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Support and Guidance from Families, Friends, and Teachers in Latino Early Adolescents' Math Pathways

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This longitudinal study linked concepts of familism and social capital to investigate emotional support and educational guidance from parents, siblings, friends, and teachers in predicting Latino early adolescents' math grades during their transition from elementary school to junior high. Thirty-one Latino youth were interviewed twice and their school transcripts analyzed. Youth reported that parents and siblings provided the most support and guidance across these years, followed by friends, and to a lesser extent, teachers, who primarily helped with homework. However, only families' support, guidance, and income predicted math grades. Implications for research, policy, and practice highlight immigrant Latino families with modest schooling as resources and how Latino youth draw resources from families, friends, and schools.

Keywords: *academic achievement; family relations/processes; Hispanic/ Latino/Latina siblings*

At 15% of the population, Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (U.S. Census, 2007), and Latino youth make up an expanding segment of school-age populations in traditional receiving

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states like California and Texas and more recently, Midwestern and Southern states, such as Indiana, Minnesota, Georgia, and North Carolina (U.S. Census, 2007). Unfortunately, Latino students have lagged in their school achievement, high school graduation, and college attendance and completion (e.g., Gándara, Larson, Mehan, & Rumberger, 1998; Oakes, 2003), which limits their opportunities for economic mobility. Until recently, most theory and research sought to explain underachievement and high school dropout rates in Latino youth by comparing them with other ethnic groups. For example, the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds classified as status high school dropouts (i.e., those not enrolled in school and not having a high school diploma) is higher among Hispanic (33%) than Black (14%), White (9%), or Asian/Pacific Islander youth (8%; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

In recent years, Latino youth have made gains in taking Advanced Placement classes in high school, completing high school, and earning college degrees (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007), although important gaps still remain. Studies have increasingly moved beyond ethnic group differences to identify both resources and challenges that explain individual variation in the achievement of Latino youth. Like African American youth, Latino students are more likely to attend schools in low-income neighborhoods with serious shortages of qualified teachers and college-prep classes (Oakes, 2003). Latino youth who attend schools with more engaged teachers and other academic resources score higher on standardized tests than those attending lower quality schools (Williams, et al., 2007). Like youth in all ethnic groups, Latino students whose parents hold higher educational aspirations for them achieve at higher levels (Catsambis, 2001). Such findings can advance educational practices and policies aimed at improving the educational outcomes and careers of Latino youth.

Currently, our greatest need for research knowledge centers on three key issues: First, how can Latino youth navigate challenges and resources across their families, peers, schools, and communities to build positive educational pathways? Second, how can Latino youth build these pathways without losing ties to their families, communities, and cultural identities (Cooper, Brown, Azmitia, & Chavira, 2005; Yosso, 2005)? Finally, what can we learn about the growing proportions of Latino youth who succeed academically (Buriel, 1984; Gándara, 1995; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Linz, 1996)? In this study, we addressed these questions by using the constructs of social support, familism, and social capital to understand the transition from elementary school to junior high school, a turning point in the educational pathways of Latino youth (Azmitia & Cooper, 2001; Larson

& Rumberger, 1995). These concepts have proven useful for mapping educational pathways in psychology, education, sociology, and other disciplines (Oakes, 2003).

Our longitudinal study contributes to this growing interdisciplinary body of work by investigating the role of emotional support and educational guidance from family, friends, and teachers in Latino early adolescents' math achievement during the transition from elementary school to junior high school. Although emotional support and educational guidance do not capture all dimensions of social support, familism, and social capital, they provide ways to integrate these constructs theoretically and empirically. Our study conceptualizes Latino families as partners and potential resources in early adolescents' schooling. This is consistent with writing on Latino families' cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and funds of knowledge (González & Moll, 2002), but we need to know more about effective Latino family involvement, especially at home.

Emotional Support and Educational Guidance from Families, Friends, and Schools

Emotional support from families, friends, teachers, and community members appears to have both positive and negative links with the academic achievement of youth. For example, studies of family support have revealed positive links when families proactively encourage high academic aspirations and help students manage challenging schoolwork and teacher and peer relationships, but negative links when parents' emotional support is reactive in response to students' academic difficulties or behavior problems at school (Cooper, Brown, et al., 2005). When the emotional support available across the social networks of Latino youth is considered (e.g., Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1994), it can work additively or in a compensatory fashion. Still, the stresses of immigration can disrupt the social networks of Latino youth in ways that affect their school achievement negatively (Levitt et al., 2005).

Researchers have measured perceived emotional support by asking youth how much they feel valued by others. This study sought a more differentiated picture by measuring specific emotional support practices. To do so, we asked Latino youth how often they had supportive conversations about personal and academic topics and received help with homework from family, friends, and teachers.

As is the case for other ethnic groups, early adolescence is a turning point in the educational pathways of many Latino youth. Some sustain high aspirations and school engagement, but others become increasingly disengaged,

perform more poorly, or engage in more disruptive behavior (Azmitia & Cooper, 2001; Larson & Rumberger, 1995). Research on ethnically diverse early adolescents suggests that, in addition to puberty, significant changes in relationships with families, friends, and teachers can make the transition to junior high school challenging (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991; Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994). Seeking more autonomy from their families can lead to conflicts and to their seeking support from friends and nonparental adults (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Friends become special confidantes as youth try to work through their family relationships and make sense of the biological, cognitive, and relational changes they are experiencing (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994). Finally, as they move into junior high and no longer are taught by one teacher, early adolescents' relationships with their teachers become more distant and controlling, which can result in early adolescents experiencing the junior high school climate more negatively than they experienced the school climate at their elementary school (Eccles & Midgley, 1989).

