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# The Culture of Mexican Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis\*

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## Abstract

*Many field investigators have observed the evolution of a “culture of migration” in certain Mexican communities characterized by a high rate of out-migration to the U.S. Within such communities, international migration becomes so deeply rooted that the prospect of transnational movement becomes normative: young people “expect” to live and work in the U.S. at some point in their lives. Males, especially, come to see migration as a normal part of the life course, representing a marker of the transition to manhood, in addition to being a widely accepted vehicle for economic mobility. International migration is cultural in the sense that the aspiration to migrate is transmitted across generations and between people through social networks. In this article, we develop a formal theory of the culture of migration and test it using a special data set collected by the first author as well as data from the Mexican Migration Project. We show that children from families involved in U.S. migration are more likely to aspire to live and work in the U.S. and that these aspirations, in turn, influence their behavior, lowering the odds that they will continue in school, and raising the odds of their eventual out-migration to the U.S.*

Field investigators working in a variety of settings have described the emergence of a “culture of migration” in Mexican communities characterized by long-standing and high rates of international migration. Within such communities, people come

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to valorize foreign wage labor positively, along with the behaviors, attitudes, and lifestyles associated with it. Foreign remittances enable poor households to self-insure against risks to their economic well-being and to elevate material standards of consumption. At the same time, foreign savings provide a source of investment capital that can raise household productivity as well as income. Given a greater ability to purchase both consumer and capital goods, migrants come to evince a widely admired lifestyle that others seek to emulate, and international migration comes to be seen as a tractable and accessible strategy of upward social mobility.

As migratory behavior extends throughout a community, it increasingly enters the calculus of conscious choice and eventually becomes normative. Young people who grow up and come of age increasingly expect to migrate internationally in the course of their lives. For young men, especially, migration becomes a rite of passage, and those who do not attempt it are seen as lazy, unenterprising, and undesirable as potential mates. In communities where international labor becomes fully integrated into the local culture, young men seeking to become adults literally do not consider other options: they assume they will migrate in preparation for marriage and that they will go abroad frequently in the course of their lives as family needs and personal circumstances change.

The culture of migration has figured prominently in field studies of Mexican migration to the U.S. Wiest (1973) speaks of migration as creating a “culture of dependency” and Reichert (1979, 1981) describes the emergence of a “migrant syndrome.” Mines (1981) elaborates the development of a “community tradition of migration” and Massey et al. (1987) speak of the “social process of international migration.” Goldring (1992) and Rouse (1992) and others describe the “transnationalization of social space” in migrant communities, and Alarcón (1992) refers to the “northernization” of sending towns. According to Smith (1998, 1999), migrant-sending communities are “transnational localities” where absent migrants are “always present” in local social life, politics, and culture. Drawing on these and other case studies, Massey and associates (1998) identify the culture of migration as a key link in the broader social process known as the “cumulative causation” of migration.

Studies of Mexican popular culture have documented the degree to which U.S. migration has become integrated into a variety of Mexican art forms. Durand and Massey (1995) present examples of migratory themes in *retablo* paintings, which are votive works left as offerings to religious icons throughout Mexico. Fernández (1983) and López (1995) document the treatment of migratory themes in *corridos*, popular folk ballads avidly followed by Mexico’s lower classes. Espinosa (1999) shows how Catholic religious life has been adapted to the reality of mass migration, with regular religious processions organized in honor of *los ausentes*, special masses dedicated to the migrant parishioners, the adoption of new patron saints to achieve village celebrations more in tune with the rhythms of seasonal migration, and special ministries, undertaken by village priests, to the migrant diaspora.

Although many facets of the culture of Mexican migration have been described qualitatively, no study has yet documented the existence of this culture or its effects *quantitatively*, using representative survey data. We thus have no model of the specific *mechanisms* by which migratory attitudes spread through cultural channels to affect behavior. In this article, we outline a theory stating how migrant-supporting values are spread between people and across generations in Mexico, and how they subsequently influence individual behavior to perpetuate out-migration to the U.S. We then draw on a unique source of survey data to document the existence of a culture of migration and confirm its connection to migratory behavior.

### The Cultural Transmission of Migration

The essence of the culture-of-migration argument is that nonmigrants observe migrants to whom they are socially connected and seek to emulate their migratory behavior. Seeing friends, relatives, and neighbors dramatically improve their socioeconomic circumstances through U.S. labor, and hearing returned migrants selectively relay stories of thrilling adventures and cosmopolitan experiences north of the border, young Mexicans acquire aspirations that lead them psychologically to invest less in Mexico and more in the prospect of life and work north of the border, thus increasing the odds that they actually do leave school to enter the transnational migrant workforce. The greater the involvement of a young person's family in U.S. migration, and the greater the prevalence of migratory behavior in the broader community, the greater should be the likelihood that a young person aspires to work and/or live in the U.S., as captured in the following equation:

$$U.S. \text{ asp} = f(+\text{involve}, +\text{prevalence}, \text{controls}), \quad (1)$$

where *U.S. aspirations* indicates an aspiration to live or work in the U.S., *involve* indicates the degree of family involvement in international migration, *prevalence* is the prevalence of migratory behavior in the community, and *controls* refers to a set of personal, family, and community characteristics that are held constant in estimating the effect of the former variables. The associated signs indicate the direction of the expected effects.

If the existence and transmission of such values lead to the cumulative causation of migration over time, then we expect people who aspire to migrate internationally should make fewer investments for success in Mexico. Since education historically has brought high returns for occupational attainment and income within Mexico, but little marginal benefit to undocumented migrants working in the U.S. (see Taylor 1987), we expect young people holding aspirations to live and/or work in the U.S., those from families more involved in international migration, and those from communities where U.S. migration is more prevalent

to display a significantly lower likelihood of aspiring to continue schooling in Mexico:

$$educ\ asp = f(-U.S.\ asp, -involve, -prevalence, controls) \quad (2)$$

where *educ asp* indicates an aspiration to get an additional year of education, the other variables are defined as before, and the signs once again indicate the direction of the expected effects.

