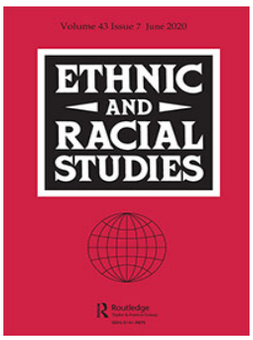

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Who benefits from ethnic capital? Group norms, social-class and education among Armenian-Americans in Los Angeles

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ABSTRACT

Sociologists show that the high levels of college-educated adults found in specific immigrant communities become a social resource, called ethnic capital, which is accessed in co-ethnic community organizations and promotes academic achievement for even the working-class descendants of these groups. But how does ethnic capital guide youth mobility? And does it benefit co-ethnic families who do not participate in these organizations? I investigate these questions through original, qualitative fieldwork with forty-two working-class, second-generation Armenian-Americans in Los Angeles. By comparing how social support for college preparation varies with organizational participation, I find that despite categorically converging with participants in graduate degree aspirations, non-participants access weaker mobility resources which distances them from perceived ethnic norms of achievement and a symbolic belonging to the co-ethnic community. I conclude that how ethnic capital benefits families varies but favours those who already possess material resources to enrol their children in co-ethnic organizations.

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KEYWORDS Ethnic capital; protective ethnicity; second-generation; education; Armenian-Americans; culture

As educational inequalities grew in the 1990s, scholars feared that the descendants of immigrant groups with lower average education levels would confront greater barriers to upward socioeconomic mobility (Gans 1992; Portes and Zhou 1993). By contrast, those in groups with higher levels, such as East-Asian communities or – more recently – Armenians (Tran et al. 2018), were hypothesized to benefit from the availability of supplementary educational organizations operated by co-ethnics – known as formal ethnic capital – which enabled even working-class youth to complete more education than previously observed (Bankston, Caldas, and Zhou 1997; Zhou

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and Kim 2006; Lee and Zhou 2017). Yet recent research on Armenian-Americans shows these after-school youth centres need not be academically oriented to be socioeconomically beneficial (Khachikian 2018), while other research challenges the gains they engender altogether. Specifically, scholars relying on robust quantitative analyses argue that ethnic capital actually engenders class reproduction, not mobility, since most immigrants occupied advantaged social-class origins prior to emigration (Feliciano and Lanuza 2017). However, mounting qualitative research shows that resettlement stratifies immigrants, complicating the second-generation's ability to identify with the ethnic community and access its ethnic capital (Louie 2004; Lee 2006; Lew 2006; Lee and Zhou 2014). In this paper, I reconcile these perspectives by asking, "how does participation in ethnic youth organizations affect how working-class Armenian-Americans in Los Angeles benefit from ethnic capital?"

In answering this question, I demonstrate that access to ethnic youth organizations is associated with the ability of immigrant parents to guide their US-raised children into the educational expectations they hold for them, which affects not only how these youth relate to the ethnic identity and co-ethnics, but the *kind* of ethnic capital they access. By this, I respond to recent calls from Feliciano and Lanuza (2017) who have called for critical research on immigrants' community resources, and Besbris and Khan (2017) who argue theorization should seek to expand and deepen the scope of extant theories through careful description. To that end, I anchor my analysis in seminal contributions from Gans (1979) and Turner (1960). I synthesize these two perspectives to depict how *functional ethnic capital* sponsors status attainment for 1.5 and second-generation Armenian-Americans who access it through formal organizations which supplements the resources they already access through their parents. By contrast, *symbolic ethnic capital* drives co-ethnic peers who do not attend such organizations to compete for tokenistic representations of success and negotiate more conflicted, dissonant relationships with parents who struggle to guide their children's mobility directly.

Though they comprise a small proportion of all US immigrants, Armenian-Americans present a strategic case for investigating ethnic capital for at least three reasons. First, Armenians are a diasporic group (Kuznetsov 2006) and retain strong ethnic identification (Bakalian 1992) that centres around the legacy of the Armenian Genocide and its continued denial (Muge Gocek 2014). Second, they are residentially concentrated within regions of Los Angeles that house multiple immigrant generations, allowing me to investigate ethnic youth organizations. Third, as shown in Figure 1, Armenian-Americans are an educationally select immigrant group, but are racialized not as Asian, but White, in contrast to existing research on educationally select immigrants and ethnic capital. Therefore, examining ethnic capital among

