Understanding the Bridging Social Capital of Latinx Immigrant Students in the American Southeast

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UNDERSTANDING THE BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL OF LATINX IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN THE AMERICAN SOUTHEAST

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership (P-12)

by
Clifford Joseph Lee, Jr.
December 2019

Accepted by:
Dr. Hans Klar, Committee Chair
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Dr. Mindy Spearman
ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I report the findings of an ethnographic study I conducted in a large suburban high school in the Upstate of South Carolina. The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that affect the formation of the bridging social capital of Latinx immigrant high school students and to provide recommendations to school leaders. For this study, I interviewed eleven Latinx immigrant high school students in Spanish about their experiences as they integrated into their new academic environment. In addition to the interviews, I conducted observations in several common areas of the school and collected stylized written statements, known as testimonios, from students that were willing to write them.

Five major factors that affected the development of bridging social capital of Latinx immigrant students were found. First, the ability or inability to speak Spanish determined the speed with which relationships between established and Latinx immigrant students were built. Second, racial self-segregation and the racialization of conflicts hampered the building of bridging social capital between different student groups. Third, an individual Latinx immigrant student’s propensity to adopt deliberately American habits or be adoptable by American students or teachers affected the bridging social capital formation between these groups. Fourth, the shedding or pliability of Latinx identity facilitated bridging social capital development. And fifth, the existence of in-group conflict between Mexican Latinx and non-Mexican Latinx immigrant students
hampered bonding social capital development, which in turn stymied bridging social capital development.

The findings of this dissertation are important because the arrival of Latinx people to the American Southeast is a relatively new phenomenon, happening mostly within the last 15 years. Furthermore, a newly reenergized and vocal anti-immigrant movement in the wake of the 2016 American presidential campaign has likely changed the relationships between traditional American power structures and immigrant populations. Because high trust and social capital are essential for the basic operations of a school, educational leaders can use these findings to facilitate Latinx immigrant students’ success by developing initiatives and programs that mitigate factors beyond their control.
DEDICATION

To Amanda and our children, Charlotte Emmeline, Clifford Joseph, and Josephine Elizabeth. I am a better person because of you.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a basic overview and summary of this ethnographic study. First, I contextualize the problem of recent demographic shifts and likely damage to the bridging social capital of Latinx immigrant students that leads to my research question, “What influences the development of bridging social capital between Latinx immigrant students, their peers, and teachers in the American Southeast?” Next, I describe the investigative framework of the study and explain the choices I made to facilitate my study. Finally, I review the overall structure of the dissertation with summaries of each of its five chapters.

Background of the Problem

Throughout the history of the United States, immigrants, no matter their place of origin, have been subjected to overtly xenophobic sentiment from native populations (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). This is evidenced in well-known political movements such as the Know Nothing Party of the mid-nineteenth century, the Nativist movements of the early twentieth century, and even the Red Scare of the mid-twentieth century. Similarly, the United States of the early twenty-first century is currently experiencing a revival of anti-immigrant sentiment. On the cusp of historic and widespread demographic change, the traditional White majority of the United States must grapple with the reality that for the first time in its history it will, by 2035, no longer be the majority population in the United States (US Census Bureau, 2018).
While there are many factors that have contributed to the rapidly approaching change in the racial makeup of the United States, two of the primary causes are immigration and births to immigrants (Hernandez, 2004, p. 19). As a result, the traditional, primarily White, power structures are reacting to the elevated anxiety caused by a perceived “threat to an ‘American Way of Life’” (Huber, 2015, p. 246) in the face of these shifts. These visible demographic shifts have reinvigorated the United States’ long tradition of xenophobia and have been coupled with a fundamental change in the tone of the political debate surrounding issues related to immigration.

The 2016 presidential campaign, particularly the Republican presidential primary, showcased the weaponization of White anxiety related to demographic and cultural change in an effort to motivate voters (Team Trump, 2016; Believe Again, 2015). Furthermore, the remainder of the campaign came to feature what was known as the Trump Hypothesis (Green, 2016). Despite the notable absence of evidence, this theory holds that immigration, particularly of Latinx peoples arriving over land borders, largely consists of violent criminals and drug dealers. While not necessarily effective at wholly swaying elections on their own (Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007), negative campaign ads such as these have been shown to reawaken or otherwise embolden previously silenced racist attitudes (Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). Additional evidence for the rebirth of these attitudes can be seen in the statistically significant surge in hate crimes in the United States in the time period immediately following the 2016 presidential campaign (Rushin & Edwards, 2018).
Problem

The fundamental change in tone surrounding immigration discussions has created significant problems for the students coming from these immigrant communities. Even before the 2016 presidential campaign, other scholars (e.g. Cuevas, 2015; Cuevas & Cheung, 2015; Nguyen & Martinez, 2015; Waters, 2015) had already explored the harm brought to Latinx immigrant students’ lives that comes from the ever-changing nature and the highly polarized discussion of policies for documented and undocumented immigration. In addition to those harmful effects, other factors exacerbate the hostile social and political environment for this student community. These other factors include the already intensifying cultural backlash from visibly changing demographics from before the 2016 presidential campaign (Huber, 2015), the dismay of the Latinx immigrant community resulting from the latest round of policy changes and law enforcement actions (Martin, 2017), and the recent increase of hate crimes directed toward minorities (Rushin & Edwards, 2018). Resultant from these many circumstances, it is highly probable that relationships, articulable as bridging social capital, between the Latinx immigrant community and other communities within broader mainstream American society have been significantly damaged.

This probable damage is of special interest to school communities and educational leaders. Positive relationships between different communities, which may be understood in terms of bridging social capital (Flora & Flora, 2013), offer significant benefits in the context of student achievement. Acar (2011) found that high levels of social capital among students directly result in “(1) higher achievement on tests, (2) higher graduate
rates, (3) lower dropout rates, (4) higher college enrollment, and (5) greater participation in school and community organizations” (p. 460). Conversely, in their study of the performance of public schools in Chicago, Bryk and Schneider (2003) showed the consequences to student achievement resulting from poor relationships between schools and the communities they serve. Due to language obstacles (Mesa, Torres, Smithwick, & Sides, 2016), inadvertent or intentional isolation by educators (Raible & Irizarry, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999), and the penalties associated with carrying the label of immigrant (Kao & Rutherford, 2007), Latinx immigrant students in American schools were at a considerable disadvantage with respect to social capital even before the resolution of the 2016 presidential campaign. In the American Southeast, the problems for these students are exacerbated by the relative newness of demographic changes, the relative lack of established culturally-similar communities (Hamann & Harklau, 2015), the unclear placement of Latinxs in its traditionally biracial social system (Lynn, 2015), and its overall relative deficiency of social capital compared to other regions in the United States (Joint Economic Committee, 2018).

The Latinx immigrant students in the American Southeast find themselves in a unique situation with respect to the development of bridging social capital with other student and teacher groups in their schools. They are a member of a group that has been villainized in national political discussions and that is relatively new to the American Southeast—a region that is already deficient in social capital relative to other parts of the United States. This likely hampers their abilities to build bridging social capital, a component of school life that is vital to academic success. Furthermore, because little
research has been conducted into this aspect of the Latinx immigrant population in the American Southeast, little is known about how this bridging social capital would develop, even in ideal circumstances. As a result, educational leaders do not have sufficient information to develop programs to maximize the achievement of these students.

**Purpose**

Investigations that uncover information about the lived experiences of Latinx immigrant students are of great interest to educators in part because of the large number of students involved. The Latinx immigrant student population represents a considerable portion of the overall public K-12 student population in the United States (US Census Bureau, 2016). Furthermore, despite the great variety of countries of origin within the Latinx diaspora in the United States, particularly in the American Southeast (Hamman & Harklau, 2015), many of the Latinx populations have a great deal in common (Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004). Additionally, this community possesses a common experience in that it has been targeted directly in recent political discourse (Martin, 2017; Young, 2017) and has likely directly experienced racism as the result of the negative effects of these negative campaign ads (Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). These common experiences and cultural commonalities make it possible that findings of these research questions will be applicable to many different educational settings in the United States.

The value of studying the lived experiences of people in an effort to develop an understanding of social capital within and between communities has been demonstrated by Forrest and Kearns (2001), Glover (2004), and Rhodes (2009). In their studies, social
capital became comprehensible through an in depth review of participants’ descriptions of their daily lives and specifically descriptions of their interactions with other people. Because of social capital’s importance as a determiner of academic success (Kao & Rutherford, 2007), this study seeks to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of Latinx immigrant students, and particularly those who live in the American Southeast. Studying these lived experiences in order to understand social capital is particularly important given the environment of newly reinvigorated racist anti-immigrant sentiment (Rushin & Edwards, 2018) and recent regional demographic shifts (Hamann & Harklau, 2015). As stated in the call for research by Hernandez (2004), this research is needed to help policymakers and educators alike create an environment in which the probability of success for these targeted students is facilitated and maximized.

Furthermore, new school accountability systems are beginning to directly assess the success of ESOL students, a group which overwhelmingly consists of Latinx immigrant students in the United States. For example, the new official measurement of success for schools in South Carolina now includes a calculation of ESOL students’ progress in learning English. In any school that hosts 20 or more English language learners, ten percent of the overall calculated rating on the state report card is directly connected to the academic progress made by these students alone (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2017). These new measures incentivize schools to ensure that these students receive the highest quality constitutionally-guaranteed education possible.
Research Question

The research question for this study is: What influences the development of bridging social capital between Latinx immigrant secondary students, their peers, and teachers in the American Southeast? Due to the importance of social capital as a major determinant of student success, this research question offers the potential for significant insight into how to best develop relationships, programs, and opportunities for Latinx immigrant students—particularly within their new and unfamiliar social (Hoops, 2017; Woolley, 2009) and academic (Diversi & Mecham, 2005) circumstances.

Delimitations

The participants of this study are all self-identified Latinx immigrant high school students aged fourteen or above that attend Gary Chalmers High School\(^1\) in the Upstate of South Carolina. These students were chosen due to strong existing relationships with me that facilitate honesty in responses and because there are considerably more technical and ethical considerations when interviewing younger children about their experiences—particularly if they are negative (Irwin & Johnson 2005; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). These students were all born outside of the United States and attended schools in their country of origin for a significant period of time. Ensuring that the participants of this study had spent a substantial amount time in school in their countries of origin ensured that they went through the usual culture shock experiences of immigrant students (Valenzuela, 1999; Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Harklau & Colomer, 2015) and thus would be able to adequately recall and describe the experiences and meaning of becoming a

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\(^1\) This and all names in this dissertation are pseudonyms.
student in their new setting. Furthermore, this time before arrival to the United States also ensured that these students mostly espouse the Latin American beliefs about the roles of family and school in their lives (Martinez, 2013; Woolley, 2009).

In addition to ensuring and recognizing consistency among this study’s participants’ experiences, it is likewise important to define and use contemporary and appropriate terminology when referring to them. In their discussion of terminology to refer to people from the various Spanish-speaking cultural spheres of the world, Hayes-Bautista and Chapa (1987) offered a lengthy discussion on the necessity of distinguishing the commonly used terms Latino and Hispanic. In their view, “‘Latino’ is the most appropriate term of reference to use to refer to persons residing in the United States of Latin American origin or descent” (p. 67). More recently, the term Latinx has gained popularity in scholarly work. This update to the traditional Latino is informed by an effort to promote inclusivity and to “resist the gender binary” (Salinas Jr. & Lozano, 2017, p. 3) that saturates the Spanish language.

Within this study the term Latinx will be used. However, in order to access the wide breadth of previous scholarship, Latinx will be used synonymously with the traditional terms Latino and Hispanic as they refer to the racialized, typically-darker skinned Spanish-speaker with ties to the Spanish speaking countries and regions of the Americas (Duany, 1998). This definition specifically excludes people from Spain, whose geography and history are fundamentally removed from Latin America, and includes people from Puerto Rico, who, despite their American citizenship, are often lumped together with true Latinx immigrants (Duany, 1998). This distinction is in line with the
general use of these terms in much of current scholarship in many fields such as education (Garcia, & Ramirez, 2018) and medicine (Spezia-Lindner, Mitre, & Kunik, 2018).

**Framework Summary**

Social capital will be the lens through which the lived experiences of Latinx immigrant students will be understood. While social capital has been defined separately by different scholars (e.g., Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Yosso, 2005), Flora and Flora’s (2013) understanding of social capital will be the most useful for the purposes of this study. Flora and Flora explained that all possible definitions of social capital possess two essential components. First, they stated that social capital always exists as a “group-level phenomenon” (p. 119). Secondly, they asserted that social capital can always be explained “in terms of reciprocity and mutual trust” (p. 119). Because schools may be understood as a community (Lawson, 2010), the descriptions that Latinx immigrant students make of social capital and its indicators can be generalized and extrapolated out to other members of that community. Furthermore, commensurate levels of social capital of an entire group can be inferred wherever trust or reciprocity is present in one participant’s perspective.

Flora and Flora (2013) divided social capital into bridging social capital and bonding social capital. Bonding social capital refers to the relationships within groups (p. 125) and bridging social capital refers to the relationships different groups have with one another (p. 127). Because this project seeks to understand the relationships between Latinx immigrant students and other groups within the school, bridging social capital is
of primary interest. However, wherever it is found to affect bridging capital, bonding social capital is explored as well. Fortunately, Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) created a data collection instrument that offers fourteen observable criteria as proxies for social capital and a manner in which to assess their relative strengths. These observable criteria allow social capital to be measured despite its intangible and abstract nature.

**Research Design Summary**

In order to accomplish the stated research goals of this project, a focus on the truths of the lived experiences of the participants and the eventual practical use of its findings are of absolute importance. At the intersection of these goals lies the phenomenological ethnography, the methodology of this inquiry. Because the focus of the knowledge uncovered through phenomenological inquiry is “meant to serve the practical aims of pedagogy” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 2), it lends itself naturally to informing the work of educators. Additionally, because schooling is a routine and ordinary activity for students, the notion offered by phenomenological traditions that the lived experiences of participants are experienced immediately, mundanely, and naturally (Van Manen, 1990) is particularly useful.

Ethnography, with its demand that research activities amplify the voices of its participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 22), also lends itself to a research project that seeks to “restore credibility to native perspectives” (Katz & Csordas, 2003, p. 275). Ethnographic research also offers the notion of the “foreshadowed problem” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.3). At the center of this project is the foreshadowed problem of anticipated damage to bridging social capital between Latinx immigrant
students and teacher and other student groups. Similarly, this research project features the inclusion of testimonios, a generally Latin American sort of soliloquy focusing on one’s lived experiences or something to which an author has borne witness (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012, p. 523). The inclusion of the testimonio offers a route to empowerment and affirmation for participants (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012, p. 527) because objective knowledge has been used in the past to legitimize the victimization of marginalized groups (Banks, 2006, p. 781).

This research was undertaken at Gary Chalmers High School in the Upstate of South Carolina. Of the approximately 2000 students in this school, roughly six percent are served by the English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. These ESOL students are overwhelmingly from Latinx immigrant communities and represent many of the countries in the Spanish-speaking cultural sphere of the Americas. As a person with regular access to this school, I was able to collect data from the study’s participants and the whole school without some of the suspicion that an outsider would otherwise create (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 60-62). The Latinx immigrant students themselves provided data directly to me through interviews, observations, and participant-generated documents. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, I interviewed eleven students in Spanish as all preferred to use Spanish as the language of the interview. These interview sessions lasted no longer than thirty minutes and took place outside of the students’ class times, during lunches, before or after school, or during other unstructured times in the school day. Five observations were performed as well. These observations allowed me to see the larger context of the lived experiences of the participants as well as provided
contacts for subsequent interviews (Cornelius, 1982, p. 387). Finally, five testimonies, the aforementioned written account of a lived experience, were collected from ESOL students.

The data collected through these methods were subjected to inductive coding that was heavily informed by previous research on the experiences of immigrant communities and their adjustments to school and social life in the United States (e.g. Menjívar & Bejarano, 2004; Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldeberg, 1995). The first cycle of coding was values coding (Saldaña, 2015, p. 89), a technique specifically designed to assess a participant’s worldview. Values coding allows for the processing of data through the specified lenses of values, attitudes, and beliefs, then uses the salient codes to describe the worldviews of participants (pp. 89-93). The second cycle was pattern coding (Saldaña, 2015, p. 152), a meta-coding technique that is designed to tease out major themes and explanations from smaller findings found through initial coding. The layering process in pattern coding also offered an advantage because this study used an inductive coding strategy, seeking to construct major comprehensive themes from a large amount of data.

**Limitations**

There were two primary limitations anticipated at the outset of this study. The first limitation related to my positionality as a person regularly seen within the school and then existent relationships I had developed with this study’s participants. Additionally, all of the participants were students at the same school and enrolled in the same ESOL classes. The hyperlocal scope of this study ensured that all of the results derived from
data collected from these participants were heavily affected by the conditions specific to Gary Chalmers High School. Also stemming from the issue of scope is the understanding that the participants did not represent the complete views of Latinxs of all national origins. While many places of origin were represented through this study’s participants, the school had a proportionally large population of students of Mexican, Colombian, and Venezuelan origin and relatively few students from other Spanish-speaking regions such as the Caribbean. As the political relationships between the governments of the United States and the participants’ origin countries changed throughout the course of data collection, the perceptions and attitudes of expatriates from those regions so may have also been affected. The second major limitation is my command of the Spanish language. While I am a competent speaker and listener rated at the Advanced-Mid fluency level (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages), as a nonnative speaker of Spanish and cultural outsider, it is likely that I was at times unaware of some of the culturally-bound knowledge attached to or imbued within specific words or expressions.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provided a cursory overview of the main elements of the study including a description of the rationale for this study, explication of the choices I made as I developed this study’s plan of inquiry, and my positionality as it related to this study. Additionally, Chapter 1 provided a brief summary of data sources, a proposed plan for analysis, and couched the research within
the context of the new social and political climate that resulted from the 2016 presidential primaries and campaign.

Chapter 2 first summarizes relevant topics surrounding the racial and social placement of the Latinx immigrant community within the broader United States in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential campaign cycle and conditions specific to the American Southeast. Specific attention is paid to the recent nature of the demographic changes within these two spheres. Next, chapter 2 summarizes the relevant research surrounding the Latinx immigrant student’s experiences in schools in the wider United States and then specifically within the American Southeast. Special attention is paid to the differing expectations of schools that arise from cultural dissimilarities and the ensuing inadequacy of interventions designed to help these students. Finally, bridging social capital is identified as a potential source of understanding and method of remediation to address the underperformance of Latinx immigrant students.

Chapter 3 describes the design of this research project. After stating the purpose of this study, to improve academic outcomes by assessing the lived experiences of Hispanic immigrant students, the research question is restated. Afterward, the methodology is discussed. The research traditions of phenomenology and ethnography are described separately and then combined into a coherent epistemological and philosophical stance. A discussion of data collected from interviews, observations, and written statements from the Latinx immigrant students themselves and the plan for analysis follows the description of research traditions. Finally, I describe the
delimitations of the study and discuss my positionality in detail as it relates to the scope of this study.

Chapter 4 explains the findings of this study. First, the chapter begins with a discussion of the discovered nature and origin of bridging social capital of Latinx immigrant students and other groups in the school. Next, the discovered influencers of Latinx student bridging capital are explained. These influencers include, language barriers, racial self-segregation, racialization of conflicts, the notion of adoption and shedding Latinx-ness as it pertains to bridging social capital, and divisions between Mexican and other non-Mexican Latinx immigrant students. Afterward, because it was found to eventually influence the development of bridging social capital, a limited explanation of the nature and traits of bonding social capital of Latinx immigrant students takes place, followed by a detailed description of its influencers.