Finally, we expect that those who aspire to migrate the U.S., and who do not aspire to additional schooling in Mexico, should display a higher likelihood of leaving for the U.S.:

$$Pr(migration) = f(-educ\ asp, +U.S.\ asp, +involve, +prevalence, controls) \quad (3)$$

where *Pr(migration)* refers to the probability of out-migration to the U.S., *mig* is a dichotomous variable that equals 1 if the respondent migrates within some reference period and 0 otherwise, and the other variables are defined as before. Together these constitute a structural equations model describing how cultural values supportive of international migration are transmitted interpersonally and intergenerationally, the effect of those transmitted values on educational aspirations in Mexico, and the effect of these values on the ultimate likelihood of out-migration to the U.S.

Recent work by Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), Hagan (1994) and Espinosa (1998) suggests, however, that the cultural dynamics of international migration may be substantially different for males and females. Whereas *work* in the U.S. is an important rite of passage for young men, offering them freedom, opportunities for economic autonomy, and the lure of unknown adventures, U.S. labor does not carry the same allure for young women. Indeed, the departure of husbands and brothers puts additional burdens, psychological and material, on wives and daughters left behind. Whereas work in the U.S. strongly appeals to men, women are much more ambivalent. They appreciate the potential material benefits, but dislike the short-term increase in work and responsibility, worry about the elevated risks of abandonment that are inevitably associated with male migration, and resent the loneliness they are expected to endure. As a result, labor migration tends to be initiated by men working through male-dominated social networks, not by women (Cerrutti & Massey 2001).

As men become more involved in international migration, however, women apply increasing pressure to join their husbands on trips north of the border. Once in the U.S., women encounter new opportunities for employment and autonomy, and new avenues of mobility for themselves and especially their daughters (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). For women, the United States offers a means of overcoming patriarchal restrictions prevalent in Mexican culture and society, of attaining power and autonomy within the family, of reducing the burdens of housework and child rearing, and of achieving a more egalitarian marriage. Hirsh (2000), for example, documents how U.S. migration not only changes intramarital

bargaining power of women but also provides a context for shifting the basis of marital relationships from traditional gendered spheres of mutual respect toward more intimate relations of shared trust. Pessar's (1999) review of migration and gendered relations cites numerous other benefits to women from migration, including control over budgeting and domestic decision making, leverage for shared housework, and access to economic resources outside of the household. Likewise, ethnographic accounts illustrate how gendered perceptions of settlement versus return diverge significantly, particularly on topics related to employment, privacy, and marital relations (Goldring 1996; Grasmuck & Pessar 1991).

We therefore expect U.S. aspirations for women to be manifest more in the desire *to live* than to work in the U.S., in contrast to males, who project their aspirations more in terms of *working* north of the border. Thus, the cultural transmission of migration is likely to be a *gendered* process, requiring us to consider the possibility of significant interactions between gender, aspirations, and behavior.

## Data and Methods

Our data come from a student questionnaire that was applied to random samples of school classrooms in Zacatecas, a Mexican state long known for its high rate of out-migration to the U.S. (see Durand, Massey & Charvet 1999). Students were surveyed in the capital city (Zacatecas), a medium-sized town (Jerez), and approximately two dozen smaller agrarian settlements. Population sizes ranged from about 350 to 150,000 inhabitants, and the prevalence of international migration varied from minimal to extensive. We selected agrarian settlements with sufficiently large populations to support at least secondary schools and which were located within easy commuting distance of major cities so that all respondents had roughly equal access to secondary educational facilities.

The survey focused on students in grades 6 through 12, yielding a pool of respondents who were old enough to make up their own minds and sufficiently literate to fill out a survey questionnaire. Our respondents ranged in age from 9 to 23 years and were sampled in numbers equal to their proportions at each grade level within each community. In the cities of Zacatecas and Jerez, we selected five representative neighborhoods and included all the schools mentioned within our survey. We supplemented this sample with a purposive survey of upper-level technical schools and senior high schools located in different neighborhoods of the cities. In agrarian settlements, we only surveyed students from schools that existed within the community itself.

This design yielded a usable sample of 7,061 students representing a hypothetical population of about 230,000 persons, nearly 15% of the state's student population in grades 6–12. Interviewing occurred during the 1995–96 academic year and was carried out by the first author with the assistance of two trained Mexican

fieldworkers. Students were given a twenty-minute introduction to the questionnaire that included assurance that their responses would be confidential. Since the survey contained potentially sensitive questions about parental migration, some of it undoubtedly undocumented, students were instructed not to write their names on the questionnaires. The instruments were self-administered under the supervision of the research team, which monitored classroom conditions, insisted on silence, and briefly reviewed each survey as it was turned in to screen for missing data and obviously incorrect answers. Regular classroom teachers remained throughout the period to ensure cooperation.

The five-page questionnaire began with a one-page grid that asked for basic social and demographic characteristics of each member of the respondent's family (age, education, occupation, job location, marital status, and household membership). The other four pages asked about the student's educational history; the approximate amounts of time he or she spent studying, doing unpaid domestic chores, and engaging in paid labor. The questionnaire also ascertained whether the student's father had been to the U.S. at any time during the prior year, the extent of U.S. migratory experience within the respondent's nuclear and extended families, and the respondent's own educational, occupational, and migratory aspirations.

To ensure that the youngest respondents would be able to understand and answer all the questions, the questionnaire was pretested in one rural and two urban primary schools prior to its full implementation. Questions were substantially revised after each trial. Because surveys contained many questions about behavior in the previous week, they were generally conducted at the beginning of each week to allow for better recall, with Mondays reserved for the youngest primary school students. After the completed questionnaire was turned in, the field team judged whether or not the student had been deliberately evasive or uncooperative. In the end, only 30 questionnaires were discarded, comprising less than 1% of the total sample.

Selection bias in our sample is unavoidable but actually works to our advantage. Since all students, particularly those at higher academic levels, are self-selected for economic resources, academic ability, and interest in schooling, they are *less likely* to be influenced by migration compared to the broader school-aged population. The latter group includes many young people who left school precisely to migrate to the U.S., and who, if included in the sample, would show greater susceptibility to the influence of U.S. migration within their families and communities.

