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10 MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS.**

Economic Capital and the Educational Ascent of 10 Mexican American Students

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## **Economic Capital and the Educational Ascent of 10 Mexican American Students**

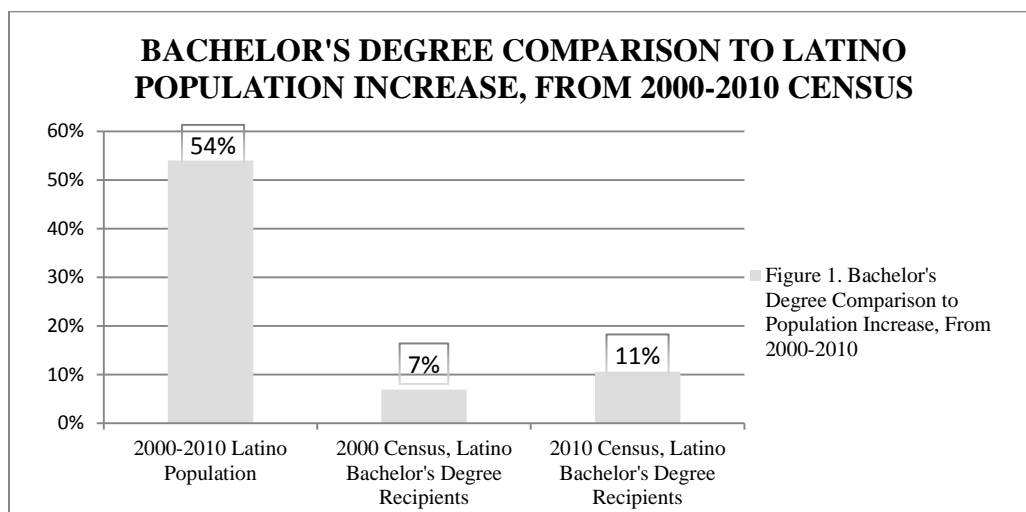
### **Introduction**

It has been said that education attainment is the great equalizer, an investment that leads to vast opportunities and monetary gain. Notwithstanding, is the view that not all is fair at the starting line of the educational process. When taking into consideration the notion of, “pulling one’s self up by the bootstrap” we find that the majority of children born into lower economic households do not have the same opportunities to thrive within the American educational system due to issues related to healthcare, hostile social environments, unfavorable living conditions, inequitable schooling, poor diet, and several other provisions that would otherwise aid in their edification. These socioeconomic variables that hinder the physical and cognitive maturation of lower socioeconomic children permeate race, ethnicity, education, and one’s life earnings.

For example, according to the United States Bureau of the Census (2006), in 2005 the average income of a Bachelor’s degree recipient was \$35,000 greater than a high school dropout, and nearly \$26,000 more than a high school graduate. Currently, the median wealth of White households is 18 times that of Hispanic households, representing the largest wealth disparity since the government began publishing such data (Kochhar, Fry, & Taylor, 2011). This disparity in household income runs parallel to the low academic attainment of the overall Hispanic population. This present article briefly highlights some of the repercussions associated with the Hispanic populations low education attainment and the economic capital that was negotiated by ten socio-economically challenged, yet, academically successful Mexican American students from San Antonio, Texas.

### The Opportunity Cost

Despite numbering over fifty-million, statistics purport that Hispanics are the fastest growing population yet one of the least educated ethnic groups in the United States with the latest census (2010) indicating only 2,652,000 age twenty-five and older holding a Bachelor's degree. The education-attainment disparities that presently exist for the Hispanic population are highlighted by the number of Mexican Americans acquiring a Bachelor's degree, where the numbers suggest that this Hispanic sub-population has experienced an increase in their population by nearly 32 million. In a similar manner, figures from the latest census also signify that 10.6 percent of the Mexican American population have attained at least a Bachelor's degree (United States Census Bureau, 2010), thus representing a 3.7 percent increase from the previous census (United States Census Bureau, 2000). That is, although the growth of the Mexican American population has increased by 54 percent from 2000 to 2010, their education level has disproportionately increased by nearly 4 percent (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Latino Bachelor's Degree Recipients' Comparison to Population Increase*

In looking at the highest levels of Hispanic education attainment, the National Science Foundation (2014) reported that of the 32,927 American students attaining a doctoral degree in the United States in the 2011-2012 school year, 2,141 were earned by Hispanics (see Figure 2). The implications of this low attainment become even more striking when noting that in a time when the United States is contending for a competitive edge in the world's global economy, there were more temporary visa holders from China (4,217) and India (2,236) earning doctorates at U.S. colleges and universities in 2012 than there were Hispanic Americans (2,141) (National Science Foundation, 2014).

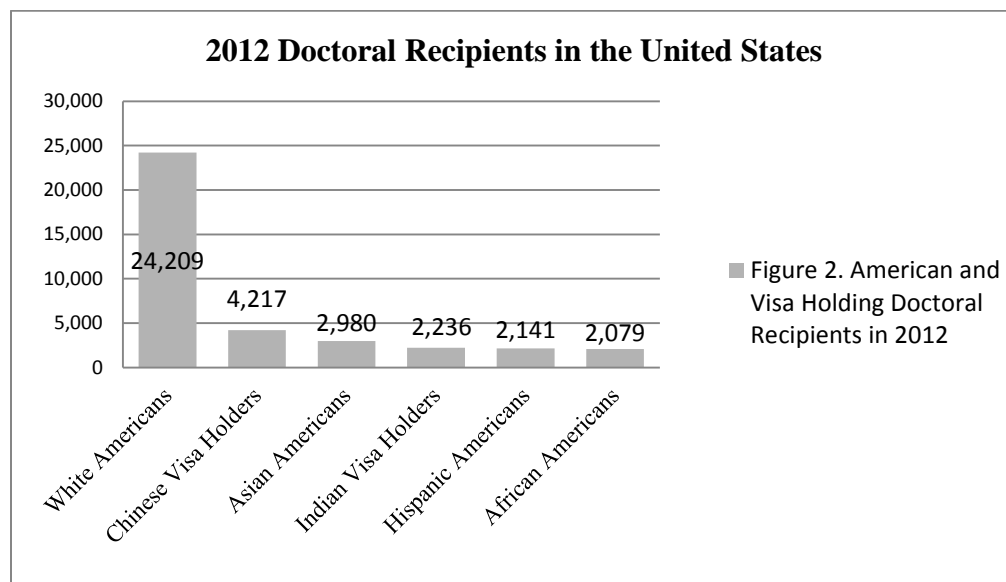


Figure 2. United States Doctoral Recipients in 2012 School Year

The impact of low education attainment of this population on the American economy is stark, and what some economists might consider an *opportunity cost*; a term used to identify the benefit that is given up when scarce resources are used for one purpose instead of another.

