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Project Title: **Transition out of School and Into Young Adulthood: The Role of Neighborhoods on the Educational and Work Outlooks and Outcomes of Mexican-origin Youth**

It is well established that Latinos, in particular, Mexican-origin youth, have the highest high school dropout rates, ranging two to three times higher than the national average, and the lowest college attendance and graduation rates of any ethnic or racial group. While many studies have addressed this educational lag, few have seriously explored the role that geographic isolation and poverty concentration has on educational outcomes specifically for this group.

This dissertation will focus on the children of Mexican immigrants, specifically 1.5 and second generation youth who are considered to be at risk of making an unsuccessful transition into adulthood. The study is designed to explore if and how the disadvantaged urban context in which many of these youth/young adults reside helps explain their outlooks and decisions as they transition from school to work, as well as their education and work-related outcomes in young adulthood. In particular, this dissertation pays close attention to the possible influence that ethnic composition at the neighborhood level, specifically immigrant concentration and African American concentration, in addition to poverty concentration, may have on these outlooks and decisions related to school and work.

Literature suggests that norms, or the cultural milieu, at the neighborhood level may shape youth outlooks and behavior. Certain research suggests that social isolation and poverty leads to the development of an “oppositional culture”, yet, other research suggests that immigrant concentration and immigrant optimism revitalizes poor neighborhoods, by altering these norms. Social ties, particularly risky peer ties to US born minority youth, are also implicated in the hypothesis that ethnic composition at the neighborhood level might influence school and work outcomes for children of Mexican immigrants in a negative way. Does the urban context play a role in shaping the outcomes of Latino youth and if so, how? As a mixed method study, this dissertation is designed to qualitatively explore how neighborhoods shape the outlooks and decisions Latino youth make in regards to school and work and quantitatively test neighborhood conditions and mechanisms that influence their educational attainment.

This study intends to provide a richer understanding of the structural and socio-cultural characteristics of the neighborhoods in which Latino youth reside and the relationship that exists between the urban context and youth educational outcomes. In doing, this study makes a contribution to an understudied area in addressing the Latino-White educational gap.