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“To Advance in life”: Adolescents' Career Aspirations in Barrio Los Bambues, Bucaramanga, Colombia.



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ABSTRACT

Los Bambues is a low socioeconomic status (SES) barrio tucked away in the municipality of Giron, in the Metropolitan area of Bucaramanga, Colombia. This study observes a case of nineteen adolescents from the barrio, who are members of a youth program, in order to learn more about their career aspirations and who or what enables those aspirations. It discovers that family ties play the largest enabling role and categorizes these family ties into three groups: liberating, binding, or both (liberating and binding). The majority of adolescents, thirteen, are classified as possessing liberating ties, two with binding ties and four as both. These ties are also deemed to be the most impactful on adolescents' aspirations out of all extra-individual factors considered in barrio Los Bambues' ecosystem. Drawing from recent developmental perspectives of *plasticity* and *positive youth development* (PYD), both of which recognize an adolescent's potential for positive developmental outcomes within any context but under supportive conditions, this study supports the view that "good kids [can also come] from *bad* neighbourhoods."

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¹ Adapted from the title of a study by Elliott et al. (2006), "GOOD KIDS from BAD NEIGHBOURHOODS: Successful Development in Social Context."

ACRONYMS

UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
SOWC	State of the World's Children
PYD	Positive Youth Development
ZA	Zona Afecto
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
ELN	El Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Colombia
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia
MAB	Metropolitan Area of Bucaramanga
MESEP	Misión para el Empalme de las Series de Empleo, Pobreza y Desigualdad
WFP	World Food Program
COP	Colombian Pesos
USAID	United States Agency of International Development
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OFP	Organizacion Feminina Popular
CRECER	Construyendo procesos de desarrollo humano
CIDEMOS	Corporación para la Investigación y el Desarrollo de la Democracia
NNA	Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes
DUA	Diversión, Unidad y Amistad
EST	Ecological Systems Theory or Ecosystems Theory
bEST	Biological Ecosystems Theory or Bioecosystems Theory
PVEST	Phenomenological Variant of the Ecosystems Theory
SES	Socioeconomic Status

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.1. About the Research	6
1.1.1. The Research and its Relevance	6
1.1.2. Research Purpose and Questions.....	7
1.2. Brief History and Context	8
1.2.1. Colombia.....	8
1.2.2. Metropolitan Area of Bucaramanga.....	9
2. METHODOLOGY.....	11
2.1. Research Methods.....	11
<i>Qualitative Research Paradigm</i>	11
<i>Qualitative Research Design</i>	11
2.2. Sampling [and Access]	12
2.3. Data Collection and Analysis	13
<i>Study Limitations</i>	14
2.4. Cross-Language Issues	14
2.5. Ethical Considerations	15
2.6. Quality in Qualitative Research.....	17
3. STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER.....	17
4. DESCRIPTION.....	18
4.1. Barrio Los Bambues	18
<i>Early Days and Living Conditions</i>	19
<i>Employment</i>	20
<i>Organizations in Los Bambues</i>	21
4.2. Zona Afecto	21
4.3. Los Bambues Adolescents in Zona Afecto.....	22
5. DISCUSSION	23
5.1. Family Ties and Career Aspirations of Los Bambues Adolescents	25
<i>Liberating Family Ties</i>	27

<i>Binding Family Ties</i>	28
<i>An Element of Both</i>	30
5.2. Barrio Effects.....	31
5.3. Beyond the Family and the Barrio	34
<i>Zona Afecto and the Acknowledgment of Family</i>	34
<i>Beaneath Family Ties: Parents' Participation in Community Organizations</i>	35
<i>Before Family Ties: Adolescents' Individual Agencies</i>	36
6. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND DISCUSSION.....	37
6.1. Ecological Systems Theory.....	37
6.1.1. Ecological Systems Theory in Los Bambues.....	39
6.2. Family and the Neighbourhood.....	40
<i>Family</i>	40
<i>The Neighbourhood</i>	41
<i>Socio-economic Status, Family and the Neighbourhood</i>	42
6.2.1. Family and the Neighbourhood in Los Bambues	43
<i>Family</i>	43
<i>The Neighbourhood</i>	45
<i>A Neighbour Resource: Parents' Participation in Community Organizations</i>	46
6.3. Plasticity and Positive Youth Development (PYD).....	47
6.3.1. Plasticity and PYD in Los Bambues.....	48
<i>Implications for Individual Agency</i>	48
7. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER DIRECTIONS.....	49
REFERENCES.....	51
PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE FIELD	57
APPENDIX 1 - Interview Guide for Los Bambues Adolescents (English/Spanish)	60
APPENDIX 2 - Compressed Interview Data	62
APPENDIX 3 - Adolescents' Family Ties	64
APPENDIX 4 - Rating of Parental (Maternal) Activism in Los Bambues (Sorted)	66
APPENDIX 5 - Parental Typologies and their Impacts on Childhood and Adolescence.....	67

