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THE DIFFERENTIAL LATINX ATTAINMENT RATE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RECENT TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines data from the Digest of Educational Statistics and other sources to investigate Latinx educational achievement rates between 2005 and 2019. After comparing educational attainment rates from white, Black, Latinx, and Asian students, the paper documents the improvement in education among Latinx students in recent years despite falling behind other groups. The data suggests that the educational transition rate from secondary school to postsecondary school is an urgent concern to be addressed by educational leaders. To further analyze differential attainment rates, the paper discusses preliminary findings from an ongoing within-group study comparing the eleven largest Latinx communities residing in the United States. Finally, the paper tries to demonstrate that the legacy of national development and a structuration theoretical framework could potentially be useful to explain different rates of educational achievement.

Keywords: Latinx, educational attainment, achievement, graduation rates, educational transition rates

Introduction

Regardless of personal wealth or national origin, educational attainment continues to be regarded as a precious human capital around the world[1]. The United Nations, for instance, counts human capital accumulation among its development goals. In the United States, investments in education are measured in trillions[2]. Around the globe, many families are said to migrate, among other reasons, to take advantage of universal access to primary and secondary schooling and for a chance to compete for admission at one of the world-class universities. Additionally, educational attainment is synonymous with personal achievement among the Latinx community, since

achievements in education usually translate into relative social mobility and status attainment[3]. The fact that educational aspirations materialized asymmetrically among groups provides researchers enough reasons to critically reflect on how achievement manifests itself in American education today.

This paper analyzes data from the 2019 *Digest of Educational Statistics,* the annual report published by the Department of Education National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES), to identify trends in the achievement gap among the Latinx student population in comparison with other ethnic groups. The United States is in the midst of a demographic shift and examining education accomplishments illustrates not just the performance of schools and educators, but essentially, the extent to which opportunities are racialized in our society. In particular, the paper makes the point that despite considerable educational achievements, measured by graduation rates over time, the achievement gap continues to be primarily driven by what Vlaardingerbroek and Ros (1990) called, educational transition rates. Considering the impact of labor market opportunities today, the weight of transition rate calculations is most relevant after graduation from secondary schools. Moreover, when transition rates are disaggregated by nationality, there is some evidence to suggest that quality of life in the countries of origin, and not just the different immigration experiences or context of receptions as Portes and Rumbaut (2014) assert[4], conditions the relation between ethnicity and educational achievement.

Ultimately, one of the goals of this study is to identify other reasons behind the persisting achievement gap besides those already noted by Zhang (2015), the effects of institutional arrangements documented by Nguyen, Bibo, and Engle (2012), or the social and economic factors exposed by E. Michael Madrid (2011) in his comprehensive review of the literature. In doing so, the paper hopes to assist educational leaders allocate resources and implement practices to help students of color fulfill their educational aspirations, despite the constraining effects imposed by historical asymmetrical educational opportunities (Velez, 2008). Finally, the paper also contributes to the emerging literature of transition rates by amending two of the more basic premises in the research published by Vlaardingerbroek and Ros (1990). First, with regards to research design, rather than focusing on analyzing data from a single discipline, this study examines the aggregated measurement of school completion without discerning specific fields. In addition, the paper does not measure educational transition rates by taking enrollment figures into account, as Vlaardingerbroek and Ros (1990) did in their calculations. Instead, this paper analyzes the more reliable graduation rates.

Transition rate calculations posit many analytical advantages for researchers and policymakers. For one, they help us assess how social differentiation impacts variations in educational achievements. Without trivializing the weight of structural discriminatory practices, transition rates also measure achievement fluctuations longitudinally and comparatively. Most importantly, considering that not all the students cleared for graduation transition to college, accounts of educational success are also reliable indicators of how institutional cultures cultivate resilience and the very important appreciation for lifelong learning despite family resources or palpable structural barriers[5]. Finally, graduation rates might be skewed by social promotion and other exogenous considerations that are usually minimized when students are admitted to post-secondary institutions through competitive admission processes.

Educational Values in Context

It should not come as a surprise that national data and many published interviews reveal how much the Latinx community treasures attaining educational degrees. When Latinx immigrant families are asked why they risk severing their safety, social kindships, and material possessions to journey to the United States, almost always the answer is because the country still offers many more opportunities than those afforded by the societies they left behind[6]. For many migrant families, the push to migrate is rationalized by the prospect of secured more earnings, personal safety, and professional opportunities[7]. It is no surprise, then, that when the Pew Research Center asked Latinx about graduating from college, over 88 percent agreed that a college degree was important for their success in life (Lopez, 2009, p. 3), a response rate 14 percent higher than the national average.

