Hispanics Staying Home for College
An Explanation for the Hispanic-White Educational Gap?

Ruth N. López Turley*
and
Matthew Desmond

Department of Sociology
University of Wisconsin – Madison

* This project was funded by the Texas Higher Education Opportunity Project, Princeton University, co-sponsored by the Spencer and Ford Foundations.
Abstract

For many students and their parents, the ability to attend college while living at home is an important factor in selecting a post-secondary institution. Because living at home during college offers students a way to remain embedded in family networks while defraying a significant amount of expenses, we expect this option to be quite attractive for Hispanics. Among Texas high school seniors, we find that 1) the group most likely to feel it is important to live at home during college is Hispanics, including those with highly educated parents; 2) net of other factors, students who feel it is important to stay home are significantly disadvantaged in terms of applying to any college and even more disadvantaged in terms of applying to a four-year college or a selective college; and 3) taking account of the preference to stay home significantly reduces the Hispanic-white gap in college application.
Hispanics Staying Home for College
An Explanation for the Hispanic-White Educational Gap?

State of the Problem

It is well-established that Hispanic youth, who make up no less than one-fifth of public school students (U.S. Census Bureau 2002), are worse off in every conceivable measure of educational achievement and attainment at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels, and that their access to and attendance at institutions of higher education remains, as it did nearly forty years ago (Astin 1982), the lowest in the country vis-à-vis whites, blacks, and Asians.

In a nation where individuals can be more or less confident that their economic prosperity, familial stability, and physical vitality will increase with educational attainment, Hispanic students have the lowest educational aspirations and expectations of all major racial groups.\(^1\) White, black, and Asian high school seniors are far more likely to submit college applications than Hispanic seniors. According to one study, only 47% of Hispanic seniors submitted an application, and a quarter of those, a group that included many high-achieving students, applied to only one college (Hurtado et al. 1997). Only 35% of Hispanics who graduated high school—and, unlike other racial groups, the majority of Hispanics do not (Chapa and De La Rosa 2004)—enrolled in a postsecondary institution in 1996, compared to 45% of white high school graduates (National Center for Education Statistics 1997). Of those Hispanics enrolled in postsecondary institutions, most attend community and two-year colleges (Carter and Wilson, 1992; Chapa and De La Rosa 2004), institutions that do far less than selective four-year universities to equip students with the skills, network ties, and pedigrees necessary to compete in a swelling knowledge economy (Lee and Frank 1990). Hispanic students who do attend four-year universities are less likely to attend prestigious institutions, relative to Asian and white students (Karen 2002); and those select few who enrolled in four-year universities were more likely to drop out after their first year, with an attrition rate of 34%, a rate that far outpaces that of blacks (29%), whites (25%), and Asians (14%) (Peng 1988).

College completion rates show equally alarming patterns. In 1980, only 8% of college graduates were Hispanic, and that percentage rose a mere two points in 2000, a paltry increase given the rapid demographic growth of Hispanic youth over the last two decades (National Center for Education Statistics 1997; Tienda 2006). In aggregate, Asians are four times, and whites are nearly three times, as likely to complete college as Hispanics, a general pattern that holds even after controlling for socioeconomic status (Camburn 1990). By one estimate, while 49% of Asians, 30% of whites, and 16% of blacks enrolled in kindergarten today will grow up to earn a bachelor’s degree, only 6% of Hispanics will obtain the same level of schooling (Williams 2003).

However low the overall rates of Hispanic educational achievement, aspirations, and attainment,

---

\(^1\) We use the term Hispanic to refer to any person who self-identifies as Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, or Other Latino.
and however high the overall rates of Hispanic high school and college attrition (Kaufman et al. 2001), some analysts recently have criticized the perseverate tendency to pass over intraracial differentiation. As Mexicans, Puerto-Ricans, and Cubans experience different modes of social integration and discrimination, and as each group has been conditioned through diverse historical processes, some have suggested that we should trisect the homogenizing header ‘Hispanic,’ investigating how some Hispanic subgroups might be privileged or disadvantaged relative to others (e.g., Crosnoe 2005; Bohon et al. 2006). Those who have pursued this line of thought generally agree that Mexican Americans are the most disadvantaged, scoring lower on standardized tests and other measures of achievement (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Crosnoe 2005), possessing lower educational aspirations and expectations (Bohon et al. 2006), and completing college at a lower rate than other Hispanic subgroups (Vernez and Mizell 2002; Chapa and Valencia 1993). Among adult Hispanics in 1990, 20% of Cubans, 16% of Central and South Americans, 10% of Puerto Ricans, and only 4% of Mexicans had completed four or more years of college (National Center for Education Statistics 1997).

It follows, then, that to understand the dire state of Hispanics in the U.S. education system, we must focus on how Mexican American students seem to be falling through the cracks even as they are rising, *en masse*, at a population pace that is fundamentally altering the American landscape.