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. About the Research

1.1.1. The Research and Its Relevance

The 2011 edition of UNICEF's *The State of the World's Children* (SOWC) report is aptly titled "Adolescent: An Age of Opportunity." This report underscores the importance of the adolescent period¹ in a child's developmental process and laments that "in a global effort to save children's lives, we hear too little about adolescence" (Lake, 2011). Greater focus on the development of adolescents, it argues, would both "enhance and accelerate the fight against poverty, inequality and discrimination" and "lasting change in the lives of children and young people can only be achieved and sustained by complementing investment in the first decade of life with greater attention and resources applied to the second" (UNICEF, 2011).

While we may "hear too little" about adolescence in mainstream media or in the development arena, research abounds on adolescence in academic literature. However, these studies are disproportionately focused on adolescents' problematic or delinquent behaviour, especially in low-income, high-risk settings (Lerner, J. V. et al., 2009). This is understandable as low-income neighbourhoods have often been shown to increase stress factors that reduce warmth, involvement and supervision, factors that, along with poor parenting, can increase adolescents' behavioural issues and antisocial tendencies (Black and Krishnakumar, 1998; Brody et al., 2003; Kohen et al., 2002). *But* studying delinquent behaviour does not altogether provide much information about the resources necessary for adolescents to succeed if indeed the objective is to *apply greater attention and resources to adolescents in order to achieve lasting change* in their lives.

Moving beyond the problematic characterization of adolescents in an effort to learn about thriving adolescents and the circumstances under which they thrive, proponents of Positive Youth Development (PYD) – a new approach that views ALL adolescents (including those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds) as societal

¹ Most researchers agree that adolescence occurs somewhere between the ages of ten and nineteen: 10-14 being largely characterized by physical bodily changes and 15-19 being marked by the brain's development and capacity for analytical and reflexive thought, and a growing sense of identity (UNICEF, 2011).

resources with talents, strengths, interests and future potential that can be realized – have provided many researchers and practitioners looking to steer away from negative and oftentimes inhibiting views of adolescents in low-income, high-risk communities with an alternative (Damon, 2004). While the approach understands that difficulties and developmental challenges do exist, it “resists conceiving of the developmental process [*solely*] as an effort to overcome [them]” (ibid, p. 15).

Focusing alone on problematic adolescents only disserves adolescents who flourish despite their stereotyped outcomes. In essence, the PYD approach provides a voice for those adolescents, especially in disadvantaged circumstances, whose familial and neighbourhood resources have allowed them to not only thrive, but to succeed in their respective *ages of opportunity*.

1.1.2. The Research Purpose and Questions

To fulfill a thesis course requirement in my Masters' program, I went to the Andean region of Colombia to conduct field work in a neighbourhood called *Los Bambues*. When I arrived, there was evidence of programs and groups for parents (mainly mothers) so I decided to focus on one of these. A few interviews later, I realized, due to false attribution, that my intended topic would not be viable. Luckily, during one of the interviews, a woman had mentioned an adolescents' group (formed through a community program called *Zona Afecto*), which her daughter was a part of. I decided to reroute to explore the adolescents' interests in the group, along with their aspirations and dreams. What I became fascinate with, however, was the breadth of those aspirations.

In literature on adolescence, various studies have documented the relationship between neighbourhoods (peers, school environments, etc) and educational achievement, but not many have documented the one between familial influences and career aspirations or vocational development (Bryant et al., 2006; Keller and Whiston, 2008). Some recent works, however, have begun to explore the links between parental modes or attachment types and an adolescent's choice for a future career (Germeijs and Verschueren, 2009; Palos and Drobot, 2010). Thus, to contribute to this area of study (howbeit from a different context) with the aid of the

PYD approach and emerging discourse that questions the existence of a significant association between low-income neighbourhoods and poor outcomes, this study purposes to elucidate upon the career aspirations of a case of adolescents in order to explain how those aspirations are further enabled by the adolescents' familial and neighbourhood resources.

Research Questions

To fulfill the above purpose, this report answers the overall question:

How do extra-individual factors contribute to adolescents' career aspirations in Los Bambues?