The present longitudinal study of immigrant Latino youth investigated whether the relative salience of parents, siblings, friends, and teachers as emotional and academic resources changed from elementary school to junior high school. Relying on friends and teachers may increase over these years as immigrant Latino youth begin to exceed their parents' level of education. Alternatively, the salience of families may sustain them as the most important resource for Latino youth. Because teachers are not as salient as families and friends (Eccles & Midgley, 1989), we predicted they would be the least frequently sought resource at both points in time.

Research related to these issues conducted with European American youth (e.g., Youniss & Smollar, 1985) showed that topics of discussion influenced adolescents' choices of conversational partners. For example, youth sought parents to talk about the future and educational choices and friends to talk about peers and dating. Youth were equally likely to approach parents, especially mothers, and friends for support regarding personal problems or worries. In the present research, we investigated whether the same patterns occurred among Latino youth. Because Youniss and Smollar reported on high school students, we did not formulate predictions about changes from elementary school to junior high school. Some research with European Americans suggests that sibling involvement declines from childhood to adolescence (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). In contrast, Seginer (1992) found that siblings provided more emotional support and educational guidance than parents and friends to Arab-Israeli youth living in a cultural community that also values family closeness. In the present study, we speculated

that given the similarities in communities, like the Arab-Israeli adolescents, the Latino youth in our study would also perceive their siblings as important resources following the transition to junior high school. Finally, we anticipated that teachers would primarily be resources for academic topics, such as homework and planning the future. This prediction is consistent with previous work showing that most junior high school students do not see their teachers as sources of emotional support (Eccles & Midgley, 1989).

Familism and Academic Achievement of Latino Youth

Familism is a multidimensional concept that emphasizes the centrality of family relationships, enacted through obligations, mutual support, and reliance on family members as role models (Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, VanOss, & Perez-Stable, 1987). Familistic values of mutual support are highly endorsed by Latinos, even those acculturated to U.S. society (Harwood, Leyendecker, Carlson, Asencio, & Miller, 2002; Sabogal, et al., 1987). Keefe, Padilla, and Carlos (1979) suggested that familism plays a protective role in Latino immigrants' well-being. For example, the belief that one can count on family assistance can help immigrants face challenges of living in the United States. Emotional support can be seen as a form of familism, and because of familistic values, family emotional support and guidance may be especially salient among immigrant Latino youth.

Researchers studying Latino familism share general views of its nature and significance (Ferrari, 2002; Lugo-Steidel & Contreras, 2003; Sabogal, et al., 1987; Villarreal, Blozis, & Widaman, 2005), although many use different models and measures of familism. The most common dimensions of familism include *attitudes* (beliefs, ideals, or values), such as norms of mutual support, family obligation, and using one's family as a frame of reference, and *behaviors* that express these attitudes, such as helping family elders and children (Baca Zinn, 1982-1983). The present study focused on the behavioral dimension of familism.

Buriel (1984) theorized that familism and other Latino values might provide important advantages to immigrant Latino students as they adjust to living in the United States. He suggested that being embedded "within Mexican-American culture allows the individual to maintain a clear sense of identity and a feeling of self-worth, while exploring the standards and expectations of Anglo-American society" (Buriel, 1984, p. 127). In contrast, Valdés (1996) noted that traditional agrarian and familistic values she observed in rural Mexican immigrant families were at odds with teachers' expectations for individualistic classroom behavior and may hamper achievement.

Empirical studies of this issue have yielded mixed findings. Early research revealed negative linkages (e.g., Chacón, Cohen, & Srover, 1986; Heller, 1966; Horowitz, 1981). For instance, Chacón et al. (1986) found that family obligations, such as caring for siblings or working to support the family led students to drop out of college or take longer to graduate than peers. In contrast, Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994) found that familistic values were positively related to Latino high school students' grades, provided that their parents had at least 12 years of schooling. More recently, however, Rodriguez (2002) found no links between familistic values and Latino high school students' grades. Thus, more research is needed on the conditions in which familism promotes or hinders achievement.

Social Capital and the Academic Achievement of Latino Youth

Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994) proposed that familistic values may promote academic success only when Latino families also adopt educational practices that do so as well. Drawing on Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital, Valenzuela and Dornbusch considered such practices as available to parents who had attained at least a high school education in the United States, given that this is a marker of social class status.[1]

Coleman (1988) highlighted two relevant forms of social capital pertinent to this debate. One can be characterized as *emotional support* and derives from resources arising from family relationships. It parallels some of the behavioral dimensions of familism. The second can be characterized as *educational guidance* and involves parents' knowledge and enactment of educational practices and ways of connecting with schools or other settings outside the home.

According to Coleman (1988), parents' education is a key source of this knowledge and a mechanism for reproducing families' social class status from generation to generation. As shown by Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994), educational guidance may be an important source of variation in the academic achievement of Latino students and of social mobility from the parents' to the children's generation.

Stanton-Salazar (1997) argued that students from immigrant and low-income families who have low levels of formal education are particularly hampered from lacking access to educational guidance. He advised that school interventions and precollege programs teach Latino youth and their families and peers how to seek help outside the family to navigate the educational system. Thus, Latino youth may obtain social capital, including both emotional support and educational guidance, from multiple sources beyond their families,

including friends, teachers, counselors, and other community members (Bettie, 2002; Cooper, Chavira, & Mena, 2005; Mehan et al., 1996; Stanton-Salazar, 2004).

In this study, we used early adolescents' sources of help with homework as one index of educational guidance. Our other index of educational guidance was adolescents' conversations about the future with family, friends, and teachers. In a study with the NELS:88 sample, Catsambis (2001) found that Latino parents' involvement shifted from helping their children with schoolwork to talking with their adolescents about the future. Moreover, conversations about the future predicted adolescents' academic achievement.

