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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, EDUCATIONAL FUTURE ORIENTATION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL LATINO STUDENTS, by ALONSO ROMERO, was prepared under the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the students' Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all the standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL FUTURE ORIENTATION OF
MIDDLE SCHOOL LATINO STUDENTS
by
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The lack of educational attainment among Latino youth, as evidenced by high school dropout rates, is a growing and costly problem that affects not only Latinos but society as a whole. Using a sample of 139 middle school Latino students, primarily of Mexican descendant, the current study used cluster analysis to identify a typology of students based on their educational aspirations, expectations, and perceived academic competence. Three distinct profiles emerged: a college-bound-congruent group with college aspirations and similar college expectations, and high academic confidence; a college-bound-incongruent group with college aspirations but vocational expectations, and medium academic confidence; and a vocational-bound congruent group with vocational or technical school aspirations and similar expectations, and low academic confidence. Students' relationship with teachers was a factor that helped differentiate students across the different profiles. Relationships with parents and peers were not. Students' gender, immigration status, and ethnic identity did not contribute to the differences in profiles. The findings suggest that future educational profiles of middle school Latino students are an important component of a comprehensive "early warning system" that could help identify students who may be at risk of dropping out school.

EDUCATIONAL FUTURE ORIENTATION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL LATINO STUDENTS

by

Alonso Romero

A Dissertation

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CHAPTER 1

EDUCATIONAL FUTURE ORIENTATION OF LATINO STUDENTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Academic outcomes of Latino students have been strongly associated with their educational aspirations and expectations (Dabul, Bernal, & Knight, 1995; Hanson, 1994; Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998). Researchers have linked contextual factors such as school environment (Vélez & Saenz, 2001), parental expectations (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004) , peer relations (Kiuru, Aunola, Vuori, & Nurmi, 2006), and generational status (G. Kao & Tienda, 1995) to Latino students' optimism and pessimism about their educational future. Research shows that when Latino students form positive representations of themselves in the future, they tend to work harder at tasks that are connected to their future educational selves (Dabul et al., 1995).

In fact, some researchers have suggested that the images that students have of themselves in the future are a key factor in driving their behavior and motivation towards making those images a reality (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992). Moreover, students' engagement in building educational aspirations has been found to foster academic self-efficacy, academic mastery, and educational attainment (Oettingen & Zosuls, 2006). Engagement in future oriented thinking by Latino students has also been associated to decreased dropout rates while increasing high school completion and enrollment in postsecondary education (Yowell, 2002). Researchers have shown that Latino adolescents who are optimistic about their future, despite being in educational disadvantaged circumstances (i.e., poor neighborhoods, low resources schools, or war-affected countries), have more defined visions about their educational goals and are more confident about their ability to explore their future educational selves (Gushue, Clarke, Pantzer, & Scanlan, 2006). For example, results from a forty year longitudinal study revealed that having educational aspirations is the most significant variable directly affecting actual educational attainment (Sewell & Hauser, 1980) and that when students maintain high educational aspirations they also develop more resilience during times of social unrest and violence (Seginer, 2008). Consequently, the formation of

educational aspirations and expectations is likely to help Latino students project themselves into the future and shield them from at-risk circumstances that could prevent them from accomplishing their educational goals.

Studies on the educational attainment of Latino students underscore the importance of supporting the development of their educational dreams as a way to lessen the possibility of school dropout (Yowell, 2002). Researchers have shown that Latino youth struggle with high school completion and are underrepresented on college campuses (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). For example, data from the National Center on Educational Statistics reveals that approximately 39% of Latino students who enter ninth grade do not complete high school (Swanson, 2004). Only 11% of Latino students who graduate from high school receive bachelor degrees (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). Therefore, it is evident that the educational dreams of many Latino students do not become reality.

High dropout rates, the lack of academic attainment, and the unrealized dreams of Latino students are sufficient reasons to focus research on this particular population. The need for research with Latino students is more compelling considering the growing contingent of Latino children in our school systems. For example, taken as a whole, immigrant and non-immigrant, the Latino population in our schools account for 15% and are projected to be 30% by the year 2050 (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). This so-called “minority” represents a growing number of all students under the age of 18. Hernandez and Lopez (2004) noted that the population growth rate of Latinos between 1990 and 2000 was 61% compared to 13% for the US population. The author concluded that the Latino growth rate meant that one in five children were under the age of 18 in 1990, and that number had changed to one in three children by the year 2000. The accelerating population of Latino youth is one reason why it is necessary for researchers and educators to investigate ways in which the growing Latino population of students can augment their chances of fulfilling their educational dreams. While current research is strong in showing that educational aspirations and expectations are strongly linked to educational attainment of Latino students, there are no studies in the literature that specifically focus on theoretically integrating multiple research

findings, on differentiating among Latino students based on their educational aspirations and expectations, and in suggesting strategies to assist students in developing their educational dreams.

Considering the above statistics, the purpose of the current paper is to review the research literature on educational aspirations and expectations of Latino youth, to theoretically organize research findings, and to suggest ways in which educators and counselors can apply such research to their every day practices with students. This literature review is informed from two theoretical perspectives: Possible Selves Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. On one hand, Possible Selves Theory offers a conceptualization of educational aspirations and expectations by proposing three different categories of future possible selves (Dabul et al., 1995; Markus & Nurius, 1986). On the other hand, Ecological Systems Theory offers a theoretical structure that allows for the integration of multiple factors that influence the development of educational aspirations and expectations of Latino youth.

Possible Selves Theory and Educational Aspirations and Expectations

Possible Selves Theory proposes that most individuals, especially adolescents, engage in cognitive processes of anticipating and predicting their future by creating representations of themselves in the future. These representations embody three kinds of possible selves: the person they hope to become, the person they fully expect to become, and the person they are afraid of becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). For example, Latino adolescents may imagine themselves becoming schoolteachers, nurses, and lawyers, which represent their hoped-for-selves. However, they realistically anticipate roles like clerical or service industry workers, which represent their expected-selves (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006).

Possible Selves Theory also contributes to research on educational aspirations and expectations through the following propositions: first, as mentioned earlier, it suggests that there are three distinct *possible selves* categories by which students envision their educational future (Markus & Nurius, 1986); second, it proposes that there is a balance that develops among the different possible selves (i.e., fear of becoming school dropout may be offset by efforts to become a high school athlete) (Oyserman, Bybee, &

Terry, 2006; Oyserman & Markus, 1990); third, it proposes that students' academic motivation is directly connected to specific images students develop of themselves in the future (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992); and fourth, it proposes that possible selves are socially constructed rather than individually created (Curry, Trew, Turner, Hunter, & others, 1994; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). One advantage of using Possible Selves Theory in the study of educational aspirations and expectations is that it provides a theoretical umbrella where different kinds of possible selves can be studied such as those related to family, work, or leisure, which are future oriented selves related to how adolescents plan their education (Nurmi, 1991).

As suggested earlier, the different categories of future possible selves are: the *hoped-for-selves,* which refers to the idealistic self-representations that students have about themselves in their future based on their unrestrained wishes and dreams; *the expected-selves,* or the realistic future self-representations which are based on their perceived individual capabilities and social constrains; and *the feared-selves,* which refers to the self-representations that students have of people they are afraid of becoming (Oyserman et al., 2006). Based on the above propositions, it is possible to suggest that educational aspirations are closely related to the *hoped-for- selves,* and that educational expectations are related to the *expected-selves* (Yowell, 2000). For example, researchers showed three distinct future possible selves in a study conducted with Puerto Rican girls from disadvantaged neighborhoods. In the study, researchers showed that the *hoped-for-selves* were represented by high educational aspirations like obtaining graduate degrees or becoming doctors or lawyers; the *expected-selves* were represented by students' realistic anticipations of obtaining associates degree or attending college; and the *feared-selves* were represented by strong feelings of becoming high-school dropouts or victims of crimes (Lobenstine et al., 2004; Yowell, 2002). From this first proposition, it is plausible to conclude that in order to help students develop their educational goals, educators and counselors need to become aware of students different possible selves. It is important to assist students not only in developing their aspirations, or hoped for selves, but also in helping them assess how their hoped-for-selves compare to their actual expected selves

and what contributes to the differences. It is also important to take into consideration what students fear of becoming, and to help them avoid those negative expectations.

The second proposition is that there is a balance among different categories of selves, where *expected-selves* offset *feared-selves* by how much students want to avoid negative future selves. Research has shown, for example, that when adolescents consider that their *feared-selves* are very likely to occur (i.e., dropping out of school), they tend to engage in educational activities that get them closer to achieve their positive *expected-selves* (Ogilvie, 1987). In other words, when *feared-selves* is likely to happen, there is a motivational force that makes students engage in behavior towards accomplishing their *expected-selves* just to avoid their *feared-selves*. Researcher have shown that students' representations of the *expected* and *hoped-for-selves* not only increase motivation and desire for learning, but also decreases behavior towards negative goals, or *feared- selves* (Gjesme, 1979; Nurmi, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2006). In a study of minority adolescents who were at risk of dropping out of school, Oyserman and Markus (1990) found that students' *hoped-for-selves* motivate behavior towards graduating from high school, while also encourage behavior away from unwelcoming images like being poor or becoming pregnant. Oyserman and Markus (1990) concluded that adolescents who anticipate strong possibilities of negative possible selves tend to work harder at attaining their academic goals. Therefore, what seems to motivate adolescents is not just what they *want to become,* but also what they *want to avoid becoming.* In the same study, however, Oyserman and Markus (1990) found that in delinquent adolescents, the balance between *expected- selves* and negative *feared- selves* did not occur. In their study comparing possible selves of delinquent and non-delinquent youth, Oyserman and Markus (1990) found that the delinquent group had a greater number of negatively valued possible selves compared to the non-delinquent group. In their study, the *feared- selves* of the delinquent group, represented by images of becoming a "junkie", "depressed", and "flunking out of school", were not offset by positive *expected- selves.* Oyserman and Markus (1990) concluded that it was likely that shared negative values of the delinquent youth provided strong group connections that were not counterbalanced by the values attached to *expected-selves* and *hoped for selves*.

Other researchers have confirmed that when adolescents report greater delinquency, they also report a greater number of negative possible selves (Newberry & Duncan, 2001). One caveat about the above research findings is that the balance between the feared and the expected selves is measured based on quantity, or in a number of possible selves that a person is able to identify, rather than in the quality, or the significance of those possible selves. Therefore, it is likely that although students may have a greater number of negative feared selves, the significance of expected selves has a greater impact in their motivation and behavior towards their positive goals.

For educators and counselors, some possible implication to help students balance their *feared-selves* with their *expected-selves* are to explore the formation of *negative-selves* among students, to help augment the number of *expected-selves* and to help students find associations with alternative groups where positive *expected-selves* provided a sense of belonging.

The third proposition argues that the images associated with the *hoped-for-selves* of students provide a link between motivation and current academic efforts (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992). Research by Ruvolo & Markus (1992) indicated that the way adolescents see themselves in the future is strongly linked to their motivation and behavior towards making those images into realities. Adolescents who imagine a greater number of successful educational and occupational possible selves tend to persist longer at difficult tasks than those who imagine fewer successful, or more negative, possible selves (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992). For example, researchers have shown that Latino students who are convinced that they could become what they imagine are likely to persevere in obtaining their educational goals (Oyserman et al., 2006; Yowell, 2002). Markus (1992) also proposes that if students lack visual representations of what they want to become, their motivation to achieve goals is diminished. In his argument (1992), he compares the concept of future selves representation with the concept of academic self-efficacy (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001), and submits that academic self-efficacy provides students with *self –beliefs* about their competencies to accomplish academic goals, whereas future selves' representations provide the *motivation* to accomplish those goals. In other words, if a student wants to be

a medical doctor, it is not enough for the student to believe in his/her academic competence, but it is necessary for the student to imagine himself or herself as a doctor performing a medical activity in order to develop the motivation and behavior towards that goal. For educators and counselors, one way to help students develop educational *hoped-for-selves* and *expected-selves* is to actually provide them with opportunities for students to see others performing actions related to their career goals, and maintain these images fresh in the minds of students. Increasing the visual imagination of students not only would help students have a clear picture of what they want to become in the future but also would help students become more motivated in the present.

The fourth proposition is that *future possible selves* are socially constructed (Curry et al., 1994; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). This proposition is supported by three social processes cited in the possible selves literature; one, that possible selves are built through social comparisons, two, that social expectations influence what students expect of themselves, and three, that stereotypes also influence how students imagine themselves in the future.

First, in terms of social comparisons, researchers found that adolescents contrast their thoughts, feelings, personal characteristics, and behaviors with the salient characteristics of others, and in turn, they use these comparisons to build their own futures selves. In other words, what others like me are now, I could become later (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The contrasting and comparing of the self with the perceived identity of others contribute to adolescents' development of a standard of what society expects them to become (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006).