Here, the implication of Hispanics' low academic attainment becomes relevant when highlighting a large segment of the American population that is unable to contribute to the consumption base and/or the economic cycle of monetary flow. Gandara (1995, p. 3) suggests, that in areas where a large percentage of the student population is Mexican American, the persistent underachievement of this group constitutes a serious mismatch between the needs of the economy and the skills and preparation of a substantial segment of the population. In other words, by raising the education attainment of the overall Hispanic population, the nation would benefit from their increased purchasing power; higher tax receipts, garner higher levels of worker productivity (Alliance For Excellent Education, 2008, p. 1), while saving over \$10 billion annually that is spent on social programs and recipients of temporary assistance (Alliance For Excellent Education, 2008, p. 2; Garfinkel, Kelly, & Waldfogel, 2005). With this in mind, there is currently a minimal amount of empirical studies that shed light on the economic obstacles and consequences of lower socioeconomic Hispanic student's education attainment. The research findings reported in this article help fill the voids in this area of research by narrowing the focus of examination on the *Life-history* narratives of ten academically successful Mexican American men and their recollections of the salient economic factors that facilitated their education attainment.

### **Bourdieu's Multi-Capital Theories**

In seeking an understanding to the phenomenon of academic success amongst a low education attaining population, the research was guided by two general questions: What barriers did Mexican American men who graduated from San Antonio high schools

face in route to their doctoral degree and how did they negotiate these obstacles; and what forms of capital were most salient in accomplishing their degree attainment?

Throughout the course of the study, a theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu's *Multi-capitals* (extracted from Bourdieu's Cultural Reproduction Theory) was employed to theoretically cement the research. Bourdieu, a French Sociologist, suggested that in most social structures, there exists the concept of a *field*, a structured social space with its own rules, values, and schemes of domination, in which people coexist through multifaceted social relations. Like players on a baseball field, each participant within and upon this so-called field must have a sense of what is at stake, an investment in the final box score, a keen awareness of the strategies required for success. In Bourdieu's words, an individual in the field must have, "A feel for the game, the versatility for the continuously changing circumstances that occur upon and within the field" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). In short, for Bourdieu, a field is identified as a hierarchically structured social arena in which the actors compete for money, prestige, and power (Verter, 2003, p. 153). These fields are represented in institutional structures such as the, workplace, education, politics, law and economy, and it is within these fields that power structures produce or delineate *economic, cultural, linguistic, symbolic or social capital*.

Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between these *multiple-capitals* by defining economic capital as the basic monetary form; cultural capital as knowledge in its broadest sense, institutionalized as educational credentials; symbolic capital as the form of cultural capital that is used to confer status or distinction; social capital as mutual obligations embodied in social networks such as kinship, friendship, and group membership; and linguistic capital as the mastery of/and relationship to language (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 114).

By focusing on these concepts, Bourdieu postulated that each of these capitals is enhanced by the ability to transform into one of the others. For example, individuals that are born into upper-to-middle class families are presented with social capital which allows the transformation and attainment of economic capital. “From Bourdieu’s perspective, the sum of the various forms of capital is the cumulative advantage of the privileged class and is key to the reproduction of the class system by transmission from generation to generation” (Gilbert, 2008, p. 94). While families can directly transfer economic capital across generations by inheritance, they can also use their economic capital to facilitate indirect transfer of economic capital across generations via attainment of valued educational credentials by their children (Veenstra, 2009, p. 65). Notwithstanding, those individuals without economic capital are unable to transfer monetary resources, and statistically speaking, have just as difficult time relaying acquired educational credentials across generations as well.

The analysis of the participant’s narrative brought to light a total of twenty-one themes while reporting on the various forms of *social, cultural, linguistic, and economic capital* the participants mobilized en-route to a doctoral degree. This current article will highlight the findings from the latter, the economic capital that was negotiated in the schooling process of the ten participants.

### **Economic Capital in the Education Field**

According to the United States Department of Education (2010), 27% of Hispanic children living in the United States are living in poverty. While nearly half of all public school 4<sup>th</sup> graders in the United States were eligible for free or reduced lunch, 77% of

these students were identified as being Hispanic. These statistics underline the lack of economic capital that several Latino students have once they enter the *education field*. For Bourdieu (1986, p. 252), economic capital is at the root of all other kinds of capital, and the nucleus by which all other material and gains are accrued. Within the education field, the economic resources that are accumulated, protected, and employed for the purpose of ensuring the empowerment of future monetary gain is non-mistakenly economic capital. These financial and/or familial resources can be identified as the economic capital that reproduces and provides access to well performing schools, experienced educators and supplemental learning opportunities such as books, technology, tutors, and enrichment programs.

The most widely used indicator of family resources is socio-economic status (SES), a term used to identify measures of financial and human resources such as, both parent's education, both parent's occupational status, family income (Rumberger & Lim, 2008, p. 48), and is the most powerful contributor to student educational outcome (Gandara, 1995). Rothstein (2004) addresses the underlying issue of lower SES, student learner outcome by introducing the social and economic variables that hinder the dissemination of knowledge. In doing so, he contends that economic factors contribute to the disparity in health related issues, which in turn impede the overall educational stability of minority students. Rothstein suggests that in order to obtain a balanced approach to the achievement solution we not only have to concentrate on educational reform, but remedies that address the lack of financial resources that a number of lower SES students have once they enter American educational institute.



