MEXICAN ORIGIN PARENTING IN
SUNNYSIDE

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

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MEXICAN ORIGIN PARENTING IN
SUNNYSIDE

Abstract

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Over the last several decades, Mexican origin immigrants have dispersed across the United States (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002). One community that has experienced particular growth in its Mexican origin population is Sunnyside, an agricultural city in the Yakima Valley. In this new destination community, Mexican origin families confront problems of gangs, violence, concentrated poverty and drug abuse, along with the challenges of surviving in a community that offers few pathways for mobility to Latinos.

In this study, I draw on 43 qualitative interviews and participant observer data to consider how Mexican origin parents, in two parent homes, go about the act of parenting in the context of Sunnyside. I query couples’ parenting styles, with attention to how they develop aspirations for their children and to what models they use to inform their parenting. I look at how the structure of the community helps to perpetuate gendered parenting practices. Finally, I explore how these parenting approaches operate in the school system.
I argue that while much of the parenting that I observed deviates from that advocated by child development specialists (e.g. Baumrind 1968; 2012), the parenting was well designed to protect children from the particular forms of risk that were prominent in Sunnyside. The parenting was typically authoritarian and drew on models that families brought with them from Mexico. Other research on immigrant acculturation suggests this was probably an effective way to keep children safe by promoting selective acculturation (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Zhou 1997). The parenting, however, was ill-designed to help the children to succeed educationally. Although parents wanted their children to get an education, they could offer little direct help to their children around educational tasks. Instead, they used discipline and engaged their children in physical labor to encourage the children to want to do well in school. This descriptive study helps to demonstrate how the characteristics of one particular new immigrant destination shape family life, parenting styles and children’s life chances.
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Charles Harris, who taught me to value scholarship and the joys of reading.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Why Parenting Matters in Sociology?

As a discipline, one of the central concerns of sociology is understanding how and why inequality is perpetuated (Grusky, Ku and Szélényi 2007). As part of this larger intellectual endeavor, family and educational sociology seeks to make sense of how the seemingly private actions of families in raising and socializing their children contributes to these children’s unequal outcomes when they enter school, the labor force and the community at large (e.g. Amato and Fowler 2002; Becker 1981; Duncan et al. 1998; Duncan, Boisjoly and Harris 2001; Furstenberg et al. 1999; Furstenberg and Weiss 2000; Lareau 2000, [2003] 2011; McLanahan 2004; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Nelson 2004; Sherman and Harris 2012). Numerous studies have shown that parental education, income and job type predict children’s educational, career and life trajectories (e.g. Bianchi and Robinson 1997; Crouter et al. 2006; Duncan et al. 1998; Entwisle and Alexander 1992; Lutz 2007; Parcel and Menaghan 1994; Phillips et al. 1998; Sewell and Hauser 1975). The mechanisms through which socio-economic status affects children are plentiful. Children whose parents occupy a higher socio-economic status tend to live in cleaner, safer, quieter homes and neighborhoods than their counterparts (Fry and Taylor 2012). These children tend to attend schools with better-stocked classrooms, more experienced teachers and more resources (Condron and Roscigno 2003; Kozol 1991). Beyond these material resources, we know that parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds parent their children differently (Sherman and Harris 2010; Lareau [2003]2011; Schaub 2010) and that one of the key
mechanisms through which social class and cultures are transmitted across generations is through the actions, attitudes, skills and beliefs of parents.

Although parenting styles may contribute to children’s disadvantage, or may be a mechanism through which class disadvantage is perpetuated, parenting may also give youth the resiliency to excel even in environments with considerable adversity (Formoso et al. 2007; Furstenberg et al. 1999). As Furstenberg and his colleagues (1999) argued, although there is a clear, and strong correlation between neighborhood and school conditions and children’s outcomes, there are also those children who do overcome adversity and who manage to attain socio-economic mobility. Understanding how the agency of parents can contribute to these successes is as important an enterprise in sociology as understanding how stratification systems perpetuate themselves through parenting and other mechanisms.

As with all forms of inter-generational transmission of socio-economic status, parenting within immigrant communities is an important area of inquiry for those who want to understand what causes some immigrant youth to attain upward mobility while others do not. In this study, my goal is to understand the actions, attitudes, beliefs, models and goals of an understudied group of parents: Mexican origin families in Sunnyside, a new immigrant destination small city in the Northwestern United States. The socio-economic trajectories of immigrant and recent immigrant generations are complicated by the experience of migration and acculturation into a new receiving community. Early immigration scholars assumed that over time, new immigrant populations would assimilate into the economic mainstream and each immigrant generation would find itself in an improved socio-economic position (Portes and Zhou 1993). This
assumption, which was based on the experiences of European immigrants, has proven to be less than apt in describing the experience of recent immigrants, most of whom are not from Europe (Portes and Zhou 1993). Rather, what has happened is that some immigrants have indeed experienced upward mobility over time while others have not. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) argued that the process of immigrant acculturation over generations is determined by a wide variety of factors, including when the immigrant family arrived in the United States; the context in which they were received; the various speeds at which the family members acculturated; and a combination of the competing effects of both the resources the immigrant family has and the barriers they face. One type of resource that Portes and Rumbaut (2001) identify is family structure, namely the experience of being raised by two biological parents.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) identify three immigrant acculturation trajectories. In the case of dissonant acculturation, the second generation gets cut off from their familial, co-ethnic and community ties and they face the challenges of discrimination and the risks of drug abuse, gang participation and other such “inner-city problems” without the benefit of countervailing influences. Unfortunately, this often translates into downward assimilation. In the case of consonant acculturation, the second generation is at least able to stay close to their parents, and when parental authority is maintained, the second generation is that much less likely to fall prey to the risks outlined above, leading to a good chance for upward assimilation. Discrimination, however, can still block their options for upward assimilation. Youth who experience segmented acculturation have the best chance for facing and overcoming discrimination and the temptations of inner city subcultures because they are under the sway of their family, co-ethnic networks and
community. Following that argument, it is important for immigrant scholars to understand what happens within those intact families to maintain the parental authority and close co-ethnic ties that youth need in order to experience a segmented acculturation process and therefore a greater probability of upward socio-economic assimilation.

It is important to recognize that parenting is not an independent variable so much as a mechanism through which class and culture are transmitted. The experience of becoming a parent is often seen as a major turning point in the life course of young or middle-aged adults, and there are numerous specific roles and expectations that come with parenthood (Eggebeen, Dew, and Knoester 2010; George 1993). What these roles are is determined by the culture and structure in which the adults become parents. The roles ultimately shape how parents will go about the daily act of socializing their children (George 1993). In this study, by delving into the daily life of one small community and by looking at the intimate world of parenting practices, I hope to make sense of how a particular set of Mexican origin parents develop their parenting styles. Although I will look at only one community, my findings will speak to the larger question of the salience of community social context in structuring parenting practices.

**Why Study Two Parent Families?**

In this study, I deliberately considered families that included fathers because I wanted to explore how they thought about parenting and how they socialized their children. My reasons for doing so were motivated both by the social policies of our era and by academic interest in how
inequality is perpetuated (or not perpetuated) across generations. Social and academic interest in fathers’ participation in parenting, particularly in low-income and racial/ethnic minority communities, has a fifty-year history in the United States. In the mid-1960s, Daniel Patrick Moynihan claimed African American families were in crisis because of the prevalence of single parenthood (Edin, Tach and Mincy 2009). Some scholars, politicians, and the popular media construed African American fathers as villains and their lack of paternal involvement was presented as a cultural defect (Edin et al. 2009; Edin and Nelson 2013). Solving the problem of absent fathers became a public priority.

To this day, policymakers at the Federal, State and local levels are focused on promoting involved fatherhood, particularly among men of color, as a way of promoting children’s cognitive, social and emotional development (Office on Child Abuse and Neglect 2006; United States Department of Health & Human Services 2011). Citing David Popenoe, the conservative family sociologist, the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect (2006) advised that fathers, “bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring.” They go on to connect involved fatherhood (and particularly involved fatherhood in the context of marriage) with a range of positive characteristics in children, including higher IQ scores, better emotional health and better educational outcomes. The United States Department of Health & Human Services spends $150 million a year on grants to underwrite programs to strengthen fatherhood and marriage (United States Department of Health and Human Services 2011). On a local level, 

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1 There is no one agreed upon definition in the sociological or public policy literature of “involved fatherhood” however, common techniques for measuring involvement are asking men to self-disclose the number of hours that they spend with their children or asking men to self-rate their involvement on a scale (Campos 2008).
as an employee of the Human Services Agency of the City and County of San Francisco, I have observed multiple trainings for social workers that similarly focus on the emotional benefits children incur from having involved fathers. These trainings have implied there is something beneficial about the mere fact of male presence that gives children better life chances than those raised away from their fathers. They have paid less attention to what it is that men can do with their children to produce these beneficial outcomes, beyond just being present. The mechanism through which men are presumed to benefit children is left unexplored.

Unfortunately, high quality and nuanced family scholarship has too often been overshadowed in the public sphere by the arguments of figures like Popenoe (1993), who saw the breakdown of the traditional, heterosexual nuclear family as a crisis. In keeping with Coontz (1997), I suspect that Popenoe’s (2006) argument about the essential value of men to the family rings true because we have a nostalgic, if misconceived, belief that the male breadwinner families of the past are morally better than the families of today. We, as a society, do not stop to question what it is that men do in families that could benefit children because we stay focused on the idea that just having men attached to families through marriage is morally right and therefore intrinsically valuable to children.

This understanding matters because it has shaped how policymakers go about encouraging fathers to behave. The research about the value of men per se, for children, rather than on what men do, has spurred a number of welfare agencies and non-profit groups to develop public service announcements and programs to try to create a culture that supports “involved fatherhood” as a laudable component of masculinity. The logic behind these outreach initiatives
is that involved fatherhood will increase if we change the culture of masculinity in communities
of color and in low-income populations. This message apparently has been absorbed by some
low-income fathers, but not necessarily to the benefit of their children and co-parents. In their
recent study of fathers in Camden, New Jersey, Edin and Nelson (2013:18) muse:

These disadvantaged dads recoil at the notion they are just a paycheck – they
insist that their role is to “be there.” … But this definition of fatherhood leaves all
the hard jobs – the breadwinning, the discipline, and the moral guidance – to the
moms.

In other words, men are getting the public service message that being present for children is
important but they are not necessarily absorbing the idea that to benefit children, they must be
responsible for their children in tangible ways, such as through financially supporting them or by
helping them with tasks like schoolwork.

At the same time as policymakers attempt to shift the culture of fatherhood to promote more
paternal involvement, the structural factors that impede full paternal participation in family life
are too often left unaddressed. For example, the structure of the welfare system, which does not
pay families enough to survive, encourages women to hide men’s involvement in their lives so
that the men’s incomes can supplement what the women earn through the Temporary Aid to
Needy Families (TANF) program (Edin and Lein 1997). Immigrant families face particular
barriers to having both parents engaged in parenting. For example, immigrants who cross the
border to find jobs often necessarily leave their children behind (Dreby 2006; Schmalzbauer
but there is no public policy initiative in place to increase opportunities for transnational parents to nurture their children. These are just a few examples of public policies that discourage active paternal involvement.

Not all programs promoting paternal involvement have taken a gentle, encouraging approach towards shifting the culture of fatherhood. While those who are politically liberal promote events, programs and public service announcements to encourage men to embrace paternity, conservatives have sought to create financial penalties for men who are not present in their children’s lives. The welfare reform act of 1996 was intended to promote marriage with the hope of increasing so-called responsible fatherhood (Haskins 2001; Hays 2003). The welfare reform laws also sought to force mothers to establish paternity as a condition for receipt of welfare and fathers were legally required to pay child support (Hays 2003).

In tandem with these social policy shifts, sociologists have produced considerable research showing what factors predict involved fatherhood. Typically, fathers who are older; have higher incomes; more education (McLanahan 2004), regular employment (Lansdale and Oropesa 2001) and stable marriages or relationships with the children’s mothers (Cheadle, Amato, and King 2010; Hamer 1998) are more likely to spend time with their children. Many of these factors are strongly correlated with one another. For example, younger men are less likely than older men to be in serious relationships with their children’s mothers. Taken together, it appears that the more privileged, stable fathers are also the men who are most likely to be a part of their children’s lives. As a result, the children who are likely to grow up in two-parent homes with a mother and a father and those who are likely to grow up in single parent homes are quite
different from one another. In addition to the class differences in who is most likely to be raised with their fathers present (McLanahan 2004), significant racial and ethnic differences exist in the probability that children will be raised around their fathers. According to the 2003 Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey, which included children in Kindergarten through Twelfth grades, 28 percent of white students, 39 percent of Latino students and 69 percent of African American students are being raised apart from their fathers (DeBell 2008:431). DeBell (2008:431) noted that 63 percent of the school-aged children who are in households with earnings of less than $25,000 a year are also in households where no father is present (this correlation is not surprising, given that household income is related to the number of labor market participants per household). In other words, children who are already subject to greater challenges, due to their class position, race and ethnicity also face a greater probability of growing up without a father present.

We further know that even controlling for other variables, children raised with two parents present tend to have better outcomes than children raised in single parent homes (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Nelson (2004) cited research showing that children raised in two parent, married households have fewer behavioral problems and are less likely to abuse substances. Children raised in single parent families are more likely than their counterparts in two parent homes to become pregnant as teenagers, to underperform in school, to have social and emotional problems and most of all, to live in poverty (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Haller, Portes and Lynch (2011) conducted a two-wave, decade long longitudinal study of 5,262 second generation immigrant youth in gateway cities. They found that children who had been raised in homes with
two biological parents were twelve percentage points less likely than their counterparts to experience a negative outcome, such as arrest, incarceration or unemployment. The effect of parenting structure on immigrant children was most pronounced for youth attending low-income schools. This information about single parents, striking though it is, does not explain how exactly men benefit their children when they are present, particularly since children raised in homes with same sex parents appear to do just as well as children raised in heterosexual households (Biblarz and Stacey 2010). The latter fact suggests that it is not men per se that change outcomes for children, but rather some aspect of what actually happens within two parent homes.

If parenting in general is a key mechanism through which children are socialized and social structure and cultures are reproduced, it behooves sociologists to pay attention to both the role of mothers and fathers in parenting. Most children, after all, experience some form of mothering, no matter what their class or race background. Although most parents are heterosexual, many children experience little in the way of fathering while other children receive a great deal of financial and emotional support from their fathers. In fact, our era is marked by a strange contradiction: fewer children than ever are being raised by co-resident fathers (Nelson 2004) and yet, those children who are raised by fathers spend more time with them than ever (Eggebeen and Knoester 2001; Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson 2004). Since heterosexual relationships are the dominant social structure for parenting, this means that many of the children who are being parented without fathers are being raised by single mothers. The fact that being raised in a co-resident mother/father family structure has a positive effect on acculturation trajectories suggests
that we need to have a better understanding of how the parenting that goes on in these families promotes selective acculturation (Haller et al. 2011).

Beyond the evidence in favor of two parent/stable homes, it is not as clear how and when male involvement helps children. The idea that men bring something special and distinct to children that women cannot provide is premised on a faulty notion of gender as a binary, absolute dividing line between men and women’s capacities to nurture and socialize children (Fine 2010). This then leaves open the question of what it is that men do in families, beyond their physical presence, that makes them important to children’s social outcomes. Certainly, men’s contributions are partially financial, because fathers earn more than mothers on average (Correll, Benard and Paik 2007) and two-parent families benefit from having dual incomes and economies of scale. Beyond that, however, presumably what fathers do (independently and in tandem with mothers) matters.

Oddly, however, while there are many studies that look at measures of paternal involvement as predictors of children’s outcomes and studies that look at what demographic characteristics correlate with the probability that fathers will spend time with their children, there is far less research on how men, and particularly men in racial/ethnic subcommunities, parent. This omission is important because sociologists have long established that parenting styles (and not just whether one is physically present as a parent) contribute to divergent outcomes for children (Amato and Fowler 2002; Baumrind 1968, 2012; Lareau ([2003]2011] Sherman and Harris 2012). How fathers parent depends on the social context in which they currently live; the experiences they have had in the past and how they define fatherhood for themselves (Nicholson,
Howard and Borkowski 2008). Simply persuading fathers to be in the same home as their children, as social policy has sought to do, is not synonymous with improving the life chances of their children. It is important for us, as sociologists, to understand in specific terms what different groups of men do with their children and how this may contribute to their children’s outcomes (Nelson 2004). We also need to know how parenting tasks are shared between parents in opposite sex two-parent homes. The contours of mothering shift depending on what fathers do.

More specifically, it is important for sociologists to bring meso- and macro- level sociological factors to the table in our effort to understand what Mexican origin men do with their children and how this contributes to their children’s development. Campos (2008) summarized the literature on Latino fatherhood involvement and found that most studies used interviews or self-rating scales. Much of the research that has been done to date has used a psychological framework of analysis and has focused on characteristics of individual men or their family systems in understanding what men do with their children. As a sociologist, I would like to see social scientific analysis of fatherhood that considers the ways that structural factors condition what fathering looks like, particularly in ethnic subcommunities. By using a more holistic research approach, in which I combine an in-depth exploration of the dimensions of a geographic place with questions directly to parents, I will be able to better establish the bi-directional, iterative relationship between meso-level structures, such as labor migration, and individual-level parenting practices.
Why Study Mexican Origin Parents?

The most obvious reason to focus on Mexican American parenting is demographic: Latinos are the fastest growing minority group in the United States, and Mexican Americans are the majority ethnic group within the Latino population (Casas and Ryan 2010; Saenz et al. 2008). One-fifth of all children in the United States are first or second generation immigrants and of those, a solid majority are Latino (Perreira, Chapman and Stein 2006). States that historically had had little Mexican origin presence are now increasingly comprised of Mexican Americans, rendering Mexican immigrant incorporation a national rather than a regional concern (Massey et al. 2002). As such, sociologists need to pay particular attention to experiences of parenthood and childhood in Mexican origin communities (Campos 2008).

Our sociological knowledge of Mexican origin parenting needs further development. Mexican immigrants occupy a range of distinct structural, economic and historical positions in the United States and sociologists do not have a full picture of how those positions interact with their parenting. While studies have been done on Mexican immigrant parenting in urban areas of states bordering Mexico (e.g. Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Romero 2011), relatively little is known about Mexican parenting in other contexts, even though a growing number of Mexican origin families live outside of these states (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002). As Foner and Dreby (2011:549) wrote in their assessment of intergenerational relations between immigrants and their children:
A research challenge is to explore how, and under what conditions, immigrant parents begin to alter or modify their values, expectations, and childrearing practices as they learn new techniques and norms from their children, as well as from other sources, including coworkers, colleagues, and the media in the United States.

It is important to hone in on Mexican origin parents, rather than looking at Latino parents as a whole. Latinos have frequently been analyzed as a whole group, which sometimes precludes more nuanced research on how the diversity of their immigration histories, ethnic identities and cultural histories create vastly different experiences for this population (Baca Zinn and Wells 2000). Even though many researchers are aware that this is problematic, some types of data do not subdivide Latinos by country of origin and so researchers have no choice but to generalize. My data collection strategy allowed me to focus on only Mexican origin Latinos and this sample gives me a sharper analytical focus for understanding the roles of context, structure and culture in creating the parenting I observed. (Throughout this text, I do present and discuss research by other scholars that was done about broader Latino groups but I specify when the research was on Latinos as a whole and when it was on Mexican origin people, in the hopes that the reader will differentiate between the relative applicability of the scholarship I am citing.) Despite the limits of the existing research on Mexican origin families, there is scholarship demonstrating that Mexican origin families experience parenting in a distinct manner, given their history of migration, their cultural history and their social and economic position in the United States. In
the following pages, I discuss some of the ways in which Mexican origin parenting differs or would be expected to differ from other parenting in the United States.

Generational Dissonance and Consonance

Significant research has discussed, supported and disputed the existence of generational dissonance between first and second generation immigrant family members (Foner and Dreby 2011; Zhou 1997). Parental values and children’s values may diverge when children acculturate more quickly than their parents do (Zhou 1997). Immigrant parents may also be alarmed by the oppositional behavior of teenagers in general in the United States and may adjust their parenting accordingly. Behnke and colleagues (2008) asked Mexican origin fathers about their parenting models and found they based their parenting on examples from Mexico. They felt they had to modify their parenting, however, to better protect their children from the risks of their new country.

Despite these sources of inter-generational conflict, there is some evidence showing that second generation and first generation immigrant families have stronger internal relations than other types of families (Foner and Dreby 2011). Swartz’s (2014) research showed that of all types of American families, the only families where there was a pattern of intergenerational sharing of monetary resources in both directions (going from parents to children and children to parents) was in immigrant families. Scholars attribute the strength of these family relationships in Mexican origin families to the cultural value of familism (Taylor et al. 2012). As Taylor et al.
(2012) explained, familism is a cultural characteristic in which individuals strongly identify themselves with their families and feel close to their families. Second generation immigrants also have a sense of the sacrifice their parents experienced in order to move to the United States and they may feel obligated to return the favor (Vallejo and Lee 2009).

*Gender Beliefs*

Gender is central to the organization of most families and the degree to which Mexican families have historically adhered to culturally distinctive gendered beliefs is likely to shape how parenting is performed and how it is shared between men and women (or not shared, as the case may be). Historically, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter five, Mexican origin fathers were disparaged in the academic literature for their machismo (Gutmann 1996). The primary role of fathering in the lives Mexican men was ignored and understudied (Gutmann 1996). The counterpoint to this presentation of fathers was an equally disparaging portrayal of Mexican American mothers as downtrodden and oppressed by the men in their lives, as I will demonstrate in chapter five. More recent scholars have sought to contradict this disparaging narrative with research showing that Mexican origin fathers are just as, or more, committed to parenting as are fathers in other racial/ethnic groups (Hossain et al. 1997).
In general, sociologists know that job type and status correlates with parenting beliefs and behaviors (Cooksey et al. 1997; Kohn et al. 1986; Menaghan 1991). Mexican immigrant men have a history of immigrating to the United States to take low-wage, demanding jobs and the Mexican origin male population is disproportionately concentrated in physical labor jobs. Just under than 16 percent of all people of Mexican origin work in managerial or professional capacities (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). The distinct structure and experience of this type of work affects Mexican origin parenting because grueling jobs with long hours preclude family time (Campos 2008). In the case of the agricultural industry, where many Mexican fathers in the Sunnyside area of Washington work, the job requires long and non-traditional hours which are likely to constrain the ability of fathers to be involved in their children’s lives during some seasons. These jobs also typically pay little and expose men to difficult physical and psychological conditions, including racism (Crouter et al. 2006). Crouter and colleagues (2006) found that Mexican American fathers’ lack of sufficient income and experience of racism correlated with their depression levels and those of their family members.

There is strong gender differentiation in between which jobs Latino men and which jobs Latina women tend to hold (Schmalzbauer 2009, 2013). While men are more likely to be found in the agricultural industry than women are, women are far more likely to hold carework and domestic jobs than men are (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). This type of labor, too, shapes Mexican origin parenting in distinct ways. Mexican women who act as caregivers for more privileged families learn from the parenting they observe in the homes where they work and see first hand how class
privilege plays out in children’s lives (Romero 2011). They may also witness, first hand, the
negative effects of the permissive, concerted cultivation model of parenting that so many upper
middle class families use today (Lareau[2003]2011; Romero 2011). Carework jobs often have
ill-defined hours and boundaries, which has implications for how much time mothers have to
spend with their own children, as opposed to the children of their employers (Hondagneu-Sotelo
2001; Romero 2011). As carework mimics work that women often do for free in the context of
their own families, it is poorly compensated (England 2005). In short, both the jobs that
Mexican origin men and women disproportionately occupy tend to have long hours, little
stability, no benefits, and challenging work conditions. These factors shape how they go about
parenting and make it important to consider the distinct labor market position that Mexican
origin parents occupy. These factors also require that we consider the local labor market
structure of receiving communities, as variations in job opportunities translate into differences in
parenting.

*Parenting across Borders*

Many Mexican families split up in order for the father to earn an income in the United States
while the mother remains home in Mexico (Dreby 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). In other
families, the mother migrates to the United States first or both parents migrate and leave children
behind in Mexico. The children who currently live with two parents in the United States may
have experienced a period of time while their parents were working across the border. This has
repercussions for children’s and parents’ emotional health and well-being, even after they are reunited in one location (Dreby 2006; Zhou 1997). On the most fundamental level, being separated from their children means losing the opportunity to engage in the type of daily caregiving that most strongly defines motherhood in Mexican culture (Dreby 2006). Parents may also experience stigma for appearing to abandon their children (Dreby 2006). At the same time, parents in general, and fathers in particular, may be able to send money home to their families, which gives them the dignity of being a good provider (Dreby 2006). Nevertheless, the experience of separation is often a painful one, and it affects how some immigrant families parent. While Mexican families are not alone among immigrants in experiencing this separation, immigration patterns differ across groups. Since Mexicans compose a relatively large share of the unauthorized immigrant population, and crossing the border is a highly dangerous activity, Mexicans immigrants have a strong incentive to leave young children across the border (Dreby 2006).

Unauthorized Status

As compared to other groups, Mexican immigrants are more likely to cross the border with only a short-term visa or with no visa at all (Portes and Rivas 2011). Occupying an unauthorized status has an effect on how Mexican origin families parent. As explained above, illegal border crossings are difficult and so unauthorized status necessitates that parents leave their children behind in Mexico. Job options and social mobility are also very limited for people who lack
papers, which affects both the parents’ socio-economic circumstances and what they can hope for on behalf of any children born outside of Mexico. Within families, some children may be United States citizens while others are citizens of Mexico. There can be tensions in families when, by accident of birth, some children have different options and prospects than their siblings.

Even for those families who are authorized to be in the United States, the illegal status of their co-ethnics has repercussions for them. Latino families experience racial stereotypes that are associated with the assumed illegality of their presence in the United States, even though 83 percent of the Latinos in the United States today have a legal right to be in the United States (Feagin and Cobas 2014:31).

**Early Parenthood**

Most of the parents I interviewed for this research were young at the time when they had their children. Latinas have earlier first pregnancies, on average, than other groups (Sweeney and Raley 2014) and Mexican origin young women have the highest rate of teenage pregnancy of any ethnic group in the United States (Toomey et al. 2013). The women in this study were sometimes still in junior high school when they had their first children, although late teens were more typical. The men were typically on the cusp between adolescence and young adulthood. Although this was not specifically a study on young Mexican origin parenting, the age of the
participants at the time of their initial transition to parenthood, and the age norms in the community around childbearing, certainly shaped what I found.

As with parenting in general, there are reasons to expect the adolescent parenting experience to be different for Latino parents as compared to parents of other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Giving birth before the age of 20 is more than twice as common among Latinas as for white women (Sweeney and Raley 2014). More common events tend to lose their stigma and indeed, Latinas report being happy about even unintended pregnancies at a greater rate than do African American and white women (Sweeney and Raley 2014). These differences in attitudes towards early childbearing shape the experience of parenting itself.

Despite the prevalence of early pregnancies among Mexican origin mothers, I found relatively little research specifically on this population and much of the work I did find was methodologically problematic or was focused on topics outside of sociology (such as medical care). Despite these limitations to existing research on early Latino parenthood, I cite some of it here to provide a context for this study. Nadeem, Whaley and Anthony (2006) studied Latina adolescent mothers to understand the effect of mothers’ primary language on their psycho-social well-being. Their results are hard to interpret, however, given that they used a convenience sample of women using welfare. Moreover, although they found a measurable positive effect of speaking English on emotional health, they did not control for heterogeneity between Spanish and English speaking Latinas. In another convenience sample study, Dornig et al. (2009) analyzed 90 letters written by teenage mothers and fathers “to their babies” as part of an HIV education program. Most of the parents in their sample were Latino although some were African
American. Dornig (2009) and her colleagues later conducted focus groups with the teenage parents about their aspirations as parents, using a series of educational exercises to stimulate conversation. Dornig et al. (2009) determined that male and female parents wanted to decrease their participation in risky behaviors for the sake of their babies.

I reviewed the research on young Latino fathers and as with the literature on mothers, I found very little of substance has been studied (Parra-Cardona, Sharp and Wampler 2008). Most of the studies of young Latino fathers have asked fathers about their hopes for their own futures and those of their children. In interviews with four unpartnered and two cohabiting Mexican-American teenage fathers in the criminal justice system, Parra-Cardona, Sharp and Wampler (2008) learned that young fathers expressed a desire to decrease risky behaviors including drug and alcohol usage and participation in other illegal activities. The young fathers they interviewed wanted to be present for their children and believed that they should take fewer risks for their children’s sakes. In addition, the young men were aware of the importance of role modeling positive behavior for their children, which meant decreasing their drug and alcohol usage. Some of the youth also talked about wanting to obtain an education for the sake of their children. The youth in Parra-Cardona’s study positioned their commitment to fatherhood as part of their overall sense of wanting to live out masculine values that are consistent with what they perceived as Latino family culture.

