifestyles (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007). Middle-class districts serving large Latino populations, or any community with a significant proportion of families where parents are known to work long hours, should consider implementing policies that facilitate communication between parents and school professionals.
In the current study, not only was technology a tool used by many parents to monitor the academic progress of their children, but email served as the preferred form of communication for these parents. By contrast, study participants expressed the inefficiency of being contacted by phone during schools hours since these hours often conflicted with their work schedules. Another reported issue in communication dealt with school personnel who were part-time at particular sites, such as the school psychologist at Pine tree elementary who was onsite only two days a week. Communicating with part-time staff over the phone was reported as inefficient since it would often take many days before voice messages could be returned. Due to these and similar issues, most of the parents within the current study preferred communication to be Internet-based. Some also reported having the ability to access their emails through a work computer or on their smartphones and to respond to such correspondences instantaneously.

Using findings from the current study, it is recommended that school staff ask parents for their preferred method of contact during open-houses. Some schools may find that web-based communication is ever more popular among parents, especially those with long work schedules. In such cases, schools can offer more web-based methods of communication. For instance, student grades and educational progress records can be made available on-line for parents to view at their discretion, a measure that was available at both Canary Middle School and Greenview High School, and which many parents labeled as effective in keeping them informed of their children’s academic progress. Furthermore, parent emails may be used as a major method of contact by all school professionals, including teachers, administrators, and part-time staff. Even school-based organizations may want to send announcements electronically in order to assure that all parents remain appropriately informed.
As an added measure, schools may also want to create private Facebook groups for parents who prefer communicating through social networks. Similarly, technology experts at school districts can be asked to create private networks, with login names and passwords, which can be accessed through district and school websites. Through the establishment of on-line communities such as these, parents and school personnel can remain in constant contact, and parents can gain the ability to respond to messages and inquiries when able. Policies may also go a step further and have standardized student email accounts created using the district emailing system (i.e. vincent.redappple@student.greenview.edu), a measure similar to what colleges and universities currently have in place for their students. These email addresses, though using student names for simplicity purposes, could be made accessible to parents and could serve as a standardized mode of communication between parents and professionals at their children’s schools.

In addition to email, schools may also use text-messaging as another convenient mode of communication between parents and their children’s schools. One such service which has been found to increase parental activity at home and which has led to gains in student learning is READY4K! This service provides tips to parents of pre-k students on how to become and remain involved in their children’s education throughout the school year. Information on how to read to their children and on how to help them sound out letters and words were sent via text-message (York & Loeb, 2014). The benefits of texting services like READY4K! is that they are affordable and convenient. Not only do most parents have cell phones at their disposal, but most cell phone owners today have unlimited text-messaging plans. While READY4K! is not yet
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available for schools to use, similar services which help schools connect to parents via text-messaging are currently available.\(^6\)\(^7\)

Community Level Support for Latino Families

Recommended policies thus far relate to increasing parents’ abilities to become involved in the education of their children at the school level. However, schools and their surrounding communities can also set policies that directly help parents. In doing so, schools districts may see children as automatic beneficiaries of policies that place their parents in better social and educational positions. In addition, helping middle-class Latino parents who are in need of assistance is a social responsibility that many organizations would do well not to ignore. This is because many of the issues that middle-class Latinos face may go unnoticed due to their socioeconomic status. While middle-class Latinos have an economic advantage over their low-income counterparts, they too may face similar issues such as low English language proficiency and lack of legal status. Furthermore, these issues can affect their ability to become involved in the education of their children both at home and at school, and as such, can also have negative effects on the educational development of Latino youth and young adults.

Some low-income communities provide social services for Latino residents including free or affordable courses in English as a second language (ESL) and legal consultations with community based lawyers and paralegals. Establishing similar services in middle-income communities that house large Latino populations can be beneficial to the community at large and to the children of that community. Schools can also work with community agencies and other entities, such as the local library, to provide parents facing immigration issues the information

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\(^6\) https://www.remind.com/
\(^7\) https://www.classpager.com/
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and resources they need, and to help them understand their rights and the rights of their children. Lastly, school districts may want to become directly involved in helping parents learn English by providing or allowing outside agencies to provide ESL courses during after-school hours, at school sites. Not only could these measures empower Latino parents and give them new abilities in helping their children succeed, but they may also build positive relationships between these parents and their children’s schools, which may ultimately result in increased levels of school-based involvement.

Limitations of the Current Study

The current study provides a glimpse into the parental involvement dynamics surrounding 21 middle-income Latino parents living in a middle-class community in the northeastern part of the United States. However, while most participants in the current study were of Colombian background, results from this study cannot be applied solely to the experiences of Colombians as one Costa Rican, one Ecuadorian, and one Dominican were also interviewed. Studies that look at Latino cultures independently from one another may uncover dynamics that are more specific to each culture. Thus, while results from the current study encompass the experiences of parents from different Latino ethnic groups, these results should not be recognized as specific to any one particular subgroup.