Summary and Predictions

The present study extended prior research on Latino early adolescents' academic achievement in three ways. First, we assessed activities that Latino families may engage in that support the school achievement of youth. Previous research (e.g., Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994) has speculated about parents' educational practices, but has not measured them. Second, we included siblings in our assessment of family resources. Some suggest that siblings dilute parents' social capital by reducing the attention that parents can devote to each child. However, theoretical and empirical work indicates that in immigrant families or those in which parents have limited schooling and English proficiency, siblings can be important sources of institutional knowledge and older siblings, specifically, can serve as *culture brokers* for schooling and help younger siblings with school tasks and educational planning (Azmitia, Cooper, García, & Dunbar, 1996; Parke & Buriel, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999; Weisner, 1986). Third, we studied early adolescents making the transition from elementary school to junior high school. It is critical to focus on early adolescence, given that developmental research has targeted the years from elementary school to junior high as important turning points for adolescents because motivation and academic performance for some youth begin downward trajectories toward school failure and dropout during this developmental period (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Larson & Rumberger, 1995; Seidman, et al., 1994).

Specifically, the current study examined the perceptions of youth regarding emotional support and educational guidance from parents, siblings, friends, and teachers during elementary school and junior high school. We also examined how parents' and siblings' support and guidance predicted the math pathways of youth from sixth to seventh grade. We chose math grades because Latino students' underrepresentation in college-prep math

courses in junior high and high school creates a major barrier to their access to higher education (Henderson, 1997).

We tested descriptive hypotheses about patterns of emotional support and educational guidance across parents, siblings, friends, and teachers from elementary school to junior high school. We predicted that Latino youth would initially seek more support and guidance from parents and siblings than friends and teachers, but that parents might decline as a resource as youth began to exceed parents' level of schooling and to seek more autonomy. Because of siblings' close relationships with early adolescents and their greater familiarity with school, their roles may increase. Given friends' growing salience, they also should be important for support and guidance and their salience may also increase. We predicted that teachers would provide Latino youth with the least emotional support, but that teachers' educational guidance would exceed their support and might increase as youth began to exceed their parents' educational level**.** However, if Stanton-Salazar (1997) is correct in assuming that immigrant families lack the social capital to teach their children to seek help outside the family, teachers' support and guidance should remain low and unchanged over this time.

We also hypothesized that youth would seek different people as resources depending on the topic. Extrapolating from Youniss and Smollar's (1985) work, we predicted that youth would prefer to talk with parents about their future, with friends about friends, and with parents and friends equally about their problems and worries. We predicted youth would be equally likely to seek support and guidance from their siblings and friends. Given their increasing salience as confidantes, both siblings and friends should increase as sources of emotional support.

Our second major question focused on whether these resources (i.e., parents', siblings', teachers', and friends' emotional support and educational guidance) predict math-grade pathways from elementary school to junior high school. We first examined the correlations between parents, siblings', friends, and teachers' emotional support and guidance and students' math pathways. If these are important resources for the academic performance of youth, these resources should be positively correlated with their math pathways. Because we were especially interested in the role of family resources in math pathways our second analysis involved examining the predictive value of parents' and siblings' resources. In particular, we examined whether these two sources of resources predicted math pathways after controlling for social class. In light of the sibling-culture broker hypothesis, we also investigated whether siblings' resources predicted math pathways above and beyond parents' resources. We used maternal education and family income

as indicators of adolescents' social class. Maternal education, rather than paternal education, was utilized because previous research has shown it is more closely related to students' achievement (e.g., Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987).

Method

Participants

Study participants were part of a longitudinal study of the roles of families, peers, and school during Latino and European-descent students' pathways from elementary school to junior high school (e.g., Azmitia & Cooper, 2001; Azmitia et al., 1996). They lived in neighboring communities in a small city in central California. In the 2000 census, the ethnic composition of the city and its unincorporated areas was 1.7% African American, 4.9% Asian, 17.4% Hispanic, 0.9% Native American, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 79% White. Also in 2000, the city's public school enrollment was 1.5% African American, 2.1% Asian, 44.7% Hispanic, 0.4% Native American, 1.3% Pacific Islander, 0.9% multiple ethnicities, and 49.2% White. Compared with the city, school enrollments included proportionately more Hispanic and fewer White students, a pattern common in California's public schools (California Department of Education, 2000). We selected schools based on their relative balance of low-income European American and Latino families, the focus of the larger study. Families were recruited for the study when target students were in their last year of elementary school.

This article focuses on Latino families from the larger study in which the target student had at least one older sibling in junior high or high school (57% of the Latino sample). In Year 1 (sixth grade, elementary school), 39 families met this criterion. In Year 2 (seventh grade, junior high school), seven families were unavailable (three families had returned to Mexico, four had moved with no forwarding address), and one declined to participate (target students were five girls and three boys). Thus, the final sample comprised of 31 families, including 20 boys and 11 girls.

Family structure. A total of 28 families were two-parent families, although the parents in one family had separated by the second year of the study. Mothers' mean age was 37.5 years (range 27 to 53), and fathers' was 41.3 years (range 30 to 57). Target students' mean age at the start of the study was 12.4 years (range 11 to 13). The average number of children in

each family was 4.35 (range 2 to 10). The median number of siblings living at home was 3 (range 1 to 5).

Immigration history and home language. All but one of the families, who emigrated from El Salvador, were of Mexican heritage. In 26 families, both parents were immigrants; in four, one parent was an immigrant; and in one, both parents were born in the United States. 32% (*n* = 10) of the students were immigrants. Most families had emigrated from the Mexican states of Michoacan, Jalisco, or Guanajuato. 51% of the families spoke only Spanish at home, 36% spoke both English and Spanish, and 13% spoke primarily English.