Chapter 5 contains the discussion and implications for practice resulting from this study’s findings. The implications are framed in a way to be useful for educational leaders. First, the chapter begins with a discussion of the routes to improve the bridging social capital of Latinx immigrant students. These routes include respecting and accommodating the importance of first experiences in the school building, the search for effective language allies from faculty and American student groups, and the need for adoption, integration, and tempering of identity of the school and its new Latinx immigrant students. Next, because it can lead to high bridging social capital, a discussion of bonding social capital and its relevance to the educational leader is discussed. The chapter ends with a conclusion.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a synthesis of the various contexts of Latinx immigrant students’ lived experiences in the United States, starting from the perspective of broader American society and then moving into a more granular discussion of the relationships between individuals and their schools. Along the way, the chapter offers and discusses theoretical lenses that are useful for analysis in subsequent chapters. This chapter begins with a description of the placement of the Latinx immigrant community within the broader setting of the United States. The chapter pays special attention to the recent demographic changes that are happening specifically within the American Southeast and then relates those demographic changes to the subsequent anxiety felt by the traditional White power structures of the United States. It then shows how this anxiety was weaponized during the 2016 presidential campaign to motivate voters with the side effect of reawakening suppressed racist attitudes. Next, the chapter describes the confusion of the placement of Latinx immigrants through a discussion of the misalignment of racial assumptions between the United States and Latin America as well as through the inadequacy of the traditional racial dynamics of the American Southeast.

After placing the Latinx immigrant community within the United States and the American Southeast, the chapter describes the educational outcomes for children from this community. Because there is a significant misalignment of school expectations and assumptions between native-born educators and the Latinx immigrants, many problems
arise through misunderstandings. After the comparison between the Latinx cultural values of respeto, educación, and familismo, and their English semi-false cognates, respect, education, and family, the inadequacy of previous interventions is revealed. Next, this misalignment is shown as a primary cause of diminished academic outcomes because of the damage it does to the bridging social capital between Latinx immigrant students, their teachers, and their peers.

Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the history of social capital and its relevance to this study. The definition proposed by Flora and Flora (2013) is used throughout this study. This definition is broken down into its subcomponents, bridging and bonding social capitals, and then used to describe different situations within an institution. The indispensability of social capital is described as a condition for academic success followed by a description of its special operational effects within a school. The chapter concludes by explaining the general difficulty with which Latinx immigrant students acquire social capital inside a school.

**The Latinx Community in Broader America**

The United States is currently undergoing a significant demographic transition (US Census Bureau, 2018). As the traditional White American majority ages, it will be increasingly replaced by members of minority groups to the point that “by the year 2035, more than half of the children in this country will be members of these groups” (Hernandez, 2004, p. 33). One of the major factors behind this transformation is immigration and births to immigrants (Hernandez, 2004, p. 19). Immigrants to the United States, no matter where their place of origin, have long been depicted as a threat
(Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). Additionally, Huber (2015) connected the changing demographics to an anxiety felt by the traditional, primarily White, power structures—explaining that these shifts represent a “perceived threat to an ‘American Way of Life’” (p. 246).

**The 2016 Presidential Campaign.**

The coalescence of traditional anti-immigrant sentiment and visible demographic shifts created an environment during the 2016 US presidential campaign where immigration, both legal and illegal, became a primary point of focus—particularly within the sphere of the Republican presidential primary. In June of 2015, at the earliest stages of the campaign, hopeful Republican candidate Bobby Jindal of Louisiana fired the first shot by airing a political ad that called for zero tolerance of illegal immigration and an outright rejection of non-White ethnic identity, himself saying “I’m tired of hyphenated Americans” (Believe Again, 2015). Immigration remained a focal point of the Republican platform and discussion rose to a fever pitch when Donald Trump, at this point the confirmed Republican Party’s candidate, aired an ad in August of 2016 that lamented a system “rigged against Americans” and the collection of public benefits by illegal immigrants (Team Trump, 2016). Despite a complete absence of evidence (Green, 2016), the campaign laid the foundation for what has commonly become known as the Trump Hypothesis, asserting that immigration, particularly of Latinxs, largely consists of violent criminals, drug dealers, and other “bad hombres” (CNN, 2016).

These political ads represented a set of negative campaigning ads on the part of the Republican presidential primary candidates. Although Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner
(2007) found no strong evidence that negative campaigning can appreciably sway elections with respect to issues, negative campaigning has been shown to be very effective in reawakening otherwise silenced or latent racist attitudes (Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). Additionally, Schneider and Ingram (1993) asserted that “there are strong pressures for public officials to provide beneficial policy to powerful, positively constructed target populations and to devise punitive, punishment-oriented policy for negatively constructed groups” (p. 334). Given the campaign’s focus on and largely negative depiction of immigration, it follows that these resurgently vocal racist attitudes and new punitive policies would be directed most strongly against those groups highly represented in immigrant populations, such as Latinxs. This animus can be seen in demands for a physical wall along the American southern border, for the termination of the immigrant student-friendly Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, and for increasingly intense immigration enforcement actions, all to the dismay of the Latinx immigrant community (Martin, 2017). Further evidence for an awakening of racist attitudes toward non-White immigrants and other minorities as a result of the recent presidential election cycle was found by Rushin and Edwards (2018) when two statistically significant and substantial surges of hate crimes were uncovered immediately after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks and then once again immediately following the election of President Trump.

The change in tone has created significant problems for the students coming from the Latinx immigrant community, regardless of their own immigration status. Even before the most recent presidential election, many studies (e.g., Cuevas, 2015; Cuevas &
Cheung, 2015; Nguyen & Martinez, 2015; Waters, 2015) explored and discussed the various harmful effects on students’ lives that arise from highly politicized and ever-changing immigration policies. These researchers demonstrated that this far-reaching harm can take various forms such as lower academic achievement and decreased physical wellbeing, all detrimental to a student’s academic performance. Despite this, because all children physically present in the United States have access to a primary and secondary education guaranteed through the United States Constitution, all children from these communities are presently able to attend American public schools systems.

**Racialization of the Latinx Community**

The Latinx immigrant community occupies a peculiar space within the American cultural landscape. Through formalized exclusionary policies such as the Jim Crow laws and the Chinese Exclusion Act, dominant racial narratives throughout the history of the United States have relegated to a lower position those members of darker-skinned ethnic groups relative to the privileged social positions of the fairer-skinned ethnic groups. As a result, the American racial hierarchy is significantly simpler than that presented in many other countries, usually only offering the two options of White and non-White for racial identity (Gans, 2012). In contrast, many places in the Latinx cultural sphere, for example those in parts of the Caribbean, have a system of racial classification that offers categories that simply do not exist in the United States such as indio (a person of indigenous descent), mestizo (a person of mixed race), and trigueño (a very dark-skinned yet not considered Black person) (Duany, 1998, p. 151). Duany continued, explaining that upon arrival to the Unites States, unless they are particularly fair-skinned, Latinx
immigrants are typically assigned membership to the lower status, disenfranchised, darker-skinned group (p. 153).

The difficulties of racial positionality of the Latinx immigrant community are particularly important when understood in light of the current political climate. Although racial hierarchy clearly influences life in their countries of origin, as obligatory members of the non-White group in American society, many Latinx immigrants are confronted and then disoriented by the social distance present between them and their new White neighbors (Hoops, 2017). This social distance has been wielded with great political effectiveness by various factions in the most recent presidential campaign and the resultant administration. From dubious emergency declarations to build a border wall, the termination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, and pledges to make immigration enforcement actions more muscular, the Latinx immigrant community has been singled out as the cause for a wide range of economic and social woes in the second decade of the 20th century (Martin, 2017). As such, a significant amount of the recent political discourse in the United States has shifted from being a country where immigration is seen as a celebrated part of the national founding myth to something more sinister that should be discouraged or outright banned. As recipients of the labels immigrant and Latinx, members of this group automatically and involuntarily receive a double stigmatization—a matter that I will discuss in later sections of this chapter.

**Latinxs and Other Immigrants**

The Latinx immigrant community includes a significant portion of all those people present in the United States. Of the approximately 320 million residents of the
United States in 2014, 42 million, nearly one in seven, were designated foreign-born. While many of these immigrants come from countries such as China, the Philippines, and India, approximately half of the immigrants arriving in the United States annually are Latinxs (Martin, 2017). Approximately 11 million predominantly Latinx undocumented workers and 741,000 predominantly Latinx DACA recipients are included in the 42 million immigrants in the United States. The future of these people in the United States has been made uncertain as the result of a chain of executive orders and potential legislation developed to specifically address these issues (Martin, 2017).

The 42 million foreign-born residents also include an enormous population of school-aged children. The US Census Bureau (2016) estimated that there are 15.3 million foreign-born Latinx children between 3 and 17 years of age—all of whom, regardless of immigration status, are guaranteed access to primary and secondary education under the *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) US Supreme Court decision. Because this is a substantial proportion of the student body of the United States, investigation into the lived experiences of this group is particularly important and relevant to inform the effort to improve their educational outcomes which, as will be discussed later, lag behind their non-immigrant and non-Latinx counterparts.

**Hispanic, Latino, or Latinx**

In their discussion of terminology to refer to people from the Spanish-speaking cultures of the world, Hayes-Bautista and Chapa (1987) offered a lengthy discussion on the necessity of distinguishing terms commonly used. Historically, the term *Latino* was not used in reference to either culture or race but rather in reference to geographic
location and subjugation under the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 (p. 61). The term *Hispanic* was and continues to be used as a marker for all cultures whose primary language is Spanish, regardless of race (p. 64). Unfortunately, this categorization includes citizens of Spain, a country separated from Latin America by the Atlantic Ocean and whose emigrants generally self-identify and are accepted as White (p. 64). Even so, *Hispanic*, as it appears in research literature, will be used interchangeably with *Latinx* in this study and will be understood in the sense of the racialized, typically darker-skinned, Spanish-speaker from Latin America (Duany, 1998). Contemporarily, the term *Latinx* has gained popularity in scholarly work. This update to the traditional *Latino* is informed by an effort to promote inclusivity and to “resist the gender binary” (Salinas Jr. & Lozano, 2017, p. 3) that saturates the Spanish language. Defining *Hispanic, Latino, and Latinx* interchangeably this way also has the benefit of including Puerto Ricans who, despite their birthright US citizenship, are often lumped together with other Latino people who are truly immigrants (Duany, 1998). Additionally, the flexibility provided by this definition will facilitate access to previous scholarship on this population.

**Latinization in the American Southeast**

The position of the Latinx immigrant community is similarly unique when seen through the lens of the “New Latino Diaspora” (Hamann & Harklau, 2015, p.3) in the American Southeast, which includes the areas designated as East South Central and South Atlantic (US Census Bureau, 1995) and excludes Central and South Florida which has a distinct population compared to the remainder of the region (US Census Bureau, 2019). Of the top ten states with the highest proportion of increase in the Latinx
population between 2000 and 2010, eight are located in the Southeast. These states are, in order of increase, “(1) South Carolina, (2) Alabama, (3) Tennessee, (4) Kentucky, (5) Arkansas, (6) North Carolina, (7) Maryland, and (8) Mississippi” (Hamann & Harklau, 2015, p. 11). Because of the recent nature of this demographic shift, these states lack any substantial long-established Latinx population that is otherwise present in different regions in the United States such as the Southwest. The lack of any established culturally-similar populations exacerbates the relative unavailability of networks of support and the resultant absence of institutional knowledge usually relied upon by new immigrants unfamiliar with their new surroundings (Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004). The relative vulnerability and isolation of this community are made clear given that the southeastern United States has particularly low levels of social capital relative to other regions (Joint Economic Committee, 2018) and few, if any, extant communities of Latinx immigrants.

Until only recently, many regions within the American Southeast have largely been “almost exclusively biracial (i.e., White and African American) and had been so for generations” (Lynn, 2015, p. 116). With the arrival of Latinxs, the entrenched social order was forced to place newly arrived people who did not fit cleanly into either group. Because the United States only offers White and non-White as potential racial identities (Gans, 2012), Latino immigrants became “minoritized” (Raible & Irizarry, 2015, p. 73) and placed alongside their historically oppressed Black neighbors in the Southeast. As with the southeastern United States today, earlier in the history of the United States other waves of immigration to places with previously few immigrants resulted in “much
handwringing by the nativists of the time” (Portes & Lagae, 2017, p. 251). Yet, despite these fears, the “native White elites kept firm control of the levers of economic and political power and existing institutions, such as schools and the court system, proved resilient enough to withstand the foreign onslaught” (p. 251). Evidence of this reactionary response can be seen in South Carolina’s official and vocal support of the self-deportation movement and the formation of a police task force dedicated to the interdiction of fraudulent identification (Brown & Yee, 2018).

The State of Education and the Latinx Immigrant Community

The relative weakness of the Latinx mutual support networks and communities in the American Southeast becomes more apparent when viewed through the lens of academic outcomes. For example, while all states have difficulties ensuring that Latinx graduation rates are equal to their non-Latinx counterparts, “the Deep South seems to be the weakest” (Hamann & Harklau, 2015, p. 12) in achieving this parity. This is to say that the proportion of Latinx students that graduate is significantly lower than the proportion of overall enrollment in their school systems. Furthermore, despite the positive effects that the formation of a community and other mutual support networks have on school outcomes (Osterman, 2010) it is frequently the case that Latinx students are unable to develop them due to pressures outside of their control.

Through their official practices, many times schools either deliberately or inadvertently stifle students’ capacities to develop community ties through “so-called zero tolerance policies” and “measures of containment, or curtailment of their freedom and mobility” (Raible & Irizarry, 2015, p. 72). Additionally, Valenzuela (1999) directly
criticized the creation of “cultural tracks” (p. 31) which remove immigrant students from mainstream students with compulsory enrollment in ESOL programs. This process, while intended to help immigrant students, has the unintended consequence of eliminating the opportunity to build social capital, particularly bridging social capital. Eventually, students are unable to create relationships and mutual support networks between student groups.

The interactions between culture and experience must also be considered within the context of the school institution. Diversi and Mecham (2005) found that most Latinx immigrant families did not fully “understand the American collaborative educational system between parents and school” (p. 32) because of the differing cultural expectations of school institutions. Furthermore, Martinez (2013) described a set of norms and behaviors in the Latinx community known as familismo. This term implies that Latinxs “place greater value on being members of a community and family” (p. 22) than many other cultures, including mainstream White American culture. Students with this family-centered orientation, when confronted with decisions such as education choices, will always make significant allowances for the good of the family unit, even when those choices would directly and clearly benefit them as an individual. This framework would account for the seemingly irrational school-related behaviors, such as those described in Martinez’s study where a student reconsidered her choice to attend a prestigious college and instead stay at home because her mother’s wishes “superseded her own” (p. 32).

Along the lines of familismo, Woolley (2009) described an extensive model of Latinx family values and their effects on educational expectations within these families.
*Familismo*, as already described, entails decision-making in which the needs of the family override the needs of an individual. In conjunction with *familismo*, Woolley presented two other values. The first of these is *respeto*. *Respeto* is a cognate, yet not an equivalent, of the English word, *respect*, that describes the lived reality that “Latino youth are especially raised to respect elders and the roles they serve” (p. 10). This cultural trait offers a model for understanding some of the attributes common among Latinx immigrant students, such as the deferential immigrant (Valenzuela, 1999), which will be described in later sections of this chapter.

Although the extended social networks of Latinx youth are couched in this understanding of respect (Wooley, 2009), a language barrier precludes effective communication between immigrant communities and school staff (Mesa, Torres, Smithwick, & Sides, 2016). As a result of an inability to communicate, this route to improve student outcomes is lost (Gallo, Wortham, & Bennett, 2015). The potential bridging social capital between these parents and their children’s school staff that could be leveraged to the advantage of students remains noticeably absent and conflicts with the expectations these families have with schools. *Educación*, similarly a cognate of the English word, *education*, carries with it a significantly broader scope than the latter. Whereas the English word, education, usually carries with it only the implication of formal schooling, *educación* entails “the comprehensive rearing of a child” (Wooley, 2009, p. 10). Furthermore, with *educación* “the non-academic aspects of education are considered just as or more important than academics” (p. 10). The semantic charge that is lost in the direct translation of these terms from Spanish to English is a powerful
symbol that demonstrates the misalignment of school expectations between Latinx immigrant and American non-immigrant stakeholders and the ease with which educators can overlook these differences.

Intuitively, this misalignment can create a situation in which school authority figures may not be equipped to handle the differing experiences and cultural demands of Latinx immigrant children. It is possible that the dissonance here can also be explained through the lens of disparate cultural expectations. Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, and Goldeberg (1995) first suggested that Latinx students’ expectations of their schools may be understood through the lens of “agrarian values” (p. 58). According to Reese et. al., agrarian values, which emphasize a collective or group orientation, may create difficulties in the highly individualistic setting of the American school, even as these values place a high worth on the education itself (p. 58). Essentially, although Latinx immigrant students certainly place great value on the education to which they have access, the school is unable to serve them adequately because most schools are ill-prepared to teach group-oriented students—a corollary to the cultural-bound ideas of respeto, educación, and familiarismo. Whatever the source of the cultural disconnect between Latinx immigrant students and the schools that serve them, it is clear that more investigation is necessary to determine the nature of this detachment.

**Solutions and Remedies**

The educational landscape of the immigrant community, particularly the Latinx immigrant community, has shown significant underperformance compared to their native-born counterparts (Gambino, 2017). Although there are some unexpected results,
such as the higher likelihood of any individual immigrant to hold a Ph.D. or similar terminal degree, by and large all immigrant communities present a lower level of educational attainment (Gambino). Despite the decrease in high school dropout rates for all immigrant groups over the period between 2000 and 2012, immigrant communities from the Latinx regions designated as Mexico, Central America, Caribbean, and South America maintained the highest dropout rates compared against the other regions such as South and East Asia, Middle East, and others (Pew Research Center, 2014). While there are surely numerous reasons for this, Lopez (2009) shed some light on the attitudes held by these students with a survey of Latinx youths aged from 16 to 25. In this study, participants were asked why Latinx immigrant students were performing more poorly than their otherwise similar counterparts. He reported that 47% cited low parental involvement, 44% cited cultural differences between them and their teachers, 43% cited low English skills, and 31% cited low student work ethic (p. 5).

In an effort to address the national phenomenon of inequity of academic outcomes, South Carolina independently revised the evaluation criteria for its K-12 public schools (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2017). One of the major changes from previous evaluation criteria is the specific focus on improvement in the command of English for English-learners, a group almost entirely comprised of immigrant students. The new structure specifies that 10% of the overall official final grade for any public school with 20 or more English language learner (ELL) students is determined by the academic success of those students exclusively. This change marks a significant shift from accountability measures that, while factoring ELL student
performance into reports cards, did not assign such a substantial portion of an overall score to the success or failure of their educational experiences. This has left schools in a position where adaptation and accommodation have risen to the utmost importance and urgency.

“Foreign” Language Teachers.

The immigrant demographic changes in the American Southeast have come quickly (Hamann & Harklau, 2015) and, as a result, they have forced schools to source teachers with bilingual abilities wherever they are able. For many schools, the only available resource is the foreign language faculty within their own schools (Harklau & Colomer, 2015, p. 155). In these settings, Spanish teachers frequently and suddenly “find themselves playing unofficial roles as translators, interpreters, counselors, or parent liaisons” (p. 153). While generally well-intentioned, this arrangement possesses significant shortcomings. At best, it remains inadequate in addressing the needs of students and, at its worst, it actively harms the Spanish-speaking students and their likelihood of academic success.