Second, in terms of social expectations and adherence to stereotypes, the literature highlights the role of gender as one of the main factors in the formation of future possible selves. For example, in a study of Latino youth, researchers found that female Latina students, in comparison to male Latino students, reported significantly less career oriented possible selves, were more sensitive to societal expectations, and imagined their educational selves in careers that would allow them to attend to family responsibilities (Curry et al., 1994). Researchers also found that Latina students tended to construct their

educational future selves based on models of other women similar to themselves rather than on their academic abilities (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). In contrast, Latino males were less socially restricted and did not prioritize family responsibilities as part of their possible selves, but rather emphasized occupational goals as the basis for their *expected-selves* and *hoped-for- selves* (Curry et al., 1994).

Third, in terms of stereotypes, researchers have found that Latino youth tend to reflect cultural stereotypes either through their own internalization or through external allocation when they are imagining themselves in the future. For example, in a study of Latino students in grades nine through twelve, Oyserman and Fryberg (2006) showed that stereotypes about Latinos' educational attainment and perceptions of educational barriers negatively influenced students' possible selves. Results of the study showed that students who reported a large numbers of negative stereotypes, such as being a dropout or being a manual labor worker, also reported greater number of feared-selves and of educational barriers. For educators and counselors, it will be important to take into consideration that they also play a significant social role on how students build their educational possible selves. Teachers and counselors may want to assist students in challenging typical gender or racial stereotypes and help them find role models that contradict what students perceived are social expectations. Teachers may also help students develop imagines of themselves in the future that are consistent with their academic abilities rather than with their internalized social expectations or stereotypes. Research findings regarding the social construction of possible selves are particularly relevant for Latino students who adhere more to collectivistic rather than to individualistic perspectives when they think about their future selves (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). Therefore, family expectations rather than personal goals may be more influential in shaping their future selves.

In sum, the four propositions postulated by Possible Selves Theory offer a distinct theoretical conceptualization of how Latino students imagine their educational future. These propositions are based on who students want to be in the future, who they really expect to become, and who they want to avoid becoming. They also highlight the importance of a balance between positive and negative selves, the

relevance of visual self-representations as a motivational force, and the influence of society in shaping the future educational selves of Latino students. Following is a review of the literature based on a complementary theoretical structure that allows for the integration under one theoretical umbrella multiple individual and relational factors that have been shown to influence the educational future of Latino youth. The review of these factors is also followed by practice implications that educators and counselor could take into consideration when trying to apply research to practice.

Ecological Systems Theory and Influential Factors on Academic Aspirations and Expectations

Ecological System Theory increases our understanding of the future educational selves of students by theoretically offering mediating points of analysis to explore the interconnections among the individual, social, and cultural contexts (Bonilla-Silva, 1999; Hess, 2000). According to this theory, students, as individuals, are at the center of multiple systems of relationship and interconnections. This ecological system is in itself comprised of several systems that are "nested …each inside of the other like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner, 1997, pg. 39) . The first of these systems is the microsystem, described as "… a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting" (Bronfenbrenner, 1997, p 39). The first patterns of activities and relationships, the microsystems, can be represented by connections that students have with their families, school, and peers. The second system is the mesosystem, described as "the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the development person." (Bronfenbrenner, 1997, p 40). For example, the interactions that occur between home and school affect the educational expectations that parents and teachers have for their children and students (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). The third system, the exosystem, "comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings." (Bronfenbrenner, 1997, p 40). For example, the relationships that parents have with their workplaces affect their availability to attend their children's school functions, which in turn could be interpreted by school personnel as the level of parental involvement in their children's education. The fourth system, the

macro system "consists of an overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystem characteristics of a given culture or subculture, with a particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge…opportunity structures... " (Bronfenbrenner, 1997, p 40). This system includes cultural orientation, practices, values, and ideologies that govern how interactions among the other sub-systems take place. For example, cultural beliefs about how to interact with school administrators or the availability of advancement opportunities and academic resources are examples of macro-systems that help construct the educational future of Latino students. These different systems help locate theoretically the multiple factors and interactions that influence the development of students' educational futures.

Through the lens of Ecological Systems Theory, the current review looks at individual characteristics, microsystemic interactions, and macro-systemic forces that influence Latino youth's educational aspirations and expectations. The individual characteristics of students included in this review are, temporality and capacity for delayed gratification, gender, and their generational status. The microsystemic relations are the relationships that students have with their parents, teachers, and peers. The macrosystemic forces considered are embedded cultural beliefs that influence students' motivational efforts and their relationships with peers and adults. These individual characteristics and micro and macro systemic interactions have been found to influence how adolescents shape their educational future. Following is a review of each of these factors along with practice implications that educators and counselors can use when assisting students develop their educational future.

Temporality and delayed gratification. The development of educational aspirations and expectations have been linked to students' capacity to project themselves into the future, also called temporality (Nurmi, Poole, & Kalakoski, 1994), and to their capacity to postpone, or wait, for the inherent rewards associated with the accomplishment of a task or goal, also known as capacity for delayed gratification (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 2004). Researchers have shown that most adolescents tend to project their thinking into the future towards their late teens or early twenties, while others project their thinking towards their mid-twenties and early thirties (Nurmi, 1991; Nurmi et al., 1994). Beal and

Crocket (2010) found that adolescents, who are able to set long-term educational goals, also have greater and more consistent aspirations than adolescents who set short-term educational goals.

Adolescents' temporal projections have been linked to their capacity for delayed gratification (Gjesme, 1979; Simons, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Lacante, 2004). Gjesme (1979) found that adolescents with greater capacity for delayed gratification have a psychological perception of time that is near in the future, where adolescents with a shorter capacity to delay gratification had a longer perception of time. In other words, for adolescents who *can wait*, the future is not too far away, but for adolescent who *cannot wait*, the future is very far away. Simons et al. (2004) noted similar results when assessing motivation and future oriented thinking. Their findings showed, somewhat paradoxically, that individuals who project their educational goals further into the future (i.e., longer temporality) are more motivated to accomplish those goals than individuals who set shorter goals. Two observations are worth mention about the above research; one is that even though Gjesme's studies where not conducted among Latino students, it is possible that similar findings could apply to Latino children also; and two, that cognitive factors like organizational skills, memory, in addition to delay gratification may also play a role in shaping the capacity that students have to plan for their educational futures. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn from Gjesme's (1979) and Simons' et al. (2004) research: one is that impatient adolescents are likely to set goals that can be accomplished quickly and without much delay, while patient adolescents are likely to set goals that could take longer time to accomplish; another conclusion is that adolescents with lesser capacity for delayed gratification are more likely to drop out of school or to set short-term educational goals than adolescents with greater capacity for delayed gratification.

Based on the above findings, educators and counselors should take into consideration students' temporality and delayed gratification capacities when trying to define their future goals. For example, educators can assist students in developing specific skills that can increase their capacity for organization and planning. Specific strategies could be to set up to reward students who plan for daily, weekly or monthly activities (Mather & Jaffe, 2002). Bembenutty and Karabenick (2004) recommend that assessing

students' capacity for delayed gratification and helping them implement self-regulating strategies could translate in students having greater capacity for planning not only their academic time but also their future educational goals.

Gender. Gender has been cited in the literature as a critical factor shaping educational aspirations, expectations, and attainment (Eccles et al., 1993; Cynthia Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005; G. Kao & Tienda, 1998). According to Eccles et al. (1993), educational decisions related to immediate and future goals are driven by individual expectations for success based on the options that students perceived to be appropriate for their gender. In terms of educational attainment, there is substantial evidence in the literature suggesting that Latina females out-perform males, but their educational goals are based on their gender and not on their abilities (Perea, 2011). For example, in one study researchers showed that from grades 8 through 12 female adolescents sustained better educational outcomes than males (Suarez-Orozco, Hee Jin Bang, & Onaga, 2010), in another study females consistently obtained better grades, particularly in social studies, math, and science (López, Ehly, & García-Vásquez, 2002), and yet in another study, females completed more years of school than males (Kao et al., 1995). Yet, the perception of females is likely to be that males would obtain better jobs that they would due to their gender differences.

In terms of educational aspirations, the literature suggests that gender differences remain relatively stable in the formation of aspirations up to 8th grade for both genders. However, the differences become more salient between grades 9 and 10 grades , when males' aspirations diminish, while females' aspirations remain relatively stable or higher (Hanson, 1994). Latinas, however, seem to experience a decline in expectations as they approach their senior year, but their academic efforts remain high (Lopez, 2003). For example, Lopez (2003) reported that Latinas spend more time in educational tasks, engage in more afterschool academic activities, receive more academic support and value education more than their male peers do, but their educational expectations still fall short of their educational efforts.

While Latinas educational expectations may be lower that their male peers, their academic attainment remains greater. Qin (2006) attributes the apparent advantage of Latina students to the following factors: a) parental expectations for female students usually favor independence from traditional home-making, and career goals are likely to take precedence over family roles; b) parents' stricter monitoring of their daughters, compared to a more liberal treatment of their sons, is likely to provide a shielding effect from negative neighborhood effects like substance abuse and violence; c) Latinas tend to form friendships with like-minded females, sharing similar education values; d) females have a more adaptive process of acculturation than males; and e), Latinas are more likely to adopt and embrace bi-cultural identities, whereas males are more likely to experience cultural dissonance between US culture and their family's culture. Based on Qin's (2006) research, it is possible to hypothesize that Latinas are in a better position to succeed than boys are, but their academic and occupational expectations are shaped by their perception and internalization of the roles of similar women rather than by their own accomplishments (Williams, Alvarez, & Hauck, 2002). This research finding is important for designing intervention strategies that could help Latina students to reflect upon their own perceptions of their future.

Not only the educational aspirations, expectations, and attainment of Latino females have been the focus of research, but also that of males. For example, studies suggests that Latino males manifest " willfulness laziness" (Lopez, 2003, p. 64), become disengaged, and make no effort to earn good grades because getting an education, rather than obtaining a high paying occupation, is not associated with cultural views of masculinity and with immediate financial earnings (Lopez, 2003). Lower educational aspirations, expectations, and performance of male adolescents have also been linked to school and home factors (Lopez, 2003). For example, in school, male adolescents experience inadequate social support, negative and hostile interactions with teachers and administrators, lower expectations by teachers, pressure by peers to underperform, and academic placement in non-college tracks. At home, they experience less parental supervision regarding time dedicated to academic activities, spend more time

outside their home with less supervision, and have more troubled relationships within the family (López et al., 2002; Lopez, 2003).

Educators and counselors should help Latino students challenge preconceived ideas about educational and occupational roles that are based on student gender rather than their capacities. Some strategies to accomplish this would be to generate group discussions on topics like sexism and racism, and to allow students to discuss how families, culture, society, and at times themselves, are likely to endorse gender stereotypes (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Latina students in particular need to be encouraged to make educational and occupational decisions based on their academic capabilities rather than on cultural expectations based on gender. Likewise, Latino students should challenge societal assumptions about Latino males, such as being trouble makers or low achievers (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999) .

Generational Status. Generational status refers to the number of generations a student and his/her family has lived in the US (Kaufman et al., 1998). First generation refers to Latino students who are born outside of the US and whose parents are also from other countries. These generations of students immigrate to the US any time between infancy and adolescence and usually have some kind of educational experience in their home country. The “one-and-half” or “1.5” generation (Rumbaut, 1994) describes the children who are born outside of the US but immigrate to the US during infancy or prior to age twelve. These children are referred as the “one-and-half” generation because their position between the first and second generations and because of their length of residency in the US. Second generation refers to students who are born in the US but have at least one parent who was born outside of the US. These students usually begin their education during pre-school or elementary school years and remain in the US for most of their educational years. Some are taken by their families to their country of origin either to learn their home language or to study for a period of time. Last, there is the third generation of students whose parents were born in the US, but whose grandparents were born outside of the US. This generation of students, similar to the second generation, receives most of their K-12 education in the US, and their parents are more familiar with the educational system than earlier generations.

There are several factors cited in the literature related to student's generational status that influence educational aspirations and expectations. The most prevalent factors are: increasing numbers of second and third generation students entering elementary schools (Kaufman et al., 1998); pre-immigration aspects of first generation students (C. Feliciano, 2006); the so called " second generation decline" (Gans, 1992; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010); and also the "first generation advantage" (Kao et al., 1995).

The literature cites a growing percentage of second and third generation Latino students in schools. Kaufman et al. (1998) reported in a study that 18% of students were first generation, 41% were second, and 46% were third. The authors also predicted that by the year 2050, the number of Latino students could reach up to 39% of the overall school population. After analyzing students' educational aspirations according to generational status, the authors found that whereas educational *aspirations* were likely to remain constant from one generation to the next, educational expectations differ significantly. Their findings suggest that first generation immigrant students maintain high *aspirations* throughout high school, but their *expectations* are lower compared to students from second and third generations. Kaufman et al. concluded that the diminished expectations of first generation students were linked to lack of access to financial aid, lack of scholarship information, and lack of information regarding college admissions. Their research is strong in suggesting that students' generational status is very relevant to how students anticipate their educational futures. Their finding also question how much of the development of educational aspirations of students is connected to external social factors rather than internal cognitive or intellectual capacities.

