

MINORITY STATUS AND SCHOOL CHOICE:

The Experiences of African American and
West Indian Immigrant Parents in Hartford

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Research Question



- Does anthropologist John Ogbu's theory on immigrant versus involuntary minorities explain any differences in parental views on school choice application processes?

Background: What is Ogbu's Theory?

Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance

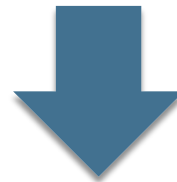
“The System”



“Community Forces”



“Minority Educational Strategies”



“Social Adjustment & Academic Achievement”

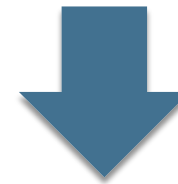
Background: What is Ogbu's Theory?

□ Voluntary Immigrants

- Positive dual frame of reference
- Includes West Indian immigrants

□ Involuntary Minorities

- Negative dual frame of reference
- Includes native-born African Americans



Orientation Towards Education

Background:



- Choice differs along socioeconomic lines
 - Unclear what this difference really looks like
(Schneider et al. 1998)
- Rational Choice Theory
(Bell, 2008)
- Parental choice does not equate with interest
(Hamilton & Guin, 2005)
- The myth of the West Indian advantage
(Doodoo, 1997; Model, 2008; Waters, 1999)

Why Does Ogbu Matter to School Choice?



- Very well known & studied theory
- Is school choice really the most appropriate method to equalize education?
 - ▣ Designed to help historically disadvantaged populations
- Intersection of Ogbu's theory and school choice
 - Does ethnicity matter in school choice?

Thesis



- While Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of school performance does not sufficiently explain different attitudes of West Indian immigrant or African American parents towards schooling in general or Hartford Public Schools more specifically, it might explain the differences in parental decisions to participate in school choice or instead, opt to remain in their local school.

Methods & Data Sample

	West Indian Immigrants	African American
total	5	3
applied for school choice	2	0
offered seat at choice school	2	n/a
enrolled in a non-local school	0	0

1: Orientation to Education in General



- Regardless of race, every parent recognized education as important
 - “School is important” (AA)
 - “Education is very important to me. I make it very important for my children” (WI)
- Education is ticket out of poverty

- Does not support Ogbu’s theory because there is no ethnic difference

2: Orientation to Urban School System



- Two parents voiced distrust with HPS
 - 1 West Indian; 1 African American
- Six parents spoke vaguely positive about HPS
 - “Satisfied” & “it’s good” (WI & AA)
- Does not support Ogbu’s theory because no clear pattern emerged

3: Orientation to School Choice

	West Indian Immigrants	African American
total	5	3
applied for school choice	2	0
offered seat at choice school	2	n/a
enrolled in a non-local school	0	0

But, no strong opinions either in support or against school choice were voiced by West Indian or African American parents

Ogbu's theory might partially "fit"

4: Orientation to Local Schools

- All parents chose their local school
 - It's "part of the community" (WI)
 - "We only have one car and my husband needs it. I work close..." (WI)
 - "I don't have the time in the morning" (AA)



Is proximity more important to lower income minority parents?

Ogbu's theory might partially "fit"

Ogbu & School Choice

- Ogbu's theory is too vague
 - Too many caveats
 - Contradictions
- Consequences:
 - How effective can intra-district choice be?
 - Do ethnic differences exist? What are the implications?

Although more research is needed, this suggests that Ogbu's theory might explain ethnic differences in orientation to school choice and proximity

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