One of the sources of academic harm that arises from this practice stems from the linguistic hegemony present in Spanish-language education in the United States. Since all students who intend to graduate with a high school diploma, including recent arrivals to the United States, must fulfil the standard curricular requirements of their district, many find themselves enrolled in Spanish language classes. While attending many of these classes, all students, including those who routinely speak Spanish outside the classroom, are encouraged or forced to conform to the norms of Castilian Spanish from
the Iberian Peninsula (Valdés, González, García, & Márquez, 2008)—including its linguistic markers not used by Latin American speakers of Spanish. Harklau and Colomer (2015) found that as a result of these practices, students were not only assailed for their dialect features by teachers in Spanish classes, but even by fellow Latino/a bilingual peers, who could likewise re-voice and re-instantiate ideologies of standard Spanish and make language proficiency an index of one’s authenticity as ‘Hispanic.’

(p. 158)

This negative feedback from peers and teachers creates a sense of alienation that removes a student from academic life and potentially from other Latinx immigrant students.

Another source of harm with using foreign language faculty as a bilingual resource takes place outside of the classroom. Harklau and Colomer (2015) noted that translation requests come from cafeteria managers, other teachers, counselors, and many others who regularly require the ability to communicate with students directly. However, many of these requests involve Spanish teachers doing real-time translation of specialized technical vocabulary, confidential content, illicit student notes, and other material “well outside their areas of academic expertise” (p. 161). Furthermore, many Spanish teachers, although potentially capable of providing faithful translations, cannot account for the variation between the educational structures of the United States and their students’ countries of origin. Harklau and Colomer (2015) reported that some teachers “pointed out that Latino parents unfamiliar with the U.S. educational system might not fully
understand translated school communication without extra explanation” (p. 162) because of this discordance.

**Parental Involvement**

It is often the case that the idea of parental involvement is not a universal concept across all educational stakeholders (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Evidence for this difference in understanding can be found in the disparity between the results of the Lopez (2009) survey of attitudes and perceptions of Latinx youth aged 16-25. In this survey 65% of respondents agreed that their parents were actively involved in their education (p. 5). Despite this, educators’ conflicting perception of a lack of parental involvement is clearly shown through the large quantity of their efforts to directly address parental involvement for their immigrant students. In their investigation, Gallo, Wortham, and Bennett (2015) suggested that the notion of parental involvement requires significant reframing for educational practitioners. Traditionally, they explained, parental involvement models “assume that the host society has a homogeneous and productive way of doing schooling, such that immigrant children should learn to speak ‘our’ language and then do the usual school activities in order to learn the curriculum” (p. 264)—seeking deliberate and uncompromising assimilation of immigrant groups that are encouraged to wholly shed their original identities. Even as they seek to adapt to other cultures, these models nevertheless ultimately fall short of being helpful because they do not adequately recognize the natural variations in populations such as social class, education levels, and specific places of origin.
Generally, the solutions adopted by schools that try to address the shortcomings of traditional models of parental involvement took the form of the cultural mismatch model of parent involvement. In this model, differences in educational values between communities were seen as simply different, without a judgment of superiority or accommodations in favor of either (Gallo, Wortham, & Bennett, 2015, p. 268). While improving on traditional homogenization models, the cultural mismatch models still fall short in that there is little to account for variation within parent and educator groups. Instead, Gallo, Wortham, and Bennett advocated for a repertoire-based model of parental involvement. In this model, the variation between members of the same groups is taken into account. In their words, “most members of a community can do certain things, like order food in a restaurant and make simple declarative statements” (p. 265). However, the variation within a group can be accounted for in the analogy that “some can speak like football announcers, or participate in debates about economic theory, or advise musicians about how to improve more effectively, while many competent speakers cannot” (p. 265). From the perspective of this model, parental involvement becomes an active exercise with the development of new repertoires for educators at its center.

**Latinx Distrust in Schools**

While many definitions of the concept of trust exist, its defining component can be summarized as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712). Additionally, the link between perceived racism and the development of mistrust has been readily established (Benkert,
Peters, Clark, & Keves-Foster, 2006). Prior to the 2016 presidential election cycle, Lopez (2009) found in his survey of Latinx youth aged 16 to 25 that 62% of respondents indicated that their teachers had their best interests in mind within the context of their school work (p. 5), indicating a level of extant trust. However, in light of the new social reality of spiking hate crime (Rushin & Edwards, 2018) and the racist content of the 2016 US presidential election, discussed above, it is reasonable to presume that the overall robustness of trust between the Latinx immigrant community and mainstream White American institutions has been affected.

Byrk and Schneider (2003) and Kutsyuruba and Walker (2015), among other researchers, have shown the consequences of the absence of trust and related positive attitudes as being disastrous for student achievement within a school. Bryk and Schneider (2003) demonstrated the importance of trust within the school-community relationship with respect to student outcomes. The results of their study of levels of trust in Chicago public schools found that the absence of trust between the community and their school correlated with universally low performance and low growth on standardized tests. Even so, while the researchers found trust was necessary for effective school operations, it was not found to be sufficient on its own, instead requiring other contributing factors to improve student performance. Kutsyuruba and Walker (2015) described community trust as particularly important to the health of schools and learning. In their words, “trust acts as an anti-toxin, a health-giving ingredient for the fostering of good will, excellent working conditions, and enhanced learning opportunities” (p. 107).
These notions of trust cannot be removed, however, from the lived experiences of the Latinx immigrants themselves. Jamison (2011) found that while still living in their own countries Latinx peoples “have difficulty trusting the media, the political regime, the politicians, the political institutions” (p. 66). The predisposition to trust or to not trust institutions and individuals in their countries of origin may affect the propensity of individuals to trust American institutions and American people themselves. In fact, Menjivar and Bejarano (2004) linked the “negative experiences with repressive authorities in the immigrants’ countries” to the “distrust of the destination country’s authorities” (p. 130) further complicating the picture of trust presented by this community, even independent of domestic factors.

Kochanek (2005) provided some solutions that may improve the nature of the trust held by the Latinx immigrant community toward their schools. Among many of the factors that have a positive influence on the building of trust within a school, she specifically cited “repeated social exchanges” (p. 12). Essentially, the more frequently people interact with one another, the greater the trust will be between them. However, this process is often frustrated by what Valenzuela (1999) called “cultural tracks” (p. 31) that actively hamper these interactions by removal from mainstream classes. Another major factor in the development of trust described by Kochanek (2005) is “social similarity” (p. 9). This is to say that the development of trust is hastened by greater amounts of physical similarity and cultural closeness. As evidence for this, she directly references the ethnic enclaves that organically developed in the United States as a result of the waves of immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Given
that 44% of respondents to the Lopez (2009) survey of Hispanic youth aged 16-25 indicated that teachers do not understand them culturally, it stands to reason that trust suffers as a result.

**Commonalities**

The common thread that runs through the previous discussions of new demographic change, cultural dissimilarities, and misadvised school programs is firmly attached to the nature and usefulness of relationships between people within schools. For the Latinx immigrant community in the American Southeast, new arrivals must navigate the peculiar social space of this region and develop useful relationships with its residents without any of the other relationships, such as those from a long-established and culturally-similar population, which would usually expedite this process. In short, they have little to no social capital upon which to draw as they make their new lives.

**The Theory of Social Capital**

Social capital has eluded a clear and universally-accepted definition in social science research. Although definitions used by researchers frequently invoke the same set of foundational texts (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Loury, 1977; and Coleman 1988), researchers have always customized and tuned their definitions to the point that “there seems to be no unanimous definition” (Acar, 2011, p. 465). Despite this lack of standardization, social capital theory still offers a valuable model with which to understand the dynamics of groups of people—particularly in the highly social setting of schools.
Bourdieu (1986) offered a clear entry point for a discussion of social capital. In this text, he provided a basic description of the origins of the theory, its basic function, and distinguished it from similar, often conflated models of the capitals possessed by human beings. In his analysis, all capital, including social capital, can be described in economic terms such that it is imbued with value and generated by “accumulated labor” (p. 241). While this hints at its origins in economic theory, it also implies something tangibly transferrable in nature. Even so, social and other related immaterial human capitals remain separate and fundamentally different in nature.

Because social capital cannot be converted into a substance and transacted in terms such as volume or weight, it falls into the realm of the immaterial. Despite its ethereal nature, physical capital is regularly expended in the creation of these immaterial capitals. Evidence for this can be seen through examples such as “the purposeless finality of cultural or artistic practices and their products” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 242). In endeavors like these, something physical is expended or exchanged in order to generate something intangible. Furthermore, under particular conditions, any of the immaterial capitals may be leveraged for the sake of the generation of economic or other physical capital (p. 242).

The nature of capital in general is further explicated by Bourdieu (1986) in that it “takes time to accumulate,” has “a potential to produce profits,” and has the ability “to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form” (p. 241). While these notions can assist in the description of the dynamics of many human relationships, it remains necessary to distinguish social capital from other forms of immaterial capital—particularly from that
of the often conflated idea of cultural capital. Bourdieu gave examples of economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital so that the reader is able to better distinguish between them (p. 242). In his analogies, economic capital will often take the form of property rights, cultural capital can take the form of an educational qualification such as a diploma, and social capital can be demonstrated through a title of nobility. While on first glance the educational qualification and the title of nobility seem to be nearly identical in nature, the difference between the two becomes apparent when viewed through the lens of social obligation. Remaining faithful to the analogy, although an educational qualification, may indeed come with a title, it does not bring along with it the social obligations of a title of nobility. Distinguishing these capitals from one another is particularly important because “when social capital encompasses anything that can facilitate school outcomes, its use as a theoretical construct becomes meaningless” (Kao & Rutherford, 2007, p. 29).

**Social Capital for this Study**

Despite the utility of Bourdieu’s (1986) influential and foundational theories, Flora and Flora’s (2013) definition of social capital is the more useful for this study. Although Flora and Flora asserted that there are many possible definitions of social capital, they clearly stipulated that all definitions of social capital must retain at least two essential characteristics. First, they said that social capital is “a group-level phenomenon” (p. 119). This implies that any existing social capital does not necessarily reside within any one individual, but rather within a community as a whole. This component of social capital is essential to this study because it will allow for the
generalization of the perceptions of this study’s participants into concepts representative of the whole Latinx immigrant student community. Second, they contended that, regardless of the definition in use, social capital can always be explained “in terms of norms of reciprocity and mutual trust” (p. 119). Using this idea, wherever the absence or presence of reciprocity or trust can be identified, levels of social capital may be assessed and extrapolated. Furthermore, since schools can be understood as communities (Lawson, 2010), it follows that either the absence or presence of social capital occurs within and throughout that community as a whole.

Figure 2.1

*Conceptual map of social capital as explained and divided by Flora and Flora (2013).*

Within their discussions of social capital, Flora and Flora (2013) described situations with high and low values each of bridging and bonding capital, themselves subcapitals of the larger notion of social capital. Bridging capital is understood to be that
which “connects diverse groups within the community to each other and to groups outside the community” (p. 127) whereas bonding capital is described as consisting “of connections among individuals and groups with similar backgrounds” (p. 125). These two subcapitals are illustrated in figure 2.1. Bonding capital is shared between members of the same group, A to A and B to B. Bridging capital is shared between different groups, A to B or B to A. With respect to educational institutions, these capitals can describe the sense of connection, or lack thereof, which an immigrant community may have with the public school that serves it as well as the connections within the community itself. Social capital provides a framework that allows this project to describe the phenomenon in terms of a whole group as well as explain the nature of the relationships this group may have with another entity, such as a school or other institution while providing a skeletal framework for the development of questions for data collection instruments.

**Bridging and Bonding Social Capitals**

Flora and Flora (2013) described situations with high and low values each of bridging and bonding capital. With respect to educational institutions, this can describe the sense of connection, or lack thereof, which the immigrant community may have with the public school that serves it as well as the connection the community has within itself. Figure 2.2 describes institutional traits that could result from different combinations of different levels of bridging and bonding social capital, according to Flora and Flora (2013), Zimmerman (2006), and Noguera (2001).
Table of institutional traits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bonding social capital high</th>
<th>Bonding social capital low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bridging social capital high</td>
<td>• All school stakeholders are recognized as having something to contribute.</td>
<td>• Relationships are mostly vertical in nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Schools align common interests with common institutional goals.</td>
<td>• School employees work more to please supervisors, bosses, than to serve students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relationships are mostly vertical in nature.</td>
<td>• Low levels of peer reciprocity are present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging social capital low</td>
<td>• Members of school community are resistant to change.</td>
<td>• Members of school community possess no social capital whatsoever and suffer from low trust and high suspicion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Information does not move quickly between differing groups.</td>
<td>• Problems can be overcome with significant investment of resources.</td>
</tr>
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**Bridging Low; Bonding Low**

Flora and Flora (2013) stated that communities with low amounts of both bridging and bonding social capital possess no social capital whatsoever (p. 129). In their view, this can be overcome with substantially higher commitments of financial resources but, in a community that does not possess this, the absence of social capital can eventually be fatal. Noguera (2001) directly connects the low levels of social capital in poorer schools with the lower outcomes of students and posits that higher levels of social capital would assist in rectifying this problem. It is likely that if these schools were better resourced, they would be able to overcome the lower social capital.

**Bonding High; Bridging Low**

Flora and Flora (2013) described a community with high bonding capital but with low bridging capital as being resistant to change (p. 129). Since the community is
tightly-knit yet suspicious of outsiders, positive change is difficult to find in the face of unified opposition. This has the effect of restricting the flow of information, and by extension the potential for improvements to practice. Zimmerman (2006) described situations in which schools themselves are resistant to change due to this sort of high bonding capital within the school community coupled with low amounts of bridging capital, manifest as an unwillingness to change.

**Bridging High; Bonding Low**

Flora and Flora (2013) understood a community with high bridging capital but with low bonding capital as a community with at least a degree of control from “community elites, helping professionals, or in the most extreme form, local ‘bosses’” (p. 130). A school community with this social capital arrangement would experience relationships mostly vertically, rather than horizontally. The communities of students, teachers, and other stakeholders, would work to please their controllers, rather than on one another’s behalf. In a school setting, this would surely lead to a situation where the focus on students would be entirely predicated on the beneficence of the community and school leaders since they directly control the behavior of their subordinates.

**Bridging High; Bonding High**

Flora and Flora (2013) explained the community with high levels of bridging and bonding capital as having members where “each person in the community is deemed capable of sharing something valuable with all members of the community” (p. 131). They described organizations such as fire departments and the Girl Scouts as exemplars for this type of social capital. Although an equality of ability, wealth, and connection is
not implied (Flora & Flora, 2013), all members of this community receive the commitment to reciprocity that others receive. Surely, this is the ideal school arrangement since it would presume that there is an alignment of interests to a common goal. In the school setting, this would likely be explained in terms of dedication to student achievement.

**Social Capital in Schools**

Since schools can be thought of as communities in their own right (Lawson, 2010), social capital within the context of a school is of particular interest when thought of in the light of academic success. Acar (2011) found that there are at least five significant benefits for those students within a school that possess high levels of social capital. These benefits are “(1) higher achievement on tests, (2) higher graduate rates, (3) lower dropout rates, (4) higher college enrollment, and (5) greater participation in school and community organizations” (p. 460). These five metrics coincide with many of the desired outcomes for students in a school, indicating social capital’s importance in student success. Additionally, in a discussion about the increasingly multicultural and multiethnic United States, Acar indicated that these demographic shifts may “to a certain extent, impede communication, interconnectedness or dialog among diverse individuals” and that this “lack of communication and dialog manifests itself in the form of decreased participation and involvement” (p. 458), ultimately decreasing natural social capital development and harming the potential for academic success.

The intersection of diversity and social capital is particularly important for immigrant communities and their interactions with school institutions. Mesa, Torres,
Smithwick, and Sides (2016) found that “language can be an obstacle for Hispanic children, both directly and indirectly” (p. 6) as they try to integrate themselves into the wider school community. Additionally, in their quantitative study, Kao and Rutherford (2007) found that “because social capital appears to facilitate favorable outcomes, immigrant students seem to be at a disadvantage, as they possess significantly less social capital than their third generation counterparts” (p. 47). This seems to show that, independent of any ethnicity-related effect encountered by these students, the status of the immigrant, and the accompanying increased likelihood of lower command of English, is significant in determining social capital and by extension a significant determinant of academic success.

Despite the multigenerational leveling off described in the study, Kao and Rutherford (2007) also found that while the immigrant disadvantage for other ethnicities “tended to disappear by the third generation, Hispanics had lower social capital throughout all generational statuses” (p. 41). It is possible, then, that even among other immigrant communities within the United States, Latinx immigrant communities may have particularly low levels of social capital with respect to their educational institutions.

In Valenzuela’s (1999) study of caring in the school environments of Mexican-American students in Texas, social capital within the context of the Mexican immigrant student’s school experience was addressed directly. On several occasions, academic success was attributed to the higher levels of social capital possessed by individual Latinx immigrant students. These students, characterized as “aggressively school-oriented” (p. 117), possessed elevated amounts of social capital in spite of, rather than because of, the
efforts of their schools’ policies and procedures. To this point, Valenzuela bemoaned the existence of a “cultural track” (p. 31) for ELL (English Language Learner), largely immigrant, students. In these tracks, students are de-capitalized through their compulsory enrollment and effective isolation from the mainstream student body. Although this removal may be the result of the good intentions of school personnel, isolation from mainstream students has the unintended consequences of stymieing relationship-building with non-ELL students and, by extension, stifling the academic success of these Latinx immigrant students. In her words, “ESL honors courses do not exist” (p. 31) which only allows for students with significant innate ability to learn in their first language to enroll in regular education classes and deprives them of the capital-building opportunities with enrollees in more advanced classes.

Social Capital in the Southeastern United States

Acar (2011) demonstrated the connection between high levels of social capital and the increased likelihood of academic success. In fact, in his view, “social capital supports success and education in the form of the disciplinary and academic climate at school, and also the cultural norms and values that motivate students to achieve higher goals” (p. 458). That social capital would correlate with academic success is especially important in light of the Joint Economic Committee (2018) report on the nature of social capital across various regions in the United States. This report, measuring social capital levels at the county level with metrics such as institutional health, mortality outcomes, and family structures, found that there are particularly low levels of social capital across regions they designate as “The Near South” and “The Far South” (pp. 26-30). These
regions were second to lowest and lowest, respectively. States in the southeastern United States are all found in either the Near South or the Far South, indicating that the southeastern United States possesses particularly low levels of social capital compared to other regions. Since there is already an extant deficiency of social capital in broader society, investigation is necessary to determine whether similarly low social capital is located in schools.

**Trust and Schools**

As mentioned before, for the purposes of this study, trust is understood to be “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712). Since I used social capital as the theoretical framework in this study to understand the perceptions and attitudes of Latinx immigrant students, the lens of trust provides additional support and clarity of analysis.

Bryk and Schneider (2003) and Kutsyuruba and Walker (2015), among other researchers, have shown the consequences of the absence of trust and related positive attitudes as disastrous for student achievement within the context of a school. Bryk and Schneider (2003) demonstrated the importance of trust within the school-community relationship with respect to student outcomes. The results of their study of levels of trust in Chicago public schools found that the absence of trust between the community and their school correlated with universally low performance and low growth measured by standardized test scores. However, while the researchers found that trust was necessary, it was not found to be sufficient on its own, instead requiring other contributing factors to
improve student performance. Kutsyuruba and Walker (2015) described community trust as particularly important to the health of schools. In their words, “trust acts as an anti-toxin, a health-giving ingredient for the fostering of good will, excellent working conditions, and enhanced learning opportunities” (p. 107).