Family income and parents' education and occupation. 22 families (71%) were low income, as defined by their children's eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals. Mothers' education ranged from 2 to 15 years (median = eighth grade), and fathers' ranged from 1 to 16 years (median = ninth grade). 14 fathers (45%) and 16 mothers (52%) had not attended high school, and most of these fathers and mothers had not gone beyond elementary school (fathers, 79%; mothers, 68%). 25 fathers and 26 mothers were employed, typically in skilled (fathers, 25%; mothers, 9%), semi-skilled (fathers, 23%; mothers, 36%), and unskilled occupations (fathers, 39%; mothers, 29%) on Hollingshead's index (1979), usually in local hotels, restaurants, or factories.

Measures

The data were drawn primarily from the *Path of Life Interview* (Azmitia et al., 1994), given to early adolescents and their parents at the end of sixth (elementary school) and seventh grades (junior high school; see Azmitia, et al., 1996, for details); information about family demographics was obtained from the parents' interview. The early adolescents' interview included questions about topics such as family life, school life, friends, and their future. For this study, we analyzed questions that assessed emotional support and educational guidance that youth obtained from their parents, siblings, friends, and teachers. The first two authors of this article developed the English versions of the interviews. They were discussed with the research team, a parent-focus group, and two teachers to ensure that questions were meaningful, flowed well, and were not too taxing for respondents. The early adolescents' interview was piloted with elementary school and junior high school students**.** The revised interviews were translated into

Spanish by the first author and two Mexican-heritage research associates, one who had worked as a translator in the community. We conducted two focus groups with Mexican-heritage parents of elementary school and junior high students to ensure that questions were clear and flowed well. The bilingual interview team compared English and Spanish versions of the interviews to ensure that they were equivalent.

Emotional support. We assessed emotional support by asking youth with whom they talked about two topics: (a) their friends and (b) their problems and worries. Students were told, "Some people talk to their family, friends, and teachers about things, but others don't. I'm going to say some things people discuss with their family, friends, and teachers and you tell me how often you talk to this person about this topic." For each topic (i.e., friends, problems), early adolescents were asked separately, "How often do you talk to (mother, father, brother(s), sister(s), other family, friends, teachers) about _____ (topic)?" A 3-point frequency scale was used, with 3 = *always/ often*, 2 = *sometimes/occasionally*, and 1 = *rarely/never*. Thus, for each source (i.e., mother, father, brother(s), sister(s), friends, teachers), adolescents received a score that ranged from 1 to 3. After each topic, youth were asked to name the person with whom they felt most comfortable talking about the issue. If youth responded with two names, both were coded.

Educational guidance. We assessed educational guidance by asking youth (a) with whom they talked about growing up and the future and (b) who helped them with their homework. Instructions and procedures for talking about the future were similar to those about emotional support. Thus, for each source (e.g., mother, father, brother(s)), adolescents received a score that ranged from 1 (*rarely/never*) to 3 (*always/often*) for the variable "talk about the future." To assess help with homework, youth were asked how often each source (e.g., mother, father, siblings, friends, and teachers) helped them with homework; youth were asked to provide the names of all the siblings who helped them. Responses for help with homework also ranged from 1 to 3 for each source. After homework helpers were inventoried, youth were asked to name the person on the list who helped them the most.

Math achievement. Math grades were obtained from students' transcripts from elementary school and junior high/middle school; final grades in sixth and seventh grades were used. A variable was created to represent the pathway of each student's grades. Students were coded as *high achievers* if their math grades averaged A or B both school years ($n = 8$) or increased to A or

B ($n = 10$), *average achievers* if grades were Cs at both time points ($n = 15$), and *low achievers* if grades fell at least one letter grade to C or D ($n = 6$). A continuous variable was created using these categories and ranged from 1 (*low achiever*) to 3 (*high achiever*). For six youth missing 1 year's grade report, parents' reports were used. The percentage agreement between math grades from parents and school for youth for whom both were available was 83%, indicating that parents' reports were sufficiently accurate to use when school records were unavailable.

Procedure

Recruitment was conducted with invitation letters that included consent forms in Spanish and English, distributed to all students in 10 classrooms. In each class, participation for Latino families ranged from 62% to 89%. The first author and a bilingual researcher visited classrooms to discuss the study and distribute forms. All teachers provided incentives, typically candy or a free pass on the day's homework, to students returning forms, whether or not parents consented. After initial collection of forms, the first author and two bilingual research assistants called or visited parents who had not returned forms to discuss the study and answer questions. Parents requesting another form received it by mail or via a home visit. Almost all recent immigrant families participated, with low attrition (14%) during the larger longitudinal study.

Nine bilingual researchers, including the first author, conducted interviews; seven, including the first author, were native Spanish speakers. The other two had taken courses in Spanish and worked in Latino communities for several years; they were fluent Spanish speakers. Participants were interviewed in the language of their choice. In Year 1, 28 parents and 7 youth chose to be interviewed in Spanish; in Year 2, the same 28 parents and only 1 youth did so.

Interviews took place at the end of the school year. Parents and youth were interviewed in separate rooms or, if not available, parents were interviewed in the home and youth were interviewed on the front steps, in the backyard, or in the family car. Students' interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and parents' interviews lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours. All were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Spanish interviews were coded in Spanish by the first author and a bilingual research assistant who helped to develop the interview; these coders and another bilingual research assistant coded the remaining interviews.