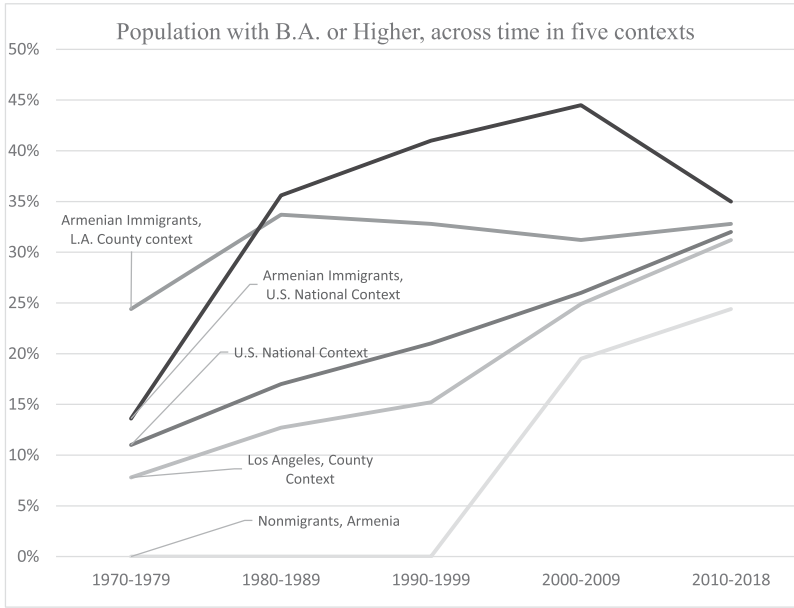

Figure 1. Selectivity over time.

Note: Author's calculations based on US Census CPS ASEC data pooled by year of entry; nonmigrant data based on UNESCO (2012) Institute for Statistics.

Armenian-Americans can contribute to a more generic conceptualization of how group-level educational attainment among immigrants becomes a social resource for descendants of these groups.

But what are the family-level factors that guide access to these resources? Moreover, could factors that are unique to this group nonetheless produce generic expressions of class differentiation previously documented among other immigrant groups in the US context such as second-generation Vietnamese (Bankston, Caldas, and Zhou 1997), Chinese (Louie 2004), Korean (Lee 2006; Lew 2006) and Latinx origin youth (Fernández-Kelly 2008; Smith 2008)? If so, what would these class distinctions suggest about the contemporary immigrant integration experience in the United States? Below, I address these related questions by drawing on over two years of original ethnographic fieldwork.

Immigrant selectivity and community resources

Studies have shown that non-economic factors such as racial phenotype can alter the effect of immigrant parents' economic resources (Luthra, Soehl, and Waldinger 2018). For example, Bankston, Caldas, and Zhou (1997) showed that even when they live in impoverished neighbourhoods and attend low-

SES schools, the children of Vietnamese immigrants tend to perform better than similarly disadvantaged peers in the same settings. Yet the contextual attainment perspective introduced by Feliciano and Lanuza (2017) contends that much of the academic achievement realized by contemporary working-class origin children of immigrants should actually be expected because many immigrants, despite differences in their individual educational attainment, tend to rank in the highest percentiles of their home countries' education distributions.

Thus, the educational performance of various second-generation groups has its origins in the selectivity of immigrants to the United States, including second-generation Chinese and Koreans of non-college educated immigrant parents. Because US officials prioritize college-educated immigrants and their extended families, some immigrant groups in the US context have college completion rates that are disproportionately higher than not only the rates of their home societies but also higher than the US population at large, making these groups educationally hyper-selected (Lee and Zhou 2015). This group-level measure is associated with individual level achievement for second-generation East-Asians (Feliciano 2005), and community resources among these and other groups like Nigerians and Armenians (Tran et al. 2018).

For example, among East-Asian immigrants, hyper-selectivity is associated with ethnic capital, formal and informal educational resources that are available to economically disadvantaged members of these communities. These informal benefits, such as ethnic success frames or knowledge about how to navigate American educational institutions, are cultural resources that benefit even non-college educated immigrant families in Asian-immigrant groups. Similarly, in studying hyper-select Nigerians, Imoagene finds second-generation Nigerians invoke the cultural belief that "it is un-Nigerian" to not attend college and thus associate educational attainment with ethnic identity (2012), reflecting how educational-selectivity passively structures the cultural environment inherited by the second-generation and provides informal, normative support for education. Research also shows that ethnic capital can be accessed formally through participation in ethnic community-based organizations, either for-profit businesses or non-profit community centres (Zhou 2009) which offer a host of social services and supplementary education (Zhou and Kim 2006; Byun and Park 2012) such as test preparation or tutoring (Park 2012), and cater to an ethnic clientele (Lee and Zhou 2017). Newer research on such ethnic-serving organizations among Armenian-Americans shows that although educational gains may arise from participation at these sites for otherwise disadvantaged 1.5 and second-generation youth, that these spaces need not necessarily be academically inclined to generate academic gains. Instead, cultivating political consciousness in these youth organizations renders ethnic identification a socially protective factor in second-generation educational attainment because organizational