**Divergent Explanations and their Shortcomings**

Researchers attempting to account for the low rates of educational achievement and attainment for Hispanics in general, and Mexican Americans in particular, have advanced three types of complementary explanations based on (1) socioeconomic status and parental education, (2) inadequate schools and teachers, and (3) the experiences faced by recent immigrants. Let us briefly take up these explanations in turn.

*Socioeconomic status and parental education.* — When calculating racial gaps in achievement and enrollment, socioeconomic status and parental education are regarded widely as the most powerful predictors (Kao and Thompson 2003). Recent research approximates that one in five Hispanics lives below the poverty line (Tienda 2006), a grim economic condition that severely limits the resources available to Hispanic children. For example, only 20% of Hispanic students reported having more than one computer at home, compared to 27% of blacks, 42% of Asians, and 57% of whites (Ferguson 2003). It is not surprising, then, that dozens of researchers have found that Hispanic students’ educational achievement increases when their parents’ socioeconomic status improves (Hauser and Phang, 1993; Vernez and Abrahamse, 1996; Brooks-Gunn and Duncan 1997). Parental education levels are a particularly important component of socioeconomic status, as researchers have found that this factor explains a significant amount of the low levels of Hispanic educational performance (Chapa and Valencia 1993).²

Nevertheless, the low aspirations and expectations of Mexican American students seem to persist

² Relative to other racial groups, Hispanic parents have particularly low levels of educational attainment, with Mexican Americans having the lowest levels compared to other Hispanic subgroups (Zambrana 1995).
even after controlling for socioeconomic status; and, although a monotonic rise in educational ambition has been documented among white students for each increasing interval of parental education, the same cannot be said for Hispanic students (Bohon et al. 2006). Moreover, as network analysts have long argued, socioeconomic status manifests itself through students’ access to information only available through social ties (Kerckhoff and Campbell 1977; Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch 1995). Conventional status attainment models that do not take into account the ways in which socioeconomic status is transferred to students through multiple social networks fail to grasp the important interconnection between human capital and social capital which Coleman (1988) articulated so forcefully.

Inadequate schools and teachers. — Pointing to the fact that Hispanic students are more racially segregated in the educational realm than whites, blacks, or Asians, some analysts have attributed low levels of Hispanic achievement and attainment to poor schools and unqualified teachers. High amounts of school segregation are negatively correlated with college enrollment and completion (Orfeld and Yun 1999). In Texas, the state with the largest proportion of Mexican Americans (as well as the state from which our data come), Hispanic students attending public schools are more likely to be taught by uncertified teachers than their white counterparts (Valencia 2000), and they are more likely to drop out relative to other students (Haney, 2000; Valencia 2000). Some researchers, however, have cast doubt on the importance of deficient schools and teachers, claiming that, on average, individual performance is affected only meagerly by school quality, if at all (Bryk et al. 1993; Arum 2000). And at least one researcher has argued that Hispanic students in segregated schools, especially those employing minority teachers, are more receptive to schooling than their peers in more integrated schools (Goldsmith 2004).

The struggles of immigrants. — Immigrants and children of immigrants comprise roughly half of the entire population of Hispanic youth (Kao and Thompson 2003), and Mexican immigrants — foreign-born Mexican women, in particular — have exceptionally low levels of educational attainment (Portes and Rumbaut 1996; National Center for Education Statistics 1997). As such, some researchers have accounted for educational inequalities affecting Hispanic students by pointing to the unique struggles facing recent immigrants. Yet this strand of literature is full of contradictory findings. Some have found that Spanish use at home is associated with low aspirations and expectations (e.g., Valdés 2001), while others have found that students benefit greatly from bilingualism (e.g., Bohon et al. 2006). Moreover, while some claim that first generation Hispanic students fair worse than second or third generation students (White and Kaufman, 1997; White and Glick 2000) and that they have lower levels of attainment than native-born Hispanics (Wojtkiewicz and Donato 1995; Tienda 2006), others have put forth opposite observations, finding that, compared to first generation Hispanic students, second generation students have lower levels of achievement (Rumbaut 1996; Driscoll 1999; Hirschman 2001) and less ambitious educational aspirations (Kao and Tienda, 1995; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995).

That socioeconomic status, parental education, school quality, and immigrant status are

---

3 Cubans, by contrast, do well in school, some argue, because they exhibit high levels of trust in the educational system, a system that has historically excluded and underprivileged Mexican Americans (Cheng and Starks 2002).
important predictors of Mexican American educational performance and completion, few would deny. However, each explanation is accompanied by contradictory findings. Taken together, these explanations cannot fully account for Mexican American underachievement. Another kind of explanation follows the writings of Bourdieu (1980) and Coleman (1988) and investigates how social capital affects educational outcomes. This approach is attractive for our purposes not only because it incorporates the three explanations highlighted above within a relational framework and has produced some of the most fertile and compelling research in the sociology of education over the last twenty years (Portes 1998; Dika and Singh 2002) but also because it has been deployed to elucidate how a specific variety of social capital — familism — both helps and handicaps Mexican Americans in school.