### Aspirations to Migrate

In the course of completing the questionnaire, students answered two questions about aspirations with respect to the U.S.: "Would you like to go to the United States some day to work?" and "Would you like to go to the United States some day to live?" Table 1 presents the percentages of respondents answering "yes" to these

**TABLE 1: Aspirations to Work and Live in the United States by Migratory Experience in One's Nuclear and Extended Families — Students in Grades 6–12 within Selected Schools in the State of Zacatecas**

Gender and Aspiration	Family Involvement in U.S. Migration				
	None Percentage	Extended Percentage	Nuclear Percentage	Father 1–2 Percentage	Father 3+ Percentage
All students					
Want to work in U.S. some day	37.2	45.9	51.2	60.3	61.9
Want to live in U.S. some day	33.8	36.2	35.3	46.0	48.6
Ever been to the U.S.	8.3	11.4	14.5	24.4	27.0
Number of cases	724	2,173	1,454	1,540	1,170
Males					
Want to work in U.S. some day	51.2	53.8	58.5	68.7	71.1
Want to live in U.S. some day	42.2	40.7	38.6	47.0	50.6
Ever been to the U.S.	6.9	11.9	15.0	24.2	27.1
Number of cases	303	1,019	726	764	547
Females					
Want to work in U.S. some day	27.1	38.9	44.0	51.9	53.8
Want to live in U.S. some day	27.8	32.1	32.0	45.1	46.9
Ever been to the U.S.	9.3	11.0	14.0	24.5	27.0
Number of cases	421	1,154	728	776	623

questions, classified by the degree of family involvement in international migration. We also show the percentages of respondents who reported that they themselves had been north of the border.

The degree of family involvement in U.S. migration is coded into five ordinal categories. “None” means that *no* members of the respondent’s family (extended or nuclear) had *ever* been to the U.S. The category “extended” contains respondents who reported that members of their extended, but not nuclear, family had ever been to the U.S. The “nuclear” category means that someone in the respondent’s nuclear family had been to the U.S., but that the father had not migrated since the respondent began school. Finally, the last two categories contain respondents from nuclear families where the father was actively engaged in U.S. migration (i.e., he had taken at least one trip since the respondent entered school): “father 1–2” refers to families in which the father had made one or two such trips, and “father 3+” indicates families in which the father had taken three or more trips.

The top panel of the table presents information on all students regardless of gender, and generally reveals patterns consistent with our expectations. The percentage of respondents saying they would like to *work* in the U.S. rises

monotonically across categories of family involvement. Whereas only 37% of respondents in families without migrant experience expressed a desire to work in the U.S., the percentage rises steadily through the extended, nuclear, and father 1-2 categories to reach 62% among those in which the father had made at least three trips north of the border.

Although lower in every category, the desire to *live* in the U.S. is likewise positively associated with greater family involvement in international migration. Whereas the percentage saying they wanted to live in the U.S. was just 34% among those in families lacking any migratory involvement, among respondents with fathers heavily involved in migration the percentage was 49%; and the percentage rises continuously between these two extremes. Aspirations to live and work in the U.S. can in no way be attributed to prior U.S. experience on the part of the respondents. At every level of involvement, the percentage who aspire to live in the U.S. is at least twice the percentage who have been there, and the percentage who desire to work there is three times the share with prior U.S. experience. These discrepancies between aspirations and behavior suggest the tremendous potential for future migration among our respondents.

The next two panels cross-tabulate aspirations separately by gender. As expected, males express a stronger desire than females to work in the U.S., irrespective of the level of family involvement. Among families least involved in migration, 51% of males and 27% of females express a desire to work in the U.S., whereas among those in the most involved families the respective percentages are 71% and 53%. As before, the increase in the desire to work north of the border is monotonic across the intervening categories. In addition, male and female desires seem to proceed upward in roughly parallel fashion as family involvement increases.

In contrast, the desire to *live* in the U.S. rises faster with family involvement among females than among males, consistent with our hypothesis of a gender interaction. Whereas the percentage of females aspiring to live in the U.S. is 14 points below that of males in the lowest involvement category, the difference is only 4 points among those in the highest class. Moreover, the degree to which females aspire to live versus work in the U.S. is quite similar, but among males the aspiration to work is much greater than the aspiration to live north of the border.

In Table 2 we present aspirations by the degree of migratory prevalence in the respondent's *municipio*, which is the smallest unit of local government in Mexico (roughly comparable to a U.S. county). Prevalence was measured using data from a special government survey carried out in Zacatecas that asked a question about recent migrant experience (INEGI 1994). For each *municipio*, we selected persons aged 12 and older and formed the ratio of the number who reported they had been to the U.S. between 1986 and 1990 to the total population times 100. We then divided *municipios* into three categories based on the resulting ratio. A low prevalence of migration was indicated in communities where the ratio was under 3 per hundred residents. A moderate prevalence ranged from 3 to 6 migrants per

**TABLE 2: Aspirations to Work and Live in the U.S. by Prevalence of U.S. Migration in the *Municipio* — Students in Grades 6–12 within Selected Schools in the State of Zacatecas**

Gender and Aspiration	Prevalence of U.S. Migration in <i>Municipio</i>		
	Low Percentage	Medium Percentage	High Percentage
<b>All students</b>			
Want to work in U.S. someday	48.1	54.8	54.1
Want to live in U.S. someday	40.7	43.3	38.3
Ever been to the U.S.	13.5	5.4	23.6
Number of cases	2,725	1,004	3,332
<b>Males</b>			
Want to work in U.S. someday	57.1	64.5	62.6
Want to live in U.S. someday	46.5	42.9	40.8
Ever been to the U.S.	13.8	6.0	23.8
Number of cases	1,273	501	1,585
<b>Females</b>			
Want to work in U.S. someday	40.3	45.1	46.3
Want to live in U.S. someday	35.7	42.7	36.1
Ever been to the U.S.	13.2	4.8	23.5
Number of cases	1,425	503	1,747

hundred residents, and a high prevalence of migration included *municipios* with migrant prevalence ratios in excess of 6 per 100.