Several studies that have examined the relationship between SES and educational attainment find that students that come from, lower SES families, low parental education, and low income are statistically more likely to drop out of school (Rumberger & Lim, 2008, pp. 48-49). Not only are these students more likely to experience disparities across a wide spectrum of social indicators such as education, income, and health care (Ramirez, Chalela, Gallion, Green, & Ottoson, 2011), other research (Mani, Mullainathan, Shafir, & Zhao, 2013) suggests that poverty directly impedes cognitive function due to the depletion of mental resources that are being utilized to deal with a large amount of factors related to their economic-to-social bearing. For example, a 2008 National Survey (Turner, Shattuck, Hamby, & Finkelhor, 2013) examined the various levels of violence and victimization that youth are exposed to and find that lower SES families are more likely to live in a *disordered community*, characterized by rundown buildings, graffiti, litter, public drinking and drug use, vandalism, and various types of other crime. Findings also reaffirm, that youth living in neighborhoods with higher levels of disorder experience significantly higher levels of psychological distress due to: the fear of crime, emotional and behavioral problems associated with physical abuse, sexual abuse, neighborhood violence, peer bullying, witnessing parental violence, or multiple forms of the previous attributes in what is termed, *poly-victimization* (pg. 260). Another study (Peinado, Villanos, Singh, & Leiner, 2014) investigated the association between exposure to violence, drugs and alcohol and the affect they have on the psychosocial and behavioral profiles of Mexican American adolescents of low SES. Findings from this study suggest that those participants that reported a single or combination of “exposures”

were more likely to exemplify behavioral and emotional problems associated with their risk factors.

In addition to social and cognitive distractions, several studies suggest that adolescents of low SES have a greater propensity toward substance abuse that will eventually lead to physical, mental, social, and psychiatric problems (Carlisle, Buser, & Carlisle, 2012; Daniel, et al., 2009; Gentry, et al., 2011; Hiscock, Bauld, Amos, Fidler, & Munafo, 2012; Hodge, Marsiglia, & Nieri, 2011; Hogan, Gabrielsen, Luna, & Grothaus, 2003; Humensky, 2010; Keyes & Hasin, 2008; Mathur, Erickson, Stigler, Forster, & Finnegan Jr., 2013; McLaughlin, Costello, Leblanc, Sampson, & Kessler, 2012; Perreira & Cortes, 2006; Vasquez, Gonzalez-Guarda, & De Santis, 2011).

By highlighting these obstructions, it is reaffirmed that economic capital impacts the reproduction of education attainment of lower SES students and is hence identified as a formidable obstruction for approximately three-quarters of Hispanic students attending American public schools. As it relates to the findings brought forth in this article, economic disparity (Castillo, 2012; Gandara, 1995, 2001, 2005; Rothstein, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valencia, 2005; Vega & Martinez, 2008) is a considerable barrier in the educational attainment of lower SES Latino students.

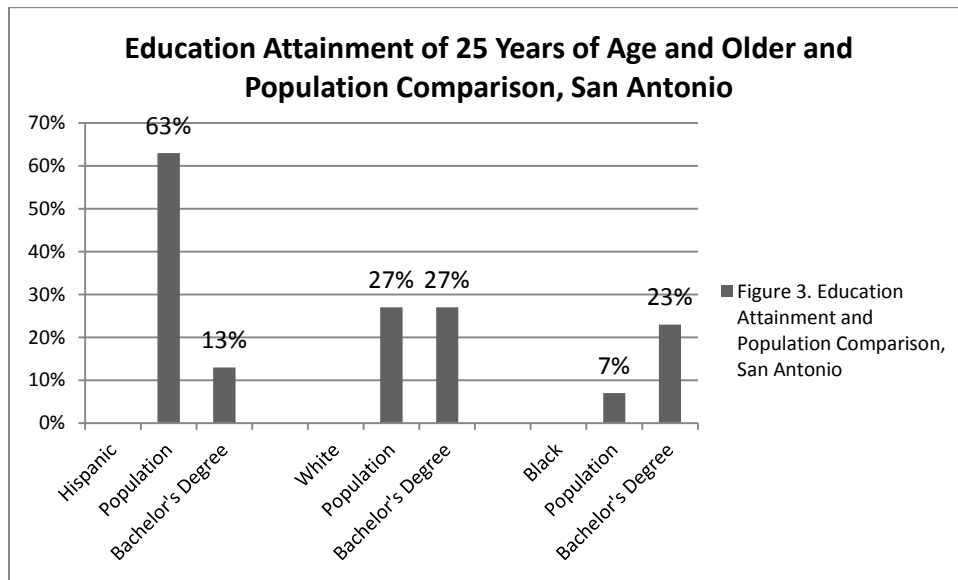
### **The Life History Study**

The findings from this 2012 *Life-history* study derive from the narrative data collected from ten academically successful Latino men from San Antonio, Texas. Life-history methods, was developed and consolidated by the tradition of sociological research known as the Chicago school. Chase (2005, p. 652) adds that Life-history is the more specific term that researchers use to describe an extensive autobiographical narrative, in

either oral or written form and, that it covers all or most of a life, or, about a specific significant aspect of a person’s life. Through the use of a Life-history methodology, the significant events that this 2012 research study delved into were the educational experiences of academically successful Latino men from San Antonio.

**Site Selection**

This study of academically successful Latinos was administered in San Antonio, Texas. According to the latest census (2010), San Antonio has the fourth largest Hispanic population in the United States, and, is among the list of the twenty-seven cities in the United States in which the Hispanic population is the majority. The demographic makeup of the city consists of, 63.2 percent Hispanic, 26.6 percent White Non-Hispanic, and 6.9 percent African-American (United States Census Bureau, 2010).



*Figure 3. San Antonio Bachelor’s Degree and Population Comparison (United States Census Bureau, 2010)*

While nearly 24 percent of the city's population had attained a Bachelor's, Master's, Professional, or Doctorate degree prior to April of 2010 (see figure 3.), Hispanics at 13 percent held a lower educational attainment rate than the city's African-American (23%) and White populations (27%) (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Currently, there are 14 school districts which encompass the San Antonio metropolitan area with five of these districts on average, reporting their students to be 90% economically disadvantaged and ranked among the top seven districts with the highest enrollment of Hispanics (averaging over 95% collectively). According to the San Antonio Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (2012), in 2011, the average number of students that were determined by the Texas Education Agency to be economically disadvantaged in this same geographic area was sixty-six percent (66%) for a total of 219,165 students.

### **The Participants and Their Economic Capital**

In this study, ten participants had the following characteristics in common: (A) educated throughout San Antonio's K-12 schooling system (B) a self identifying Latino of Mexican descent, (C) a doctoral degree recipient and (D) economically disadvantaged during their K-12 schooling process. The following section provides a brief overview of the ten participants in this study.

