

Latinos, now the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2002), continue to lag behind other groups in educational attainment (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Latino students also have lower expectations for their educational futures than other groups. Because of the strong link between educational expectations and educational outcomes for all groups, the relationship between these two factors was addressed in an attempt to better understand the gap between Latinos and other students using a sample of academically promising students. This study also explores gender differences in racial/ethnic patterns of educational expectations and college graduation.

Two explanations for the differences in college graduation rates between academically promising Latinos and other youth were tested in this paper. The first draws upon the crucial role of educational expectations in predicting eventual educational attainment. Latino students, even those who do well in school, have lower expectations than other similarly performing students. Such humble expectations may stem from recognizing that their, on average, modest financial resources are an obstacle to realizing ambitious educational goals. They may also be rooted in the belief that educational credentials will be insufficient to overcome obstacles such as discrimination and limited integration into the mainstream economy (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1991). In this view, Latinos, particularly Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, fall into the category of “involuntary immigrants” or “castelike minorities” because their incorporation into the U.S. was nonvoluntary and resulted in their relegation to the lower socioeconomic classes (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991).

The second explanation focuses on the socioeconomic resources available to young people and their families. Latinos are more likely than whites or Asians to live in poverty; on average, they have less educated parents than other groups, including African Americans. Drawing on the status attainment model, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, even those who show academic promise, are less likely to continue their education than are their more advantaged peers (Sewell, 1971). It is expected that the low mean SES of Latinos accounts for some portion of their lower levels of educational attainment.

This paper has two aims: 1) to examine the predictors of high educational expectations among high school students, comparing Latinos to whites, African Americans and Asians; and 2) to examine the association between high expectations and the odds of graduating from college, again comparing Latinos to whites, African Americans and Asians. Analyses uncovered important differences between males and females, therefore they are examined separately.

The data are from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88). NELS:88 is a longitudinal study of a cohort of students who were first interviewed as eighth graders in 1988 and were reinterviewed biennially three more times, in 1990, 1992 and 1994 and then a fifth time in 2000 when they were approximately 26 years old. This last wave of data offers the opportunity to examine educational attainment in young adulthood among this cohort. The overall goal of this project is to understand why Latino youth who were performing well academically converted their academic promise into actual educational attainment at lower rates than other racial/ethnic groups. Thus, the sample consists of students who had at least a B average in their core courses in the eighth grade.

### Educational Expectations

Latino students have lower educational expectations than other students (Table 1).

Table 1. Percent of Students with High Educational Expectations<sup>a</sup> in 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Grades

	Males	Females
Whites	70.3 <sup>b</sup>	73.1 <sup>b</sup>
African Americans	62.9	64.6 <sup>b</sup>
Latinos	58.3	50.0
Asians	69.9	86.1 <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Expect to at least graduate from college

<sup>b</sup>Significantly different from Latinos at  $p < 0.05$

Controlling for the generally lower SES of Latino students does not entirely erase these differences. Table 2 presents the odds ratios for whites, African Americans and Asians relative to Latinos from logistic regression models predicting high expectations in sophomore year.

Table 2. Odds of High Educational Expectations in Sophomore Year<sup>c</sup>

	Males	Females
Whites	0.92	0.82
African Americans	2.50*	1.77
Latinos	1.00	1.00
Asians	1.02	2.52**

<sup>c</sup>Net of SES, earlier expectations, parental expectations, effort, GPA, other future expectations

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

### College Graduation

Academically promising Latino males are less likely than similar white and Asian youth to graduate from college; Latinas are less likely to earn a bachelor's degree than females from any other racial/ethnic group (Table 3). Both whites and Asians average higher SES than Latinos, an explanation for some of the differences between whites and Latinos and Asians and Latinos. However, African Americans and Latinos have similar socioeconomic backgrounds which suggests a different explanation for the African American-Latina difference among females.