membership extends academically and occupationally beneficial cultural capital to the children of non-college educated immigrants (Khachikian 2018).

From Khachikian's protective ethnicity perspective, however, Armenian immigrants arrive in the context of reception with shared pre-migration cultural values, such as a common diasporan desire to preserve ethnic heritage, that guides post-migration ethnic identification and thus access to formal ethnic capital. The contextual attainment perspective buttresses this observation by illustrating the relative cultural homogeneity of many educationally select immigrants' pre-migration class-cultural origins, through a common cultural disposition. Therefore, if access to ethnic capital is predicated on the second-generation's ethnoracial identification with its parental national origin community as past research suggests (Imoagene 2017; Lee and Zhou 2017; Khachikian 2018) then all second-generation youth of a given educationally select group should be able to benefit from their respective national origin community's ethnic capital.

Stratification of ethnic identities

However, abundant evidence suggests that this prediction might not be supported because the cultural dispositions parents bring to the context of reception are reconfigured after-migration and affect how children relate to co-ethnics. Immigrants' post-migration stratification results in what psychologists call intergenerational value discrepancies between immigrant parents and their children (Phinney, Ong, and Madden 2000) underlining the importance of parents' *post-migration* material resources.

For example, Lew (2006) shows that co-ethnic socialization among Korean-Americans in ethnic-serving churches exposes middle-class immigrant families to social support and status symbols of academic achievement. But children of non-college educated co-ethnics who do not attend perceive those who do to be privileged and as representing an ethnic ideal. Louie (2004) similarly finds that among Chinese-Americans, co-ethnic norms of achievement are driven by wealthier co-ethnic élite who author the meanings of ethnic status emulated by disadvantaged co-ethnics. Co-ethnics with fewer resources thus negotiate a secondary stratum of career success defined by vocational and quasi-medical degrees that approximate the ethnic success frame of higher-SES co-ethnics. Lee (2006) also shows that social-class based differences among working-class and middle-class Korean-Americans lead to tensions surrounding whether youth feel as though they meet the requirements of "being ethnic" when they fail to achieve the academic expectations of their immigrant parents.

These findings suggest that although educationally select immigrants may share pre-migration social-class cultural characteristics, the process of migration destabilizes that status and jeopardizes who can continue to

possess it in resettlement. When this status becomes inert, the context of reception favours co-ethnic élites with material resources who determine how status is culturally represented in resettlement, through practices such as membership in ethnic organizations (Min 1984, 2008) that co-ethnics perceive as symbolic of the ethnic identity. By comparing their children to higher achieving co-ethnic families as an economic frame of reference then, relatively disadvantaged families inadvertently frame strategies for high-status careers as representative of their national origins, and their children interpret these symbols as such, even though they are decidedly generic status symbols used by all.

Culture and mobility

Gans (1979, 11) provides valuable conceptual tools to detect how this form of symbolic capital might emerge among Armenian-Americans. Gans theorized that the labor-market constraints confronted by immigrants in the context of reception would control the cultural forms that their economic practices would assume. Thus, immigrants' economic behaviour such as specialization in particular entrepreneurial niches or the creation of community organizations would be cultural practices observed among the first-generation because they functioned to solve shared socio-economic problems in the context of reception where opportunities to pursue alternative lifestyles are limited. Gans theorized these would gradually become symbolic of the ethnic identity as a latent function of integration. But if co-ethnic socialization exposes second-generation youth to these symbolic representations of ethnicity, then why, after exposure to co-ethnic networks through their families of origin, do some succeed in attaining educational goals if others are instead distanced from them, as research above illustrates?