In doing so, it answers the following specific questions:

- What types of families are evident in Los Bambues and how do these families' types and/or their circumstances contribute to adolescents' career aspirations?*
- How does Los Bambues itself contribute to adolescents' career aspirations?*
- Which of these extra-individual factors is more influential and why?*

1.2. BRIEF HISTORY AND CONTEXT

1.2.1. Colombia

In Colombia, where this study occurs, internal warfare has persisted for more than sixty years. The murder, in 1948, of populist politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán resulted in "La Violencia," a decade of fighting among various non-state armed groups (UCDP, 2011). The early 1960s saw a coalition government formed by the two major parties (Liberals and Conservatives) which excluded other actors. As a result, the mid-1960s saw the onset of guerrilla groups such as FARC, ELN, and EPL whose activities were financed illicitly. In the mid-1980s, large landowners and narco traffickers also formed their own paramilitary groups to protect themselves from the guerrillas. In the 1990s, while FARC increased in size and aggressiveness, a new right wing paramilitary group (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC) also joined the fray (Rochlin, 2011). Although some groups disarmed later in the 90s, ELN, FARC and AUC remain active today, along with emerging threat from neo-paramilitary groups who now fight over coca-producing turfs with sea access (The Economist, 2011).

The 1990s wrought havoc on Colombia's economy and security – many were killed while others were forcefully displaced, losing their homes and livelihoods in the process (Rochlin, 2011). This, amid other national security concerns, prompted the USA to create Plan Colombia in 2000, a significant contributor to Colombia's ability to suppress the insurgency (Felbab-Brown et al., 2009). Economic reforms under the plan also contributed to an improved business climate, the attraction of greater foreign investment and GDP growth (ibid.).

Despite these gains, the country is highly unequal, with a poverty rate of around 50% (Rochlin, 2011; Martínez, 2007). Poverty (and extreme poverty), living conditions and unemployment have even worsened in certain areas despite national and international efforts, with a significant proportion of the affected being children and adolescents (Paternina et al., 2009). Gomez (2004) characterizes these marginalized groups as the “other Colombia,” poor populations that are neither visible to the public nor in the media. Furthermore, Colombia's poverty and inequality has contributed to its “housing problem,” a scarcity of affordable housing which has driven poor people to live in the most basic of infrastructures with the most minimum of dignity (Castillo, 2004). Within such margins exists Los Bambues, a neighbourhood that is characterized by poverty and unemployment and whose families (including children and adolescents), as a result of unaffordable housing outside the neighbourhood, dwell in the basest of homes.

1.2.2. Metropolitan Area of Bucaramanga

With a population of more than 1.2 million, the metropolitan area of Bucaramanga (MAB), is the fifth largest in Colombia (“Bucaramanga,” 2010). The MAB consists of the city of Bucaramanga and the municipalities of Giron, FloridaBlanca and Piedecuesta. The city is one of the most well-organized in the entire country, with modern infrastructure, and plentiful amenities and services. It has a very educated citizenry, with seven universities and other institutes, and enjoys close proximity to Barrancabermeja (some two hours by road), the home of Ecopetrol, Colombia's state-owned oil company. At 18.5% (data from 2009), the city of Bucaramanga has the lowest rate of poverty in Colombia (MESEP, 2010).

Los Bambues, where this study takes place, is a barrio¹ (neighbourhood) in the municipality of Giron, located along a river called *Rio de Oro*. It is also the poorest barrio in Giron, and one of the poorest (if not the poorest) in the MAB (Moreno, 2011). Indeed, Los Bambues seems invisible as no official data exists on the neighbourhood and few people outside of the barrio know of its existence. Later in the paper, I construct the history and context of the barrio based on the information provided by participants. The following offers a geographic visualization.



<www.bucaramangacity.com>



Bing Maps

¹ 'Barrio' is Spanish for neighbourhood. I use 'barrio' when referring to Los Bambues to remind the reader of the context. I use 'neighbourhood' when referring to other neighbourhoods, especially those in literature.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Methods

Qualitative Research Paradigm

Stemming from the ontological assumption, *interpretivism* allows for “constructed realities that generate different meanings for different individuals, whose interpretation depends on the researcher’s lens (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). In essence, it alludes to the presence of the *self* in the research process and outcome. From the epistemological assumption, *social constructivism* allows for subjective meanings of experiences, where complexities are sought and the focus is on the specific contexts in which people live (Creswell, 2007). This study is guided by these philosophical assumptions under what Patton (2002) classifies as the tripartite *social construction, constructivist, and interpretivist* perspectives where researchers are not only “conscious about their own perspective...but [also] view the social world as socially, politically and psychologically constructed” (ibid., p. 267). It also follows from these perspectives that the researcher does not *start* with theory but inductively develops them through the research process (Creswell, 2007). Similarly, this study does not begin with theory, but instead grounds itself in the perspectives of the participants, and later uses theory to explain these perspectives (ibid.).