However, these notions of trust cannot be removed from the lived experiences of Latinx immigrants themselves. The link between the perceived existence of racist attitudes and the ensuing development of mistrust has been readily established (Benkert, Peters, Clark, & Keves-Foster, 2006). If this is the case, it becomes reasonable to infer that the anti-Latinx and anti-immigrant content of the 2016 presidential election (which is discussed later) has likely changed the nature of any trust that existed between the Latinx immigrant community and larger society. Moreover, Jamison (2011) discovered that due to factors specific to each country, Latinx peoples living in their places of origin have difficulty trusting “the media, the political regime, the politicians, the political institutions, and particularly they do not trust their fellow citizens or neighbors” (p. 66). While she cited a variety of possible reasons why this may be the case, it is entirely plausible that these predispositions toward, or in this case against, trusting an institution or person would follow individuals as they decide how to interact with American institutions and people. In fact, Menjívar and Bejarano (2004) directly linked the “negative experiences with repressive authorities in the immigrants’ countries” to the “distrust of the destination country’s authorities” (p. 130), which further complicates the picture of trust presented within this community, even independent of domestic factors. All of these factors coalesce into a bleak picture for trust between the Latinx immigrant
student community and the institutions with which they interact in their new home country.

In Putnam’s (1995) foundational work about the diminishing levels of social capital within the United States, trust, alongside networks and norms, forms a functional definition of social capital as a feature of social life (p. 664-665). He posited that “the weight of the available evidence confirms that Americans today are significantly less engaged with their communities than was true a generation ago” (p. 666). Throughout his analysis, Putnam articulated that across time the trend line of social capital and, by extension, the levels of trust within overall American society, have been trending downward since the 1970s. Furthermore, he argued that in an increasingly multicultural and multiethnic society it is “intuitively plausible that race might somehow have played a role in the erosion of social capital over the last generation” (p. 672).

This sentiment seems to have been confirmed nearly a decade later by Bryk and Schneider (2004) with respect to trust in institutions and their human members. In their view, “as a consequence of these large-scale societal changes, distrust now characterizes many of the social interactions that poor families have with local schools and other public institutions” (p. 6). Furthermore, this distrust is “often exacerbated by race and class differences” (p. 6), creating a particularly hostile environment for trust in schools when teachers are not demographically similar to their students and where native White elites keep “firm control of the levers of economic and political power and existing institutions” (Portes & Lagae, 2017, p. 251).
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of social capital is used as the lens of inquiry and understanding for this study. Although social capital has been defined independently and even divided into separate subcapitals by a multitude of researchers (e.g., Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Yosso, 2005), Flora and Flora’s (2013) understanding of social capital is most useful for this study. They asserted that there are many possible definitions of social capital but that all maintain two essential characteristics. First, they said that social capital is “a group-level phenomenon” (p. 119)—implying that the social capital does not reside within any one individual, but rather within the community as a whole. This allows me to extrapolate the perceptions of the study’s individual participants into concepts representative of the whole Latinx immigrant student community. Second, they contended that, regardless of the definition in use, social capital can always be explained “in terms of norms of reciprocity and mutual trust” (p. 119). Essentially, wherever I can identify the absence or presence of trust, levels of various social capitals may be extrapolated. Additionally, since schools can be understood as communities (Lawson, 2010), it follows that either the absence or presence of social capital occurs within and throughout that whole community. Figure 2.3 summarizes this framework. Individuals, as members of a group, serve as representatives of social capital held by a group (Flora & Flora, 2013). Indicators of social capital and their direction, in or out group, eventually determine relative levels of different types of social capital (Flora & Flora, 2013; Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).
Within their discussions of social capital, Flora and Flora (2013) described situations of high and low values each of bridging and bonding capital. Bridging capital is understood to be that which “connects diverse groups within the community to each other and to groups outside the community” (p. 127) whereas bonding capital is described as consisting “of connections among individuals and groups with similar backgrounds” (p. 125). With respect to educational institutions, this can describe the sense of connection, or lack thereof, which the Latinx immigrant community may have with the public school that serves it as well as the connections within the community itself. Social capital provides a framework that allows this project to describe the phenomenon in
terms of a whole group as well as explain the nature of the relationships this group may have with another entity, such as with a school or other institution, while providing a skeletal framework for the development of questions for data collection instruments.

Social capital, due to its intangible nature, can be difficult to measure directly. It runs the risk of being conflated with other factors of academic success and, “when social capital encompasses anything that can facilitate school outcomes, its use as a theoretical construct becomes meaningless” (Kao & Rutherford, 2007, p. 29). Fortunately, Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) offered a method to identify the presence and relative levels of social capital. In their study of information networks of Mexican-American students, they defined fourteen variables that may be used to identify and extrapolate relative levels social capital. These variables, also listed in Figure 2.4, are “number of high-status adults named as likely or current sources of information-related support,” “number of nonfamily weak ties,” “number of school-based weak ties,” “average socioeconomic level of the student’s information network,” “average socioeconomic level of the student’s friend network,” “proportion of all friends who are not of Mexican-origin,” “number of people actually relied on for academically related information and guidance,” socioeconomic status, and “language proficiency and use,” “grade level,” “self-reported grades,” “educational expectations,” “occupational expectations,” and “post-high school plans” (pp. 122-123). These criteria will greatly enhance the interview protocol developed to understand the nature of this study’s participants’ social capital and serve as tangible indicators for such an abstract subject.

<table>
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<td>• Number of high-status adults named as likely or current sources of information-related support</td>
<td>• Number of people actually relied on for academically related information and guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Number of school-based weak ties</td>
<td>• Average socioeconomic level of the student’s information network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Average socioeconomic level of the student’s friend network</td>
<td>• Proportion of all friends who are not of Mexican origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Number of nonfamily weak ties</td>
<td>• Socioeconomic status</td>
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<td>• Language proficiency and use</td>
<td>• Grade level</td>
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<td>• Self-reported grades</td>
<td>• Educational expectations</td>
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<td>• Occupational expectations</td>
<td>• Post-high school plans</td>
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Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I first explained the racial and social placement of the Latinx immigrant community in broader American society. I started by describing the major demographic shifts occurring throughout the entire United States and how these changes produces anxiety and, through the 2016 Presidential election, a cultural backlash against the Latinx immigrant community. Because the demographic changes have occurred most recently in the southeastern United States, I explained how this regional context is different from other parts of the United States. I continued by describing some of the unique circumstances faced by Latinx immigrant students as they adjust to life in the public American school system.

In the second half of this chapter, I singled out social capital as a useful framework to understand many of the difficulties of Latinx immigrant students as well as to provide solutions to these problems. I started this section by explaining the origins of social capital and how it is applied in this study—settling on Flora and Flora’s (2013)
understanding of the concept. Because this study focuses particularly on schools in the American Southeast, I described the unique state of social capital in schools and in region. Finally, I described the theoretical framework that was used in this study and how I was able to extract information about social capital from my data collection.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

In Chapter 1, I offered an introduction and basic overview of this study. In Chapter 2, I described relevant research in an effort to contextualize the issues surrounding Latinx immigrant students in the United States. I explained matters specific to the intersection of demographic change in the American Southeast and social capital. In this chapter, I describe the epistemological and methodological choices I made. I begin with a brief reiteration of the study’s purpose and background of the problem and then states the research question. Next, I describe the intersection of phenomenology and ethnography, showing the natural partnership between them. As a complement to these methods, I describe the literary phenomenon of the testimonio as a route to understanding the lived experience. Subsequently, I depict the research site and articulates the data analysis and collection methods used. Finally, I explain the limitations of the study as well as my positionality as researcher as it related to this project.

Purpose

Immigrant groups in the United States have historically been subject to xenophobic sentiment (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). Coupled with the fickle and ever-changing nature of official immigration policy, many researchers (e.g., Cuevas, 2015; Cuevas & Cheung, 2015; Nguyen & Martinez, 2015; Waters, 2015) have demonstrated that significant harm is routinely done to immigrant groups in general and to their students specifically. However, because the United States today is at a major
demographic crossroads, immigrant groups are now living in fundamentally different societal circumstances (US Census Bureau, 2016). For the first time in its history, the traditional White majority must confront the reality that it will very soon no longer be the majority population (US Census Bureau, 2018). This change has created a backlash in some segments of American society (Huber, 2015), likely precipitating a fundamental change in the bridging social capital between different racial and socioeconomic groups. Evidence for this can be seen in the wake of the most recent presidential campaign where, similar to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, significant resentment has been fomented against groups that stand in contrast to traditional power structures (Rushin & Edwards, 2018). Yet, all of the children from these groups, through protections enshrined in the US Constitution, are already present in our schools. Educators have an ethical and professional obligation to provide the best education and ensure immigrant students can overcome these disadvantageous circumstances.

Experienced racism has been shown to negatively affect student outcomes and trust (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002), which itself has been shown to be necessary for the successful operations of a school (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2015). Acar (2011) found that students within a school who possess generally higher levels of social capital have greater levels of academic success (p. 460). However, he also asserted that an increasingly multiethnic and multicultural United States may struggle to build social capital among different groups in schools (p. 458). Through factors such as communication barriers and cultural misalignment of educational expectations, students from immigrant groups are at an inherent disadvantage compared to otherwise similar
students who are not immigrants (Kao & Rutherford, 2007). Many of the solutions in place now to assist immigrant students have been insensitive to students’ cultural identities (Valdés, González, García, & Márquez, 2008), misunderstood the educational expectations of immigrant communities (Gallo, Wortham, & Bennett, 2015), and not addressed the particularities of the immigrant experience (Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004; Jamison, 2011) in students’ lives.

This study seeks to assess the lived experiences and perceptions of Latinx immigrant students in the new environment of resurgent racist anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States, particularly in the American Southeast. Because of its particularly large proportion of population increase among Latinx (Hamann & Harklau, 2015), its comparatively low levels of social capital (Joint Economic Committee, 2018), and recent historic change to the long-entrenched socioracial hierarchy (Lynn, 2015), the American Southeast is unique. Furthermore, because of the recent nature of these changes in demographics and the increase in racial resentment, scholars have had little opportunity thus far to make any assessment that would be useful in providing recommendations to practitioners. Finally, this study seeks to respond to Hernandez’s (2004) call for research that will permit the informed development of policies and programs for immigrant children.

**Research Question**

The research question focuses on understanding the nature of relationships that the Latinx student population has with its teachers and peers. Using the lens of social capital, this study seeks to inform practitioners as they create policies and programs that
help Latinx immigrant students succeed in their new school setting. The research question that guided this study was: What influences the development of bridging social capital between Latinx immigrant secondary students and their peers and teachers in the American Southeast?

Research questions addressing the foreign-born Latinx student population will provide a great benefit to many students because there are currently many such students present in the United States (US Census Bureau, 2016) and, despite the great number of Latinx countries of origin, there are many cultural points in common from one nationality to another (Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004). Additionally, this research question needs to be answered because this student group’s greater community has been specifically and negatively targeted in recent political discourse (Martin, 2017; Young, 2017). Even beyond the ethical obligation of educators, the trend of new accountability systems in parts of the American Southeast (e.g. South Carolina Education Oversight Committee) has created a redoubled sense of urgency to understand how best to provide educational experiences for this community.

**Methodology**

This section describes the choices I made as I constructed the study. First, I will discuss the research tradition of phenomenology. This discussion features a discussion of the study’s focus on the lived experience of study participants. Next, the distinctly Latin American literary tradition of the testimonio is described as an extension of the lived experience of this study’s participants. The testimonio’s goal of empowerment for its
creator and its focus on justice and witnessing leads naturally into a discussion of the ethnographic research tradition, the methods of which lend themselves well to this study.

**Phenomenology**

This qualitative, interpretative study is designed with the intersection of the philosophical perspective of phenomenology and the research tradition of ethnography in mind. Since this study seeks to eventually improve the educational outcomes of students from the Latinx immigrant community, there is a presumed pedagogical orientation directed at educators themselves. In his discussion of the human sciences, a term he used interchangeably with the word, *phenomenology* (p. 2), Van Manen (1990) asserted that the knowledge generated through any phenomenological inquiry is “meant to serve the practical aims of pedagogy” (p. 2). Pedagogy, in his view, is understood as “the activity of teaching, parenting, educating, or generally living with children” and that this activity “requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations” (p. 2). The call for educators, anyone who is actively engaged in pedagogy, to constantly reflect and refine can also be understood through the lens of repertoire development as described in Gallo, Wortham, and Bennett (2015). In that study, the specifics of individual experiences were taken into account in social interactions in order to help children arrive at better school outcomes.

Phenomenology can also be understood as “the theory of the *unique*” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 7) and does not necessarily seek to create explanations or categorize phenomena. Instead, as an essentially reflective task, “human science aims at explicating the meaning of human phenomena (such as in literary or historical studies) and at
understanding the lived structures of meanings (such as phenomenological studies of the lifeworld)” (p. 4). A participant’s lifeworld, also referred to as lived experience and the object of study for phenomenological research projects, is his or her “immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness which is, as awareness, unaware of itself” (p. 35). In the purview of phenomenology, the hallmark of lived experience is the absence of any active metaphysical consciousness and the participation of a person in activities in an immediate, mundane, and natural way (p. 36). The pedagogical task of phenomenology becomes apparent in that its aim is to “transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence” (p. 36) through reflection and re-living and to powerfully animate the reader “in his or her own lived experience” (p. 36).

Testimonios

The pedagogical task of phenomenological projects is also made apparent in another of the aims of these projects as described by Van Manen (1990). In his words, “the aim is to construct an animating, evocative description (text) of human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences as we meet them in the lifeworld” (p. 19). While these rich descriptions can be attained in many ways, the distinctively Latin American tradition of the testimonio has historically been used to record accounts of lived experience of one person to many people. This focus on one’s own lived experience as it is lived makes the testimonio tradition uniquely positioned to enhance the rigor of a phenomenological study. In essence, a testimonio “entails a first person oral or written account, drawing on experiential, self-conscious, narrative practice to articulate an urgent
voicing of something to which one bears witness” (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012, p. 523). While these first-person stories “may not be empirically, scientifically, or legally true” (p. 527), these perspectives do nevertheless offer unfiltered insight into their authors’ lived experiences and provide significant opportunity for growth and repertoire development for educators (González, Plata, García, Torres, & Urrieta Jr., 2003).

In addition to their evocative style, testimonios have historically been powerful tools of resistance for oppressed and otherwise marginalized groups and “must include the intention of affirmation and empowerment” (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012, p. 527) in order to truly be a testimonio. In light of this, due to its aim to amplify the voices of the marginalized (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 217-218), the ethnographic tradition has an epistemological contribution here as well. In their words, “to be of value, ethnographic research should be concerned not simply with understanding the world but with applying its findings to bring about change” (p. 14). The dual focus on empowerment and change offered by the testimonio and the ethnographic tradition, respectively, are appropriate to provide a starting point for the reduced position in which the Latinx immigrant community today finds itself.

**Ethnography**

A well-accepted starting point for ethnographic research can be “dissatisfaction with the accounts of some phenomenon currently found in the research literature” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 22). While this project’s primary objective is the discovery of new knowledge, its philosophical stance requires it to simultaneously amplify the voices of the Latinx immigrant students alongside completion of that inquiry.
Understanding and inclusion of these voices are sought in an effort to “restore credibility to native perspectives that have already been undermined by professional knowledge and power” (Katz & Csordas, 2003, p. 275-276). This restoration can be achieved through deliberate mindfulness toward the potentially oppressive notion of objectivity as it pertains to the creation of new knowledge in this project. Nevertheless, in order to make useful and eventually accepted knowledge, “multicultural researchers should have objectivity as an important aim of their work” (Banks, 2006, p. 781).

However, because supposedly objective knowledge has been used to legitimize the victimization of marginalized groups in the past (Banks, 2006, p. 781), the direct and explicit inclusion of Latinx immigrant students’ voices through testimonios assisted in the creation of a counternarrative truth closer to that experienced by my participants (p. 776)—essentially a description of their lifeworlds. Furthermore, the ethnographic tradition offers a helpful perspective through its notion of the “foreshadowed problem” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). The foreshadowed problem is some area of interest to a researcher and indicates that a researcher’s “orientation is an exploratory one” (p. 3). In this study the foreshadowed problem is the change precipitated by the newly negative social and political environment of the United States as a result of the 2016 presidential campaign and its effect on the building of social capital, eventually resulting in decreased academic success of Latinx immigrant students. This exploratory orientation allows for general ideas to first be explored followed by refinement of questions and inquiry throughout the life of the investigation. Given the recent nature of the changes, the flexibility offered in this approach is especially useful.
Ethnographic work focuses on actions and accounts within “everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3)—or, in other words, a participant’s lifeworld. In addition to data collection methods, this focus on the everyday lived experience is what effectively unifies the phenomenological perspective with the ethnographic tradition for the purposes of this project. Luckily, in order to embrace phenomenological aims, an investigator need not “always explicitly apply phenomenological method (the reduction or epoche), engage the work of phenomenological thinkers (Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty), or elaborate themes and concepts typically associated with phenomenology as a descriptive enterprise (intersubjectivity, thematization, embodiment)” (Katz & Csordas, 2003, p. 277). In this way, a researcher of the everyday lived experience can be thought of as engaging in phenomenological work, although he or she may not be dogmatically conforming to the method itself.

**Research Methods**

**Site Selection**

I conducted this investigation at Gary Chalmers High School in the Upstate of South Carolina. Gary Chalmers High School currently serves just under 2000 students in grades 9-12 and, in addition to its mainstream students, operates as the centralized site specializing in services for moderately and profoundly disabled students. Among these students, Gary Chalmers High School has a significant population of immigrant students with a significant Latinx majority, about 6% of the student body. These students use the
ESOL services provided by one full-time specialized teacher. Overall, these immigrant students come from a wide variety of linguistic, cultural, and geographic origins.

Gary Chalmers High School is modern in appearance and remains in good repair, thanks to a dedicated maintenance crew. On its grounds there are two buildings connected by a second-story covered walkway, the very large main building, constructed in the 1997, and a newer building designed for project-based learning, built in 2016. The school is so large that if students’ classes are far apart, they may struggle to arrive to their destination on time while navigating the flood of students in the hallways during passing periods. While there are tennis courts, a football practice field, and a practice track located on the campus, the school’s athletics complex is located at a separate facility across the major nearby highway and requires that students drive themselves or ride a team bus to the facility on days where events are held there.

Because the school is so large, it is not located in a neighborhood but rather bracketed by relatively busy roads. Across one road is an auto body repair shop. Across from the front of the school are houses that were clearly built before the roads were widened to accommodate larger volumes of traffic. Nearby there are other large facilities such as a motor pool for the local parks department and postal distribution center. Recently, a gas station and convenience store complex was built within walking distance to the school, resulting in some students sneaking out to buy refreshments that are not available for sale inside the school due to federal nutrition guidelines.

Gary Chalmers is very typical in its offerings to students. There is a wide array of sports offered to boys and girls, with the girls’ lacrosse and soccer teams recently
winning state championships, as well as many other extracurricular activities and special interest clubs. The band director and theater teacher have been building their programs in recent years and have attracted a great deal of support from the school community overall. The school also has a robust Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp (JROTC) program that regularly wins national awards. In order to facilitate participation in these events and after-school tutoring, the school runs a late bus program on every Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday with Wednesdays are reserved for faculty meetings.