Harding (2010) maintains that although youth can be exposed to specific representations of status, such as high-status careers or educational credentials, how well these representations resonate with individual desires is not enough to ensure youth attain their goals. In addition, youth must have concrete social support, such as mentorship relationships, that supply knowledge and resources to support the pursuit of these goals. This support eventually enables strivers to gain membership into the social community they associate with these goals. Individuals who provide social support then, by brokering resources such as knowledge or motivation, socially sponsor youth mobility by inducting them into social communities, as originally conceptualized by Turner, who distinguished between sponsored and contest mobility (1960). In sponsored mobility, élites provide social support for select strivers whose ascribed characteristics appeal to them, whereas in contest mobility élites are uninvolved in support and merely evaluate strivers who compete for status they achieve through merit. Although Turner originally relied on

these ideal types to contrast organizational cultures between British and American educational institutions from the "top down," I rely on this typology to understand hierarchies from the "bottom up" and to characterize youths' relationships with organizational resources in their ethnic communities.

Methods

Data for this paper were generated using a survey questionnaire, semi-structured interview guide and field notes. While the survey measured respondents' nativity, educational expectations, parental national origin and educational background, interviews provided respondents an opportunity to reflect on their survey responses. In interviews, I asked respondents to provide reasons for their survey responses and discuss their home lives, how they imagined their futures and how they prepared for college. I recruited forty-two respondents total primarily born to parents with only a high-school education: twenty 1.5 and 2.0-generation youth who participate in an Armenian youth scouting organization, and twenty-two 1.5 and 2.0 generation peers who do not, drawn from a local public high-school. To measure formal ethnic capital, I asked respondents to discuss their knowledge of ethnic community-based organizations and their experience in participating in them. By varying on the causal factor Khachikian (2018) theorized supports educational mobility, participation in ethnic organizations, this sample was constructed to investigate whether ethnic capital operates for Armenian-Americans as it does for other immigrant groups.

Setting

The specific city chosen for this study, Glendale, CA, was shown by economists and sociologists to be a high mobility community in the Equality of Opportunity Project (EOP) (Chetty et al. 2017) due to the unusually high rates of intergenerational income mobility observed among students in the local community college. This suggests that there might be wider structural and organizational resources at play, exogenous to ethnic institutions, that support youth educational mobility in ways that existing accounts of ethnic capital do not capture. EOP research finds that the local community college in Glendale, CA ranks seventh – of 2,463 colleges nationwide – in successfully moving students from the first quintile of the income distribution to the top fifth.

Ethnic youth organization

The ethnic organization chosen for this study is the local branch of a non-denominational, international Armenian diaspora non-profit organization that specializes in various youth athletics and extracurricular activities, such

as scouting, and participates in local, regional and international tournaments. The organization is over 100 years old, was founded in 1917 in the waning days of the Ottoman Empire by Armenian political élites in exile who fled Turkey during the Genocide. While not religious, the organization supports a political ideology which emphasizes maintaining political consciousness among later generation Armenians globally, and advocating for reparations and transitional justice from the Republic of Turkey. The organization operates branches worldwide, in cities where there are large populations of ethnic Armenians.

Relationships with sites, access and data collection

As a former member of the organization, I initiated contact through a known scouting member who facilitated access. Although I participated briefly in the organization over twenty years ago as a scout, long before the respondents I interviewed were born, I was a newcomer to all the members I met. My familiarity with the site was instrumental in gaining access, I still had to earn the trust of my respondents, some of whom were initially concerned about how I would represent the organization or its aims. With approval for this study from my university's human-subjects research board, a youth leader was asked to circulate a recruitment e-mail to all members of the troop, nearly 120 in total, asking for volunteers to participate in the study. After participating with respondents in equal measure at their activities, I recognized most respondents grew more committed to working with me and provided reliable data. By chance, one of the senior volunteers at the organization introduced me to a teacher at the local high-school whom she knew through her own personal relationships, and thus began a multi-site referral chain as is common in ethnographic fieldwork (Rivera 2012).

The high school

With approval from the school district to enter the high school as a researcher, I asked the teacher to circulate an e-mail to any teachers who would consider working with a researcher to understand their students' college preparation plans. Several teachers responded and after a week of observations at three different classrooms, I settled on a creative arts classroom due to the unstructured time students had and because it was a required course for graduation so students in the course represented the school broadly. The expressive nature of the classwork required collaboration and open discussion which allowed students to be more at ease and allowed me to build relationships with them more quickly than in conventional English and Math classrooms where students were required to "be on task." In the classroom, I introduced myself and passed around survey sheets asking youth to take them home, obtain parental signatures and return them if they desired to participate in the interview. Across four different class periods, I gathered a total of thirty-

four survey questionnaires and interviewed as many of the students who were interested in doing so, for a total of twenty-two interviewees, as described below in Table 1.