The relationship between migratory prevalence and U.S. aspirations roughly follows our expectations, although the pattern is not as strong or as consistent as that uncovered with respect to family involvement. Among all students, the percentage wanting to work in the U.S. rises from 48% in the low migration prevalence category to 55% in the medium category, but then fails to advance as we move into the high prevalence category, dipping slightly to 54%. The same pattern is observed among males, although as before the overall percentages are higher: the share aspiring to work north of the border rises from 57% among those living in communities with a low prevalence of migration, to 65% in communities characterized by a moderate prevalence of U.S. migration, and then falls back to 63% at high prevalence levels. Although the female increase is monotonic across prevalence categories, it is not very sharp, going from 40% in the lowest category to just 46% in the highest.

The aspiration *to live* in the U.S. is even less clearly related to the prevalence of migration in the community. Among both men and women, the percentage expressing a desire to live north of the border rises from low to medium prevalence

and then falls to very low levels as one moves into the high category. Among all students, for example, the progression is from 41% to 43% to 38%, a shift that is inconsistent with the theory we developed earlier.

Simple cross-tabulations thus indicate that the cultural values in support of migration are transmitted primarily within family and kinship networks rather than more broadly within sending communities. Among school students in the Mexican state of Zacatecas, aspirations to live and work in the U.S. are most closely connected to the degree of family involvement in U.S. migration. Those coming from families that are highly involved in transnational migration are much more likely to express a desire both to live and work in the U.S. than those coming from families with little or no involvement. Although desires to work in the U.S. are positively related to the degree of migratory prevalence in the respondent's community, the relationship is somewhat weak and aspirations to live north of the border are unrelated to the prevalence of migration. Results also suggest possible differences in the transmission of values by gender: males are consistently more likely than females to want to work (as opposed to live) in the U.S., and female aspirations appear to be more sensitive to the degree of family involvement in U.S. migration than those of males.

### Determinants of Aspirations

Although the foregoing tabulations are generally consistent with the cultural theory of migration sketched earlier, a more systematic test requires estimating well-controlled equations. We measure U.S. aspirations using two dichotomous variables indicating whether or not the respondent expressed a desire to work in the U.S. someday (yes = 1 and no = 0) and whether he or she someday would like to live in the U.S. (yes = 1 and no = 0). The degree of family involvement in migration is measured using the five-category ordinal classification described above, and accordingly, we use four dummy variables in our models (leaving the fifth category as the reference point).

The number of control variables we are able to consider is constrained by the information solicited on the five-page student questionnaires. We hold constant each respondent's prior migratory experience (1 if ever migrated to the U.S., 0 if not), his or her basic demographic traits (age, sex, and number of nonworking dependents in the household), and place of residence (rural, semi-urban, and urban—with the second category including respondents from the town of Jerez and the third from the city of Zacatecas). We also control for the degree to which respondents are involved in local work by measuring the number of paid hours of labor performed in the prior week, the number of months of paid work done in the prior year, and the number of hours unpaid household labor performed in the prior week. In addition, we include as controls a set of dummy variables indicating mother's education (none, primary only, and secondary or more) as well as

**TABLE 3: Logit Regression Predicting the Likelihood of Wanting to Work in the U.S. — Students in Grades 6–12 within Selected Schools in the State of Zacatecas**

	Primary Students		Secondary Students		Preparatory Students	
	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.
Family involvement in migration						
No migrants in family	—	—	—	—	—	—
Migrants in extended family	.360	.193	.463*	.134	.248	.127
Migrants in nuclear family	.641*	.213	.660*	.147	.105	.137
Father has 1–2 U.S. trips	1.142*	.194	.920*	.156	.569*	.194
Father has 3+ U.S. trips	1.020*	.231	.995*	.153	.742*	.209
Prevalence of U.S. migration						
Percentage 12+ in U.S. 1986–90	.033	.027	-.013	.014	.035	.033
Control variables						
Respondent's U.S. experience						
Has been to U.S.	.262	.181	.062	.101	.159	.120
Urban status						
Rural	—	—	—	—	—	—
Semiurban	-.095	.182	-.230*	.099	-.548*	.177
Urban	.211	.201	-.124	.107	-.123	.177
Demographic background						
Age	.134*	.069	.009	.031	.005	.034
Female	-.658*	.127	-.714*	.075	-.485*	.098
No. of dependents	.076*	.038	-.002	.022	-.023	.028
Work experience						
Hours worked prior week	-.002	.010	.008	.006	.004	.006
Months worked prior year	.027	.030	.052*	.017	.025	.016
Hours housework prior week	.011	.008	.017*	.005	.003	.005
Parental education						
Mother less than primary	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mother primary only	-.201	.167	-.265*	.090	-.038	.116
Mother secondary only	-.204	.179	-.598*	.106	-.332*	.130
Mother's schooling unknown	.139	.199	-.062	.119	-.115	.192
Parental educational aspirations						
Mother wants child to continue	-.452*	.187	-.469*	.098	-.367*	.123
Father wants child to continue	-.362*	.179	-.227*	.095	-.326*	.119
Intercept	-1.385	.915	.366	.476	.328	.650
$\chi^2$	155.208*		412.524*		147.480*	
-2 Log-likelihood	1602.522*		4623.818*		2772.344*	
Number of students	1,312		3,636		2,113	

\*  $p < .05$

dichotomous variables indicating whether or not the father and the mother wanted the respondent to continue schooling once the current grade level was completed.

Using these variables, we estimated equation 1 separately for students in primary (grade 6), secondary (grades 7-9), and preparatory schools (grade 10) to capture the influence of migration on aspirations at distinct phases of children's education histories. These correspond to rough age intervals of 9-11, 12-14, and 15 and older, respectively, although there may be some overlap owing to grade repetition and discontinuities in attendance. Means and standard deviations are shown for these three groups of students in the Appendix, and the equation estimates are presented in Table 3. These regressions estimate gender as a main effect, leaving interactions for more detailed scrutiny in the following section.