Table 3. Proportions Who Graduated College by Sex and Race/Ethnicity

	% with a B.A.	
	Males	Females
Whites	49.8 <sup>e</sup>	53.0 <sup>e</sup>
African Americans <sup>d</sup>	28.7	39.6 <sup>e</sup>
Latinos	30.1	26.3
Asians <sup>d</sup>	55.9 <sup>e</sup>	70.6 <sup>e</sup>

<sup>d</sup>Males and females are significantly different

<sup>e</sup>Significantly different from Latinos at  $p < 0.05$

Holding consistently high educational expectations (expecting to earn at least a bachelor's degree in both eighth and tenth grades) by no means guarantees that a student will graduate from

college. However, *not* having consistently high expectations almost guarantees that a student will not become a college graduate. For example, while only 46% of Latinos with consistently high expectations graduated from college, 89% of Latino college graduates had such expectations (Table 4). In fact, expectations are the most powerful individual predictor of future attainment, followed by grades.

Table 4. Associations between Consistently High Expectations and High Attainment

	% with High EE <sup>f</sup> who have B.A.		% with B.A. who had High EE <sup>f</sup>	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Whites	62.4	65.7	88.0	90.1
African Americans	41.9	44.6	90.3	78.5
Latinos	45.8	46.4	89.2	88.0
Asians	73.0	75.6	92.2	91.6

<sup>f</sup>EE = educational expectations

Multivariate logistic regression models predicting the odds of earning a bachelor's degree by 2000 (eight years after graduation from high school given normal progression) compared Latinos to whites, African Americans and Asians (Table 5).

Table 5. Odds of College Graduation

	Blocked Opportunities <sup>g</sup>		Blocked Opportunities + SES <sup>g,h</sup>	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Whites	2.14**	2.27***	1.32	1.56*
African Americans	1.24	1.80*	1.00	1.68
Latinos	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Asians	2.47**	3.48***	1.65	2.47**

\*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001

<sup>g</sup>Controls include: educational and occupational expectations, parental educational expectations, effort, GPA, attitudes toward the future

<sup>h</sup>Controls include: family income, number of siblings, parental education

The first two results columns present odds ratios net of educational expectations and other factors that describe students' views of their opportunities. The last two columns present odds ratios controlling for SES as well. Holding expectations and related factors constant does not alter the racial/ethnic patterns of college graduation found at the bivariate level for either males or females. This finding suggests that the gap in college graduation rates between academically promising Latinos and others is not due to lower expectations and sense of opportunity among Latino youth. Controlling for SES, however, has very different effects for males and females. Net of SES, there are no longer any significant differences in the odds of graduating from college between Latino males and whites and Asians. In contrast, although controlling for SES narrows the differences between Latinas and others, white and Asian females are still significantly more likely than Latinas to become college graduates. Whereas SES differences appear to account for differences in the odds of college graduation between Latino males and more advantaged whites and Asians, this gap does not explain the difference between Latinas and other females. In other words, these findings suggest that low family SES is the primary barrier to higher educational

attainment among academically promising young Latino males, but that the explanation for what is holding young Latinas back lies elsewhere as well.

In the models in Table 5, having consistently high educational expectations was strongly and positively associated with the odds of graduating from college. Given the importance of high expectations, models interacting race/ethnicity and expectations explored whether the racial/ethnic patterns found for males and females were similar among subgroups with consistently high expectations and for those with lower expectations (Table 6). Among males, the pattern of no racial/ethnic differences holds for both those with high expectations and for those with lower expectations. The patterns for females differ for the two subgroups. Among females with consistently high expectations, Asians are twice as likely to graduate from college as Latinas, but there is no difference between whites and Latinos. However, among those with lower expectations, Latinas are from 2.1 to 5.8 times less likely to graduate than females from other racial/ethnic groups. This finding suggests that not having consistently high expectations is particularly harmful to the chances that Latinas who show early promise in school will go on to become college graduates.

Table 6. Odds of Graduating from College among Educational Expectation Subgroups<sup>i</sup>

	Males	Females
Always High Expectations		
Whites	1.29	1.42
African Americans	1.10	1.26
Latinos	1.00	1.00
Asians	2.12	1.97*
Ever Low Expectations		
Whites	1.43	2.13*
African Americans	0.68	3.70*
Latinos	1.00	1.00
Asians	0.78	5.77**

\*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01

<sup>i</sup> Controls include: educational and occupational expectations, parental educational expectations, effort, GPA, attitudes toward the future, family income, number of siblings, parental education

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