Although the school district serving the community ranks nationally as a top district, publicly available reports show the high-school has the highest rates of poverty, earning it designation as a Title 1 school with 69.1 per cent of its 2,310 students coming from socio-economically disadvantaged homes. Moreover, 17.1 per cent of the students are English language learners and although the school has a 94 per cent graduation rate, only 35.5 per cent of graduates complete all courses required by the University of California and California State University system for admission. The largest national origin groups at the school are Filipino, Mexican and Armenian. Because the segmented assimilation model predicts that working-class students from educationally select groups can achieve even in disadvantaged contexts, this high school was chosen because it replicates that model's empirical conditions, enabling me to contribute cumulatively to it.

Data analysis

Using MaxQDA qualitative data analysis software, survey questionnaire responses were tabulated and reported as given in Table 1 whereas interview and field notes were analysed using several iterations of a dual-cycle coding practice as described by Saldaña (2009). In first cycle analysis, pre-coded questions were identified and coded for values. In secondary coding, attributes of

Table 1. Sample characteristics ($n = 42$).

	Non-members ($n = 22$)	Members ($n = 20$)
Parental education		
Mother at least BA (or more)	13%	25%
Father at least BA (or more)	4%	20%
Parental employment		
Stay at home mother/unemployed	9%	25%
Mother employed full-time	64%	50%
Other work arrangement	27%	25%
Stay at home father/unemployed	0%	0%
Father employed full-time	91%	70%
Other work arrangement	9%	30%
Parental home ownership		
Own	14%	55%
Rent	86%	45%
Youth's educational expectations		
High School Diploma	5%	0%
BA/BS	9%	0%
MA/MS/MBA	32%	25%
MD/JD	50%	65%
PhD	5%	10%
Post-high school college pathway		
Community college (transfer to 4-year)	82%	35%
Direct to 4-year (after high school)	18%	65%
Total	22	20

data were added as new codes, including a combination of emotion and values coding. Examples include anxiety, family tension, co-dependence, attachment, pride, optimism, strain, competing for resources and so on. Finally, I used code co-occurrence to identify associations between first-cycle and second-cycle codes. Through secondary coding, I discovered the code for ethnonym (Armenian) appeared more frequently with non-members than members of the organization and proceeded inductively to discover how the use of this phrase appeared as it did.

Findings

Data show that both participants and non-participants share similar elements of a pre-migration cultural orientation as observed through the high educational expectations all parents held for their children. However, important differences arise in the parent-to-child relationship when comparing families that participate and those who do not. Whereas organizational participants benefit from social capital that helps these youth achieve the high expectations parents hold for them – effectively sponsoring their occupational mobility – non-participants more frequently reported conflict with and dissonance from their parents with respect to planning for their futures. The strict enforcement of lofty status attainment goals without concrete social support for them led non-participant youth to characterize their college plans as a contest for meeting the expectations of parents and other co-ethnic adults, which they reflexively called "the Armenian thing." Below I first present the experiences of organizational participants to reveal how participation provides access to functional ethnic capital which sponsors youth mobility. Next, I contrast with those who do not participate and illustrate how these youth access symbolic forms of ethnic capital due to their parents' limited ability to better support them.

Functional ethnic capital and sponsored mobility

At the organization, children are minimally supervised by adults, who instead rely on youth leadership to create a physically safe and positive environment. Scouting activities are held on Sunday mornings when parents drop off their children, who find their way to their respective groups, which are age and gender segregated. The youth then embark on various activities for the day which include field-trips, hiking at a nearby park, or problem-solving tasks that require team-work such as constructing shelters with primitive materials. As they age, youth gradually ascend the various groups and become eligible for youth leadership positions, when they become responsible for managing budgets, obtaining legal and medical clearances for organizing activities and eventually managing other leaders, all forms of cultural capital previously

documented by Khachikian (2018). By providing leadership training and career guidance, participation in the organization satisfies Armenian diasporic norms of indebtedness to co-ethnics and identifies academic purpose by enabling youth to explore a variety of career options that can benefit co-ethnics.