Other things equal, the aspiration to work in the U.S. is significantly and positively related to the degree of family involvement in international migration, although the strength of the relationship moderates as children pass from primary through secondary to preparatory school. Among primary school students, family involvement is the *leading* determinant of aspirations to work in the U.S., with respondents in the top two involvement categories having nearly three times the odds of those in the lowest category to express a desire to work north of the border ( $e^{1.020} = 2.77$ ). Moreover, aspirations for U.S. labor are unrelated either to the prevalence of migration in the community or to the respondent's own U.S. experience. Among the controls we consider, the only factors that matter are those associated with the respondent's demographic characteristics and parental aspirations. The aspiration to work in the U.S. is much lower for females, rises with age, and increases with the number of dependents in the respondent's household; it is also strongly reduced when the father and the mother want the child to continue his or her schooling. Although it is possible that parents of children who lack aspirations to work in the U.S. may decide to encourage education in Mexico (thus reversing the causal arrow), we implicitly assume that parents have an asymmetric influence on their children. Although we cannot directly test this assumption, it seems quite reasonable, especially at younger ages.

Similar patterns are observed among secondary and preparatory students. In both cases, the odds of wanting to work in the U.S. rise steadily with family involvement. Among the former, the odds of wanting to work north of the border is again nearly three times as great among respondents from families displaying the highest migratory involvement as among those in families exhibiting the lowest involvement ( $e^{0.995} = 2.70$ ). Likewise, among preparatory students the odds of aspiring to work in the U.S. are roughly twice as great in the highest as in the lowest category ( $e^{0.742} = 2.10$ ). In both sets of students, moreover, females are significantly less likely than males to express an aspiration for U.S. labor; and, as before, parental aspirations for schooling reduce children's aspirations for work north of the border. The desire for U.S. work is likewise reduced by mother's education.

**TABLE 4: Logit Regression Predicting the Likelihood of Wanting to Live in the U.S.: Students in Grades 6–12 within Selected Schools in the State of Zacatecas**

	Primary Students		Secondary Students		Preparatory Students	
	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.
Family involvement in migration						
No migrants in family	—	—	—	—	—	—
Migrants in extended family	.389	.189	.213	.133	-.049	.180
Migrants in nuclear family	.277	.207	.374*	.146	-.124	.195
Father has 1–2 U.S. trips	.657*	.203	.855*	.144	.133	.199
Father has 3+ U.S. trips	.784*	.219	.741*	.150	.627*	.221
Prevalence of U.S. migration						
Percentage 12+ in U.S. 1986–90	.023	.024	-.025	.014	-.071*	.035
Control variables						
Respondent's U.S. experience						
Has been to U.S.	.489*	.169	.640*	.098	.439*	.120
Urban status						
Rural	—	—	—	—	—	—
Semiurban	.059	.164	-.290*	.099	-.215	.190
Urban	.277	.190	.150	.105	-.249	.181
Demographic background						
Age	-.023	.063	-.113*	.035	-.095*	.037
Female	-.255*	.119	-.193*	.073	-.352*	.102
No. of dependents	-.059	.036	-.051*	.022	.004	.029
Work experience						
Hours worked prior week	-.006	.008	.006	.006	-.001	.006
Months worked prior year	-.007	.027	-.003	.016	.005	.017
Hours housework prior week	.007	.007	-.006	.004	-.005	.005
Parental education						
Mother less than primary	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mother primary only	.038	.155	.057	.089	-.078	.121
Mother secondary and above	.024	.168	.076	.105	-.195*	.137
Mother's schooling unknown	.091	.184	.074	.118	-.153	.204
Parental educational aspirations						
Mother wants child to continue	.184	.172	-.130	.097	.081	.131
Father wants child to continue	-.105	.166	.041	.094	-.067	.127
Intercept	-.280	.826	1.091*	.469	1.603*	.691
$\chi^2$	50.252*		179.477*		83.608*	
-2 Log-likelihood	1768.457*		4734.675*		2588.879*	
Number of students	1,312		3,636		2,113	

\* p &lt; .05

Table 4 presents the aspiration to live in the U.S. among students in our sample. The effect of the family involvement in migration is similar to that just described: as involvement rises so do the odds of aspiring to live in the U.S., although once again the strength of the relationship moderates as children age. Whereas *primary school students* coming from families with the greatest migratory involvement have 2.2 times the odds of those in families with the least involvement to express a desire to live in the U.S. ( $e^{0.784} = 2.19$ ), among *secondary school students* those in the highest category have only 1.9 times the odds. As before, the prevalence of U.S. migration in the community is not strongly related to the aspiration to live in the U.S. Although the coefficient attains significance in the equation for preparatory students, the direction of the effect is contrary to theoretical expectations.

Among background characteristics, females are once again less likely to express a desire to live in the U.S., although the effect of gender is much smaller than before. Whereas the gender coefficient in the three work aspirations equations ranged from  $-.485$  to  $-.714$ , in the living aspirations equations it ranged from  $-.193$  to  $-.352$ ; and only in the cases of primary and secondary students are the differences statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Unlike the aspiration to work, moreover, the desire to live in the U.S. is strongly connected to a respondent's own migratory experience: those who themselves have been north of the border are far more likely to express a desire to live there than those who have never migrated. In contrast, U.S. experience has no effect on aspirations to work abroad, and aspirations for U.S. residence are generally unrelated to parental education or to parental aspirations for schooling.

Table 5 presents estimates for a model that connects respondents' desires to live and work in the U.S. to their aspirations to continue schooling in Mexico. Students were asked if they planned to continue schooling after the current grade level. If there is a culture of migration, we expect that aspirations to migrate to the U.S. will lower the desire to invest in additional schooling within Mexico.

Among primary school students, this hypothesis does not appear to be sustained. Aspirations, family involvement, and a respondent's own migratory experience are not significant in predicting educational aspirations within Mexico. Educational aspirations are negatively influenced, however, by the prevalence of U.S. migration in the community. In communities with relatively large numbers of U.S. migrants, primary students exhibit systematically lower educational aspirations than in those where migrants are scarce. Not surprisingly, the desire to continue schooling among primary students is very strongly related to mother's education and to parental aspirations for additional schooling.

Firmer evidence for the culture of migration comes from equations estimated for secondary and preparatory students. In both cases, the aspiration to work in the U.S. appears to compete with the desire to continue schooling in Mexico, especially among preparatory students. Among them, the odds of aspiring to an additional year of schooling are about half as big among those who aspire to work in the U.S.