It is also important to note that in the case of Latinx students, the high premium placed on educational achievement is not just a mere concern for inter-generational mobility as the Pew and other research studies suggest (Lopez, 2009). As one may suppose, individuals do not always act based on economic interests alone[8] and surveys often do not unveil the historical depth behind the formulation of social attitudes or personal choices. In the case of Latin America, it is essential to consider that besides personal aspirations, human capital has been traditionally considered one of the strongest engines for national development. Individuals who commit to advance the well-being of the nation were always revered as iconic figures, not just by their co-nationals, but throughout the hemisphere. Even today, public intellectuals consistently advocate for wider access to education and consider these reforms indispensable, regardless of national origins or political persuasions[9]. The preoccupation with human capital development among Latinx families goes back to at least the humanist gestations to configure the postcolonial nation-state. If there is one consideration of eclectic social critics of the stature of Hostos, Henrique Ureña, Vasconcelos, Marti, Sarmiento, and Rodo, to name a few, shared, is their steadfast support to promote ample educational opportunities and rigorous pedagogical training[10]. A case in point is the career path of Pedro Henrique Ureña, who in 1918 became the first Dominican, and perhaps the first Latinx, to earn a Doctorate from the University of Minnesota and later endeavored as an educator in Mexico before settling in Latin America's Southern Cone until his passing in 1946. Considering the well embedded historical legacy of education in the region, it is not surprising that Latinx families continue to regard educational attainment as one of their principal social aspirations and one of their motivations to move across borders.

Despite the entrenched drive to attain educational achievement, Latinx students today confront similar challenges as many other students of color with comparable socio-economic backgrounds, but their fate is often a bit grimmer. Exogenous conditions related to the hostile context of receptions, racialized opportunities, fears of deportation, and economic insecurities, often adjoin already straining conditions of public education in immigrant communities (Capps et al., 2020) to test the determination of many students and their families. As we know, disparities of resources among schools are conditioned by the dispersion of revenues, which tends to unfavorably penalize immigrant enclaves. In the school year 2016-17, for instance, 82 percent of revenues for public school districts were derived from local property taxes according to figures published by NCES[11].

The result is that even after graduation, the fate of many Latinx students only improves in relative terms, often reproducing conditions of inequality even in the most affluent areas around the country. This disheartening conclusion is also reflected by key demographic indicators among Latinx in the Bay Area today. Consisting of a quarter of the population in Santa Clara and San

Mateo counties, Latinx educational attainment reached just 21 percent in 2019. Despite experiencing an increase of 23 percent in annual per capita income from 2009 to 2019, Latinx reported a median income of $30,618 in 2019, the lowest among all racial and ethnic groups in both counties, according to data reported by the San Jose based Institute for Regional Studies (2021 p. 25). The same report also states that 57 percent of Latinx households lived below self-sufficient standards in comparison with just 18 percent of white families (p. 44) in 2018.

A Review of the Literature

Explaining graduation trends over the last few decades has taken considerable effort among social scientists. Starting with James Coleman's groundbreaking *Equality in Educational Opportunity,* a nationwide study published in 1966, scholars developed an interest in documenting the dispersion of opportunities, measured by school completion, to explain educational success and to estimate the quality of schools. The Coleman Report (1966), as the mammoth study came to be known, was one of the first national studies to disaggregate student performance by race to document the legacy of decades of school segregation. Coleman's evidence-based approach also demonstrated how rigorous empirical findings and inquiries could be used to generate parsimonious and robust explanatory statements that would impact national educational policies, uprooting the sociology of education field. In concrete terms, the massive data captured by Coleman was instrumental to advocate for the urgent need to formulate more inclusive policies that would reduce racial and ethnic disparities. After his report, it became abundantly clear that when it comes to understanding achievement, the strains between three levels of analysis, roughly corresponding to the micro, meso, and macro, remain undeniable.