Not all researchers have learned that teenage fatherhood decreases young Latino men’s willingness to accept risks, however. Hernendez (2002) interviewed seven Chicano teenage fathers that he met through a non-profit agency that worked closely with gang members.
Hernandez (2002) found that the fathers he met perceived drug dealing and other illegal activities as necessary in order to support their families and fulfill their financial commitment to fatherhood. Therefore, participation in risky activities actually increased after the men became fathers. Several of Hernandez’s (2002) informants explicitly rejected schooling as a route to being a better father because time in school took away from time for work. These informants also observed that completing adult education appeared to not give rise to better job opportunities and were skeptical about schooling as a route to social mobility. There is an obvious need for sociological studies of the subpopulation of young, Latino men and women who are parenting, since what has been done to date is still quite limited.

**Why Research in a Small City**

Ethnographic research on family life in ethnic subcommunities has historically been concentrated in large cities (e.g. Burton, Obeidallah and Allison 1996; Edin and Nelson 2013; Furstenberg et al. 1999; George 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Romero 2011; Stack 1974; Waller 2002). Lichter and his colleagues (2007) argued that there is evidence of increased deconcentration of non-white communities and noted that most residents of the United States today live outside of central cities. By the 2000 Census, 43% of the United States population lived in smaller cities (those with populations of under 50,000) and the size of the Latino population in these areas has been steadily growing (Brennan et al. 2005). Concentrated areas of spatial poverty are increasingly common in the United States (Lichter et al. 2012). Areas with
high rates of concentrated poverty are associated with low rates of educational achievement and low earnings (Lichter et al. 2012). Burton and her colleagues (2011) document that in what they term rural ghettos\(^2\), many whites see the incoming migrant population as a threat and conceive of that threat in racist terms. Burton and her colleagues describe a change in many areas of the rural United States where growing numbers of non-white populations concentrate in segregated communities with high levels of poverty and the white population in the area responds with increased prejudice and stigmatization, in part because being a white community has often been part of their rural self-identity.

These factors presumably shape parenting but there is inadequate information on how Mexican Americans living in an environment like Sunnyside, where such prejudice and stigmatization are commonplace, are shaped into parents. In a community like Sunnyside, employment opportunities are different than they are in urban areas. While in some urban areas, immigrant women have actually had better economic prospects than immigrant men (Flippen 2014) in a community like Sunnyside, which is dominated by jobs centered around the agricultural industry, “men’s jobs” pay more than those typically held by women. Jobs as domestic employees, which often employ the female, first immigrant generation are limited because there is not a sizable

\(^2\) Technically, the Yakima Valley area, where I did my research, cannot be defined as rural because it is located primarily within Yakima County, which is a Metropolitan Statistical Area. Distance, however is experienced subjectively (J. Johnson, 2014, personal communication). For those with reliable vehicles and the money to buy gas, Yakima is an easy trip from Sunnyside. For a family that is barely breaking even, Yakima is far away. Given this, Burton’s ethnographic descriptions of rural ghettos seem apt in describing the racial dynamics of the community I studied.
middle or upper middle class in Sunnyside. It is therefore problematic to try to generalize urban studies of Mexican origin families to these new destination communities.

Why Research in a New Immigrant Destination?

Acculturation stressors in Sunnyside are also different than in other communities, given the historically white identity of this area. There is a need for exploratory research to show how parenting practices are constructed in the context of an agricultural, ethnic enclave in a historically white, politically conservative area. As the Mexican population grows in areas that have not historically been immigrant destinations, the family is a locus where children may be given the skills and resilience to overcome the challenges of living in a place that is not structured for them to succeed. Alternatively, family life, and parenting in particular, may become a conduit for reinforcing the disadvantaged status of the next generation. For this reason, this study of parenting in a new immigrant destination falls squarely within sociology’s larger concern with transmission of inequality across generations.

Structure of this Book

In the next chapter of this book, I will give an overview of Sunnyside, where I conducted my research and I will explain how I collected data. In the third chapter of this book, I will consider how the transition to fatherhood affected Mexican origin men in the Sunnyside community. Unlike most other scholarship, I find that becoming a father is not an abrupt change for the men
in this study and I explore ways in which becoming a father does and does not change how men in Sunnyside see their roles in the larger world. Understanding what fatherhood means to fathers is a pre-requisite for understanding how they go about the daily tasks of parenting. Accordingly, in the following chapter, I delve into couples’ general parenting styles, with attention to how they form aspirations and goals for their children and to what models they use to inform their parenting. I will focus on how adhering to the parenting models from Mexico may protect children even if that parenting style is authoritarian in nature. In the fifth chapter, I will demonstrate how parenting is gendered and I will look at how the structure of the receiving community helps to perpetuate gendered parenting practices. In the sixth and last analytic chapter, I use ethnographic data that I collected in an elementary school and from the interviews to look at how these parenting approaches play out in determining how the children perform educationally.

Certain themes, as I will discuss in the conclusion, cross-cut all of my analytic chapters. Above all, my emphasis is on how the structure of Sunnyside and the structure of immigration shift typical findings about fathering and fatherhood. Other social scientists have asked and answered questions about how parents, including Mexican origin parents in the United States, go about parenting. My contribution to sociology comes from the fact that I asked these questions from the perspective of understanding how the structure, culture and history of one distinct community shaped the answers to those questions. I do not claim to be able to establish causality or to be able to compare Sunnyside parenting to parenting in a different context. Rather, as a descriptive study, I intend to provide evidence of the importance of considering community context as
factors in predicting how parenting styles and approaches are likely to affect the socio-economic trajectories of children. In so doing, I hope to raise questions in the readers’ minds about how the very foundation of what it means to parent and to parent well shifts depending on the structure in which the parenting is taking place. In each chapter, I invite the reader to consider how the labor market, immigration history in a given area, institutionalized racism, family structure and even demographic trends help to shape parenting, which in turn becomes a mechanism for reproducing or changing the social milieu.
CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH SITE AND DATA COLLECTION

Research Location

Sunnyside is located in Central Washington, midway between the Tri-Cities area and the City of Yakima. Between the Tri-Cities and Yakima, small cities like Sunnyside dot the landscape, connected by a long stretch of freeway. The area as a whole is known as the Yakima Valley. At the time of this research, Sunnyside had a population of 15,858, according to the United States Census (2014). Although Sunnyside is technically close to cities, it feels isolated from the cities that surround it. Between the cities, much of what one sees is agricultural production and wineries. The city of Sunnyside itself, although urban, has a certain calm feeling to it, a calm that many residents comment on when they discuss their home.

On first glance, as a traveler enters downtown Sunnyside, one sees factories full of industrial looking machines and non-descript buildings surrounded by dirt and mud. There are abundant gas stations and convenience stores along the roads. A few malls and the local Walmart serve as gathering places in the town. During some seasons, the town’s odor gives away the presence of its ranch industries. The smell of manure is sometimes overwhelming. Indeed, just past the city center, Sunnyside is agricultural. A major town event is the annual parade of “illuminated farm implements”, a parade of farm machinery, such as tractors, festooned in multi-colored festive lights.
The manure smell is only one downside to the prevalence of big agriculture in the area. Allergies and asthma are, according to the interviewees and my own observations, pervasive. The gorgeous field of blooming cherry trees that I marveled at made one of the women I interviewed miserable because of the mass use of agricultural chemicals. Smudge pots\(^3\) are also commonly used and some days, the air is thick with dust and smog to the point where people cover their faces with their handkerchiefs.

Still, on clear days, the landscape is bucolic. Early in my time as a researcher in Sunnyside, I wrote this description of my drive into town, “It was bright and cold and the Cascades were a visible presence in the Valley today. The river rushed a lovely blue along the side of the road and what had seemed grim last week seemed uplifting today, despite the industrial clouds of smoke that dotted the air.” Many people in the area could be found in the river on the hot days, swimming and fishing.

The weather in Sunnyside is far more temperate than in other parts of Washington but still can reach uncomfortable highs in the summer and lows in the winter. In the summer, the temperature was certainly warm enough for swimming and in the winter, it was often cold enough to snow. For people who made their living working outdoors, the hot and cold temperatures were a regular topic of conversation.

\(^3\) Smudge pots are oil burning heaters that protect crops from the frost.
Sunnyside’s Socio-Economic Structure

Twenty-nine percent of the population of Sunnyside works in agriculture and the area grows asparagus, apples, pears, grapes, hops and mint, among other crops (US Census Bureau n.d.). The other main occupations in Sunnyside are education, health care, social services or in retail services (U.S. Census Bureau n.d.).

There are high rates of youth participation in agricultural labor in the area. Bonauto, Keifer, Rivera and Alexander (2003) noted that fourteen percent of the teenagers they surveyed in the Yakima Valley, using a sampling frame of all households in the region, reported that they had begun doing agricultural labor before the age of eight. An additional 37 percent had started to work in agriculture between the ages of nine and twelve. In the United States as a whole, studies estimate that fifteen percent of all employed agricultural laborers (excluding those who work on family farms for no compensation) are under the age of nineteen.

Outside of agriculture, manufacturing and service industries, there is little other employment. Although Sunnyside and its surrounding communities have tried to build a tourist trade based on wine, I saw relatively little evidence of successful tourism. The winery tasting rooms that I visited were often empty. In one town that adjoins Sunnyside, there was a misfired attempt to attract tourists with a town dinosaur theme. Two large dinosaur statues flank the town’s greeting sign and a few run down dinosaur toys are in the local park, next to a picturesque, willow-flanked lake that is too polluted for swimming.
A few areas in and around Sunnyside look like a middle-class suburb, particularly on the hill above the town. In other areas, the town’s poverty is pervasive and many houses are in very ill repair. Trailer homes prevail, some without glass windows. Residents instead try to hold the heat inside with tape and plasticized sheeting over the windows and doors. In keeping with these observations about the scope of poverty, the Census (2014) reports that at the time of the 2010 Census, 26 percent of the individuals in the City of Sunnyside lived below the Federal poverty line and the per capita income average over the last twelve months was $14,702. Thirteen percent of the population in Washington State as a whole is below the poverty line (US Census Bureau 2014).

Mean levels of educational attainment in Sunnyside are low, as compared to other areas of Washington State, as shown in the chart below:

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2014
**Crimes and Gangs**

I observed a great deal of community anxiety about crime, an anxiety that is not entirely matched by statistical evidence of the scope of crime. Several people in the nearby, and much less ethnically Mexican town of Prosser warned me that homicides, often several a week, are commonplace. In fact, the Sunnyside police department reports say that the reported violent crime rate is 2.7 per 1,000 people, which is below the state average of 3.4 per 1,000 residents. Property crime is indeed very high as compared to the general rates in the state of Washington however, and property crimes affect 74.8 per 1,000 residents. In Washington State overall, the property crime rate is 36.7 per 1,000 residents (Lapczynski et al. 2009).

In an interview broadcast on National Public Radio in 2007, Sunnyside’s City Manager stated that there were 250 suspected gang members in the town and said that 15 percent of all surveyed eighth graders reported that they are involved in street gangs. The Mexican drug cartels also have connections in the area (Moore 2009). In 2008, 200,000 marijuana plants were found in Yakima Valley vineyards that had been leased for marijuana production by Mexican cartels (Moore 2009).

**History of Migration into the Yakima Valley**

White homesteaders moved into Yakima Valley in the 1860s, and primarily made their living on ranching and dry wheat farming (Brady 2004). Between 1946 and 1966, the Yakima Valley landscape was irrigated and transformed into farmland that was suitable for growing fruit (Brady
Across roughly the same time period (1942-1964), the Bracero Program established an immigration conduit for adult male laborers between Mexico and agricultural employers in the Yakima Valley, although as shown in the chart on the following page, few stayed in the area (Brady 2004; Gonzalez 2013). The population further increased as a result of changes in U.S. immigration laws in 1986, which allowed immigrants without documentation to apply for legal status as special agricultural workers (Massey et al. 2002). Many residents of the Yakima Valley took advantage of this opportunity (Andrews, Ybarra, and Miramontes 2002). Moreover, the tightening of the border in 1986 encouraged Mexican migrant workers to settle in the United States on a longer-term basis to minimize their exposure to the physical and economic dangers of apprehension during repeated border crossings (Massey et al. 2002). Finally, conditions in the traditional major receiving communities for Mexican migrant workers became more intolerable in the 1990s, in the wake of xenophobic social movements (Massey et al. 2002), which pushed immigrants into new receiving communities. The Yakima Valley became a destination for immigrants because the main crops are fruits, vegetables and hops, all of which require intensive hand cultivation and demand a large supply of labor (Andrews et al. 2002). Yakima Valley’s productive capacity also increased in the 1990s after several additional irrigation projects were completed, which further created a demand for agricultural field workers (Andrews et al. 2002). More recently, Washington State has gained a national reputation for the quality of its wines (Steiman 2010). As a result, the number of wineries in the Yakima Valley and presumably, the demand for the labor to produce wine grapes, have increased considerably. The chart below
shows the relative sizes of the Mexican origin and non-Hispanic population in Yakima County over time, as captured through Census data.

![Relative Size of the Mexican Origin and Non-Hispanic Population in Yakima County](image)

Source: Ruggles et al. 2010

Unlike in the earlier Bracero period, today’s Mexican origin population is equally distributed between men and women and includes a large subpopulation of children (Gonzalez 2013; US Census Bureau 2014). Thirty nine percent of the population of Sunnyside is under eighteen, which is far higher than the youth representation in other parts of Washington (US Census Bureau 2014). The town has an equal distribution of men and women and the median age of the towns’ residents is 25 years of age (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). The table on the following page shows the age distribution of the male and female residents, respectively:
Age and Sex Distribution in Sunnyside

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of Males</th>
<th>Number of Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years</td>
<td>1,045</td>
<td>957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 29 years</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 34 years</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 39 years</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 44 years</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 49 years</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 54 years</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 59 years</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 64 years</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 69 years</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 to 74 years</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 to 79 years</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 to 84 years</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 years and over</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2014

Sunnyside’s parents of minor, related children are predominantly in husband/wife families. Of the 3,428 families in the 2010 Census of Sunnyside, 1447 are headed by a married, opposite-sex couple. 914 families are headed by women with no husband present (U.S. Census Bureau 2014).

According to the United States Census (2014), 82 percent of the Sunnyside population identifies as Hispanic. Sixty nine percent of the population reports that a language other than English is the primary language in their home. Twenty nine percent of the population was born outside of the United States.
The recent rapid expansion in the size of the Mexican origin population is critical to understanding the challenges residents in the community face. In Donato and Armenta’s (2011) literature review on unauthorized migration, they noted that places which have had large immigrant population growth are most likely to also have anti-immigrant policies. In Sunnyside, lack of acceptance of immigrants was most notable in the failure of the infrastructure to keep pace with the needs of the Mexican origin population. Although the expansion of agriculture has boosted the number of employment options, the infrastructural needs of the Mexican origin community, such as for sufficient housing and school facilities, had largely been neglected. At the time of this research, the nearby town of Prosser was in the middle of a politically-charged fight over whether to allow Catholic Charities to build a new housing project for low-income families. In a packed town hall meeting, the majority of the attendees objected stridently, on racial/xenophobic grounds and because the schools already were overcrowded. Catholic Charities argued that housing stock in the greater area (including Sunnyside) had reached a breaking point and the construction of new housing was urgent. Both parties agreed that lack of infrastructure was a persistent challenge in the area.

Race and Class Segregation

Race and class appear to be strongly correlated in Sunnyside. Although Mexican Americans dominate the population of the small towns in the Yakima Valley, and most notably dominate in Sunnyside, the large tracts of agricultural land between the towns continue to be owned by a
white population of landowners (Brady 2004). The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services data (2015) on use of various types of means-tested welfare in Yakima County during fiscal year 2012-2013 helps to demonstrate the difference in the economic status between whites and Latinos. For example, they reported that 65 percent of Hispanic population and 20 percent of the white population received temporary aid to needy families (TANF). This is striking given the restrictions on unauthorized immigrants being able to use this type of assistance. Ninety-two percent of the Hispanic population in Yakima received Consolidated Emergency Assistance\(^4\) during this time period as compared to four percent of whites.

\textit{Religion}

According to the Yellow Pages (2014), Sunnyside has 31 churches located within the town, representing a wide variety of Christian faiths including Catholic, Church of Latter-Day Saints, Baptist, non-denominational evangelical, Christian Science and Seventh Day Adventist churches. The interview subjects also invited me to church gatherings that took place in private homes. In my observation, religion plays a large role in community life.

\^4\ This is emergency assistance to pregnant women or families who have no other means of support. By definition, families that are currently receiving TANF cannot get this form of assistance.
**Sunnyside as a Microcosm**

While Sunnyside certainly has its distinctive characteristics, it also serves as a microcosm for exploring how living in a small city with concentrated poverty and pronounced racial stratification circumscribes family life and parenting. As I conducted research, I was interested in understanding how the town’s structure shapes parenting behaviors, which in turn feed back into maintaining and reproducing the town’s race and class-based inequality. To my knowledge, no other study has looked at how parenting and social reproduction operate within this type of community context. Given this, I identified Sunnyside as an ideal location for this type of study.

**Research Methods**

I chose to do an ethnographic study because I was interested in exploring how the act of parenting contributes to the perpetuation of social structures or to the resilience of children being raised in a challenging environment. Ethnographic research has also been highly effective at uncovering family practices in ethnic subpopulations in other settings (Burton et al. 1996). Qualitative research like that used for this project is appropriate in studying an area of inquiry that has received little academic attention to date. The purpose of this type of research inquiry is to explore and to set the stage for future research projects and hypotheses, rather than to be an ending point onto itself. Qualitative research also has room to shift focus during the research process, which can be beneficial when studying a new area of inquiry. My approach and my research questions indeed shifted over my year of collecting data. The most major change was
that I had initially wanted to focus my attention on fathers but I eventually expanded my focus to looking at parenthood in general in this community context.

**Participant Observation Structure**

I sequenced the participant observer and interview process so that I would start out by doing observations and then segue into primarily conducting interviews. The observation period helped me to understand the community context before I began the actual process of interviewing. As a participant observer, I wanted to integrate myself into the community as much as possible. To that end, I rented a room in Prosser, Washington, two small towns up the freeway from Sunnyside. The room was located in a former sewing factory that been converted over to a kind of de facto dormitory populated primarily by Washington State University graduate and post-doctoral students who were studying agricultural sciences. I actually had intended to rent a room in the home of a community member but I could not find a room within my price range that was clean and able to accommodate a bed and a place to work (I wanted to spend just a few hundred dollars because I also had a lease in Pullman, near the university.) The room I ultimately rented, which lacked a window, and which had the added disadvantage of being directly over a ballet studio’s speaker system, was at least affordable. Indeed, my search for housing was a first-hand window into how scarce housing is in Sunnyside. I had limited income as a graduate student but I also had a high credit score, cultural capital, a paycheck from Washington State University, race privilege and ready access to student loans. Most of the
people who came to Sunnyside to work did not have those advantages and their incomes were both lower and less stable than mine was.

My second step towards integrating myself into Sunnyside life was getting a volunteer job with one of the local elementary schools. I applied to be a volunteer through the parent involvement center. After a criminal background check, and with no further assessment of my educational capacity to tutor children, I was sent to a local elementary school to meet with the principal. I told the principal that I was there with a goal of meeting parents who I could interview. I ended up working three days a week at the elementary school for a semester. I worked with first, second, fourth and fifth graders in small groups and one-on-one, assisting them with reading and math skills. I learned a great deal about the community from observing at the school, including in the classrooms and in the staff break room.

Description of the Elementary School Population

As my primary site for participant observation, I collected much of my data in the school where I volunteered. The school population appeared to be about 95% of Mexican origin and the majority of the children spoke English as a second language. Within the school, the staff in lower-paid and non-credentialed roles, including the janitors, office staff and aides were largely of Mexican origin. The credentialed teachers were overwhelmingly white. The principal was white.
Although I did more observations in the school than anywhere else, I stumbled across many opportunities to observe in the community. I did a lot of my academic work in three cafes, one in Sunnyside and two in Prosser. Although I was initially driven to the cafes because I needed food, coffee and an internet connection, I quickly discovered that the cafes were a great venue for collecting field notes. I could easily write observations, with almost verbatim quotations, in a café without attracting attention. In a small town environment, people typically asked me what I was doing in the area, and that gave me the opportunity to tell people my research subject and to find interviewee prospects. The same thing happened in venues like the local stores.

In addition to these unplanned opportunities for participant observation, I cultivated relationships with local community organizations with a goal of finding observation and interview opportunities. I secured an invitation from a staff member of the Family Engagement Center, a project of the Sunnyside schools, to visit computer education classes, citizenship classes and parent education groups. I further formed relationships with a leader at a local Catholic Church, staff at a housing program for migrant workers and the local Head Start program.

In the first semester (winter of 2011) when I was in the Yakima Valley, I was also conducting qualitative interviews for a separate research project. Participating in two research studies simultaneously, as both a lead researcher and as an assistant, had implications for my research process and my thinking. I did interviews with a number of community members who did not fit into my participant guidelines, and whose interviews are not included in this analysis (or in my interview count), but who did inform my perspectives on the community. The observations I made in doing those interviews further enriched my data for this study because they helped me to
better see the structural and cultural context in which the interview subjects lived. In total, I spent all of 2011 dividing my time between the Yakima Valley and Pullman, Washington. I volunteered at the school on consistent days, so I was always in Yakima on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. I spent some weekends in Pullman, some in Yakima Valley and some in Berkeley, California with my family. My schedule was dictated more by the availability of interviewees than by anything else. In the winter, when agricultural work options are limited, I had more opportunities to do interviews and so consequently, I spent more time in Yakima Valley. During the high summer season, when work was plentiful and school was closed, finding interview opportunities was much harder.

**Research Approach in Conducting Participant Observation**

As an observer, my original intent was to look at how men describe themselves as fathers when they are talking to other men, to their families and to their children. I wanted to observe how the work of parenting takes place, observing who was most often seen with children and what they did to teach and supervise the children. This research goal proved to be harder to put into practice than I had anticipated. Getting close enough to families in public spaces to observe their parenting was difficult. In the private homes I visited, however, I was able to observe parenting directly.

Beyond just observing parents, I set out to observe the community context in which they live and work. In this research goal, I was much more successful. In order to learn about the poverty in
the area, I talked to community organization representatives, teachers and leaders about the scope of poverty and about available resources. To study the effect of the agricultural industry on the community, I talked with farmers, winemakers and other people in agribusiness about the changes in their industry and about their need for workers. In public spaces, in public meetings, at community agencies and at the school, I took note of how Mexican origin families were discussed to understand the possible effect of xenophobia and racism on parenting.

**Interviews**

*Sampling Method*

In the interests of being able to recruit a reasonably sized sample, I cast as wide a net as possible to try to recruit Mexican origin fathers as participants. I was open to interviewing anyone by this description who currently lived in the Sunnyside vicinity. I also interviewed some people who were currently living slightly farther afield but who had grown up in Sunnyside and retained ties to the area. I limited the sampling frame to men in heterosexual partnerships, including cohabiting and married men. (I do not know the exact size of the sampling frame but the Census (2014) says there were 1,348 husband/wife families with children under the age of 18 present.) I started out the interview process by stating my intention to interview men, but that approach did not work. Women were much more willing to be interviewed. Typically, after I interviewed a woman, she would promise her spouse or partner that the interview process was fine, which would then enable me to get interviews with men. Moreover, I realized that even when I just
tried to interview men, often the entire extended family would gather around us and the women and children would chip in their thoughts. Even if they did not want to participate, in the small, crowded homes and trailers that I visited, family members literally had nowhere else to go. My presence was also a form of entertainment in some families and nobody wanted to miss the action. Last and certainly not least, my desire, as a woman, to meet alone with a man, sounded suspicious and I hesitated to make the request.

That being said, I ended up getting rich data from women and my data was much stronger with the inclusion of multiple voices from within families. In total, I interviewed 43 people for this project, including a handful of extended family members of the subjects (such as the adult daughter of one of the men) and direct subjects. Ironically, despite my intention to focus on men and couples, I ended up with a sample that disproportionately included women. On several occasions, this was because the women had committed the couple to the interview but then the men bowed out of actually being interviewed directly. These interviews were informative and I chose to keep them in my sample, since they still represented the family life of my target population.

Overall, identifying research participants was an arduous and difficult process. My first step was to make the prospect of an interview as appealing as possible. I agreed to meet interviewees in their homes, or their places of work, or even a fast food restaurant or café if that felt more comfortable to them. I also offered an incentive of a $25 gift card in return for their time. The $25 gift card was definitely a draw for the participants. While the gift cards were appealing to participants, particularly during winter months when there is little work, plenty of people felt
able to refuse the interview request and so the incentive amount was not coercive. The only real disadvantage to the gift cards is that a few people seemed to see the interview as an unfortunate barrier to getting the gift card, rather than as an end onto itself.

More than trying to make the interviews appealing, my best strategy for finding participants was through building a social network to encourage people to want to talk to me. I had hoped the school would be a good place to make varied interview connections and as described earlier, when I spoke to the school principal, I set up my volunteer time with that as an explicit goal. Although the principal had initially volunteered to help to connect me with families, several months later, she withdrew her offer to help and instead referred me to the district administration. The administration offered me a list of phone numbers of all of the parents in the district. I tried cold calling parents but everyone I tried hung up on me. I realized that the cold calls were futile and resigned myself to snowball sampling from as many different starting points as possible.  

Fortunately, one charismatic, warm first grade teacher took it on herself to help me, as a kind of quid pro quo for all of my work in her classroom. She invited me to an annual parents’ service night, where all of the families were set to work scrubbing their children’s desks. She then introduced me to the families, one by one, and I filled my calendar with interview plans. She made a point of complimenting each family and telling them that they were a special family and

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5 My ability to get interviews with strangers, and not through social networks, may also have been hampered by local deportation trends - In early January of 2011, when I was first collecting data, immigration enforcers did a mass raid in nearby Ellensburg (Dininny 2011).
should be interviewed. Her classroom was the biggest starting point for the snowball sample. I found other interview prospects through local non-profit agencies that serve children and through people I met in the local cafes. Another source of interviews was the community college, where I did presentations to social science classes, seeking interviewee prospects. A few students offered to participate themselves or recruited their family members as participants. Other than that, I used standard snowball sampling techniques to find interviewees.

Snowball sampling was one of the only recruitment methods available to me but it also gave me an interesting vantage point for understanding the participants’ narratives. For example, one family told me about their wonderful uncle and aunt, who had modeled parenting to them. I then had the opportunity to interview the uncle and aunt as well. The community was small enough that I sometimes heard second hand information about people I had already interviewed. At one point, when I was getting my hair cut in Prosser, the hairdresser, who lived in Sunnyside, described a relative, a new parent. At some point during my haircut, I found myself in the awkward position of realizing that I had interviewed her relative. She then offered to introduce me to her relative to do an interview. At that moment, it became clear to me that I was starting to hit the point of saturation. Essentially, I considered the data collection at saturation when I reached a point where I found people were repeating one another and when people I interviewed started to refer me back to other people that I had already interviewed.
**Characteristics of the Sample**

**Descriptive Characteristics of the Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Women and # of Men</td>
<td>24 women and 19 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># spoke Spanish as a 1st language</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># in legal marriages</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean # of children</td>
<td>3.34 (SD =2.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># currently working in seasonal agricultural jobs</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># unemployed or between jobs</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># working in more stable jobs (e.g. retail)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I interviewed most of the people in the sample in their homes. Most lived in trailer home parks or in small apartments, although a handful lived in single family homes that were located on the periphery of the community.

I did not limit the sample by how many generations their family had been in the United States or by where their family was from in Mexico. The interviews were more or less equally split by people who had immigrated from Mexico themselves or whose parents had immigrated. Some of the interviews were with people who were hard to classify by generation. For example, some of them migrated to and from Mexico or had been born in the United States but had grown up in Mexico. The people who were born in the United States were typically from the immediate area or had been born in Southern California or Texas. The people who had been born in Mexico were from a hodgepodge of different places including Guerrero, Morelos, Zacatecas and Michoacan. Some had grown up in urban areas, such Mexico City and others were from rural, highly isolated communities. Unlike in some other receiving communities, which have a strong relationship to a particular sending community (Massey et al. 2002), people from all over Mexico, California and Texas seemed to have found their way to the Yakima Valley.
Men were more likely to be more recent immigrants, as shown in the chart below:

Eighteen of the 43 people that I interviewed had finished high school and five more had gone back for their general equivalency diploma. Three people had credentials in teaching. The remainder of the sample had somewhere between a second grade and an eleventh grade education. The men typically had less education than the women and the first generation migrants typically had far less education than the people who had been born in the United States.