**TABLE 5: Logit Regression Predicting the Likelihood of Wanting to Continue Schooling after the Current Year — Students in Grades 6–12 within Selected Schools in the State of Zacatecas**

	Primary Students		Secondary Students		Preparatory Students	
	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.
U.S. aspirations						
Wants to work in U.S.	.261	.173	-.383*	.086	-.614*	.110
Wants to live in U.S.	-.078	.159	-.056	.085	-.079	.116
Family involvement in migration						
No migrants in family	—	—	—	—	—	—
Migrants in extended family	-.059	.266	.180	.157	-.137	.219
Migrants in nuclear family	-.109	.283	-.247	.167	-.385	.228
Father has 1–2 U.S. trips	-.013	.285	-.066	.169	-.475*	.233
Father has 3+ U.S. trips	-.570	.300	-.161	.174	-.640*	.251
Prevalence of U.S. migration						
Percentage 12+ in U.S. 1986–90	-.080*	.028	-.008	.015	-.078*	.034
Control variables						
Respondent's U.S. experience						
Has been to U.S.	.508	.270	.694*	.123	.439*	.120
Urban status						
Rural	—	—	—	—	—	—
Semiurban	1.561*	.208	.651*	.110	.123	.186
Urban	.685*	.237	.617*	.120	.249	.200
Demographic background						
Age	-.368*	.080	-.124*	.035	-.042	.038
Female	-.313	.165	.042	.086	.103	.113
No. of dependents	-.076	.046	-.049*	.025	-.030	.032
Work experience						
Hours worked prior week	-.001	.011	-.006	.007	.001	.006
Months worked prior year	.033	.036	.017	.018	.035*	.018
Hours housework prior week	.001	.009	.004	.005	.005	.005
Parental education						
Mother less than primary	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mother primary only	.261	.196	.243*	.097	.435*	.127
Mother secondary only	.686*	.240	1.009*	.131	.821*	.151
Mother's schooling unknown	.370	.243	.242	.129	.344	.214
Parental educational aspirations						
Mother wants child to continue	.946*	.209	1.185*	.102	.786*	.130
Father wants child to continue	1.107*	.166	.625*	.101	.993*	.129
Intercept	4.174*	1.052	.937	.535	.699	.741
$\chi^2$	344.580*		843.060*		495.107*	
-2 Log-likelihood	1066.215*		3753.130*		2221.246*	
Number of students	1,312		3,636		2,113	

\*  $p < .05$

as among those who do not ( $e^{-0.614} = 0.54$ ). Likewise, the odds of aspiring to additional schooling fall steadily as familial involvement and migration prevalence increase. Respondents falling into the highest category of migratory involvement have about half the odds of those in the lowest category to desire another year of schooling ( $e^{-0.640} = 0.53$ ), and each point increase in the prevalence ratio lowers the odds of wanting another year of schooling by around 8% ( $e^{-0.078} = 0.92$ ).

The only migration-related variable to mitigate these negative effects on educational aspirations is the respondent's own experience. Other things equal, students who have actually *been* to the U.S. actually evince a *higher* motivation for additional schooling, possibly reflecting an exposure to education in U.S. schools. As always, children's own aspirations for schooling are strongly related to their parents', but they are not significantly related to gender. At each grade level, males and females display essentially the same aspiration to continue schooling beyond the current year.

In summary, the heavy involvement of Mexican communities and families in international migration contributes to a cultural milieu in which young people invest more faith in foreign wage labor than in Mexican education as a strategy for socioeconomic mobility. The greater the involvement of a student's family in international migration, the more likely he or she is to express a desire to live and work in the U.S. Likewise, the greater the involvement of both communities and families in foreign wage labor, and the more individuals aspire to work in the U.S., the less motivated these individuals are to seek additional schooling in Mexico. In other words, as communities and families shift from low to high involvement in U.S. migration, cultural attitudes increasingly shift to increase the likelihood that future cohorts of young people will seek their fortune abroad rather than at home.

### Aspirations and Gender

Despite strong evidence for the emergence of a culture of migration in response to rising migratory involvement among Mexican families and communities, it is still possible that the cultural dynamics operate differently for males and females, as a variety of investigators have argued. Being more closely tied to the family than the wider public, the inculcation of migration-supporting values among young women may be more closely tied to family involvement and less related to community participation than among young men. The emergence of pro-migration values may also follow more directly from the personal migratory experience of females than it does from that of males.

Table 6 examines the hypothesis of such a gender interaction by showing for males and females the estimated effects of family, community, and personal involvement in U.S. migration on respondents' aspirations to live and work in the U.S. Each equation was estimated separately for males and females and the resulting

**TABLE 6: Effect of Individual, Family, and Community Involvement on Aspirations to Work and Live in the United States Estimated by Gender — Students within Selected Schools in the State of Zacatecas**

	Primary		Secondary		Preparatory	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Outcome: Wants to work in U.S.						
Family involvement in migration						
Migrants in extended family	-.003	.638*	.194	.752*	.264	.276
Migrants in nuclear family	.386	.858*	.352	.987*	.054	.230
Father has 1–2 U.S. trips	.811*	1.439*	.769*	1.102*	.573*	.654*
Father has 3+ U.S. trips	.715*	1.204*	.766*	1.254*	.858*	.717*
Prevalence of U.S. migration						
Percentage 12+ in U.S. 1986–90	.043	.028	-.023	.003	.056	.015
Respondent's U.S. experience						
Has been to U.S.	.077	.386*	.043	.086	-.032	.321*
Outcome: Wants to live in U.S.						
Family involvement in migration						
Migrants in extended family	.292	.493*	-.068	.479*	.263	-.317
Migrants in nuclear family	.160	.470*	.133	.615*	.089	-.279
Father has 1–2 U.S. trips	.346*	1.054*	.509*	1.203*	.273	.057
Father has 3+ U.S. trips	.643*	.894*	.457*	.994*	.769*	.547*
Prevalence of U.S. migration						
Percentage 12+ in U.S. 1986–90	.069*	-.017	-.033	-.016	-.076	-.075
Respondent's U.S. experience						
Has been to U.S.	.227	.715*	.578*	.705*	.349	.521*
	Primary		Secondary		Preparatory	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Intercept	-1.4679	-2.4786	.9836	-.9094	.6221	-.5782
$\chi^2$	44.810	91.060	123.374	172.508	64.870	72.168
-2 Log-Likelihood	721.295	859.540	2247.052	2354.955	1253.358	1498.096
Number of students	625	687	1780	1856	954	1159

Note: Significant male–female differences highlighted in bold.