My considerations for having chosen this school as my study site are many. It is a convenient setting as I have regular access to this school and, by extension, I have regular access to this study’s participants. Additionally, since the students are familiar with my presence, I was able to avoid much of the suspicion that a complete outsider researcher may have generated (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 60-62). This allowed me to collect as much data as I felt was necessary for this project. Second, as a trained language teacher, many of the ESOL students with whom I interacted were already aware of my command of Spanish, which is uncommon among the school’s teaching staff. These students have routinely sought help from me with classwork outside of my trained area of content. This likely neutralized any obstructions or anxiety caused by my presence. Third, the ESOL teacher and I have developed a positive relationship through collaboration on several projects, most recently a proposal to procure more materials for her English-learner students and the creation of a Spanish language after-school tutoring program. This has allowed me to demonstrate to her and to her students that I sought to be a non-judgmental, constructive presence in her classroom.
Although these pragmatic logistical considerations are important, there are also conceptual reasons for which I chose this school to conduct this study. Since Gary Chalmers had a large number of Latinx ELL students from a wide variety of national backgrounds, I was able to consider the dimension of national origin in my analysis of students’ lived experiences. This allowed my findings to be useful in more settings and, consequently, for more educational leaders. Furthermore, since schools within a single district can have significant variations in their demographics, I sought to focus on the implications for building-level, rather than district-level leadership. Gary Chalmers High School offered a setting that is demographically similar to many other schools across the American Southeast.

**Interviews**

Since developing an understanding of the Latinx immigrant student experience was the ultimate goal of this study and, in order to “target the people who have the knowledge desired and who may be willing to divulge it to the researcher” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 106), interviews took place with the Latinx immigrant high school students themselves. They occurred in various classrooms or other quiet spaces outside of the students’ scheduled class times or during other unstructured times throughout the school day. In order to develop rapport and ensure the trustworthiness of the interviews, I made a deliberate effort to spend as much time as possible where these students spend most of their time (Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004, p. 129), inside the school.

Because of issues of access and opportunities to develop rapport, I conducted all of these interviews with students attending the school to which I had the best access,
Gary Chalmers High School. Since there are ethical issues working with young children (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 212), I only interviewed students who were 14 years of age or older and, in order to emphasize the status of immigrant among my participants, all participants entered the school system in the United States after having attended school in their countries of origin for a meaningful period of time, at least six years. While there were many students that fit these criteria, I initially interviewed students that I already knew and then used snowball sampling to identify more participants.

I interviewed as many participants as possible until the limitations of the end of year school calendar stopped my data collection. I conducted all interviews completely in Spanish, in accordance with the preference of the participants, in the hopes of using my language ability as a “powerful route to acceptance” (Welch, & Piekkari, 2006, p. 420) and to gain access to the stories of my participants. With the exception of the combined interview for Diego and Valentina, all interviews were individual.

The “rules” of phenomenological interviewing provided by Vagle (2016, pp. 78-84) provided a general guide for my comportment during these interviews and the construction of the interview protocol. I transcribed the interviews verbatim from spoken Spanish into written Spanish. I only translated portions of the interviews into English immediately before their inclusion in the findings section of this dissertation. I delayed translation in an effort to preserve the original intent and context of the participants’ statements.

All of these interviews conformed to a semi-structured protocol and were accompanied by analytic memos to record data that may not be included in the interview
dialogue. This protocol contained almost entirely non-directive questions that focused on describing the relationship each Latinx immigrant student had with his or her school and how he or she arrived at these perceptions. These initial questions can be seen in Figure 3.1 below. During the interviews, I sought to “minimize the influence of the researcher” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 118) and to allow the participants to speak for themselves. I conducted eleven student interviews in total. With participant permission, I recorded the interviews using a digital audio recorder. In light of the time constraints of the high school environment, I did not allow any individual interview session to last more than thirty minutes. However, I tried to “leave the door open” (Glesne, 2016, p. 97) in the event that a participant decided to return for a second interview to share additional information.

Figure 3.1

*English versions of the mostly non-directive questions from interview protocol.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tell me about…</th>
<th>…how you’re doing in school.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>…your friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>…a time you had a hard time at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>…working with your teachers and principals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>…the things that help you feel connected to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>…your plans after high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other than taking classes, what else do you do at school?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observations**

Observations were also a significant component of this study. As a participant-observer, I used my time spent doing observations not only to gather data but also to encounter contacts for subsequent interviews (Cornelius, 1982, p. 387). Since students were already accustomed to seeing other adults walk throughout the school while
working on a laptop for observations, I recorded traditional full ethnographic field notes (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) on my school-issued laptop. Although these observations were heavily influenced by previous research such as the Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) indicators of social capital and Valenzuela’s (1999) profiles of students, for the sake of flexibility no specific protocol was enacted. This allowed me to record as much as possible with the intention that data for analysis would be maximized. These field notes included simple chronologically-recorded events, diagrams of student locations and activities, interesting bits of dialogue, or anything else that seemed salient at the time of the observation. Immediately upon completion of the observation, I reread the information I recorded and developed a narrative (Glesne, 2016, p. 74) to be used for later analysis. The narrative-building process was intended not only to “make the data intelligible but to do so in an analytical way” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 162)—converting fragmented, sloppy sentences and ideas into something more useful.

I conducted all of these observations within the school campus itself and contemporaneously with my other data collection. I was not personally acquainted with all students but, due to spending time working with many of these students, I was able to readily distinguish Latinx immigrant students from others. I spent time observing students in the ESOL classroom, in the hallways during passing periods, in the cafeterias during lunchtimes, at the front car pickup line, and at the bus loop at the rear of the school. Other than the ESOL classroom which was chosen because of its unique composition, these were all public spaces where student behavior was least managed by adults. Figure 3.2 shows a map of these observation locations relative to one another.
Having a variety of observation locations provided a more complete picture of the immigrant experience than focusing on only one of these sites alone and conforms to Vagle’s (2016) notion of a “phenomenology walk” (p. 85-86). The freedom offered with observations in this style allowed for the witnessing of events and gathering of information whose “significance might not come to us during an observation” (p. 86). I conducted five 50-minute observations, having left the possibility open for additional observations should I have recorded contradictory or insufficient data.

**Figure 3.2**

*Map of locations for observations. The dotted lines are paths for cars.*

**Documents**

Since this study took place within a literate setting in which non-spoken communication is regularly created by students and assessed by teachers, I collected written data for analysis since they offered another perspective and provided an additional opportunity for triangulation and member checking of the data contained in my interviews and observations. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) asserted that “there is
nothing to be gained, and much to be lost, by representing such a culture as if it were an essentially oral tradition” (p. 133). With the guidance of the ESOL teacher’s knowledge of student needs, I created an academically-optional written assignment (Glesne, 2016, p. 83) in the style of a *testimonio* that conforms to the South Carolina ESOL content and performance standards. The *testimonio* is a primarily Latin American style of narrative that is either written or spoken but is always in some manner recorded and recounting of personal experience. The *testimonio* assignment combined Vagle’s (2016) descriptions of “written anecdotes” (p. 87) and “art-based methodologies” (p. 92).

This assignment was developed to allow students to explain any aspect of the Latinx immigrant experience of their choosing in their high school and control its depiction entirely. However, even though the information included in the documents was produced by the students themselves, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) insisted that they “should be treated as social products: they must be examined, not relied on uncritically as a research resource” (p. 130). While the *testimonios* offered an additional route to access the experiences of my participants, they nevertheless required that I remain conscious that students may have written what they had assumed I wanted them to say. I collected five anonymous *testimonios* through the course of my data collection by giving a handout to each participant at the conclusion of our interview. Additionally, I gave extra copies to the school’s ESOL teacher for use as an optional writing assignment. She then returned any completed *testimonios* from participants or her students to the mailbox assigned to me in the school’s mailroom. While additional statements may have been useful to further enrich my findings, the time constraints of the end of the academic year did not
allow me to collect them. Themes and patterns emerged from these artifacts in isolation. However, the ultimate purpose of collecting this data was to corroborate, triangulate, and enrich the data collected from interviews and observations.

**Participant Biographies**

Diego was an 18-year-old senior from Cuba. He arrived about two years prior to the study and was placed into one of the school’s Spanish classes. While this class had very little to offer him in the way of mastering communication in Spanish, I was nevertheless able to enrich his understanding of Latin American history through some of the supplemental readings in the class textbook that I recommended Diego read. His English skills were much lower than many of the other immigrant students and Diego did not socialize very much in his classes during his first year. In the school year of this study, however, he had integrated himself well into several of the social groups in the high school.

Graciela was a 15-year-old sophomore from Venezuela. Prior to this study, she had been in the United States fewer than two years. She wore a cursive script Venezuela necklace every day and was fashionably dressed. I first met Graciela during one of the meetings of the after-school extra help sessions for Spanish-speakers that are held after school every other week. Despite our best efforts, she and I were able to achieve little progress on her geometry assignment and instead started talking about Latin American history. This off-topic conversation began when she noticed a historic map of Gran

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2 These biographies are written from the perspective of late June 2019—after the conclusion of the data collection process for this study which began in May 2019. The information was drawn from the analytic memos I wrote immediately following each of their interviews. All participant names are pseudonyms.
Colombia, the primordial country that eventually broke into Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. She spoke enthusiastically about her country’s history and mentioned that she never really has the opportunity to show off what she knows about it.

Isabela was a 17-year-old student originally from Guatemala, although she lived in Belize for several years before coming to the United States. Prior to this study, she had been in the United States for seven years and arrived to South Carolina two years ago after spending about four years in New Jersey. I met her two years before her interview as a student in one the school’s Spanish classes. She always gave me the impression that she is an exceptionally mature student and has always been noticeably academically-focused. I initially interviewed her for my pilot study (Lee, 2018) and asked her earlier this academic year if she would be willing to participate again in the next phase of my research.

Jacinto was a sixteen-year-old sophomore student from Venezuela. He very much fit the appearance of the racialized Latinx with dark hair, dark eyes, and a copper complexion. He was fashionably dressed and wore a large dangling golden cross from one ear. Prior to the study, he had lived in the United States for several years but initially arrived to the United States in Miami, where he lived for a brief time. Before his interview, I had not been acquainted with him and I only met him for the first time when I was recruiting participants from the school’s ESOL classes. After having completed interviews with some of his classmates, he overheard several students speaking favorably of the experience, prompting him to participate.
Marco was a 16-year-old freshman from Colombia who arrived a little over two years and two months prior to this study. He mentioned the city where he is from with a significant amount of pride and was eager to talk about his life before arriving in the United States. I met him for the first time during the Spanish language after school tutoring program where I helped him complete an assignment for an English class. He was noticeably respectful of teachers and wants to join the US Army when he graduates from high school. To reach his goal, he was taking Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) classes and wore his uniform proudly on days when the cadets are required to do so.

Mariana was an 18-year-old senior from Venezuela. At the time of her interview, she was due to graduate in a few weeks. At the time of writing this biography, she had completed all of her requirements to graduate in early June of 2019. I met her two years prior to this study as a student in one of the school’s Spanish classes where she agreed to participate in my pilot study data collection. Mariana had lived in the United States for two years and by this time she had made enormous strides in her mastery of English despite knowing no conversational English when she first arrived.

Mauricio, brother of Mónica, was an 18-year-old sophomore student from Colombia. Prior to the study, he had lived in the United States for four and a half years with his adoptive American family. He was an outwardly friendly person who smiled a lot and was an eager participant, genuinely wanting to describe his impressions of school life in South Carolina. Mauricio was an athlete that competed on Gary Chalmers High School’s cross country and track teams, despite that coach’s reputation for being
unwelcome to newcomer athletes and disinclination toward active recruitment. Before his interview, I had not had any interactions with Mauricio. Even so, participation in this study was used by the ESOL teacher as an incentive to complete some homework assignments. He regularly received extended time on work from other classes due to his language barrier accommodation plan.

Mónica, Mauricio’s sister, was a 15-year-old sophomore student from Colombia. I met her for the first time while recruiting participants for this project. She was the biological sister of Mauricio and both students lived with the same adoptive American family, arriving as a pair four and a half years ago. Like her brother, she was an athlete and played soccer on the school team. She was very petite and did not appear outwardly Latinx. Her English was quite good, despite having an accent, and I noticed a handful of times that she would inject English expressions into our conversation that were otherwise entirely in Spanish. This was remarkable because even I, a nonnative speaker of Spanish, knew Spanish expressions that could have allowed her to communicate in identical fashion.

Óscar was a 17-year-old senior from Mexico who arrived to South Carolina during his sixth grade year, about six years prior to this study. I first met him three years ago in one of his Spanish honors classes and was struck by his intellectual curiosity. His curiosity had grown and I noticed that he was eager to graduate and take ownership of his learning. Immediately before his interview, he had become very interested in Latin American history and on the day of his interview was carrying around a book about the history of Che Guevara, a topic about which he and I spoke for some time. Because he is
Mexican, I was very eager to hear his perspectives given that most of my other participants came from South America. During his participation in my pilot study, he expressed a unique, very candid perspective on the Latinx experience at Gary Chalmers High School.

Valencia was a 16-year-old second-year freshman from Colombia. She was very specific on her date of arrival December 19, 2017, which means that she had been in the United States for about a year and a half prior to the study. She was invariably fashionably dressed and has, by her count, been involved in three physical altercations in her school. Her propensity toward conflict had strained her ability to integrate herself into the wider school community but she mentioned with pride that she was turning over a new leaf and had been doing much better in school. Her command of Spanish seemed to be a bit elevated which made me think that she had very good educational experiences in Colombia before leaving. Additionally, she was in a cheerleading club before coming to the United States but had not continued this activity in South Carolina.

Valentina was an 18-year-old senior from Venezuela. She arrived two and a half years prior to this study. I met her in one of her Spanish classes where she enrolled halfway through the school year. Because the academic calendars in Venezuela and the United States did not align, she arrived too late in the school year to take most of her classes for credit and was considered to be auditing all of the whole-year classes she attended—effectively losing a semester of progress. She was very academically-oriented and managed to graduate with honors, despite being disadvantaged by learning her academic content in a nonnative language and not having access to the weighted GPA
classes. She participated in my pilot study and offered excellent reflections on the transition from being a student in Venezuela to being a student in the United States.

**Data Analysis**

Drawn from interviews, observations, and student-produced documents, a significant amount of data was available for analysis. Despite this wealth of information, Saldaña (2015) asserted that “rarely is the first cycle of coding data perfectly attempted” (p. 8). As a result, even a strong analysis will generally require second cycle analysis that “further manages, highlights, and focuses the salient features of the qualitative data record” (p. 8). Inductive coding techniques were used to generate a code book that was nevertheless heavily informed by previous research on the topic (e.g. Menjívar & Bejarano, 2004; Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Figure 3.3 summarizes my data analysis process, starting with raw data and leading to findings. **Figure 3.3**

*Map of data collection and analysis plan.*

The first cycle of coding was values coding. Values coding is “the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 89). Since the
objective of this phenomenological ethnographic research project is to understand how social capital is experienced by Latinx immigrant high school students, this method’s focus on the participants’ perspectives provided a useful framework. Furthermore, since attitudes “may not be directly stated” (p. 134), values coding of observation and document data provided insight into participants’ perspectives that enriched my understanding of interview responses. Because the goal of coding is to “identify stable concepts” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 163), I subjected the data to a second cycle of coding. In the second cycle, I used pattern coding. As described by Saldaña (2015) pattern coding works as a meta code analysis across data seeking an understanding the nature of “social networks and patterns of human relationships” (p. 152). Figure 3.4 summarized the nodes found as a result of first and second cycle coding.

Figure 3.4

Table of nodes generated by first and second cycle coding. First cycle codes use A to indicate an attitude, B to indicate a belief, and V to indicate value.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second Cycle Node</th>
<th>First Cycle Node</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on differences</td>
<td>• A - Dim view of “los morenos”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bridging)</td>
<td>• A - I can't communicate with Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A - I don't understand English well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A - Mexico v. other Latinos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A - Positive adoption of American culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A - Racial Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B - I have lots of American friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B - Language barrier causes teacher frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B - They make fun of us because of low English command</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on outside of school</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A - I deserve to be here too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A - I'm not here because I want to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• B - I don't really know the principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• V - National Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• V - Pan-Latino affinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• V - Positive adoption of American culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Focus on people
- A - Dim view of “los morenos”
- A - I can't communicate with Americans
- A - Mexico v. other Latinos
- A - Racial Awareness
- B - American students want to know me
- B - I have lots of American friends
- B - Language barrier causes teacher frustration
- B - They make fun of us because of low English command
- V - Centrality of teacher as school adult

## Focus on school
- A - Non-centrality of school in students' lives
- A - Our school is good
- B - Grades don't match effort
- B - Little help for me
- V - Doing well in school
- V - Educational Expectations
- V - ESOL Common Experience
- V - Low importance of extracurriculars

## Focus on similarities (bonding)
- A - Easy to make Spanish-speaking friends
- V - ESOL Common Experience
- V - Helping other new arrivals
- V - National Heritage
- V - Pan-Latino affinity
- V - Sitting together at lunch

## Limitations

Whereas most limitations become apparent upon reflection at the conclusion of an investigation, several were already apparent at this study’s beginning. The first major limitation of this study was the nature of the sample of participants. Because all of these students were enrolled in the same school, its stands to reason that much of the data gathered was significantly colored by the experience particular to Gary Chalmers High School. The degree to which this coloring affected the study will require further research in other settings. Second, because this high school had a disproportionate distribution of immigrant students from different Latin American countries, the study likely missed...
perspectives that would have been included in other settings. The school had many students from Colombia, Venezuela, and Mexico but correspondingly few students from the Latinx cultural spheres of Central America and the Caribbean. Due to recent political developments, national origin can easily be imagined as a major factor in determining social capital.

Another limitation that may have been problematic is my fluency level in Spanish. Because all participants opted for an interview in Spanish, as a nonnative speaker I was placed at a disadvantage with respect to linguistic nimbleness and adaptability. Fortunately, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages offers a scale on which to measure linguistic command. On this scale, I was formally tested at the Advanced-Mid level in the oral proficiency exam. This level indicates that an individual is able to “handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar” (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012, p. 6). Although I was able to navigate language tasks in an interview context with relative ease, my status as a nonnative speaker may have created issues that I did not notice because I may not have been cognizant of the cultural charge imbued into some words or expressions particularly those used by youths.

Statement of Positionality

With significant reflection, I have begun to see how influential my formal training in literary analysis has been in shaping my world view. As McAdams and McLean
Merrill and Fivush (2016), and Singer (2014) have explored, I believe that the self-crafted narrative is the fundamental means through which humans interact with the world and understand themselves. Since I believe my relationship to the world and to myself take place within a narrative, my understanding of truth is fundamentally tied to personal experience. This demands a conscious pragmatism. As I explore the nature of trust and develop an understanding incorporated into my own narrative, my understanding is useful only insofar as it is predictive. There are no “guaranteed foundations and no practical need for them” (Bredo, 2006, p.25).

My dedication to the “whatever works” attitude in educational leadership research is tied to my professional experience as a K-16 educator. The narrative I have constructed for myself has developed to tell me that there is little in the way of absolute truth or perfect generalizability. To this end, the improvement of the knowledge base with an understanding that findings will likely not be useful in all situations is the foundation of creating my own research goals. I view my role in educational research as a scholar-producer. While I feel that the generation of knowledge is the foremost responsibility of the researcher, it is necessarily predicated on its utility for the practitioner. I must remain cautious, though, since as a researcher tied to the narrative situations of my study participants, I face inadvertent complicity in otherizing my study participants through my own lens or through culturally-hegemonic advocacy.