Micro-level explanations of achievement emphasize agency, especially the extent to which levels of parental perseverance and resilience motivate students to overcome structural impediments associated with schooling [12]. Rumbaut (2005) persuasively argues that a case in point is the sense of obligation first-generation students developed to compensate for their parent's devotion to sustain the family and support the children in school regardless of human capital. Although many studies would confirm Garry Hornby's (2011, p.2) bold assertion that, "it is clear that parental involvement is of considerable importance to children's achievement in schools," this line of research also points to several hindrances that condition the extent of parental commitments. Suarez-Orozoco et al. (2002) and Schen (2005), for instance, stress the effects of family separation on the psychological wellbeing of immigrant students and their parents. Vega et al. (2015) have found that often among low-income families, work schedules, transportation hurdles, and strained financial resources often interfere with parental desires to get more involved in schools related functions and academic activities. Zarate (2007), finally, argues about the importance of maintaining frequent and meaningful parent/teacher communication to assure successful progress in schools.

The second line of research, more prevalently argued by educators and student service providers, tends to emphasize how institutional arrangements, practices, and socialization exponentially augment student achievement. The University of South Carolina Student Success Center is not alone when it brazenly proclaims on its webpage that "with the right resources and relationships, there is no end to what we can achieve."[13] Multiple studies have also demonstrated how, particularly among immigrant populations, connecting to caring advisors and mentors has proven to have a positive impact on increasing the chances of graduation. As we all know too well, dedicated high school counselors usually provide timely information to secure financial assistance opportunities, strategies to complete admission applications, and even crucial insights to help

select the most suitable colleges and universities. The ongoing research also demonstrates that access to faculty of color who can function as dedicated role models also improves the chances to complete school. After conducting an extensive review of the literature, Alcocer and Martinez (2017, p.2) conclude, "Mentoring is critical at all levels of development, and research affirms the need for these relationships at every stage in the professional career of underrepresented minorities." Unfortunately, recruiting a diverse faculty has proven to be one of the most pressing challenges higher educational institutions confront today. According to a nationwide report issued by the Pew Research Center in 2019 (Davis & Fry, 2019), university faculty has increasingly become more diverse in the last two decades but still lags behind students. In 2017, just 19 percent of professors, 24 percent of associate professors, and 27 percent of assistants identified themselves as faculty of color as opposed to 81 percent of professors, 76 percent of associate professors, and 73 percent of assistant professors who self-identified as whites. This racial imbalance is particularly evident among Latino/a faculty whose growth has remained fairly flat between 1997 and 2017, according to the Pew Center report (Davis & Fry, 2019).

The passing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top, and other federal programs that attempt to reduce the achievement gap is at least a tacit recognition by federal authorities that the quality of schools and teachers, as well as the relevance of the curriculum, have a decisive effect on student outcomes. Whether the federal legislation proposes to promote more effective schooling by incentive grants, market competition, or sanctions, the overriding assumption behind these policies is that schools that do not meet standards of excellence fail their student population. In higher education, the drive to promote programmatic assessment and faculty accountability is often grounded on this premise.

Finally, macro-level accounts band together various explanatory positions that underscore the innumerable weight of ecological obstacles, including the social stigmatization many students of color must overcome to succeed in schools from years of prejudice and discrimination. The substance of this copious literature is too rich to summarize here, but proponents of this level of analysis seem to agree that structural conditions continue to affect learning outcomes while also imposing such elevated transaction costs to, in effect, derail the chances for academic completion or transition to college. In a pointed critique of the cultural literacy movement published in *The Guardian* newspaper in 2014, Tait Coles forcefully argues that to make teaching more relevant, and therefore more effective for the growing number of students who encountered oppression, instructors must integrate without hesitation the effects of structural social conditions into their pedagogy. Coles (2014) emphatically defends his position proposing that "teachers cannot ignore the context, cultures, histories, and meanings that students bring to their schools." For opportunities to stand a chance at all, the goal is then to refrain from converting schools into what Paolo Freire (1993) cogently calls "acts of depositing."

As this scanning review of the literature and the overview from notable books, such as Mehta and Davis (2018), Sadovnick and Coughlan (2016), and Karabel and Halsey (1977), among several others, demonstrate that the implications of educational inequalities in our society today is no leisure task. Many questions remain unanswered, and none are more pressing than to try to discern the reasons behind the fluctuation of attainment rates among and within ethnic groups. Beyond this important consideration, it is also critical to reassess how educational attainment is usually operationalized in the literature. If the research concentrates on grade completion, the outputs seem very different when the number of those who successfully transition to college is considered. Regardless of levels of analysis, education research still seems bias towards explaining achievement according to completion rates alone without contemplating the possibility that not all

graduating students continue with their education after commencement. The dreadful fact that only a portion of students who finish high school transition to universities, or even community colleges, is all too common to ignore. Calculating transition rates constitutes a fertile research ground to begin to address important misconceptions that distinguish school completion and from personal achievement.