After receiving clearance from the Institutional Review Board, this study commenced on April 4, 2011 and closed on April 4, 2012. During this time, forty-seven potential participants were contacted utilizing a snowball recruiting technique and from this number, ten agreed to participate (see Table 1). In the process of capturing the narrative responses from the ten participants, a phenomenological interviewing (Seidman, 2006) technique was utilized to probe, analyze, and report on the data that was being

collected. A series of three digitally-recorded interviews were conducted with seven of the ten participants that lasted approximately 90 minutes each, resulting in twenty-one interviews. Two of the remaining three participants were interviewed in one sitting, while utilizing the same three interview protocols; this resulted in interviews that lasted approximately 150 minutes (2.5 hours) each. The remaining participant, Julio, was interviewed once using only the first interview protocol. Julio was not available for the other two interviews due to illness. In sum, a total of twenty-four interviews were conducted across the ten participants. All of the digital recordings were transcribed verbatim, analyzed, and coded for analysis with the aid of the qualitative software program, NVivo.

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Table 1.

*Degree Attainment of Pathfinder Participants*

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| Participant | Age | Year of Graduation |               |          |           | Degree  |
|-------------|-----|--------------------|---------------|----------|-----------|---------|
|             |     | HS                 | Undergraduate | Graduate | Doctorate |         |
| Ronnie      | 34  | 1995               | 2003          | NA       | 2011      | DDS     |
| Raul        | 69  | 1961               | 1970          | 1972     | 1991      | PhD     |
| James       | 71  | 1954               | 1957          | 1969     | 1979      | PhD/STD |
| Carlos      | 62  | 1968               | 1973          | 1975     | 2001      | EdD     |
| Jose        | 63  | 1966               | 1969          | 1971     | 1976      | PhD     |
| Martin      | 58  | 1972               | 1977          | 1982     | 1988      | JD      |
| Albert      | 67  | 1961               | 1965          | 1967     | 1974      | MD      |
| Julio       | 56  | 1972               | 1977          | NA       | 1984      | DDS     |
| Hector      | 45  | 1984               | 1988          | 1990     | 2007      | EdD     |
| Gilbert     | 47  | 1982               | 1990          | 1992     | 2006      | EdD     |

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To protect their anonymity, pseudonyms were given to each of the ten participants and the people in their lives; however, the name of the places and institutions that these men entered into remain the same. Together, the ten participants represented nearly seventy years of continuous education in San Antonio (1942-2011), and six different types of doctoral degrees.

*Ronnie the Dentist*

34 year old Ronnie is a first-generation Mexican American who has attained an Associate's degree in Liberal Arts, a Bachelor's of Science degree in Biology, and a Doctorate in Dental Surgery (DDS). He was raised by both parents in a lower socio-economic (SES) household, and was the second-born out of four children. Both of his parents graduated from high school, while his father dropped-out of community college. Ronnie's economic status growing up was heavily affected by his father losing his job and filing bankruptcy during what he called the era of, "Reaganomics." This would play a significant role in Ronnie's adolescent years for two reasons. First, his father who was a photographer by trade owned his own business until losing his job and becoming a long haul truck driver who was constantly on the road. As the family's economic status dropped, and his father's absence, Ronnie began to participate in risky behavior and would eventually fall under the influence of drugs, alcohol, and gang violence with Ronnie adding, "There were fights, stabbings, and shootings... a lot of shootings; a lot of people I knew died during this time."

*Ronnie the Dentist's Economic Capital*

While in the K-12 educational system Ronnie's family struggled to make ends meet. Once he graduated from high school, he started accumulating economic capital

through full time employment at a blue jean factory until he graduated from the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) with his Bachelor's degree in 2003.

Prior to transferring to UTSA, he spent the first two years of his academic career at St. Phillip's Community College.

In both cases, he paid for his education from his bi-weekly employment checks and financial aid in the form of college grants. Once he was accepted into dental school, he applied to a program called D-STAR; a program that paid for the total cost of attending school, "It gives you a monthly stipend, it pays for books, and tuition. This program has paid for everything I do not have to pay this back. I did also take some loans out that I do have to pay back," explained Ronnie.

#### *Raul the Professor*

Raul, a 69 year-old professor, came into the world during the height of World War II as his family resided in one of San Antonio's housing projects, the *Alazan-Apache* courts. While in junior high school, Raul's father acquired a job at Kelly Air Force Base and the family of eight moved out of the projects to the Southside of San Antonio. Neither of his parents acquired formal education; as his mother, who was born and educated in the Mission of San Jose, dropped out during sixth grade. His father dropped out of school during the third grade, and after numerous attempts, failed to attain his GED. Raul's graduation in 1991 from the University of Michigan, where he earned a PhD in Political Science, marked a capstone to a thirty-year journey that started with his high school commencement in 1961.

*Raul the Professor's Economic Capital*

Raul would share the period of transition when his father attained a better paying job and moved the family out of the housing projects into a lower-to-middle class neighborhood. It was during this time when he began to notice the social inequities between Mexican Americans and Whites stating, “The Anglo kids had homes that looked like mansions, they lived on paved streets, they had sidewalks....we had gravel streets and no drainage, it always seemed bad.” Although he lacked economic capital throughout his K-12 schooling, Raul enlisted in the military soon after high school graduation and upon his honorable discharge attained a vast amount of economic capital.

In 1966, Raul married and in the same year used his ten-point veteran's preference on the Civil Service exam to become a postal worker. In January of 1967, he fulfilled his long standing ambition of going to school and enrolled at San Antonio Community College. During this time, he would work from midnight until 8:30 a.m., and then go to school, go home, study, and then go to sleep. After transferring, and later graduating from St. Mary's University, Raul was accepted into Trinity University at which time he quit his job with the Postal Service, and received the Brackenridge Fellowship which paid for his tuition and books. After graduating from Trinity in 1972, he applied to several universities to include, Harvard, Michigan, and Santa Barbara. Although he was accepted into these universities they did not offer financial assistance. Then, at the last minute Raul would state:

Michigan came in with money *mijito* (son) to pay my tuition; they gave me a stipend, the whole thing through a minority award fellowship, then I attained the Ford Foundation for Pre-Doctoral Students. Again everything was paid for. The Ford Fellowship helped me a lot, a thousand dollars a year for books alone.



Because he did not want to burden his family budget, Raul stayed away from college loans and subsidized his undergraduate education with his GI Bill allotment. When coalesced with the before mentioned GI Bill and Trinity fellowship, the Minority fellowship at Michigan and Ford Fellowship provided a vast amount of economic capital for Raul, aiding him in his educational ambitions.