**Hispanic Familism**

Familism can be defined as a social pattern whereby individual interests, decisions, and actions are conditioned by a network of relatives thought in many ways to take priority over the individual. This social pattern manifests itself through three dimensions: (1) the attitudinal, expressed in dispositions, values, and beliefs that prioritize the welfare of the family, (2) the behavioral, expressed in everyday actions, or major decisions, informed by one’s attachment to family ties, and (3) the structural, expressed in the spatial architecture of family networks (Valenzuela and Dornbusch 1994; Lugo Steidel and Contreras 2003). Researchers from several disciplines have observed that familism is an important component of Hispanic culture, especially Mexican American culture (Marín and Marín 1991; Oyserman et al. 1992; Okagaki and Frencsh 1998). At the attitudinal level, Hispanic adults and adolescents value interdependence, as well as family support and obligations, more so than whites (Sabogal et al. 1987; Harrison et al. 1990; Fuligni et al. 1999). At the behavioral level, Hispanics report higher degrees of familial cohesion than whites (Sabogal et al. 1987), and Mexican Americans assist family members in instrumental ways more so than whites (Sarkisian et al., 2006). And at the structural level, Hispanics, and Mexican Americans in particular, live in larger and denser kinship networks than whites (Valenzuela and Dornbusch 1994; Sarkisian et al., 2006).

It is no wonder, then, that researchers have explored how Hispanic familism affects educational outcomes. By and large, they find that Hispanic youth benefit greatly from extended family ties. Psychologists have found that familism produces positive psychological effects (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995; Fuligni et al. 1999; though see Mirande 1980), while educational scholars argue that familism can mitigate the negative experiences associated with minority status (Zhou and Bankston 1998). High academic performance of Mexican American students (as well as South Asian students [Caplan et al. 1991]) has been linked to social capital provided by family and peer networks (Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch 1995; Ream 2005). Some have found that, while whites gain nothing from familism when it comes to achievement, Hispanics gain much, on the condition that their parents have at least twelve years of schooling (Valenzuela and Dornbusch 1994). Others cite a positive association between familism and students’

---

4 In a similar vein, some have argued that economic stability, or lack thereof, informs network ties in specific ways. For instance, when confronted with problematic situations in schools, middle-class parents, regardless of race, tend to work collectively to confront the situation, behavior not exhibited by working and poor parents (Horvat et al. 2003).
aspirations and expectations (Pribesh and Downey 1999; Quian and Blair 1999; Smith-Maddox 1999), and one study suggests that extended family ties help Hispanic students make informed educational decisions (Valadez 2002). In addition, several studies document a positive relationship between social capital and high school and college completion among ‘at risk’ youth (Furstenberg and Hughes 1995; Yan 1999).

While most have focused on the overwhelmingly positive effects of Hispanic familism on educational outcomes, some researchers have found negative effects (e.g., Portes and Landolt 1996; Ream 2003). Portes (1998) has pointed out that dense network ties, which often place weighty demands on their talented and privileged members and which value group conformity, can stifle high-achievers’ motivation and accomplishments. Noting that intelligence is a culturally-conditioned entity (Sternberg 1985), some have found that Hispanic parents value the noncognitive and social aspects of intelligence as much as the cognitive and individualistic aspects, a precedence that might result in Hispanic youth underperforming in (very cognitive and individualistic) educational evaluations (Okagaki and Sternberg 1993). Indeed, some researchers have attributed the poor performance of Hispanic students to the unique demands and restrictions placed on them by their parents (Okagaki and Sternberg 1993; Brooks-Gunn and Markman 2005).

Familistic networks comprised mainly of immigrants may be accompanied by their own set of disadvantages. Among Mexicans, immigrant parents tend to favor conformism, while native-born parents value autonomy; and the former trait is correlated with low educational achievement (Okagaki and Sternberg 1993). Rumbaut (1977) found strong bonds of familistic solidarity to be associated with weak test scores and grades. Alternatively, immigrant students and children of immigrants may take advantage of resources located in intergenerational network relations more readily than their third-generation counterparts, who are more peer-oriented (Zhou 1997; Kao 1999). The peer networks in which Hispanic students are embedded, some contend, discourage educational success. For example, 22% of Hispanic students polled in a recent study claimed that “my friends make fun of people who try to do well in school,” while only 13% of whites reported likewise (Ferguson 2003).