As a person who is in constant contact with the school and district in which I conducted this research, I need to bear in mind some of the implications for my relationships with its employees as I move forward with the research. For instance, if I
had uncovered perceived or overt discrimination, I would have needed to be careful in my reporting while still finding a place for ethical advocacy. Fortunately, I felt that the current leadership team at the building level was supportive of my research. I also had to bear in mind my own perspective as a regular visitor to campus. Since many of the faculty were my friends, I had to be receptive to information that may be critical of them and take care to equitably pursue lines of inquiry that may not cast them in the most positive of lights.

Another positionality factor that I was forced to contend with was my membership in the Anglo, White, mainstream hegemonic culture. While I sought to use my access and opportunity to “restore credibility to native perspectives” (Katz & Csordas, 2003, p. 275) and to “counter the pervasive and institutionalized stereotypes about groups” (Banks, 2006, p. 776), from a cultural perspective, I was nevertheless an outsider. Despite this, within the context of this study, I sought to become an “external-outsider” as described by Banks (2006). In his view, an external-outsider is an individual who “was socialized within another culture and acquires its beliefs, values, behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge” yet, “because of his or her unique experiences, the individual rejects many of the values, beliefs, and knowledge claims within his or her indigenous community and endorses those of the studies community” (p. 778). Accounting for my own biases and assumptions required deliberate attention and constant reflection to reduce the effect of my own cultural predispositions in data analysis and interpretation.
Trustworthiness and Rigor

In order to improve trustworthiness and rigor, Lincoln and Guba (1986) described ways in which to enhance credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in naturalistic qualitative research (p. 77). Through the course of my designing this inquiry, inclusion of its various elements were heavily informed by an effort to maximize these traits. Lincoln and Guba described prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks, and persistent observation as good ways to improve the credibility of an investigation. Within the context of my design choices, I included multiple data sources drawn from multiple participants as opportunities for triangulation and testimonios as a direct member check for my interpretation of the data the sources provided. Furthermore, as a person that was regularly present in the school building over the course of many years and that worked directly with the participants in classrooms and the after-school tutoring program, this study benefited greatly from my prolonged engagement with my participants and my persistent observation of them in their school environment.

For transferability, Lincoln and Guba (1986) stressed the creation of thick description—described in their words as a “narrative developed about the context so that judgments about the degree of fit or similarity may be made by others who may wish to apply all or part of the findings elsewhere” (p. 77). For this reason, I included substantial description about the macro and micro contexts of the Latinx immigrant student’s experience with respect to their social capital development at Gary Chalmers High School. This description includes an account of the national zeitgeist and the unique
context of the American Southeast. Furthermore, I also included a detailed description of the participants’ school environment and the participants’ appearances and demeanors.

In their discussion of dependability and confirmability, Lincoln and Guba (1986) described a process of conducting an “external audit” by a “competent external, disinterested auditor” (p. 77). Because this investigation was conducted as a dissertation research project, it was completed under the expert supervision of my dissertation committee composed of four veteran qualitative researchers. In the course of designing this investigation, I conducted and defended a pilot study similar to this project, defended this project as a proposal prior to data collection, and defended it one final time as a complete dissertation after data collection and analysis was complete. Each stage of this process was marked by formal submissions of results to Clemson’s graduate school and by rounds of revisions with the committee members to improve its quality.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I first summarized the content of the dissertation from Chapters 1 and 2. Next, I reiterated the purpose of the study and the research questions. After reiterating the purpose of the study and central question, I summarized the methodology by describing the epistemological choices I made in this study. I explained that this study took place at the intersection of phenomenology, its philosophical stance, and ethnography, its root method to understand truth. The following section described the research methods, justifying the study’s site selection, its data sources, and briefly describing each of the participants individually. The penultimate section described the analytic framework of the study, two rounds of inductive coding, and the study’s
limitations as they may have affected this study. The final portions of this chapter were dedicated to explaining my positionality as a researcher, with an emphasis on describing how I view truth and my relationship to the school in which I conducted my research, and to a discussion of the trustworthiness and rigor of this project.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

Chapter 1 offered an introduction to the basic elements of the study, summarizing and briefly explaining the overall structure and rationale for this study. Chapter 2 explained information pertinent to this study with special attention paid to the importance of social capital as a determiner in academic success for students and how this capital has likely been harmed in recent years. This likely harm has come in the form of general anti-immigrant anxiety (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013), cultural and political backlash against overall demographic change (US Census Bureau, 2018; Huber, 2015), and overt hostility against minority populations (Rushin & Edwards, 2018). Chapter 3 described the structure and epistemological positionality of this study. It also revealed the research question of this study, What influences the development of bridging social capital between Latinx immigrant secondary students and their peers and teachers in the American Southeast? Chapter 4 details the findings of this study and finds central analytical themes from the data collected through this study.

There are five primary findings related to the direct understanding of the development of bridging social capital of Latinx students, also summarized in figure 4.3 at the end of this chapter. First, language barriers hampered the development of bridging social capital between Latinx immigrant students and other groups that did not speak Spanish whereas Latinx immigrant students quickly built bridging social capital with those who did speak Spanish. Second, racial self-segregation and the racialization of conflicts between student groups hampered the development of social capital between
these different student groups. Third, the inclination of individual Latinx immigrant students to adopt American habits or to literally or figuratively be adopted by American teachers or students facilitated the building of bridging social capital. Fourth, the deliberate shedding or pliability of the Latinx identity of Latinx immigrant students facilitated the development of bridging social capital. And fifth, the existence of in-group conflict between Mexican and non-Mexican Latinx students hampered the development of bridging social capital.

This section begins by identifying the nature of the origin of bridging social capital for Latinx immigrant students. Next the five major influencers of the development of bridging social capital of Latinx immigrant students found by this study are described. Afterward, to improve the discussion of bridging social capital in the final chapter of this dissertation, relevant findings about the nature and origin of bonding social capital of Latinx immigrant students from this study are described.

The Nature of Bridging Social Capital of Latinx Immigrant Students

The affective origin of bridging social capital

The coding and subsequent translation processes uncovered that the development of bridging social capital was largely based on the attitudes or beliefs of the participants as opposed to long-standing cultural values. These attitudes seemed to be based on individual experiences and were specific to the school environment. Graciela, because of her negative experiences with an American Black student over three years, concluded that all Black students disliked Latinx students. Valencia, for similar reasons, came to the conclusion that “more than anything those that make fun of others are Black.” She
held this belief despite having described earlier in detail through her interview an episode where a White student was making fun of her.

Additional evidence of the affective origin of bridging social capital for the Latinx participants is found in the centrality of the language barrier and their beliefs and attitudes surrounding it. Responding very directly to a question about things that make classes more difficult than they ought to be, Jacinto referred to the teacher’s frustration with him not understanding instructions or content on the first pass, “the teacher doesn’t have patience.” Marco and Valencia also described similar experiences with Valencia also attributing some of the frustration to the race of her teacher, mentioning the race of the teacher and saying, “I feel like I’m bothering her when I ask her questions.”

**Influences on the development of bridging social capital**

Because bridging social capital describes the health or existence of a relationship that exists between different groups, evidence for it can be found in participants’ descriptions of the differences they perceive between themselves and the other agents in the school building. Furthermore, evidence of deliberate or accidental steps taken to hasten or harm the development of bridging social capital can be found in participants’ descriptions of how these differences are overcome or navigated.

**Language barriers.** A frequently mentioned factor related to bridging social capital was the language barrier that exists between the Latinx immigrant students and those people already present in the school community. Óscar, the senior from Mexico, described his first few days in an American school.
A very difficult time for me was the first week that I entered the school because I didn’t know what anything was called in English. The only thing I knew was, ‘Hi, my name is Óscar.” That was when I was about 12 years old and for me it was super difficult because I couldn’t communicate with other people. I tried to communicate but I couldn’t and the simple task of asking to use the restroom was super difficult and when I waited for the bus, I didn’t even know which one to take.

Óscar, like many of the other participants of this study, was unable to reach out to his peers and adults in the school to establish the relationships that would have alleviated his confusion or ideally would have blossomed into a relationship with all teachers or another peer group.

While the language barrier did hamper the development of bridging social capital between the immigrant Latinx students and other students, the participants nevertheless reported that some students did want to know them. The language barrier, however, frustrated the efforts of these students to become friends with the immigrant Latinx students. Graciela said “They want to become friends with me but language is at the center. They want to know me but everyone doesn’t know how to tell me that.” Isabela corroborated the friendly intentions of the majority of the non-immigrant students, saying of them, “I feel comfortable. They’re open-minded. I don’t sense any type of rejection whatsoever. They accept me.” Through my observations conducted in the school cafeteria, I noted that all of the Latinx students that were seated together were using Spanish, further demonstrating these students’ strong preference for Spanish in
communicative tasks. The language barrier and lack of ability to communicate effectively laid at the center of bridging social capital between different student groups.

The language barrier wasn’t only referenced as causing difficulties in relationship formation with students but also with the teaching staff. Across the school, while I observed many mainstream students engaging in conversations with teachers and administrators, I never once saw a Latinx immigrant student do so. Jacinto, a sophomore from Venezuela, in responding to a question about what was a factor that made school difficult, reported that “the teacher doesn’t have patience and other students bother her so she takes it out on all of us.” Valentina, a second-year freshman from Colombia, also referenced teacher frustration stemming from language issues. “I feel that it bothers her when I ask her a question so I feel that it’s better to just not ask her at all.” Even so, as with the students, most of the participants trusted the intentions of the teachers and were comfortable seeking help from them. Óscar described the ease with which he seeks extra help from teachers.

If it’s something that has to do with math, of course I go to the math teacher. If I have a problem with literature, I go to my literature teacher.

If art, I go to my art teacher because her answer would help us most.

She’ll say “very good.”

By and large, the participants perceived their teachers as putting forth effort to help and be accessible but perhaps easily frustrated by the inability to communicate expediently.

While no command of Spanish was found to hamper communication and bridging social capital formation between Latinx immigrant students and their teachers, teachers
with formal training surrounding Spanish or second language acquisition were readily able to overcome these barriers. When questioned about who helped them with school work or with whom they discussed their plans for after high school, the ESOL teacher was mentioned by nearly all of the participants by name. The centrality of the ESOL teacher’s efforts in students’ experiences was directly referenced as a reason for their success. Mariana said, “I think that if I hadn’t entered high school that I wouldn’t have ever learned English because when I arrived, I could understand some words but I couldn’t understand everything and much less speak it. [Ms. List] helped me so much.”

The ESOL teacher at the research site was not a conversational speaker of Spanish but, through her formal training in second language acquisition, she was able to make inferences and develop an understanding of student intent that alleviate the frustration that participants reported perceiving at times with teachers that are unfamiliar with Spanish.

Part of the reason for the participants’ overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the ESOL teacher may have been due to the high quality of the help given by the school’s ESOL teacher. The ESOL teacher at the research site had recently earned a prestigious award for her work with her students, many of whom were participants in this study. However, while not directly mentioned by any of the participants, most of the participants and other Latinx immigrant students routinely went for help to several of the Spanish-speaking teachers on staff in addition to the ESOL teacher. This was evident

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3 This is a pseudonym. Spanish does not always require the reiteration of a subject pronoun when it is previously mentioned. While she did not say it, adding the ESOL teacher’s name here was the easiest way for Mariana’s response to flow naturally.
through their participation in the after-school tutoring program for Spanish-speakers that was offered at the school where these teachers served as tutors. It was also evident as these students frequently went to Spanish-speaking teachers to seek social and academic advice and at times to have an intermediary between them and other non-Spanish speaking teachers. The linguistic sensitivity offered by either speaking Spanish or knowing how to navigate a multilingual environment offered an opportunity to create bridging social capital between teachers and Spanish-speaking Latinx immigrant students.

**Racial self-segregation.** Throughout all of the interviews and observations that were conducted, participants regularly demonstrated their view of the social world of the school through a fundamentally racial lens. In all of my observations, I noted that the students were segregating themselves by race, despite having complete control of which students with whom they could socialize. This segregation was particularly obvious during two different after-school observations of student dismissals at the car line at the front of the school and the bus loop at the rear of the school. In each of these instances, students were largely grouped by their racial or racialized background. Black students were generally with other Black students, White students were generally with White students, and Latinx students were largely with other Latinx students. The only racial group that did not have any exclusive groups were the South and East Asian students, who were mixed throughout any setting they were in.

Isabela, a junior from Guatemala, also described some anxiety at her racial preferences being undermined when a teacher selected students as her group members.
The first time I came to this school she made me sit in a group where there were only White students. This made me feel a little nervous because I had already been in the United States for some time and my friends had not been White. They were always Black or Hispanic.

She was not allowed to select her own group for that class and segregate herself according to her comfort zone. Several other students mentioned similar episodes where discomfort arose from being unwilling or uncomfortable to work with students of particular racial backgrounds.

**Racialization of conflicts.** With very few exceptions, whenever a participant mentioned a time when he or she had a problem with another student, that other student was given a racial identifier. Generally, this racial identifier was *moreno*, referring to a dark-complexioned person that would be considered Black in the American racial system. Even so, White students, usually referred to as *blanco*, were also specifically labeled—although not nearly as often. When asked whether or not she had had a difficult time working with other students in school, Valentina characterized some of the problems she had from Black and White students as racism in her unequivocal use of racial identifiers.

With the Black students yes, and with some of the Whites. They laugh but I never stay quiet and I respond the only way I know how. The first thing that we from other countries learn is the vulgar words always. Some of the Whites know some in Spanish too.
Figure 4.1

Map of bridging social capital relationships by race.

The majority of the conflicts that were framed around race focused on the participants’ interactions with Black students. Marco said that he has had some problems with “a group of Blacks” and that

They tried to fight with me even though I never told them that I wanted to fight. Sometimes they would ignore me and I would leave but one day one of them came over and pushed me so I pushed him back and I hit him.

Not all of the conflicts were violent, however, and about half of the participants described an atmosphere similar to that described by Valencia where “more than any others those that make fun of me are the Blacks.” More evidence of the poor relations between the school’s Black and Latinx students was evident in the lunch room observations and the
yearbook pickup event observation where only one Latino boy was observed socializing with Black students and no Black students were present in any Latinx groups. Figure 4.1 shows a map of the bridging social capital between specific racial groups as identified by my participants.

**Bridging capital and adoption.** Although nearly every participant reported at least one instance of being made to feel uncomfortable because of his or her linguistic or immigrant background, there was a marked difference between the stories of those participants who had made deliberate efforts to adopt American friendships, been adopted by Americans in some form, or had experienced some combination of both. Mauricio and Mónica, both adopted children from Colombia now living with a White American family, were likely the greatest example of the relationship between adoption and greater bridging social capital. Each adopted a common experience in for mainstream American students, playing sports on a school team. Mauricio was on the cross country and track teams and Mónica was on the soccer team. Mauricio reported that “I have many good friends. I think I have more friends from the track and cross country team.” Mónica reported that she has a specific group of friends “only from soccer practice.” Because very few of the immigrant students participated in extracurricular activities, the vast majority of friends from these sports teams were American students. By disposing themselves to adopting customs and habits and by having been adopted by families and teams, these two students greatly improved their bridging social capital.

Other evidence related to the higher propensity to adopt or to be adopted was found in other participants’ responses. For example, Diego mentioned specifically that
“the (online) social networks are not used in my country so when you arrive here you start to use them more and to meet more people.” Additionally, during a recent school theater production, I noticed that Mariana and Valentina, both highly successful seniors, were in the audience on the same night that I attended. Mariana also described her new friendships with American students very positively and as a new social choice that she had made. “The great majority I would say this year are Americans. Last year I had too many Colombian friends but I didn’t maintain a friendship with them so much. I made friends recently with two good (American) girls.” Isabela, another academically-oriented student, stated that, despite being an English language learner, her friends were “dedicated to their studies” and almost entirely all “are from here.” The deliberate adoption of both American people and American habits had the direct outcome of increasing the bridging social capital of these students. Furthermore, the reciprocation of adoption also increased this bridging social capital.

**Shedding Latinx-ness.** While Mauricio and Mónica showed that they had a high predisposition to adopt American culture while receiving a reciprocal adoption by Americans, this adoption did seem to carry with it a possible abandonment their old linguistic and cultural life. Although all interviews were conducted in Spanish, Mónica, during the course of our interview, used several English expressions where equivalent Spanish expressions would have been equally appropriate, would have carried identical semantic charge, and would have flowed better in the course of our conversation. Use of these English expressions indicates a deliberate, although clumsy, blending of the American habits with their own. Furthermore, Mauricio addressed this directly when he
said, “Yeah, I speak English more that I speak Spanish but when I get home I only speak English. Of course I can speak Spanish but I prefer to speak English because I’m going to need it more.” It was also notable that in his ESOL classroom his best friend was an Arabic-speaking Egyptian student despite having access to other Spanish speaking students. Mónica also showed a similar preference as I only ever saw her in the hallways with English-speaking students. Because of their willingness, or perhaps acquiescence facilitated by their adoption, to be shed their Latinx identities, these two students had an easier time than others building bridging social capital through high-quality, repeated interactions.

Some of the participants showed evidence of being able to maintain a balance between their Latinx identity and the necessity to adopt new cultural norms. Diego was stunned when he arrived to the United States to see the centrality of social media in the lives of high school students but maintained a distance and chose specifically what he wanted to adopt and what he preferred to ignore.

When you arrive here you start to use it more and you become familiar with the different types of people that there are. You start to enter more into this world and learn more about it like the little abbreviations, the little things about English.

Marco demonstrated a similar ability to adopt what he wanted from American culture and maintain the identity he wished to keep. When I asked him where he was from, he named with a fair amount of pride his city of origin in Colombia. Even so, he was also proud of his achievements at school.
Socially things are going very well with everyone but I’m pretty serious and I don’t like to talk too much with others. Academically, I really like JROTC. It’s preparing me to be a soldier and it’s going really well and I like it.

Diego and Marco had been able to selectively adopt what they like from American culture, sampling as they go along, and then converted that knowledge and participation in activities into bridging social capital.

Other participants had an extremely difficult time developing relationships with non-Latinx students and also possessed a low propensity to adopt American culture and fuse it with their own. Graciela was one of the participants with the greatest number of negative experiences with other students. Where other students tended to branch out their friend groups with greater time in the United States, despite having been in the United States for nearly three years, she reported that her friends “are super great people. They help me and so on and some of them are Venezuelan, the vast majority are Columbian.” Furthermore, she demonstrated a great eagerness to lose herself in conversations about her country of origin. During one of the after school help sessions for Spanish speakers, we spent the whole session talking about the history of the defunct nineteenth century country, Gran Colombia. Valencia also reported that “more than anyone else I speak with the Hispanics of my own country” and was observed in the lunch room sitting with a group of exclusively Spanish-speaking girls. These students have been unsuccessful in adopting American cultural norms and have subsequently had a difficult time building bridging social capital with other student groups in the school.
**Latinx and Mexican students.** One of the more surprising findings of the data collection was the discovery of significant social divisions between Mexican and other non-Mexican Latinx students. Within the framework of understanding social capital and because of findings from other researchers, I had assumed that all Latinx students would be a unified block, whose internal relationships would be described using only the framework of bonding social capital. However, several non-Mexican participants were quick to bring up some of the problems they have had with Mexican classmates. Jacinto said,

The truth is that it hasn’t been easy in this state because I understand that there haven’t been too many Hispanics here and that some people here don’t know how to get along with Hispanics and they look at us differently. And some Mexicans have called me *indio*, they’ve called me everything.