*Father James*

75 year-old James is a high-ranking Catholic priest who currently is a tenured professor at a prestigious university in the Northeastern part of the United States. He attained a Bachelor's of Science degree in Chemistry and another Bachelor's Degree in Seminary Studies, a Master's Degree in Pastoral Anthropology, and a PhD and S.T.D. (Seminary Doctorate of Theology) in Theology. Although James is a first-generation American, his paternal lineage can be traced back to Texas well before the U.S./Mexican War as part of his family decided to move back to Mexico to avoid being raised in a Protestant country. It was during this time that his father married his mother and decided to rejoin the family that was situated in San Antonio. Despite having a third-grade education, his father raised enough capital to establish a grocery store on the impoverished Westside of San Antonio. Father James' long road to the pinnacle of the educational summit took approximately 25 years after his high school commencement.

*Father James' Economic Capital*

James' academic success was heavily impacted by economic capital after graduating from high school in 1954. Once he enrolled at St. Mary's University he received a scholarship that paid for tuition and books, then in graduate school, he

reported that the “Jesuits” paid the total cost of attending school until he earned his Priesthood.

### *Carlos the Engineer*

Graduating from high school in 1968 at the height of the Civil Rights movement and Viet Nam War protests, Carlos never dreamed that 33 years later he would be acquiring a doctoral degree in Higher Education. This 62 year-old, first-generation Mexican American who is currently the Executive Director of a central Texas university engineering program, was born, raised, and educated within a lower SES environment where the highest level of education was “at best,” was his mother’s second grade attainment. Growing up within a *barrio* of San Antonio’s south side, his father was a day laborer who packed and moved families coming into and departing many of San Antonio’s military installations, while his mother cleaned homes for a living. After acquiring a Bachelor’s of Science Degree in Electrical Engineering, Carlos earned a Master’s of Science degree in Computer Science, followed by a Doctorate in Education (Ed.D).

### *Carlos the Engineer’s Economic Capital*

As he enrolled as an undergraduate student at Texas A&M University in 1968, Carlos performed as a musician in a Rock and Roll band, worked full-time throughout the semesters, and applied for grants and scholarships. Whatever he could not cover, his family would help supplement his financial resources. After A&M, Carlos applied and was accepted into Columbia University where his graduate school tuition, books and fees were paid for by his employer. Nearly thirty years passed once Carlos graduated with his Master’s degree from Columbia, when he decided to go back to school to attain his Ed.D

in the late 1990's. To pay for his doctoral studies, Carlos stated, "I was already working and had a career or was working towards the end of my career. So, I basically accumulated the resources to help pay; it wasn't cheap, but I used those funds."

*Jose the College Administrator*

Sixty-three year-old Jose attained his PhD in Counseling Psychology, and is a tenured professor and full time administrator at a university in central Texas. He is a first generation Mexican American who was the last of ten children born into a lower socio-economic family. Jose's parents did not have a high level of educational attainment with his father dropping out of school during the third grade and his mother failing to enroll in school once she arrived in the United States. Out of all ten participants in this study, Jose earned his doctorate degree in the shortest period of time, within ten years of earning his high school diploma.

*Jose the College Administrator's Economic Capital*

A few years before he was born, Jose's parents left the migrant fields as his father acquired his first, full-time, stationary job at Kelly Air Force Base. To Jose, this was the best thing that ever could have happened because it provided the family with a small amount of stability. Prior to college, Jose worked 20 hours a week during high school at a local grocery store, moving up from a sack boy to a cashier. The first summer after his high school graduation, Jose began working two forty-hour jobs and attending San Antonio Community College. After a year at SACC, he transferred to the University of Texas at Austin, where he graduated in 1969. During his undergraduate studies at UT, Jose paid for his education by continuing to work at grocery stores, applying for grants, scholarships, and loans.

After he graduated from UT in 1969, Jose came back to San Antonio and started working as a teacher within Edgewood Independent School District. At the end of his first year of teaching, a recruiter from Texas Tech came by his school promoting a Master's level graduate program designed to increase the number of minorities in the profession of school counseling, "It was a nice program and had a lot of money; my monthly stipend was greater than what I was making at Edgewood as a teacher," stated Jose. Once in doctoral school, Jose would state that, "Financially, things could have been better but my wife was teaching and I had an internship that paid monthly stipends."

*Martin the Attorney*

The eldest of five children, 58 year-old Martin, went from being raised and educated as a lower SES student, to earning a Bachelor's of Arts degree from the University of Pennsylvania, a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Harvard University, and a Doctorate of Juris Prudence Degree from a law school in Texas, sixteen years after his high school graduation. Both of Martin's parents were junior high dropouts, with his father being diagnosed with severe alcoholism early on. Martin's maternal grandparents were both born in Texas with his grandmother being born near the missions of South San Antonio in 1909, and his grandfather being born in Laredo, Texas in 1904. Both of his grandparents from this side of the family migrated to the United States during the Mexican Revolution between, 1909 and 1911.

*Martin the Attorney's Economic Capital*

As a child growing up, Martin's economic capital was heavily influenced by his father's inability to maintain a steady job. As a result, his family relied on both sets of grandparents to help out. Although it was a struggle to make ends meet, his grandparents

helped out financially in buying school clothes and groceries. His mother's father was an airplane mechanic at Kelly Air Force Base, and owned a little mechanic shop within the community where Martin was raised. His grandparents on his father's side of the family also helped out with financial support. His grandmother was a beautician and owned a beauty shop and small grocery store, while his grandfather worked on the railroads with what Martin called, "a very steady job."

During the process of applying to undergraduate programs, Martin commented that, "Penn made it impossible to say no. They offered a full scholarship with minimal loans and work study program." When seeking out graduate programs, he applied to Harvard, Princeton, and once more to the University of Texas and was accepted into Harvard University. Once he decided to attend law school, he started taking prep classes and was eventually was accepted into the University of Houston School of Law in 1984. In subsidizing his graduate studies, Martin borrowed money, received scholarships, "but for the most part" took out federal loans.

#### *Albert the Medical Doctor*

As a former Chief of Staff of a major hospital in San Antonio, and current Pulmonary Specialist, 67 years-old Albert was born into a lower SES household on the west side of San Antonio. Although Albert's mother was Anglo, his father was born in Mexico and came to the United States with his family in 1917 to avoid the hostilities of the Mexican Revolution. His grandfather, was an entrepreneur in Mexico but lost "everything" and decided to resettle his family in the United States for better opportunities. Growing up, his father worked as a shipping clerk and his mother stayed at home to raise his two older brothers and younger sister. After enrolling in the San

Antonio public school system, Albert would experience the hostilities that are associated with gang affiliation, however, would eventually excel at mathematics and use this skill as a catalyst in acquiring his MD.