I interviewed nineteen men and twenty-four women. As shown in the chart below, the men in the sample were typically older than the mothers of their children at the time when their children were first born. At the time of the interview, the men were also older, on average as a group, than the women.
### Sample by Age and Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women at the Age of 1st Child</td>
<td>18.60</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women at the Time of the Interview</td>
<td>28.31</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men at the Age of 1st Child</td>
<td>22.58</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men at the Time of the Interview</td>
<td>33.84</td>
<td>10.09</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Representativeness of the Sample for the Sunnyside Area**

To test whether my sample was representative of the population of Sunnyside Mexican origin families as a whole, I compared the characteristics of the people in the sample with the Census data for the upper Yakima valley area, using the Census’ data ferret system (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2014). I found that the sample did differ in some ways from the Census data on Mexican origin families in the community as a whole. The Mexican origin fathers in the sample overwhelmingly worked outside the home – 89% reported being employed as compared with the 61% of Mexican origin fathers who reported to the Census Bureau that they were employed. This may be because the median age of the men in the study was 10 years older than the median age in the community at large. By contrast, mothers in the sample were 10 percentage points less likely to work outside the home than the population who answered the census (71% versus 61%). The median age of the mothers in the sample was only two years older than the median age of women in the area.

The sample also differed slightly from the larger population in their educational background as they were more likely to have left high school and obtained a GED than to have graduated from high school (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2014). I suspect this was reflective of the fact that so many of them had had children when they were young, which had made completing high school
more challenging. By looking for people with children, I therefore over-sampled people who had dropped out of high school. I also somewhat over-sampled agricultural workers and child care workers, probably because I used a snowball sampling methodology.

**Interview Content**

An interview guide containing my original interview questions is attached as Appendix A. As I described above, the questions were modified to reflect themes that emerged during the project and the interviews were only semi-structured to allow the participants to shape the interviews. The original purpose of the interview questions was generally to ask men about their lives before and after becoming fathers, including their job history and aspirations, educational history and aspirations, relationship history and relationship aspirations, history of involvement in their community and the history of their relationship with their families. These questions were intended to reveal how fatherhood operates in the minds of these men. Finally, I discussed how men are involved with their children’s lives on a day-to-day level and how they think they should be involved in their children’s lives. I asked the men to talk about their hopes for their children’s futures. I asked the women variations on the same questions I asked the men. Parents tended to present a fairly unified account of their parenting styles. Each interview was intended to be intensive but some lasted quite a bit longer than others. With one interview, where I could barely get a sentence out of the interviewee, the entire interview was roughly thirty agonizing
minutes long. With other interviews, the interview filled up sixty-four, single-spaced, word processed pages of transcription and I spent the full afternoon and evening with the family.

A certain degree of pandemonium permeated many of the interviews. The interviews with Ashley and Anthony, for instance, were extreme but not an outlier. They live with Anthony’s mother in a public housing apartment. The downstairs room, where we did the interview, was a hub of activity as both Ashley and her mother-in-law conduct home-based businesses from the living room/kitchen area. Ashley has a business re-selling ice cream, which she does from her kitchen. In the meanwhile, Ashley’s mother-in-law makes dinner for fieldworkers and so at the time when I did the interviews, there were nine men in the room, waiting for dinner, and assorted ice-cream seeking children. There were also at least three children in the house who belonged to other family members. I could not entirely distinguish between the ice cream customers and the relatives’ children, but the net effect was there were never fewer than five children in the room at any given moment. Ashley was juggling two children of her own, including a toddler experiencing severe effects of prenatal drug exposure and a small baby. Neither child had anything to occupy them during the interview and so they attempted to play with the interview consent guide, my tape recorder and my keys. It was hard for any of us to concentrate on the interview and there were an extraordinary number of interruptions.

I conducted the interviews either entirely in English, entirely in Spanish or frequently, in a mishmash of Spanish and English. The interviewees and the people I observed in the community frequently began a sentence in English, jumped over to Spanish halfway through the sentence and then returned to speaking in English, seamlessly. In cases where the statements were
translated in full or in part (because some words were in Spanish and some were in English), I note that in the text.

Transcription and Translation

Transcription and translation of these interviews added their own bias to my findings. In the early stages of this project, I did my own transcription and translation of the interview transcripts. Later, when it was financially feasible, I hired assistants to do the remaining transcription and translation, on the assumption that a very fluent Spanish speaker or a native speaker could do a far better job than I could in capturing the conversation. I originally deliberately sought to hire someone who was, to the degree, possible, closely in cultural alliance with the community I was writing about (although not from the same region, to protect the subjects’ identities). I therefore hired a high school educated, 1.5 generation, young adult, native Spanish speaker who also had an excellent command of spoken English. When I checked over her work, I could see that she had captured the meanings of what was said correctly. She was scrupulous to the point of looking up the names of places in the Yakima Valley to confirm that her spelling was correct. The vocabulary that she used, however, was often simplistic, as were the sentence structures she employed. In short, she translated everything into her own writing level. I am guessing she captured the speaking style of many, but not all, of the interviewees quite well by doing that. Interestingly, when she did direct transliteration, however, I realized that she was not able to capture the complexity of my English language speech. Even in the
process of hearing and writing down exactly what I was saying in English, she used transliteration in a way that somehow made me sound as simplistic as a middle-school student interviewing for a school project. For example, in her transcriptions, instead of saying, “going to” she transcribed me as saying, “gonna.” While my own speech was not important per se, her lack of ability to capture complexity concerned me.

I decided a change was in order and I subsequently hired a bilingual native English-speaking graduate student who lives in Mexico to translate the remainder of the Spanish language interviews. In her hands, the comments people made in Spanish suddenly became far more sophisticated and my own speech returned to its usual educated style. My brother also volunteered to help me with English language transcription. My brother is a precise, methodical person, and he went as far as timing the pauses in speech and accurately captured every little speech tic or oddity. In his naturalistic transcription, my own voice sounded the most like my own, perhaps even more than it did when I transcribed my own words. Again, although my focus in my analysis is not my own statements, seeing them put to paper did give me a barometer for understanding how much de-facto measurement error transcription and translation added to the data. My brother probably found it easy to make me sound like myself because he has a lifetime of listening to me talk and we have similar speech patterns. By contrast, no one who did the transcription was from the exact same community where I did the interviews and so the voice of the research participants was always mediated by that of an outsider.

There is no right way to do transcription or transliteration in social science data collection. When we hear speech, we may use disfluencies (sounds such as “uh” and “um”) as moments to
process and absorb what is being said to us, rather than as focus points in the sentences we are hearing (Watson 2012). Those disfluencies, however, are distracting on the written page and may be used to convey subtle meanings about the speaker, such as their educational background (Oliver, Serovich and Mason 2005). Given this, there are values to denaturalized transcription that focuses only on communicating meaning (Oliver et al. 2005). As someone transcribing ones’ own work, the subliminal tendency to leave or delete odd speech patterns in the vocabulary of the speaker, in keeping with our own impressions of that person, is hard to avoid. By having others transcribe, I avoided that pitfall. As a researcher, I concluded that the difference in the transcriptions I obtained, let alone their translations, calls into question how we can most precisely treat this type of textual data. I have seen grounded theory analysis (e.g. Strauss 1987) that spends pages analyzing one word for hidden meaning. Given the degree of subjectivity that apparently plays into the process of taking recorded text and putting it on paper, I take a different approach. I assume for this study that there are limits on our ability to grapple with transcriptions and transliterations as if they are texts and I focus on larger meanings.

When I present comments from the interviewees in this text, I strike a balance between focusing on what the participants said, and also showing when my own comments might have shaped the responses I heard from the interviewees. If my own comment simply consisted of making encouraging sounds or a few words to get the participant to keep talking, I used ellipses in the quotations to avoid interrupting the flow of the interviewee’s comments. If my questions or comments substantially affected the discussion, I reproduced the discussion in full, referencing myself by my nickname of Liz.
Use of Pseudonyms

Sunnyside is the real name of the community where I did this research, but the names of all the people I interviewed and portrayed have been changed to protect their confidentiality. I gave the interviewees the option to select their own pseudonyms, although some of them declined and I chose the pseudonyms for them. I modeled my approach to confidentiality on the work of Edin and Nelson (2013), in interviewing fathers in the Camden, New Jersey. Like Edin and Nelson, I recognize that the family life I studied happens within a social and geographic context and I wanted to give the reader a transparent description of the community where I did my research. I also needed to be able to cite information that I gleaned about the community from sources such as the local newspaper or a study about adolescents in farmwork that was done in the same location as my research. Even if I had changed Sunnyside’s name, but had described it accurately, it would have been obvious to many readers where it was. Like Edin and Nelson (2013), I changed the names of the people I interviewed. Also in line with Edin and Nelson (2013), I provide aggregate tables, describing my sample, but not specific descriptions of all of the characteristics of each person in the sample. To have done the latter would risk identifying the participants to readers. Out of necessity, I also changed the job description of one of the interviewees because otherwise, it would have been clear to readers in Sunnyside who he was. I also deleted some specific references to local employers, again, to disguise participants.
Analysis

I coded and analyzed the interviews and field notes in Atlas-ti qualitative analysis software. I coded for a wide range of different topics, themes and attitudes. Certain topics came up with particular frequency. I often (on 50 or more occasions), coded for subjects related to work, such as farm labor, agriculture and economic survival. Within these subjects, two common subtopic were parents’ challenges in managing the dual obligations of work and family and children as workers. Since I was asking questions about parenting and children, I also heard many comments on aspirations for children, child care, education, fathering, mothering and parenting models. Within these comments, I frequently found and coded for evidence of beliefs about “good parenting,” evidence of level of paternal involvement in parenting, knowledge of children and for information about how mothers and fathers experienced their transition into parenthood. Other common topics were family history, crime and violence, drugs and alcohol, health, migration, language and relationships. I asked questions about the community and I coded for opinions of Yakima Valley as a place to live and evidence of ongoing ties to Mexico. In my analysis, I copied all of the quotations pertaining to a particular subject and reviewed them. I then clustered the quotations into groups to look for trends and thematic unity across participants or subgroups of participants.
Researching as an Outsider

Prior to deciding to conduct research in the Yakima Valley, I had done some previous research assistant work in interviewing farmworkers and community members about the effects of agriculture on family life. Beyond that experience, I came into the Yakima Valley as a complete outsider to the community. This outsider perspective has shaped my data and the research process overall. The large research projects I had done in the past had focused on subjects to which I had a close, personal connection. There are undoubtedly advantages to studying subjects as an insider (Lofland et al. 2006). In conducting qualitative research, I have found, in keeping with other research, that people tend to open up to the interviewer about stigmatized subjects if they feel the interviewer shares in their perspective (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). People conducting interviews from an insider status also sometimes have an easier time getting access to participants or with blending into the crowd when they are doing participant observations (Lofland et al. 2006). In the Yakima Valley, I was a complete outsider and I had none of those research advantages.

The advantage I had in the Yakima Valley, however, was that I could effectively reinvent myself into as neutral a person as possible, in each of my public interactions and interviews (Kerstetter 2012). My goal was to get as much of a 360-degree view of the community and its social issues as possible. No person, however, operates outside of his or her subject position, and my appearance had everything to do with how I collected data. The light color of my skin and my blue eyes absolutely defined who I was assumed to be in the Yakima Valley and what people would say to me. Even when I was not actively seeking data, and when doing mundane
activities like paying my rent, I had open access to hearing other people’s anti-Mexican sentiments because the white people in the community assumed I would share their racist views. I was, as a result, deeply aware of how racism shaped community life and that in turn drew my attention to the role of institutional racism in shaping local parenting. I, of course, have no way of knowing what would have been said to me if I was Mexican American, or if Spanish was my first language. I may have missed a great deal of data based because of who I am but by the same token, I had some definite points of access.

In particular, as a white woman in a community where many whites do not learn Spanish, I had some uncensored access to Spanish-language commentary in the general community and in the school where I obtained a volunteer position. In public spaces, people assumed I could not understand them, unless I proved otherwise, and I did a good bit of eavesdropping and note-taking without the observation subjects knowing what I was doing. My comprehension was not perfect but it was certainly good enough to follow the conversations.

As a woman, I also had different access to research subjects than a man would have had and I faced barriers to meeting with men away from their spouses. Still, there are advantages to doing research on men as a woman. Given that much of the existing literature on fatherhood has been written by men, there is something to be said for bringing a different set of gender biases to the field. The fact that I elicit different information from men than a man would does not mean that the information was any less worthwhile to collect.
Beyond being white and female, my main identity was of being a stranger to the community. I was given leeway to ask clueless questions, often a necessary part of qualitative research, because my ignorance could be blamed on my position as a stranger. As a qualitative researcher doing research within my own community, I had sometimes been frustrated by the unwillingness of the participants to fully explain their feelings because they assumed I already knew what they had to say. In the Yakima Valley, people explained themselves at length because they assumed I was ignorant and needed for them to elucidate. As an example, at one point, a Latina teacher in the break room was talking about her brother, who was dying of cancer. She said that she personally could not afford to go to see him but her son would be chipping in with the cost of gasoline. She then looked at me directly and said that in her Hispanic family, everyone pitched in to help one another. She characterized this as being true of all Hispanic families, because everyone might need help from their family one day. She told me she did not want to offend me about my family because perhaps we helped each other too. She would have been unlikely to give me this explanation if she thought I really did belong to a family like hers.

Another advantage I had, as an outsider with no meaningful social ties, was that people could be honest with me without taking much of a risk. If someone told me about his or her drug history for example, it would not affect how he or she was then perceived in the town at large. I was also free to pretend that I had no personal knowledge of the backgrounds of the people I was interviewing (in fact, I did Google searches about everyone I interviewed). As a case in point, I did an interview with a family that had a reputation for involvement in extreme gang violence. The family was experiencing a lot of social stigma because one of the children had recently gone
on a murder spree⁶. I am sure, from our conversation, that they would never have let me in the
door if they thought I shared in that stigma or if I was from that town. They clearly assumed,
however, that I had no knowledge of that part of their family history and they were able to show
me the part of their identity that centered around their pride in being parents, rather than feeling
defensive in their shame in being associated with teenagers who had done violent acts.

As a stranger, I was free to leave some parts of my identity and personality hidden, which I
hoped would give me more holistic community access. I did not, for example, tell anyone that I
am a lesbian because I felt that would complicate my ability to get data. I did not express my
opinions when others said racist things to me or expressed anti-immigrant sentiments. Although
I was frequently disturbed by what I saw in the school where I volunteered (as I will describe in
chapter six), I kept those opinions to myself. Indeed, I tried to go through my time in the Yakima
Valley as a quiet, friendly, pleasant, mild-mannered observer. In a small town, I felt this was
necessary to preserve my neutrality as an interviewer and I maintained that persona in all
settings. I hope, in retrospect, that this allowed me to get access to a variety of opinions and
perspectives that I might not have heard if I had been more open about who I am in my regular
life.

I also could not avoid disclosing my position with Washington State University. Right away, to
some of the people I met, this identified me as privileged and as someone with social

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⁶In Sunnyside, I found that when one member of the family had a bad reputation, that reputation was generalized to
the rest of the extended family. For example, I heard a teacher complain about a student in her class. To
demonstrate what made the student so difficult, she explained to her friends that the student had a grandmother who
had not changed her daughters’ diapers properly.
connections and information, someone who might be worth knowing. This identity actually gave me insights, as will be described in chapter six, into how few options people in the community have for getting information about the educational system.

By virtue of being a member of groups that enjoy privileges based on ascribed and acquired characteristics (race, class, citizenship status and education, among others) I had a different type of power balance with my research participants than another researcher might have had (Kerstetter 2012). Overall, I found that my position as an outsider and a newcomer to the area were both an advantage in my ability to conduct research and a limiting factor. I have no doubt that a different person would have collected different data than I did, but being who I am gave me an interesting position from which to observe, interview and write.

**Limitations of this Method**

As I have discussed at some length, my subject position as an interviewer affected my data and findings. This was one of many limitations to this study. As with any non-random sampling method, there was selection bias in who entered into the study. Although I used multiple starting points for the snowball sample, there is still selection effect because I sought connections primarily through institutional contacts. I did some of the recruitment through a Head Start parenting group, for example, knowing full well that people who attend parenting classes are either deeply committed to parenting or they are required to attend those classes by the state (Reich 2005).
Although I went into the research with clearly identified research questions, those questions evolved as I grew to know the community and as I conducted more interviews. For example, I ended up looking at how and why parents encouraged their children to do physical labor, a topic I had never even considered until the interview participants and the people I observed brought it up. I also became more attentive to the intersection between education and parenting. I have been interested in the relationship between parenting and schools for many years but my fieldwork observations were what led me to ask and try to answer unexpected questions about how the school pedagogy affected parenting, which in turn, affect children’s educational trajectories. I had originally conceived of connecting with the schools as a source for finding interviewees but it became a rich environment from which to do much of the observational work. Moreover, the interviewees brought up education repeatedly, which rendered it a more central concern in the study.

My choice to allow my research questions to be re-directed by the data had advantages for the quality of the overall study but also created some limitations. As someone who was an outsider to the community I was studying, I needed to be nimble and willing to change direction because my original questions were based on a literature review about the research topic and not an insider’s knowledge of the particularities of the community. At the same time, the change in my approach means that not everyone was asked the exact same research questions. For example, I asked later subjects about what television shows influenced their parenting because earlier subjects mentioned television as a cultural influence on their parenting. I was not able to re-
capture data from earlier participants and so I cannot answer questions about television
influences for the entire sample. This means I cannot quantify the qualitative data.

Another limitation of this research approach is that it is cross-sectional. I compared men’s
retrospective reports on their lives before having children with how they and their partners
describe their lives since having children. Recollected data is sometimes marred by the
limitations of memory. I also can only speculate about how the parenting I saw will affect the
trajectories of the specific children whose families I interviewed. Cross-sectional data is not a
method for determining causality and I hope the reader will recognize that the intent of this study
is not to establish definitive causal relationships. In general, qualitative data is limited in its
capacity to study causality. Rather, as an early study in this area, I would hope that other
researchers could build on these findings to do more definitive longitudinal analysis in similar
communities.
CHAPTER THREE

THE TRANSITION TO FATHERHOOD:

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTEXT

Background

Family scholars argue that co-resident fathers have stronger relationships with their extended family members and better work engagement than those men who are not fathers\(^7\) (Eggebeen and Knoester 2001; Keizer, Dykstra and Poortman 2010) and therefore posit that fatherhood is socially beneficial and adaptive for society as a whole (Knoester and Eggebeen 2006). In large-scale quantitative studies, researchers have found evidence that having children for the first time increases everything from men’s social involvement to their religious engagement (Petts 2007) to their work commitment (Knoester and Eggebeen 2006). The studies referenced here, however, look at broad population groups and their findings may not be applicable to distinct subpopulations, such as the one I studied in Sunnyside.

Scholars have advanced various theories to explain these changes in fathers. The first explanation is that when men become fathers, they change in response to the role demand that they at least become responsible breadwinners for their children, if not direct care providers (Eggebeen 2001). Men who fail to do so may be sanctioned by peers and their family (Knoester

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\(^7\) Eggebeen and Knoester (2001) measure the strength of family relationships by looking at the frequency of contact and intergenerational exchanges of help.
and Eggebeen 2006). Fathers are therefore forced to rearrange their lives to comply with the expectations of their new role. Scholars who invoke role theory note that men who live with their children show greater change across their lives than men who do not co-reside with children, suggesting that actually participating in fathering is what creates these life changes (Knoester and Eggebeen 2006).

Another mechanism through which fatherhood is assumed to create positive changes in men’s lives, overall, is by giving men new opportunities to emotionally develop and grow. As fathers care for their children, they must make complex decisions and handle frustrations but they also get to see their children developing and changing in positive ways, which may increase their sense of self-efficacy (Daly, Ashbourne and Brown 2009). This theory argues that new fathers develop increased capacity to problem-solve, to handle frustrations and to ultimately succeed, which then places fathers in a better position to be effective across spheres of their lives, including in the workplace. Fathers may also make better decisions about personal safety and the life consequences of impulsive choices as they develop these emotional skills. There are, of course, many life opportunities for men to grow emotionally and to take on new roles. Per this theory, the bond between parents and their children is so emotionally powerful, however, that it is capable of creating significant changes in a fathers’ entire approach to life beyond what might happen in assuming other types of roles.

The most striking thing about the studies cited above, when taken together, is how very far reaching they find the effects of fatherhood to be. Eggebeen and Knoester’s (2001) widely cited work is a good example of one such study. Although the authors acknowledge that they cannot
discount ways in which men select into fatherhood, other than by controlling for basic
demographic information such as race, age, socioeconomic status and marital status, they still
frame their analysis as a study of the causal relationship between fatherhood involvement and
positive changes in men’s lives. Later, using longitudinal methods, Knoester and Eggebeen
(2006) found more support for their argument that fatherhood causes changes in men’s life
orientations. Taken together, these studies suggest that becoming a father transforms how men
do everything from approaching work to spending their free time. The transition to fatherhood
even seems to shift men’s belief systems and their sense of self-preservation.

Although I based my questions about the transition to fatherhood heavily on the scholarship of
researchers like Eggebeen and Knoester, I used a very different methodology than Eggebeen and

Perceptions of changes due to fatherhood may be very different than measuring differences in
behavior between different groups of fathers. This study was also different from previous
studies of fatherhood transformations in that I focused on a group of men for whom this type of
role theory appears to have limited applicability, as I will explain in more detail later in this
chapter.

Given all this, it is perhaps not surprising that my findings deviated from past research on the
transition to fatherhood. I did not find the transition to fatherhood was perceived as having such
a blanket, uniform effect across all spheres of men’s lives. While the findings supported the
literature on how fatherhood made the men feel they had become more safety-conscious, I found
mixed support for men’s perceptions of increased work engagement.
In this chapter, I will begin by giving an overview of how the men in the study said that the transition to fatherhood affected their relationship to work and their focus on personal safety outside the home. My decision to focus the narrative on these areas was guided by the men I interviewed. Even though many of the men did not believe they had experienced personal transformations from becoming fathers, those men who did describe personal changes stated they had primarily experienced the changes in these two areas. Work involvement and personal safety are also theoretically interesting to compare and contrast because the fathers perceive work engagement as being dependent on a number of structural and community factors while deciding to avoid unsafe behavior was perceived by the men as being mostly a matter of the individual agency of the new father. Comparing and contrasting the men’s reported changes in these two areas therefore gave me opportunities to explore whether the field’s theories on perceptions of the fatherhood transition extend to this group of men. I will argue that in a life arena that is experienced as being primarily dependent on men’s own agency, that of better guarding their personal safety and of taking fewer risks, the transition to fatherhood consistently was experienced as changing the men in the study, as the theories cited above would predict. In the life arena of work, which is experienced as being heavily dependent on structure and context, the men described a considerably more tenuous relationship between becoming a father and work engagement.

The role of structure in increasing or attenuating the connection between fatherhood and other life arenas has typically been under-theorized and under-explored in studies on the transition to fatherhood for Latinos. As I described in the introduction of this book, this is partially because
most of the studies about this population have been done from a psychological standpoint and have not taken macro and meso-level factors into account. In fact, there are numerous structural barriers that low-income, subordinated populations of fathers face when they try to maintain connections with their children (Edin and Nelson 2013). Our laws are structured to assume mothers are the main caregivers for children (Edin and Nelson 2013). For immigrants, the arbitrary boundaries between nations and the laws that govern migration between nations certainly limits their access to their children. The fact that immigrants find it necessary to seek work in the United States, and indeed the dependence of the Mexican economy on remittances from the United States, also speaks to how macro-level structural factors shape low-income fathers’ physical access to their children (Gonzalez 2013; Schmalzbauer 2013). The government’s distinction between those who are authorized to be in the United States and those who are not further limits co-resident fatherhood. During the research, I met families who had been separated by deportation. Parental incarceration also inhibits relationships between fathers and children, including those in the sample, whose families often have experienced disproportionate rates of incarceration. In other words, paternal agency operates within the boundaries of social structures and role shifts and transitions depend on the opportunities and limitations of the social context in which they take place (Elder 1994). There is therefore a need for more research on how factors like neighborhood/community context, immigration status, ethnicity and age may shift the effects and perceived effects of entering fatherhood.

Later in the chapter, I will look more closely at the theoretical bases for believing that men’s lives will change globally after the transition to fatherhood. Fundamentally, studies on the
transition to fatherhood start with the assumption that fatherhood is a transition point that will change men’s life trajectories. I will show that this assumption does not describe well the subjective experiences of the men I studied. I will demonstrate how demographic factors, socio-economic context and family structures may be attenuating the perceived significance of becoming a father as a turning point in men’s lives.

Finally, I will point my attention to an area of literature and theory that has been, to my knowledge, entirely neglected by the fatherhood researchers within family sociology. In keeping with labor market discrimination and gender research, I will consider how the social status associated with fatherhood may account for the general improvement in men’s work prospects after fatherhood, as found in the literature, but may not provide the same type of boost to men who occupy the migration, economic, social, racial and age status position of the men in this study.

**How Fatherhood Affected the Mexican Origin Men of Sunnyside**

*Fatherhood and Risky Behaviors*

In keeping with the literature on young Latino fatherhood, the men in the study described feeling an obligation to stop “partying” after they became parents (Dornig et al. 2009; Foster 2004; Parra-Cardona et al. 2008). “Partying,” refers to getting inebriated, using drugs and engaging in reckless behavior. For example, one couple with a history of criminal justice involvement and crystal methamphetamine addiction described the period of their life when they did those
activities as “partying.” Another person defined partying as getting into bar brawls while a third defined it as underaged drinking.

Hercules, a former gang member, remembered, “You know, I was young, I wanted to party and hang out with my friends and stuff. But all of a sudden, I was a Dad and I felt like, hey, I need to - If I want to get ahead in life and raise this kid right, I can’t be doing that. So I felt like I was forced to mature a bit.”

Of course, not all fathers had been engaged in the same unsafe behaviors before becoming parents and the sense of caution around personal safety affected different new fathers in different ways. For Lucinda’s first partner, being safe meant avoiding gang participation. For Jeremy, a firefighter, it meant being safer on the job:

I guess it kind of made me more of an [fire-safety] person. In the beginning, I was really about, “Hey, want to get out there. I want to do stuff. I want to get into as much crap as I can.” And I think having [my child] kind of taught me thinking more … safety issues. More when I get out there, or when I do something even that’s routine, I need to think more of, “Okay – Before I do whatever it is, what if this goes to crap? How am I going to, you know, overcome this?” Or, “How am I?” I guess it just got me to think a little bit more when I was doing stuff. Just because, I guess, I want to make sure that my kids have a Dad, you know? For the rest of my life.

Jeremy’s comments are telling because he explained the logic behind his motivation to be
safer: he wanted to be alive and present for his children. The interviewees described uninvolved, non-resident fathers who apparently did not share such feelings or a sense of motivation to forego fun yet risky activities. (These men were not in the sample and so I do not know how the transition to fatherhood was perceived by non-resident fathers).

As presented by the interviewees, avoiding unsafe behaviors is a matter of volition and of intention. In sociological terms, they thought that fathers who accepted fatherhood and responsibility for their kids can exercise agency to keep themselves safe. This thinking is far from universal and many see problems such as drug addiction or alcohol abuse as diseases that take on a life of their own. The interviewees, however, did not use this kind of medical language to describe these behaviors and were instead focused on how the right level of maturity, morality, and personal commitment could enable individuals to give up drugs, alcohol abuse, and the like in favor of more responsible behavior. These men attributed their increased maturity and morality to becoming co-resident, involved fathers.

Despite the sample fathers’ focus on morality and maturity as the driving forces behind their ability to give up “partying”, many had shifted their social networks to make such a change possible. Although the men presented these changes in their social networks as being part of protecting children (examples appear later in chapter five), changing social networks and social affiliations also created the structure in which men could change their own behaviors. After having children, for example, some of the men said they joined Pentecostal churches that preached against substance use. Others gave up on old...
peer associations and focused on spending time with those of their family members who did not participate in gangs or use illegal substances. Men did not simply decide to stop using drugs and alcohol after having children. Instead, their social networks and community involvement changed, which in turn created a forum in which the men could turn away from dangerous behaviors. Still, for the purposes of this discussion, it is important to note that these changes felt like a matter of choice to the men, whereas other aspects of their lives did not.

Work and Fatherhood

In keeping with the sociological literature (Eggebeen and Knoester 2001; Knoester, Petts and Eggebeen 2007; Munch, McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1997), I interviewed men who reported that they felt more obligation to earn money or to have a viable career path after they had become fathers. On the other hand, in contradiction to the sociological literature, half of the men I interviewed mentioned no changes in their career or job orientation after transitioning to fatherhood.

Gustavo was a quintessential example of the men who said he changed his work orientation after becoming a father. He had worked in a variety of odd jobs but he buckled down to focus on school, career development and family after his son was born:

> It has helped me [to] become a father … Before I had my boy, um, you know, I did want to go to school, and become a civil engineer, but now, it’s just like I
really have to do, uh, grow up and not, not party as much or just, just settle down, stay home, be in the study, you know, and spend time with my family and stuff.

And not be doing what a single man does.

Not everyone had such lofty career goals, however. Some men just talked about the need to earn money consistently to buy things for their children. According to Diego, after he had his children, “Yeah, I was just working more to provide all that … like pampers and stuff like that. When I was putting in whatever hours I had to, for you know, extra hours to make more money.”