\*  $p < .05$

coefficients for migration-related variables are presented in the table. In the interests of economy, neither coefficients for the control variables nor the estimates of standard error are shown, but statistically significant coefficients are marked with an asterisk and significant male-female differences are indicated in bold.

Consistent with the observations of field researchers, the processes by which pro-migration values are socially transmitted *do* appear to be gendered. For example, the aspiration to work in the U.S. is more strongly connected to family influence and especially personal experience for females than for males. For young women, the inculcation of aspirations to work in the U.S. is dependent on the degree of migration within their families — more so that it is for their male counterparts. Among primary and secondary students, in particular, the coefficient associated with *each category* of familial involvement is greater for females than males; and six of the eight possible contrasts are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Only among preparatory students do gender differentials moderate to insignificance, but by this time many young men and women have already left the population of active students.

Women are also more responsive than men to prior personal experience in the U.S. Among primary students, for example, having migrated to the U.S. increases the odds of males wanting to work there by only 8% ( $e^{0.077} = 1.08$ ), whereas it raises the odds of females wanting to do so by nearly 50% ( $e^{0.386} = 1.47$ ). Although there are no significant differences between male and female secondary students, at the preparatory level prior U.S. experience raises the female odds of wanting to work in the U.S. by 38% ( $e^{0.321} = 1.38$ ) compared with a small and insignificant *decline* in the odds for males.

Similar patterns are observed when we consider aspirations *to live* in the U.S. Among primary school students, female aspirations are closely connected to family and personal experiences, not to the extent of community involvement, whereas among males the reverse tends to be true. All the female coefficients for family involvement are greater than those of males (although only one of the four pairings attains statistical significance). Likewise, primary school females who have been to the U.S. have twice the odds of those who have not to want to live north of the border ( $e^{0.715} = 2.04$ ), although primary school males are only slightly more likely to aspire to U.S. residence ( $e^{0.227} = 1.25$ ). For young primary school males, however, each percentage point increase in the prevalence of migration increases the odds of wanting to live abroad by around 7% ( $e^{0.069} = 1.07$ ), whereas the degree of a community involvement has no effect on the odds that a young woman would like to live abroad.

The gender differential with respect to family involvement is even greater among secondary school students. Within each category of familial involvement, the effect participation is stronger for females than males, and all the differences are statistically significant. Likewise, personal experience in the U.S. has a stronger effect in promoting the desire of female than of male secondary students to live

north of the border, although the differential does not reach statistical significance. As with aspirations to work in the U.S., the gender differential with respect to aspirations to live abroad appears to moderate at the preparatory level. Thus, gender seems to play its most powerful role in shaping the culture of migration among students in the younger grades, *before* they reach preparatory school.

### The Link to Migratory Behavior

The final stage in the cumulative causation of international migration occurs when aspirations to live and work in the U.S. lead to a higher likelihood of out-migration by young people coming of age in communities characterized by a well-established culture of migration. Ideally, we would like to identify boys and girls who express aspirations to live and/or work in the U.S. as children and then follow them through their teenage years and young adulthood to see whether, other things equal, they display a higher probability of leaving for the U.S.

Unfortunately, we do not have access to this kind of longitudinal data. Although our data do include longitudinal event histories for household heads, these are *retrospective* life histories and respondents simply cannot reconstruct with any validity their past psychological states. Recollections of aspirations held at some earlier time are inevitably contaminated by intervening events and behaviors, and respondents consequently are not reliable witnesses to their own earlier mental orientations. The best we can do is link aspirations and behavior in the cross section. If aspirations do condition behavior, then we expect those expressing a desire to work in the U.S. to display a higher likelihood of actually embarking on a trip northward at some point in time.

Although the student questionnaire asked children to report whether they had *ever* been to the U.S., it did not attempt to ascertain the *timing* of specific U.S. trips. For a subset of the school-based sample, however, we can link students to households enumerated by Durand and Massey's (1999) Mexican Migration Project (MMP) in three sample communities: the city of Zacatecas, Jerez, and one of the outlying agrarian settlements. When we attempted to link student records with individual data from the MMP, we were able to make 268 matches, yielding detailed information on the timing as well as the incidence of migration. For these cases, we defined a dichotomous variable that equaled 1 if the child left on a trip to the U.S. in the two years prior to the survey and 0 otherwise. Using a logistic model, we then regressed this outcome on aspirations reported to us on the student survey while controlling for age and gender. Given the limited degrees of freedom, we sought to keep the model simple. The resulting coefficients are shown in Table 7.

The students in this subsample ranged in age from 10 to 18, and not surprisingly the strongest single predictor of the odds of out-migration was age. As children got older, the likelihood of leaving for the U.S. rose sharply. According to our estimates,

the odds increased by roughly 50% with each additional year of age ( $e^{0.417} = 1.52$ ). As one might expect, the coefficient for females was negative, although it was not statistically significant. Holding age and sex constant, however, the likelihood of out-migration to the U.S. was most strongly connected to prior aspirations to work there. Students who reported a desire to work in the U.S. had five times the odds of having left for the U.S. during the reference period ( $e^{1.63} = 4.95$ ), an effect that just misses attaining significance at conventional levels ( $p = .07$ ) owing to the small number of cases. There is no statistical evidence of any link whatsoever between U.S. migration and either the aspiration to continue schooling in Mexico or the desire to live north of the border. It is only the desire *to work* in the U.S. that is directly predictive of migratory behavior.

Obviously a cross-sectional correlation between attitudes and behavior does not prove a causal relationship, although it is consistent with such a relationship. An alternative interpretation is that the act of migration itself promotes aspirations to work north of the border; but the well-controlled model of Table 3, estimated on thousands of cases, has already shown that having been to the U.S. has no bearing on current aspirations to work there. We thus feel confident in arguing that aspirations to work in the U.S. arise from family rather than personal involvement in U.S. migration, and that it is the culturally transmitted aspiration to work abroad that increases the odds of leaving for the U.S. rather than the reverse.