*Albert the Medical Doctor's Economic Capital*

Although he grew up in the impoverished west side of San Antonio, Albert states that he never really focused on what he and his family had or did not have. To pay for his undergraduate and graduate studies, he worked, acquired scholarships, and took out a few loans. Once in doctoral school, he saved up enough money while working at General Dynamics to pay for the first two years of medical school. During the remaining years of medical school, he married a teacher and lived off her salary, taught math part time at a junior college, and then was paid as a resident intern.

*Julio the Dentist*

Fifty-six year-old Julio, was born in a *colonia* situated on the south side of San Antonio, and would later go on to earn a DDS and become a dentist. As a child, he traveled throughout South Texas picking cotton and cantaloupe and then north to Michigan and Ohio to pick cherries. At the age of 14, his father acquired a job with the city of San Antonio driving trucks and this drastic change of employment provided Julio and his family with economic stability to move out of the shack-like-dwelling that was illuminated by kerosene lamps; into one of San Antonio's housing projects. Julio would state that this promotion, "Allowed me to be stable in one school and graduate." Both his parents were migrant workers and had little, to no public education, with his father's attainment capitulating during the first grade. Despite this, Julio would go on to become

the Director of Admissions of a dental school located in central Texas where he credits his humble beginnings as, “the driving force behind his academic success.”

*Hector the Economics Professor*

As a second-generation Mexican American born into a lower SES household, 45 year-old Hector became the first of four brothers to earn a college degree. Currently, he is an Associate Professor of Economics at a small college situated in central Texas. Like the previous participants, Hector’s parents were married, present, and both influential in his educational ascent. His father worked at a grocery store distribution center where he was a baker, and worked long hours at a time. His mother stayed at home to take care of the younger children. According to Hector, acquiring a doctoral degree was always something he wanted to pursue. Twenty-three years after his high school graduation, his ambitions of academic success would come to fruition when he graduated with his Ed.D in 2007.

*Hector the Economics Professor’s Economic Capital*

As an undergraduate student at St. Mary’s University, Hector worked full time and received grants and scholarships to help fund his education. Soon after graduating with his Bachelor’s degree, Hector would stay at St. Mary’s for his graduate studies where he would pay for his studies through loans, and a fellowship that he acquired through the Alamo Area Council of Government (AACG). This fellowship paid tuition, while providing him an opportunity to work with the City of San Antonio. According to Hector, “It wasn’t a lot of money, but together the job and loan took care of my second year of grad school at St. Mary’s.” In addition to these funds, Hector stated that his wife,

who is a teacher, was the main provider of income during this particular time, “She was a huge support system during this particular juncture.”

To supplement his finances, Hector started taking out loans while paying off the interest during the doctoral process. Right before he graduated in 2007, a colleague provided him with some information about the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s loan forgiveness program. He would expand on this program by stating:

It stipulated that if you graduate from a low income high school, attained a doctoral degree in the State of Texas, and worked as a community college instructor for at least one year you were eligible. It awarded you up to \$100,000 at \$20,000 a year for up to five years, provided that you stay employed as a college instructor, and I got lucky because I had over \$36,000 worth of loans paid off because of this plan.

*Gilbert the School District Administrator*

Second generation Mexican American, Gilbert graduated with his Ed.D in 2006 and is currently a school district administrator in a city located in South Texas. His father, Gilbert’s biggest influence, was a warehouse stockman until he acquired a job delivering uniforms to various companies located in and around San Antonio. Gilbert’s mother primarily was a stay at home mom when she wasn’t working with her sister’s office cleaning company. According to Gilbert, both sets of his grandparent’s families came over in the 1920’s or 1930’s seeking opportunities that were not offered in Mexico. All three of Gilbert’s brothers would eventually earn their high school diploma and some community college; however, Gilbert was the only one of the siblings to attain a college degree.

*Gilbert the School District Administrator’s Economic Capital*

Growing up in a “tough neighborhood,” Gilbert’s family struggled early on with finances but was “blessed” with two safety nets. First, his “stay-at-home” mother had a



sister who owned her own cleaning company. According to Gilbert, when the family needed some extra income, his mother would go and work for the sister to “help ends meet.” He would add, “Although I would not consider my upbringing to be impoverished, we did often struggle to make ends meet.” In the worst of economic times, Gilbert recalls that his grandfather was always there to lend a helping hand.

After graduating from high school, Gilbert joined the Air Force where his education was paid for by the government. After receiving an honorable discharge, he moved back to San Antonio and enrolled in a community college while working full time for a television cable company. Throughout his community college, undergraduate, and graduate schooling, Gilbert utilized his GI Bill Benefits to supplement his income. Once he started his doctorate studies, Gilbert utilized what was left over from the GI Bill, and then started using the Hazelwood scholarship which pays up to 150 hours of schooling for any service member from Texas, who enlisted while a resident of Texas.

### **Analysis of the Participant’s Economic Capital**

All ten participants in this study acquired high levels of education, despite being raised in a lower SES environment. Although most of the men make note of the joy in their early childhood, several did speak of the disparity and hostilities that were present within their households, communities, and schooling. For example, nine out of the ten participants reported witnessing a hostile act, participating in a hostile act, or experiencing a hostile act in their educational career. In reviewing the data, these acts of hostility were categorized as a, Hostile Social Environment (HSE), to include: Ronnie’s gang affiliation, witnessing of shootings and stabbings, and the threat of being killed by rival gang members; Albert, who mentioned being chased by a rival gang in a

“territorial” dispute and witnessing a peer shooting of another peer; Carlos’ daily routine of traveling through the “invisible boundaries” of gang-affiliated territory; and Gilbert’s adolescent memories of several men fighting with crow-bars at a local convenient store, in addition to an incident where he stumbled across a dead body on the way to school. In several cases, the participants in this study reported that there were grave consequences to traveling in areas that were forbidden to include being shot, stabbed, “jumped” or getting into a fight. In regards to the latter, Carlos stated that fighting was inevitable and that, “a lot of times that you had to defend yourself.” This sentiment was echoed by Hector, Albert, and Gilbert who experienced several altercations due to inner-city violence.