Qualitative Research Design

Adherents of the *social construction, constructivist, and interpretivist* perspectives are interested in understanding specific cases in a specific context (ibid.). Consequentially, and as a result of the purpose, this qualitative study uses the *case study* design in order to explore one bounded system (or case) – an object of study which is bounded by time, setting or context – over time through detailed data collection from various sources to produce a “case-based description and case-based themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73).

The study further uses an *instrumental case study*, that is, it focuses on an issue and then selects a bounded case to illustrate it (ibid.). Specifically, the study uses the case of adolescents in Zona Afecto, a community youth program (an already established bounded system) to explore adolescents’ career aspirations and the influences

behind them in order to produce case-based descriptions and themes. The case is bounded by time (one month of data collection) and by place (barrio Los Bambues).

More methodological issues including access, sampling, data collection techniques, and ethical considerations are considered next.

2.2. Sampling [and Access]

My access to Los Bambues was facilitated by a group of Catholic Sisters who perform charitable duties in the barrio and with whom I had been connected by a colleague. To determine which adolescents were best suited for the study, I needed to sample purposefully to “select information-rich cases whose study [would] illuminate the [research] questions” (Patton, 2002, p. 273). I was referred to the first adolescent by an adult participant whose daughter was in the ZA program. From that adolescent, I solicited other group members' names and as a result, snowballing became the sampling strategy (Creswell, 2007). When school began a few weeks later, finding adolescents became less easy, resulting in the interviewing of whoever was available, a convenience sampling strategy. Because I volunteered to teach English thrice a week to the children in the barrio, I went there in the morning (to teach those who studied in the afternoon) and stayed until the afternoon (to teach those who studied in the evening) – the time in between classes, I sought out interviewees.

When school began, ZA also began their weekly meetings on Wednesdays, and like me, twice a day to accommodate all members. Wednesday was one of my teaching days so these became, in addition to interview days, group observation days. During the meetings, I noted who the participants were in order to try to interview them afterwards, i.e. during my break on other teaching days or on non-teaching days when I went to the barrio.

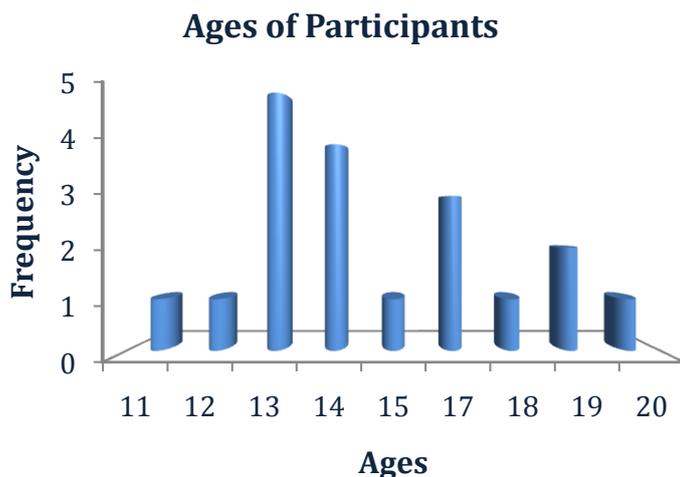
Sampling and *access* are tricky, especially when field work time and resource constraints are factored. However, it was my proactive approach (i.e. not letting interview chances ‘slip’ away and going to the barrio on days when interviewees were free as opposed to when *I* was) that helped me prevail.

2.3. Data Collection [and Analysis]

“We do not simply “collect” data; we fashion them out of our transactions with other men and women” (Coffee and Atkinson, 1996, p. 108).

Primary data for this study was derived from semi-structured interviews and participant observations carried out with six adults (four mothers from the barrio and two ZA staff, also women) and twenty-one adolescents between January and February 2011. Although the adults are not the primary study sample, their disclosures are used to construct a context for the barrio and a description of the ZA program – both of these occur later.

The adolescents ranged from age eleven to twenty, with the majority being girls due to availability and the composition of the ZA group itself. All interviewees gave their consent and all were informed that the data would be used to produce a thesis paper. Adolescents were not comfortable with their names being disclosed; therefore, in text citation is done using participant numbers (#s) - #s being the order in which they were interviewed. Consent was given to record nineteen of the twenty-one interviews – the other two chose not to be recorded. Of those twenty-one, two were inadmissible – one had to leave almost immediately to run an errand and the other left part-way through. Thus, nineteen interviews comprise the study sample. The following charts the age distribution of the interviewees.