Methodology

The research for this paper follows two derivations of the comparative approach, the group, and within-group comparison, to assess the differential attainment rates in education. For the former, the performances of four major ethnic and racial groups were contrasted following a standard approach in the literature. For differentials attainment rate within a single ethnic group, the within-case comparison, 11 of the largest Latinx communities residing in the United States were selected. In both cases, the data was collected from a variety of government sources and public policy institutions. The three tables capture data across two decades to measure not just the performance in selective years, but also any improvement trend over time. The longitudinal rates were determined by standard percentage change calculations. The standardization of measurements permits provocative comparisons of achievement trends by race and ethnicity for more than a decade. Also, all the data follows the conventional practice of showing values in percentage points and the usage of percentage change, a standard computation in educational policy studies, to access the pace of improvement over time. An r square confidence of 0.697 measured the degree of association between the human development index (HDI), a United Nations indicator of national progress, and the differential educational attainment rates, measured by percentage changes, in table 3.

Comparative Data Analysis

To further reflect on completion and achievement in education and the merits of exploring the transition rate approach, this paper first proposes to examine current trends in graduation rates by race and ethnicity. This will be followed by a discussion of how transition data provides us with a more comprehensive view of educational success. Finally, I propose to disaggregate college graduation among the top Latinx nationalities in America to discern the variations in achievement rates within the group.

The data captured in table 1 reveals the complexities behind educational inequality over time. One of the many conclusions gathered from these scores is that Latinx students have made enormous strides since 2005, despite having one of the lowest overall attainment rates among the four major ethnic groups represented in the table. The gains made by Latinx students are more impressive with regards to high schools and associate degrees, as measured by the percentage change between 2005 and 2020, where their achievement is well above the averages from other social groups by about 10 percentage points. Not surprisingly, this is not the case with the college and graduate level, where Latinx students only showed modest improvements, as the diversity and inclusion literature argue. In the case of college completion, the Latinx scores exceed the gains of other groups since 2005, with white students closely following one point behind. However, if the completion rate is measured on the yearly basis, Latinx students score lower than others except for associate and graduate degree completion in 2020, where they tied with African American students.

Even with regards to graduate success, the encouraging news is that the percentage difference between the number of Latinx students who graduate from college and then move on to

complete an advanced degree is just 11 points, a rate that is similar to white students. Year by year, excluding high school completion in 2010 and 2015, regardless of grade, the overachieving group is Asian-American students, and this conclusion contributes to the perpetuation of the contentious model minority categorization of the group.

The disturbing news with regards to educational attainment, when we compare all levels of schooling, is that there is still a perceptible inverse relationship between the progression of educational attainment and degree completion. Simply put, the higher the grade, the lower the number of Latinx graduations. In 2020, the most recent year for which we have reliable data, the transition rate from high school to the two-year degree is 53 percent, and for college an alarming 65 percent. Among other things, these figures indicate that the educational aspirations of Latinx students and their families are not being met and more programs such as, the College Advising Corps (CAC) are needed to supplement the work of high school professionals to continue to place low-income, first generations, and underrepresented students in colleges and universities nationwide.

Table 1

Educational attainment by race/ethnicity of youth between 25 and 29 years old 2005 to 2020.

Degree Completion	2005	2010	2015	2018	2019	2020	Percentage Change 2005-2019
High School							
Whites	93	95	95	94	96	96	3
Blacks	87	90	93	77	92	95	8
Latinx	63	69	67	72	86	90	27
Asians	96	94	89	95	97	97	1
Associate Degree							
Whites	44	49	54	54	56	56	12
Blacks	27	29	31	33	40	37	10
Latinx	17	21	26	31	31	37	20
Asians	66	61	69	72	75	75	9
Bachelor's Degree							
Whites	32	39	43	44	45	45	13
Blacks	18	19	21	23	29	28	10
Latinx	11	14	16	21	21	25	14
Asians	60	53	53	67	68	70	10
Master or Higher							
Whites	8	8	10	10	10	10	2
Blacks	3	5	5	5	6	5	2
Latinx	2	3	3	3	3	5	3
Asians	17	18	21	28	27	27	10

Note. Tables 104.10 of DES. Asian-Americans include Pacific Islanders. All percentages were rounded off.