Currently, there is not enough evidence to conclude precisely how familism affects Mexican American students’ performance and attainment; however, there is certainly enough evidence to conclude that this topic deserves further investigation. Exploring patterns of college application provides an especially fruitful opportunity to understand how familism might serve or disserve students of Mexican American descent. During this critical juncture, students must decide if and where they will apply to college, and, for most, going to college requires leaving home, severing oneself from familistic support networks. A tension thus presents itself. The student is pulled in two competing directions: One impulse encourages the student to cultivate herself, to leave home if the best education requires it so, while another impulse encourages the student to stay put, to uphold familistic ties that have played such an important role in establishing her identity and, perhaps, her academic success thus far. If one of the most important components of

5 This review, however brief, demonstrates that both family and peer ties—and, we add, with Stanton-Salazar (1997), ties to institutional agents, such as teachers and counselors—matter when determining educational outcomes.
familism is the subordination of the self to the family (Lugo Steidel and Contreras 2003), then students with durable and deep family ties exploring the possibility of higher education might be reluctant to remove themselves from such networks. For these students, assuming they have the ability, track record, and drive to attend college, the question is not so much, ‘Where should I apply?’ but ‘Do I want to leave home?’

### Living at Home during College

Of course, there is a middle ground: Students may choose to live at home while attending college. For many students and their parents, the ability to attend a college or university while living at home is an important factor in selecting a post-secondary institution; in fact, 54% of parents of high school seniors in 1992 felt that it was important for their children to live at home during college, and 83% of those students agreed with their parents (Turley 2006). Even those living in rural areas, where post-secondary institutions are scarce, want to stay close to home. One survey found that nearly 75% of high school seniors living in rural Iowa communities believed it was very important to live near their parents during college (Johnson et al. 2005). Indeed, the chances a student will apply to a college increase as her household’s proximity to that college decreases (Weiler 1994). Because living at home during college offers students a way to remain embedded in family networks while defraying a significant amount of college expenses (e.g., rent, food, start-up costs, out-of-state tuition), we have strong reason to expect this option to be quite attractive for Hispanic students.

Living at home during college, however, may result in negative consequences regarding students’ educational attainment. First, familistic obligations might narrow students’ postsecondary opportunities, resulting in many colleges and universities being tossed aside as ‘discarded possibles,’ to borrow an expression from Bourdieu (1998 [1994]: 40). Such self-imposed restrictions, conditioned by familial relations, could force students to attend mediocre institutions close to home rather than top-notch institutions further away — or, worse, they could discourage students from applying to college at all (Wellman 1983; Portes 1998). Young adults who leave home to attend school obtain higher levels of educational attainment than those who stay home (White and Lacy 1997). Second, while living away from home during college cultivates students’ independence and establishes bonds of mutual respect between parents and children (Flanagan et al. 1993), living at home during college often whittles away students’ aspirations, as well as family ties (Dubas and Peterson 1996). Finally, a surfeit of responsibilities confronts students who live at home (e.g., caring for younger siblings, elderly parents, grandparents, or other relatives), and these obligations may obstruct them from studying.

For all these reasons, investigating if, and to what degree, Mexican Americans find it important to live at home during college, and the consequences of this decision on educational expectations, might help us better grasp their desperately low levels of educational attainment. We treat students’ preferences to stay home during college as a concrete measure of educational expectations, one based on a tangible action rather than on the conventional survey response to a query regarding hypothetical expectations: E.g., ‘Realistically speaking, how far do you think

---

6 In general, the likelihood of leaving home for college is higher for those whose parents’ income is higher (Mulder and Clark 2002).
you will go in school?'' While the latter measure is acceptable, and has been employed by countless researchers (e.g., Hout and Morgan 1975), it does not yield very detailed information. Our measure, by contrast, grounds expectations in a practical accomplishment, allowing us not only to gauge the extent to which students view attending college as a realistic option but also to examine the types of institutions they expect to attend.\(^7\) Unlike aspirations, then, which refer to what students hope to accomplish, and which tend to be inflated (Schneider and Stevenson 1999; Reynolds et al. 2006), expectations refer to what students believe is likely to occur (Mickelson 1990). In other words, expectations reflect students’ overall ambitions conditioned, and therefore attenuated, by available resources and opportunity structures.

This study focuses on two groups of high school seniors: those for whom the ability to live at home during college is important and those for whom it is not. Our goals are threefold: (1) to describe the extent to which this preference to live at home differs among racial groups, (2) to examine the extent to which these racial differences are due to socioeconomic factors, and (3) to investigate the association between this preference and educational expectations, as measured by whether and where students apply to college. In doing so, we hope to increase our sociological knowledge by concentrating on a dimension of educational stratification rarely emphasized in the literature — college application patterns\(^9\) — by traversing the black-white binary that continues to saturate most work on educational stratification (e.g., Hout and Morgan 1975; Morgan 1996), and by highlighting a unique mechanism, that of familism, that may help to explain why Hispanic youth lag so far behind other racial groups in every measure of educational success.