Andrew, a high-school senior whose parents emigrated to the United States from Iran during the 1979 revolution spoke readily about these organizational effects. At the time of our interview he had just been admitted to UCLA to pursue his bachelor's degree in molecular biology:

> **Can you tell me some more about what you do here?**
> Yeah so I am in the Armenian health initiative. I want to help with the medical aspect of things … after I finish medical school … I want to be able to give back to the communities either in Armenia, or just provide healthcare here for Armenians in LA County.
>
> **Would you say that is common with other participants here?**
> Well, I think the common goal is to … spread the Armenian culture, the Armenian identity. We've been raised with, sort of told over the years, it's important to preserve our culture … our identity … if we don't do it, who will? So we encourage the next generation to be involved within the Armenian community … a lot of scouts go to Armenia to fulfill … community service projects in rural communities. So coming here brings people together but it also sort of pushes us outwards to help other Armenians who aren't as close to us.

Andrew's narrative highlights the functional dimension of organizationally embedded ethnic capital, whereby the organization provides youth the opportunity to apply their education in the charity of both the real and imagined ethnic community. However, not all gains were necessarily programmatic outcomes of the organization. For example, several other members spoke about how the social capital accessed at the organization benefitted them by chance, but was still vastly helpful as Linette's narrative highlights:

> I was talking to the mom of one of my scouts and I told her I am studying to be a registered dietician and she's like, "that's what I do. I work for that company!" She kind of told me, "start volunteering here, let me hook you up with this person." Through that experience, I worked in one of this company's branches in San Diego and then I got into this really competitive accredited internship program here in Los Angeles. She showed me the ropes. I thank her all the time because of it.

These sorts of organizationally embedded gains are an important aspect of ethnic capital that previous research has documented. However, in extending that research, I found that these gains supplemented the supportive parental relationships that respondents already possessed. Probing revealed that parents of organizational participants were better prepared to align their children's striving with their expectations, a key indicator of educational mobility previously shown by past stratification scholars (Kim and Schneider 2005).

Karineh, for example, was one such youth who entered the organization when she was 8 years old. She mentioned her mother actively sought information during middle school to ensure she could attend the local magnet high school. Karineh was born in Greece where her parents – neither of whom completed any formal education beyond high school – were offered asylum after they fled Iran as refugees. After resettling in Los Angeles, her parents borrowed from friends and family to open an Armenian bakery, where they both work today:

> She was talking to everyone, aunts, her friends, even like customers at the store! My mom was always on top of it, she pushed a lot.
>
> **What would you say she pushed for?**
> Just to keep me in touch with what was best. She pushed me to stay in ballet, to stay here in scouts, to continue with Armenian language classes, all that.

At the time of our interview Karineh was a freshman in college at a local California State University where she enrolled directly after graduating high school because her parents strongly discouraged attending a community college. She indicated she planned on eventually becoming a high school principal or district official and expected to earn a doctorate in educational leadership and was deciding between a PhD and EdD. She sought her specific bachelor's degree programme because it allowed her to concurrently complete her teaching credential so she could work as a K-12 teacher upon graduating college.

> **When did it become clear for you that you were going to go to college?**
> I mean there was no other option. I wasn't going to just work and … my dad's the number one advocate for education … He always pushed me through it. My parents basically provided me everything in order for me to go to a four-year university … They didn't really want me to take the community college path and neither did I.

Although many of these youth respondents relied on co-ethnics for their mobility, they instead highlighted the role of family members in motivating and supporting their mobility. Seline, a second-generation respondent whose parents never attended college, was preparing to earn a joint MBA and M.S. degree in Civil Engineering, which she grew interested in after participating in a job shadowing opportunity that the organization facilitated. She discussed how her parents encouraged her to pursue any career she enjoyed, as long as she could earn a graduate degree for it. Seline lauded organizational alum for the networking and mentorship they provided her, and analysis revealed that these relationships not only helped her develop time management and leadership skills useful in any career, but also helped her discover a passion for using her knowledge in civil engineering to oversee environmentally sustainable development projects in Armenia. However,

when asked if she thought of any of these mentors as role models, she responded:

> … I don't really have role models, but the best example would be my mom, because she moved here from Iran when she was 21, at a time when Americans hated Iranians so much, and she didn't know anyone. And she didn't have any education. She couldn't speak English. But she just- she put that all aside, and she got through it. And then she got a job … It's just- if they were able to come here from a different country without knowing the language, and raise a family, then I should be able to do the same, whatever hardships I have.

These data evidence that organizational participation merely supplements the preexisting parental support youth already access at home, to sponsor youths' educational and occupational mobility.