Jesus talked about his sense that he needed to be careful not to get fired after he became a father, “It was more responsibility … well, to not miss because they can fire you. You need to work every day now” (translated from Spanish).

In some cases, when men could not find good jobs, their wives/partners allowed them the fiction of being the main breadwinners even if they were underemployed or earning less than the women in their families. This did not seem to relate, in their narratives, to the men being fathers but rather to the men being men. Natalia explained, “Even if he’s not bringing in the cheese, like they say, I’m not going to degrade him. He’s a man, and they need to be put in their spot. So they need to feel like they are the man.” Ariana similarly talked as if she was financially dependent on her husband even though he is a farmworker and she is a teacher. Paula and her husband, whom she characterizes as “working here and there” as a farm laborer, maintain a joint narrative that the value of her employment is learning child care skills that she can use on their
kids at home, particularly around how to handle sibling fights and how to talk to children effectively.

Some men were quite bewildered by the questions about their work life before and after fatherhood, because their sense of masculine obligation to earn an income had remained constant. As with the examples above, in their minds, earning a family income has to do with being men, not with being fathers. At one point, I asked John, “Did that sort of change how you thought about work, once you realized you were going to have a family?” John’s response was, “What do you mean?” He then described his many failed attempts to support himself but he did not seem to draw a distinction between his financial obligations before and after his baby was born. I interviewed other members of John’s extended family and they held him up (not at my prompt) as an example of someone who failed to understand what it means to be in the fatherhood role and to have responsibilities. When I talked to John, however, his desperation to find work was palpable. He was pinning his hopes on a job he had heard about through a friend, a job that paid over minimum wage, but there seemed to be little hope in his mind that he would get that job. Indeed, at the time when I interviewed him, he was barely surviving financially and the utility company had turned off the lights in his home because his bill was overdue. It did not seem as if he failed to feel a sense of responsibility. Rather, he could see no way to do any more towards getting a decently paid job and fatherhood had not placed him in an improved labor market position.

Unlike with observing safety precautions, the ability to land a good job was something that many of the interviewees (male and female) saw as being contingent on the availability of jobs and on
forces outside of the individual’s control. While some found it easy to get a job, others did not. Anthony told me, “I’ve tried looking for a different job to get ahead. Like, last week, I went to check out a job in Yakima but well, it’s hard, it’s very difficult here ... Because it’s a lot of field … and it’s hard, but well, I don’t know. We’ll see what God says (translated from Spanish).” Anthony added that there was little work in the winter for those who do not migrate to follow jobs. In the year I interviewed him, he elected to remain unemployed rather than going to California and leaving his son behind. In addition to vagaries of the weather and growing season, layoffs were another source of job loss that individuals could not control or entirely predict. I heard from several interviewees about the local agricultural factory that had closed its doors the year before and laid off hundreds of employees.

Social and familial networks were repeatedly mentioned as sources of employment. Gustavo, for example, relied on his sister’s help in finding him jobs in construction. “When I was seventeen for like my last two years of summer in high school, I would go to Seattle and … go work with my sister or I’ll go stay with my sister and she’ll find me jobs up in Seattle.” John tried to hear about new job openings through his social networks. His goal was to get the jobs before they are advertised. Work reputation also mattered for getting a job. Isaac hoped his children would not do their jobs “halfway” because “in the future ... no employers are going to want you (translated from Spanish).” Isaac has worked hard to cultivate a good reputation as a worker. In other words, while “not partying” was largely seen as a matter of immediate, agentic choice that one could exercise at the point of having a child, work engagement was seen as being a product of varying degrees of personal history and structural factors. A man with a bad work reputation or
who lived in an area with few jobs could not change their fortunes readily, out of a desire to be a better father.

**Is Fatherhood Always a Transition Point?**

Beyond the limited changes in work engagement and the decrease in partying behaviors, I did not discover the kind of grand, far-reaching personal shifts that the fatherhood transition literature had led me to expect. To make sense of the disparity between my findings and those of other scholars, it is worth returning to consider the theories about why fatherhood would be expected to be such a major transition point in so many men’s lives, as found by quantitative sociological studies (e.g. Eggebeen and Knoester 2001; Knoester and Eggebeen 2006; Keizer et al. 2010). As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the most obvious way that fatherhood is assumed to change men’s lives is by placing them in a role in which they must provide ongoing financial and caregiving support for their families (Eggebeen 2001). It might seem that this explanation could standalone as a reason to expect changes in fathers were it not for two glaring facts: first, many men do not take caregiving or financial responsibility for their children (Edin and Nelson 2013), so the obligation is a matter of choice, and second, some groups of men may have had large financial and caregiving responsibilities before becoming parents (Burton, Obeidallah and Allison 1996). This latter point demands some discussion because it requires the reader to consider some of the cultural assumptions that underlie the scholarly expectation that men will have new responsibilities and different role demands after having children.
New Obligations to Earn a Living

Many young people in the United States now rely financially on their parents well into their adult years and experience a long period of not being entirely financially independent, let alone being responsible for others’ financial well-being (Johnson 2013; Swartz 2014). To an adult who has become accustomed to only having to take care of himself, often with family help, the sudden need to provide material support to a vulnerable dependent is a significant change. This change, however, is not necessarily universally experienced across all sub-populations. In a review of ethnographic research, Burton, Obeidallah and Allison (1996) argued that in low-income, African American communities, young people frequently have significant responsibilities in the home, ranging from substituting emotionally for adult male partners to earning money. They suggest that in some ethnic subcommunities, a period of leisure in adolescence is far from the norm. In this study, like Burton, Obeidallah and Allison (1996), I found that many men in Sunnyside do not have a period without caregiving responsibilities prior to having children.

Normative age expectations for different groups vary (Burton 1996; Burton et al. 1996) and in my observation, in Sunnyside, there was little sense of adolescence as a time for men to enjoy leisure, educational pursuits, and a life without full financial responsibility. For the young men in the sample, they had never experienced a period of time when they did not feel an obligation to earn money. Young men in Sunnyside frequently begin to work in the fields, alongside their older family members, when they are still in secondary school (if not earlier). Financial
responsibility and the importance of hard work are key values for these young people and the concept of having to provide for family is hardly novel for the new fathers. In a recent study by Swartz (2014), she found that while 75% of all people in their late twenties receive financial support from their parents, immigrants’ children tend to feel obligated to give support to their parents, just as their parents may help young adults if they need assistance.

As the age of transition to parenthood was young for the people I interviewed, the men did not experience an extended period when they lived outside the home but had not yet had children of their own. In the United States overall, Latina women have children at an earlier age, on average, than their white, African American and Asian American counterparts (Mathews and Hamilton 2009; Sweeney and Raley 2014). Lower levels of education have also long been associated with earlier birth timing (Heck et al. 1997) and, as discussed earlier, mean education levels in Sunnyside are low. Compressed generations tend to erase the experience of adolescence as a time of gentle transition from childhood into adulthood (Burton et al. 1996).

Given this, for many of the men in this study, caring for their own children was simply an extension of their existing responsibilities to other younger family members and did not, in fact, introduce new economic challenges to the men because these men were already used to being family providers. For the families I interviewed, the relationship I posited about the significance of parenthood for work engagement was therefore quite ill-suited to explaining their life histories. My conversation with Jorge, one of the men I interviewed, was telling. I asked him to recall how his work life had changed after he had children:
Liz: When you had kids, did it make you change anything about your life? Like work more or something like that?

Jorge: I don’t know.

Liz: You don’t know.

Jorge: Because I work all the time. When I started at 15, I was raising my brother, and I was in charge of my house … no difference (translated partially from Spanish).

I had a similar conversation with Isaac. Isaac was raised in Mexico, on a large ranch. He and his entire family worked together to sow the land. They also had a small business making and selling ice pops. Everyone’s labor counted towards the household’s economy and so Isaac was no stranger to working before he had his first child:

Liz: Were you working so hard before you had your family?

Isaac: It was almost the same … since we were working like at some seven, some seven years … We were already working, already … It wasn’t difficult for me (translated from Spanish).

Jeremy described his father’s life of financially supporting his natal family and then of taking on financial responsibility for supporting his wife and children. Jeremy did not perceive a change in his father’s responsibilities at the point when he had children. Jeremy thought that his father took on adult breadwinning roles in his family of origin. As we discussed:
Jeremy: My Dad has always been, you know, a hard worker. Ever since I was a kid, My Dad has always held at least one job. Sometimes, he has as many as two or three jobs.

Liz: All at once?

Jeremy: Yeah. When we were kids, I mean when I was a kid. My Mom was, you know, stay at home with us until my brothers went to school. And then she started working. So, you know, my Dad worked many jobs as a kid just so he could, you know … take care of the family. We were, you know – My Dad, he dropped out of school when he was a kid. His – my Grandpa died when my Dad was sixteen. So, he dropped out of school … They were migrant workers, you know, traveling doing, you know, migrant work. And they ended up settling here [in Sunnyside] and like I said, my Grandpa died when my Dad was sixteen. And he dropped out of school to help, you know. And all the other kids, you know, to help, you know, with bills and stuff like that. To help my Grandma. And so he never, you know, finished actual school. He went back, got his GED eventually. But, you know, he never graduated actual high school. So, like I said, he was always a real hard work[er] …

Liz: Sounds like it. Did he do agricultural work, too, or?

Jeremy: Yeah, oh yeah. Yeah, he even as – when I was a kid, he worked out, you know, picking asparagus, working in the fields, apples. Even after – I don’t
remember exactly how old – I think he said, I think he was nineteen – he said the year I was born, he started working for [an agricultural production factory]. And he worked there for, gosh, nineteen years … And even working there, when he didn’t work, you know, depending on what shifts work, he would be out in the fields still working, doing something else. And again, it was because, you know, we were, you know … us four and Mom didn’t work at the time, so he was, you know, still trying to support the family.

New Caregiving Responsibilities

Some men may have limited previous experience with caring for children. Caring for children brings with it frustration and the experience of overcoming problems. The sense of self-efficacy that this can bring men is helpful in a variety of areas of their lives (Daly et al. 2009). For some men, fatherhood may be their first significant experience of caregiving. This is particularly likely to be true for those who are not around extended family; whose peer groups consist of other childless adults; and who have not participated in the kind of caregiving work that young women often do to earn money (e.g. babysitting). The men in this study, however, typically had extensive experience in being around children, even prior to having children of their own.⁸

⁸ Again, because of the sampling, I do not know how many men who did not get involved with their children had previous experiences with being children’s caregivers. It is possible that past experience with children primes men to be more likely to want to be involved as parents and caused me to therefore oversample people with strong histories of caregiving.
Studies of Latino family structures and family practices show that there is a higher emphasis than in other family groups on providing support to extended family members, including child care support (Foner and Dreby 2011; Sarkisian, Gerena and Gerstel 2007; Swartz 2014). The interviews were replete with examples of extended family members providing practical support for one another, particularly around raising children, and then making a seamless transition into parenting their own children. Both men and women were described by the interviewees as taking on caregiving roles with siblings, nieces and nephews. Isaac’s wife works in child care but they are opposed to having their own children in a child care environment. Isaac explained, “Always family members take care of them … - like her Mom that doesn’t work, her brother does it … Always they are taken care of almost exclusively by family members. The pure family, my brothers, sister, pure family (translated from Spanish).” Isabel played a central role in raising her brother. Later she parented her nieces and nephews, and indeed talks about them as if their upbringing was mostly her doing. Diego helped to raise his nephews after his sister gave birth to twins at the age of fourteen. By the time his own children were born, he was already used to raising children. Ashley and Anthony were already raising her sister and his brother’s child when their biological child was born (Ashley’s sister and Anthony’s brother are partnered to each other). Ashley was thrust into parenthood after her sister went to jail. It did not require such extreme situations, however, for non-parents to take on caregiving roles with their siblings, nieces and nephews. Natalia described her family life:

I’ve worked with kids since I was – I’ve babysatted my little brothers, well, since I, since I knew how to cook, I guess at the age of 8. I – My Mom would go pay
the light, and my Dad would go, and I would sit down and watch them. And I was very responsible … They didn’t have a vehicle. They – Well, they had one, but sometimes it would break down so they had to walk. So it was five of us, little. So I would have to stay home. My sister was a good cook, and I was a good babysitter and good cleaner. So I would stay home. Clean. And my sister would cook while I entertained my brothers.

Rolando and Angelina similarly said they had not experienced any real changes in their family life after having children because Rolando had been caring for his siblings since he was five years old.

On a practical level, in communities such as this, where housing is scarce, incomes are low, and family members rely on one another for survival, extended family members tend to be clustered together. Many of the families I interviewed, even after marriage, shared housing and parenting with their siblings, parents, cousins, nieces and nephews. Even families who technically lived in their own nuclear family home had groups of relatives living in the adjoining apartments or in the same trailer parks. This clustering too increases the probability that men will reside with or next door to relative children and will already have caregiving responsibilities for those children.

All of these factors served to negate the possibility of dramatic shifts in the transition to fatherhood, as posited by role theorists (Daly et al. 2009). In the case of the fathers I studied, they already had the experience of caregiving for children and so having their own children did not present the same kind of developmental opportunities as other fathers may experience. In
other words, the demands of the fatherhood role may not be dramatically different in this population from the demands of the role of involved male relatives.

Transition to Fatherhood or Transition to Marriage?

When I initially asked questions about fatherhood, drawing on academic readings about fatherhood, I assumed the transition to marriage and the transition to fatherhood would be two distinct, life course transition points for the people I interviewed, each imbued with its own set of meanings, emotional development opportunities and role consequences. Instead, I learned that marriage and having a baby often happened in very close temporal proximity and were interlinked in the minds of the interviewees, who saw both events as part of a man becoming responsible for his family. Even in situations where women were important breadwinners, men still identified themselves as managing the family’s financial needs. Jorge’s wife worked but he saw her labor as being something he controlled. From his standpoint, he sent her to work as needed and he returned her to the home as needed because in the end, he was accountable for the family’s financial solvency. The women I interviewed endorsed this perspective as frequently as the men did. In Ariana’s words, “It’s a big responsibility, him knowing he has to work. It’s not so much him. It’s the child and myself, too.” This comment was particularly striking from Ariana because she has a Master’s degree and her husband had dropped out of school in the sixth grade. Nevertheless, she saw herself as his financial responsibility.
In this community, marriage and parenthood were seen as one and the same. When I asked Marisol what she wanted her children to be when they grow up, she said, “I think that for now, they don’t marry … I hope. I hope that they want to study, they want to progress (translated from Spanish).” She positioned marriage as a barrier to socio-economic mobility, and I wondered whether marriage was her code for taking on financial familial responsibilities and therefore being unable to further one’s education. During another interview, Antonio was confused by my question about whether he had taken on more work after becoming a father. His wife turned to him and clarified the question, asking whether he had worked more after he stopped being “single (translated from Spanish).”

A pregnancy or a new birth often was what prompted couples to get married at the time when they did and in remembering, the interviewees saw both events (marriage and parenthood) combined as harkening a time of change. Since getting married and having a baby typically occurred in close temporal proximity, they were mixed in the interviewees’ minds as one larger event. (Note that I deliberately elected to interview families with men who were involved in raising their children and so I cannot speak to how many marriages occur without children present or how many pregnancies occurred without spurring cohabitation or marriage.) Jessica described how the combination of marriage and parenthood damaged her relationship with her spouse. She got married because she was pregnant and in talking to me, she could not quite decide whether pregnancy, marriage or actually having the child contributed to the change in her relationship. “[The relationship] changed when I got married – No - because I got married when I got pregnant with my first child (translated from Spanish).” Cecilia and Gustavo moved
in together after she got pregnant with his first child (she has an older son from a relationship she had in high school) so her pregnancy entirely changed the nature of their relationship. John decided to get married just after his son was born. As has been documented in other low-income families, John and his wife had held off on marriage because they wanted to do a full ceremony that exceeded what they could afford (Edin and Kefalas 2004). After the baby was born, they decided they should get married even though they could not execute the ceremony they wanted. Given how closely intertwined marriage and fatherhood are, both temporally and in these families’ minds, fatherhood onto itself is not necessarily a harbinger of transition in the life course of these men. Although previous research has argued that men start to engage in more positive work activities when they begin to raise children (Eggebeen and Knoester 2001), my study did not fully support this because the men I interviewed had already been involved in work activities to support their families, including siblings, nieces and nephews, well before the men became parents. Even the idea that fatherhood, as a distinct event, would cause a life transition was sometimes foreign to the men I interviewed because they tended to associate becoming responsible with getting married and becoming fathers, as if they were one and the same.

*Where Does Structure Factor In?*

The limitation of theories that assume men undergo a major role shift after becoming fathers is that they focus entirely on the intent of the men. They do not account for how the structure and context of a place like Sunnyside might render making role shifts in areas such as employment
implausible. Being asked to take on new roles is not always positive or possible. Role theory acknowledges that not everyone can fulfill their social roles and recognizes the negative effects of this type of role strain (Burr 1972). Given the economic context of the study, when men experienced fatherhood/marriage as a new challenge, they often simultaneously experienced a sense of lack of self-efficacy because they could not fulfill the roles that accompany adult manhood. Rather than showing increased engagement with work, some of the men showed frustration and self-doubt because they could not be who they wanted to be for their children.

Instead of experiencing greater sense of self-worth and self-efficacy from parenting successes, as developmental theories of fatherhood would predict, the parents instead experienced the feeling of being unable to be the parents they wanted to be in challenging social and economic context. Caleb cares about fathering but he also emoted a sense of powerlessness when he told me, “The kids here sometimes make their own decisions or they do what they want because we leave. Abandoned because of the work (translated from Spanish).”

John’s financial situation, as described above, points to a real limit to the generalizability of the studies showing men feel more engagement with paid work after they become fathers. In order to become engaged in work, men need a job that allows them to be engaged. For men in this community, with its high rates of poverty and low rates of educational attainment, paid work is often risky, unrewarding, poorly remunerated and only available seasonally. In general, precarious work is associated with poor mental health and physical health (Menéndez et al. 2007). Immigrants who lack authorization to be in the country face particular challenges in finding employment and may be consigned to only precarious jobs (Donato and Armenta 2011).
Even immigrants with a legal right to work find themselves engaged in precarious work that offers little in the way of room for social mobility (Kalleberg 2008). If being a “good father” demands a particular enactment of masculine responsibility in the labor force, fathers who cannot fulfill their normative responsibilities through work may experience low self-worth and depression (Conger and Elder 1994; Rubin 1976, 1994; White et al. 2009), not the emotional growth opportunity that Knoester and colleagues (2007) describe.

*How Bias in the Labor Market Shapes the Transition to Fatherhood*

The studies on the effect of children on fathers typically have assumed that fathers *do something* different after they become fathers, such as focusing more on work. A separate body of research, however, has demonstrated that men who are fathers are perceived as more work focused and more desirable as employees than other men – in effect, fatherhood is a status characteristic that privileges men in the labor market. Quantitative studies on the changes engendered by the transition to fatherhood have not parsed out whether men’s increased time spent at work is a response to the role demands of fatherhood or whether men who are fathers are simply favored by employers for hiring, promotion and higher rates of compensation (Correll, Benard and In Paik 2007; Fuegen et al. 2004). On the other hand, laboratory studies and other experimental designs have shown definitively that employers see fathers as being the best possible employees, even if their skills and backgrounds are identical to those of mothers and to women and men who do not have children (Correll et al. 2007; Fuegen et al. 2004).
The positive, ascribed characteristics associated with fatherhood, however, may not be enjoyed by the fathers in this study. According to intersectionality theory (Collins 2000) people are treated differently based on the intersection of different subject positions that they occupy. Per this theory, the positive characteristics that employers associate with fathers in general may not hold true for the fathers I interviewed. Fathers in general are seen as ideal workers because they are presumed to need to earn a family wage and to be able to devote themselves selflessly to work while their spouses handle household responsibilities (Correll et al. 2007). The status characteristics associated with being a Mexican origin father at work may differ from those assigned to men in general, however. Mexican origin young men who are unencumbered by family have long been valued by the labor market in the United States for their capacity and willingness to do difficult labor in whatever location where their labor is most needed (Gonzalez 2013). The ideal Mexican worker is one who is not constrained by family, in this type of labor market system. The ideal Mexican origin worker from this perspective is one who has no children at all, or who has left their children behind in Mexico to receive remittances, and ultimately is someone who will leave after the labor is done. The popularity of guest worker (bracero) programs speaks to the value our politicians have placed on having Latino men come to this country whose only focus is working (Gonzalez 2013).

Past research by Hodges and Budig (2010) has also shown that the fatherhood wage boost is less pronounced in situations where a man does not meet a racialized, class-based definition of

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9 Although technically, the Bracero Program ended fifty years ago, Gonzalez (2013) makes a powerful argument that modern guest worker programs are a direct continuation of those programs, under a new name.
hegemonic masculinity. In other words, Latino and African American men, men who perform physical labor, and men with limited educations do not experience as much of a wage boost as more privileged men (Hodges and Budig 2010). The positive associations between fatherhood and work effort may not appear in this sample because employers did not accord the men special treatment after their children were born. The differences between this study’s findings on work engagement and those of other studies may therefore lie in racialized, class-based, and occupational type-based differences in how paternity is viewed by employers. Further research should investigate this possibility more specifically.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at how well theories on the relationship between the transition to fatherhood and men’s pro-social behaviors applied to the Mexican origin men in Sunnyside. I found general support for the idea that becoming a new father encouraged some of the men in this sample to want to decrease their participation in risky activities, such as using excess quantities of alcohol or getting in gang fights. I found only a subset of men who described greater work engagement after transitioning to fatherhood. My findings demonstrate that fatherhood frequently is not perceived by men in this community in the same manner as would be predicted by previous large quantitative studies (Knoester and Eggebeen 2006). This study demonstrates the importance of more nuanced studies of fatherhood that consider in full the role of context and structure particularly when exploring how fatherhood changes men’s experiences
with other complex institutions, such as the labor market. This chapter also supports the idea that life course transition points are not uniform across communities and the meaning and changes that seem to be associated with fatherhood in some communities, as per the literature, may look quite different in other contexts. Finally, this chapter argues for considering not only how fatherhood may change what men do and how they think but also considering that the direction of the relationship between fatherhood and experiences in other institutions, such as the labor market, may be different from what has typically been assumed in family sociology. Future research that takes these complexities into account may generate a more robust theoretical basis for understanding how fatherhood affects men, across a broader spectrum.

Looking Forward: The Fatherhood Transition as a Precursor to Parenting Practices

Part of my interest in looking at families with fathers lies in the fact that fathers in our society have such diverse effects on children, ranging from not acknowledging paternity at all to strongly participating in shaping children’s development. Although most children experience mothering of some variety, fathering comes in a seemingly greater range of shapes and forms (Nelson 2004). In the United States, fathers face smaller sanctions than mothers when they are not active parents. Mothering and fathering are also physically distinct experiences at the point of transition to parenthood. Although the experience of becoming a mother biologically involves a dramatic set of physical changes and bodily experiences, changes that cannot help but focus

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10 As an example of this, child protective services regularly takes children into state custody because they are being neglected. The listed “perpetrator” in these situations is usually the mother, even if the father is also entirely absent.
most women on their impending motherhood and the changes it will bring, fatherhood involves no such personal, physical changes. How men experience the transition to fatherhood is a socially constructed experience and one that depends entirely on the cultural meanings we assign to biological paternity. This then too has implications for how the men engage in the process of raising children, as will be discussed over the following several chapters.
CHAPTER FOUR

PARENTING APPROACHES

Parenting Styles Overview

For the last fifty years, sociologists, psychologists and child development experts have looked at the relative effects of three primary parenting styles: authoritative parenting, authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting (Baumrind 1968). Per Baumrind (1968), authoritative parents typically produce the most emotionally healthy and successful adults because the parents exercise reasonable boundaries on their children, in combination with plenty of love and warmth. Permissive parents also show a similar degree of love and warmth but do not establish boundaries for their children. Authoritarian parents are excessively harsh with their children and fail to provide the type of emotional support that children need (Baumrind 1968). Baumrind (2012:abstract) more recently differentiated between types of use of power in authoritarian versus authoritative parenting, saying:

Although both parenting styles (in contrast to the permissive style) are equally demanding, forceful, and power-assertive, they differ from each other in the characteristic kind of power they assert on their children to obtain compliance with parents’ demands. The kind of power that characterizes authoritarian parents is coercive (arbitrary, peremptory, domineering, and concerned with marking status distinctions), whereas the kind of power that characterizes authoritative
parents is confrontive (reasoned, negotiable, outcome-oriented, and concerning [sic] with regulating behaviors).

Numerous social scientists and clinicians have used Baumrind’s (1968) typology in comparing children’s outcomes in a range of different family structures, cultures and settings and most have agreed with her findings about the positive effects of authoritative parenting and the negative effects of authoritarian parenting. As one of many examples, a study by Gaerther and her colleagues (2007) found that co-resident fathers who hold authoritarian attitudes spend less time with their children than other fathers, as measured through time diary studies. Bronte-Tinkew, Moore and Carrano (2007) found that youth with authoritarian fathers reported higher levels of delinquency and substance use. Ozer, Flores, Tschann and Pesch (2013) argued that Mexican origin youth are more likely to be depressed if their parents are authoritarian and inflexible in their expectations. Similarly, using measures of Mexican origin, junior high school aged students’ assessments of their fathers’ parenting styles, Formoso et al. (2007) found that authoritative fathering correlated with lower rates of mental health problems in the students. Some authors, however, have suggested that parenting approaches do not have identical effects on all groups of children (Dumka et al. 2009; Dwairy 2008) because children of different racial groups and different cultural contexts face different social risks (Furstenberg et al. 1999; Roche, Ensminger and Cherlin 2007). These authors argue against simplistic generalizations and predictions about the effects of these three parenting styles.

Interestingly, although Baumrind (1968, 2012) unequivocally opposes authoritarian-style parenting, immigration “scholars studying segmented assimilation [associate] strong discipline
and guidance with consonant or selective acculturation” (E. Fussell, 2015, personal communication). By contrast, children who are not adequately constrained by parental authority are at greater risk of dissonant acculturation, which is associated with downward socio-economic mobility. In the words of Haller, Portes and Lynch (2011:737), “Others [second generation immigrants] succeed, despite low parental education and income, because of strong families and cohesive co-ethnic communities that support parental discipline and guidance.” What exactly this parental discipline and guidance is, however, and how it maps onto the authoritarian/authoritative/permitive parenting categorization of Baumrind (1968, 2012) requires more exploration.

Accordingly, in this chapter, I will explore what cultural toolkits parents applied in thinking through, enacting and reflecting on their parenting practices. I will show how first and one point five generation parents predominantly drew on the parenting models they learned from their own parents, often in Mexico. The Mexican Americans parents with longer family histories in the United States seemed to waffle more about discipline, and to cast about for different disciplinary models more, sometimes trying on those endorsed by the child development field or modeled in mass media. In my conclusion, I will consider how these recent immigrant generation parenting approaches reflect parental goals for their children and speak to the distinct needs of a Mexican immigrant population living in a place where co-ethnic and familial solidarity may play important roles in protecting children from local risks, such as gang involvement (see Haller et al. 2011’s discuss of the importance of family factors for low income immigrant populations). I will contextualize these findings within the body of research showing that first and second
generation Mexican origin immigrants, as compared to immigrant generations that are further removed generationally, are less likely to live in poverty (Zhou 1997); less likely to be arrested (Jennings et al. 2013) and more likely to perform well in school (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes and Milburn 2009). I will show that in keeping with Furstenberg et al. (1999), there is variation in what types of parenting are most appropriate across contexts. I will demonstrate that in Sunnyside, the authoritarian, Mexican style parenting models appeared to be well thought through responses from parents to the needs of their children in their current environment.

The parents themselves characterized their parenting as being from Mexico, or Mexican style. Scholarship on Mexican style parenting has mostly come from the field of psychology and researchers have come to a vast array of different conclusions about the nature of Mexican parenting (White et al. 2013). White and colleagues (2013) found that none of the families they studied were authoritarian and they criticized other studies of Mexican origin parenting for methodological limitations. Research by psychologists Varela and colleagues (2004) suggested, however, that parents of Mexican origin in the United States tend to be more authoritarian than parents in Mexico. All of the Mexican origin parents, whether in the United States or in Mexico were more authoritarian than non-Hispanic whites in the United States (Varela et al. 2004). In Varela et al. (2004), they posited that ecological factors may play a significant role in determining the parenting style that parents use, since the “Mexican-Style” strictness may be more authoritarian in the United States than it is in Mexico. Similarly, Behnke and colleagues (2008) found that Mexican origin fathers felt compelled to be more strict in the United States than they had been in Mexico, even though they self-classified their parenting as coming from
Mexico. Most scholarship, however, emphasizes the traditions of emphasis on authority, respect and family-orientation in Mexican origin homes (White et al. 2013). The people I interviewed seemed to share in this latter definition when they talked about their own parenting.