Three interview guides were used: one each for the mothers, adolescents, and ZA staff. Adolescents were questioned about their families, the ZA program, their career aspirations and their dreams, with a few questions being modified or added during

the process (see Appendix 1 for adolescent interview guide and Appendix 2 for interview aggregate data). Participant observations occurred during ZA group meetings, ZA parent meetings, and time spent visiting and or interviewing adolescents and their parents. Documents regarding the program were obtained from ZA staff, and further information about the context was gathered online from websites of the municipality and city of Bucaramanga. The translated data from these sources were then synthesized in Microsoft Excel and successive spreadsheets were used to further compress the information from which themes and other points of analysis were discovered.

The earlier quote is a reminder of the interpretivist root of this study and it acknowledges that this report is not only a consequence of the research design but also a product of the data collected through *my* interaction with the interviewees.

Study Limitations

The two month interview period was limited and the scope of the study was small as it did not pursue the issue of gender, although it does, in the paper, allude to the presence of gendered female roles in the study context. Furthermore, it investigated some of the adolescents in the ZA program, not *all* adolescents in Los Bambues; thus, discoveries relate to the *case* of interviewed adolescents. Lastly, in the barrio, female interviewees tended to be more gregarious and easier to find and this is manifested in the disproportionately female sample, although it is posited that this disproportionality had negligible effect on the findings as the paper is interested in aspirations of *all* interviewed adolescents, *not* in the difference in aspirations between genders of interviewees.

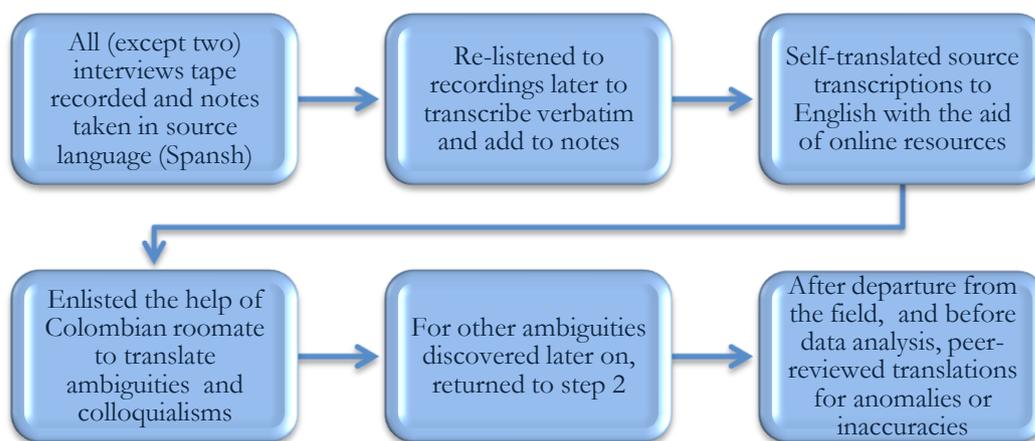
2.4. Cross-Language Issues

Before entering the field, I had an intermediate knowledge of Spanish due to a previous immersion in a Spanish context. When I began the interviews, my Spanish abilities were on the lower rung of the sociolinguistic competence ladder and this allowed me to interview and take notes directly in Spanish (see Squires, 2008, 2009). Temple (2008, p. 357) states that “words evoke experiences” – this is especially true in Colombia where words are complimentary to bodily expressions – and she suggests

“choosing words to produce rhetorical effects rather than simply moving meaning across languages.”

Acutely aware of the language issues in this study, I noted underlying meanings as supplied by body language inflections. After each interview, I meticulously transcribed and translated with the help of my translator, a young Colombian who was knowledgeable about proverbial sayings and privy to the latest colloquialisms. Fortunately, my interviewees were very patient with me, even as I appeared puzzled at some ambiguity. And but for a few questions that I had to repeat and a few colloquial phrases that I had to clarify, my language abilities appeared sufficient during the field work process.