Symbolic ethnic capital and contest mobility

However, parents of youth who did not participate in the organization also held high expectations for their children. Unexpectedly though, data revealed that non-participants were more likely to come from economically strained households, mention financial duress in interviews, and to relate to their parents in markedly different ways compared to participants. Often these youth disagreed with parents about educational goals and responded to perceived co-ethnic community norms and identity as though they were a burden. For example, Marina, whose father has only a high school education and whose mother has completed some college coursework, plans on attending a community college before transferring to a California State University campus. There she plans to earn her undergraduate degree in psychology as a pre-medical major primarily to satisfy her parents who dissuaded her from pursuing creative writing. When asked what she thought her parents expected of her, Marina responded:

> You know, the Armenian thing. My parents always said that they want to see me sign my name with "doctor" in front of it, or like something high. Like they've always said that since they both came here from a different country … they couldn't really go to school because they had to work and … never developed their skills to have an actual career. And my parents always said, "Don't end up like me. Have something like – a career, a backbone." And my mom's dream is for me to be a doctor, for me to have doctor in my name.

Aspiring for a post-graduate degree is common to many upwardly mobile-second generation youth as shown by Louie (2004); Zhou et al. (2008) but was framed as symbolic of the ethnic identity as previously shown by Sara Lee among educationally select Korean-Americans. Indeed, several other non-participants framed their educational goals as an "Armenian thing." When asked why she "ethnicized" her educational goal, another respondent,

Anna, whose mother had completed some college and father only high school, explained:

> **Why do you think that that's an Armenian thing?**
> I don't know, I feel like, Armenians we always have this like, chip on our shoulder about survival and resistance and … I think that's the thing, that's the reason why we want lawyers and doctors, and I think we want the title more than the job. I definitely think we want the title. I feel like my mom wants to go my aunt's house and be like my daughter is a doctor, you know what I mean? They like showing, you know?

Similarly, Anaïs mentioned extended family as a source of both competitive comparison and information for her own college preparation plans. Overall, these respondents discussed ethnic norms of striving in tokenistic status achievements which indicated they perceived these educational credentials as being symbolic of an ethnic ideal. Without support to pursue these goals, however, their striving can be characterized as contested (Turner 1960) where learners are competing not just for resources to acquire ethnic status symbols, but for recognition from the wider co-ethnic community and extended family. When asked why she aspired for a Master's degree in Business Administration, Anaïs responded:

> I don't know, my parents? The Armenian mentality of all lawyer! doctor! lawyer! doctor! I'm like you know what? I'm sorry to crush your dreams guys, but I don't want to be a lawyer or a doctor. So at least a master's is like a way to prove them and prove to myself I could get there without being a doctor or lawyer, because I'm not doing it for you. I'm doing it for me. I could get a higher degree if I wanted …

Turner's analysis provides a powerful interpretation of the institutions and credentials from the subject's perspective to characterize the social context where students develop aspirations to mobilize from high school to a 4-year degree granting institution. Although Anaïs' mother completed high school, her father dropped out of high school, and yet they both expect her to earn an advanced education. This educational goal becomes symbolic of the ethnic norm, however, or *symbolic ethnic capital,* when parents enforce the ethnic success frame but provide few resources to pursue it. Students who did not participate in the organization frequently admitted that their parents had no understanding of how hard it is for them to achieve their expectations, largely because they are unfamiliar with US higher education.

Similarly, Meghan is a senior in high school, takes classes at the local community college and works up to 5 hours a day to contribute to the family income. At the time of our interview, she had been actively exploring both medical and law school as post-graduate options:

> **What do you think you need to know that you don't know now?**
> I just want to know, for example I have two options: it's either the medical field

> or law. I want to see how I end up, in all aspects of life, from both fields. It's like, will I be happier in the medical field? How is my job going to be? Am I going to be able to take care of my family? My parents? How much debt am I going to be in? Am I going to be satisfied with my job? And the same questions with law. I just want to know what I'm going to be happier with, because I've been led to believe that these are the two main paths you have to take if you want to be financially stable. And I've done my research … even with your advanced education and everything you're not guaranteed a stable income.