The literature has cited many reasons for the schematic data regarding the trends shown in table 1. Perhaps one of the most persuasive regards social class and family income considerations. When graduate-level achievement data is paired with net earnings, one cannot help to conclude that a graduate degree is only becoming disproportionally more affordable to wealthy families. In 2019, the median household income of the two top graduate student achievers was also the highest, $98,174 for Asians and $75,057 for whites. On the other hand, the net family income for African Americans was just $45,438 and for Latinos $56,113, according to figures released by the Census Bureau (see also Semega et al., 2020).

Although table 1 does not document the impacts of economics on degree completion, several research studies have concluded that college affordability and opportunity cost define college and graduate degrees among working-class families (Zaloom, 2019). Many successful

students decide to enter the labor force and delay enrolling in graduate programs to absorb at least a portion of the hefty burden of paying for college. The high costs of tuition also tend to steer students towards remunerable professions, such as business or STEM-related majors, where Latinos continue to be underrepresented[14]. According to data published by the US Department of Education, of the 79,598 Computers and Information Sciences undergraduate degrees conferred in the academic year 2017-18, 42,080 or roughly 53 percent, went to white students, 6,862 or 9 percent to Black students, 8,084 or 10 percent to Latinx students, and 12,609 or 16 percent to Asian and Pacific Islander students. The distribution of social science degrees among these undergraduate groups, on the other hand, consisted of 19 percent, 10 percent, 17 percent, and 16 percent respectively in the same academic year (DES, table 322.30, p. 345). As many of those who regularly teach and mentor Latino students in higher educational institutions would attest, many Latinos often agonize over the time it would take to complete graduate school and the extent to which their dedication might compromise some of their earning potentials, at least in the short term. Perhaps the vocational inclination among Latinx students, as shown by the 20 percent jump in associate degrees between 2005 and 2020, and the fact that almost 4 of every 10 enroll in two-year degree programs, is an indication of economic realities.

A more concerning trend is the transition between grade levels, or what the paper refers to as the transition rates, illustrated in table 2. Some attrition between grades has always been expected but transitioning from high school to college is now more significant than ever. Still, on average, 4 of every 10 high school graduates do not make it to college among Latinxs, a rate that is only surpassed by African American students. Educational attainment today is considered one of the most effective vehicles to break the cycle of poverty. According to estimates calculated by Broady and Hershbein (2020) of The Brooking Institute, the earning potentials of individuals holding a college degree in 2018 are reflected in the median salary of $68,000 as opposed to $49,000 for associate degrees. College graduates still earn much more across the board than the median earnings of high school graduates in all majors studied, they conclude. When earning potentials are added to the demands for knowledge workers and the social considerations already mentioned in the introduction of the paper, it is safe to conclude that a transition at this level of schooling is categorically more important today than ever in our nation's history to offset the effects of post-Fordist. As if economic incentives were not enough, the COVID-19 pandemic has also amplified the public health effects of professional stratification. Flexible occupations that require at least a college degree are fundamentally less likely to expose individuals to the effects of the pandemic.

The number of high school graduates enrolled in college between 2000 and 2019 demonstrates how the dimensions of educational inequality fluctuate according to how achievement is measured. The number of Latinx students holding academic degrees from high schools and beyond, show an improving trend since 2005, albeit the modest rate in graduate degrees earned. However, when these numbers are contrasted with the percentage of high schoolers who transition to college the picture is much more sobering since Latinx transition scores bottomed from 2000 to 2010 only to bounce back moderately during the next four years. In short, as other observers have concluded[15], there is meaningful progress among Latino students, especially in the last few years, but for the most part, they still lag behind other groups, particularly when compared with white and Asian students. Even though the Latinx rate of transition between high school and college remains one of the lowest in the last two decades, it is worth noting that the rate of improvement between 2000 and 2019 is the highest of the four groups, even surpassing Asian students by one point.

Table 2

Transition rates. Percentage of high school graduates enrolled in college by race/ethnicity 2000-2019.

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2018	2019	Percentage Change 2000-2019
White	66	73	71	71	71	68	2
Black	55	56	62	56	65	50	-5
Latinx	53	54	60	69	65	63	10
Asian	81	87	85	83	74	90	9

Note. Data about recent high school completers enrolled in college in October of their graduation year. Table 302.20. DES.