Results

Our first question tested descriptive hypotheses about Latino early adolescents' emotional support and educational guidance across families, friends, and teachers from elementary school to junior high school. We used multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) and examined the frequency with which youth talked to each conversational partner to assess whether youth would seek different people as resources (i.e., parents, siblings, friends, teachers) depending on the topic (i.e., future plans, problems, friends) and examined patterns across conversational partner and year (sixth or seventh grade). We also used MANOVA to examine the degree to which each resource provided help with homework and examined patterns across conversational partner. For those who reported on multiple parents (i.e., mother and father) or multiple siblings, the higher value for each was utilized to reflect the highest levels of guidance and support perceived from parents and from siblings. To address our second question, whether conversations about friends, problems, and the future and help with homework predicted math pathways, we first examined bivariate correlations to test the associations among emotional support, educational guidance, and math pathways. We then used hierarchical regression to test our prediction that parents and siblings' emotional support and educational guidance would predict math pathways after controlling for family income. Mothers' education was not significantly correlated with math grades and thus income was the only index of social class included in this analysis. Because of low statistical power given the small sample size, and because gender did not emerge as a significant correlate of any study variable, gender was not examined in the analyses that follow.

Emotional Support and Educational Guidance from Elementary School to Junior High School

Table 1 presents how often early adolescents talked with parents, siblings, friends, and teachers about three topics: their problems and worries, goals for the future, and friends. We carried out individual 4 × 2 (Conversational Partner × Year) MANOVAs on the frequency of talk for each of the three conversational topics. For each MANOVA, the only significant effect was for conversational partner: Talk about Problems, $F(3, 90) = 16.68$, $p < .001$, Talk about the Future, $F(3, 90) = 21.11$, $p < .001$, and Talk about Friends, $F(3, 90) = 39.63$, $p < .0001$. Individual comparisons (paired t tests) revealed that youth relatively rarely sought their teachers for

emotional support and educational guidance, as indexed by conversing with them about problems, friends, and the future. Only teachers differed consistently and significantly from other resources; youth were less likely to talk to them about all three topics. In 17 of 18 t-test comparisons,[2] talk with teachers was less frequent compared with every other conversational partner (all ps < .01). The only comparison involving teachers that did not reach significance was between teachers' and friends' talk about problems in elementary school. In contrast, youth talked with parents as often, and in some cases more often than siblings or friends. Youth confided in parents more often than friends about problems at Year 1, $t(1,30) = 4.22$, $p < .001$, and more often than siblings at Year 2, $t(1,30) = 2.08$, $p < .05$. Youth also talked more with parents than with siblings about the future at Year 2, $t(1,30) = 2.04$, $p < .05$. There was no overall change from elementary school to junior high school in the frequency of these conversations.

We also investigated early adolescents' sources of emotional support and educational guidance by asking with whom they felt most comfortable talking about problems, the future, and friends. As shown in Table 2, at both time points, youth felt most comfortable talking with parents about problems and the future, but were more evenly divided across partners in talking about friends. Youth were more likely to name siblings and friends for talking about the future and problems in junior high than in elementary school.[3] However, this increase did not come at the cost of parents' nominations. Teachers were named by only one youth at each time point. Thirty-one percent provided two names in Year 1, and 44% did so in Year 2; typically the two preferred conversational partners were mother and sibling (most often a sister).

Finally, we examined how often youth received educational guidance in the form of help with homework from family, friends, and teachers (see Table 3). A 4 × 2 (Conversational Partner × Year) MANOVA revealed that only the main effect for conversational partner was significant, $F(3, 90) = 4.69$, $p < .01$, but the pattern differed from emotional support and educational guidance in the form of talking about the future. In elementary school, adolescents received the least help with homework from friends than from any other source; this was the only significant difference occurring among homework helpers in elementary school. In junior high, teachers provided significantly more help with homework than siblings or friends. The reports of youth who helped *most* with homework are presented in Table 4. Parents were named most frequently in Year 1 and siblings in Year 2, and teachers were consistently named as most helpful by nearly one quarter of the students in both Year 1 and Year 2.

Table 1
Mean and Standard Deviations of Early Adolescents'
Reported Talk about Problems, the Future, and Friends
with Parents, Siblings, Friends, and Teachers

Topic and Partner	Elementary School		Junior High School	
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
Talk about problems				
Adolescent and parent	2.55	0.57	2.45	0.72
Adolescent and sibling	2.29	0.74	2.10	0.70
Adolescent and friend	1.97	0.66	2.16	0.78
Adolescent and teacher	1.70	0.75	1.60	0.72
Talk about the future				
Adolescent and parent	2.39	0.56	2.39	0.67
Adolescent and sibling	2.13	0.81	2.16	0.73
Adolescent and friend	2.13	0.67	2.13	0.67
Adolescent and teacher	1.58	0.62	1.68	0.70
Talk about friends				
Adolescent and parent	2.26	0.58	2.23	0.72
Adolescent and sibling	2.45	0.72	2.45	0.62
Adolescent and friend	2.52	0.68	2.45	0.68
Adolescent and teacher	1.52	0.68	1.32	0.54

Note: A total of 29 youth reported on adolescent-teacher talk; all other data for conversational pairs are based on the total sample ($N = 31$).

Table 2
Number of Early Adolescents Naming Parents, Siblings,
Other Relatives, Friends, and Teachers as Most Comfortable
to Talk with about Problems, the Future, and Friends

Topic	Number of Early Adolescents Naming Conversational Partner				
	Parents	Siblings	Other Relative	Friends	Teachers
Elementary school					
Problems	15	2	2	2	1
Future	16	3	6	3	0
Friends	10	6	1	7	0
Junior high school					
Problems	19	8	1	7	1
Future	21	5	3	4	0
Friends	11	10	4	10	0

Note: The total number of responses exceeds the number of study participants ($N = 31$) because when adolescents named more than one person, both were coded.