Pre-immigration factors such as reasons why families have to immigrate, or their social standing prior to immigration have also been linked to students' educational aspirations. Feliciano (2006) found that immigrant families who choose to leave their countries to seek a better future are likely to be more optimistic in terms of work and educational opportunities, than families who are forced to emigrate due to political persecution or under the threat of violence.

Feliciano (2006) also noted that immigrant students, who come from impoverished pre-emigration conditions, are likely to replicate their social conditions in the US by settling in similar impoverished communities. Consequently, they encounter limited advancement opportunities, and their US realities do not match their US expectations prior to immigration. Nevertheless, these students have been found to maintain high educational aspirations and academic persistence despite their adverse circumstances.

Another factor associated with students' generational status has been proposed by Gans (1992) who refers to a general decline in the second generation of immigrant families. Gans (1992) argues that second generation students show an educational decline as evidenced by low academic attainment, low academic expectations, and diminishing optimism. Gans (1992) suggests that one reason for this decline is the concentration of immigrant students in highly populated areas, especially impoverished areas in inner city neighborhoods. In these areas, resources and social networks that encourage upward social mobility are likely to be absent (e.g., work opportunities, achieving schools). Gans (1992) also suggests that the immigrant parents of second-generation students may not be familiar with the educational system in the US, and find it difficult to guide their children in their educational pursuits. Suarez-Orozco and Todovora (2008) have confirmed the existence of such a decline of expectations in second-generation students, but added that the lowering of expectations is also frequently found among first generation students. According to their research, first generation immigrant youth usually have high educational aspirations when they first arrive in the US, but as they attend segregated schools and live in high poverty neighborhoods, their high educational aspirations diminish into low expectations. Although the idea of a second-generation decline is important when assessing how Latino students develop their educational aspirations and expectations, the above research is short in discussing the possible influence that US cultural assimilation may have on second-generation students' educational goals (Rumbaut, 2008). Investigating how assimilation may influence a possible decline may yield greater understanding to second-generation students.

While some researchers have offered support for the idea of a second generation decline (Gans, 1992; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010) , there are others that highlight a first generation advantage. Kao and Tienda (1995) argue that first generation students maintain higher hoped and optimism than later generations of immigrant students. The authors propose an “immigrant optimism hypothesis,”(Kao et al., 1995, p 5) which states that as new immigrants arrive, children and parents are full of hope and optimism. However, as they extend US residency, their optimism, as well as their children’s, tends to decline. Kao et al. (1995) noted that this downward trend in optimism, especially in second and subsequent generations, was attributed to the lack of optimism expressed by native-born parents compared with foreign-born parents. The authors suggested that while optimism prevails among first generation students and their parents, the lack of academic English places the first generation at a disadvantage.

Although second generation students may be in a better position to achieve academically, the literature still points to a downward achievement that is linked to their length of residence in the US and their levels of acculturation (Perea, 2011; Rumbaut, 2008). For example, Rumbaut (2008) has noted that immigrant students who arrived to the US between birth and 12 years old, the so called 1.5 generation, when compare with students who arrive later, were more likely to have low grades, report low educational aspirations, and drop out of school. Males also had higher rates of incarceration, and females had higher rates of childbearing. The author concluded that immigrant students who had been in the US less time than their peers were likely to experience better educational performance and maintain higher aspirations. Perea (2011) has confirmed this downward achievement curve. From a review of the literature, the author concluded that acculturation, as defined by greater use of English, loss of home and family language, and longer residency in the US, leads to poorer academic outcomes among children of immigrants. She also points to a paradox where more recent and less acculturated Latino students have more optimal education, health, and positive behaviors than the more acculturated peers who usually know more English, have better social networks, and earn more money (Perea, 2011, p. 45).

From a practice perspective, school administrators could anticipate demographical changes in their schools, especially in inner city schools where the population of Latino families seems to be growing (Kaufman et al., 1998), and could plan accordingly by creating welcoming committees that can assist new parents in becoming familiar with school expectations, as well as attending to the needs of immigrant families. Considering that parents of first and second generation students may be unfamiliar with the US educational system, schools should offer English language classes as well as informational seminars in the parents' language to prepare families for educational transitions (i.e., elementary to middle school or high school to college). Educators can also assist first generation students, who may be optimistic about their future in a new land, but who may be unaware of how to fulfill their goals. In sum, educators, counselors, and school administrators, should not opt for "a one size fits all" attitude to deal with students' diversity, but should be attentive to the particular needs that each generation brings with them.

Parents. Regarding how families influence the children's educational pursuits, the literature cites parental expectations, children's academic performance, parental involvement, and family composition as some of the factors that are likely to shape the educational aspirations of Latino students (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001; Ramos & Sanchez, 1995). For example, Teachman and Paasch (1998) found that three-quarters of the variance in the formation of educational aspirations lies within the family. Kao and Thompson (2003) also cited a research done by Mare and Winship (1988) where they found that one- third to one- half of the difference in educational attainment between minority and non-minority groups were accounted for by family factors (G. Kao & Thompson, 2003). When parents believe in their children academic capabilities and have high aspirations for their educational attainment, they provide stimulating material like books and other school related items that encourage them to focus on academic tasks (Teachman & Paasch, 1998).

Children's academic performance also influences parental aspirations, which in turn influence their children's own aspirations. Goldberg et al. (2001) found that when children demonstrate a greater capacity for school tasks, parents are likely to increase educational expectations for their children. The

authors proposed that there is “performance-driven” model (p. 567) where children’s academic interest and performance form the basis for parents’ expectations, and an “expectation-driven” model (p. 567), where parent’s expectations affect children’s educational attainment.

Children of parents who have high expectations tend do better in school than children whose parents do not communicate with their children about educational pursuits (Kao & Tienda, 1998). Parents, however, do not always show their commitment to their children’s education in traditional and expected ways like involvement in PTA meetings or attendance of parent-teacher conferences (Qian & Sampson Lee Blair, 1999). Latino parents are likely to demonstrate their parental involvement through home based practices like monitoring their children’s time, enforcing homework rules, and discussing school matters at home (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). Latino parents consider academic issues to be the domain of teachers and would see it as a sign of disrespect to questions teachers’ authority (Desimone, 1999). Moreover, when Latino parents began to participate in school activities, researchers have found that they usually feel unsure as to what roles to play, and their involvement is not always welcomed outside of traditional parent involvement ways (e.g., PTA, volunteerism) (Sosa, 1997). These findings are important in understanding that the influence of Latino parents in their children’s education cannot be measured strictly by traditional US standards, but that educators and researcher have to consider cultural nuances when evaluating Latino parents’ participation in school.

Family composition has also been associated with how families influence the development of educational aspirations in Latino adolescents. Bohon, Johnson, and Gorman (2006) found that adolescents living in mother-headed households have greater educational aspirations than those living with both biological parents, and that adolescents living with step or adoptive parents had lowered expectations than adolescents with both biological parents. This finding is important when considering that many Latino families undergo multiple parental separations due to their immigrant trajectories where families may be in two different countries for long periods of time prior to family re-unification (Ko & Perreira, 2010).

From a practice perspective, teachers and counselors should learn more about their students' families and about parental expectations for their children. Counselors should offer support to parents on how to communicate to their children, and children in turn should feel safe to discuss with school counselors family matters that impact their educational goals (Auerbach, 2002). Considering that parents play a pivotal role in shaping their children educational aspirations, counselors should take advantage of such influence to educate families on realistic opportunities available to their children. School counselors may facilitate interactions between parents and school by creating alternative ways in which parents feel empowered to be part of their children's schools. Usually, parents support their children's education, but feel unsure on how to participate in school activities beyond traditional parent-teacher conferences (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995).

Teachers. The literature points to the emotional and academic support that students receive from their relationship with teachers as one factor that influences the formation of future educational selves. Studies suggest that the role of supportive adults like teachers is paramount to how students feel about themselves and about their capabilities to perform in school (Eccles et al., 1993). For Latino students in particular, supportive adults other than parents, have been found to play a positive and significant role in increasing students' educational attainment (Scritchfield & Picou, 1982), as well as their educational aspirations (Sanchez et al., 2005). This is especially true for immigrant Latino students who are likely to have limited access to supportive networks outside their home or school (Scritchfield & Picou, 1982). Regarding the emotional support that teachers provide students, Eccles et al. (1993) found that students' relationships with their teachers help them navigate a period in their lives that is marked by a desire for personal autonomy, as well as by significant biological, emotional, and social changes. Positive relationships with teachers have been shown to function as protective factors to otherwise unsupportive home environments, especially for students who may be at risk for school failure regardless of ethnic background (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997). When Latino students feel that their teachers listen, encourage, and respect them, their academic engagement increases, while their problem behaviors tend to

decrease (Brewster & Bowen, 2004). Research has shown that when students feel cared for, trusted, and accepted by teachers, their commitment to future educational pursuits increases (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Additional research also shows that when Latino students feel that their teachers have high aspirations for them, they in turn also develop high aspirations for themselves. However, if students perceive that their teacher don't expect much of them, their aspirations are usually low (Cheng & Starks, 2002).

In terms of students' academic performance, Wentszel (1998) has shown that student-teacher relationships have a bi-directional effect, meaning that students' academic performance is influenced by how students feel about their teachers, likewise teachers' feelings about their students is influenced how students perform. Lee and Burkman (2003) found that positive relationships between students and teachers are especially helpful during transitions from elementary-to-middle school and from high school-to-college. During these types of transitions, students rely on teachers to prepare them and help them adapt to new academic environments. Lee and Burkman (2003) found that positive teacher-student relationships were strongly associated with students' desire to continue in school rather than dropping out. While most of the literature points to positive influences derived from student-teacher relations, some studies have documented that teachers' perception of students can be clouded by students' ethnicity (Arnold, Griffith, Ortiz, & Stowe, 1998). In the case of Latino students, Arnold et al. (1998) found that as early as in pre-school, teachers' perception of Latino students, especially boys, was negatively affected by their ethnicity. The authors found that teachers, especially Latino teachers, described Latino children to be difficult to deal with and had to spend considerable amount of time with them. However, the authors questioned whether the teachers' reported difficulties with Latino boys were born out of their concern or out of their bias. Considering the positive and/or negative influence that teachers have on their students' educational future, educators should take a more active role in helping students plan for their educational futures. Many Latino students and their parents lack understanding about the academic requirements to graduate and pursue higher education. School counselors and educators are in a place where they can provide guidance to students and their families on how to attain their educational goals.

Educators can provide the academic support and career advice that children may not find in their families, as well as emotional support to persevere in school. With the assistance of school counselors, teachers may also facilitate classroom discussion on how emotional issues affect students' academics. The relationships that teachers build with their students have been found to be protective factors against students' academic and emotional adversity (Scritchfield & Picou, 1982).

Peers. Researchers have shown than Latino students' associations with their peers influence their academic aspirations and expectations. Some prevalent peer factors cited in the literature are: collective self-identification (Trusty, Plata, & Salazar, 2003), sense of belonging and shared values (Hanson, 1994), associations along gender lines (Kiuru et al., 2006), countries of origin, and social class (Gibson, Gandara, & Koyama, 2004; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). Self-identification through group identities, also referred to as "allocentrism" (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988, p 323), helps adolescents develop a sense of belonging and a shared-vision about their future (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). This collective self-identification allows members to remain consistent with group expectations and with group values (Trusty et al., 2003). Hanson (1994) showed that when students join positive peer networks at the beginning of the year, they tend to develop similar academic values and goal as their peers (i.e., getting good grades, being interested in school, attending classes and planning to go to college). However, the same effect did not occur for students who join peer networks towards the end of the year. Hanson's (1994) findings could be especially beneficial in helping new arrivals of immigrant Latino students connect with other students who display positive educational values (Espinoza-Herold, 2007).

Students also come together in peer groups according to their gender. This gender separation influences the development of students' educational aspirations and expectations. For example, researchers found that there is a marked gender difference between school achievement and educational expectation of groups (Kiuru et al., 2006). In their research, Kiuru et al. (2006) found that males who belong to the same peer group and have similar problem behaviors like smoking, drinking, and drug- use

also tend to have similar educational aspirations and educational outcomes. In female groups, however, the factors that best predicted similar educational aspirations were similarities in academic achievement, learning difficulties, and attitudes toward school. The researchers also found that females were more susceptible to peer-pressure than males, most likely due to the frequency of social comparison.

Students' country of origin and social class were also peer factors that influence students' educational pursuits. For example, in a five year longitudinal study of immigrant Latino adolescents from Mexico, Dominican Republic, and Central America, researchers found that adolescents assemble themselves according country of origin and social class (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008, pp. 75–84). In their study, Suarez-Orozco et al. (2008) showed that 44% to 51% of Latino students reported having friends from the same country of origin, and only 4% percent reported friendships with members from other nationalities. The researchers also noted that length of residency in the US, generational status, and levels of acculturation were factors that facilitate group association. Their findings indicated that students who were newcomers associated mainly among themselves and students from second and third generations formed different associations. Ability to speak English also differentiated peer groups. Students who spoke better English and seemed to be more "Americanized" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008, p 135) rejected associations with less acculturated and less English proficient peers. In their research they also found that newcomers were somewhat segregated, so they did not get the benefit of being around more experienced English speaking peers. Moreover, recent immigrant students who needed assistance with homework did not ask for help from their seasoned peers, but remained within their own peer networks (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010).