Explaining the Comparative Analysis Trends

The breakdown and consequences of college achievement displayed thus far has puzzled educators and pundits alike for decades. To try to depict this baffling dispersion, table 3 breaks down the graduation rates by selective years between 1990 and 2018 among the top Latino migrant groups residing in the United States. Although is well known that no two migration experiences are fully comparable, paring co-ethnics control for language, cultural factors, identity, and other attributes which may condition success in school. Table 3 summarizes preliminary findings from a pilot research study that I am conducting attempts to assess the extent to which the levels of national development among sending societies impact the incorporation of migrants. Regardless of the limitations of these exploratory findings, it is worth considering few implications from these early results. First, conditions in sending societies should be taken into account more seriously to formulate educational policies. The dedication of many Latinx families is evident in the improvements in educational performance in the last two decades, but the legacy of national development still jeopardizes the changes to determining educational success. Lastly, educational research could benefit from conducting more within ethnic comparisons rather than continuing its focus on pan-ethnic research designs.

One unexpected pattern from the selective sample of cases listed in table 3 is that, except for Cuban Americans after 2000, students from South American countries outperformed those from Caribbean Basin nations when it comes to college graduation rates. This pattern supports the findings from a report published by Krogstad and Radford in 2018 where they showed that in 2016, the college graduation rate among Latinx from Caribbean Basin nations was 20 percent below the scores from South America students (12 vs. 32 percent) who also surpassed by two percentage points the media college attainment for all migrant students that year. In addition, South American students also demonstrated a greater overall improvement rate in college attainment between 1990 and 2018 than their counterparts from the Caribbean Basin. Finally, with regards to how levels of development impact educational attainment, in the sample of nations shown in table 3, for all cases except Mexico there is at least an association between levels of development as indicated by the UN human development index (HDI) college graduation rates.

Table 3

Educational Attainment Levels within the Latinx Community 1990-2018 measured by college graduation rates.

Latin/Latinx Groups	2017 HDI	1990	2000	2010	2018	Percentage Change 1990-2018
South American Nations						
Venezuelans	0.761	39	48	64	65	26
Argentinians	0.825	39	43	65	64	25
Colombians	0.747	17	32	36	41	24
Peruvians	0.750	21	25	35	34	13
Ecuadorians	0.752	13	15	18	26	13
Caribbean Basin Nations						
Cubans	0.777	9	22	18	29	20
Dominicans	0.736	9	12	17	22	13
Mexicans	0.774	5	6	9	17	12
Hondurans	0.617	7	7	6	12	5
Salvadorians	0.674	4	5	7	8	4
Guatemalans	0.650	6	6	5	6	0

Note. Luis Noe-Bustamante. Education levels of recent Latino immigrants in the US reached new highs as of 2018. Pew Research Center. April 7, 2020. Human Development Index (HDI) data represents the level of national development and is an indicator of the quality of life in countries. The data was drawn from Table 1. UNDV 2017 HDI report. The shaded area captures nations with a high or very high HDI of 0.700 or above. The clear area, nations with medium HDI of between 0.550 and 0.699. Figure 3. UNDP 2018, p. 3.

In his book, *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development. Spanish American in Comparative Perspective*, James Mahoney (2010) demonstrates that despite the turbulent political history that has dominated the region since independence, the pattern of inequality that characterizes Latin American nations has remained fairly consistent; he attributes this configuration to the distinct legacy of colonialism in the region. To this effect, Mahoney (2010) concludes, "colonialism not only helped to create the countries of South America; it also sorted them into different positions in the world hierarchy of development" (p. 203). My research takes Mahoney's assertion one step further to demonstrate the lingering effects of national development stratification on educational outcomes in receiving societies. The sociologist, Arthur Stinchcombe (1968), along with a considerable number of historians, recognizes the persistent effects of historical factors when it comes to reproducing social conditions.

Admittedly, the outcome of my research needs to be supported by more evidence before any conclusive findings can be reported with confidence. However, for what it is worth, a similar pattern of differential attainment rates manifest itself among Asian students. Students from less-developed Southeast Asian nations do not usually match the educational performance of their counterparts from other parts of Asia. After disaggregating the 2018 scores of Asians and Pacific Islanders, it is evident that the two groups graduated almost the same number of high schoolers (98 and 91 percent respectably), but as grades levels increased, disparities within the Asian-American community widen from 71 percent of Asian college graduates to just 15 percent from Pacific Island nations. (NCES, 2018, Table 104. p. 20).