**Strategies and Parenting Models across Immigrant Generations: Case Studies**

*First Generation: Jessica*

Jessica saw a clear relationship between how she, as a parent, monitored and disciplined her children and who they will be. She presented a dichotomized perspective on what constitutes good parenting and what type of parenting turns children into “drug addicts” and “homeless people.” Jessica’s model for good parenting is to try to use her mother’s Mexican-style, strict discipline as much as possible. She clearly used authoritarian parenting. She resented the government because she believed parents in the U.S. were not allowed to use corporal punishment to discipline their children. She further criticized U.S. style parenting for being overly permissive. In Jessica’s words:

So, in Mexico, we have different rules for our children [gestured spanking] … It doesn’t hurt – spanking – it only teaches them a little … This is what I think. I think it’s the difference in how, today, the children, today in the United States, feel the protection of their rights to say that they don’t want to help to take out the garbage or clean their rooms or contribute in the yard … And, at the end, they say if you give them a spanking, or if they want to get your attention, they tell you
that they will call the police. This is the thing of which I am afraid, because to me the police are going to respond to all of the bad things they say. Because I work very hard to attend to my children so that they do not run into drugs or become homeless, right. And so that they become productive people here …

I do not allow less than my mother. I was not allowed to yell at my mother because if I yelled at my mother, they gave me a spanking. Therefore, I brought many customs here …

I think that the Hispanic parents who are here in this country, many of them are afraid of the threats of their children to call the police. Others do not have sufficient, how do you call it, strength or love to not let their children fall into the abyss of drugs (partially translated from Spanish).

There is nothing easy about how Jessica has chosen to parent. Like many immigrant parents, she feels she has to use her parenting to fight against a tide of dangers in the United States (Foner and Dreby 2011). She also condemned parents who are not willing to set boundaries with their children because they lack “strength.” Her main source of information on parenting is her own parent.

First Generation: Salvador and Ariana

Salvador is a first generation immigrant from Mexico and his wife, Ariana, is second generation. Salvador said he tries to be like his own parents in Mexico, who were “good”
but who “also scolded us when we did something bad (partially translated from the Spanish).” Salvador did not mince words when he talked about the importance of tight discipline and monitoring children. We chatted about his views:

Liz: Why do the children sometimes have problems here in Sunnyside? …
Salvador: I think it’s because of the father.
Liz: The father?
Salvador: The mother lets them run free ... And they don’t have – they aren’t, how do you say? Strict! … They don’t help them well, they don’t help them. They leave them by themselves … And many times they don’t look after them … They leave them by themselves (partially translated from Spanish).

Salvador and Ariana moved to an agricultural, non-urban part of Sunnyside to better be able to exercise control over their children’s relationships and friendships. They do not let the children spend the night away from home or associate with children of whom they do not approve. They monitor their children’s friends by ascertaining whether their family is associated with a church (they are Pentecostalists) and by scrutinizing their children’s friends. Friends who have poor grades, who have a reputation receiving punishments at school and who use profanity are not acceptable friends. Ariana even asked the friends’ teachers directly for an assessment of their suitability. Their sons are generally not allowed to be around girls, because even their oldest, at sixteen, was considered to be too young.
Rolando moved to the United States when he was only three years old. Nevertheless, Rolando, like Jessica, saw Mexican-style parenting, particularly as practiced by his own father, as an excellent model for raising children. Angelina, his wife, similarly patterned her parenting off of her parents. Both of them work in the school system, he as a teacher and she as an aide, and that too has fueled their sense that Mexican-style parenting is superior to what parents raised in the United States typically do. Rolando told me that children from Mexico improve more quickly in school than children who are raised by Americanized parents because they value education, are independent and focused. He characterized United States children as being “apathetic” to their learning. He explained that parents in Mexico take care of their children but they do not focus excessively on telling children, “I love you” and cuddling them. Children in Mexico, he said, do all sorts of independent tasks. Rolando and Angelina’s goal with their children is to cultivate unquestioning respect for the parents, as authority figures.

Angelina also pointed to a negative model that she saw in how her younger brother was parented. She said he was coddled, to the point where, as an adult, he got lost in Seattle and he called his father to come to help him (Seattle is roughly three or four hours from where they lived). Later, when Angelina’s parents died, her brother was unable to function. As a result, Angelina talked regularly to her children about how they would

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11 The digital file of this interview was corrupted and so the discussion of this family are based on the extensive field notes that I took.
have to be independent. At the same time, she and her spouse maintained close and supportive relationships with the children. For example, they checked in regularly with the children’s teachers, did family activities together and ate dinner together every night. They disciplined their children but not in a manner that was coercive.

*Second and Third Generation: Diego and Bettina*

Diego’s family comes from Texas and Bettina’s family is from Washington State. Diego is third generation and Bettina is second generation. They mentioned no ties to Mexico during the interview and unlike the other couples featured here, Diego and Bettina did not mention Mexican-style parenting as an inspiration for their own parenting style. Bettina’s parents were absent during her childhood and she was raised by her grandparents and her uncles. Diego’s parents were not together and he lived with his mother until he was a pre-teen and then moved in with his father.

Diego and Bettina’s home was turbulent during the interview. The interview was interrupted by their three children screaming, hitting each other viciously, and climbing on perilous piles of old electronics. Both yelled at the children during the interview. They lived with a number of extended family members, including one whom I recognized, from an internet search that I did later, as a registered sex offender with a history of raping a child who was under the age of fourteen.
Despite the undeniable chaos and problems with the home environment for their children, Bettina and Diego care about parenting well. In fact, I interviewed them because their child’s first grade teacher thought they stood out as a family with a strong commitment to parenting, despite their family’s reputation for criminality. She thought I would find them interesting as research subjects. As parents, from what I could discern in the interview, they have consciously looked at the sum of their own experiences and thought about how those can inform their parenting. Most notably, both of them are dedicated to being present for their children because they feel that being raised without two parents present was damaging to them. Their parents served as a kind of negative role model. As we discussed during the interview:

Diego: I don’t want to be a single parent cause I think it’s more harder cause a parent is always working or so you’re mostly by yourself when it’s school and so I’m trying to do that different.

Bettina similarly said, “I know I didn’t, I didn’t really have my Mom or Dad, and that really, it affected me. Even till now. Um, and I know that’s really hard on the kids, they, it does affect them in the long run.”

The positive experiences that Bettina had growing up centered on having her uncles do activities with her:

My uncles, they would chip in with raising us. Like before they had kids. Um, they would do a bunch of things, like different things. One uncles would like to
go fishing. One of them would take us camping all the time … And we’d go bike riding. They exposed us to a lot of things. And one was in the army so we knew like army stuff. We went to like an army base. I can remember and then they would take us to like football games, basketball games, a baseball game. And Silverwood [an amusement park in Idaho]. A lot of different thing.

As parents, Bettina and Diego have responded to this negative modeling of parental absence and positive modeling of indulgent uncles by trying to do a lot of activities with their kids. Diego emphasized the masculine activities (Bettina termed these activities, “boy stuff”) he did with his children, such as teaching his children how to shoot cans with a BB gun and playing football, basketball and video games with them.

Bettina has also actively sought other role models for parenting from watching television. Bettina has learned authoritative techniques for disciplining children appropriately from fictional television shows:

Bettina: I would watch like a lot of shows like Full House, um, the Cosby show. … I remember watching them and kind of wanting to be in some sort of like – with the punishment stuff or like grounding them, things like that.

Liz: Do you ground them now?

Bettina: Yeah, we’ve actually started … Because I would use time out and he would that but he’s like older now so he’s actually grounded right now.
They told me, however, that the television techniques do not always work and so
sometimes, Diego, explained, “You got to grab them and get um and they learn the hard
way.” Bettina told me time outs did not work for her “because I would never stick to the
time.” It seems probable that it is harder to consistently apply parenting techniques
learned from fictional television shows than to use the parenting approaches to which one
was exposed as a child.

Both parents relied on the church as a source of parenting models. Diego saw attendance
at the Pentecostal church as a strategy for teaching his children not to steal or lie or do
other bad things, even though he was not personally enthusiastic about attending church.
In his words:

Well, I mean, I go with [the children and Bettina to church] to show support and
all that, because if I don’t go, then they won’t want to go. So I kind of just go
with them and make sure they’re doing what they have to go and do or you know
be involved in it instead of trying to be like me [drowned out]. So, I mean, I used
to be in the church when I was small, at a young age, with my Mom. We used to
go church and all that, so I want them to have that experience of being able to
know who God is a little bit.

Bettina, who was a strong believer in the teachings of her church, also saw church
attendance as one of the positive parts of how she was parented to know right from wrong
and she wants to do the same for her children. In her words:
Yeah, I like to tell him like mostly like the sins are like it says in the Bible, cause they do, they do have a lot of questions. They like want, they want to know more. But that’s why I like taking them to Church is they just have more questions and I like that they want to know, want to know more and I know if they do end up, like, getting older, they’ll choose a different way. They’ll always remember when they were young because that’s how I remember. I went to church when I was younger and then stopped going and then you know, that’s what I wanted for my kids because I remember things that I was taught, so I know they’ll remember this and I’m – they know, like not to steal or that lying’s bad and things like that.

For good measure, they also tried to scare or intended to scare their children about crime and drinking, using popular media and field trips to the jail and car crash sites. Bettina told me:

Some movies that we watch, and, things that like they see, like, we’ll just tell them like that’s what happens if you drink alcohol. Or there’s one thing I was wanting to do with them, um, you take them to like the police station and then, um, one of the police officers said she would do it for me – I just had to email her. Um, to take them in so they can have a tour of the jail, and she would talk to them, you know, so they don’t end up there. Or like, taking them to like the crash sites, so they can see the car from drunk driving.
Although Bettina and Diego clearly are articulate and thoughtful about their approach to parenting, their ability to implement their own parenting philosophy was not as strong as it appeared to be in some of the other families. They were not authoritative in their style, even though they tried to copy discipline models that they saw on venues like the Cosby show. Indeed it appeared that they alternated between being permissive (for example, by freely allowing one of their children to shoot me with a full water gun during the interview) and being authoritarian (by yelling or hitting them). In my observation, their parenting seemed to be less than effective in controlling their children’s behavior and aggression towards one another and towards me as their guest. (In addition to the interview, I observed their child in the school classroom). Unlike most of the earlier generations that I interviewed, they actively sought to incorporate positive discipline models into their repertoire and they did not identify themselves as using a Mexican model.

**Implications of Parenting Approaches in Sunnyside**

In keeping with past research, most of the recent immigrant generation parents expressed a strong preference for the Mexican model of parenting over the models that they saw around them in the United States (Foner and Dreby 2011). Some of their parenting methods, such as corporal punishment, fly directly in the face of typical, “expert” parenting advice and are openly authoritarian. Studies on corporal punishment have
shown it teaches children that violence is an appropriate and morally righteous approach to solving conflict and addressing problems, with obvious negative consequences when children attempt to use violence to resolve conflicts as adults or adolescents (Strauss 2008). Jessica’s complaints that she cannot hit her children without fear of being accused of child abuse are, according to the literature, common immigrant complaints about their ability to parent according to the standards of their countries of origin (Foner and Dreby 2011). One commuter immigrant, Alejandro saw hitting children as a Biblical mandate and resented the United States government’s interference in his ability to follow his creed. Given the evidence against physical punishment and authoritarian parenting, those taking a traditional child development perspective might expect the largely authoritarian parenting I have described here to produce negative outcomes for the children.

The concept of positive outcomes, however, is problematic because what parents aspire to for their children, or define as positive outcomes, is not identical across all cultures and families (Burton et al. 1996). Given this, I argue, in keeping with Roche et al. (2007) and with Furstenberg et al. (1999), that there is no one universal “right way” to parent across all communities. In fact, the parenting approaches that these families favored, in keeping with the models that their parents used in Mexico, may actually help to protect children from many risks in the Sunnyside community. When I looked at their parenting approaches in light of their visions for their children, their actions were seemingly quite well-tailored to achieving many of their goals for their children. They lived in a risk-filled environment and their goal was to teach their children to be resilient to those risks.
Conclusion

Other scholars have expressed skepticism about the applicability of Baumrind’s typology in predicting outcomes for youth who live in environments with many risks and a great deal of adversity. Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder Jr. and Sameroff (1999) noted that the research showing that authoritative parenting produces the best youth outcomes was done in comfortable neighborhood environments. Dumka, Gonzales, Bonds and Millsap (2009) found that maternal harshness correlated with higher grades in a large, random sample of Mexican origin junior high school girls. Different strategies of parenting are more or less appropriate depending on where families live and what adversities they face. Although the parents described using a variety of sources of information on how to parent, their most common source was their own families and their cultural traditions from Mexico, traditions emphasizing respect, parental authority and control. This was particularly true for the parents who had closer ties to Mexico. Historically, classical assimilationists have assumed as more generations pass, new immigrant groups will increasingly adopt the ways of Anglo-Americans and thereby rise up the socio-economic ladder (Alba and Nee 1997; Zhou 1997). For some groups, however, assimilation with Anglo-Americans has not occurred, particularly as new immigrant groups are likely to have darker skin tones than European Americans and phenotypes that expose them to systemic racism and discrimination (Portes and Zhou 1993). Even within ethnic groups,
some subpopulations may experience downward assimilation while others thrive (Haller et al. 2011), a phenomenon called segmented assimilation. In fact, there is no good reason to believe that assimilating into Anglo-American or so-called “white”\textsuperscript{12} culture is likely to produce better educational, career or life outcomes for Mexican immigrants than they would experience from staying close to the culture of their country of origin. While whites undoubtedly experience systemic privileges and higher rates of educational, career and socio-economic success than other groups (Reskin 2012), these “successes” are strongly predicated on the whites’ historical privilege and differential treatment based on their ascribed characteristic of “whiteness” (Reskin 2012; Zhou 1997). In other words, assimilating into the Anglo “culture” is unlikely to produce improved socio-economic mobility for Mexican immigrants as a whole because doing so will not remove them from the effects of broad systemic racism and discrimination. This is particularly true in communities like Sunnyside where there is a pronounced racial caste system and where the labor market is strongly segregated by race.

Moreover, some of the cultural characteristics that people bring with them from their countries of origin may well prove to be more valuable in achieving socio-economic mobility than those characteristics that are associated with “white ethnicity” (Zhou 1997).

\textsuperscript{12} Sociologists do not agree on whether there truly is such a thing as “white ethnicity” or “white culture.” While I personally hold some skepticism about these terms, it is almost impossible to discuss classic assimilationist theory without using their thinking. Too, the interviewees in this study certainly saw a “white” or “American” culture against which they verbally juxtaposed “Mexican culture.” Given the pervasiveness of this concept in our collective imaginations, I therefore choose to use it here, with a full acknowledgement that the meaning of “whiteness” or of “mainstream” culture is the subject of many debates (see McDermott and Samson 2005 for a more thorough discussion).
As Rolando pointed out in the interview with him, the immigrant focus on the value of education for socio-economic mobility may advantage youth. The focus on family connections and co-ethnic solidarity may also give the children of the parents I interviewed critical social capital (Zhou 1997). Although not all familial social connections are positive (for example, living with a convicted child rapist was probably not beneficial to Bettina and Diego’s children), kin clearly played a role in helping one another to manage daily responsibilities, such as child care, monitoring children and adolescents’ behavior, and in finding jobs (see the discussion on kin relationships in chapter three). Even the strong emphasis on traditional Mexican authority, discipline and following rules may have been protective in the context of an environment like Sunnyside. In a place where rebellion and strong peer-associations can take the form of joining gangs, youth who rebel against their parents face high-stakes risks. The parents recognized this risk and selected parenting models accordingly. Perhaps most importantly, by parenting youth in the same manner in which they themselves had been parented, the parents were helping their children to be raised with similar value systems to their own, which will, as per the literature, increase family cohesion in the future (Foner and Dreby 2011).

In empirical tests, Mexicans who retain strong cultural ties with their countries of origin are advantaged in some ways. Valdez (2006) found, using a set of regional census data, that second generation Mexican Americans, who are presumably more acculturated into the United States’ mainstream culture than their parents, tend to earn less than the
immigrant generation. Zhou (1997:988) cites data showing that 26 percent more third generation Latinos live in poverty than first generation Latinos. Second generation Latinos are more likely to be arrested for crimes than are their first generation counterparts, as per a recent study of arrest records by Jennings, Zgoba, Piquero and Reingle (2013). Greater time in the United States tends to decrease the academic performance of Latinos (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes and Milburn 2009). Across multiple areas, it appears from the literature that the more generations that have passed since a given Latino individuals’ family immigrated, the worse his or her probable socio-economic position. While time and generation number are not identical to a measurement of cultural affinity, they do suggest that there are some benefits associated with staying close to Mexican or Latino traditionalism.

The parents in this study who said they modeled their parenting on their own experience of being parented, often according to traditional Mexican values, used largely authoritarian approaches that child development theories (e.g. Baumrind 1968) would tend to see as counterproductive to their children’s future successes. However, when considered in light of the research showing how immigrants benefit from consonant or selective acculturation (Haller et al. 2011; Portes and Rumbaut 2001), there is good reason to think that these parents were taking actions to keep their children close to the family in a manner which is likely to protect the children from the local risks of drugs, alcohol abuse, crime, school dropouts and gangs. These findings complicate our traditional understandings in family sociology of how parenting affects youth outcomes.
and social reproduction within families. My results demonstrate the importance of considering immigration history and immigration context as a factor in assessing parenting.
CHAPTER FIVE

PARENTAL GENDER ROLES

Introduction

Machismo is a Mexican construct of male gender identity that emphasizes adhering to strict gender differentiation and gender hierarchy between men and women. Machismo has been widely condemned by feminists and exploration of its ill effects dominated much of the cross-disciplinary research of the 1980s and 1990s about Mexican origin families. A number of these scholars, including scholars in Mexico, characterized these gender roles as a cultural outgrowth of the violence of the Spanish conquistador era (Gutmann 1996). Goldwert (1985), for example, published the following authoritative sounding statement in the abstract of his article in The Psychoanalytic Review:

Macho role-playing … necessitating the repression of all feminine characteristics, is viewed as stemming from the brutality of the Spanish conquest. In Mexican consciousness there exists a “metaphysical bisexuality," in which masculinity is associated with the Spanish conquistadores, [and] femininity with the ruthlessly conquered Indians.

In the political science field, theorists of modernization have often presented Latino machismo as an artifact of underdevelopment and have assumed that gendered attitudes will automatically become more egalitarian under more modern economic conditions or as Latinos assimilate in the United States (Bejarano, Manzano and Montoya 2011). For
their part, sociologists focused on how the experience of racial subordination and
disempowerment encouraged Latinos and Chicanos to subordinate women. Baca Zinn
(1980:20), a sociologist, summarized the social scientific literature on Chicano and
Chicana gender identity: “The social science literature views machismo as a
compensation for feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness.” Sociological literature has
also typically found that Latinas experience greater power within their families in the
United States than they did in their countries of origin (Pessar 2003), thus reinforcing a
vision of Latin American countries as having old-fashioned gender beliefs as compared to
those enjoyed by women in the United States.

In response to the pejorative caricature that this type of cross-disciplinary scholarship created
about Chicano men, social scientists have actively looked for new ways of exploring Mexican
and Mexican American fatherhood so as to more clearly be able to see the strengths of Mexican
origin men (e.g. Gutmann 1996). Modern scholars regularly contextualize their impetus for
studying Latino fatherhood as a desire to correct these macho stereotypes. Coltrane, Parke and
Adams (2004) compared Mexican origin men by their level of acculturation to the United States,
using an indicator of acculturation that measured the degree to which the men preferred Mexican
media and opted to participate social gatherings composed of Mexican co-ethnics. Based on that
measure, they found that more Mexican-identified fathers spent more time on feminine typed
activities with their children than their less-Mexican oriented counterparts. They went on to
argue that this is evidence of greater family emphasis in Mexican-oriented families than in other
communities and they speculated this family-orientation may be protective in low-income
communities. As with much of the recent literature on Mexican American fathers, Coltrane and his colleagues explicitly contextualized their findings as evidence of how problematic and inaccurate macho stereotypes may be. Haxton and Harknett (2009) found similarities in gendered kin support patterns between African American and Latino families, a finding they thought to be surprising in light of the patriarchal reputation of Latino families. Hofferth (2003) and Parke et al. (2004) cited research showing Mexican American fathers have greater familism than other fathers have and therefore may experience more sense of responsibility for their children. Hofferth (2003) specifically argued in her conclusion that the stereotype about macho Latino fathers is not borne out by her findings and in fact, she found Latino fathers to be more permissive than their counterparts in other racial/ethnic groups. Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth and Lamb (2000) described a new emergence of Mexican American fathers who provide a key nurturing role in their children’s lives. Behind much of this scholarship seems to be the authors’ desire to disprove culturally disparaging portrayals of extreme gender differentiation in Mexican American families.

Some of the early feminist scholars of immigrants have since reconsidered their positions on the degree to which acculturation to the United States gave women greater power within their homes. Pessar (2003) somewhat ruefully recalled her early excitement about female immigrant empowerment, an excitement she now attributes partially to her own feminist optimism in the wake of the women’s movement in the United States. She now takes a more measured perspective.
This change in the tone of scholarship on Mexican men is not entirely an artifact of shifting academic perspectives. There have been measurable changes in gender beliefs over time in Mexico, as in the United States (Bejarano et al. 2001; Gutmann 1996). According to Bejarano, Manzano and Montoya’s research (2011), in the mid-1990s, Mexican men and women’s gender beliefs were markedly more traditional than they were twenty years later. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) also noted that as in the United States, women joined the paid labor force in Mexico in significant numbers starting in the 1970s, which challenged the gender ideologies that are associated with strict gender divisions of labor. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) criticized the common belief that Mexican families were all organized accordingly to strictly patriarchal criteria. This characterization both was inaccurate for men and for women, whose individual interests, social networks, and life trajectories tended to get lost in the academic literature in favor of narratives about joint, male-led, family decision making.

In this brief summary of the literature, I hope the reader can see how this bifurcated research has been limiting to scholarship on Mexican origin parents. While I can certainly understand and appreciate the impetus behind the scholarship that intends to show how similar Latino fathers are to other fathers, this framing has left the Latino fatherhood researchers with little room to explore how gender differentiation persists in Latino parenting. As a result, there is little analysis of what structural forces, and particularly structural forces embedded in immigration patterns, in religion and in receiving communities, serve to perpetuate these gendered differences in parenting. In this chapter, I intend to help to fill in that gap. I will discuss the gender roles of the parents in the study and then I will discuss how the economic, migration and religious setting of
Sunnyside help to contextualize the gender roles that the interviewees and ethnographic subjects discussed.

**Machismo versus Egalitarianism in Popular Discourse**

Interestingly, comments by the interview subjects reflected this academic schism in how Mexican origin fathers have been and are portrayed. These findings are echoed elsewhere in the literature. Anthropologist Matthew C. Gutmann (1996:26) explained, “An equation of machismo with Mexican culture as a whole has occurred well beyond the confines of mere social science; it has been common in the stories Mexicans tell about themselves.”

I heard many examples of this type of discourse first hand, both from outside of and inside of the Mexican origin community. Outside of the Mexican community, people assumed machismo continued to be prevalent in Mexican origin families. From a white school volunteer, I heard stories about the father who discouraged his daughter from getting an education because girls are just good for making babies. The volunteer told me she is opposed to violence but she would like to do something violent to that father. From a realtor, I heard about the Mexican origin fathers who ostensibly fathered babies just prove to prove their virility and then refused to care for them, saddling the women with the responsibilities. Some of these stories may be true (I had no other indications of racist beliefs from the white school volunteer) but they helped to create a larger community narrative backdrop about misogynistic Mexican men subordinating women.
The Mexican origin interviewees presented machismo as a component of the old Mexican generation. They presented gender egalitarianism as the new modal way for Mexican origin families to organize their family life. Nathan, Marisol and I discussed their expectations for boys and girls around schooling and Nathan explained why he supports education for his girls, even though he was born in Mexico, saying, “I think like the second generation … I come from Mexico, but the second generation think differently than the first generation.” When I asked her to describe her father, Cora explained, “Well, you know, in Mexico, they bring their machismo … like [the father] bosses the mother. The Mom has to do everything.” Cora firmly told me that her spouse does not have “machismo” and in the winter, both of them play together with the children. In the summer, however, they have a traditional division of labor: he worked outside the home and she stayed home. Similarly, Grace told me, “My Dad, he’s very strict. And so, since he doesn’t let my Mom work, my Mom just has to be like in the home. That’s it. Period. He expects the same from us. And I tell him that, you know it – we’re not in his time no more.” Grace very clearly saw herself as having an egalitarian relationship with her husband but it was quite clear, as will be described later in this chapter, that she was the primary caregiver for the children and that he saw his role as largely being financial. Marina and Antonio both told me they espoused gender egalitarian beliefs, even though their relatives in Mexico disapproved of their thinking: “We both work in the fields. We work the same, well, both of us have [to] take care of [the children] (translated from Spanish),” Marina explained. When asked, however, Antonio did not volunteer examples of any caregiving that he independently does with the
children. Rather, the two of them took the children places together and they both contributed financially to the children’s well-being.

Although Cora, Grace, Marina, Antonio and others I interviewed would have had me believe such gendered or “macho” thinking was a thing of the past, their own lives provided evidence that fatherhood responsibilities have not become synonymous with motherhood responsibilities. Patriarchal tendencies may no longer be as pronounced as in their childhoods but gender continued to be salient in how parents divided child care responsibilities. At the same time, like the recent scholars I cited above, I found evidence that the fathers who co-resided with their children frequently had a strong sense of familial obligation to their children and they did not see raising children as purely the job of women13. In this chapter, I will explore how fathers conceived of their paternal roles and I will show that the two roles they emphasized the most were financially supporting their families and protecting their children. By contrast, they reported spending little time on direct nurturing activities. I will then analyze the role of the economic structure of Sunnyside, immigration history and religious beliefs in shaping how the participants thought about gender roles in parenting.

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13 Since I sampled specifically for men who resided with their children, and for men who wanted to talk to me about fathering, the sample was skewed necessarily towards men who felt paternal obligations.
Paternal Responsibilities

Providing for Children’s Material Needs

Fathers defined their self-value in terms of what material goods they could offer their children.

As a typical example, in a parenting education class I attended, Alanzo chatted happily about his plans to get his four-year-old a bigger dollhouse and more Barbie dolls. A father in the sample, Antonio, talked about how he wanted to improve on the parenting he had experienced as a child himself:

We want to be different. Like, give them more things, like me that I didn’t have.

My parents, they didn’t give me anything like that, I had to work to buy clothes, for everything. And them, I tell them we want you guys to study, we’ll buy you clothes, we’ll buy you shoes or we’ll take you out to eat.

Hercules also wanted to build a life that differs from his own childhood. He dreamt of a family life with the kind of material ease he has seen on television:

Yeah, when I was a kid, we didn’t have - I didn’t have my own room or - I always had - I always slept [with] my older brothers or you know, there was a point in time when we’d - we had a house full of people. Just two-bedroom house.

My sister got one bedroom. My parents got another one. So the rest of us would sleep in the living room. And my dad, he would take in these extra migrant workers that would come into the United States. My dad would let them live with
us for a while, ‘til they got on their feet. We had all these people then with us, and we all slept in the living room kind of piled up.

I would see on TV that kids had their own rooms and TVs in the rooms, and I wanted that. So when we started having kids, we wanted, you know, we kind of tried to picture our lives the way we seen it on TV. That’s what we’ve been trying to do so far.

It was clear in the interviews that financially supporting a family, and being able to give children as pleasant a material lifestyle as possible, was the primary barometer by which fathers evaluated their own parenting performance. These findings both mirror and diverge from other studies of low-income fathers. In Edin and Nelson’s (2013) in-depth ethnographic study of economically unstable African American and white men in the Camden area, they found that when joblessness, incarceration and other problems kept men from being able to be breadwinners, they liked to provide extra niceties to their children, like Alanzo with his plans to buy his child special toys. The interviewees in this study, however, described feeling a sense of financial obligation that was far broader in scope than those described by Edin and Nelson’s research study participants. While Edin and Nelson’s (2013) subjects also cited television families as a model (specifying the Cosby show, just as the Sunnyside subjects did), the fathers I interviewed seemed to see this model as more of a standard than as a kind of unattainable dream.
There are a number of reasons why this sample probably held more traditional views of paternal financial responsibilities than men appeared to do in other studies of fathering in economically-challenging environments. The sample consisted of Latino immigrants whereas other authors have focused on African American and white men’s tendencies to redefine fatherhood in non-breadwinner terms (e.g. Edin and Nelson 2013; Sherman 2009). While Latino immigrants have typically moved to a destination where they have more job opportunities than their families did in the past, the authors who have found definitions of fatherhood that are not as focused on breadwinning have done their interviewing in places where job prospects for men are on the decline. I also limited the sample to men who are involved in their children’s lives, which necessarily screened out those men who entirely abdicated family responsibilities.