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations of Early Adolescents'
Reported Homework Help from Parents, Siblings,
Friends, and Teachers ($N = 31$)

	Elementary School		Junior High School	
Variable	$\overline{X}$	SD	$\overline{X}$	SD
Homework help				
From parent	2.16[a]	0.69	1.97	0.71
From sibling	2.06[a]	0.73	1.81[b]	0.79
From friend	1.68[b]	0.70	1.77[b]	0.67
From teacher	2.26[a]	0.73	2.19[a]	0.75

Note: Within columns, means with different superscripts are significantly different. $p < .05$.

Table 4
Number of Early Adolescents Naming Parents, Siblings,
Teachers, and Friends as the Person Who Provided
the Most Help with Homework

	Nominations for Most Help With Homework			
	Parent(s)	Sibling(s)	Friend(s)	Teacher(s)
Elementary school	15	5	3	7
Junior high school[a]	7	11	4	7

[a]Parent and sibling totals include one adolescent who named "my whole family" as helping the most with homework.

Because the culture broker hypothesis posits that siblings' assistance with school tasks will increase as youth begin to exceed their parents' education, we carried out a *t*-tests comparing the homework assistance provided by mothers who had not gone beyond elementary school with mothers who had attained more schooling. The *t*-test was not significant, indicating that both groups of parents provided similar levels of help with homework.

Bivariate Correlations: Emotional Support, Educational Guidance, and Math Grades

Because we were interested in the roles of emotional support and educational guidance in predicting math pathways, we examined only

Table 5
Correlations among Study Variables (*N* = 31)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Math grades Year 1 to Year 2	—	.36*	.41*	.45**	.35*	−.04	.22	−.29	−.49**	.12	.16	.45**
2. Parents' emotional support		—	.26	.02	−.09	−.06	.08	.17	.11	.20	.06	.13
3. Parents' educational guidance			—	.04	.37*	−.04	−.18	−.15	−.07	−.05	.11	.20
4. Siblings' emotional support				—	.62**	.39*	.02	−.25	−.21	−.29	.12	.18
5. Siblings' educational guidance					—	.16	.10	−.22	.10	−.18	−.05	.15
6. Friends' emotional support						—	.31	−.03	−.13	−.07	.02	−.01
7. Friends' educational guidance							—	−.04	.32	−.14	.19	.19
8. Teachers' emotional support								—	.41**	−.17	.05	.21
9. Teachers' educational guidance									—	−.21	.12	.24
10. Youth gender (girl = 1, boy = 2)										—	.13	−.19
11. Mothers' education											—	.54**
12. Family income												—

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

conversation and homework measures from Year 1 (sixth grade). To examine emotional support and educational guidance from parents, siblings, teachers, and friends, a composite score was created for emotional support and educational guidance from each conversational partner (i.e., parents, siblings, teachers, and friends). For each conversational partner, the emotional support composite was created by computing the mean for conversations about problems and about friends; the educational guidance composite was created by computing the mean for talk about the future and help with homework.

As shown in Table 5, math grade pathways (low, average, and high) from elementary school to junior high school were positively and significantly correlated with parents' emotional support and educational guidance and siblings' emotional support and educational guidance. Family income was significantly correlated with math pathways, but no such relation was found for mothers' education. For teachers and friends, only the correlation

Table 6
Parents' and Siblings' Emotional Support and Educational
Guidance and Family Income Predicting Math Pathways

Math Pathway	B	$SE\ B$	β	t	R^2	ΔR^2	F Value
Step 1							
Family income	.435	.120	.479	3.61**	.20		7.25***
Step 2							
Parents' guidance and support	.627	.245	.305	3.79**	.41	.21	14.74***
Step 3							
Siblings' guidance and support	.331	.188	.237	1.76	.46	.05	11.61***

**$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

between teachers' educational guidance and math pathways was signifi-
cant; teachers' educational guidance was negatively correlated with the
math pathways of youth.

Multivariate Analyses of Family
Correlates of Math Grades

Although parents' and siblings' emotional support and educational guid-
ance were correlated with math grades, we cannot conclude that this pattern
functioned independently of social class. We used hierarchical multiple
regression analysis to test for this possibility. We first created composites of
parents' and siblings' resources by creating a mean score for their emo-
tional support and educational guidance; thus, the variables used in the
regression indexed the totality of parents' and siblings' resources. Given the
small sample, we did not include teachers' educational guidance in
the analysis. Because we were interested in whether parents' and siblings'
resources predicted math grades after controlling for family income and
whether siblings' resources predicted math pathways above and beyond
parents' resources, we entered family income in Step 1, the parent resource
composite in Step 2, and the sibling resource composite in Step 3. Together,
these three variables accounted for 46% of the variance in math grades (see
Table 6). Findings indicated family income was a significant predictor of
math grades, explaining 20% of the variance. Furthermore, after controlling
for family income, only parents' resources significantly predicted math
pathways, explaining an additional 21% of the variance in the model.[4]

Discussion

This study advances our understanding of how Latino early adolescents draw resources from families, friends, and schools for their academic achievement. Researchers, educators, and policy makers are thinking in more developmental terms about Latino families as partners in children's schooling rather than focusing on parents alone or on parent-intervention programs that are based on deficit models of Latino parents. Viewing Latino immigrant families, in particular, as potential resources for early adolescents is consistent with views of Latino families' "cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005) and "funds of knowledge" (González & Moll, 2002), but we need to know more about effective Latino family involvement, especially at home.

Our results also underscore the importance of investigating sources of within-group variability in academic achievement of Latino youth (see Mooney & Rivas-Drake, 2008). As they transitioned to junior high school, a third of the students continued to excel in math, a third continued with average grades, and a third declined. Our study highlights factors associated with this variability in school achievement, such as families' conversations about personal (emotional) and academic topics, and family income. Many studies have linked family income to school grades; thus, this finding is not surprising. As noted by Coleman (1988), economic capital shapes families' access to resources that, in turn, affect their children's schooling.