To be sure, many intervening variables often affect the lingering effects of national development on the distribution of educational outcomes. For instance, table 3 does not show any data about the levels of academic support universities offer Latinx students. We cannot possibly know if these are first, second, or third generations graduates or if the education and income levels of families contributed to the success in school[16]. The migration status is also unknown, although we can suppose that South American migrants tend to fall into what is generally categorized as political refugees, which usually consist of the middle-class and other professionals fleeing repressive regimes or political upheavals. For these reasons, among others, any conclusions from the data presented in table 3 must be considered preliminary and received with caution.

At least conceptually, levels of national development, as measured by the United Nations human development index, may be regarded as another condition impacting the range of educational opportunities. It is expected that immigrant families coming from societies with the highest levels of development enjoy more access to better-run schools and early childhood education programs. Even if families do not have direct access to high-performing schools and programs, they might witness the success and prestige of these schools and their perceptions may be enough to further stimulate their aspirations to pursue more educational opportunities. With regards to having access to Early Child Education, to take one example, a comparison between Mexico and Cuba illustrates the point. Although both countries share comparable HDI levels, each nation's approach to Early Child Education programs could not be more radical. According to Jennifer L. O'Donoghue (2014), a researcher with the public policy organization Mexicanos Primero, in 2009 Mexico allocated $6,589 in public funds per child up to the age of 5 years old, the lowest amount among OECD nations (p.82). In Cuba, on the other hand, 9 out 10 children attend some form of early education program at least partially financed by the state, according to UNICEF (O'Donoghue, 2014).

Finally, the advantages of hidden curriculums in middle and upper-class schools should not be discounted either, when it comes to student achievement. Just like in the United States, successful Latin American schools maintain high expectations that are supported through initiatives that teach effective strategies to prepare students for college and studying abroad. Students have also reported evidence of a healthy dose of peer pressure to push students to attend universities. In addition, one should not underestimate the number of resources dedicated to secure student readiness among the different enclaves around the United States where Latinx families settle. For instance, across Montgomery County, Maryland, in one of the most successful and wealthy public-school districts in the nation, Pumar and Sitsis (2012) found that differences between schools serving lower and higher-income families accounted for the disparities in standardized test scores throughout the county.

Perhaps the achievement differentiation rate research can be conceptualized through Anthony Giddens' (1984) contributions to structuration theory. Formulated in response to the ongoing structure-agency dilemma that has preoccupied social scientists for years, the structuration perspective proposes an interactive and dynamic process by which individual actions are assumed to be constrained by the normative and practical dimensions of social structures which Giddens (1984) calls conditions of actions (p. 5-6). One appeal of structuration is that it explores the role of agency without denying the constraining effects of circumstantial structural impediments. This theoretical framework is devoid of the strict adherence to the determinism characterizing many structural perspectives and the voluntarism of micro explanatory perspectives.

Structuration would account for such structural conditions of actions as the legacies of national development among sending societies and the disparities among school resources in the

United States without discounting the fortitude and disposition of students to achieve. To put it differently, structuration recognizes the undeniable impact of social stratification, but it leaves enough room to consider how some students gather sufficient motivation and persistence to muster enough strength to succeed in school. This recognition opens many possibilities to understand the variability in achievements among and within groups and why some students graduate from college while others exposed to similar programs and circumstances during the formative years opt for more vocational training. This perspective might also explain why, in some cases, students from poor surroundings and limited means overcome this deficit to outperform their more affluent peers.

One illustration of the promise of this analytical approach is the case of the Princeton Classics professor Dan-el Padilla Peralta. An undocumented migrant from the Dominican Republic raised around New York City public housing by a single mother, Professor Padilla tells the story in his autobiographical book, *Undocumented: A Dominican Boy's Odyssey from a Homeless Shelter to the Ivy League* (2015) of how his mother's fortitude and the personal drive early in his life helped him overcome the overwhelming hindering forces associated with marginalization and his irregular immigration status to complete a doctorate from prestigious universities in a discipline not known for its diversity.