_Fathers as Protectors_

Fathers’ concerns about safety and protecting their children varied depending on the age of the children. For John, as a father of a baby, protecting children meant installing safety covers on the outlets. Isaac worried about his young children getting hit by a car or falling down from running when they should walk. Parents of older children wanted to protect their children from drugs, gangs, alcohol and sex. These worries were appropriate, given the prevalence of gang membership, alcohol abuse, drug abuse and early pregnancy in Sunnyside. Across all ages, the fathers saw protecting their children as part of their job as responsible caregivers. This
obligation was sometimes enacted in tandem with their children’s mothers but sometimes as an independent obligation.

For older children and teenagers, men used discipline to encourage their children to stay safe from drugs and alcohol. Elian described repeatedly hitting his son to teach him not to drink to excess, not to drive drunk, and not to use marijuana. Levi told an old family story, seemingly a fable of sorts, about how lack of spanking contributed to adult alcoholism:

I know a man that … had alcohol problems. He was old. And he said that his parents never help him out with that. That they didn’t care [for] his life. So, he ask my Grandpa to spank him … My Grandpa … he got one of those whips they use in a rodeo … And [the man] was drunk … And then that guy was so drunk [he] said, “Hey, my parents didn’t love me. They didn’t spank me. Never spanked me. They – that’s why I’m sick and I drink a lot.”

And my grandpa say, “Hey, yeah, I can help you out with that.” And he hit him.

According to the scholarly literature, the parents’ emphasis on physical punishments is far from unique to this community (Gershoff 2002). More than 90% of all parents spank their young children (Gershoff 2002). Corporal punishment is appealing to American parents, who value its documented ability to get children to comply immediately with whatever they are asked to do (Gershoff 2002). In both retrospective reports by parents and in laboratory studies, corporal punishment causes short-term changes in behavior (Gershoff 2002). In a meta-analysis of 88 studies done between 1938 and 2000,
however, Gershoff (2002) found strong evidence that corporal punishment is associated with a number of problematic behaviors in adults and children. Among these problems are children not learning to internalize a sense of right and wrong; depression and low self-esteem; and increased aggression across a child’s lifespan, including a greater probability of committing intimate partner or child abuse in adulthood (Gershoff 2002). Gershoff (2002) cautions that most of the studies on this subject cannot establish temporal ordering and so her meta-analysis findings show association and not causation. In addition, less than half of the studies that she considered on corporal punishment considered race, ethnicity or socio-economic status as variables. Still, there is little in the academic literature to support the belief that physical punishment is beneficial to children, even if, as in with the families I interviewed here, it is well-motivated.

In addition to discipline, fathers and mothers alike pushed participation in sports and religion as a way to protect children from substance abuse and gang involvement. Levi is not worried about his own children or about his brother’s children:

   Because my kids, I told you before, they really like sports. And my nephew, he … was telling me that some friends he knew, that they offered him some drugs. And he said, “I don’t want. I don’t want to do that.” So we’re really not that worried because we know the Word of God and we serve Jesus. That’s why.

Levi believes that involvement in sports and religion will protect children from risks.
Marisol and Nathan coach soccer teams together and they, like Levi, believe in sports as a way of protecting their children. Nathan and Marisol work hard to promote soccer because they believe doing so will stop their children from becoming gang members. These beliefs are congruent with a larger American narrative about the value of sports and extra-curricular activities as ways of keeping youth away from violent activities, although empirical, quantitative research has not shown such an effect for first and second generations of immigrant youth (Jiang and Peterson 2012). In general, empirical work has demonstrated some protective characteristics to participating in sports and some risks associated with contact sports, including a greater propensity towards violence (Kreager 2007).

Another mechanism that parents jointly deployed in protecting their children is by monitoring and exercising control over their children’s social networks and possible negative role models. The case study of Salvador and Ariana that appeared in the last chapter is an example of how this protection manifests. Alissia, too, described how she and her spouse keep their son away from harmful social influences, “He only has his friends from school and we just tell him to be very careful and now he wants to be around, up and out, and we don’t let him be (translated from Spanish).” Antonio also restricts his children’s movements, “We go pick them up from school. When they get out, they come home and no, no, they won’t be in the streets (translated from Spanish).”

Some parents felt they even had to protect their children from their own family members, to keep them safe. Gustavo told me, “I have an older sib, my oldest sibling … he’s an alcoholic. So trying to keep our kids away from him until he does get the point and, does what he sees that um,
his lifestyle is … not right and we’re going to keep our kids away from him.” In research studies, parental monitoring decreases the probability that youth will use substances (Pokhrel et al. 2008). There is also evidence that youth who are well-embedded in social networks with substance abusers are more likely to abuse substances themselves (Ennett et al. 2006). To the degree that this research can be generalized to the Sunnyside sample, these parental actions of protection and monitoring may well have provided the youth with critical resiliency against the negative influences of drugs, alcohol and gangs, just as their parents hoped.

Sex and promiscuity were also significant concerns for the parents I interviewed. When I attended a parenting education class, the parents, men and women alike, were horrified when they heard one of the other participants’ daughters had been “sexting” (sending sexually explicit messages or photographs using a cell phone). The group was much less concerned that the same participant’s son had been stealing. This topic also emerged during the interviews I conducted, most notably for the fathers. Jeremy, one of the interviewed fathers, was concerned when his daughter wore shimmering lip gloss or dark colored nail polish because he wanted her to look more like a child and less like a sexual being. His wife, however, thought his daughter’s fashion choices were natural and age-appropriate. In Jeremy’s words, “Like [my daughter’s] very into, like, nail polishes. And you know, wanting to put lip glosses on, and stuff like that. One thing I – then that’s one thing, depending on colors of nail polishes, lip glosses if they have colors on them, I absolutely am like, ‘No! She’s a kid.’”

I found fathers typically wanted to prevent their daughters from becoming sexually active at too young an age. This finding was congruent with other research showing that immigrant fathers
conceive of their own daughters as being vulnerable and sexually pure and of other adolescents as predatory (Solebello and Elliott 2011). Other research suggests that Latino fathers want to protect their daughters’ ability to make socio-economic progress in life and they recognize that early sexual activity and consequent early pregnancies are threats to that progress (González-López 2004). This was important to the parents in the study because roughly half of them had felt impeded by having children before they were ready for them and their first pregnancies were unexpected. John is a good example of the fathers who struggled with having children too early. He said of his transition to fatherhood, “This one [his child] was a surprise … He came in a rough time.” It is easy to understand why these parents would not want their children to experience similar “surprise” pregnancies.

**Lack of Direct Care Work**

As significant as what fathers and other family members told me about paternal responsibility was what they did not say. I heard little about the responsibility of fathers to nurture their children and to provide the kind of intensive parenting and care that has historically been associated with mothers (Hays 1998). The people I interviewed instead presented fatherhood in traditional, gendered terms. This does not mean the men in the study felt no obligation to be involved – many did – but rather that the forms of involvement they took were being protective, disciplinary and breadwinning, rather than direct care work like holding children, playing with
children and providing physical care. The finding that men did little direct care work differs from some other studies of low-income fathers (e.g. Edin and Nelson 2013).

Although I did not do a time study, I heard evidence that women still do the lion’s share of the child care. I typically heard about fathers keeping children occupied while their mothers did discrete household tasks. John “helps” Grace by taking their son to “look at the goats for maybe 10, 15 minutes” while she does housework. Caleb “watches [our daughter] when I’m doing the chores (translated from Spanish),” said Cora. Anthony helped Ashley, when she was “busy” but he expected her to keep the children entirely out of his way while he read the Bible, an attitude she implicitly accepted when she refers to the baby as if he is hers alone. They explained:

Anthony: I always make a schedule, I always get some time and I read, study and write. But yeah, I always make a schedule to read the Bible at night or when there are people here, I leave, I go study, or when they’re upstairs, I come down here [the interview took place in the downstairs half of a townhouse style apartment].

…

Ashley: Sometimes, he gets mad because he comes when we’re up there and he comes downstairs to read the Bible, and I don’t, I don’t think that he’s coming downstairs to read the Bible. So I don’t want to be upstairs by myself with my baby, so like, we come down here, we’re playing, we’re talking with his Mom and
watching TV. And then, when I turn [the TV] on, he gets mad because we follow him down here (partially translated from Spanish).

In other words, the participants thought watching the children was the women’s job but the men sometimes “helped” while the women did other household labor. When Ashley followed Anthony, with their baby in tow, he felt justified in being angry with her for invading his space. Their default mode was for women to be in charge of the children.

Structural Factors Influencing Gender Roles in Parenting

I found that in Sunnyside, fatherhood continued to be a gendered task that is distinctive from the responsibilities of motherhood and that neither the old macho narrative nor the newer gender egalitarian narrative about fatherhood fit the data. One of the shortcomings of the dichotomized portrayal of Mexican origin fathers is that it emphasizes their attitudes and beliefs about fathering as if those occur independently of current structures. Most of the more recent scholars on these fathers have failed to come to terms with how the gendered structure of immigration and of the labor market push Mexican origin families into traditional gendered divisions of labor (Schmalzbauer 2009, 2013 is a notable exception).

One of the advantages to looking at one community locale in detail is that I could explore how the community structure appeared to relate to the traditional gendered division of parenting labor, although as a qualitative researcher, I cannot draw definitive cause and effect relationships. In the context of Sunnyside, there were precious few opportunities for women to
earn as much as men. Research on Mexican origin families shows that in places where women have greater economic opportunities, men are more likely to be involved in traditionally feminine-nurturing activities with their children (Coltrane, Parke and Adams 2008; Schmalzbauer 2009). The opposite holds true in places with few opportunities for women. When Schmalzbauer (2009) studied a rural, new destination Mexican migrant community in Montana, she found that the lack of job opportunities for women translated into a rigid gender division of labor at home. Men’s work hours are typically (but not always) inversely related to the number of hours men spend fathering (Coltrane et al. 2008).

These studies suggest that in Sunnyside, one needs to consider men’s and women’s relative economic strengths and work obligations as a possible structural factor that contributed to parenting roles continuing to be gendered, even in the families that saw themselves as egalitarian and modern in their thinking. When I took the labor market structure into account, it followed naturally that this research did not find men in nurturing, intensive fathering roles. The men were simply too busy working and trying to survive. The primary jobs in Sunnyside are those doing manual labor that emphasize physical stamina and strength, both characteristics that are more strongly associated with men than with women. During the Bracero era, only men were allowed to immigrate to the United States to do agricultural work, thus setting a precedent for Mexican origin men being the main holders of agricultural jobs (Gonzalez 2013). Indeed, 76 percent of all of the men in Sunnyside are in agriculture, manufacturing or construction (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2014). In the United States as a whole, women’s wages in agriculture are three quarters as high as men’s are (United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor
Statistics 2014). In Sunnyside, per the Census (2014) more than twice as many men as women are in agriculture (76% versus 23%) and women are disproportionately represented in underpaid carework jobs. This distribution of jobs creates a climate in which it is more economically feasible for men to be focused on breadwinning, as they were in this study, while women focused on the daily tasks of nurturing children.

**Role of Migration in Creating an Emphasis on Breadwinning**

Family sociologists have a rich history of using a gendered lens to look at whether the meanings of fatherhood have expanded past the breadwinner definition. The fathers that I interviewed, and the community members at large, drew a strong connection between paternal obligation and earning money. While one could see this narrative about men and breadwinning as part of a traditional, patriarchal family viewpoint, it is possible that I heard so much talk about men earning money because a desire for socio-economic mobility was what inspired the recent immigrants to come to the United States in the first place. In Sunnyside, the economic structure of the town has created a context in which men, in particular, have an incentive to move to the area to take jobs. On a national level, Schmalzbauer (2013) and Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) astutely noted that the practice of having men come to the United States to do economic labor, while their significant others remain in Mexico, creates a structure in which the male role in the family is economic production and the female role is raising children and earning enough to cover whatever living costs are not covered by remittances. There is a reason, therefore, why the
breadwinner narrative is likely to be so prevalent among men, beyond just the culture of machismo.

First generation immigrants may go through extreme hardships to cross the border to seek economic opportunities. Levi, as an example from the interview pool, moved his family to Washington because he wanted his children to have the opportunity to be educated in the United States. He described, in front of his children, the hardship that this has entailed:

The bad thing is your seasonal work and it’s real hard. And you get sick easier out in the fields. The pollen and dust … You get like allergies [in] the fields. Like my wife got, last year she had like, it was like a asthma attack. She was picking apples at some place where they had like cows. They have apples and, like, I have to take her to the doctor. So, I know, I know it was because of that dust. And my brother, he has asthma … I have some problems with my lower back.

The second and third generation may not have the same direct experience but, like Levi’s children, they grew up hearing family accounts about how their family members sacrificed and suffered to give the next generation a better material quality of life and an education. In sociological literature, many immigrant parents present their migration as an act to allow their children socio-economic mobility (e.g. Lopez 2001; Romero 2011).

Given this, it is not always possible to distinguish between a father describing traditionally gendered familial responsibilities and a father who is expressing a migration narrative about
moving to the United States to give his child the economic means to succeed, a means that was not available in their country of origin. There is a danger to interpreting qualitative data from a framework that fails to account for the intersecting subject positions (e.g. male, immigrant and Mexican origin) of the people speaking. I challenge the reader to consider, therefore, that the gendered meanings that particular narratives take in one cultural context may mean something different to speakers in a different cultural context or to speakers who occupy different subject positions. For a population that has migrated for economic reasons, economic visions of fatherhood are likely to loom large, not necessarily as part of a masculine ideology but because the people who moved to the United States from Mexico are self-selected to emphasize economic productivity and economic opportunities are not distributed equally between men and women. Since Sunnyside is a location with markedly better economic options for men than for women, this tendency to focus on male breadwinning is likely to be more exaggerated than it is in other economic environments of the United States.

Cultural Context for Gender Roles in Parenting

In the interviews, the most proximate cultural explanation for the “protector” role that the men described themselves as holding was their evangelical Protestantism. A growing number of Mexican immigrants and people in Latin America identify as evangelical Protestants (Lorentzem and Mira 2005). Pentecostalism, the most common form of evangelical Protestantism in this population, includes literal interpretation of the Bible and focuses on the individual’s experience
of “being saved” through a direct relationship with Jesus. For example, in determining how to parent, interview participant Alejandro, as a Pentecostalist, would open the Bible at random and seek to interpret and act on whatever passage Jesus guided him to read. Since the early 1990s, a defining characteristic of evangelical Protestantism, as evidenced by the Promise Keepers movement, has been its insistence that there are God-given, gendered qualities that only a man can bring to a household (Silverstein 1996). Religiosity is one the strongest predictors of conservative gender views among Latinos (Bejarano et al. 2011). Pentecostalists also emphasize the importance of keeping youth away from sexuality and sexual self-expression, just as the interviewees did (Lorentzem and Mira 2005). Pentecostalists eschew drugs and substance abuse in favor of focusing on family (Lorentzem and Mira 2005). The narrative I heard about how fathers must focus on their families and must protect children from the dangers of sex and drugs falls very closely in line with teachings of the Pentecostal churches.

My focus on Pentecostalism as a driving force in the gendered thinking of the participants emerged during the course of the interviews. Although I had initially only intended to ask two questions that pertained to the role of religion in parenting, I frequently found that when I asked general questions about family life, the interviewees spoke at length about their religious beliefs and their relationship with Jesus. Anthony was a good example of how Pentecostalism permeated the thinking that the interviewees did about families. Anthony was most eloquent on the subject of his faith and its teachings about protecting children:

Well, more than anything, the Bible is like a manual for our lives. We learn how to love others … How to love our neighbor; how to love our kids; learn to love
other people. I used to – I was rude with other people, even with those that I
didn’t like. Others, I was rude with others. But I’ve learned to love my enemies,
to love those who hate me and to bless those who curse you ... There are a lot of
things in the Bible. It says that God’s Kingdom belongs to the children. One has
to watch over the children because they are the future of this world.

The protective attitude of the fathers aligns closely with this belief that children must be
monitored as “the future of this world.”

**Conclusion**

Mexican men have been branded in social science and in common lore for their machismo and
for their expectation that women will hold all of the household caregiving burdens (Gutmann
1996). This perspective is equally disparaging of women, whose life stories and
accomplishments tend to be subsumed into a larger narrative about the male led family
(Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). More recent scholarship has tried to rectify this problem by
emphasizing how similar Mexican American fathers are to other fathers. While I agree with the
latter point, as parenting is heavily gendered in all groups, it is worth stopping to analyze the
context in which the specific forms of gender differentiation I identified during the study.
Namely, I found that men focused their attention on breadwinning and on being the disciplinary
protectors of their children. I argue, in keeping with other scholars of gender and immigration,
that gender in Sunnyside is embedded in the structure of migration patterns (Broughton 2008), in
the structure of the immigrant labor force (Flippen 2014) and in common religious beliefs.
CHAPTER SIX
THE ROLE OF PARENTING IN FOSTERING OR INHIBITING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Introduction

A longstanding, substantial body of literature in sociology demonstrates that aspirations are connected with educational and occupational achievement (Ceballo et al. 2014; Sewell, Haller and Strauss 1957; Sewell and Hauser 1975). Parental aspirations are transmitted to youth and ultimately influence youth’s aspirations (Lloyd, Leicht and Sullivan 2008). Most recent studies, however, suggest that aspirations of United States youth are generally high across race and class lines, which calls into question whether aspirations alone are still a good indicator of future achievement. These studies argue that beyond aspirations, youth who have clear expectations, and the cultural and structural position to know how to fulfill those expectations, are more likely to achieve educational success than those who just dream of a college degree and a solid middle-class job (Schneider and Stevenson 1999). Parents’ capacities to act to achieve these aspirations on behalf of their children also predict educational achievement (Lareau 1987, 2000, [2003]2011). In this chapter, I will use my research on parenting in Sunnyside as a springboard for understanding how the structural context of the community limits Mexican origin parents’ access to the cultural toolkit they need to enable academic success in their children.
This subject is of importance to educational and family sociology because as compared to other racial and ethnic groups, Latinos have relatively low levels of educational attainment, despite possessing high educational aspirations and strong parental and cultural commitment to educational attainment (Auerbach 2006; Ceballo et al. 2014; Hill and Torres 2010; Kao and Tienda 1998). To date, only limited ethnographic work (Auerbach 2006; Pérez Carreon, Drake and Calabrese Barton 2005; Schmalzbauer 2009) has tried to make sense of why this seeming contradiction exists. There is a need for more studies in a diversity of environments to better explore the mismatch between familial aspirations and achievements in Latino youth. My theoretical sample is useful for exploring this question because a growing percentage of the Latino community resides in places that historically did not have a large Latino presence (Burton, Garrett-Peters and Eason 2011). Some early research has demonstrated that in new settlement communities, there may be greater stratification in test scores between immigrants and non-immigrants than in older settlement communities, such as Texas and California (Potochnick 2014). As sociologists work to develop theories on this Latino aspirations and achievement paradox, it is helpful to conduct research across a variety of types of sites to see how the school and community context factor into aspirations and achievements of Latinos.

**High Aspirations**

Given how common high aspirations are in the United States overall (Schneider and Stevenson 1999) and in the Latino community in particular (Auerbach 2006; Hill and Torres 2010;
Schmalzbauer 2009), it is predictable that the vast majority of the parents I interviewed reported that they intended for their children to complete high school and college, and to get a middle class job. Cecilia mused, “I want them to graduate and then go also to college … You need to finish college to actually be successful in life.” Most of the parents, like Cecilia, saw having an education as the key to social mobility and being able to choose one’s own path in life. Robyn said her dream for her children is:

Honestly, just like successful. And I think of like, just, you know, better than me. Like I want them to have an education higher than high school. You know I want them to be able to have dreams and follow them and not just stop because, you know, something happened.

Even in cases where these dreams clearly were not realistic or attainable, the parents continued to express them. Lucinda and her brother raised boys who are now in their teenage years. One was sentenced for a murder conviction and is expected to spend his life in jail. The other boy was, at the time of this research, hiding from the police, in connection with the same murder. Nevertheless, Lucinda had dreams of educational attainment for her children. Of the parents I interviewed, only a handful expressed doubts about their children’s ability to afford to go to college and no one expressed concerns about their children’s academic capacity or academic preparation to succeed in college.
High Aspirations, Low Achievement and Parental Involvement

If parental aspirations alone predicted educational attainment, Sunnyside would have an outstanding high school and college completion rate. Instead, in the 2010-11 school year, when I conducted this research, just shy of 65% of the students in the high school graduated on time (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction 2014). That figure was widely fêted in local conversations as evidence of the schools’ improvement. In the State of Washington as a whole, during the same time period, 76.5% of all students graduated on time (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction 2014). Sunnyside’s depressed academic attainment rates are largely driven by the Mexican origin population, which constitutes the overwhelming majority of the school population. As per the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (2014), there is disparity in academic test scores between whites and Latinos. By 10th grade, 89.8 percent of the white identified youth had met the State’s reading proficiency test standards, as compared with 63.3 percent of the Latino students. There is a 14 percentage point difference in math proficiency scores in the eighth grade.

Educational sociologists have demonstrated that neighborhood characteristics, maternal and paternal educational background, maternal and paternal occupation, family income and school characteristics all predict educational attainment levels (Duncan et al. 1998; Duncan, Boisjoly and Harris 2001; Lutz 2007; Stanton-Salazar 1997; Teachman 1987). All of these variables could play a role in the low levels of educational attainment in Sunnyside and although I do not discuss them here to any great length, past research demonstrates their significance. Parental involvement in schooling is also positively associated with youth educational outcomes (Ceballo
et al. 2014), in part because parental involvement creates an opportunity for parents to transmit their educational values and aspirations to their children. In this chapter, I will consider the forms that parental involvement and educational support take for the Mexican origin families in this community and I will consider how the structural characteristics of the community determine the cultural and social resources that parents draw upon to support their children’s educations. I will further consider how parents’ own identities and experiences of parenthood affect their approach in supporting their children’s educations.

Overall, I saw little evidence of parents specifically engaging in activities that were intended to foster the cognitive development of their children. Rather, I saw parents pushing their children to want to succeed in school but doing very little to add to their skills in areas such as reading. They focused entirely on developing their children’s aspirations to attain a higher education, not for its own sake, but as a route to socio-economic mobility. This was striking to me, given how broadly parents in the United States in general have moved towards seeing cognitive development activities as a central part of their role as parents, a role they are expected to play in tandem with the formal schooling system (Schaub 2010). There is an implicit assumption in the American education system that responsible, middle-class parents do not simply trust the education system to do what is right. Rather, they are expected to closely monitor school practices and to cultivate their children’s learning through outside activities, educational activities at home and to intervene with schools when they are not satisfied (Lareau [2003]2011).

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14 The exception to this was among the handful of families who I located through the local Head Start program. The Head Start program was staffed, predominantly, by Mexican origin educators who placed a strong emphasis on parental educational empowerment.
In this research, I saw few examples of parents engaging in this type of academic intervention and cultivation of their children’s cognitive skills.

These observations match other qualitative research on Latino parental involvement in schooling. Ethnographers have found that school systems operate according to their own sets of cultural logic and that dedicated immigrant parents who strive to be involved often do not do so in ways that match the schools’ cultural expectations (Pérez Carreón et al. 2005). Schools in secondary receiving communities are often unprepared to teach immigrant students, both because they lack experience doing so and because they lack resources, such as bilingual staff (Potochnick 2014). In my observation in Sunnyside, the educational system fundamentally failed to engage with or educate Mexican origin parents about how to move their children forward educationally.

Indeed, the educational system did little to demonstrate how to model positive attitudes towards learning for the students. This is particularly relevant to the parents because, in a place where early childbearing predominates, some of them recently dropped out of, or graduated from, the same educational system where their children are now in school. The result is that even parents who are committed to motivating their children to do well in school, and to get a college degree, may be ill-equipped with the knowledge they need to achieve those goals. The parents who immigrated to the United States after adolescence typically had little education beyond grammar school, and were limited in their capacity to second-guess the educational system.
Cultural and Social Capital in Sunnyside

The concepts of cultural and social capital have been operationalized in differently across the sociological literature (Kingston 2001; Lamont and Lareau 1988; Portes 1998). In the theoretical tradition of Lamont and Lareau (1988), I use the concept of cultural capital to argue that parents in this community typically lack the cultural toolkit (Swidler 1986) to develop a roadmap for enabling children to fulfill their expectations. The parents lack pragmatic knowledge of things like how a student can go about applying for college; what types of study habits students need to have to succeed in school; how to advocate for their children within the schools; and of how to help their children to get good school grades. It was clear that the majority of the parents I interviewed wanted their children to succeed educationally and were doing everything in their power to promote that goal. The actions parents took to support their children’s educational careers, however, were based on the parents’ own scope of knowledge and did not look like the kind of parental involvement that is ballyhooed in United States schools.

One of the reasons the parents’ lack the cultural capital they need to support their children’s educations is that the community is highly segregated by ethnicity and class. Rarely did I ever hear anyone mention even having a friend of a different racial ethnic identity. Given this community structure, there are few opportunities for most low-income, Latino parents to learn about educational attainment strategies from other families with direct experience of educational attainment or with direct experience of social mobility. People’s social networks are simply not diversified enough to allow for that kind of exchange. This lack of social capital translates into a lack of cultural capital, which in turn translates into fewer opportunities to earn human capital.
through the educational system. In this chapter, I will explore whether this interlinked lack of social and cultural capital resources helped to make sense of the aspirations and achievement mismatch.

**Lack of Access to Information about the Education System**

*Limited Social Networks*

One of the most striking things in the interviews and in the participant observation data was how little detail parents had about how the educational system worked. The parents themselves typically had very little education (about a third of the sample had graduated from high school) and they were surrounded by friends and family who also had low levels of educational attainment. A community outreach worker with the Catholic Church said most of her clients, who are typically first generation immigrants, had roughly a third grade education. Parents thus could not draw on their own school successes or those of their peers as models for teaching their children. For some, since they had not attended school in the United States, they also lacked basic knowledge of the structure and institutional expectations embedded within the educational system.

As a case in point, in conducting field observations, I met a Mexican immigrant mother who was very interested in my Washington State University (WSU) business card (I handed out business cards to the interview participants). Ironically, we met in the building of the school program that was supposed to help with parent engagement. She immediately wanted to know more about the
WSU “program” – Could her son get his GED there, if he dropped out of high school? Could her son take mechanics classes at WSU? Could anyone take classes at WSU or only “special people?” What followed was a conversation in which I struggled to describe the educational tiers in the United States and the lack of practical classes at WSU in areas such as mechanics. I very much doubt I clarified matters for her but our conversation had certainly alerted me to one fact: The parents in this community were particularly in need of support from local institutions or more educated social networks about how to support their children’s schooling. As I will detail below, such support, unfortunately, was largely not available. Indeed, the very number of educational questions I was asked during the field work speaks volumes about the families’ lack of contact with people with college educations. In a similar type of study of a recent Mexican immigrant settlement in Montana, Schmalzbauer (2009), a white academic, also found she was repeatedly asked for advice because she was the only connection that her interviewees had to someone with her particular cultural capital. A Catholic Charities outreach worker also told me that her clients were confused about the structure of the educational system.

Linguistic Barriers

Other than through social networks, the most obvious source for parents to learn how to support their children educationally would presumably be through the schools themselves. Unfortunately, many institutional barriers prevented this from happening, the most obvious being the lack of Spanish-speaking teachers and administrators, particularly at the middle and high
school levels. Libby, one of the interviewees, explains why her parents did not get involved in helping her to resolve a bullying problem at school, a problem that led to her dropping out in the 10th grade. “You know, that was because my Mom …. Hispanic lady, she didn’t speak English. I never really came to her with my problems. I’d just deal with them myself. Yeah, she was never involved.”

Ariana, one of the few Spanish-speaking teachers, was very critical of the school system for making it so hard for Spanish-speaking families to connect with the schools. “Even the kids notice that, too … The kids, you know, they even say that … there was only three Hispanics in the whole building … They always say, it’s you know, that people are racism.” Ariana thinks the lack of Spanish speakers drives away many parents:

That’s another reason too why in middle school, or secondary school, some parents feel inferior because the language barrier is there. I mean, elementary, they do feel it, but not as much. When I speak to parents, it’s secondary. And like imagine there’s a lot of families, parents, when they have an event in elementary, it’s packed. And when you have an event in the middle school, and [they] provide free, you know, lunch or free something, you get the parents, very few … I would say a lot of it has to do with the language barrier.

As a case in point, Salvador, Ariana’s monolingual, Spanish-speaking husband, said he does not go to the schools events because he cannot talk to the teachers.
In my observations in one of the elementary schools, I saw evidence that Spanish is not only not spoken, but not respected. Although the school did have Spanish language classrooms, the English language classrooms where I volunteered were primarily filled by children who spoke English with an accent. Despite this, the school culture seemed not to allow Spanish to be spoken outside of the bilingual classrooms. As I wrote in my field notes, “The school looked to me like it was about 95% Latino, and many students spoke heavily accented English. I did not hear a word of Spanish all day, even between the kids.”

Several weeks after writing that note, I had a revealing interaction with one of the children I tutored in the school. A young child asked me to tell him what an M&M candy he had found said. The candy had a message printed in Spanish and so I read it to him in Spanish. The child looked at me, rather sternly, and replied in perfect mimicry of a teacher, “And what would that be in English, please?” The children in the reading group went on to demonstrate how their parents spoke by speaking in Spanish and then they demonstrated English language speech as the appropriate speech for school.