Overall, our results highlighted the associations between Latino families' emotional support and educational guidance and their children's school achievement. These youth saw their parents and siblings as their most important sources of support and guidance, and the importance of families persisted from elementary school to junior high school. Friends were key sources of both emotional support and educational guidance, but teachers were more specialized sources of homework help. A finding that may be surprising yet important is that Latino parents' support and guidance were positively correlated with students' math grade pathways, and these associations did not vary as a function of family income. In contrast, friends' emotional support and educational guidance and teachers' emotional support were not correlated with math pathways but were cited by youth as more specialized resources. That teachers' educational guidance was negatively correlated with students' math pathways may reflect a reactive pattern in which teachers provide more help to students who are struggling with math (see also Cooper, Chavira, et al., 2005). Taken together, these findings did not unequivocally support our prediction that families

would provide more support and guidance than friends, but did support our prediction that teachers would be least likely to provide emotional support.

Earlier analyses of interviews with parents in this longitudinal study revealed that they expressed familistic values in conversations with their children, giving advice or *consejos* (Azmitia & Brown, 2002; Cooper, Brown, et al., 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). These resources were evident in parents' clear valuing of respect for others and vigilant tracking of how well their children were navigating the good moral path of life—*el buen camino de la vida*. Here, parents' agency and engagement seemed to matter more than their literacy. We also saw bridging between familism and social capital when parents exempted youth from chores to allow them to study, and when a number of mothers with connections at school asked that a note be sent to a neighbor if their child was not doing well in their classes or was behaving poorly. These mothers sensed that their child would not deliver a note from school and, if one were mailed, would intercept it before parents had read it. Although links from familistic values and practices to school engagement have been reported (e.g., Fuligni, 2007), we have more to learn about comparable links to school achievement.

This picture of family support and guidance is consistent with research demonstrating the continuing importance of families in adolescence (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). On average, parents helped youth somewhat less with homework during junior high, a pattern that has also been reported for European American families by Epstein et al. (2002). However, for some youth, siblings gained prominence in helping most with homework. This finding indicates that older siblings can play important roles in the school achievement of Latino youth and directs attention to sources of individual differences in academic success. It also underscores the importance of including siblings in studies academic achievement of Latino youth.

Friends provided emotional support and educational guidance, whereas teachers were not sources of emotional support. However, as students transitioned into junior high school, teachers provided more educational guidance, particularly to struggling students. The findings for friends are consistent with the large body of work highlighting the salience of friends during adolescence. The growing importance of friends did not come at the cost of ongoing connections with families (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). That youth sought high levels of homework help from teachers suggests that youth had at least this social capital; teachers may also be making efforts to help Latino students with homework especially when they are performing poorly. Taken together, patterns for friends and teachers suggest that Latino youth have the social capital to connect productively with relationships and

institutions beyond the family, but that these connections vary by topic. Nevertheless, the frequency with which youth sought these resources was not significantly related to their grades. Research is needed to elucidate links between such social capital and academic achievement in Latino youth.

In sum, both in elementary school and junior high school, Latino youth were more likely to get help with homework from teachers, parents, and siblings than from friends. There was some evidence that teachers became more prominent and parents slightly less so as sources of homework help in junior high. In junior high school, siblings were as likely as teachers or parents to be named as providing the most help with homework. The finding that these youth did not consider friends for homework help highlights the importance of considering the topics in identifying sources of support and guidance. It also would be important to consider other academic domains for which friends can play important roles in the schooling of Latino youth; considerable research has identified friends as both positive and negative influences in the academic trajectories and persistence in school of Latino youth. (Azmitia & Cooper, 2001; Ogbu, 1994).

The increase in siblings' help with homework from elementary school to junior high school is consistent with the sibling culture broker hypothesis (Parke & Buriel, 1998). However, our finding that the composite of siblings' educational guidance and emotional support was not a unique predictor of math pathways above and beyond parents' guidance and emotional support is not consistent with this hypothesis. About half of the mothers in the current study had not gone beyond elementary school, but their educational guidance did not differ significantly from those who had completed junior high or high school. Furthermore, analyses of the interviews carried out as part of the larger study showed that parents' educational guidance and emotional support extended beyond content. For example, whether or not parents were literate, they supported their children's educational success by consistently requiring that they finish homework before watching TV or spending time with friends (Cooper, Brown, et al., 2005). Other practices that appeared to foster academic success included parents sending youth to free after-school tutoring at school, the Boys' and Girls' Club, and a neighborhood Latino community center.

Analyses of the interviews also showed that youth were not solely responsible for enlisting teachers' help with their homework. Teachers showed investment in students' success by providing orientations and homework workshops to families, sending notes and homework in both Spanish and English, or recruiting a Spanish-speaking classroom aide. A few teachers offered help with homework during morning and lunch recess.

However, because other studies of achievement of Latino youth have not painted teachers in such a positive light (e.g., Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007), it will be important to examine further the role of teachers in the academic pathways of Latino youth.

In addition to educational guidance, emotional support has been linked to school achievement for Latino adolescents (e.g., Levitt et al., 2005). Our findings advance existing work in two important ways. First, investigators typically measure perceived support by how much youth feel valued by others. In contrast, we sought to measure specific actions of support by assessing the frequency with which family members and others engaged in supportive conversations about personal and academic topics and helped with homework. By measuring behavioral practices, our study identifies potential mechanisms through which familism and social capital promote math achievement in Latino youth. Second, our work identified siblings' educational guidance and emotional support as an additional way to represent the social capital that families invest in youth. For interventions that support school achievement, it is helpful to identify factors on which families and schools can act, such as having siblings do homework together, rather than demographic variables, which families and schools cannot control (e.g., number of siblings). Nevertheless, because siblings' emotional support and educational guidance did not predict the math pathways of youth, above and beyond parents' emotional support and educational guidance, we must remain cautious about the role of sibling support and guidance in the academic performance of Latino youth.