Group associations according to country of origin and students' level of acculturation have also been linked to educational aspirations and expectations. Bohon, Johnson, and Gorman (2006) found that adolescents from Cuba had greater educational aspirations than adolescents from Mexico and Puerto Rico. However, the authors attributed the results not just to the difference in countries of origin, but also to the lower academic skills and socioeconomic status that was prevalent among students from Mexico

and Puerto Rico. In a four-year longitudinal study of Mexican-American students conducted by Gibson, Gandara and Koyama (2004), the researchers found that there were three distinct patterns of group association among Mexican-American students. One group considered themselves *Mexicanos,* characterized by a strong Mexican heritage and family ties to Mexico. They hung out with other *Mexicanos* and held high educational aspirations among themselves. Another group was described by others as "Wannabees". These were Mexican born students and Mexican-American students who were oriented towards American culture and were usually segregated from other students. They usually had low educational aspirations. A third group was identified as *Cholos,* who were Mexican students stereotyped by others as not participating in school, not carrying books, and not doing any academic work. These students were found to hold low academic aspirations. They also reported that by doing well in school, they would be denying their heritage and would be seen as "gringos"- a term used to describe their American acculturated peers (Gibson et al., 2004, pp. 39–45).

From a practice perspective, teachers and counselor can contribute to students' collective self-identification (Trusty et al., 2003) by promoting group associations that are based on students' academic and occupational interests. For example, counselors and teachers may promote student groups that focus on meeting the needs of immigrant communities. Counselors and teachers should form these groups early in the academic year so that students can bond with peers and avoid a sense of isolation (Hanson, 1994). It is also important to consider that gender, country of origin, and ability to speak English play an important role on how Latino students come together in peer networks. Educators should work within these spontaneous ways of coming together rather than against them.

Cultural Practices. Embedded cultural concepts that are passed from generation to generation are likely to shape the educational pursuit of Latino students. These cultural concepts influence how children relate to their families and friends, how they develop their educational efforts, and how they treat adults in their communities and in school. Some of these concepts can be grouped according to the following Spanish words: *familismo, amistades, ganas, respeto, and simpatia*.

Concepts like *familismo* (Comas-Díaz, 2006), or family attachment, have been shown to influence educational aspirations among Latino students. For example, closeness to one's family is likely to discourage educational mobility, thus preventing students from seeking opportunities that are away from home. Latino students have been found to describe their future educational pursuits through collectivistic terms that emphasize the importance of family (Dabul et al., 1995).

A*mistades* refers to the kind of friendships that students and parents develop in and outside of their communities. Parents use the Spanish phrase "dime con quien andas y te dire quien eres," loosely translated as "tell me who your friends are, and I'll tell you who you are," to highlight the importance of positive and influential relationships in the development of their children. Parents believe that through influential "amistades", or powerful friends, their children may have a better chance to advance their educational pursuits. Research has shown that Latino students make educational decisions from a relational perspective taking into consideration who can provide support to their educational efforts, rather than solely relying on their own personal efforts and capabilities (Triandis et al., 1988).

Ganas, or the drive and will to succeed, is another cultural concept that relates to the persistence and motivation to accomplish goals. Parents convey to children a desire, or *ganas*, for achievement (Hill & Torres, 2010) and emphasize the value of *empeños* , or having the dedication and commitment to a task or a goal (Auerbach, 2006). Latino parents also promote in their children a dedication to their studies, or *estudios*, because *estudios* represent *" un buen camino*", or a positive path, to social respect and financial success (Reese, 2002).

In regards to children's relationships with adults, there are cultural concepts cited by Delgado-Gaitan (1994) that are likely to influence the kind of the relationships that Latino adolescents develop with significant others like teachers and mentors. Through the power of *consejos*, or good advice given to younger family members, Latino parents instill in their children values such as *respeto,* or showing respect to figures in authority and adults in general, or *simpatia*, or engaging with others in a warm and kind manner. These different types of *"consejos*" are cultural practices by which parents emphasize to

their children the need to get along with others as a requisite to obtain respect and support (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994).

Although educators and counselors are likely to embrace and promote multiculturalism within their schools, multiculturalism should be embedded in day-to-day practices. In the case of Latino culture, educators can take advantage of the strong sense of family (*familismo)* that may be prevailing among some Latino students, in order to involve the family in developing their children's educational goals. It is likely that Latino students prioritize family responsibilities first, and educational goals last. However, educators can help students and families plan for educational futures that meet the needs of both students and families. Educators should also try to develop relationships with parents that convey a personal interest for the success of their children. At the same time that Latino parents and their children have great respect (*respeto*), for the role of teachers, they also rely on personal friendships (*amistades*) to advance their children educational future. Latino students and their parents tend to respond well to teachers who show *simpatia* and try to help their children succeed.

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to review the literature on educational aspirations and expectations from two theoretical perspectives: Possible Selves Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. Both perspectives provide complementary views on how the educational dreams of Latino students are shaped. Possible Selves Theory provides a perspective where students anticipate their educational future based on three categories of future selves. According to this theory, hoped-for-selves are related to the educational aspirations of students, expected-selves are related to students' educational expectations, and feared-selves are related to the future selves' students want to avoid. It is also very likely that for a majority of students, expected-selves are lower than hoped-for-selves. There is also a proposed balance between expected-selves and feared-selves as evidenced by students' motivation to accomplish their expected-selves and by their efforts to avoid their feared-selves. For delinquent youth, however, the expected-

selves are not likely to offset their feared-selves. The motivation that students have to accomplish their hoped-for-selves is derived from the actual images students envision for themselves in the future. Finally, students' future educational selves are socially constructed through social comparisons, social expectations, and stereotypes.

While Possible Selves Theory provides a conceptual understanding of aspirations and expectations as future oriented constructs, Ecological Systems Theory enhances this understanding by providing a theoretically organizing structure that accommodates multiple influential factors according to students' individual characteristics, and relational characteristics with family, teachers, and peer relations. According to students' individual characteristics, educational aspirations and expectations are associated with students' capacity for delayed gratification. Students who have greater capacity for delayed gratification set higher educational goals, are more persistent in achieving those goals, and are more academically motivated.

In terms of how gender influences Latinos educational futures, females are likely to have better educational outcomes maintain higher aspirations than males, but their expectations diminish as they progress through high school. Latina females also outperform males academically, maintain higher levels of academic efforts, and have better educational outcomes than Latino males. Despite an apparent female academic advantage, females have lower expectations than males, and they tend to select their educational goals based on gendered expectations rather than on their academic competence. Males, on the other hand, are likely to become disengaged with school tasks, to receive less social and academic support, to experience peer pressure to underperform academically, and to be more focused on obtaining employment rather than on developing their careers.

Regarding the influence of Latino students' generational status on the formation of educational aspirations and expectations, the literature points to several conclusions: a) immigrants who chose to come to the US are likely to have higher educational expectations and higher attainment than those who are forced to emigrate from their countries due to violence or political reasons; b) first generation students

are likely to have a *first generation advantage* which is evidenced by their high educational aspirations, expectations, and attainment, however, their educational expectations tend to decline due to a lack of resources, lack of opportunities, and poor English skills; and c) second generation students are likely to experience a *second generation decline* as evidenced by greater dropout rates, less academic attainment, and lower educational expectations. Nonetheless, there seems to be *immigrant optimism* prevalent among families of first and second-generation students that may be responsible for their high educational aspirations despite their lower educational expectations.

Students' relationships with teachers are likely to be a source of emotional and academic support that positively influences their educational aspirations and expectations. These relationships have been found to serve as protective factors for students who are at risk of dropping out of school or who experience difficult school transitions. Latina students receive greater academic support from their teachers, while Latino males are more likely to receive negative attention.

The relationships that students have with their parents are important because family relations are likely to account for two-thirds of children's educational aspirations. Some of the factors that influence these relationships are parental expectations, children's academic performance, parental involvement, and family composition. Parents are likely to have high academic expectations when their children perform well in school; likewise, children perform better when they know that their parents have high expectations for them. Latino parents are not always involved in their children's education by attending school-sponsored activities, but they show their support through home-based practices. Moreover, Latino parents believe that academic issues are the domain of the school; therefore, they are hesitant to question teachers about their children's educational progress. However, Latino parents encourage their children to excel in school through the power of "*consejos*", or by giving them advice to help them persist in their educational pursuits and to get along with others along the way.

Students' relationships with peers are characterized by collective self-identification, strong sense of belonging, and a shared vision of the future. These aspects of peer networks contribute to shared

educational aspirations and expectation. Members of female groups are likely to be similar in academic achievement, learning difficulties, and educational attitudes, whereas members of male groups are likely to be similar in problem behaviors, drinking, and drug use. These types of group associations also influence how students began to develop their educational aspirations and expectations. Groups who share negative factors are also likely to have low academic expectations and aspirations, while groups who share positive factors are likely to also have high aspirations and expectations. Latino peer groups also come together according to countries of origin, social status, ability to speak English, and level of acculturation. Educational aspirations and expectations are likely to be shared across groups with these types of associations.

There are several practice implications that can be drawn from this review. Educators should assist students in increasing their capacity for delayed gratification so that students can learn to organize and plan for their educational futures. Counselors, as well as educators, should be attentive to how gender stereotypes prevent Latino students from moving outside of expected educational and occupational roles. Counselors should promote critical thinking about gender and race stereotypes so that aspirations and expectations are based on academic capabilities rather than on social expectations. Furthermore, counselors should pay attention to the diversity within the Latino population, especially to the differences across generational status. Schools should offer English and career informational classes so that parents of first and second-generation students can become familiar with educational transitions and career opportunities for their children. Counselors should facilitate links between parents and school that go beyond traditional parent-teacher conferences or PTA participation. Educators should acknowledge that lack of parental presence on school campus does not mean that parents do not support students educational pursuits, it means that parents still support their children in alternatives ways and that schools still need to find ways to acknowledge parental participation in their children's education.

Just as parents play a pivotal role in their children education, teachers can also provide emotional support to their students. By showing concern for their students, teachers can foment student academic

engagement, academic achievement, and greater academic expectations. Counselors and teachers can also play a role in how students come together on peer groups. Counselors should facilitate ways in which students can have a sense of group identity and belonging at the beginning of each academic year rather than waiting for natural groups to form. This sense of association should alleviate feelings of isolation that may result in academic disengagement.

In sum, through the lenses of Possible Selves and Ecological Systems theories, research shows that students' representations of themselves in the future, their individual characteristics, their social interactions, and cultural practices influence the development of their educational aspirations and expectations. Educators and counselors should take advantage of what the research literature already offers and begin to implement strategies in the classroom and across their schools to help students build sustainable educational aspirations and expectations. However, there is a need for future research to investigate how future educational selves work across different stages of development, and how individual and relational factors influence different groups of Latino students. Lastly, there is a need for research to address how immigration ideologies and educational policies influence educational aspirations and expectations of immigrant Latino students.

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CHAPTER 2

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECATIONS OF LATINO MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS: A PERSON CENTERED APPROACH

Adolescents from different backgrounds dream about their futures in domains such as relationships, family, education, careers, occupations, and leisure activities (Nurmi, 2004). Regarding the educational domain, many adolescents in the United States (US) envision finishing high school and continuing on to post-secondary education (Yowell, 2000). Similar to most adolescents, Latino adolescents, immigrant and non-immigrant, make educational plans and decisions, and develop their educational aspirations and expectations according to individual characteristics, family influences, relationships with teachers and peers, and influences from their ethnic cultures and from their adopted US culture (Portes & Hao, 2004). For many Latino adolescents in the US, particularly immigrant children from low-income families, economic and family responsibilities take precedence over academic plans and their educational dreams never become reality. For example, researchers have shown that many students dropout out of high school at a lawfully allowed age in order to meet family and financial responsibilities (Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997). Consequently, their educational dreams are postponed, segmented, or never realized (Yowell, 2002; Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005).

Researchers have also shown that many Latino students begin their educational trajectories with difficult transitions from elementary to middle school or from middle to high school (Lys, 2009), and as they move through their educational years, they encounter personal and societal difficulties that influence their thinking about the future. For example, low academic self-efficacy has been found to negatively influence students educational aspirations (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Pajares & Urdan, 2006). Family factors, like lack of parental support, have been shown to influence how students feel about their educational pursuits (Teachman & Paasch, 1998), and school related barriers, like teacher negative bias towards Latino children, have been shown to influence Latino children academic confidence and commitment to academic tasks (Arnold, Griffith, Ortiz, & Stowe, 1998; Schneider, Martinez, &

Owens, 2006). As a result, many Latino students are prone to lower academic attainment, are likely to be held back in lower grades, and are less likely to attend college (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). However, despite difficult educational transitions and multiple barriers, there are many Latino students who do persist in accomplishing their educational dreams and are able to graduate from high school and continue on to college (Abrego, 2006; Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005; Hill & Torres, 2010).