Moreover, we wish to distinguish between aspirations, representing a general and subjective desire, and expectations, which indicate more realistic plans and assessments. We expect that had our survey questions been worded as expectations, our responses would not have changed dramatically, thereby leading to much more significant results. Wording the survey questions as aspirations actually yields more conservative results for our analysis.

## The Culture of Migration in Quantitative Perspective

Through a quantitative analysis of survey data gathered from primary, secondary, and preparatory students interviewed in the Mexican state of Zacatecas, we have confirmed the basic propositions of qualitative fieldworkers who have argued for the importance of a culture of migration in promoting international movement between Mexico and the U.S. Simple tabulations prepared for more than 7,000 students indicate that as a family's level of involvement in U.S. migration increases, children are progressively more likely to report an aspiration to live and work north of the border. Multivariate statistical models reveal that this association persists when a variety of personal, parental, and household characteristics are controlled, and that the relationship is strongest among primary school students, less strong among secondary school students, and least strong (but still significant) among preparatory students. Thus children's aspirations vis-à-vis the U.S. appear to be

**TABLE 7: Logit Regression Predicting the Likelihood of Migrating to the U.S.**  
 — Selected Students in Grades 6–12 within Three Communities in  
 State of Zacatecas

	Outcome: Migrated 1994–1996		
	$\beta$	S.E.	p
Respondent's aspirations			
Wants to continue schooling	.628	.933	.501
Wants to work in U.S.	1.631†	.914	.074
Wants to live in U.S.	-.921	.905	.309
Control variables			
Age	.417*	.140	.003
Female	-.142	.767	.854
Intercept	-10.904*	2.818	.001
$\chi^2$	13.158*		
-2 Log-likelihood	58.785*		
Number of students	268		

†  $p < .10$     \*\*  $p < .05$

shaped powerfully by familial involvement in international migration during young childhood.

The aspiration to work in the U.S. is related to other attitudes and behavior in ways predicted by the cultural of migration thesis. Those aspiring to work in the U.S. are less likely to want to continue their education in Mexico, an association that strengthens as one moves from primary to secondary to preparatory levels. Aspirations inculcated early in childhood thus later come to influence aspirations to remain in school. Those who want to work in the U.S. are less likely to invest psychologically in resources (such as schooling) associated with socioeconomic mobility in Mexico and are more likely simply to leave for the U.S., at least in the cross section. Holding age and sex constant, children who aspire to work in the U.S. are five times as likely to migrate as those who do not.

Consistent with the observations of many fieldworkers, moreover, the cultural processes involved in the transmission of migratory behavior appear to be highly gendered. In particular, the inculcation of aspirations to live and work in the U.S. are more strongly connected to family migratory involvement among females than among males; and personal experience in the U.S. appears to be far more important to instilling a desire for U.S. residence among young women than among young men. As Mexican families become more involved in U.S. migration, therefore, girls are more likely than boys to acquire pro-migratory attitudes, and to the extent

that these attitudes subsequently increase the odds of leaving for the U.S., experience north of the border is far more likely to promote aspirations to settle among females than among males.

Thus, our quantitative analyses yield insight into the social mechanisms by which the culture of migration is transmitted within a community. The more a community's families become involved in migration, the higher the likelihood that children will aspire to work in the U.S., which causes them to look northward rather than locally for opportunities and social mobility. As a consequence, they reduce their investment in the acquisition of resources for mobility within Mexico (education), and increase their investment in the prospect of migration, substantially raising the odds that they actually will migrate as they get older and, through their involvement in international migration, ultimately pass pro-migration values on to their own children. These links between family involvement, children's aspirations, and later migratory behavior are especially powerful among young women, particularly when it comes to the decision to settle north of the border. Although more work research is needed, especially on the nature and extent of the empirical link between migratory aspirations and behavior, our analysis provides the first quantitative evidence for the culture-of-migration argument made so well by earlier qualitative fieldworkers.

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## APPENDIX: Means and Standard Deviations, by Academic Level

	Primary Students		Secondary Students		Preparatory Students	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Dependent variables						
Student wants to work in U.S. someday	.607	.488	.517	.500	.467	.499
Student wants to live in U.S. someday	.495	.500	.407	.491	.327	.469
Student wants to continue schooling	.771	.420	.673	.469	.657	.475
Migration-related variables						
Family involvement in migration						
No migrants in family	.141	.348	.096	.294	.090	.287
Migrants in extended family	.264	.441	.311	.463	.330	.470
Migrants in nuclear family	.195	.396	.194	.395	.234	.423
Father has 1–2 U.S. trips	.230	.421	.218	.413	.211	.408
Father has 3+ U.S. trips	.170	.376	.182	.386	.135	.342
Community-level prevalence of migration						
Percentage in U.S. 1986–90	6.400	3.802	6.024	3.753	5.755	3.490
Control variables						
Respondent's U.S. experience						
Has been to U.S.	.154	.361	.159	.366	.203	.402
Urban status						
Rural	.276	.447	.352	.478	.168	.374
Semi-urban	.403	.491	.339	.473	.402	.490
Urban	.321	.467	.309	.462	.430	.495
Demographic background						
Age	11.588	.943	13.548	1.173	16.731	1.381
Female	.524	.500	.510	.500	.549	.498
Number of dependents	4.012	1.725	4.083	1.649	3.907	1.731
Work experience						
Hours worked prior week	2.062	7.514	2.060	6.718	3.300	9.027
Months worked prior year	.829	2.417	.948	2.505	1.726	3.333
Hours housework prior week	6.768	8.177	7.805	8.327	9.690	10.035
Parental education						
Mother less than primary	.233	.423	.276	.447	.264	.441
Mother primary only	.332	.471	.358	.479	.380	.486
Mother secondary	.264	.441	.232	.422	.284	.451
Mother's schooling unknown	.171	.376	.134	.341	.072	.259
Parental educational aspirations						
Mother wants child to continue	.705	.456	.694	.461	.671	.470
Father wants child to continue	.675	.469	.656	.475	.629	.483
Number of students	1312		3636		2123	

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