In another telling moment, I was assisting a fifth grader with his school project on Julio Iglesias. I correctly pronounced Iglesias’ name and my correct pronunciation was greeted by hoots of excitement from the fifth graders seated around us. The boy asked me, in open-faced astonishment, whether I spoke Spanish. It was, apparently quite unusual to have someone of my appearance be able to pronounce correctly a Spanish “J,” even though I had demonstrated only the most basic level of Spanish language skills.
This sense of a linguistic community divide between those who spoke Spanish and the white educators who spoke English was reflected in the interviews. Natalia remembers, “We weren’t allowed to speak Spanish in school. They would kick us out … So they would tell my Mom, ‘If your son and your daughter speak Spanish again, they going to get picked out, kicked out.’”

Taken together, these and other similar incidents suggested that by elementary school, the children had apparently internalized a set of values about language and school and had learned to see the English language as belonging to the world of school and the Spanish language as belonging to the world of home. I never observed any specific mechanisms through which this set of cultural norms were communicated to the students, but these norms seemed to be pervasive across all of the classrooms where I volunteered. Previous scholarship has demonstrated that bias against Spanish is one of the mechanisms through which racial bias towards Latinos is expressed (Feagin and Cobas 2014). The parents’ sense of alienation from the schools reflected not just a pragmatic problem with being able to speak to the teachers but their larger sense that the English-speaking world of the school was closed to those parents whose primary language was Spanish.

**Negative Attitudes Towards Parents**

Negative attitudes towards Mexican origin families were not merely expressed through pushing Spanish out of the schools. In the elementary school where I volunteered, I spent a good deal of time sitting in the break room and listening to the teachers talk about their jobs. I heard the
teachers openly criticize the parents of the children they taught. When I told one para-
professional that I was going to interview fathers of the students in the school, she warned me
that the fathers of the children in the elementary school are “dangerous.” She told me that when
the office staff have to talk to fathers of truant children, it is scary for them, because the fathers
“get mad or they are just uneducated (partially translated from Spanish).”\(^\text{15}\) Another teacher
said that she knew about the families from her days as a Head Start teacher, when the parents
would show up with children who needed to be bathed to get the urine off of them. A third
teacher said it was hard to maintain classroom discipline today because corporal punishment is
not allowed and parents no longer support the school by giving, “double punishment” for
behavioral infractions at schools. A fifth grade teacher told me that the children all tell her that
they have no bedtimes and that they stay up until midnight or 1 am playing video games. She
said she could not figure out where the parents are while their children are playing video games.
She added that when students write about their home lives, their primary subject is their favorite
video games. She also said that the children spend the summers unsupervised. For this teacher,
who had maintained a 10 pm bedtime for her children until they completed high school, such a
lack of parental supervision was disheartening. She and I both observed in the classroom that the
students complained of sleep deprivation. Another teacher described sending a student home for
wearing too short a skirt. She and other teachers agreed that when parents allow their girls to
dress that way, “it is no wonder they get raped.” Such criticisms were mostly framed as

\(^{15}\) Being uneducated is meant as a greater slur than it sounds like when translated into English. Being uneducated
seemingly refers to lacking a whole host of moral qualities, not just having failed to attend school. An alternate
translation is not well brought up.
concerns about the children and I do not think they were at all ill-intentioned. Nevertheless, to the degree that parents and children picked up on these beliefs about their families’ deficits, they may have felt hurt and alienated. For example, given how much the fathers emphasized protecting their children’s sexuality, the idea that they were priming their daughters for rape, through parental negligence about their clothes, would have horrified most of them.

Some of the discourse in the educational community was more overtly racist and xenophobic towards Mexican origin parents. In a town hall meeting in nearby Prosser, which is less Latino in composition than Sunnyside, a white, former Sunnyside teacher spoke to warn her neighbors about why they should limit new affordable, family housing: they do not want to end up looking like Sunnyside. The implied racial meaning behind her comment was probably lost to no one in the audience, as it came in the wake of a series of comments on the “illegal aliens” who were presumed to be the most probable tenants in new housing. It was noteworthy that a long-term teacher in that school system was willing to be so public about her feelings about Latino families. Given these attitudes, one could see why parents might not feel well received at the school. It is also worth remembering that some of the parents in this study were quite young and had recently experienced those negative attitudes as students.

*School Focus on Crime Prevention Instead of Education*

Even when parents do receive information in Spanish from the schools, that information did not seem to be focused on educational attainment. Near one of the schools, a small portable building
contained the district’s short-lived parent education and parent involvement center (it was closed down during the time while I was researching). It was stocked with helpful pamphlets for parents, but I only saw one about education, per se. The majority were about keeping children away from gangs and crime and had advice on how to identify children who were engaged in crime, advising parents to be wary of particular colors, sports team shirts for the Kansas City Royals, strange handshakes and the use of marijuana. Undoubtedly, this is important advice but the implicit message to parents seemed to be that the best they could hope for was a child who did not do drugs or join a gang. Alternatively, a parent might have read these pamphlets and concluded that avoiding drugs and gangs was the most important pathway to educational success.

Parents in the community reflected this perspective when they presented their hopes for their children’s educational future as part of a larger hope for their children’s ability to stay out of gangs and criminal life, as if they were one and the same. One such parent, Jessica explained:

> They have Spanish; they have English. So, they have the opportunity that I did not have. And it is this that I would like that they have the advantage, that advantage, that this opportunity, that this opportunity to study, to graduate … To try not to become homeless, or a drug addict *(partially translated from Spanish).*

Jesus, a father I interviewed, also presented his aspirations for his children as being centered on the avoidance of criminal activity: “What do we teach our kids? Well, that we’re always normal, to not be ‘cholos’ and ‘gangers’ *(partially translated from Spanish).*” When I asked Grace,
another interviewee, what she wanted her children to do when they grew up, we had a telling conversation in which she equated career success with not getting into trouble:

Liz: So, what do you imagine your kids doing when they grow up?

Grace: Um, well, I would just encourage them to do what they want to do … Just as long as it’s not trouble … So, if he wants to be a lawyer, I’m fine with that. If he wants to be a doctor, teacher or just a vet, anything’s fine. I’m fine. I would support them. One hundred percent. As long as it keeps them out of trouble.

Liz: What kind of trouble are you thinking of?

Grace: Um, well the gangs and you know, bad influences. And just party here, party there. And just all that stuff.

Certainly, there was no information at the parent education center on how to help your child to progress past secondary education. Pragmatically, this lack of guidance meant that parents did not know how the university system works, even though they saw a college education as important. One family, for example, asked me about getting jobs as a preschool teacher in the local school system because they assumed my Washington State University affiliation meant I also worked for the local school district and that in turn, I possibly, as a graduate student, had authority over preschool teacher selection. Another family wanted my help in getting their child a boxing scholarship to the university. Jesus and Rosa’s extended family questioned me on when children were allowed to enter Kindergarten. At most, parents seemed to know the names of some local schools of higher education, typically the community college in Yakima and a local
private, four year college. They did not know how these schools differed from one another or what they offered in terms of educational choices.

**Using Discipline to Improve Educational Performance**

One of the places where parents learn how education is intended to work is from being students themselves. As largely young parents, many had left school recently and their memories of the school culture were fresh. The school system, in my observation, aligned every educational activity with a punishment, a reward, or, most often, a kind of hybrid carrot and stick system to try to motivate children to want to achieve. The joys of reading and discovery were noticeably in short supply, even in the classrooms with compassionate, dedicated teachers, because the entire school system was organized around testing performance. This was expected as under the No Child Left Behind laws, when students in schools repeatedly failed to meet certain test score standards, the district and the school personnel could be penalized. Such penalties include, among others, the prospect of the school being entirely reorganized and the possibility that staff might be removed (Dworkin 2005). The school where I volunteered had been designated as such a failing school.

One of my assignments, as a volunteer reading tutor, was to help the children to pass their reading level tests. Every book in the school had a designated reading level. Children would read the same book aloud, on multiple occasions, until they could do so with as few errors as possible. They were graded based on the percentage of words that they could read correctly in
their book. In the fifth grade class, the students were told that if all of them could get to 100 percent they could participate in a dodge ball game day. As further motivation, children with under 80 percent were not allowed to go outside during recess because they needed to stay in to improve their scores. Ironically, research has demonstrated that children who take recess breaks are more able to function academically than children who do not (Pellegrini and Bjorklund 1997). The names of the children and their scores were displayed, and I overheard the children chastising one boy who had a very low score that was seemingly jeopardizing the class’ ability to win the dodge ball game activity. Thus, peer pressure and shaming were deployed to pressure the children into academic achievement in reading. Ironically, some of the pleasure children might have found in exploring the library to find a good book or reading something that strikes their fancy was often suppressed in the interests of helping the children to achieve academically. I heard the librarian yell at children who tried to read a book of the wrong level, for example. During library class, children were advised to pick the easiest possible book within their reading level category in order to score higher. As a result, reading at school became a painful chore even for those children who might have otherwise enjoyed it. I had children try to wheedle me into reading them a non-authorized book of the wrong level because they were tired of re-reading the same book over and over again.

Yelling at the students in the school where I volunteered was a common practice. In one second grade classroom, I could hear the teacher through the walls of the auxiliary tutoring room, yelling comments such as, “I told you to write that down and you don’t write down nothing!” That teacher often carried her ranting into the break room, miming strangling motions and
talking about one particular child who was, allegedly, “driving her crazy.” Her behavior was certainly extreme but it was apparently tolerated by her employer, as she had been at the school for many years.

Parents also described personal experiences with harsh school discipline in Mexico. Levi, who migrated back and forth between Mexico and the United States explained:

My son, he was in … second grade. The teachers … yeah, the kids don’t listen real good. They don’t have enough patience to teach. So you know, they, what they do … they grab the ear. Pull the ear. Yeah, that’s what they do in Mexico. Most of the schools do that. They did it to me.

Given this educational modeling, it is not surprising that parents who sought to support their children’s academic performance sometimes used punitive methods of their own to push their children in school. Both the school and the parents focused on developing the children’s desire to learn, by force if necessary, with little attention to how the actual process of learning works. Ironically, most studies about extrinsic rewards suggest that they decrease students’ desire to focus their unscheduled time on academic tasks (Cameron and Pierce 1994). In other words, a student who gets a dodge ball game reward for reading is less likely to want to read for reading’s sake. It is hard to see how the parents could encourage children to take joy in the pleasures of discovering through reading, writing, or conducting scientific experiments if that joy had never been experienced by the parents themselves.
The school sometimes actively encouraged parents to use punishments to persuade their children to improve their academic performance. One of the first graders that I tutored was extremely anxious about making mistakes on his math homework, and more specifically about having a smiling face drawn on his homework. He told me that his mother hit him with a big stick when he did not have a smiling face on his paper. The teacher confirmed that she was using smiling faces and frowning faces to communicate to that boy’s parent how he was doing in his classes, in hopes that that would improve his performance. The mother was not able to read written feedback on the boy’s work so the teacher was pleased to have developed the happy/sad face communication system instead. When I told her about the hitting, she said that his behavior had definitely improved since she started making sure she always had a face on the paper. It is striking to me that the teacher knew, with complete certainty, that the boy’s mother would not be able to assist him with his homework, given her own illiteracy. Nevertheless, she wanted to make the boy’s mother an ally in pushing the boy to achieve academically, even though in this case, the mother responded in a punitive and harmful way.

**Pushing to Success**

This emphasis on pushing seemed to occur because parents saw developing children’s aspirations as being the main conduit to actual academic achievement. Natalia said she explained her philosophy to her children’s teachers, “If you’re focused on them and you push them to where you want them to be, they’re going to succeed, no matter what.”
Just as authoritarian parenting may have been helpful in keeping children away from risks, I suspect these parenting attitudes were indeed successful in communicating to their children the importance of schooling and the importance of good school behavior. As compared to schools I have visited in other communities where I have lived, such as in a middle-class neighborhood of Berkeley, California and in the university town of Pullman, Washington, the children I observed in this community were strikingly obedient in schools.

The problem with this strategy is that, according to the academic literature, obedience and following rules are actually not positive harbingers for high educational attainment and socio-economic mobility, and may indeed limit intrinsic motivation to study. While being cooperative and following rules are valued characteristics in working class jobs and in the schools of Sunnyside, these behaviors are not valued by universities seeking evidence of critical thinking skills or in fields where independent, creative work is required. (Bowles and Gintis 1976, 2002; Lareau [2003]2011; Willis 1977). The parents, however, based partially on the feedback they got at school, saw their job as beginning and ending with pushing the youth to work hard and to obey, as means towards socio-economic mobility.

Unfortunately, this approach to supporting their kids educationally did not give their children practical skills for achieving in school, other than a will to succeed. For example, schools traditionally define “educational support” as helping with homework, attending school events and advocating for students’ needs (Auerbach 2006). These forms of involvement correlate with improved educational outcomes for students, such as better grades (Ceballo et al. 2014). Parents are also expected to facilitate their children’s ability to have a quiet, study-oriented environment.
at home, which has been shown to improve school grades (Teachman 1987). Only one of the fathers I interviewed described supporting homework in this way. Jeremy, a father of four, said,

I try to help [my daughter] with her schoolwork, especially when it comes to like … right now, most of her homework is like, math stuff. So, I try to help her out … You know, I’ll sit there and I’ll – if she doesn’t get it right, I’ll be, “Okay, it’s wrong. So let’s figure it out again. Try to figure out a different method.” So I help her out quite a bit.

For most, the parents’ lack of formal education and English skills frequently got in the way of their efforts to help their children with homework. Alissia said, plainly, “It’s all in English and the eldest, I see that he is on the computer – I don’t know how (translated from Spanish).” Libby said she could help her first grader with homework, but, as for her older son, “He’s got homework I can’t even understand anyway so I didn’t get involved.” Juan said, when asked if he helps with homework, “Not much. I just know Spanish. I don’t know English (translated from Spanish).” The reading teacher at the school where I volunteered confirmed that many parents could not assist with reading practice at home because they do not read in English. The children with whom I worked in the elementary school also told me that they did not get support with homework at home.

Lack of time was another factor that kept parents from assisting children with homework. Marina said, “Yeah, well, but sometimes, one doesn’t have time, like when one works a lot (translated from Spanish).” Gustavo also cited work as a constraint to helping his stepson with homework,
“I used to, yeah, when I was, when I was working part-time but now I’m working full-time, I can’t.”

The fact that parents in this community typically provided encouragement but not the type of support that is valued in school has ramifications for how parents as a group are seen and treated by the school. This in turn, as I discuss elsewhere in this chapter, contributes to families and children feeling alienated from schools (Auerbach 2006, Pérez Carreón et al. 2005).

Even though most of what I saw was schools and parents failing to connect, schools can and sometimes do restructure their approach so as to better engage Latino parents, rather than just waiting for families to assimilate into a middle-class version of appropriate involvement (Auerbach 2006, Pérez Carreón et al. 2005). The first grade teachers at the school where I volunteered invited parents to come to the school to clean their children’s desks. The classroom was overflowing with parents. Only one child’s parents did not attend. When given a concrete way of supporting their children’s education, the mothers and fathers turned out in force.

Parents also did not advocate for their children within the schools because they trusted and respected the educational system. Their cultural orientation did not promote confronting teachers or questioning the schools. I certainly never heard anyone question the pedagogic methods of the schools, although I do not know whether they held back out of lack of knowledge of pedagogy or out of respect for the teachers. I also did not hear people question aspects of the schools’ practices outside of pedagogy. At one point, Robyn told me, “With the school … I know like they have a lot of safety, and they have lock downs … I know they take a lot of
precautions when it comes to the kids.” As it happens, I had been at Robyn’s daughter’s school when an active shooter was in the neighborhood and the process was far from reassuring. Many children remained outside for an expanded recess because they did not know the school was on lockdown. When no teachers arrived to retrieve them, because the teachers were locked down inside the building, the children just continued to play outside. Robyn, however, had faith in the schools’ ability to maintain safety despite her larger concerns about the regularity of gun violence in the community. Paula spoke highly of the local schools for their graduation rates, rates that are far lower than in the rest of Washington but that “broke a record … biggest record yet” for graduation in Sunnyside. That type of belief and trust in schools made parents unlikely to question school practices in the manner that is seen as appropriate in middle-class communities (Lareau [2003]2011).

**Beliefs about Educational Aspirations: the Role of Physical Labor**

Many of the parents who wanted their children to succeed in school hoped that they could develop their children’s academic motivation to work by showing their children how much easier and more pleasant school is than heavy labor. Some of the parents in the study wanted to maximize children’s experience of the physical discomfort of farm work or other heavy labor. They reasoned that if children experience the extreme heat, cold and fatigue in the fields, they will instead gravitate towards school as a conduit to getting an indoor, middle class job. My findings in this area reflect other studies on Latino parenting and orientations towards school.
Bachmeier and Bean (2011) argued that there is a cultural consensus within the Mexican origin community that there is no acceptable cultural option but to devote oneself to school or work, and therefore if work is unpleasant, children will default to focusing on school (Bachmeier and Bean 2011). Lopez (2001) and Ceballo, Maurizi, Suarez and Aretakis (2014) observed that the Latino parents they studied saw bringing children to work as a form of educational involvement and encouraged other scholars to be attentive to those forms of involvement that fall outside of the “traditional school-related models” (Lopez 2001:abstract). Based on her ethnographic work in the Los Angeles area, Auerbach (2006) suggested that immigrant parents draw on their experiences in the field as a basis for giving their children what she terms “moral support” for their education.

In the interviews, Alissia put this philosophy most succinctly:

> The eldest, since he’s sixteen, when he can, he comes and helps us so that way he sees what the field is like. And the school, that way he puts his efforts in his studies, because you know how hard it is to work in the field (*translated from Spanish*).

The fathers who spoke to me frequently discussed this strategy as one of their major roles in their children’s lives, often as an extension of their overall role as a disciplinarian and as the family breadwinner. Fathers often talked about doing fieldwork alongside their children, as a learning experience. Elian had many self-doubts about his parenting abilities but he was proud of how he
used the threat of fieldwork and labor to force his children to attend school. He recalled his first success at teaching his young son the value of education, using the discomfort of labor:

So he didn’t go to the school. And I tried, I’m trying to spank, you know. You have to go to school because it’s - Well, he didn’t want to go. He said, “No, I didn’t want to go.” Finally, he start crying and I finally told his mother, “Okay, he don’t have to go.” He little kid … Yeah little. So I told his Mom, “You know, he don’t have to go to school.”

And he say, “Yeah, I going to help my Mom.”

“No, no, you have to bring some money to the house, for food.” And I used to be like, um, manager in that ranch. So and it was kind of like a lot of rocks in one place and I told him, “I going to pay you” – I don’t remember, I think three dollars an hour because this was I used to make in [a local small town]. Yeah, 3.25 or 4.00 dollars. I don’t remember but something like that. And I told him, “I going to pay you 3.00 dollars an hour. And you going to work for me.”

And he say, “Yeah. Better than to go to school.”

And I told him, two hours, you going to have ten minutes break. And you going to work for four hours. Or eight hours.”

“So and what you want me to do?”

“Okay, row by row, you going to move those [rocks] over here. Put it over here.”
And he started, but it was like a 30 minutes and he was tired and, “I want to rest.”

“No, no, no, no. Two hours. Work is work. You do that slow. You don’t have to be in a hurry. You just take one and put it over here. No big ones, you know.” He didn’t have to carry no big ones. And he was then, no finally he was, finally, he start crying. He went inside and told his Mom “I want to go to school.”

It was good.

Part of Elian’s emphasis is on the idea that his son could not simply help his mother around the house. He had to experience men’s labor, in this case, the brute tedium of moving rocks, to understand the relative pleasures of education. Elian, also, however, made a point of not being cruel. He did not want his son to get hurt by carrying heavy rocks. He did, however, feel happy with making the boy cry and ask for school.

Elian’s sister also used the hardship of labor to push her daughter into attending school and Elian credits his sister for raising two children who now hold professional, lower-middle class jobs. Elian recalls,

One day, he [my brother-in-law] was too soft with my nieces. Oh, because one day, my niece she didn’t want to go to school, too … And she was already old – after high school. She didn’t want to go to college. And my brother-in-law, he told [the mother] “Well, if she don’t want to go, just respect her. She wants to do that. She don’t want to go anymore.”
My sister was, “No … Because you are old enough to work and if you don’t
know nothing; if you don’t know how to do nothing, the best you going to be is
a maid. Maid in Mexico, you can be maid. And with people, rich people, and
they [treat] you not very good but they pay you.

So she say, “No, I don’t want to do that.”

“Well, right here, you don’t want to go to school, you have to do that.” So she
took her daughter with a friend of her, and told her, you know, “My daughter is
going to come and ask you for work. To be a maid, to be your maid. So give it
to her and just make her work. Make her mop the floors. Make her do
whatever.”

And mm-hmm, so my niece crying. She went down there and ask her for work.

And she did. “Yeah, you start tomorrow.” And yeah, she help my sister. “And
you going to do this.” And then she describe what she was supposed to do.

And finally, my niece decided that night, “I going to go to the school. I’m
sorry.” So she went to school.

The parallels between Elian’s story and that of his sister are evident. The accessible
cultural model he had for encouraging education was using labor as a disincentive. He
saw the fact that his nieces are well-employed as evidence in favor of the parenting
technique he learned from his sister.
One reason why parents think hard labor will teach children to value education is that it gives the children a personal experience through which to understand the hardships of their parents. They hope that by feeling this hardship first hand, the children will be motivated to achieve more and will understand the value of educational attainment.

Jessica explained:

I think that it could help him, the hardness with which he works, the same in the [factory] as in the cherries. He does well in school. He will be helped by working hard and that the children work to see what people who come from Mexico do (translated from Spanish).

In this line of thinking, the more contrast between education and labor, the better the chance that children will learn. Nathan hopes for hot weather when he takes his children to pick cherries, “To sow seeds in the sun is very hot or in the school, and in the cool air, and you just write notes. It’s totally different (translated from Spanish).” Nathan and his wife got into a friendly argument, during the interview, about the relative educational merits of laboring at McDonalds versus doing fieldwork. Nathan’s wife sees all types of hard labor as equally educational but he insists that field work is better, “So that they learn. It’s very hot. It’s not easy (translated from Spanish).”

Hercules thinks field work is beneficial to his fifteen-year-old son because it teaches him critical work values. He is unhappy because he has a disability and he cannot take his children to work in the fields. When I asked him about field work, he said:
I actually wanted to do that with my kids, because you pick up some good work ethic doing that. I actually wanted to grab my kids and take them out in the summer and pick cherries or whatnot, so that they could, you know, pick up some work ethic from you … But with my health, I just can’t do it. I can’t be out in the fields myself. [My son] actually has a friend whose parents own an asparagus field and he’s working for them right now. After school, he goes over and picks asparagus. And I think it’s, you know, a great place to learn. You know, start learning. Makes you get older and say, “Hey, man, I don’t want to do that for a living for the rest of my life.”

Child labor has historically been a component of the Mexican economic system and so the idea of having children work in the fields or in other types of labor is a familiar cultural model (Carey 2004). As discussed earlier in the chapter on parenting approaches, the first generation immigrant families that I interviewed held up their own generation as one with good productive values as compared to those of their United States-raised children. Isaac complained, “The parents in Mexico do things differently than how they are here … There, since you are small … you go to school and also you work. Here you only go to school and when they are big, they don’t want to work (translated from Spanish).”

In the United States, until the mid-1990s, children were also permitted to do farm labor so many of the first generation and one point five generation immigrants grew up with child labor is a regular part of their childhood (Human Rights Watch 2000). In point of
fact, many children of all races and ethnicities in the United States participate in paid work during their adolescence and uncounted others work in family businesses (Hansen, Mortimer and Kruger 2001; Mizen, Pole and Bolton 2001; Song 1999). In the United States, we have tended not to acknowledge the economic significance and commonplace nature of child labor because it flies in the face of our notions of a protected time of childhood (Mizen et al. 2001). Still, child labor is common, and it is not surprising that it is a component of the cultural toolkit parents bring to bear when they want their children to learn to value schooling.

There is also some empirical evidence suggesting that this parenting strategy benefits children and families. There is evidence showing improved educational effort in adolescents who hear from their parents about their sacrifices, such as doing farm work, in order to give the children opportunities for mobility (Ceballo et al. 2014). Young Latino adults who have experienced social mobility attribute their success to seeing their parents doing hard work (Romero 2011). Youth may feel a greater sense of self-efficacy if they work regularly because they can help their families financially and develop relationships with adults in a peer-environment (Cunnien, Martin Rogers and Mortimer 2009). Despite these benefits, it is clear that what the parents were trying to influence is their children’s motivation to do well in school, without giving much attention to the intrinsic pleasures of learning (other than getting to attend school in a cool, comfortable environment).
Protecting Children from Work

A second set of parents came to the exact opposite conclusion about the effect of child labor on schooling. These parents perceived work as antithetical to their children’s ability to stay focused on school and they wanted their children to avoid experiencing the hardships and sacrifices that their parents had undergone. Corazon discussed the legal changes in labor laws in the United States that made it harder for children to work in the fields. She thinks the new laws are a big improvement:

I mean, the kids should be in school. They should not be out there working. They should be in school for, for them to have a better future and um, just because it’s important, you know. It’s the parents’ job to support the children. And not the children be out there with them.

Marina and Antonio jointly told me why they do not want their children to work. Marina said, “What we want is for them to study” and Antonio added, “To study so that they can get a good job so they won’t be working in the field like us because in the field, it’s very hard, picking apples with the ladder and-” Marina interrupted, “It’s because at times, one takes them to work and they go sleepless to school, so they don’t study. We tell them that their only job is to study (translated from Spanish).”

Some of the teachers I met talked about how they saw agricultural work affecting their students. One teacher told me that in April, she could identify which children were picking asparagus because they were tired at school. A young teacher’s aide remembered
how tired she was when she picked asparagus before school, starting before dawn.

Human Rights Watch (2000) said only 55 percent of all teenage farm laborers graduate from high school but it is not clear from their report whether the teenagers disengaged from school and then became farm laborers or whether farm work itself limits academic achievement. In addition, farm labor occurs in tandem with other social conditions that may limit academic achievement, such as poverty.

Interestingly, the proponents and opponents of children doing heavy labor characterize the labor in the same way and see it as directly connected to schooling. Both groups, in short, see hard work as having an effect on educational aspirations and achievement but the direction of that effect is not agreed upon within the community. Part of what may contribute to this difference in opinion is that different patterns of work involvement carry different types of benefits and risks with them. Hercules dropped out of school after he got behind from doing farm labor whereas his son just does farm labor after school. Jessica’s son and his father picked cherries together on his summer break, and he earned enough to pay for his shoes, clothes and other personal expenses. Picking cherries in the summer did not interfere with his schooling in the same way as harvesting the asparagus crop in the spring would have.

Even when farm work is done in a limited way, however, some parents see agricultural work as carrying health and safety risks for children. Said Corazon:

There’s just dangerous things out there … My father, while he was in the winter time, when they did um – was it pruning? – Or thinning … He fell off the ladder
and he broke his arm, so. I mean, it’s the middle of, uh, the snow and everything. And so you know, those ladders are not always safe … You know, you can fall and just uh, the, the sprays they have out there, it’s just you know. One of the other things that I don’t like, it’s, um, like during lunchtime, you don’t go out … If you’re out in the fields, uh, you pack your home lunch and you just eat it under a tree. And I don’t think that’s safe either. And you know, there’s no other choice, you know. There’s no other choice than opening your sandwich if, or whatever you have, and just eating it under [a] tree or close by, you know. Those chemicals are always there … I think it’s kind of dangerous for just anybody to be out there.

Corazon’s point is supported by research studies showing that participating in agricultural labor places children and youth at increased risk of death or injury due to heavy lifting, the use of repetitive motions and exposure to the elements. Youth are also, as Corazon pointed out, exposed to chemicals such as pesticides when they work in the fields (Hennessy-Burt et al. 2013). A study published by Bonauto and colleagues, in 2003, used random sampling in a community in Yakima to measure the annual teenage rate of physical injury and poisoning during the course of conducting agricultural labor. That study found that over the course of one year, 4% of the teenage workforce sustained an injury requiring medical attention or time off work/school. Human Rights Watch (2000) wrote a scathing indictment of the prevalence of Latino children and youth in the agricultural labor force. They pointed out that children and youth are at greater risk than adults of injury because the regulations around farm work were
designed with adult bodies in mind. Human Rights Watch warned that children’s growth can be permanently altered by doing such heavy labor.

Variations in the Parents’ Attitudes Towards Child Labor

I could see no defining characteristic that predicted which parents would support field work and other heavy labor as an educational tool and which would not. The difference in attitudes that the parents expressed, however, may relate in part to parents’ endorsing different assimilation and acculturation strategies for their helping their children to succeed educationally in the United States. The classic model of assimilation posits that immigrants will adopt “mainstream” values, abandon their traditional cultural beliefs and through that process, will move towards becoming structurally and economically assimilated into the United States (Alba and Nee 1997). As an alternative, some immigrants may gain socio-economic mobility through maintaining the immigrants’ communities’ values and through co-ethnic solidarity (Zhou 1997).