Where the previous participants report a Hostile Social Environment (HSE) due in part to their direct or indirect involvement with gangs, Martin’s early childhood was overshadowed by his father’s drinking problem and violence, where he was the target of many physical beatings. Martin would share several of these unfortunate experiences and state, “I wish I could say that my childhood was one of pleasantry but my father was very violent and there was a lot of violence in the house.” The *victimization* found within Martin’s childhood and many other children across the United States, has been reported to increase anxiety and depression, while decreasing school attachment for lower SES students (Faris & Felmlee, 2014). Educational obstacles found within the cognitive, social, and affective development of some Latino students speak on the number of distractions associated with their socioeconomic status. Hence, findings from this present study suggest that economic status and the distractions found within their at risk social environment (Castillo, 2012; Gandara, 1995, 2001, 2005; Rothstein, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valencia, 2005; Vega & Martinez, 2008) were considerable obstacles in

the lives of the lower SES Latino students. Moreover, the findings here run congruent to the studies reported in the literature (Mani, et al., 2013; Peinado, et al., 2014; Turner, et al., 2013) which suggest that lower SES students living within at risk communities have higher levels of psychological distress due to: the exposure of drugs and alcohol, the fear of crime, emotional and behavioral problems associated with physical abuse, sexual abuse, neighborhood violence, peer bullying, witnessing parental violence, or multiple forms of the previous attributes in what is termed, *poly-victimization*.

Despite these hurdles, the academically successful students in this study were able to unmask the initial setbacks, and finance their education by accumulating resources over a period of time. The economic resources that are amassed, saved, and employed for the purpose of pursuing a higher education is a salient aspect in educational attainment of the overall Hispanic population. It is with this thought in mind, that the following paragraphs highlight the economic capital that was reported in the findings of this (Castillo, 2012) Life-history study.

#### *Institutional Support*

Several of the Latino men in this study acquired economic capital through institutional support. These resources, which were acquired to help finance their ongoing educational aspirations, are identified as school support, employer support, and government support. As reported in the following sections, Ronnie, Raul, James, Carlos, Jose, and Martin were the recipients of financial support offered through their academic institute.

*School Support*

In their undergraduate studies, Carlos applied and received scholarships that helped supplement his financial resources; Penn provided Martin a full scholarship and additional funds through work study; James received a scholarship that, “paid for books among other things,” while the Jesuits paid for his graduate and doctoral level courses. Once enrolled in graduate school, Raul was awarded the Brackenridge Fellowship which paid for his tuition and books while attending Trinity University. When he applied to the University of Michigan, he was awarded the Ford Foundation Fellowship for Pre-Doctoral students that provided him a stipend, paid for his tuition, and, “a thousand dollars for books alone.” Once enrolled at Texas Tech University for his graduate studies, Jose was awarded a fellowship that provided him more income than teaching, and later was awarded another fellowship that paid monthly stipends during his doctoral studies. While Ronnie received funds through the D-Star program which paid the total cost of attending dental school.

*Employer Support*

Two of the participants acquired financial support through their place of employment. Carlos reported that his employer paid his full salary while, allowing him to, “go to school during the day, to work two days and go to school three days, and they paid for my lab fees, books, and tuition.” Albert on the other hand, was paid by his employer as a resident intern.

*Government Support/Benefits*

Six of the participants in this study also received financial support through government entities. Both Ronnie and Carlos were awarded government grants; Jose and Hector's graduate education was paid for through Texas Loan Forgiveness programs; while the majority of Raul and Gilbert's education was paid for through the GI Bill and Hazelwood awards, Raul stated:

The Veteran's GI Bill paid \$235.00 a month, back then that was a lot of money. So, that's what bankrolled me all the way through. I didn't borrow a single penny. When I got to St. Mary's, what I would do was...I would get a ninety day loan that I used for tuition and books, and then when my VA check came in I would pay it off. I built an immaculate credit rating because I would always pay it off. But when I wasn't paying for my school my VA check would go into the family budget.

Macdonald (2004, p. 121) identifies the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the G.I. Bill, as a vehicle to higher education for Mexican Americans. The GI Bill was passed primarily to ensure economic stability for the country when the millions of veterans serving in WWII returned home. While it has been altered several times since its inception, the GI Bill is still a benefit offered to those military veterans seeking home, business, land and farm loans, and higher education.

*Community College*

Four of the participants, Ronnie, Raul, Jose, and Gilbert attended San Antonio area community colleges before moving on to four-year universities. In this study, of the four men identified as attending community colleges, Ronnie and Jose worked full-time while Raul and Gilbert utilized their GI Bill benefits.

Some studies (Campa, 2008; Castillo, 2012; Cobian, 2008; Colley, 2007; Jovel, 2008; Lodmer, 2008; McGregor, 2003; Reyna, 2008; Rivera, 2007) have found that two barriers that influence some Latin@ students from pursuing educational opportunities beyond community colleges are, low income and financial commitment to family. Currently, a full-time course load at San Antonio area colleges is approximately \$900.00 per semester. As such, a two year enrollment in a community college may be seen a financial alternative to four-year institutes. Since neither of the two veterans were enrolled beyond a year, community college for Latino military veterans is noted to be both, a feasible alternative and an important transition that takes place between military-separations and acquiring higher education; with the economic capital of the GI Bill leading the way.

#### *Spousal and Family Support*

Carlos and Martin reported that throughout their educational career, their financial resources were supplemented by their family such as their parents and grandparents. While the trio of Jose, Albert, and Hector reported that during their doctoral studies their wives provided the main source of income. This support speaks on the familial commitment to the student once they entered the education field. The narrative from these four participants, runs congruent with the findings (Brown-Klingelhoefler, 2003; Colley, 2007; de Souza, 2006; Diaz-Rueda, 2006; Gonzalez, 2005; Kypuros, 2005; Lopez, 2007; Parra, 2007; Reynosa, 2002; Williams, 2000; Zambrano, 2004) in the literature that purport that family as support systems are crucial to the economic capital of college going students.

Table 2.