Prior research has shown that during early adolescence, students begin to shape their educational futures and their beliefs and expectations influence their educational outcomes (Nurmi, 1991; Nurmi, Poole, & Kalakoski, 1994; St–Hilaire, 2002). Researchers have also shown that early formation of educational expectations among Latino students is a strong predictor of school completion (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005). Researchers suggest that successful Latino students are likely to start thinking about their educational future as early as middle school (Lys, 2009), which helps them maintain their educational goals throughout their high school years (Grace Kao & Tienda, 1998). However, although prior research has addressed how different factors influence the formation of educational aspirations and expectations of Latino students during high school and college (Nurmi, Poole, & Kalakoski, 1994; St–Hilaire, 2002), there is limited research on the formation of educational aspirations and expectations in middle school. In sum, there are two gaps found in the literature : one is that most of the research has focused on individual variables rather than on individual students: and two, that there has not been any particular focus on understanding the formation of aspirations and expectations as early as in middle school. Considering the above observations, the current study proposes that as early as middle school, Latino students can be divided into distinct groups based on their different levels of educational aspirations, expectations, and perceived academic competency.

Latino students' thoughts about their educational futures reflect both "wishful thinking" or aspirations, and "realistic thinking" or expectations (Gottfredson, 1981; Mickelson, 1990). Although educational aspirations and expectations refer to similar future orientation constructs, educational aspirations capture students' considerations of ideal possibilities (Gottfredson, 1981), whereas educational

expectations capture probable and realistic anticipations of their educational outcomes (Mickelson, 1990). Not only do students anticipate their educational future in terms of aspirations and expectations, but they also evaluate their academic capabilities that could bring them closer to their goals (Nurmi, 1991). These self-assessments of academic competency result in students having various degrees of confidence about their abilities to accomplish their goals; positive evaluations generate high confidence, whereas negative evaluations generate low confidence (Bandura et al., 2001). Perceived academic competency, defined as students' self-beliefs about their own schoolwork, their classroom performance, and their perception of how smart they are (Harter, 1982), have been associated with academic achievement (Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004), academic self-efficacy, and educational expectations (Bandura et al., 2001). Researchers have found that promoting a sense of academic competency is instrumental in increasing achievement and motivation among Latino students (Ibañez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, & Perilla, 2004). Although the above research highlights different associations among factors that influence educational aspirations, expectations and perceive competency, it does not address how there may be specific type of students that are different from each other based on what they hope to become, what they really expect to become, and how confident they feel about their academic capabilities to accomplish their educational goals.

The most prevalent research approach to studying the future educational pursuits of Latino students has been to look at significant variables that shape the formation of aspirations and expectations or that could predict their educational attainment. However, the current study focuses not on identifying significant variables (variable-centered), but rather on identifying different types of students based on what they hope and expect to accomplish (person-centered) (B. Laursen & Hoff, 2006; Phinney, Dennis, & Gutierrez, 2005). The approach taken in the current study is person-centered because it investigates how variables coalesced in individuals to create different groups of students, rather than investigating how specific variables affect all individuals. This person-centered approach treats variables (i.e., aspirations, expectations, and perceived academic competency) as attributes of individuals that make

them distinct from each other (B. P. Laursen & Hoff, 2006). One reason for taking a person-centered is that by indentifying types of individuals rather than just variables, educators can then begin to think of "early warning system" that among other factors helps identify the type of students who may be at risk of not graduating from high school, as well as the type of students who are on track to fulfill their educational dreams. Another reason is that a person-center approach captures associations and working combinations of variables as they manifest in particular types of students, rather than isolating the variables from the students. Kao and Tienda (1998) suggest that a person-centered analytical approach brings to light the heterogeneity of the Latino population that at times has been assumed to be monolithic. In addition, to identifying individuals based on their future oriented academic profiles, a person-centered approach contributes to the development of a larger early warning system that takes into consideration not only types of individuals, but also other factors such as achievement, attendance, academic English abilities, or extracurricular activities, all factors that have also been found to influence school completion (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007).

In order to identify the different type of student's profiles, the main method of analysis used in the current study is cluster analysis. Cluster analysis is a statistical procedure designed to create classification of entities into homogeneous groups based on specific criteria (Blashfield & Aldnderfer, 1988). In other words when researchers want to assess whether there are subgroups of individual within in a larger group, they look for unique clusters of characteristics that bring individuals into distinguishable groups (Moii & Sarted, 2011). These unique subgroups are then further analyzed to make sure that they are indeed different from each other at least according to the initial criteria use to classify them.

While the identification of profiles of students based on classifying variables can augment our understanding of their differences in educational dreams, it is important to assess what is similar or dissimilar about the resulting profiles based on other variables that are not consider in the initial classification (Breckenridge, 2000; Huberty, DiStefano, & Kamphaus, 1997). In other words, it is not sufficient to explain how students differentiated from each other based on their educational goals, but it is

important to find out whether there are additional differences that make each profile of students different from each other. To do this, once the profiles are formed, the researcher looks into other characteristics that could possibly differentiate the groups just formed. Previous researchers, for example, have already examined how gender (Perea, 2011), family composition (Wojtkiewicz & Donato, 1995), generational status (Kaufman et al., 1998) socio-economic-status (St–Hilaire, 2002), relationships with significant others (Cheng & Starks, 2002), sense of school belonging (Harter, 1985), and ethnic identity (Qian & Sampson Lee Blair, 1999) influence not only educational outcomes, but also the development of educational aspirations and expectations among Latino students (G. Kao & Tienda, 1998). Therefore, these additional variables can also help further differentiate among profiles. Assessing the similarities or dissimilarities of the profiles according to additional variables has been recommended in the literature as a way to reliably assess the differences of the initial clustering profiles (Huberty et al., 1997) .

The literature also suggests that researchers take into consideration a theoretical framework that guides the selection of variables (Milligan & Cooper, 1985). For example, when working with a diverse population, such as Latino students, Swanson & Spencer (2004) recommends that researchers employ theoretical frameworks that accommodate not only the focus of their research, but it also allows for future inclusion of additional factors. In line with this rationality, the selection of variables for the current study is guided by Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1997), which takes into consideration students' individual characteristics, as well as interaction among the different systems that affect the development of students. The individual characteristics included in the current study are educational aspirations, expectations and perceived sense of competency, as the classifying variables that guide the identification of profiles, as well as students' gender, generational status, ethnic identity as the secondary variables that help determine further similarities or dissimilarities among profiles. The relational variables are students' relation with parents, teachers and peers. According to Bronfenbrenner (1997), these relational variables represent the interpersonal interactions that students have in particular settings like family and school. This system of interactions is also called the micro systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). This classification

of variables allows the investigator to look into the nested ecological spheres of Bronfenbrenner's (1997) Systems Theory the scope of the current study within the larger ecology of Latino youth. Following is a description of the individual characteristics and relational variables contained in the current study.

Individual Characteristics

Gender.

Research has shown that there are gender differences in the academic performance of Latino students. For example, Latinas are more likely to outperform Latino males in measurements of academic attainment (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005). They perform better academically than boys in grades 8 through 12 (Suarez-Orozco, Hee Jin Bang, & Onaga, 2010), they earn better grades (López, Ehly, & García-Vásquez, 2002), they complete more years of school, and they have greater expectations for postsecondary education than their male peers (Perea, 2011). Researchers have noted that while Latina students are likely to have higher educational aspirations than males, their expectations decline as they go through high school (Lopez, 2003). This decline has been attributed to Latinas' perception of limited availability of educational opportunities after high school graduation (López et al., 2002). Based on the above propositions, females are likely to have high educational aspirations, low educational expectations, and high perceived academic competency. However, what the above research does not point to is how Latinas are likely to have different type of aspirations and expectations than their male peers and not just higher or lower educational aspirations or expectations. The current research explores whether gender is a characteristic that may differentiate among different groups of Latino students' based on their levels of educational aspirations and expectations.

Generation status.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (Kaufman et al., 1998) student generational status refers to the number of generations a student's family has lived in the US. *First-generation* refers to students who are born outside of the US and whose parents are also born outside of the US. *Second-*

generation refers to students who are born in the US and who have at least one parent who is born outside of the US. *Third generation* students are born in the US and their parents are also born in the US.

The relationship between students' generational status and future educational pursuits can be analyzed from two different perspectives: a classic assimilation perspective (Alba & Nee, 1997) and a segmented assimilation perspective (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Proponents of the classic assimilation perspective contend that there is a gradual "straight-line" assimilation of immigrant children into mainstream American culture. According to this perspective, the longer immigrant families reside in the US, the more likely they are to embrace cultural values, behaviors, and characteristics similar to the main culture. As children of immigrant families participate more in the US educational system, their educational aspirations, expectations, and outcomes are more likely to reflect patterns and traditions espoused by the main culture (Alba & Nee, 1997). The above research, however, does not represent the diversity of backgrounds found among the growing Latino immigrant population, but it is rather base on European descendant immigrants.

The segmented assimilation perspective, on the other hand, proposes that immigrant families and their children experience a "bumpy road" rather than a "straight-line" type of assimilation as they integrate into the American culture (Gans, 1992). In regards to education and economic mobility, segmented assimilation proposes several ways of assimilation: a) upward assimilation into middle class; b) downward assimilation into lower class status; or c) upward economic mobility with little cultural assimilation.

According to the above propositions, it is possible to hypothesize that, based on the classic assimilation perspective, low educational aspirations, low educational expectations, and low perceived academic competency is more likely to be prevalent among students from first generations than among students from later generations. Based on the segmented assimilation perspective, it is likely that levels of educational aspirations, expectations and perceived academic competency are influenced by students'

patterns of cultural assimilation linked to their economic mobility, rather than by their length of residence in the US or by their generational status.

Ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity has also been linked to educational aspirations and expectations, and academic competency of Latino students (Cano et al., 2012; Phinney et al., 2005). Phinney (2001) defines ethnic identity as a person's sense of self identification with a particular ethnic group, a feeling of belonging and commitment, and a sense of shared values with members of an ethnic group (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Her measurement of ethnic identity, which is used in the current study, assesses students' ethnic behaviors (e.g., participations in cultural practices), ethnic sense of belonging (e.g., strong attachment towards group) and ethnic exploration (e.g., talking to other people about group culture). Ethnic identity has been positively linked with high optimism, self-esteem, and mastery (Phinney, 1992). Strong ethnic identity also has been positively associated with high educational pursuits and upward economic mobility among immigrant groups (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Based on these findings, it is likely that students with strong ethnic identification have high aspirations, high expectations, and strive academically to achieve their goals. Likewise, students who do not retain a sense of ethnic identity with their cultural groups, are likely to have low educational aspirations and expectations and may not strive as hard to accomplish their educational goals. However, the above research on ethnic identity does not take into consideration that there may be Latino students who retain their cultural roots but who still are likely to have low, or at least different educational aspirations. Now that the individual characteristics have been considered, following is a look at the relational characteristics.

Microsystemic interaction.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), microsystems refer to an individual's interpersonal interactions characterized by patterns of relatedness across different settings. The microsystems included in the current study are exemplified by the relationships that students have with parents, teachers, and peers. Research has found that the quality of relationship that students have with significant others is

positively associated with the development of high educational expectations (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Hurtado et al., 1996; Scritchfield & Picou, 1982; Woelfel & Haller, 1971). Following is a closer look at each of these microsystemic relations.

Students and parents.

Several studies have analyzed the influence that parents have in the academic development of their children. Researchers have found that students' perceived academic competency can be positively or negatively influenced by parents (Bouchey & Harter, 2005; Oettingen & Zosuls, 2006, pp. 246–247). For example, Cheng and Starks (2002) have shown that Latino students, especially newcomers and recent immigrants, rely on relationships with parents and families to help them navigate the educational system in the US. Researchers have also shown that the communication that parents have with their children around educational issues serves to inform students about the value that parents place on education (Scritchfield & Picou, 1982). Furthermore, Teachman and Paasch (1998) found that three quarters of the variance in educational aspirations lies within the family and that there is a correlation of .6 to .7 between family factors and educational attainment.

While the above-cited research points to connections between families and children educational aspirations, few of the findings address Latino families in particular (e.g. Cheng & Starks 2002). Most findings are based on populations of black and white students whose families' influences are likely to be different from immigrant Latino families. However, it is possible that students who experience positive relationships with their parents are likely to have high educational aspirations and expectations. Likewise, it is also possible that lack of strong connections between parents and their children may result in children's lower aspirations, expectations, and probably lack of confidence on their academic competence.

Students and teachers.

Just as parents are likely to influence their children's educational goals, teachers can also help shape students' educational aspirations and expectations and can make students feel positive (or negative)

about their academic performance. Research has shown that teachers can help students feel more connected, trusted, and accepted in the school environment resulting in students being more committed to their educational pursuits (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Marjoribanks, 1985; Ramos & Sanchez, 1995; Sanchez, Colon, & Esparza, 2005; Wentzel, 1998). Marjoribanks (1985) found that when teachers report positive relationships with students, students in turn have better academic performance, are more self-directed, and are less likely to avoid school. However, the same research showed that when teachers report a negative bias towards students, students are more likely to report negative self-assessment of their academic abilities, to have less connection with school, and to show low academic involvement. It is important to point out that research by Marjoribanks (1985) and Ramos and Sanchez (1995) were conducted with older adolescents (16 years and above) and their findings may not be applicable to a younger sample. However, their research still suggests that students' educational aspirations and expectations, and their confidence in their academic performance may be directly influence (positively or negatively) by the quality of the student-teacher relationship.