Conclusion

This paper addressed the ever-important questions related to educational success by first comparing the achievement rates of Latinx students to other ethnic and racial groups and then calculating the differential attainment rates among the eleven Latinx nationalities with the highest number of residents living in the United States. This research strategy yielded several important conclusions. First, there was measurable progress made by Latinxs at all grade levels since 2005, as demonstrated by graduation data. Second, when achievement trends are measured using the transition rate between secondary and post-secondary grades, the findings continue to demonstrate a high degree of attrition among Latinx students, a conclusion that merits further investigation. A plausive explanation for the rates of attrition seems to be household income. To further explore differential attainment rates, the paper reports the preliminary findings from ongoing research that attempts to determine the extent to which the legacy of national development correlates with the process of immigrant incorporation. Although admittedly in its early stages, this approach found a robust association between levels of national development and the educational attainment progress made by Latin American students in selective years between 1990 and 2018.

Another point worth exploring is the promise of structuration theory to discern the reasons behind the dispersion of differential educational attainments. This body of theory tries to avoid the traps of determinism and voluntarism to account for variations when groups of students are compared. As the reference to Professor Padilla's biographical case illustrates, in specific circumstances students from marginalized communities achieve exemplary success in education. One of the most promising considerations of structuration theory is that it recognizes the weight of structural constraints while also affirming how subjective determinants and specific processes of socialization enable students to succeed even though at times, they might face severe hindering barriers. At the very least, the process of structuration should be included among the repertoire of contending perspectives seeking to understand the reasons behind differential attainments rates. It seems plausible to conclude that despite the obvious problems with schooling, education continues to be a forceful determinant of social status and professional attainment among the many migrant

families who so often sacrifice valuable possessions and relationships for a chance to provide a better life for their children.

NOTES

[1] For instance, the UN 4th Sustainable Development Goal states "Education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escaping poverty." UN.org.

[2] To take just one investment measurement, according to Forbes Magazine, by the end of 2018 there were 44 million borrowers who collectively tallied $1.5 trillion in student loans in the United States.

[3] When measured by annual earnings, in 2018 high school graduates earned a median income of $34,900, college graduates $54,700, and individuals with a graduate degree $65,000.

[4] Portes and Rumbaut (2014, p. 122) state "the specific characteristics and experiences of immigration of different foreign groups play a significant role in academic attainment, above and beyond the effects of family on individual predictors."

[5] Some educators might argue that the high cost of higher education impedes many families to attend universities even if they have an appreciation for learning. But since this paper measures transition rates from secondary to post-secondary schooling without disaggregating schools by cost, it is possible to assume that students can select schools within their price range, or they might receive incentive offers to continue their education.

[6] Although there are many moving anecdotes supporting the reasons for migrating, Sara Ritchie's story about Elena illustrates the point well. See Ritchie (2020).

[7] The literature documenting migration waves from Latin America makes the point abundantly clear. An illustration is the insightful reporting published by Refugees International among other organizations.

[8] For a classic discussion of the tensions between interest and other values see Hirschman 2013.

[9] In a recent interview, Tania Bruguera, a Cuban artist, and dissident, argued that to further democracy in the island educational institutions need to democratize their pedagogical approach to incorporate aspects of critical pedagogy in the classroom.

[10] In 1913, for instance, after completing his law degree, Henriquez Ureña became the Director of the Normal Institute in Santiago de Cuba, in Cuba even though he was Dominican born. Vasconcelos served as Secretary of Education in Mexico, Sarmiento went on an educational tour that took him through Northern Africa, Europe, and the United States to assess education policies and institutions, and Hostos expanded educational opportunities in the Dominican Republic and Chile, besides his native Puerto Rico, and by 1873 proposed to make science education available for women.

[11] Hussar et al (2020) figure 3, p. 115.

[12] Gandhi is reported to have said, "the future depends on what you do today."

[13] See: https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/student_success_center/index.php

[14] Although STEM-related jobs have increased by 79 percent since the 1990s, Latinos only comprise 7 percent of all STEM workers according to a report filed by Funk and Parker in 2018 and according to NCES, in the academic year 2015-16, 15 percent of all STEM bachelor's degrees conferred in the nation went to Latinos as opposed to 18 percent for Whites and 33 for Asians.

[15] See the research note by Kelly Field (2018).issued by The Hechinger Report.

[16] When it comes to the immigrant population and schooling, generations matter. In 2016, 16 to 24 years old Latinos showed one of the highest drop-out rates nationwide. However, first-generation students were driving these percentages with 16 percent. The second and third generations were within the range of other groups with 7 percent. (NCES, Figure 4, 139).

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