**Data & Methods**

This study draws upon data from the Texas Higher Education Opportunity Project (THEOP). The sample is comprised of 13,803 seniors attending 96 Texas public high schools in the spring of 2002, selected through stratified random sampling.\(^10\) Our study focuses on Hispanic (predominantly Mexican American) seniors, who make up 36% of the sample – a proportion almost as large as whites, who make up 39% of this Texas sample (see Table 1). All students were surveyed during their last semester in high school – a time when post-graduation plans, for most, should have been solidified. Data were collected through self-administered surveys, which, for the most part, were completed during class time (a small number of surveys were mailed to students).

---

\(^7\) This sample question was taken from the Survey of High School Seniors administered in the Spring of 2002 for the Texas Educational Opportunity Study.

\(^8\) Convincing evidence suggests that students who apply to college end up going to college, since the majority of postsecondary institutions are far from exclusive—in most cases, colleges do not select students but vice versa (Bowen and Bok 1998). Our own calculations based on NELS data find that, for the high school class of 1992, 96% of seniors who applied to at least one school were admitted by at least one school. This implies that examining the college(s) to which students submit an application will result in a solid demonstration of their educational expectations.

\(^9\) By contrast, most studies focus on college enrollment patterns and thereby capture a very different stage in the process of transitioning to college, one that occurs after students have self-selected during the application process.

\(^10\) All public high schools in Texas were included in the sampling frame except charter schools, special education schools, and schools with fewer than 10 seniors.
We focus on the preference to live at home during college and its influence on educational expectations. As mentioned earlier, we measure educational expectations by using college application as an indicator of concrete postsecondary educational plans. Students were asked if they had applied to college, to list their top five college preferences, and to indicate the colleges to which they had applied. Our main dependent variables are whether they had applied to 1) at least one college of any type, 2) at least one four-year college, and 3) at least one selective college. Selectivity was based on the US News and World Report, which groups schools into five categories: least selective, less selective, selective, more selective, and most selective. We defined students as having applied to a selective college if they had applied to at least one school categorized as either more selective or most selective.

Our measure of the importance of living at home during college is based on the question, “In choosing a college or university to attend, how important to you are/were each of the following? ... Ability to attend school while living at home.” Approximately 61% of the students responded that the ability to attend school while living at home was somewhat or very important. It is important to note that students who indicated that they did not aspire or expect to continue their education beyond high school were not asked about college applications or their preference to live at home during college, since these questions are irrelevant to them (this applied to about 6% of the sample). It should also be noted that about 50% of those who did not aspire or expect to continue their education were Hispanic students. Because this study is based only on students who expect to continue their education, this means that our findings may be somewhat conservative, given that students not expecting to go to college are systematically excluded.

There are of course many factors that have an important influence on whether and where students apply, which we try to take into account as much as possible. Academic achievement in high school is clearly an extremely important factor. We use class rank as a measure of achievement, given its special importance in Texas, where students in the top 10% of their class are guaranteed admission at any public school in the state. Although lower-ranking students are less likely to know their rank, students who did not know their rank (about 39% of the sample) were asked to provide their best estimate, yielding a high response rate of 97%. We also control for ascribed characteristics such as race, gender, and immigration status (whether they were born in the US), as well as an estimate of parents’ socioeconomic status, based on education and home ownership. For parents’ education, we use the highest level completed by either parent or guardian, so as to reduce the amount of missing data. All of the variables used in our analyses are summarized in Table 1.

THEOP data provide rich opportunities to explore questions of racial variation even though, for generalizability purposes, national data are usually more informative than regional data.

11 The US News and World Report ranks institutions based upon 15 indicators, including peer assessment surveys, retention and graduation rates, faculty resources, student academic performance (before college), alumni gifts, and financial resources. While many have criticized this ranking system, there is little doubt that the US News and World Report significantly influences how students view prospective institutions (see Chang and Osborn 2005).

12 Missing values were imputed for all variables except dependent variables.
However, the goal of this study is to focus on Hispanics, a rapidly growing yet understudied racial group. For this type of analysis, a sample with a large number and proportion of Hispanics is ideal. Compared to a comparable national dataset (NELS), THEOP not only has a much higher proportion of Hispanics (36%, compared to only 12% in NELS) but also a much higher number of Hispanics (about 4,200, compared to only 2,100 in NELS). This larger sample size may be important for detecting significant differences by race/ethnicity.