Students and peers.

Another significant type of relationship that has been shown to influence the educational attainment, aspirations, and expectations of Latino students has to do with students relationship with peers (Hanson, 1994; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992; Vaquera, 2009). Peer relationships are important in students' educational pursuits because students tend to associate themselves with like-minded individuals, and share career and occupational interests (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). A collective self- identification for their future seems to develop among friends (Trusty, Plata, & Salazar, 2003). At a time when adolescents are seeking *independence* from their parents, they seem to fall into *interdependence* with their peers (Steinberg et al., 1992). Peer relations affect not only how students approach their current academic endeavors, but also how they envision their educational future. For example, Oyserman et al. (2006) found that peer networks provide students not only with a sense of belonging and acceptance that help them navigate their current circumstances, but

also with a shared vision of the future. Based on the above findings, students of the same peer groups are likely to have similar levels of educational aspirations, expectations, and perceived academic competency, in addition to having commonalities along countries of origin, SES, level of cultural assimilation, and generational status. The above research is strong in highlighting the important influence that peer connections and adolescents groups have in shaping their members view of the future, particularly among immigrant Latino students who are likely to have less peer connections than students who are born and raise in the US, but who rely on the few peer-connections to obtain educational information.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The purpose of this study is twofold: one, to determine the existence of groups of Latino students base on different levels of educational aspirations, expectations and perceive academic competencies; and two, to determine if the different groups of students further differentiate from each other according to additional individual characteristics and relations with significant others. The specific questions that the current study tries to answer and the hypothesis that it proposes are as follows:

Question 1: Is there a typology of Latino students where different profiles are revealed based on levels of academic aspirations, expectations, and perceived academic competency?

Question 2: Are there additional differences in students' profiles according to gender, generational status, ethnic identity, and their relationships with parents, teachers, and peers?

Regarding Question 1, it is hypothesized that there is a typology of middle school Latino students divided into the following profiles: Group A, will be comprised of students who have high aspirations, high expectations, and high perceived academic competence; Group B will have students who have high aspirations, low expectations, and high perceived academic competence; and Group C, will be formed by students who have low aspirations, low expectations, and low perceived academic competence.

Regarding question 2, it is hypothesized that in terms of gender, females will be more likely than males to be groups characterized by high aspirations and high-perceived competence, and low

expectations. In terms of generational status, first-generation students will be more likely than second and third generation students to be in groups with high educational aspirations, high expectations, and high-perceived academic competency. In terms of ethnic identity, students with strong ethnic identities will be in groups with high educational aspirations, high expectations, and high-perceived academic competency. And, in terms of relationships, students with positive relationships with parents, teachers, and peers, will be in groups with high aspirations, high expectations, and high-perceived academic competence.

Methodology

Participants.

Two-hundred and thirty five students in grades sixth through eighth from a middle school located in metropolitan Atlanta participated in the survey. A large percentage of students reported their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino (61%), followed by smaller percentages who reported their ethnicity as African American (6%), Asian (5%), White (4%) and other (22%). From the total pool of participants, the study focused on a sub-sample of one hundred and thirty nine (n=139) students who reported their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino. This sample was representative of the overall population of students in this particular school where at least 73% of students are of Latino background (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). The focus on the Latino population draws from several research interests: to look at the heterogeneity of a population within a school that is largely comprised of Latino students (73%) (Georgia Department of Education, 2009); to address the complexity of factors that influence a population that has a large dropout rate (45%) (Laird, Kienzl, DeBell, & Chapman, 2007); and to discern the differences within one population rather than to make comparisons across several student populations.

Procedure.

Data collection procedures were designed to gather information from a randomly selected representative sample of students. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained in order to conduct the research. Students who expressed an interest in participating were given parental consent forms and

were instructed to return the signed forms to their health education instructor within three days of receiving the forms. Consent forms and information about the study were available in both English and Spanish. Students who returned signed parental consent forms and students agreed to take the survey by clicking "yes" to a form included in the online survey. Administration of the survey was done online by accessing a secure website (Psychdata.com), and was monitored by a research assistant who spoke both English and Spanish.

Measurements.

The data obtained for this study came from the *Prevention and Intervention Group Survey* (PIGS), a survey instrument developed by researchers at the Center for Research in School Safety, School Climate and Classroom Management at Georgia State University (Henrich et al. 2006). Selected items for the current study were chosen according to the research questions and hypothesis postulated**.** Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were calculated for scales in the current research. A detailed description of the survey item follows.

Individual demographic characteristics.

In order to measure individual demographic characteristics, several items were presented: five of the items collect information regarding general students' demographics including gender (boy, girl), date of birth, grade level, eligibility for reduced or free lunch (free, reduced-price, neither); and nine items collected information on place of birth for the respondent, for the parents, and for the grandparents.

Student- Parent relationships.

Quality of relationships between students and parents was measured with a 9-item scale adapted from the Communities That Care Youth Survey (Arthur et al., 2002). The original instrument assesses risk and protective factors of youth across different races and ethnicities and includes several questions that measure parental communication (e.g., "I share my thoughts and feelings with my parents/guardian"), parental support (e.g., "My parents/guardians notice when I am doing a good job and let me know"), and parental monitoring (e.g., "When you go out, how often does your parent/guardian tell you the time to be

back home?”). The scale consists of items on a 4-point Likert type scale ranging from “almost never” to “almost always”. Items were averaged to create a scale score with a higher number indicating greater communication, support, and monitoring. Reliability for this scale was $\alpha = 0.80$.

Student-Teacher Relation and School Belonging.

Quality of the relationship between students and teachers and sense of school belonging was measured with a 6-items adapted from the student survey used in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Items that measure school belonging assess how close students feel to people at school, how much students feel being part of the school and how happy they feel at school (e.g. “I feel I am part of the school”). Items that measure connectedness with teachers assess the support and respect that students feel from their teachers (e.g. “How often do you have trouble getting along with teachers at school?”) (ADD Health; National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, 2006). The scale is on a 4-point Likert type scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Reliability for this scale was $\alpha = 0.70$.

Student-Peer relationships-Perceive Social Acceptance.

Quality of the relationship between students and peers was measured with a 6-item scale adapted from the Adolescent Self-Perception Profile (Harter, 1988). This scale measures students’ perceived social acceptance (e.g., “I have a lot of friends”). The scale uses a 4-point Likert scale response raging from “not at all true” to “very true”. Reliability for this scale was $\alpha = 0.77$

Perceived academic competency.

Students’ perceived academic competency was measured with a 6-point item scale adapted from the Adolescent Self-Perception Scale Profile (Harter 1988). This scale measures students’ perceived abilities with academic subjects, (e.g., “I do my class work well,” or “I am a good student”). The scale was slightly modified to reflect a better equivalent translation into Spanish. The scale uses a 4-point item Likert scale response, ranging from “not at all true” to “very true”. Reliability for this scale was $\alpha = 0.77$

Ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity was measured with a 12-item scale adapted from the Shortened Form of Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). This scale measures students' positive attitudes and sense of belonging to an ethnic group, ethnic behavior and practice, ethnic identity of achievement, and cultural orientations. The scale uses a 4-point Likert scale response ranging from "not at all true" to "very true." Higher scores indicate higher levels of ethnic identity. Reliability for this scale was $\alpha = 0.82$.

Educational aspirations and expectations.

Educational aspirations and expectations were measured with a 2-item scale adapted from Monitoring the Future Survey (Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 1987). Educational aspirations refers to students' desires to attain specific educational goals, whereas educational expectations relates to their realistic beliefs as to how far they may actually attain in their educational pursuit (Rumbaut, 1994). In the current study, the possible *responses* for both survey items (aspirations and expectations) are the same, but the survey questions are different. The question for aspirations is as follows: "If you could do exactly what you wanted, how far would you go in school?" For expectations, the question is as follows: "We can't always do what we most want to do. How far do you think you will actually go in school?" The choices of responses for both aspirations and expectations questions are comprised by seven possible answers ranging from items that reflect less than high school ("9-11th grade") to items that reflect post-masters education ("getting a law degree, Ph.D. or medical doctor's degree"). In the current study, the researcher assigned values from 1 through 8 to the different responses: a value from 1 to less than 3 denoting a response of "less than high school" to less than "vocational training" reflects *low* educational aspirations and/or expectations; values from above 3 through 5 denoted responses that reflect *medium* aspirations and/or expectations like pursuing vocational or technical training (3), some college (4), or completing business college or two year degree (5); and values of 6 and higher denote responses that represent *high* aspirations and/or expectations like graduating with a bachelor's degree up to pursuing post-master education. This particular classification rule (*low, medium,* and *high*) was later used in the

data analyses to assign students to different groups based on their levels of aspirations and expectations. However, a second classification rule was also considered that was not based on the researcher assigned value to students' choices, but rather on the sole descriptions of their choices and the congruency between their educational aspirations and expectations.

Data Analyses

Cluster analysis (Milligan & Cooper, 1985) was the main statistical procedure used to identify profiles of students. The data that used for the classification of clusters was the total number of students in the sample (n=139). This analysis was followed by a series of ANOVAS and Chi-squares (Field, 2009) to determine the significant individual and microsystemic relational characteristics that could best describe members in each of the clusters or groups (Huberty et al., 1997). All the analyses for this study were conducted in SPSS statistical package version 18 (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2011). The cluster analysis was conducted following recommendations and guidelines outlined in the literature (Blashfield & Aldenderfer, 1988; Borgen & Barnett, 1987; Breckenridge, 2000; Milligan & Cooper, 1985), with specific attention to suggestions on how to conduct cluster analysis with school populations (Huberty et al., 1997). The steps for the cluster analysis were as follows: 1) obtain a data matrix, 2) decide variables to be included in analysis, 3) standardize variables within the matrix, 4) decide on the specific clustering procedure, 5) decide on the number of clusters, 6) analyze the results of the clustering solution based on the classifying variables, and 7) and describe the shared characteristics of students in each of the clusters based on secondary variables. Examination of missing data revealed that there were students with missing values. An expectation-maximization (EM) procedure (Allison, 2002; Little & Rubin, 1989) was performed to compute for missing data based on means, covariance and correlations of all cases. This method was preferred to other missing-data handling methods, like listwise or pairwise, which either could omit students with missing values from the analysis entirely, or only use pairs of students that have non-missing values to perform the missing value analysis (Allison, 2002). The EM procedure also

checked that the missing data was “missing completely at random” (MCAR). The Little’s MCAR test obtained for the current study produce a Chi-square= 956.335 (DF= 910; p<. 139). A non-significant result implied that the values were missing completely at random and were not systematic.

Results

Descriptive statistics showed that the sample’s gender distribution was 57 (41%) males, and 82 (59%) females, and ages ranged from 11 to 16, with a mean age of 13. Students reported their grade level as follows: 45 in sixth grade (32%), 64 in seventh grade (46%), and 30 in eighth grade (22%). The majority of the participants were immigrant students born outside of the US, or first-generation (n=104; 75%) followed by children of immigrants born in the US, or second generation (n=35; 25%). From the students born outside of the US, most were born in Mexico n=87, 83%) , followed by students born in El Salvador (n=17, 16%) and few from Colombia and Dominican Republic (n=2, 1%) other Additional descriptive statistics showed that 91% of students were eligible for free lunch and 9% for reduced-price lunch. Regarding living arrangement, 73% lived in two-parent households, 18% lived with their biological mother only, 2 % with their biological father only, 5 % with their mother and step-father

Table 1. *Demographical Information*

Gender		**Grade**	
Male	41%	Six	45 (32%)
Female	59%	Seven	64 (46%)
Age		Eight	30 (31%)
Range	11-16	**Immigration age**	
Average	13	US born	35 (25%)
Generational Status		US reared (0-4)	19 (13%)
First Born outside US	Total 104 (75%) (Mexico, 85) (Central America, 17) (South-America, 2)	Child Immigrant (5-11)	52 (37%)
Second Born in US to immigrant Parents	33 (24%)	Youth Immigrant (12+)	33 (23%)
Third Born in US to non-immigrant parents	2 (1%)	**Qualify for Free-Lunch**	91%

and 2% lived in other living arrangements. (See Table 1- Demographical Information).