*Economic Capital of Pathfinder Participants*

## Economic Capital Attained at Each Level of Higher Education

| Participant | Community College              | Undergraduate                                   | Graduate                                    | Doctoral   |
|-------------|--------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Ronnie      | Full-time Employment           | Government Grants                               | D-Star, Paid for total cost of Attendance   | D-Star, Paid for total cost of Attendance                              |
| Raul        | Full-time Employment + GI Bill | Full-time Employment + GI Bill                  | GI Bill + Brackenridge Fellowship           | GI Bill + Ford Fellowship-Stipend, Tuition, \$1000.00 for Books        |
| James       |                                | Institutional Scholarship                       | Familial Support + Institutional Fellowship | Institutional Fellowship   |
| Carlos      |                                | Familial Support + Institutional Scholarships   | Government Grants                           | Employer-Salary, Full Tuition, Lab Fees, and Books                     |
| Jose        | Full-time Employment           | Full-time Employment                            | Fellowship that paid more than teaching     | Spousal Support + Fellowship-Monthly Stipends + Texas Loan Forgiveness |
| Martin      |                                | Loans + Institutional Scholarships + Work-study | Loans + Work-study                          | Loans  |
| Albert      |                                |   | Full-time Employment                        | Spousal Support + Employer-Paid as Resident Intern                     |
| Hector      |                                | Full-time Employment                            | Full-time Employment                        | Spousal Support + Texas Loan Forgiveness                               |
| Gilbert     | Full-time Employment + GI Bill | Full-time Employment + GI Bill                  | GI Bill                                     | Hazelwood Award  |

*Julio was not available for second and third interview protocols*

*Employment*

Seven of the nine participants in this study reported that they worked full-time during their undergraduate studies. Ronnie worked full time at a blue-jean company while attending San Antonio Community College; Raul dug ditches and worked full-time with the United States Post Office; Carlos played in a Rock and Roll band; Jose was

employed as a grocery store cashier; Albert reported working full-time as a metal shop apprentice; Hector worked full time as a bank teller; and Gilbert worked full-time as a cable-man during his undergraduate studies.

### *Loans*

Of the nine participants that addressed the question of whether they received loans to supplement their education, Ronnie, Raul, Carlos, Jose, Albert, and Hector reported that minimal to no funds were applied for to supplement their education. Martin on the other hand, reported maxing out at every opportunity stating, “I do realize that today’s education is more expensive, but I really believe that it’s the best investment you will ever make,” a sentiment that Raul is in agreement with, “Some people spend thirty-thousand dollars on a car that will last five years, an education lasts forever.” According to the National Science Foundation (2009), 13% of Hispanics’ earning a doctorate degree in the United States in 2008 reported their cumulative education-related debt to be over \$70,000. Findings within the current study, suggest that the majority of men interviewed utilized a various strategies to avoid educational related debt.

### *Age and Time as a Factor of Economic Capital*

As reported in Table 2, when examining the economic capital that was employed throughout their educational ascent, it took the participants in this study on average, a little over 20-years to attain their doctoral degree. Jose, at 27 years of age attained his doctoral degree in the shortest period of time, 10-years after he graduated from high school, compared to the time it took Raul (30 years) and Carlos (33 years) to acquire their degree after graduating from high school. At 51 years of age, Carlos’ ascent to the doctorate from the starting line of his high school commencement took more time than



the other participants. The average age of all participants in this study was 37 years of age. In 2008, the average age of all doctorate degree recipients in the United States was slightly over 32 years of age (National Science Foundation, 2009, p. 14). The average time it took these men to acquire their Doctorate degrees speaks on the notion brought forth by Bourdieu that, time has a market value which rises the higher up one is in the social hierarchy (Stewart, 2010, p. 54).

For most of the men in this study, the time it took to earn a doctorate and the economic capital accrued along the way becomes a significant factor in Latinos acquiring higher education. For Bourdieu (1984, pp. 281-282), the market value of time is highlighted by the fact that the dominant sector of society has the capacity to dominate time and money. However, this does not mean that the “dominant sector” of society intentionally sets out to hold back the less-affluent by controlling time or providing inexperienced teachers, hostile living conditions, inequitable facilities, and inadequate healthcare. This process of educational suppression is brought about by the residue of competition in capitalist structures such as the education field. That is, the “more-affluent” are not competing with the “less-affluent,” they are in competition with other affluent members of society for capital and it is this strife for economic resources that drown out socioeconomic challenged students. For those families that do not know how the game is played on the field, it is difficult to compete in the game. When taking into account the economic conditions in which these men where born and raised and the various strategies used to acquire higher levels of education, the data suggests that support, age, time, and accumulated resources are interrelated variables.

## Conclusion

For the ten participants in this study, we find that academic success can be achieved despite the initial lack of resources. However, for many students throughout the United States, “pulling one’s self up by the bootstrap” is not enough in a capitalist society, unless one is speaking of the middle-to-upper-class affluent students born into a culture of reproduction. These class distinctions become more significant as one ascends toward the apex of the educational structure with the “have-nots” attempting to scaffold support systems and financial resources that will pave the way to the pinnacle of higher education. In this process, there are several physical, social, psychological, and economic impediments that sieve this population out of the process of acquiring higher knowledge.

How did the students in this study initially move out of the K-12 trajectory if it were not from intestinal fortitude or *ganas* alone? In the 1995 movie, *Dangerous Minds*, the character played by Michelle Pfeiffer proclaimed to her students that there were, “no victims” in her classroom and that this mindset was prophetically self-fulfilling. According to the studies brought forth in this article, there is such a thing as victimization and for millions of lower SES students throughout the United States, community disorder and polyvictimization is a formidable educational obstacle. Having said this, the point that should be underscored is that Pfeiffer’s character was providing a vast amount of social and cultural capital; that is, she went over and beyond reaching this population with high expectations, empathy, support, and encouragement. This concept speaks volumes on the essence of multi-capitals, specifically the salience of adult role models in the education process. Not reported here, the data acquired within this study suggests that academically successful Latino students were able to ascend the educational apex with a

vast amount of social, cultural, and linguistic capital despite the minimal amount economic capital in their K-12 schooling.

Due to the health related effects highlighted in this study, providing access to healthcare for this population prior to, and throughout their schooling process is crucial to their cognitive development and just as salient to the vitality of the American economy. The phenomenon of low academic attainment amongst the less affluent, increasingly growing Hispanic population has undesired economic consequences for our nation. As Americans attempt to accumulate resources that flourish by means of cultural reproduction, we indirectly and unavoidably slice our economic strength by segregating a large segment of our society from the educational field. For those Hispanic students growing up in lower SES households that do reach the summit of the educational structure, they are the anomaly; the fraction of a thriving population, that has the potential and capacity to contribute to the cycle of economic flow in the United States.

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