Another limitation of the current study is the number of different schools that participants’ children attended, as well as the disparity in age and grade level of their children. As a result, the experiences of parents within this study will also vary. For instance, at the elementary school level, parents complained about the lack of extracurricular activities, while at the middle school and high school level, many parents praised the many extracurricular offerings that their children had available to them. Furthermore, the district online grading system, which
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was also praised by many parents under study, was only mentioned among parents of middle school and high school students, hinting at the possibility of this system not being accessible in the earlier grades. The use of income as a determinant of class status may also be of consequence in this and other studies. Many of the participants in the current study were middle income, yet they did not live middle-class lifestyles as may be defined among other groups. For instance, in order to support their current lifestyles, many participants worked long hours or formed double income households. Some also depended on extended family in order to support them with the care of their children. As a result, their lifestyles will differ from those traditionally referred to as middle-class.

Implications for Future Research

Given the previous limitations, future studies on parental involvement dynamics may consider focusing on specific grade or student age groups. These may also attempt to establish a definition of what living in the middle-class means for Latino groups, and how their group-specific lifestyles impact the way in which they practice childrearing and parental involvement. Studies focused on the Latino population should also focus on specific immigrant groups, considering the differences in childrearing and lifestyle choices that may exist between these groups. Social context may also be of consequence, such that results may vary in areas where Latinos the majority or where Latinos are afforded a higher level of social capital. In the current study, Latinos made up one-fourth of the community while their children were over one-third the student population at each of the seven schools. Nevertheless, the level of social capital that Latino parents in this community had seemingly trailed that of the other ethnic groups found in the same area.
In addition to focusing on specific Latino subgroups and student age and grade levels, future studies may further want to employ quantitative methods of research in order to test relationships between parents’ views of the American educational system and their children’s academic progress. Such studies may seek to find out if parents with favorable views of k-12 education in the US have children who do well academically. Similarly, studies may want to assess the relationships that exist between favorable views of this system and the ways in which parents get involved in the education of their children. Studies may consider employing survey research to assess the parental involvement practices under home-based and school-based involvement, as well as under academic socialization, that are most consistent among parents whose views align with the goals of the American educational system and those whose views do not.

Future studies in qualitative research may want to focus specifically on middle-income Latino parents and how they view the American educational system, as well as the motivations that have led them to their overall outlook. If researchers find further divergence between middle-income Latino parents’ views and the educational system that their children’s schools follow, studies may want to then suggest policies to either help establish more favorable views of that system among parents or to help align school goals with the expectations that Latino parents have for their children.

Another topic of future study is that of academic socialization among middle-income Latino parents of elementary school-aged children. While the educational literature has found that academic socialization begins mostly at the middle school level (Hill & Tyson, 2009), this study found signs of academic socialization as early as 3rd grade. These results align with childrearing under concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003); nevertheless, future studies may still
want to delve deeper into parent-child interactions and conversations during the earlier grades. In doing so, researchers may be able to establish a better understanding of Latino childrearing in the middle-class at the elementary school level and the ways in which educational professionals may better engage these students in appropriate and constructive ways.

Additionally, the relationships between middle-class Latino parents and members of other cultural groups, such as and Asian middle-class parents, may be topic of future study. Both in the current study and in the educational literature (Gándara & Contreras, 2009) fundamental differences between middle-class Latinos and their White and Asian counterparts have been reported. Researchers may employ qualitative methods to better understand how differences between distinct cultural groups influence their relationships. This type of study may lead to suggested policies that aim to support cultural integration. Researches may consider employing ethnography and case studies within multi-cultural communities for this purpose.

Researchers may be further interested in learning about middle-income Latinos independent of other groups, such as low-income Latinos or middle-income White and Asians. While the current study has focused on such comparisons, future studies may want to investigate which policy initiatives are most appropriate for middle-income Latinos parents absent other groups. These studies may also want to focus on specific groups of Latinos (i.e. Colombians, Dominicans, etc.) and work to establish generalizations by employing methods in quantitative research with large sample sizes. Survey research may once again be used with focus on parents’ preferred modes of communication between themselves and their children’s schools or their preferred types of educational involvement practices.

Lastly, future studies may want to focus on the legal status and English language proficiency of middle-income Latinos and how these experiences relate to and diverge from the
experiences of low-income Latinos. These studies may aim to determine whether resources currently afforded low-income Latinos facing issues of legal status and English language proficiency should also be made available to Latinos in the middle-class who face similar issues. Researchers may want to interview middle-income Latinos about the ways in which they experience these barriers and how their lives are affected by them. Responses may then be related to the educational literature on the experiences of low-income Latinos who are undocumented and those lacking English language fluency. In cases where the experiences of these two groups converge, researchers may want to focus on the ways in which low-income Latinos have responded to community resources aimed at helping them through these two barriers. Such studies may serve as a way to predict the effectiveness of similar resources being employed among Latinos of higher socioeconomic classes.

The inclusion of Latinos of middle-class status in the parental involvement literature is both appropriate and necessary. The current study found that members of this group may share trends in parental involvement and childrearing that are specific to their socioeconomic status and to their cultural backgrounds. Educational researchers studying in the field of parental involvement may find the perspectives of middle-class Latino families beneficial to both the literature and to future policy. Similarly, policy makers who work with middle-class Latino families may be able to positively influence overall student academic achievement by focusing on the dynamics that surround these families. As would be the case with all groups who make up a prominent part of the American population, and whose children will likely live their adult lives as American citizens, the wellbeing of Latino families of all social classes may be of high consequence to the United States maintaining its status as a competitive world leader.

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