Valencia also reported a similar negative experience with a Mexican classmate where she and the other student nearly came to blows,

Well, when I arrived to this high school, I had been here about one week, nothing more, and I had a problem with a Mexican girl. She had been talking bad about me and it made me really angry that she would do that to me because I had only been here for a week. How are you going to know me well enough to talk about me like that? She and I had a discussion and we almost fought each other.
While this could be just an aberration within the student groups at Gary Chalmers High School, Óscar, the only Mexican participant, specifically brought up this division across a larger context.

I like to work with the Americans because between Latinos one says that there’s a union but in reality, no. It’s a lie, we hate each other sometimes.

The Columbians, Mexicans, Argentinians, Peruvians, there’s always a battle between Latinos. I don’t know why.

Because Latinx students divided themselves into Mexican and non-Mexican groups rather than being exclusively subject to bonding social capital, the Latinx student group had complex bridging and bonding social capital structures that take into account their national origins rather than only their common cultural marker.

This intra-Latinx conflict seemed to be unique to the interactions between Mexican and non-Mexican immigrant students. Within the ESOL student body, there was ample evidence for high levels of bonding social capital through their common experience. One of the most salient examples of this high bonding social capital was the location of the sole East Asian ESOL student at the high school. She was in a romantic relationship with Diego and was spotted several times with him during the observations I conducted. During these times together they were inseparable. Furthermore, during one of the lunch observations, I noticed her sitting with a large group of Latina immigrant girls—several of whom were my participants. There were several other examples of high bonding social capital among the ESOL students such as the friendship between Mauricio and the Egyptian immigrant student and the other romantic relationship between a female
Brazilian student and another male Egyptian student. The divide between non-Mexican Latinx students and Mexican Latinx students seemed to be unique and important, even among such a diverse group of students. These social capital structured are mapped in figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2

*Map of social capital shared among ELL students viewed from within the group.*

**The Nature of Bonding Social Capital of Latinx Immigrant Students**

The primary objective of this study was to determine what influences the development of bridging social capital. Even so, understanding the nature of bonding social capital of the same students and how it is constructed provided an important point of comparison and accounted for some of the factors that might otherwise have seemed absent in an analysis of only bridging social capital. Furthermore, the misattribution of influences to one capital or the other could be potentially damaging by creating intergroup and intragroup identity assumptions that are false. Finally, the presence or
absence of bonding social capital of Latinx immigrant students can either lead to or divert from the eventual creation of bridging social capital.

The values origin of bonding social capital

Whereas bridging social capital was largely determined by the attitudes and beliefs of the participants, the bonding social capital held within the Latinx immigrant student group seemed to be largely values based. For example, one of the most commonly reported means of making other Latinx friends was the value of helping other new arrivals. For Graciela, this meant not allowing new arrivals to sit alone in the lunch room. She said, “I don’t want them to sit alone.” Mariana also describes receiving a similar invitation that she had during her first few days in her new American school.

I met them because in the moment when I came from Venezuela I had the help of a friend… She was in her senior year and I was a sophomore so she helped me and introduced me to the school and introduced me to her friends.

Another values-based indicator was the centrality of sitting together at lunch in the daily school day experience. Many students specifically referred to this as a key social point in their day and evidence was also recorded in the observations. During the two lunchroom observations, there were obvious groups of Latinx students sitting with one another and using Spanish with one another. When I asked Mariana how she met her friends, she immediately framed her answer around which lunch they were in that year. Mariana said, “I see Valentina in the first lunch and I also see Juan in lunch the same way.” Valentina and Diego give answers along the same lines. Valentina explained that
“I don’t have many friends other than seniors and I’m usually with them at lunch” and Diego said “It’s the same for me. When I’m in lunch I’m with them and I talk with them.” Given the limited nature of their ability to converse casually with English-speaking classmates, the extra effort indicated the importance of easy conversations with linguistic peers.

**Influences on the development of bonding social capital.**

Evidence for bonding social capital, the social capital that described the health or existence of relationships that exist within a specific group, was found in participants’ descriptions of the similarities they perceive among themselves and fellow group members of the school building. Defining where group boundaries lay assisted in determining the nature of bridging social capital.

**Non-English language as initial relationship builder.** In opposition to difference in languages straining the ability to build bridging social capital, having a command of the same language facilitated the creation of bonding social capital. During both of the lunch room observations groups of Latinx students were observed sitting together. Without exception, all of the students sitting in these groups were speaking Spanish with one another. None of the Latinx students known to have been in the United States for an extended period of time were sitting in these clusters and students in these groups seemed to be more recently arrived. Óscar explained, “Well at the start my friends were by and large Hispanic and from the Hispanic community. Although you might be from another place, you’re also Hispanic and you understand them and they’re going through the same thing as you.”
Having a command of Spanish was important in creating initial bonding social capital between students but there is also evidence that the common experience of not being able to speak English created bonding social capital. Marco explained his relationship with another Arabic-speaking ESOL student.

A friend that I have right now in class is an Arab and ever since I arrived to this school I’ve been talking with him. I have confidence in him and I like him. He and I understand each other well.

The word *understand* in the translation of his description did not only refer to understanding the English spoken between them but also to understanding their common lived experience of being a non-English speaker in the United States. This quote illustrated that it is not simply the command of a common language that created bonding social capital between immigrant students but rather the commonalities of struggling to succeed with the added barrier of linguistic disadvantage.

**Latinx-ness as glue.** Identifying as a Latinx individual was found to be important in establishing bonding social capital. Before arriving to South Carolina, Jacinto mentioned the importance of being around other Latinos.

Because when I arrived here, I didn’t initially arrive to South Carolina. I arrived to Miami and I lived there for a bit. In Miami there are lots of people from Venezuela and many other Hispanics. I made friends there. Later, I moved here.

In his answer, I believe Jacinto used the word *Hispanic* to signify the racialized category for a person from Spanish-speaking Latin America instead of the cultural
category. The equivalence between Venezuela and other Hispanics is evidence of this. After describing his experience in Miami, Jacinto continued describing his initial experiences coming to an area with no Latinxs in South Carolina. “Afterward, I moved to here, to South Carolina but it was to a small town named Canton\textsuperscript{4}. That was the school where I was first forced to learn English because there wasn’t a single person that spoke Spanish.” He later said that “it was the most uncomfortable thing not being able to speak English.” He was unable to create either the bridging or bonding social capital between himself and other students needed to integrate into a group, and he was only able to do so after moving to a school that had a significant number of Spanish speakers. Furthermore, it is important to note that the mention of Latino took place in the same story as the description of his first school in South Carolina. I took this as evidence of the equivalence between Latinx and Spanish-speaker within the context of Jacinto’s story.

The city surrounding Gary Chalmers High School was home to Latinx families from many disparate parts of Spanish-speaking Latin America. Many of these families were concentrated in specific parts of the city and several enclaves had developed over the course of their arrivals to the Upstate of South Carolina. Evidence for this was seen during an observation of the bus loop at dismissal time. The immigrant Latinx student bus riders were not equally distributed across all of the busses but rather were concentrated nearly completely into one bus with two other busses containing significant proportions of students. These students also waited in a group together for their busses to arrive, indicating that they possess high bonding social capital. Furthermore, during the

\textsuperscript{4} This is a pseudonym.
car loop dismissal observation, several groups exclusively composed of Latinx students were seen leaving campus walking in the same direction. The Latinx students in both observations represented a significant range of national backgrounds, years spent in the United States, and command of English but were nevertheless geographically clustered.

**Hyper-local heritage.** While the relationship between Mexican and non-Mexican Latinx students has already been explored through the lens of bridging social capital between the two groups, other national categories nevertheless color relationships among the non-Mexican Latinx students. Valencia, a student from Colombia, mentioned that nearly all of her friends are Colombian as well. In fact, she even stipulated which cities that her friends are from compared to her. She explained, “Well the majority of my friends are Colombian from Medellín. It’s only my brother and I who are from Bogotá and we all talk almost every day but not a whole bunch.” Having a nearer geographic origin equated to a more-rapidly developing bonding social capital between immigrant Latinx students, even if it’s not within the same country. In fact, Graciela, herself a Venezuelan student, said of her friends “They’re good people, great people. They help me on this and that and some of them are from Venezuela. The great majority are Colombian.” When explaining that her friends were from Venezuela, the tone of her voice made it seem like an unexpected bonus that she would find someone from Venezuela in her school—as if to say, I *even* have friends from Venezuela but there are only so many of us here.

The comparatively high numbers of students from Venezuela and Colombia can be contrasted with the relatively low numbers of students from Central American and the
Caribbean. Óscar, the participant from Mexico, mentioned that he had branched out his immediate friend group to majority non Latinx people. He said, “The majority of my friends are artists that I meet. I learn from them.” Isabela, the Guatemalan participant, while telling her story of arriving to South Carolina by way of New Jersey, implied that the majority of her friends in school were not Latinx. She explained, “Well the friends that I had outside of school are Hispanic. Here in the school, though, I don’t have Hispanic friends, I only really socialize with Hispanics outside of school.” Furthermore, Diego, the Cuban participant, was in a romantic relationship with an East Asian student in the same ESOL class as him, despite their language differences. It seemed to be the case that Latinx immigrant students gravitated toward those who also have geographically near origins. However, if there are few potential friends from nearby one’s own origin, the consideration of origin is less important.

Figure 4.3

*Summary of factors found to facilitate or hamper the building of bridging capital for Latinx immigrant students.*
Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described my findings that resulted from the data collection and analysis for this study. I began the chapter by reiterating the contents of Chapters 1, 2, and 3, then transitioned into a presentation of the salient information from the perspectives of the participants. I started by explaining that the influencers of bridging capital for Latinx immigrant students were largely based in attitudes and beliefs, were affective in origin, and were influenced heavily by the first few experiences in a school building. Next, I described in detail the five primary influencers of bridging social capital: language barriers, racial self-segregation and racialization of conflicts, propensity to adopt or reject American habits, flexibility of Latinx identity, and in-group conflict among Latinx students. Because it was found to affect the development of bridging social capital, I also described the nature of bonding social capital among Latinx immigrant students. In that section, I explained that bonding social capital originated in the common values held by Latinx immigrant students. I ended the section by describing several of the key influencers of the development of bonding social capital that have ramifications for the development of bridging social capital.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Acar (2011) described the significant benefits for academic achievement that result from a student possessing a high level of social capital. Among these are higher test achievement, higher graduation rates, and lower dropout rates (p. 460). Because the new accountability measures in states in the American Southeast now include a sizeable portion of overall score determined by ELL students’ progress in mastering English (e.g. South Carolina Education Oversight Committee), educational leaders are now required to expend resources to ensure that these students maximize their achievement. The ELL students in this region of the United States are overwhelmingly Latinx (US Census Bureau, 2018) and are a recent arrival to the racial and cultural landscape (Hamann & Harklau, 2015; Lynn, 2015). In an unfamiliar new home, many of these Latinx immigrants find themselves bewildered adjusting to this new environment (Hoops, 2017) which lacks the information networks that would otherwise be present in other regions with a more established Latinx population (Menjívar & Bejarano, 2004).

Given the southeastern United States’ already relatively low levels of social capital (Joint Economic Committee, 2018), it would be difficult for students from the Latinx immigrant community to develop social capital under ideal circumstances. However, during and after the 2016 US Presidential election, Latinx immigrants found themselves in the midst of a cultural backlash directed specifically toward them (Rushin & Edwards, 2018; Green, 2016). Because negative campaign ads can awaken latent racism (Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002) and perceived racism can affect the
development of trust in schools (Benkert, Peters, Clark, & Keves-Foster, 2006), Latinx immigrant students in the American Southeast are at a marked disadvantage with respect to developing social capital and, by extension, needlessly underachieve in their schools as a result.

The findings of this study have the potential to improve the experiences and educational outcomes of Latinx immigrant students throughout the American Southeast. School leaders will be able to improve the educational outcomes of their Latinx immigrant students by adopting policies that specifically address social capital deficiencies inside their schools and by accommodating for the unique positionality of their Latinx immigrant students among other students, leading to improved academic success. Because “the Deep South seems to be the weakest” (Hamann & Harklau, 2015, p. 12) with respect to the graduation rates of Latinx students and new school success measures now include academic progress made by English language learner students (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee), school leaders are specifically incentivized to address these problems.

This chapter is organized into two major sections. The first section describes the practical implications for leaders that wish to facilitate the development of bridging social capital between their Latinx immigrant students and other student groups and teachers. The specific implications for leadership are the oversized importance of a Latinx immigrant student’s first few experiences in a new school building, the need to find peer and adult language allies, the need for accommodating Latinx cultural identity, and bonding social capital among Latinx students that can facilitate the development of
bridging social capital. Figure 5.1, at the end of the first section, summarizes the recommendations for educational leaders. The second, smaller section describes some of the pitfalls into which school leadership can fall that needlessly harm the development of bridging social capital. The chapter ends with recommendations for further research and a brief conclusion.

**Improving the Bridging Social Capital of Latinx Immigrant Students**

**The Importance of First Experiences.**

One of the key findings of this study is that bridging social capital is largely determined by the attitudes or beliefs of its participants rather than by long-standing values held prior to the arrival to schools in the United States. This shows that the development of bridging social capital begins immediately upon arrival to a school building. The importance of these first experiences is supported by the Menjivar and Bejarano (2004) findings regarding the attitudes of recently-arrived Latinx immigrants toward law enforcement. In their study, initial experiences, either positive or negative, in the United States with law enforcement heavily informed all future interactions with and expectations of American law enforcement. A positive initial experience resulted in a favorable view of law enforcement and facilitated cooperation, high bridging social capital, whereas a negative initial interaction resulted in an unfavorable view of law enforcement and hampered engagement between agencies and the community, low bridging social capital. In a parallel fashion, the initial interactions of Latinx immigrant students with American student groups and teaching faculty profoundly inform the long-term views of those groups.
In addition to demonstrating that the first few interactions with law enforcement are fundamental in deciding future attitudes, Menjivar and Bejarano (2004) also showed that the current attitudes of the broader Latinx community were transmitted to and largely adopted by new arrivals. However, because the Latinx immigrant community is so new in the American Southeast (Hamann & Harklau, 2015), newly-arrived Latinx immigrants do not have as robust a community upon which to fall back for information compared to the Phoenix metropolitan area as studied by Menjívar and Bejarano. For this reason, educational leaders in the American Southeast cannot rely upon cultivating goodwill or developing a long-standing relationship with a large community to guide new arrivals. Because those first experiences at least partially determine the ease with which bridging social capital will be built over the course of a student’s education, in turn affecting academic success (Acar, 2011), a school leader must consider and plan around the inflated importance of each individual Latinx immigrant student’s initial experiences in their school.

However, as school leaders develop plans to improve the initial experiences of their Latinx immigrant students, they must also take into consideration the cultural and societal positionality of these students that now must navigate an American educational institution. Wooley (2009) described the three cultural traits of educación, respeto, and familismo which come into play as Latinxs interact with their schools. Furthermore, Valenzuela (1999) described the image of the deferential immigrant that seeks to not create any disturbances in the fabric of an institution. Because respeto predisposes a Latinx immigrant student to “respect elders and the roles they serve” (Wooley, 2009, p.
10, and Latinx immigrant students are not inclined to complain, a school leader is in the American Southeast is required to move beyond superficial indicators as they craft initial experiences for these students. A student that appears to be having a pleasant first few days in a school in fact may only be masking his or her negative, true feelings similar to those many experiences described by this study’s participants.

Fortunately, the cultural traits of Latinx immigrant families may yet offer a solution to this problem. If respeto discourages a Latinx immigrant student from expressing himself directly to an authority figure in a school building, a school leader may be better served by first developing positive relationships with the more hierarchically-equal parents before the student arrives onto campus. Being closer to the age of the school leaders, they may be able to offer higher quality information to school leaders’ programming decisions because they may be more inclined to speak candidly and eventually involve themselves more with the school community. While the feedback itself is valuable in that it can provide information that will improve initial student experiences and facilitate the building of bridging social capital, the ensuing potential for improved parental involvement also holds promise, especially since many Latinx families are not initially aware of “the collaborative educational system between parents and school” (Diversi & Mecham, 2005, p. 32). Gallo, Wortham, and Bennett (2015) explained that to best cultivate immigrant parental involvement, a school must deliberately take steps to minimize the cultural mismatches that can occur as American educational institutions interact with immigrant groups. These steps are the active
exercise of developing new repertoires, a recognition that there are variations within a culture and that institutions must be flexible to accommodate individuals.

Finding Language Allies

Not being able to express oneself was one of the most common experiences described by this study’s participants. Whereas some participants described ridicule at not being able to speak English fluently and others described helpful, yet incomprehensible, American peers, all expressed a great frustration with being unable to express themselves clearly and with the nuances afforded by one’s first language. Being unable to express oneself due to language “can be an obstacle for Hispanic children” (Mesa, Torres, Smthwick, & Sides, 2016, p. 6) as they try to integrate themselves into the wider school community and build bridging social capital.

Peer Language Allies. With respect to having low English abilities, the participants in this study generally described their experiences with peers in one of two ways. If the experience was positive, they lamented the inability to establish friendships with their American peers. If the experience was negative, they described being mocked by classmates. According to Kochanek (2005), of the many factors that improve bridging social capital among students, “repeated social exchanges” (p. 12) were cited as being very important in relationship development. Essentially, as different student groups interact with one another, bridging social capital should develop as a result. However, because the initial interactions between Latinx immigrant students and their American peer groups could be traumatizing to individual students, the quality of those interactions
is of critical importance. Continuous negative experiences with their peers, caused by
low English ability, can irreparably stymie the development of bridging social capital.

Several participants reported that a Spanish-speaking student was assigned
directly to them by a school administrator as a helper of sorts. This role was intended to
serve as a guide as they navigated the school building for the first few days. The
selection of these students seemed to be haphazard, however, as some of these
experiences were described as positive and others negative, depending on the willingness
of the peer to assist the new arrival. These relationships could be seen as the creation of a
linguistic enclave within the school building that could harm the development of bridging
social capital by discouraging Latinx immigrant students to communicate with American
students. Valenzuela (1999) lamented the creation of “cultural tracks” (p. 31),
demonstrating the harm done to students by inadvertently isolating them from English-
speaking mainstream peers. Additionally, Harklau and Colomer (2015) described the
potential for other Spanish-speaking peers to assail the “dialect features” of new arrivals.
The participants’ stories described validate the potential for harm to relationship-building
that comes from unmanaged, potentially highly negative, interactions with English-
speaking and Spanish-speaking peers.

A school leader who wishes to use a Spanish-speaking peer of a Latinx
immigrant student to assist in navigating their new surroundings must keep in mind the
pitfall of inadvertently facilitating negative interactions. If new Latinx immigrant
students arrive to a school frequently, the designation of a group of helper students with
the linguistic skills and desire to assist could help mitigate the potential for these negative
experiences to occur. However, because the students who speak Spanish well enough to effectively assist may themselves be Latinx immigrant students, the group should also be comprised of students that are not Latinx immigrants. A student group with a deliberately diverse composition of students will be able to avoid culturally-tracking students and build bridging social capital as well as fulfill the mission of helping a new student navigate a linguistically foreign educational setting.