In what follows, we highlight differences between whites and Hispanics. We begin by comparing the importance of living at home during college by race as well as other factors. We then examine the association between the preference to live at home and educational expectations, as measured by college application. Finally, we use logistic regressions to predict the probability of applying to any college, a four-year college, and a selective college. We focus on the effect of having a preference to live at home during college, while controlling for numerous factors that have an important influence on college application. We recognize of course that we do not control for all other influences on college application, but we attempt to take account of at least the most influential factors that previous work has identified.

Results

Approximately 61% of the high school seniors in this Texas sample felt that the ability to live at home during college was important (see Table 1). But this proportion varies significantly for different groups of students. By race/ethnicity, Hispanics are the most likely to state that living at home is important (78%), followed by Blacks (63%), then Whites (44%). These differences are statistically significant, according to chi-squared tests. Furthermore, those born outside the US are significantly more likely to feel that living at home is important than those born in the US (75% vs. 59%). In addition, students whose parents are less educated are significantly more likely to feel it is important to live at home (83% of students whose parents have less than a high school education, compared to 36% of students whose parents have a graduate degree). Finally, by home ownership status, students whose parents rent their homes are significantly more likely to feel it is important to live at home than students whose parents own their homes (69% vs. 60%), suggesting that a lower socioeconomic status is associated with a higher likelihood of preferring to live at home during college.

The most significant differences in the preference to live at home during college were found among students of different racial groups and among students whose parents had different education levels. Since Hispanics have the lowest educational attainment of all US racial groups, the observed racial differences may be due to education differences instead of racial differences per se. However, Figure 1 shows that within each level of education, racial differences persist, such that Hispanics continue to be significantly more likely to feel that living at home is important even when compared to whites whose parents have a comparable education. Furthermore, the differences among racial groups increase as the level of education increases.

---

13 It is important to note that these percentages only refer to students who indicated that they aspired or expected to continue their education beyond high school. We expect that these percentages would be even higher if we were to add those who did not intend to continue their education beyond high school (6% of the sample, about 50% of which is Hispanic).
For example, among students whose parents’ highest level of education was less than a high school diploma, about 74% of whites felt it was important to stay home compared to 85% of Hispanics — a difference of about 11%. But among students whose parents had a graduate degree, 27% of whites and 58% of Hispanics felt that living at home was important — a difference of about 31%. Thus, differences among racial groups are greatest among those with the highest level of education. In fact, Hispanics whose parents have graduate degrees are more likely to feel it is important to live at home than whites whose parents only have some college. These findings suggest that educational differences do not seem to explain why Hispanics are much more likely to state that it is important for them to live at home during college.

This prevalent preference is a concern because it is associated with a significantly lower likelihood of applying to college, which is a good indicator of a high school student’s educational expectations. We find that, relative to students who felt it was not important to live at home during college, students who did feel this was important were significantly less likely to apply to at least one college of any type (51% vs. 81%), significantly less likely to apply to at least one four-year college (37% vs. 79%), and significantly less likely to apply to at least one selective college (12% vs. 52%). It is important to note that among students for whom living at home is not important, the likelihood of applying to any college and the likelihood of applying to a four-year college are about the same (81% and 79%). In contrast, among students for whom living at home is important, the likelihood of applying to a four-year college is much smaller than the likelihood of applying to any college (37% vs. 51%). This suggests that, among those who applied to any college, almost all students for whom living at home is not important applied to four-year colleges, while many of the students for whom living at home is important applied to two-year colleges. These findings suggest not only that there is a significant association between the preference to live at home and educational expectations but also that this preference is associated particularly with a lower likelihood of expecting to attend a four-year college or a selective college.

As shown in Figure 1, the preference to live at home during college is especially pronounced among Hispanics, where even Hispanics with highly educated parents are significantly more likely to have this preference than whites with highly educated parents. We have seen that this preference is a concern because it is associated with a significantly lower likelihood of applying to college. Furthermore, Figure 2 suggests that the white-Hispanic gap in college application is much smaller when the preference to live at home is taken into account. When comparing all students, regardless of their preferences, the college application gap between white and Hispanic students is substantial — a 13% difference in applying to any college, a 15% difference in applying to a four-year college, and a 23% difference in applying to a selective college (differences are highlighted by lines in Figure 2). However, among students who feel that it is important to live at home during college, the college application gap is very small or non-existent (0%-3%), suggesting that the preference to live at home may explain a large portion of the white-Hispanic college application gap.