Meghan lamented that her mother regularly drew on the example of her older cousins who work as attorneys. She spoke of them resentingly but noted that although her relationship with cousins is strained because according to her parents their careers "are supposedly what everyone is supposed to be doing," she has still consulted with them about graduate school options and timing. When asked what she thought her parents expected of her, Meghan added:

> So I don't end up like them basically.
>
> **How do you know that?**
> Because they've told me first of all, and second of all it's kind of transparent. Growing up I saw them struggle so much … My mom didn't pass her radiology technician licensing exam and she took the test 7 or 8 times … because she isn't fluent in English … and she's been in this country for 18 years, you know? So it's difficult. Um, she expects me to go through school get a very stable job and get an active income, because I'm fluent in English … and … I'm going through the education system here, they didn't do that. My dad was a dropout, he struggled for like 23 years just to get a livable income. They struggle now just to be financially stable …

However, Meghan's college preparation plans do not accommodate participating in ethnic youth organizations, and thus benefitting from formal ethnic capital:

> **Have you heard of any of the Armenian organizations? Do you go to any of them?**
> Yeah, of course I've heard of them. No, I don't go.
>
> **Do you have friends who do? Why don't you go?**
> Yeah, I have friends that go. I know people that go to a lot of different places like that. It's just that money is a really big problem for me. All of my friends who … do different extracurricular activities, it's because they're financially supported, and they have the time to go do these things … I prioritize the money first, I have to work.

As these narratives reveal, for second-generation Armenians who do not participate in ethnic organizations, the ethnic success frame is symbolic of a privileged, perhaps élite, status within the co-ethnic community and in pursuing it, they must compete for recognition as a prize among extended

family. Respondents like Meghan and Anaïs, whose parents simultaneously enforce the ethnic success frame and present few if any resources to support it, compete not just with classmates for this status, but with co-ethnics who embody the ethnic ideal of academic success largely because their parents are less able to guide them into the expectations they hold for them. In line with Feliciano and Lanuza's interpretation (2016), the informal ethnic capital that these youth access comes primarily in the form of academic aspirations which they perceive to be an ethnic norm, and – to a lesser extent – knowledge about post-graduate options through extended family.

Conclusion

Although parents' educational expectations for their children are comparable among non-college educated families who participate in the ethnic organization and those who do not – owing to their pre-migration cultural orientations as the protective ethnicity and contextual attainment models suggest – class stratification in resettlement leads to ethnic capital being used *differently* by ethnic Armenian families in Los Angeles. Functional ethnic capital sponsors mobility for organizational members (Turner 1960), but leads non-members to compete for symbolic representations of it (Gans 1979), rendering *symbolic ethnic capital* a latent function, or externality, of *functional ethnic capital*. Ironically, youth whose mobility is socially sponsored by co-ethnics are less likely to describe their particular success frames in ethnic terms. Regardless, nearly all the supports they rely on to pursue their academic ambitions and career goals are co-ethnics. Cohort peers who do not participate in the organization had weaker supports, had parents who were not home or small-business owners, but readily described their educational aspirations as part of an ethnic norm that they strove to achieve. The lack of resources led these learners to compete for recognition from immediate and extended family in exchange for achieving ethnic educational norms.

These findings support the hypothesis that ethnic identification with an educationally select group on its own can be socially protective of socio-economic mobility but qualify the benefits youth can access. Specifically, youth must come from homes where parents are able to guide their children's behaviour into the expectations they have for them in order to mobilize. This analysis suggests formal ethnic capital is not an essential benefit inherent to immigrant groups, but simply a class resource. Whereas past research operationalized class boundaries using parental education (Louie 2004; Lee 2006; Park 2012), I showed that even when considering primarily the children of immigrants who on average only have a high-school education, class distinctions arise during resettlement and favour parents who are more

knowledgeable about college preparation, and are usually home or small-business owners. For the most disadvantaged youth of educationally select groups then, educational striving becomes not just a contest for meeting parental expectations, but for a symbolic belonging to the ethnic community as previously shown among East-Asian immigrants in the United States. Moreover, while these data present new evidence for old claims, they are also among the first of their kind to analyse how group-level education becomes a social resource for immigrant communities *beyond* the case of East-Asian Americans. Specifically, data showed that among Armenian-Americans group-level education supports formal ethnic capital when immigrants respond to diasporic norms of collectivism.

Future research can more fully investigate the community college pathway frequently reported by youth who did not participate in the organization. While it is ultimately beyond this study's research design to determine whether respondents converge in their socioeconomic destinations, population-level findings on this community (Chetty et al. 2017) suggest students who attend the local community college can expect to see significant gains in their income mobility. To achieve that, however, based on the data presented non-members will probably have to negotiate more competing demands on their time, including work and family obligations, than members. Future research could contribute by incorporating a longitudinal research design and following students into the community college. Such an approach would illustrate whether the socially protective practices and knowledge accessed within co-ethnic networks could potentially be redistributed across ethnoracial lines via social capital, an important mechanism that some scholars have argued is key to more equitable intergroup outcomes but has yet to be seen.

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