Flowchart of Transcription Process (adapted from Lopez et al. 2008)



2.5. Ethical Considerations

Do no harm; informed consent; privacy, confidentiality or anonymity; informants' preferences; and genuine access to the field are some of the qualitative ethic principles that have been presented over time (Gilgun, 2006; Clifford, 2000). Another views the researcher as obliged, not to a professional code of ethics, but to the host community's moral codes (Peled and Leichtentritt, 2002). Ramcharan and Cutcliffe (2001) offer an 'ethics as a process model' where trust is maintained, consent is continually re-established, and the researcher-participant relationship is sustained over time. Shaw (2003, 2008) further cautions that, in field work, researchers should be attentive to power relations, reciprocity and contextual relevance.

The majority of these I knew I could deal with, but two I found a little more challenging. My anxiety over reciprocity – what I would *give back* to my eventual host community – began long before I arrived in the barrio. I was fraught with guilt over the idea of entering a community to question people in order to garner data with which to produce a thesis report, the contents of which I knew would only graze the surface of any discoverable truths, given the complexity and multi-layered nature of human relations; and giving nothing back – I had insufficient money to buy gifts to distribute and besides, to whom do you give and to whom do you not? My guilt was assuaged when, on the night of my introduction to the barrio, a child asked me to teach English to the barrio's children. I immediately acquiesced and a few days later, committed to teaching English twice a day, thrice a week. I became known as *the English teacher*¹, and fortunately for me, a telenovela by the same name also began airing on TV (although I never did see an episode), further raising my popularity. I also made it imperative to *share* information about myself with the adolescents in order to reciprocate what they shared with me.

Power relations were my other area of concern. The last thing I wanted to appear to the barrio was *rich*, although to the adolescents (and understandably so), that was exactly what I was. If not, how could I have afforded to come to Colombia from Canada and live there for months without working? I explained to them the virtues of the Canadian student loan program, and how it was money that needed to be paid back soon, with interest. And I told them of my struggles to survive in Colombia, something which eventually resulted in my early exit from the country. While they may have been convinced that I was not rich, my *status* as a foreigner meant that I was still viewed (justifiably) as being different in some way.

This is not to say that teaching English, sharing information about oneself and tapering power relations are enough to dismiss ethical concerns, but it is to recognize their role in assuaging (although not completely eliminating) *my* most egregious concerns. Essentially, I discovered that money or money-based remunerations are not the only way to provide reciprocity – some creativity or luck (if a community asks for something within one's abilities) just might suffice.

¹ The telenovela, "La teacher de Ingles" debuted in Metropolitan Bucaramanga in February 2011.

2.6. QUALITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

For the *social construction, constructivist, and interpretivist* perspectives in qualitative studies, the evaluative criteria of credibility, transferability and dependability are applied (Patton, 2002). These three in turn measure trustworthiness, and when added to the ideas of dependability (systematization of the research process), authenticity (consciousness about researcher's perspective and acknowledgement of others') and triangulation (the inclusion of multiple perspectives), provide a strong guide to judge qualitative work (Lincoln and Guba, 1986 as cited in Patton, 2002)

Credibility implies that we return data or analysis to the subject group; transferability refers to the applicability to theory, not the generalization from sample to population; and dependability refers to the ability to trace one's theoretical, methodological and analytical choices (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, as cited in Endacott, 2008). I plan to translate part of the study to Spanish and forward it to interviewees whose contacts I still have who may in turn avail it to other adolescents. True to the research design, this paper does not attempt to generalize about the entire population of adolescents in the barrio, but hopes to connect observations about those who were interviewed with emerging directions in adolescent literature. Saved journals and documents will allow the traceability of the research process. To further improve the trustworthiness, Endacott (2008) suggests persistent observation, continuous data analysis and alertness for contradicting evidence, all which were preformed during and after the field work process. Finally, an acknowledgement of my *self* in this process, as I have done earlier, fulfills the authenticity criteria.

3. STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

This paper's structure reflects the logic and chronology of both the field work and writing process. It began with the customary introduction, context, research relevance and questions, and methodology. Now, it goes into the core of the paper – the description; discussion; and theoretical perspectives and discussion – before it wraps up with some concluding remarks.

The description section – otherwise known as findings – is a construction of ‘facts’ from the data gathered at Los Bambues and aggregates only the information provided by participants. I use the word ‘description’ so as to not evoke a quantitiveness that the word ‘findings’ might. The succeeding section contains the discussion, my analysis of the ‘facts’ provided in the description. These two sections are separated so that the reader may distinguish more clearly between the exact information (as exact as possible) gathered from the field *and* the analysis constructed from that information.