Faculty Language Allies. As with their peers, the participants of this study described a wide variety in the quality of interactions with their teachers. Whereas most of the participants described their teachers as trying to be helpful, but perhaps not being able to, some perceived great frustration from their teachers as these teachers attempted to work with these students. These accounts generally corroborate the findings of Lopez’s (2009) survey of Latinx youth aged 16-25. In his study, he found that 65% of respondents felt that their teachers had their best interests in mind yet 44% of respondents did not believe that their teachers understood them culturally (p. 5). Whereas most teachers genuinely do want to help their students, a significant number of them are unable to do so due to linguistic or cultural reasons. Additionally, many participants described the struggle to become better acquainted with their teachers. This is significant because Stanton and Dornbusch (1995) found that the raw number of relationships Mexican-American students had with people for academic information and guidance was directly proportional to the levels of social capital they possessed (pp. 122-123). If students are unable to cultivate bridging social capital with their teachers, they will be less likely to experience academic success.
In order to help newly-arrived Latinx immigrant students, many school leaders in the American Southeast have come to rely upon their Spanish teachers as their only available resource (Harklau & Colomer, 2015, p. 155). However, this arrangement can cause unanticipated problems for both the faculty member and the Latinx immigrant student. First, many Spanish teachers privilege the form of Castilian Spanish from the Iberian Peninsula (Valdés, González, García, & Márquez, 2008), which contains linguistic markers not used by Latinx Spanish speakers. Corrective feedback from well-intentioned teachers toward a Latinx immigrant student’s use of Spanish can cause great harm to the formation of bridging social capital with teachers. Second, unfamiliarity with education-specific technical vocabulary among Spanish teaching faculty can cause miscommunications that result in unclear expectations or at worst the appearance of dishonesty. As such, bridging social capital creation is harmed despite a teacher’s best efforts.

Although a trained interpreter should always be sought for important meetings or other settings where specificity is of the utmost importance, school leaders may nevertheless still leverage their teachers’ language abilities to help develop bridging social capital between teachers and Latinx immigrant students. One of the more interesting programs at Gary Chalmers High School was the after school help program specifically designed for Spanish speakers with teachers who spoke Spanish. During these after school sessions, Latinx immigrant students would receive help with their homework but also cultivate bridging social capital with teachers directly in a setting where mistranslations had little lasting impact. Many of the conversations would drift
into advice for interacting with other teachers that did not speak Spanish or even for postsecondary educational opportunities. Because Stanton and Dornbusch (1995) indicated that the number of people consulted for educational planning directly correlated to high social capital, programs like this improved educational outcomes directly through information-giving and indirectly through building social capital.

While Spanish-speaking faculty are useful in assisting Latinx immigrant students, the ESOL teacher, whether or not a Spanish speaker, has a special significance for these students. The participants of this study universally praised their ESOL teacher, Ms. List, placing her at the center of their educational experience. In fact, the ESOL teacher at Gary Chalmers High School had recently won a prestigious award that recognized her hard work and significant contributions to her students’ successes. While not a Spanish speaker herself, she was nevertheless able to effectively serve her students through her extensive experience working in multilingual environments, notably her time spent abroad as an English teacher. This experience can be understood through the lens of repertoire-building as described by Gallo, Wortham, and Bennett (2015) where knowledge of variations among individuals in a population informs a teacher’s practice. As a repertoire-rich teacher, she was able to overcome not sharing a language with her students. Within a school that has a large number of Latinx immigrant students, the recruitment and retention of a talented ESOL teacher is high priority for a school leader.

Adoption, Integration, and Tempering of Identity

In the wake of the 2016 Presidential election, Latinx immigrant students in the American Southeast find themselves in an environment of overt hostility toward
immigrant groups (Rushin & Edwards, 2018). Furthermore, even before the development of the contemporary social climate, the American Southeast had been experiencing low levels of social capital relative to the rest of the United States (Joint Economic Committee, 2018). Despite this, the participants of this study by and large believed that their teachers wanted to help them succeed—corroborating the Lopez (2009) Latinx youth survey’s results about their educational experiences. Although these external factors likely affected individual students’ predisposition to seek relationships with other groups, there was a significant difference in the observed bridging social capital among those students that took deliberate steps to adopt American culture and those that did not.

Much of this difference seemed to be accounted for in participation in extracurricular activities and repeated exposure to other student groups. Kochanek (2005) described the building of social capital as the natural result of extended contact between people. Fortunately, within a school, participation in extracurricular programs provide exactly this opportunity. Those students that participated in activities such as sports teams, enrolled in JROTC, or attended the school’s theater shows in the evenings exhibited significantly higher bridging social capital compared to those who did not. Even students that simply conformed to the social media habits of American students were better able to navigate the social setting of their American high school. As evidenced in low extracurricular participation and racial self-segregation, deliberately exposing oneself to another group did not come easy for several participants. As a result, they clung to their comfortable and familiar habits and settings, remaining uninterested in change and minimizing their chances to integrate into the broader school student body.
Despite Kochanek’s (2005) insistence that social capital grows naturally from repeated exposure, in order for the successful process of adoption to occur, and by extension build bridging social capital, both the Latinx immigrant student and their school must opt in simultaneously. The adoption required deliberate action from both parties. First, the Latinx immigrant student must decide to adopt, at least superficially, aspects of American school life. This adoption includes a decision to shed overt Latinx-ness, as understood through old habits and traits, replacing them with new ones. Second, the school must predispose itself to adopting these newly-arrived students. Whereas a school leader cannot simply change a Latinx immigrant student’s attitude, he or she is able to position a school to be more readily able to adopt these students.

Two of the participants in this study lamented that they were not able to continue participation in an extracurricular activity in which they participated in their country of origin. Despite these exact same activities being offered at Gary Chalmers High School, they nevertheless did not participate. They each mentioned that they were uncomfortable at the prospect of being surrounded by strangers, not knowing whether or not they were welcome. Conversely, one student did continue participating in soccer, coming directly from her club in Colombia and integrating herself into the school’s soccer team. Relative to other Latinx immigrant students, she possessed higher levels of bridging social capital toward mainstream American students and teachers. While maximization of contact is certainly important, simple contact will not maximize the potential for building bridging social capital. In order to address this, the school leader should direct coaches, faculty activity sponsors, and their participating students to invite Latinx immigrant students into
their groups. Furthermore, a school leader should also consider facilitating the creation of formal activities of interest to their Latinx immigrant students and mainstream American students. There is a clear association between participation and high social capital and between non-participation and low social capital.

**Bonding Social Capital That Leads to Bridging Social Capital.**

There was a significant degree of variation of the levels of bridging social capital among the participants of this study. Even so, bonding social capital with other Latinx immigrant students was very high and built very quickly, particularly during their first experiences. Rapid development of bonding social capital was likely related to the common language shared by these students and the linguistic barrier between them and monolingual English students and staff (Mesa, Torres, Smithwick, & Sides, 2016). While bonding social capital in this study did not function as a predictor of eventual levels of bridging social capital, it was never found to hamper the development of bridging social capital. In fact, for several of this study’s participants, positive relationships with other Latinx immigrant students in their initial days in Gary Chalmers High School made it possible to navigate the overall American high school experience. This usually took the form of being assigned a Spanish-speaking peer student, always a fellow Latinx immigrant, to ease entry into their new setting and these peers were always found in their ESOL classes.

Valenzuela (1999) observed the creation of “cultural tracks” (p. 31) in her study of Mexican-American students in Texas and saw them as barriers to immigrant students’ integration into the mainstream student body, understood as bridging social capital.
### Summary list of recommendations and considerations for educational leaders by theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implication</th>
<th>Recommendation for Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The quality of a Latinx immigrant student’s first experiences in school building greatly affect eventual bridging social capital. | • Latinx immigrant students may not be forthcoming with feedback because of cultural prohibitions speaking out against authority.  
• Partnerships with a hierarchically equal member of the Latinx immigrant community can offer feedback on whether or not first experiences are good.  
• Early parental involvement in school life can mitigate poor experiences.  |
| The negative impact of the language barrier on bridging social capital formation can be overcome by finding language allies. | • Whenever a Spanish-speaking student is chosen to help, selection must be deliberate and careful.  
• Minimize cultural tracking that limits Latinx immigrant students’ exposure to others.  
• Whenever a teacher is offering to assist with his or her language skills, he or she must not be corrective of the Latinx immigrant student’s Spanish usage.  
• A high quality ESOL teacher can mitigate many negative experiences in the school.  |
| The formation of bridging social capital can be facilitated by deliberate processes of adoption. | • The opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities greatly improves bridging social capital.  
• A school leader can maximize these opportunities by curating offerings and directing activity leaders to reach out to Latinx immigrant students.  |
| Good bonding capital among Latinx immigrant students can lead to good bridging social capital with other groups. | • Compelling Latinx immigrant students to help one another may harm bridging social capital.  
• The lessons learned by an experienced student can be transmitted to new arrivals, facilitating their entry into mainstream American school.  |

While her fears of isolation were well-founded, especially when it comes to unintended consequences such as exclusion through discriminatory disciplinary policies (Raible & Irizarry, 2015), the participants nevertheless noted that they were excellent guides for one
another. Diversi and Mecham (2005) found that Latinx immigrant families did not immediately understand the cultural differences between schools in their countries of origin and American schools. Additionally, Latinx immigrant cultural norms make students behave differently than American students when confronted with authority (Martinez, 2013; Wooley, 2009). While potentially harmful, a good peer guide to the American school can transmit the lessons learned by his or her own first experiences—mitigating some of the potential damage done by negative points of contact in the first few days of arrival.

**Harming the Bridging Social Capital of Latinx Immigrant Students**

Many of the factors that would harm the development of bridging social between Latinx immigrant students and other groups in the school can be understood as the opposite of what does, in fact, facilitate this development. Whereas a good initial few days in a school building greatly help these students eventually develop higher bridging social capital, a highly negative first few days will greatly hinder this development. Similarly, having access to fellow Spanish speakers will facilitate bridging social capital development whereas having no fellow Spanish speakers will similarly hinder its development. Also, while adopting some American habits can prove beneficial for bridging social capital formation, an outright rejection of them stymies the building of bridging social capital. Some factors that cause harm to bridging social capital, however, do not have a positive opposite and solutions are more evasive.

One of these factors is the racialization of conflict between the Latinx immigrant students and other student groups, particularly the Black American students. The racial
context in the American Southeast is unique compared to other parts of the United States. First, for generations, this region has been “almost exclusively biracial (i.e., White and African American)” (Lynn, 2015, p. 116). Second, the Latinx population has only recently become noticeable in the Southeast—most notably in South Carolina where the population increased by over 400% in the period between 2000 and 2010 (Hamman & Harklau, 2015). Finally, the minoritization of Latinxs as non-White (Raible & Irizarry, 2015; Gans, 2012) conflicts with the racial assumptions brought from their countries of origin that relegate non-Black Latinxs to a higher status than Black Latinxs (Duany, 1998).

The participants of this study, whenever using a racial identifier to describe a conflict with an American student, would almost exclusively use the adjective for describing complexion, *moreno*, which refers to a person that would be considered Black in the United States. While there were a couple mentions of conflict with White students, they were very few and came from many fewer students overall. When Latinx immigrant students come to the United States, they bring along with them the racial hierarchies of their countries of origin, creating a misalignment of racial assumptions between different student groups. Ultimately, because Latinx immigrant students do not behave in a way expected of them by other student groups and other student groups do not behave in a way expected of them by Latinx immigrant students, the formation of bridging social capital between all of these groups is hampered. It’s not immediately obvious what a school leader could do to specifically mitigate conflicts arising in this manner. However,
restorative justice practices show promise in helping school leaders foster a better racial climate in schools (Payne & Welch, 2013).

Another factor that can harm the bridging social capital development of Latinx immigrant students with other student groups and teachers is the tendency to automatically group together all Latinx students, not taking into account their specific countries of origin. This grouping is not limited to high schools. Menjívar and Bejarano (2004) lumped together all Latinx immigrants because of their cultural similarities. Despite these superficial cultural similarities, however, participants of this study that addressed any differences within the Latinx immigrant student group noted the distinct separation between Mexican Latinxs and non-Mexican Latinxs. For some participants, this separation rose to the level of a conflict within their group along lines of national origin. In different ways, three of my participants mentioned this division across Mexican nationality among the Latinx students. Within the Latinx immigrant student group, the formation of bonding capital between these distinct groups is stymied by their poor relationships.

While the conflict between these two Latinx immigrant student groups was not necessarily going to harm bridging social capital formation on its own, assumptions made by American student and teacher groups that overgeneralize can harm the formation of this capital. Gallo, Wortham, and Bennett (2015), in their suggestions to improve parental participation in schools, recommend that educators are trained in repertoire building. At its core, repertoire building is the recognition that there is variation within groups of people that appear to be outwardly and superficially similar. Whereas all
Latinx immigrant students can be brought together under one of several labels, these labels can only be helpful when users of these labels recognize that there exists significant variation within the group. A school leader, specifically for his or her staff, must provide this insight if it is not already commonly understood.

**Recommendations for Additional Research**

As I conducted this research and arrived at my conclusions, more questions arose that will require further investigation. One of the first questions that arose from my investigation was whether or not Menjívar and Bejarano’s (2004) assertion that Latinx people of different national origins have many similar cultural traits and may therefore be lumped together as similar people. My finding that there is a significant division between Mexican and non-Mexican Latinx immigrant students makes me question whether this group can be treated as whole group. Along the lines of national origin, my study did not include perspectives from many Spanish-speaking countries. It seems very likely that the racial confusion that many Latinx immigrants experience when they arrive to the United States (Hoops, 2017) is affected by national origin. A Dominican Latinx immigrant, usually of a darker complexion, may have a fundamentally different initial experience that a Chilean immigrant, usually of a fairer complexion. If these perspectives had been included, the racialization of conflicts and racial self-segregation seen in Latinx immigrant students may have taken on a different form.

Another area for further research is the lens of social capital. Flora and Flora (2013) asserted that bridging social capital is held as a group rather than within individuals. Because different students had significantly different relationships with
different student groups, more research must be conducted to understand these relationships and find the borders between student groups within the Latinx immigrant group. Social capital is generated through extended interactions (Kochanek, 2005) between individuals. Further research that takes into account the differences in opportunities for the development of social capital for different Latinx students is needed. Dividing Latinx immigrant students into a high-contact group and low-contact group for analysis might yield useful insight.

Finally, because little research has been done on the bridging social capital of Latinx immigrant students in the whole of the American Southeast, there is no understanding of variations across the region with respect to community type (e.g. urban, rural, affluent, impoverished, cosmopolitan, homogenous). This study was limited in scope, only drawing participants from one school in a suburban and district-specific context. Other schools with a higher or lower proportional quantity of Latinx immigrant students or other composition of demographic traits may face different problems than those found in this school. Because much of the American Southeast is not suburban, and most of the region lies outside the boundaries of South Carolina, additional studies are needed to contextualize my findings with respect to other settings.

**Conclusion**

Educational leaders cannot realistically control many factors in the lives of their students. However, the findings of this study show that there are many factors over which they do have control and that make an extraordinary difference in the long-term academic success of their Latinx immigrant students. School leaders should pay special
attention to the first days of new students’ experiences in their school building, possibly connecting them with other Spanish-speaking peers and teachers to ease the navigation of their new surroundings. They must be mindful of the potential cultural pitfalls that may take place such as conflict among Latinx students along national, as opposed to cultural, boundaries and the dissonance between racial assumptions in countries of origin versus the United States. Because bridging social capital is a significant factor in the educational outcomes for Latinx immigrant students and, because new accountability standards now incentivize school leaders to serve these students to the best of their ability, the findings and recommendations from this study can be used to improve the quality of academic programming across the entire Southeast of the United States.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A

Interview Protocol Planning Matrix

Research Questions: What influences the development of bridging social capital between Hispanic immigrant secondary students, their peers, and teachers in the American Southeast?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Concept(s)</th>
<th>Interview Question(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch (1995) | These variables are… “number of high-status adults named as likely or current sources of information-related support,” “number of nonfamily weak ties,” “number of school-based weak ties,” “average socioeconomic level of the student’s information network,” “average socioeconomic level of the student’s friend network,” “proportion of all friends who are not of Mexican-origin,” “number of people actually relied on for academically related information and guidance,” socioeconomic status, and “language proficiency and use,” “grade level,” “self-reported grades,” “educational expectations,” “occupational expectations,” “post-high school plans” (pp. 122-123). | What do you do when you have trouble with school work?  
  • Who helps you?  
  
Tell me about your friends.  
  • Where are they from?  
  • Are they in many classes with you?  
  
Tell me about how you’re doing in school right now.  
  • What’s (not) going right?  
  
Other than class, what else do you do at school?  
  • Do you do sports/performing arts?  
  • Why (not)?  
  
Tell me about your plans after high school.  
  • Do you talk to anyone at school about them?  
  • What do they do? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Citation</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flora &amp; Flora (2014)</td>
<td>“aggressively school-oriented” (p. 117)</td>
<td>Bridging capital is understood to be that which “connects diverse groups within the community to each other and to groups outside the community” (Flora &amp; Flora, 2014, p. 127)</td>
<td>Tell me about working with your American classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoops (2017)</td>
<td>“cultural track” (p. 31)</td>
<td>Hispanic immigrants are confronted by the social distance present between them and their new white neighbors (Hoops, 2017)</td>
<td>• What is hard/difficult about it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesa, Torres, Smithwick, &amp; Sides (2016)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Language obstacles (Mesa, Torres, Smithwick, &amp; Sides, 2016)</td>
<td>How do you feel when you speak/work with your teachers and principals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What should your teacher/principal have done differently?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

The pilot study of May 2018 provided significant information for this dissertation project. Most importantly, the interview data collection showed that few questions can be reasonably addressed in a thirty-minute interview. This interview protocol contains main questions, numbered in the order they will be addressed. These questions are followed by bulleted questions that may be used if a participant is having difficulty elaborating a complete answer.

1. Tell me about how you’re doing in school.
   - What is going right?
   - What isn’t going right?
   - Do you feel like you’re learning?
   - Do you feel like you’re getting the grades you expected?
   - Is it important to you that you do well?

2. Tell me about your friends.
   - Where are they from?
   - Are they in many of the same classes?
   - How do they feel about school?
   - Do you meet your friends at school?

3. Tell me about a time you had a hard time at school.
   - What about class work/homework?
   - Who helps you when you need it?

4. Tell me about working with your American classmates.
   - Do you do group work with them?
   - Do you work with them outside of class?

5. Tell me about working with your teachers and principals.
   - Do they know how to help you?
   - What do you want them to do for you?
   - Are they doing what you expect?

6. Other than taking classes, what else do you do at school?
   - Do you do sports/band?
   - Why (not)?

7. Tell me about the things that help you feel connected to school.
   - Does anything make you not feel connected?
• How did you make your friendships?
• What are people doing to help?

8. Tell me about your plans after high school
• Do you talk to anyone about them?
• How do they help you?
• How could they help you?
Appendix C

Testimonio Assignment

The testimonio, essentially “entails a first person oral or written account, drawing on experiential, self-conscious, narrative practice to articulate an urgent voicing of something to which one bears witness” (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012, p. 523). This literary tradition will be used to gain an entry point into understanding the lifeworld of this study’s participants. The prompt below will be given to the students, who will then write as much or as little as they would like in English or Spanish. This prompt will be written in English and Spanish on the students’ assignment.

Prompt:

Write about something important that has happened to you or a friend in school in the United States. You may want to consider writing about a time when:

- …you had to work extra hard on something school related.
- …you needed help but didn’t know where to go for it.
- …a teacher did something especially helpful or unhelpful for you.
- …our school felt like a very comfortable or uncomfortable place.
- …you did something to help a classmate.

You may write as little or as much as you with in English or Spanish, whichever you prefer. Please write as much about your feelings as you are able to. You can take as long as you want to work on this essay. If you don’t quite understand what to do, just ask!