With such caution, it is also important to point out that siblings' homework help was not related to mothers' education. Thus, this is another way in which our data did not support the sibling culture broker hypothesis (Parke & Buriel, 1998; Weisner, 1986), that siblings would play more important roles in families where parents were unfamiliar with U.S. schools or where youth have exceeded their parents' educational level. Like Latinos' familistic values, these activities may not vary with acculturation or may reflect factors beyond parents' education. For example, some older siblings held time-consuming jobs, some were on the "bad path of life" such as in jail, and some younger siblings were doing better in school. Other older siblings had their own homework or helped care for disabled siblings or other relatives living at home. Our findings highlight the role of siblings in the schooling of Latino youth, although the small sample did not allow quantitative analyses of key factors in their pathways. Research on configurations of such factors may benefit from family case–based as well as variable-based analyses.

Limitations

Generalizing from this study should be done with care because of its small sample size. Further studies with larger samples will help clarify findings of this study, especially where larger studies have shown significant results. For example, although gender was not significantly correlated with emotional support and educational guidance or math pathways of Latino youth in this sample, other studies have revealed gender differences in academic outcomes for Latino students and in the family, friend, and school factors associated with these differences (e.g., Alfaro, Umaña-Taylor, & Bámaca, 2006).

Another potential limitation is that a self-selection bias may have stemmed from parents who chose to participate being more invested in their children's schooling. However, such bias would work against our finding both variation in parents' involvement and its relation to students' math pathways. Future research should examine whether this linkage extends to urban settings, beyond central California, to nonimmigrant families, to middle- and upper-class Latinos, and in general, to communities different from those we studied. It is also important to consider whether our findings extend beyond Mexican-descent families. Although Mexican-descent families constitute the majority of the school-age population in California, and as a group Mexican-descent students perform more poorly in school than other Latino students (Gándara, 1995), researchers and educational practitioners have increasingly recognized the need to examine variation in Latino subgroups' familism, social capital, academic performance, and educational pathways.

Finally, the use of math grade pathways as the only indicator of achievement was a limitation of this study. However, participating students' standardized test scores in both math and language arts showed restricted ranges, with most clustering between the 20th and 35th percentiles and offering little variation to study. Also, our observations of the participants in their classrooms suggested that their math grades reflected academic skills more accurately than their language arts grades, which were influenced by their behavior. Nevertheless, language arts grades might have helped illuminate whether support and guidance and parents' English proficiency contribute differently to grades, depending on domain.

Summary and Conclusions

Our results highlighted the importance of both group-level developmental changes and individual differences in family dynamics and academic achievement among Latino youth. Our final comments address proposals (Azmitia &

Cooper, 2001; Cooper, Brown, et al., 2005; Cooper, Chavira, et al., 2005; Phelan, et al., 1991) that youth navigate multiple interconnected worlds of home, school, and peers. We found that the relationships of youth varied in complex ways across worlds. For instance, friends were rarely called on for help with homework but provided other guidance and support (see also Stanton-Salazar, 2004). Friends appeared to serve more specialized roles than parents or siblings in the world of school. Youth may have gained enough homework help from family and teachers, friends may not have been doing well in school, or youth may have wanted to avoid criticism for being studious (Ogbu, 1994). Because many participating families did not have telephones and lived in dangerous neighborhoods, friends' low homework help may reflect limited access to friends after school. Whether friends' low homework help reflected potentially negative influences needs further exploration.

Teachers' roles also appeared highly specialized. They were rarely asked for emotional support, although they were asked for help with homework relatively often. As suggested by Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2004), it is important to find ways to encourage youth to seek help beyond the family in planning their educational futures. Teachers often have knowledge about college requirements, applications, and financial aid that may be especially useful for immigrant youth whose families are unfamiliar with U.S. schools (Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002). Yet in the present study, relative to other conversational partners, teachers were an underutilized resource for talking about the future. By mapping how Latino youth draw across their changing worlds of family, peers, and schools, our work contributes to theory, research, practices, and policies aimed at enhancing educational and life pathways of one of the fastest-growing ethnic minority groups in the United States.

Notes

1. Immigrant parents with high school or higher education credentials from their home countries were not part of this study and merit attention with respect to this argument.

2. p was set conservatively at .01 to protect from Type 1 error.

3. We could not test for statistical differences between elementary school and junior high school because students could nominate more than one person with whom they felt most comfortable talking about these topics. Thus, the assumption of independence required by chi-square analysis was violated.

4. We conducted a power analysis for our multiple regression analysis with the expectation of large associations between parent income and math grades based on (a) published studies that have addressed these factors using data from the NELS:88 longitudinal study, (b) a moderate association between emotional support and educational guidance and math grades, (c) cross-sectional research that has correlated these three variables (e.g., Azmitia et al., 1996; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), and (d) a modest association between sibling educational guidance

and math grades (Azmitia et al., 1996) and emotional support and school achievement (Milevsky & Levitt, 2003). We had only three predictors, so we set our alpha level at .05. If the three independent variables were orthogonal predictors of math grades, we would antici-pate an R^2 value of approximately .45, which corresponds to power of .96 at $\alpha = .05$. Because we were using composite variables in our analysis, it is possible that power would increase to approximately .55, which still is in the moderate range. Assuming modest overlap of predic-tors attenuating the R^2 to .45, the power of our regression analysis remains in very good range, at .80 for $\alpha = .05$.

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