Theoretical perspectives – an outline of some useful theories and perspectives – follow the discussion, a sensible succession due to my field work process as I arrived in the field with little theory. It also follows, as mentioned earlier, from the *social construction, constructivist, and interpretivist* perspectives that where the researcher does not begin with theory but connects with theory through the research process. By positioning theory *after* the discussion, I also *emphasize* the participants’ own constructs of their experiences. The subsections of this section are the theoretical discussions where the theory is used to explain the observations from Los Bambues, thereby placing it in a broader perspective and connecting it with similar works.

Finally, the paper concludes with a few summative sentences and some suggestions for further research.

4. DESCRIPTION

4.1. Los Bambues

The historians of Los Bambues, as I discovered, were Los Bambues inhabitants themselves, and the following has been aggregated both from information provided by them and from personal observations.

Early Days and Living Conditions

Barrio Los Bambues is at least eighteen years old. The longest dwelling inhabitant with whom I spoke recounted to me her earlier days in the barrio, some eighteen years prior (all the other adults that I spoke with had been living there for at least

fifteen years). When she moved to the barrio, there was no piped water, electricity, or sewage system. Clothes were washed along the river and cooking water, which was later boiled for usage, was fetched at the same site. Water and electricity arrived a number of years after wards but until now, there is still no sewage system. Moreover, when she moved to the barrio, there were only a few families, but now, the barrio is home to more than sixty families, a population of at least two hundred and forty persons (sixty families with a rough average of four per household).

The plot of land, on which the barrio sits, was bestowed by the Municipality of Giron to people who have been displaced – most of the inhabitants that I spoke with were ‘financially displaced’ (it was the only *accommodation* they could afford) although displacement through natural disasters, especially flooding, mudslides and landslides, was also common. Land plot in the barrio is administered under the jurisdiction of its elected president – the barrio elects a president every three years – who adjudicates on a case by case basis. However, the municipal bestowment is not altogether altruistic – although there is a collective title kept by the president, no one has a legal individual land title and the issue of rent is a bit muddled. All adult participants spoke of paying, as best as they could, utilities such as water, electricity and gas (for cooking) and all spoke of having moved to the barrio because it was the only left place that they could go, having heard of it through friends, relatives or acquaintances. Some who work, or have a family member who does, are able to pay rent through a contractual commercial agreement that grants them ownership of the property but not the land on which it sits. Others, who are less able, pay intermittently. The rest simply cannot.

The barrio is situated along the ‘Rio de Oro’ (River of Gold) in Giron. Some homes are situated right beside it on a precipice elevated just a few metres. These are the *poorest* of the homes. One of the families that I encountered, a family of four (a mother and three children), lived in a one-room wooden shack along one such precipice that dangled precariously. In 2010, Colombia had a particularly difficult rainy season which increased the occurrence of flooding, mudslides, and landslides that washed away homes, devastated lives and damaged roads and infrastructure (AFP, 2010; pers. obs., 2010). As a consequence, the Municipality promised to relocate

those families in Los Bambues which were especially close to the river, something which would benefit those poorest of homes. According to participant #9, this relocation was supposed to have occurred during my time in Los Bambues (ibid.). When I left, the families were still there.



Barrio Los Bambues. 1) Barrio entrance 2) The 'cancha' 3) Rio de oro 4) Precipitous homes

Employment

Many in Los Bambues do not work simply because jobs are hard to come by. My trips to the barrio were on weekdays and I was always flummoxed by the amount of adults that were home. I was told that not only were jobs hard to come by, but it was especially difficult as their minimal education was a further barrier. Nevertheless, there was *usually* at least one person working per household, enabling the family to have access to basic necessities. Sometimes, that person was the eldest child in the family. Some of the older working youths with whom I spoke worked in the 'shoe' industry as Bucaramanga is the 'calzado' (footwear) epicenter of the entire country. However, I was told that the shoe industry is seasonal and only lasts few months – December, January and February were some of those months during which the industry abated and many were unemployed. As for earnings, one participant (#3) who had been working at a shoe warehouse in Bucaramanga (but was now laid off)

reported having earned 10 000 Colombian Pesos (COP) for a part time (five hours a day) position. To place this in perspective – a lunch meal in Bucaramanga begins at 5 000 COP (this is on the *very* cheap end) and a one way bus fare from Bucaramanga to Giron is 1550 COP. The journey ranges between 45 minutes and an hour so walking is not an option. If this adolescent were to travel to work *and* eat lunch daily, she would be left with 1900 COP with which she could buy one of the following: an avocado, a mango, five mini buns, a bottle of water, an empanada, an arepa, etc. As one of the adults put it, “Life is hard, but thank God!”¹ (Adult Participant, 2011)