Bivariate correlations analysis was used to assess the relationship among variables that were used in the cluster analysis. Educational aspirations were significantly and positively related to educational expectations [r (139) = .573, p < .01] and perceive academic competency [r (139) = .216, p < .05]. Educational expectations were significantly and positively related to perceived academic competency [r (139) = .233, p < .01]. Perceived academic competency was significantly and positively related to generational status [r (139) = .237, p < .01], to relationship with teachers [r (139) = .186, p < .05], and to relationship with peers [r (139) = .225, p < .01]. Generational status was significantly and positively related to peer relations [r (139) = .0.216, p < .05]. Moreover, ethnic identity was significantly and positively related to peer relations [r (139) = .201, p < .05] (see Table 2. Significant Correlations among Variables). A hierarchical cluster analysis using the Ward method, followed by a K-means clustering analysis was used to determine the optimum number of clusters based on the classifying variables. After standardization of the classifying variables, a hierarchical cluster procedure was conducted. Visual inspection of the resulting dendogram (See Figure 1-Cluster Analysis Dendogram) a pictorial representation of the cluster analysis (Milligan & Cooper, 1985), showed that there were three distinct "branches" that agglomerated students with similarities on the classifying variables

Table 2. *Significant Correlations among Variables*

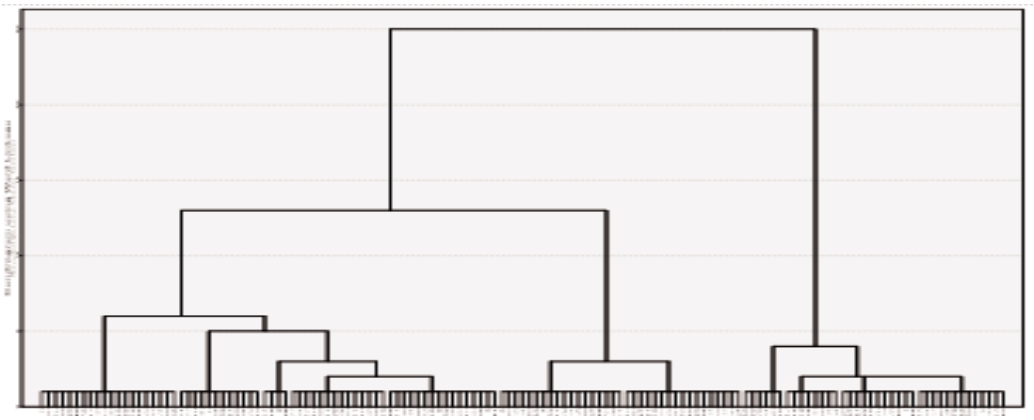
VARIABLES (n=139)	**Expectations**	**Perceived Academic Competency**	**Generation Status**	**Student-Teacher Relations**	**Student-Peer Relations**
Aspirations	.57	.21			
Expectations		.23			
Perceived Academic Competency			.23	.18	.22
Generation Status					.21
Ethnic ID					.20

Correlations are significant at the P < .05 level (2 tailed)

This visual inspection was confirmed by analysis of the agglomeration coefficients, which showed that according to a demarcation point, or a gap between coefficients, the three cluster solution best represented the data. Subsequent number of cluster solutions (e.g., 4 or 5 groups) did not represent any distinct group of students. Therefore, the three-cluster solution was used as the seed number for the subsequent K-means analysis. The K-means cluster analysis divided students in three groups according to the same classifying variables used in the initial hierarchical cluster analysis. The resulting number of students in each group were Group A n=57, Group B n=42, and Group C n=40.

An ANOVA test followed by a Tukey post hoc test was conducted to assess the differences among clusters based on the classifying variables. The reason to conduct an ANOVA test is to make sure that the different groups revealed in the cluster analysis actually differ from each other base on significant differences among the resulting means. Results of the ANOVA indicated that there was statistical significant difference between clusters for educational aspirations ($F(2, 136) = 164.750$, $p < .0005$), for educational expectations ($F(2, 136) = 110.108$, $p < .0005$) and for academic competence ($F(2, 136) = 26.825$, $p < .0005$). A post-hoc Tukey's significant difference test revealed that all pairwise comparisons were also significant among all classifying variables. Results of the ANOVA test also revealed that educational aspirations (MSE=.296, F=164.75), contributed the most to the difference between clusters with the least mean square error (MSE), followed by educational expectations (MSE=387, F=110.10), and then perceived academic competency, which contributed the least to the difference

Figure 1. Cluster Analysis Dendogram



between clusters with the highest mean square error (MSE=.728) and the lowest F statistic (F=26.82). In other words, the groups differ mostly on academic aspirations and less on perceived academic competency.

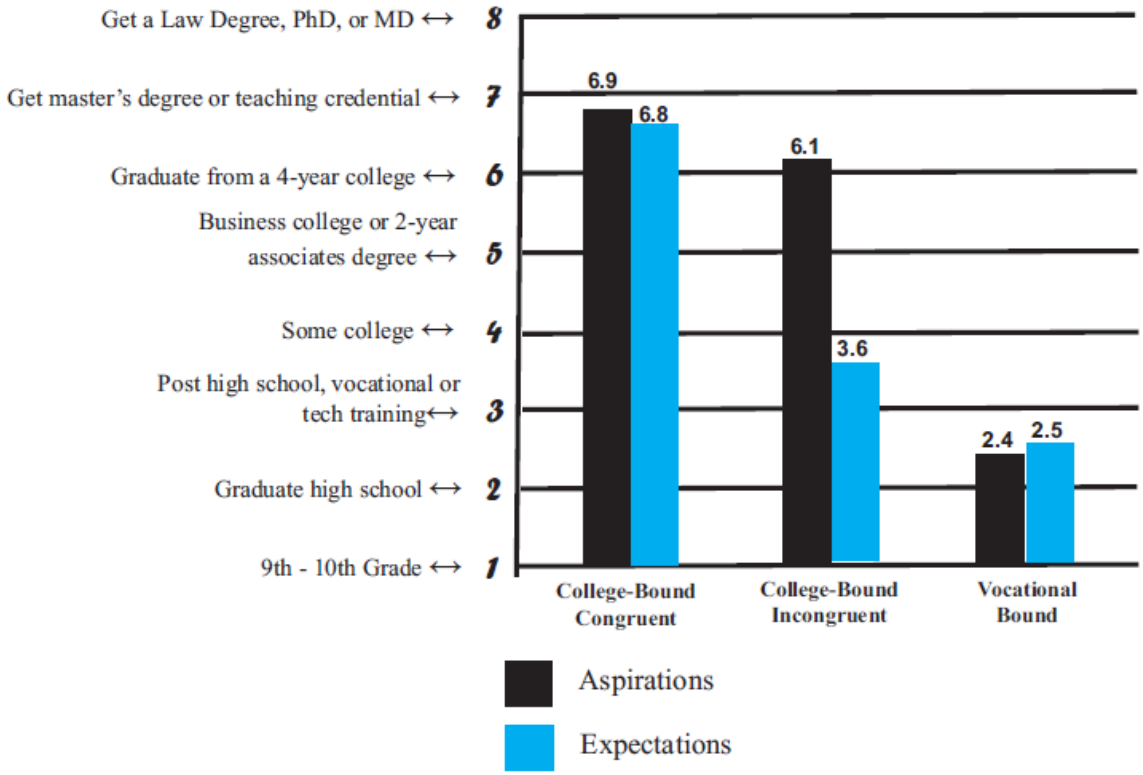
A summary of the means and standard deviations, along with a qualitative description of each group, is displayed on Table 3 (Means and Standard Deviations of Classifying Variables and Qualitative Description). Group A (n=57) was characterized by high educational aspirations (M = 6.94, SD = 1.28, on a 1-8 scale), high educational expectations (M= 1.87 SD = 1.22, on a 1-8 scale), and high academic competency (M = 3.16, SD = 0.52 on a 1-4 scale). This group was labeled the College-Bound Congruent because their aspirations and expectations were compatible with each other and reflected college choices In sum, the clustering analysis results revealed that there were three distinct groups of middle school Latino students based on different levels of educational aspirations, educational expectations, and perceived academic competency. Perceived academic competency contributed the least to the differences among groups, while educational aspirations contributed the most. Students in Group A, or the College-Bound Congruent Group, were characterized by having high values across all three classifying variables, while students in Group B, or College-Bound Incongruent Group, had high aspirations, medium8 scale), medium educational expectations (M= 3.64, SD = 1.62, on a 1-8 scale), and medium to low academic competency (M = 2.43, SD = 0.40 on a 1-4 scale). This group was labeled College-Bound

Table 3. *Means and Standard Deviation of Classifying Variables and Qualitative Descriptions*

Classifying Variables	**Group A College-Bound Congruent n=57 M (SD)**	**Group B College Bound Incongruent n=42 M (SD)**	**Group C Vocationally Bound Congruent N=40 M (SD)**	**F**	**p**
Educational Aspirations	HIGH 6.94 (1.28)	HIGH 6.10 (1.37)	LOW 2.38 (1.06)	164.75	<.01
Educational Expectations	HIGH 6.87 (1.22)	MEDIUM 3.6 (1.62)	LOW 2.52 (1.75)	110.10	<.01
Perceived Academic Competence	HIGH 3.16 (0.52)	MEDIUM-LOW 2.43 (0.4)	MEDIUM-LOW 2.71 (0.54)	26.82	<.01

Group B (n = 42) was characterized by high educational aspirations (M= 6.10, SD = 1.37, on a 1-Incongruent because while their aspirations reflected college choices, their expectations were closer to vocational choices. Group C (n= 40) was characterized by low educational aspirations (M= 2.38, SD = 1.06, on a 1-8 scale), medium expectations (M= 2.52 SD = 1.75 on a 1-8 scale), and medium to low academic competency (M = 2.71, SD = 0.54 on a 1-4 scale). This group was labeled the Vocational-Bound Congruent because their aspirations and expectations were compatible in the vocational areas (See Figure 2) . An ANOVA and a Chi square test were conducted to assess for significant differences among clusters based on additional variables (gender, generational status, ethnic identity, and student relations with parents, teachers and peers). The ANOVA results indicated that among the three groups, there were no statistical significant effects for parental relations (p =.73), peer relations (p=.14), and ethnic identity (p=.89). However, there were statistically significant effects for relationships with teachers [F (2, 136) =

Figure 2. Groups According to Educational Aspirations and Expectations



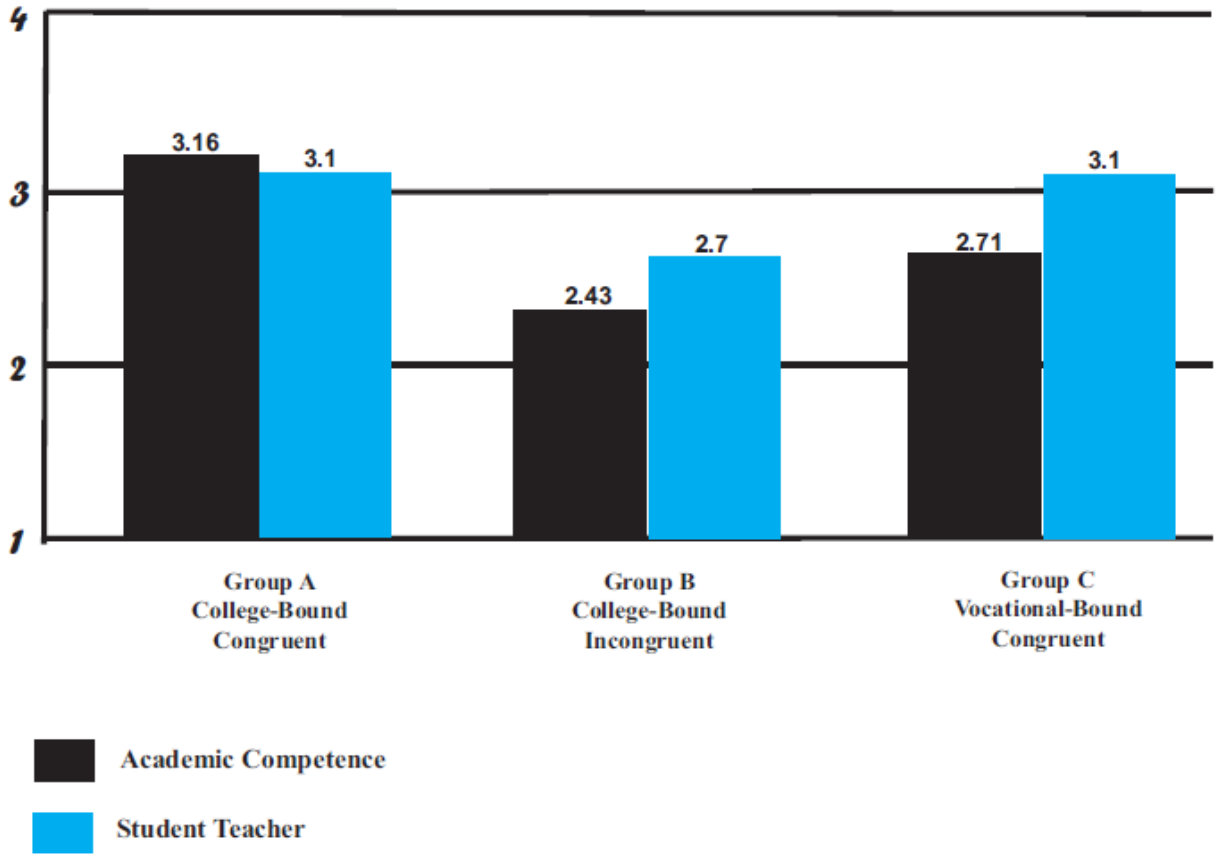
3.54 p=.03]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that there were statistical significant differences for the effect of relationship with teachers on a scale 1-4 between Group B students (M=2.7, SD = 0.77) and students from both Group C (M=3.1, SD = 0.71) and Group A (M=3.1 , SD 0.86) at $p < .05$. Students in Group A were not significantly different from students in Group C (See Figure 3) The Chi-square results indicates that there were no statistical significance for the effects of gender (X2=2.73, df=2, p= .25) or generational status (X2= 5.62, df=4, p=.22). expectations, and low to medium perceived academic competency. Students in Group C, or Vocational Congruent Group had low aspirations, medium expectations, and medium to low perceive competency. There were no significant differences across groups based on gender, generational status, and relationships with parents and peers, but there was a significant difference based on student's relationship with teachers. Students in the College-Bound Congruent and the Vocational-Bound Congruent groups perceived stronger relationship with teachers than students in College-Bound Incongruent Group.