In supporting labor for their children, one set of parents emphasized the importance of family and co-ethnic solidarity, by teaching children the importance of contributing economically to the family. The second set of parents believe that the key to social mobility is for their children to learn English, focus on schooling and after-school activities like sports and stay away from the fields, which fits more closely into an assimilationist vision of socio-economic mobility. Levi, explained the tension in these two perspectives in layperson’s terms:
My Dad, he wasn’t thinking like I am thinking … He was all different … He thought that in school, we might go with friends, maybe to a gang. Something like that. And he wanted us to be close to him. Help him out. And, where I am, at least, I don’t think that way now … We didn’t want them to go out of school and just go out there and work at the fields. We don’t want that to happen. My Dad, he only wanted us to be out of trouble.

There are sociological arguments that would suggest that children’s participation in agriculture could be either positive or negative for their socio-economic mobility. If working in agriculture does indeed foster a sense of familial obligation in children, that sense of family obligation may serve important protective functions for children and communities. Being well integrated into a kinship network and having a sense of community solidarity may protect young Mexican origin people in this area from having a sense of alienation (see Zhou 1997 for a discussion of the effects of alienation on second generation immigrants). In a place where crime rates are unusually high, such a sense of community solidarity may be even more important. There is a safety, as Levi’s father posited, in not assimilating.

On the other hand, youth who work in the fields may not be acquiring human capital that translates readily into academic success and socio-economic mobility. The physical risks of this kind of labor are also a drawback to this strategy for educational motivation. What we do not know is whether the social benefits of maintaining family kinship ties and of incurring a sense of familial economic obligation offers enough protection to the family unit and to the community to counterbalance some of the more obvious negative sides of children’s involvement in field work.
Financing Higher Education

The one practical barrier to educational attainment that parents were most aware of is that a university education is not free and going to college takes away from time when one could be earning an income. For immigrants who are unauthorized, a university education was particularly unattainable because of Federal limits on access to financial aid. Nevertheless, I saw little evidence that parents felt it was their obligation to assist youth with overcoming this barrier. The high cost of education may have been self-apparent to parents because some had grown up in areas of Mexico where school was a privilege for those who could afford it. As one mother explained to me, she had only been able to attend school until her uncle decided she needed to work. Today, she wishes she had more education. Manuel remembers his own formal education in Mexico:

There only a teacher came to teach us classes. Eh yes, but only on Sunday and Saturday … Yes, only those days and the other days, work. Take care of goats or cows or whatever and work in the fields, whatever he had … There, like it was a ranch where they taught us in that the teacher would arrive and the parents would pay him. The government paid him and the parents paid him more because they would give more time (translated from Spanish).

Children who had been raised in the United States also cited situations where they had to drop out of school to work. Jeremy, for example, left school before college, despite his parents’ aspirations because he became a teenage father and needed to earn a living.
John recalled dropping out of school to pay a large dental bill:

I had to take over payments. That’s why I started working in the construction.

Like I said, that’s when I started working there. So, I didn’t really go to high school because I started working. And I just ended up working and working.

Despite this awareness of the cost of education, I did not speak to or encounter any families who talked about saving money for their children’s education, nor did I see any community outreach materials aimed at educating families about financial aid. Even had such information been available to families, the margin of survival of most of the families would have made it impossible for them to save extra money. The amount of financial aid that many families receive is not sufficient to offset the cost, not to mention the short-term opportunity cost, of having their children attend college (Long 2010). Moreover, for any children who did not have legal authorization to be in the United States, financing college would be next to impossible, as federal financial aid did not cover college tuition and universities charge immigrant youth extra fees for their international status (Donato and Armenta 2011).

A handful of parents mentioned the need to finance their children’s educations but their plans were vague. Levi said he hoped his son would be awarded a boxing scholarship at Washington State University and he proudly showed me all of his son’s trophies. Lucinda, who has some community college background, expected her youngest children go to college and added, “With the help of financial aid, I know they will.” Lucinda was the only person who cited financial aid or loan money as a source of support for college. Again, this may be partially because for
families who lacked immigration authorization at the time when they were young, financial aid was never an option.

**Personal Educational Goals and Parental Educational Goals**

Some of the parents juxtaposed their hopes for their own futures with those of their children. Most of the participants had not completed as much education as they believed they needed in a timely way. I asked the study participants why they had left school or why they thought others left school. Most interviewees who had dropped out became progressively more and more disengaged until they essentially ceased to be a student. Corazon said she just stopped going to school. “I just made the big, big mistake of ‘oh, I don’t have to go to school,’ you know. And so you could say, I dropped out.” As Corazon describes it, dropping out is less of an active decision or more of a passive outcome of a long period of not choosing to do school. Empirical studies on school exits typically say that dropping out is the outcome of a process of disengagement and not a sudden event (Rumberger 1995).

Cecilia, now a babysitter, mother of two and a part-time community college student, said that students often do not graduate from high school because:

> They’re more focused on their friends. They don’t really care about graduating at that point. I mean, I was in school. I actually dropped out myself when I was a junior. And I actually had my first son later on, and then after I had him, I went back because of him.
She later modified her statement by adding, “Oh, actually, it was more with being with my ex. I thought I was in love with him. I thought he could take care of me. I really didn’t need to go to school.” Cecilia’s brothers also did not finish high school but unlike Cecilia, they never returned to school. She remarked, somewhat wistfully:

One of them, I think right now, he’s working out in the field. I think. Or something like that …. Yeah, but I feel like they could’ve at least graduated maybe they would’ve had a better opportunity to do something better than being, going out in the sun, yeah, you know, in the cold.

Anthony, although just barely over the age of twenty, told me, “I didn’t like [school] … I never paid attention in school … I would like to study but I can’t. Time has passed already (translated from Spanish).”

Ashley, Anthony’s new bride, sounded similarly hopeless about schooling:

I just got, I was eighteen, and I got tired of, yeah, I got bored because I wasn’t doing nothing. I wasn’t going nowhere. I got off probation and as soon as I got off probation, I got out of school because that’s the only reason I was going. But I did like math and everything … and cooking class and stuff. But just the fact of waking up early in the morning and going, you know, that’s what I didn’t like.

Libby became disengaged from high school because she was bullied, and, as she said:
Well, I wasn’t very into school. So I didn’t graduate. I was very stubborn and I was very, a rebel. So, and I do blame a little of that on the teachers and the school system, because I was one of those who got bullied. And I would bring it up to the attention of them and I feel they would just kind of brush me off and, you know, I also started doing a lot of, well, I... was unhappy. I would skip that class … Yeah, so by 10th grade, I was already, you know, a dropout.

Hercules, Libby’s spouse, dropped out at the same age. He too became disconnected from school:

I didn’t graduate either. Going through the whole school system and …. I liked school. But when I got to 10th grade I, well, I didn’t go to school for like the first two months because I was out working in the fields with my family. And when I went back, went to work on it, I think it was like, towards the end of October. And I was way behind, I could never catch up, and then I was [a] troublemaker. And there was this one teacher who did not like me at all and I … At one point, he would always yell at me and I felt like he wanted to fight me all the time. At one point, I stood up to him and I wanted to fight him back. Then I got expelled. So I never went back to school. And then a few years later, I actually wanted to go back to school.
These descriptions of the dropping out process may provide a clue as to why the parents focused so heavily on aspirations with their own children. In each of these narratives, the parents take some responsibility for their own lack of motivation in school and each has lived with the consequences of either having a limited education or trying to continue their schooling while juggling parenthood and work. Even in cases where there were obvious structural barriers to completing school (Libby was being bullied and Hercules was working in the fields with his family), the parents blamed their own problem partially on self-motivation. In fact, Hercules, who started his dropping out process by doing field work, still has encouraged his son to pick asparagus. The cultural narrative that the participants deployed in parenting their own children were therefore a continuation of the narratives they used to explain their own failures, failures they sometimes felt more acutely in the wake of their transition to parenthood.

**Conclusion**

Latino children in the United States have lower rates of educational attainment than any other racial or ethnic population, despite the high academic aspirations of their families (Hill and Torres 2010, Kao and Tienda 1998). Sociologists have considered many possible explanations for this problem (Crosnoe 2005). In chapter six, I looked at the community of Sunnyside as a microcosm for understanding how parenting approaches may contribute to these poor outcomes. I suggest here that the parenting I witnessed does indeed deviate from the type of cognitive nurturing that is widely endorsed by educators and parents in the United States (Schaub 2010),
however, I complicate those findings by looking at the role that local institutions, and particularly educational institutions, play in limiting the capacity of Mexican origin parents to develop their children educationally, despite their best intentions. Therefore, while the cultural toolkit that parents deploy does indeed shape their children’s educational trajectories, I ultimately argue that the racialized structure of the community and of its institutions is the driving force behind the cultural parenting approaches that the parents employ. These institutional factors are particularly potent in this community because the parents have low levels of educational attainment themselves, or limited exposure to the United States’ educational system, and are thus unusually dependent on the local educational system to guide their approach to supporting their children’s academic lives in the United States’ context. Those parents who did attend school in the United States were often exposed to a punitive model of schooling that paid little attention to developing the intrinsic motivations of their students. Moreover, the parents I interviewed were often grappling with self-blame around their own decisions to leave school early and so they were intent on not letting their children replicate the same mistakes.

Unlike scholarship which compares the relative influence of family, neighborhood, school and peer influences on youth outcomes, and thereby suggests these are distinct variables (for example Duncan et al. 2001), my findings here suggest that while parenting styles might well be a factor in Sunnyside’s low educational outcomes, those parenting styles cannot be divorced from the institutional context in which they have developed. Moreover, for young parents who recently left school or are still trying to get an education, their experiences as students strongly affect
their approach to being parents of students. Parenting approaches are dictated by the cultural toolkit that parents have available to them.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Class Reproduction or Surviving Adversity?

When I began this book, I said sociologists care about parenting in ethnic subcommunities because we want to understand how parenting can either serve to reproduce class stratification or can be protective in adverse conditions. I particularly focused on families with a mother and a father present, noting that in past research, immigrant children raised in such families have better segmented assimilation outcomes than their peers (Haller et al. 2011), even in the face of adverse conditions such as poverty. I wanted to understand what it was about the presence of fathers, in particular, that might explain this resiliency. I also deliberately sought to do research in a community where little or no research has been done before: a Mexican origin, new immigrant destination that parents seek out because there are agricultural industry jobs and a “peaceful” lifestyle. Sunnyside is also a small city that is marked by gang violence, substance abuse, concentrated poverty, racism and little room for socio-economic mobility. As more and more Mexican origin people live in secondary receiving communities, understanding parenting in this type of context will be important to our overall understanding of whether Mexican Americans will have the room to excel in new immigrant destinations or whether they will be pushed into a kind of permanent underclass.

As a whole, the parents had remarkably similar goals for their children; they wanted them to stay out of trouble, to succeed in school and to join the middle class. I found that most of the parents
used largely authoritarian parenting strategies to try to achieve this goal, in concert with parenting techniques that were intended to keep children culturally close to their families of origin and to Mexican culture. Although my research cannot speak to these children’s futures, based on the academic literature and my community observations, I suspect that the parenting I observed is likely to both be protective against adversity and to contribute to social reproduction.

The fathers, especially, defined their responsibility as protecting their children. The strategies they deployed to protect the children have been shown, through other research, to be effective ways of keeping children safe. One of the things that many of them did was insisting on complete obedience, from a young age, with a goal of being able to maintain control of their children in their adolescence. Some studies on adolescent well-being in adverse environments show that this type of parenting may be protective (Furstenberg et al. 1999). They also sought to limit their children’s peer networks because peer associations can lead to gang involvement, alcohol abuse or drug use. Many sociological studies have shown that being embedded in some peer social networks does indeed shape youth’s probability of engaging in risky activities (Cavanagh 2007; Kramer and Vaquera 2011; Lakon and Valente 2012). In fact, the fathers themselves had to change their peer networks in order to give up risky activities, like too much “partying.”

Many parents sought to protect their children by engaging them in strict religious practice. The evangelical Christian parents did not see religion as something one does only on Sundays. Religious faith is expected to permeate every aspect of a person’s life, because religiosity consists of having a personal relationship with Jesus. I do not know how the children felt about
this religious practice for but the young parents who had converted over to this type of faith, they perceived that their conversions had facilitated their ability to give up significant drug addictions, and other seemingly intractable problems. Given the literature, it seems probable that if the children do grow up following the teachings of the Pentecostal churches, it is likely to help them to stay away from drugs and alcohol abuse. One, large, national, randomized study on adolescents showed that even after controlling for family background and self-esteem, religious interest and religious participation are associated with lower rates of smoking, alcohol use, marijuana use, truancy, sexual activity and depression (Sinha, Cnaan and Gelles 2007). Another, smaller study that focused on Hispanic youth in the Cincinnati area, found that frequent church attendance correlated with lower use of alcohol (King and Vidourek 2010).

Parents also actively sought to keep their children busy with sports and work because they wanted to create too busy a lifestyle for their children to get involved in drugs and gangs. High levels of parental monitoring like this are likely to make it harder for children to get into trouble. Past research has shown an association between adolescent participation in extracurricular activities and positive educational and career outcomes (Guest and Schneider 2003). The association between participation in sports and positive outcomes for adolescents is strongest in lower-performing schools, such as the schools of Sunnyside (Guest and Schneider 2003). Guest and Schneider (2007) argue that in lower-performing schools, sports participation is seen as a route to social mobility and therefore argue that the assumption of an identity as an athlete is conducive to general educational attainment and achievement. Participation in contact sports, however, is associated with higher tendencies towards violence (Kreager 2007) and the pro-
social benefits of sports for recent immigrants has been questioned (Jiang and Peterson 2012).
From the academic literature, it is not clear how this parenting strategy is likely to affect youth’s safety.
More than anything else, parents sought to protect their children by keeping them close to their familial, Mexican traditional values. They did so by basing their own parenting on that of their parents, by limiting the children’s exposure to those outside of their own family and by insisting that the youth to do similar manual labor to that of their parents. Studies have demonstrated that Latino immigrants’ acculturation to U.S. values may be negatively associated with earnings and likelihood of engaging in dangerous activities, like substance abuse (Cavanagh 2007; Valdez 2006; Zhou 1997). Keeping children close to the family means keeping them closer to Mexican culture. Overall, it seems likely that all of these parenting strategies are indeed well-designed to protect children from the risks of gangs, drugs, and criminal justice involvement, even if they look nothing like the ideal parenting described by Baumrind (1968) and her intellectual followers.
These observations are in line with what I saw at the parent engagement center that I visited on one of my first days of field work, where I perused the many Spanish-language handouts on gang awareness and drug use prevention. What the parents are doing well is exactly what the pamphlets told them to do: keep kids away from drugs, alcohol and gangs. I doubt that most of the parents I interviewed ever read those exact pamphlets but I think it is striking that the parents were most effective in doing the one thing that the school literature seemed to support and care about: preventing crime and delinquency.
Then, I think about what the pamphlets, at that school-based institution, did not include. There was nothing on how to foster children’s interest in reading. I did not note seeing anything suggesting that parents should spend time reading to their children or listening to their children read. I did not see anything about how to encourage and guide children’s natural inclination to hypothesize and experiment, as a method of teaching them scientific thinking. There were no exercises on how to identify teaching moments in daily life. There was nothing on how to get a youth ready for higher education, how to apply for financial aid or how to help a young person to take college entrance exams, despite the fact that almost every parent I met wanted their children to go to college. Mexican immigrants and their children perform a critical economic function in the Yakima Valley. They do the dangerous, backbreaking work of cultivating, processing and manufacturing the food products that sustain the big agri-businesses in the area. From a Marxist standpoint, the white, moneyed power structure of the Yakima Valley has little economic interest in raising a generation of young, Mexican origin people who will earn a college degree and refuse to do that type of labor. I am sure that if I were to ask the teachers I met whether their goal was to maintain the current class structure, they would be bewildered. Nevertheless, there has been plenty of persuasive sociological literature that shows exactly how the structure of schooling contributes to class reproduction (e.g. Bowles and Gintis 1976, 2002; Lucas 1999; Oakes [1985]2002; Willis 1977). I cannot help but see characteristics of Sunnyside like the lack of Latino teachers, the lack of information for families on educational options, and the pedagogical approach of the school as part of a larger system that limited the opportunities for Mexican origin children and youth to attain socio-economically.
Unfortunately, although I think many parents who I met were effective in keeping their children safe in the face of risks, I suspect that most were unable to prepare their children to attain economic mobility through education. The parents believed that their job was to push children to want to succeed but they did not actually intercede in their children’s education in a way that would make success possible. Most of the parents had negative experiences of school themselves and limited academic knowledge. If the school district had made a concerted effort to educate the parents about academic achievement, about fostering intrinsic pleasure in learning and in preparing children for future academic success, the picture might have looked very different. However, absent that information, parents were essentially trying to navigate the educational system without even the most basic information about how it worked. The parents fell back on using the same authoritarian strategies that they had designed to promote their children’s safety, and the children were raised to see school as a place where they were yelled at, asked to memorize disconnected bits of information and required to complete endless multiple choice tests. When the students struggled in school or resisted attending school, their parents disciplined them or sent to them to do physical labor, with the hope that they would develop a greater desire to study. At best, they were given the time to study by well-intentioned parents, but they had no one at home or at school to show them the pleasure of making sense of a complicated math problem or of losing themselves in a book.
Parenting in a New Immigrant Destination

The demographic history of Sunnyside and the history of immigration into Sunnyside create the context in which families operate. Sunnyside was, in recent memory, a mostly white community and at the time of my research, Sunnyside was controlled by white leaders, including in the schools, in political office and in industry. Racial segregation limits Mexican origin people’s social capital and ultimately their knowledge about how to attain mobility, such as through a higher education. Without that kind of cultural capital, people fall back on the parenting of their parents’ generation, parenting that is not necessarily conducive to socio-economic achievement in the United States, even though it has other protective characteristics.

Sunnyside’s demographic history and labor market structure also dictate how parenting is likely to be shared between men and women. Historically, the people who came to Sunnyside were men, who came as migrant workers. Although today, most Mexican origin people in Sunnyside are not migrant workers, that history of men working in the United States and women staying home in Mexico, still lingers in how people parent. Men also have markedly better job prospects in Sunnyside than women do, which further dictates how men and women are likely to divide breadwinning tasks.

Scholars have made much of the familism that characterizes Mexican origin families. While I too observed close kin relationships and a strong culture of mutual family support, I do not see these qualities as being purely cultural in nature. In fact, many other communities have strong cultures of kin support (e.g. Stack 1974) because extended family networks are critical to
survival in harsh economic environments. I interviewed families that had more than a dozen people clustered into one tiny trailer. One could call that a culture of familism, but it was also a mechanism for surviving on a tiny household income. Having children babysit for younger siblings, or even work in the fields with their parents, may seem like outgrowths of familism, but child labor also serves a practical function of sustaining families that are living on the economic margins. Purely cultural theories of parenting have limited usefulness in explaining how families go about the business of socializing their children. In this book, I have sought to consider culture as an outgrowth of larger structures.

Policy Implications

At the beginning of this book, I discussed the policies that have focused on trying to get men in low-income, ethnic minority communities to participate in parenting, on the theory that having two, involved parents can help children to excel. These policies try to create cultural changes that will make men want to be involved parents, often by seeking to shift the definition of masculinity. The men I interviewed in the Yakima Valley are those who co-reside with their children and who want to do right by their family. They are the men who have, by and large, already bought into a vision of fatherhood that includes financially supporting ones’ children and keeping them safe. No matter their intentions, however, I found that the men I interviewed and met in Sunnyside are caught in a situation where they have very little room to meet their own expectations as fathers. Bad working conditions, long hours, and poor wages are not conducive
to involved parenting. Since field workers are disproportionately male, these labor market practices are particularly relevant for fathering. Hercules explained his reservations about staying in Sunnyside, “What makes it hard is, I think the economy. People don’t earn the money they need to earn. So they’re out working, working, and working and not paying attention to the community, to kids and what not. That’s what it makes it hard, I think.” Salvador told me that children in Sunnyside are truant and run the streets because:

The father and the mother … They don’t pay attention in the, in the family …

Yeah, they work and they don’t pay much attention to the children … And others drink and don’t pay attention to the family either. Therefore, the children decide what to do on their own … And I think that the family, the father and the mother are guilty for letting their child do what he, she wants.

Unlike Salvador, I would not call the father and mother guilty. I would call them trapped. While authors like William Julius Wilson (1997) have talked about the hardships faced by African American men in inner city communities, where they have no work and no sense of the dignity that comes with work, in Sunnyside, fatherhood is challenging because men work such extreme and erratic hours, for little pay.

While mass changes in labor policy in immigrant dominated industries might be hard to implement (and hard to sell politically), I see somewhat more room for hope in the schools. Many educational scholars have demonstrated better models for teaching than what I saw in Sunnyside (Ravitch 2010). The schools in Sunnyside are not horribly crowded or under-
resourced, like the ones described by educational researcher Kozol (1991). Some of the teachers are skilled. Their pedagogy, however, and the curriculum they use are stifling and, at least in the school where I observed, the general tolerance for teachers using shame, yelling and humiliation as educational tools was disturbing. These are not just the schools where children are learning, or failing to learn, today. These are often the same schools where the parents learned what it means to get an education.

Schools could take simple steps to significantly improve parental involvement in education. It would be relatively straightforward to provide Spanish language instruction on how to help children to enjoy learning and to make connections between school learning and what they learned in daily life. Families tended to see education as a means to financial success but there was little emphasis on learning as an end onto itself, and indeed as a source of joy and fulfilment in life.

Parents in Sunnyside clearly needed more specific guidance on how to support their children’s educational paths. The parents cared passionately about education but they were not familiar enough with the educational system to help their children through the process. Their lack of knowledge, combined with the pedagogical methods favored at the schools, contributed to low educational attainment levels in the Sunnyside schools. There is no reason why the schools could not actively seek to hire bilingual teachers and to develop a culturally competent outreach program to engage parents in helping their children to go forward in their schooling. Existing teachers could receive training in cultural competence. Schools could also be more creative in how they engage with families. The teacher who held the desk scrubbing party demonstrated
that if schools give Mexican origin parents comfortable ways to engage in their children’s schooling, the parents will respond with enthusiasm. Until such a time as that happens, however, parents will continue to have only their high aspirations and little else with which to guide their children forward.

**Contributions to Future Research Directions**

Early in the chapter on research methods, I noted that ethnographic, qualitative research is well-suited to doing exploratory research on a topic that has not been studied extensively in the past. This research project opens the door to other researchers who are interested in understanding the relationship between parenting and segmented assimilation trajectories for Mexican origin families in new immigrant destinations. These findings can also speak to ways in which future studies could be designed to best capture the complexity of the relationship between parenting and youth outcomes. In each chapter, I emphasized how parenting approaches and strategies are embedded in larger structures, such as the local labor markets and the schools. Future research projects that look at segmented assimilation pathways should be designed using hierarchical models so as to allow scholars to consider the effects of family level factors like parenting approaches, along with macro-level variables describing the schools and labor markets in which the families are raising their children.

I would like to see future research studies that more explicitly draw out the relationship between some of the structural variables that I identified and parenting approaches. For example, I
explained that parents perceive work demands as being an impediment to their involvement in their children’s supervision and schooling. Time studies that specifically look at the relationship between precarious work/farm labor and parenting activities would be an illuminating way of determining how parenting is affected by work. For Mexican origin immigrants, who tend to be concentrated in a small set of types of jobs, time studies could look at the effect of work on parenting on a job type by job type basis. Ultimately, given the correlation between gender and job type, such a study could more definitively help to show how gendered trends in Mexican origin parenting relate to the structure and demands of the labor market. Large comparative studies of gender roles in Mexican origin families across locations could also help to elucidate the relationship between the labor market and gendered divisions of labor in the homes.

Some of the parenting approaches that the families discussed have, to my knowledge, never been used in longitudinal, quantitative studies on segmented assimilation pathways. I have found some discussion in the literature of parents taking their children to work in the fields with them (Auerbach 2006; Ceballo et al. 2014). I also found literature identifying the risks associated with children and youth laboring in agriculture (Human Rights Watch 2000). I found no studies that looked at the long-term effects of children’s participation of agriculture as an independent variable in predicting segmented assimilation trajectories. More specifically, we do not know how early labor as a farm worker affects educational outcomes, future earnings, and the likelihood of facing problems such as incarceration. This topic seems particularly ripe for study because in the generally homogenous sample that I used, there was still large variation in how parents felt about children doing agricultural work and in whether their children did field work.
Parents in this study believed that participation in sports and religion would protect children from the risks of their community. As I outlined earlier in this chapter, it is unclear from the literature how likely these sports are to be protective for this particular population. While religiosity has been shown to have some positive effects on youth, we do not know whether participation in the specific types of worship that these families favored is protective. It would be useful to explore the empirical basis behind these beliefs in greater detail. Qualitative research tells us a great deal about how people describe their lives and beliefs. It is less useful for measuring how close those beliefs are to empirical fact. It will take subsequent research, using different research designs, to demonstrate definitively how the parenting I described here will affect the trajectories of the growing population of Mexican origin youth in secondary receiving communities.
References


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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview Questions for Men

History in Area

- When and where were you born?
- How do you like living here?

Schooling

- Can you tell me a little bit more about your experience with school?
- What made you stop going to school when you did?
- Did having kids make you think differently about going to school?

Work

- Tell me about the jobs you have had in the past.
- Where are you working now (if working)?
- If you could do something else, would you? Why?
- Have you ever experienced discrimination at work?
- Did having kids change how you think about work?

Childhood

- Can you tell me about your parents?
- Do you think your Dad was a good father?
- What is your relationship with your parents like?
- Did your relationship with your parents change after you had your first child?
- Where do (did) your parents work?
• What do you typically do when you get together with extended family?

Social Networks
• Do you belong to any groups, like a church or PTA?
• What do you do with X group?
• Did you get more or less involved with X group after having your child?

Relationships
• Are you married or do you live with someone?
• How long have you and your partner been together?
• Is your partner the mother of your kids?
• Does your partner work outside of the home?
• In your home, who makes the decisions?
• In your house, who does the cooking and cleaning?
• Do you and your partner agree about most things?
• Are you happy in your relationship right now?

Effects of Fatherhood
• Did your relationship with your partner change after you had kids?
• Can you tell me about your kids and their ages?
• Had you planned on having children at the time when you did?
• Where did you get your ideas about how to be a good father?
• Do you think your ideas on how to be a good father come from Mexico or from here?
• Are there differences in what fathers do in Mexico versus what they do here?
• Is there anyone that you know who is a particularly good father? What does that person do that makes them good?

• Does the Church help you figure out to be a good father?

• Did you change your job, school plans, your relationship with your family or your relationship with your partner after you found out you were going to be a Dad?

• When you first imagined being a father, what did you think it would be like?

• Are you happy with yourself as a father?

• Do you live with your children all of the time, some of the time or not at all?

• When do you spend time with your kids?
  - Is your partner usually present when you are with your kids?

• What kinds of things do you do with your kids?

• Do you go to meetings at your kids’ school(s)? What are those meetings like?

• What do you imagine your kids doing when they grow up?

• Is there something special that you try to teach your kids?

• How do you go about teaching your kids to avoid dangerous things?

• Did having kids make you change anything else about your life?

• Is there anything else that you think I should have asked or that you want to tell me.

• May I speak to your partner to get her ideas too?
Interview Questions for Women

History in the Area

- When and where were you born?
- Tell me about what it is like to live here.

Work

- Where are you working now (if working)?
- Do you like this job?
- Did having kids change how you think about work?
- How does your partner feel about your working outside of the home?

Relationships

- How long have you and your partner been together?
- What does your partner do for a living?
- Does your partner take work seriously?
- Does your partner earn enough to support the family?
- In your home, who makes the decisions?
- In your house, who does the cooking and cleaning?
- Do you and your partner agree about most things?
- Is there anything you would like to change about your relationship?

Parenting

- Did your relationship with your partner change after you had kids?
- How old are your kids?
• Had you planned on having children at the time when you did?

• What were you doing when you first found out that you were going to be a mother?
  o Did your boyfriend change his job, relationships with family members, school plans or your relationship with you after you found out you were going to be a mother?
  o Did your boyfriend grow closer to extended family after you had kid(s)?
  o Did your boyfriend talk to you about his hopes for being a Dad? If so, what did he talk about?

• Are there differences in what fathers do in Mexico versus what they do here?

• Do you live with your children all of the time?

• When do you spend time with your kids?
  o Is your partner usually present when you are with your kids?

• What kinds of things do you do with your kids?

• What do you imagine your kids doing when they grow up?

• How do you go about teaching your kids to avoid dangerous things?

• Did having kids make you change anything else about your life?

• Overall, how happy are you with your life?

• Is there anything else that you think I should have asked or that you want to tell me.