[Figure 1 about here.]
The significant association between the preference to live at home during college and college application of course does not take account of the many other factors that could explain the likelihood of applying to college. While we do not claim to control for all of them, Table 2 attempts to take account of at least the most influential factors that previous work has identified. Logistic regressions report odds ratios for ease of interpretation, and standard errors are adjusted for clustering within high schools. Model 1 is a simple bivariate regression showing that Hispanics are significantly less likely to apply to college than whites – 42% less likely to apply to any college, 46% less likely to apply to a four-year college, and 69% less likely to apply to a selective college. Model 2 controls for whether it is important for the student to live at home during college and shows that students who prefer to live at home are significantly less likely to apply to college than those who do not – 68% less likely to apply to any college, 80% less likely to apply to a four-year college, and 84% less likely to apply to a selective college. After taking account of the preference to live at home, the college application gap between Hispanics and whites is much smaller for all three outcomes and is insignificant for applying to any college and applying to a four-year college. Model 3 controls for academic achievement (class rank), race, gender, immigration status, and socioeconomic status (parents’ highest level of education and whether they own their home). After taking account of these factors, students who prefer to live at home are still significantly less likely to apply to college than those who do not – 53% less likely to apply to any college, 70% less likely to apply to a four-year college, and 76% less likely to apply to a selective college. These results suggest that, net of other influential factors, students for whom the ability to live at home during college is important are significantly disadvantaged in terms of educational expectations, especially in terms of expecting to attend a four-year college or a selective college, and the preference to live at home seems to explain most of the college application gap between Hispanics and whites.

[Table 2 about here.]

Summary and Discussion

These analyses have shown that among Texas high school seniors, Hispanics are the most likely to feel that living at home during college is important. The lower education of their parents does not seem to account for this, since even Hispanics with highly educated parents are more likely to indicate that staying home is important than whites with similarly educated parents. In fact, Hispanics whose parents have graduate degrees are more likely to feel it is important to live at home than whites whose parents have only some college experience. Furthermore, net of other influential factors, students for whom the ability to live at home during college is important are significantly disadvantaged in terms of applying to college and even more disadvantaged in terms of applying to a four-year college or a selective college. Finally, the preference to live at home seems to explain most of the college application gap between Hispanics and whites.

Recall that there are probably two main explanations for Hispanics’ strong preference to stay home for college: socioeconomic status and familism. The socioeconomic explanation makes sense given that Hispanics tend to have higher poverty rates, the value of financial aid has decreased, and living at home is less expensive than attending a more distant college and setting up a separate household. However, socioeconomic factors do not entirely explain why living at home during college is so important for Hispanics. Familism, or strong feelings of family
obligation, may explain why even Hispanics with a high socioeconomic status are more likely to feel it is important to stay home for college. Hispanics may be more likely to want to stay home for college, despite their socioeconomic status, in order to remain embedded in their family networks.

Although the desire to stay home for college may limit students’ educational expectations and lead them to be less likely to apply to college, a four-year college, or a selective college, it is important to note that familism can have both positive and negative effects. First, even if family obligations limit a student’s college applications during the senior year of high school, familism is likely to have had a positive effect on achievement and aspirations during the primary and secondary school years. Second, living at home during college is not necessarily a negative outcome. For example, these students’ families are likely to benefit from having an additional wage earner in the household, their younger siblings and other relatives may benefit from having an additional caregiver, and their communities may benefit from retaining some of these students in the local job market. The students themselves may benefit from living in proximity to family members and from having a support network of friends and family during college, especially if they feel they are not ready to live on their own. Recognizing these possibilities, this report should not be interpreted to mean that all outcomes are negative.

However, it is clear that the preference to live at home is associated with a reduced likelihood of applying to college and, especially to a four-year or selective college. If this is the case, it raises the question of what can or should be done to alleviate the significant disadvantage faced by the many Hispanic students for whom staying home is important. There are perhaps two main approaches: 1) to try to alter the preferences of Hispanics, or 2) to try to provide more local postsecondary options for them, either by altering where they live or by altering where colleges are located. It is unlikely that either of these approaches is feasible or even desirable.

Altering the educational preferences of Hispanics, or anyone, is a very difficult undertaking, given that the desire to live at home may be conceptualized as an educational strategy (Turley 2006). Following the work of Bourdieu (1990; 1977) and Swidler (1986), the term “strategy” refers to “a general way of organizing action… that might allow one to reach several different life goals” (Swidler 1986, p.277). There are two important features of strategies of action. The first is that they are not consciously planned. Even if students are aware that alternative strategies exist, they do not view them as viable options and therefore do not give full consideration to these alternatives, such as leaving home and family in order to attend a distant and perhaps culturally foreign institution. The second feature is that strategies of action are cultural products that are passed down from one generation to the next. Bourdieu explains that a strategy is not “the product of a conscious, rational calculation… it is the product of the practical sense as the feel for the game, for a particular, historically determined game – a feel which is acquired in childhood...” (1990, p.62-63). One example of how educational strategies are passed across generations is that parents are more willing to invest in their children’s higher education if they received educational financial support from their own parents (Steelman and Powell 1991). Another example is that parents’ preferences for their children, regarding the importance of staying home for college, are highly correlated with their children’s own preferences (Turley 2006). If these educational preferences are not consciously planned and passed down from one
generation to the next, altering them in order to attain some desired educational outcome would be very difficult and require several generations.\textsuperscript{14}