Discussion

The main goal of the current study was to investigate the existence of distinct groups of middle school Latino students based on their educational aspirations, expectations, and perceived academic competency. A second goal was to identify the similarities or dissimilarities of the groups based on students' individual and relational characteristics. Results of the current study showed that there were three different profiles of middle school Latino students based on the classifying variables (educational aspirations, expectations, and perceived academic competence). Results also showed that students' relationship with teachers was significant in. differentiating across profiles, whereas students' gender, generational status, ethnic identity and relationship with parents and peers were not significant.

Based on Ecological Systems Theory, the results suggest that students' individual perceptions of their educational future, and at least one microsystemic type of relationship (student-teacher), are factors that help differentiate the groups of students. The results also suggest that the microsystemic relationship

Figure 3. Means for Academic Competence and Student-Teacher Relations



between students and teachers is closely linked to students' educational futures. This finding is supported by prior research which has shown that the relationship that students have with teachers is a protecting factor that helps prevent school dropout among Latino students (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Marjoribanks, 1985; Ramos & Sanchez, 1995; Sanchez et al., 2005; Wentzel, 1998). Furthermore, this finding also suggests that students' perceptions of their academic goals and their academic competency are likely to influence how teachers relate to them. Considering that Ecological Systems Theory proposes a bi-directional effect between microsystems, it is likely that when students have high expectations and positive assessment of their competency, teachers also share those expectations (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). It is also possible that Latino students who have positive relations with their teachers feel more confident about their academic abilities and about their educational future. This type of support has been found to be important for first and second generation students whose parents may not be able to assist them in

formulating their educational goals because of their lack of familiarity with the US educational system (Valencia, 2002). While the above conclusion support findings for the College-Bound Congruent group, the same conclusions are less likely to support the level of educational aspirations and expectations of the Vocational-Bound Congruent group. It is likely that further research will be necessary to explore whether the positive quality of student-teacher relations in the Vocational-Bound Congruent group may be an indication of the congruency between educational aspirations and expectations of students.

While some factors were significant in contributing to the different profiles, other factors like gender, generational status, ethnic identity, and relationships with parents and peers were not significant. According to Ecological Systems Theory, one possible explanation is that there are individual and relational characteristics that do not seem to play an immediate or apparent role in the development of the individual at a given particular time in his or her lives (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). In other words, although gender, generational status, ethnicity and relationships with parents and peers are factors that have been shown to influence educational aspirations and expectations of Latino students (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005; Phinney, 1992), the same factors did not have a significant effect on the particular sample of students in the current study. It is possible that some factors are influential at one age, but may not be influential at a different age.

Although some factors did not contribute to the distinction among groups, few factors were correlated with each other. For example, perceived academic competence was found to be positively correlated with generational status and relationship with peers. This finding suggests that students who are from latter generation and students who have positive relations with their peers are likely to report greater confidence in their academic abilities.

In sum, the existence of the three profiles (College-Bound Congruent, College-Bound Incongruent, Vocational-Bound Congruent) suggests that there are meaningful differences among Latino students in middle school regarding how they anticipate their educational future and how they perceive their academic competency. Furthermore, microsystemic interactions between students and teachers also

seem to differentiate students in the different profiles. However, there are other individual characteristics, as well as other microsystemic interactions with parents and peers, that are less significant in differentiating across profiles. Following is detailed description of each of the resulting profiles.

Students in the College-Bound Congruent Group combined high aspirations, high expectations, and high-perceived competency. This means that they aspire and expect to obtain bachelors and master's degree and their educational choices were congruent. They also reported high confidence on their academic capabilities. Students in this group also had strong relationship with teachers, a finding that has been found to be positively linked to how students feel about their educational capabilities (Eccles et al., 1993). Although prior research suggests that most Latino students usually have higher educational aspirations than expectations (Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman, 2006; St–Hilaire, 2002), students in this group were congruent between their levels of educational wishes and their realistic expectations. The profile of the College-Bound Congruent Group was consistent with characteristics of a similar profile reported by Feliciano and Rumbaut (2005) on a previous a longitudinal study of Latino students from high school to college. The authors identified a profile that they labeled the "motivated achievers." This profile was comprised of students who in their teens had high aspirations and expectations of obtaining bachelors and advanced degrees, and by their mid-twenties, most of them had already achieved their goals. One plausible conclusion for the similarities in both groups is that students with high levels of aspirations, expectations and perceived competency are likely to be in their way to achieve their educational dreams. However, it is also possible that students in this group only at the level of middle school rather than in high school and they may not anticipate educational barriers like lack of institutional support, unfriendly immigration policies or laws, lack of college admission information during high school, and reduced access to college funding (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005). Another conclusion about his particular Group A is that students who define high educational goals during middle school, and who have high self-assessment or their academic competencies, are likely to be less prone to drop out during high school and to have greater motivation to graduate and to accomplish their educational goals.

From an “early warning system” perspective, it is likely that students with a profile similar to students in this group need to be supported not only during middle school, but also throughout their high school years in order to maintain their high aspirations and to help them plan on how to achieve their educational goals. Based on the positive relationships with teachers that characterized this group of students, it is likely that teachers could play a pivotal role in maintaining and/or increasing their aspirations and expectations, and in providing information to students on how to pursue postsecondary education.

Students in the College-Bound Incongruent group had high aspirations, medium expectations, and the lowest degree of perceived academic competency among the three groups. This group of students aspires to obtain bachelor and master degrees but their expectations were much lower like attending vocational school or college but not graduating. Their aspirations were incongruent with their expectations. The quality of their relationship with teachers was also the weakest among the three groups. The low perceived competency of this students may be explained by research findings indicating that when Latino students don’t believe on their ability to perform academic tasks, they are likely to feel less confident about accomplishing their goals (Pajares & Urdan, 2006). In comparison with the College-Bound Congruent group, students in this group differ significantly in their relationship with teachers, a factor that may also be associated with this group’s low perceived academic competency. Detailed exploration of their responses revealed that this group of students was likely to experience difficulties getting along with teachers and to feel like teachers did not treat them fairly. One conclusion from this finding may be that their low student-teacher relationship was a prelude to their low perceived academic competency (Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hamre, 2011).

In regards to this group incongruence between their high aspirations and lower expectations, previous research supports the idea that students may aspire to greater educational goals that what they actually expect to obtain (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998). However, this group of students may be at particular risk because not only their expectations are significantly lower than their aspirations, but also

because it seems that as early as in middle school they may be anticipating barriers to their education. It is also possible that during high school this group of students will experience academic difficulties given their low self-assessment of academic abilities and their lack of connections with teachers. It is also likely that their educational expectations may be even lower considering that research has pointed to diminishing expectations of Latino students as they progress through high school (Hanson, 1994; Portes & Hao, 2004). Another conclusion is that this group of students may wish to do well in school despite not feeling hopeful about future opportunities or confident about their academic capabilities (Phillips, 1987).

From an "early warning system" perspective, students in the College-Bound Incongruent group may be supported by providing them with opportunities to explore differences between their high aspirations and their low expectations. It will be important to allow for opportunities where these students and their teachers can develop stronger bonds, such as participating in school socials or in individual tutoring. Research suggests that a strong relationship with teachers may increase students sense of belonging to school and their commitment to academic tasks (Sanchez et al., 2005). Lastly, in order to address their low perceived academic competency, teachers may explore with these students academic subjects in which they feel less competent in order to better prepare them for high school.

Students in Group C had low aspirations, medium to low expectations, and medium perceived academic competency. This group of students, similar to Group A students, also reported strong relationships with teachers. Their medium perceived academic competency suggests that they do not see themselves to be as smart as other peers, but they seem to be confident about their academic work. Students in Group C aspired to attain vocational or technical training, but actually had slightly higher expectations than aspirations such as completing associates degrees and attend college. This particular combination of low aspirations and higher expectations is not usually supported by the literature (Nurmi, 1991), however, a similar profile has been identified in previous research. Phinney et al. (2005), for example, found that a cluster of Latino college students, which the authors labeled the *default group*, was

characterized by not having a particular college motivation, by lacking clear academic purpose, and by not being highly confident in their academic competency. Students in Phinney's *default group* expected to drift into college without a clear purpose or direction. They were also the type of students who were not highly confident about their academic capabilities, but who nevertheless maintain high grade point average. From an "early warning system" point of view, and to echo Phiney's et al. (2005) suggestions, students in Group C could gain the most by receiving college information to assist them in clarifying their educational and occupational goals. The strong relationship that these students seem to have with their teachers could be used to learn more about what is educationally and/or occupationally expected in postsecondary education.

Limitations and future research.

There are several limitations and future research implications that can be derived from the current study. Although findings in the current study point to specific profiles of middle school Latino students, there may be some limitation to the generalization of these findings to a larger Latino population. Since the study's sample population was primarily comprised of Mexican immigrant students from low SES, it is likely that the students' profiles in this study may not be applicable to other Latino groups like Cuban-American or Puerto Rican students. Students from these different nationalities have been found to have different levels of academic aspirations and expectations than immigrant student from Mexico and Central America (Bohon et al., 2006). For example, Cuban-American students aspire and expect higher educational degrees than Puerto Rican in part due to higher socioeconomic status (Bohon et al., 2006; Rumbaut, 1994). Therefore, it is important to consider not only where Latino students come from in terms of their nationalities, but also their differences in socioeconomic status, when assessing their educational aspirations and expectations.

Another question that the study raises is the likelihood that these profiles may or may not extend to non-Latino students. Although educational aspirations and expectations have been found to be influential in formation of educational aspirations of non-Latino students (Jencks, Crouse, & Mueser,

1983; Sewell & Hauser, 1980), the microsystemic interactions that influence Latino populations may not be the same, or may have the same level of influence for a different population. Ecological System Theory proposes that individuals develop within their own particular environment, influenced by the interactions among different systems (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Therefore, the influence of the systems that comprise the ecology of Latino students may be different from that of non-Latino students. Future studies may assess whether the identified profiles in the current study may be unique to particular groups of Latino students or could they be generalized to non-Latino population.

A second limitation of the study has to do with the possible use of the profiles as a sole component of an early warning system. Although, the identification of students' profiles can enrich our understanding and ability to intervene early with middle school Latino students, other factors should be taking into consideration when trying to build an early warning system that would help address risk factors associated with school dropout and low academic aspirations of Latino students. For example, research has shown that factors such as early adult responsibilities, school performance, academic English ability, school attendance, and grades (Hammond et al., 2007), constitute strong predictors of school completion. Therefore, future research should assess how the profiles identify in the current study may be a part of a larger and comprehensive early warning system to be used in conjunction with other indicators that has shown strong association with school dropout.

Although the current study was focused on assessing educational aspirations and expectations of students, which in general they are indications of what students want or expect to become in the future, it is also important to point out that according to research (Oyserman, 1996) there are students' expectations that reflect not what they want to become, but what they don't want to become. Many students are likely to have negative expectations of themselves such as not graduating from high school or never enrolling into college. These types of negative expectations also play a significant role in how students anticipate their educational future. For example, prior research has shown that students try to offset their feared-selves (or what they do not want to become) by engaging in behavior towards their expected-selves (or

what they expect to accomplish) (Yowell, 2002). This means that it is important to study not just their dreams but also their fears. Future research may take into consideration not only the positive educational aspirations and expectations of students, but also the negative expectations that may be influencing students' educational goals.

One last limitation of the current study is the inherent difficulty of collecting data regarding the influence of immigration laws in the educational future of many immigrant Latino students. Although researchers have shown a strong connection between educational aspirations and students' legal or illegal immigration status, school systems are likely to prevent collection of such information (Abrego, 2006; Alfred, 2003; Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). Changes in immigration laws (e.g., the Dream Act) could potentially increase the educational aspirations and expectations of many undocumented students (Flores, 2010) who currently may not see an educational future beyond high school. Future research may take into consideration, not only individual and microsystemic factors (i.e. family, neighborhood, school) that are likely to influence the educational pursuit of Latino students, but also macrosystemic factors like immigration policies that are part of the larger environment in which students develop.

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