The second possible approach to alleviating the disadvantage faced by students for whom staying home is important is to try to provide more local postsecondary educational options for them, either by altering where they live or by altering where colleges are located. Although the location of colleges relative to where Hispanics live has not been studied directly, there is some evidence that Hispanics in Texas tend to live further away than other groups. For example, Jones and Kaufman (1994) found that counties in the Texas-Mexico border region are the furthest away from a comprehensive university, and they estimated that students from this predominantly Hispanic region have to travel five times as far as students from other regions. While this may be due to where Hispanics choose to live, it may also be due to where postsecondary institutions are founded. For example, the University of Texas at San Antonio, an institution created in the 1960s to serve a poor and predominantly Latino population, was conspicuously built about 16 miles from downtown, closest to the upper-income, white-dominated northwest periphery of the city, thereby exacerbating the inequality of access to higher education between Hispanics and whites (De Oliver 1998).\textsuperscript{15} This discrepancy is even more pronounced when the type of college is taken into account, where recent trends suggest that students from predominantly minority high schools in Texas live the furthest from the more selective Texas flagship universities (UT and Texas A&M) (Tienda and Niu 2004). All of these studies suggest that Hispanics, at least in Texas, tend to live further away from colleges, especially more selective colleges.

Future research should directly investigate the location of colleges relative to where Hispanics live. If it is confirmed that Hispanics tend to live further away from colleges or from more selective colleges, then our finding that Hispanics have a particularly strong preference to stay home for college suggests that the significant educational disadvantages faced by Hispanics are likely to remain unless some effort to alleviate their disadvantage becomes feasible. It is important to note that the educational inequality between Hispanics and other groups is likely to become increasingly important in the years to come, because Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the US. Currently constituting about 12% of the total US population, the Hispanic population grew by about 57% between 1990 and 2000, whereas the total US population grew by only 13% during that time period (Chapa and De La Rosa 2004). If current levels of educational disadvantage are unabated as the Hispanic population expands, then an increasing fraction of the US population will be insufficiently prepared for work and civic life; thus, the problem is not one for the Hispanic community alone, but for the US as a whole.

\textsuperscript{14} This task is even more daunting considering that each new wave of immigrants brings with it the cultural norms and preferences of their countries of origin and that students born outside the US are significantly more likely to indicate that staying home for college is important.

\textsuperscript{15} This location was selected despite the fact that the county offered 378 acres located just 10 minutes from downtown, in the Hispanic-dominated south side; census-tract maps of San Antonio reveal that the location selected means that students from Hispanic-dominant tracts have to travel significantly farther than students from white-dominant tracts (De Oliver 1998).
Works Cited


Dubas, Judith Semon, and Anne Petersen. 1996. “Geographical Distance from Parents and Adjustment during Adolescence and Young Adulthood.” *New Directions for Child Development, 71*: 3-19.


Policy Analysis and Management, Madison, Wisconsin.


Table 1. Summary Statistics (N=13,803)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>mean</th>
<th>std dev</th>
<th>min</th>
<th>max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>applied to any col</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>applied to 4yr col</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>applied to sel col</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>live-at-home pref</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class rank</td>
<td>42.65</td>
<td>23.96</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>white</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>black</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hispanic</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>born outside US</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents &lt;HS</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents HS grad</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents some col</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents col grad</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents grad deg</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents own home</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Missing values were imputed for all variables except dependent variables.
Table 2. Logistic Regressions Predicting College Application, Odds Ratios Shown (Robust Std Errors in Parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Any College</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Selective Coll</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model1</td>
<td>Model2</td>
<td>Model3</td>
<td>Model1</td>
<td>Model2</td>
<td>Model3</td>
<td>Model1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hispanic</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.08)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
<td>(.15)</td>
<td>(.08)</td>
<td>(.13)</td>
<td>(.22)</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>live-at-home pref</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td>(.04)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.02)</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.02)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05   ** p < .01   *** p < .001

Missing values were imputed, and standard errors were adjusted for 96 high school clusters.

Model 1 is college application regressed on race/ethnicity (white is the reference category, other race categories not shown).

Model 2 is the same as Model 1, plus whether it's important for the student to live at home during college.

Model 3 is the same as Model 2, plus students' HS rank, gender, immigrant status, parents' education, and whether they own their home.
Figure 1. Students for whom Living at Home is Important, by Race and Parents' Education
Figure 2. Proportion of Students Applying to College, by Race and Importance of Living at Home

- white, all students
- hispanic, all students
- white, important to live at home
- hispanic, important to live at home

Type of College Application:
- any college
- 4yr college
- selective college

Proportion of Students Applying to College