Organizations in Los Bambues

Los Bambues attracts the attention of non-governmental organizations and outreach programs. The Catholic Sisters have been active in the community for more than ten years, working mainly with mothers and children. In collaboration with the World Food Program, they distribute food rations (enriched flour, legumes and baby food) monthly to more than 60 families. Their other programs include an ecological group of sixty women who recycled and ‘greened’ the barrio (it terminated in December 2010); a children’s crafts program (December 2010, during summer vacation); and a lunch program during school season for children up to fifteen years whose parents pay 2500 COP per week, among others. The NGO Acción Social has a food and nutrition team that teaches women how to cook more salubrious meals while Organización Femenina Popular (OFP) works to empower and to educate the women about their rights. Although a few men participate in Acción Social’s program and some adolescents are in the lunch program, there was no other forum for either of these groups, that is, until the ZA program began in 2010.

4.2. Zona Afecto

“For the dignity of boys, girls and young people.”²

Zona Afecto (ZA) is a project created, in July 2008, through an alliance of two Bucaramanga-based institutions – CRECER and CIDEMOS – in order to respond to the needs of children and young people in the metropolitan area, particularly in areas of high vulnerability (Moreno, 2011). Funded by the Colombian Institute for

¹ Direct quote from interviewee: “La vida es dura, pero gracias a Dios!”

² This is ZA’s tag line which originally reads “Por la dignidad de los niños, niñas y jóvenes.” (Pamphlet, 2010).

Family Wellbeing (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar) and the European Union, the grant in January 2012; however, the project hopes to strengthen adolescents' capacities so that the groups will become sustainable (ibid.).

ZA is concerned with the dignity and rights of *niños, niñas y adolescentes* (NNA, which translates to boys, girls and adolescents), especially as it relates to sexual and commercial exploitation (SCE) of NNA. The word 'Zona Afecto' literally means 'affection zone' or 'zone of affection' where NNA can construct their own identities, reflect, think and "favour spaces to enhance [their] capacities" (Pamphlet, 2010).

Furthermore, ZA's specific objectives are to:

- a) Mobilize social actors and institutions against the SCE of NNA.
- b) Strengthen public and private institutional response and attention towards NNA victims (or those at risk) of SCE.
- c) Implement a model of psychosocial care which guarantees the rights (and social inclusion) of NNA victims of SCE through a process of leisurely, pedagogic, and therapeutic interaction directed at NNAs of SCE in the MAB.

(Moreno, 2011).

Despite ZA's emphasis on SCE, in Los Bambues (due to little or no occurrence of SCE), the program focuses more on the ideas of dignity and rights violation and educates its participants about their rights, especially the right to refuse to partake in a high-risk activity. Its other program activities include, but are not limited to: strengthening institutional capacity; sensitizing and mobilizing the community, especially parents; and leisurely and therapeutic exercises (Pamphlet, 2010).

4.3. Los Bambues Adolescents in Zona Afecto

The ZA program operates in three barrios in the MAB: Communal 15, Café Madrid, and Los Bambues (Moreno, 2011). After a consultative process with various civil and social actors, these neighbourhoods were deemed the most vulnerable and thus, suitable for intervention. Los Bambues was particularly suitable – it performed worst on all quality of life indicators.

Program activities – for all adolescents from the three barrios – began in 2009 at the ZA house in central Bucaramanga. Among these were two LB adolescents who had

been recruited by social workers who came in search of participants. Later in the year, precisely on July 20, 2010, the Los Bambues ZA group – Grupo Juvenil DUA¹ – was born out of the enthusiasm of the two initial adolescents who saw a need for the group's embedment in the barrio. Travelling back and forth to Bucaramanga was cumbersome and it was imagined that the program would have greater reach if it were brought to the barrio. The group's objective, as stated on its blog, is “to become recognized as a leading youth organization which works for its community in order to radiate toward the rest of the metropolitan area of Bucaramanga”² (DUA, 2010).

In 2010, meetings were held bi-weekly on Saturdays – most were held in Los Bambues but a few were held at the ZA house during special events (transportation costs were provided). At its peak in 2010, Grupo DUA had twenty-eight adolescents – nineteen of whom are this study's sample. Due to some highly attractive incentives such as bursaries for various courses, the second phase of the project, which began in February 2011, already had at least eleven additional members.

The next section offers a glimpse into these adolescents' experiences based on interview information (to a larger extent) and observations.

5. DISCUSSION

Los Bambues adolescents seem to defy stereotype. Without the background provided above, one could not easily deduce that such data emerged from the poorest neighbourhood in a metropolitan area of some 1.2 million people. Interviewed adolescents had varying career aspirations that included engineering, beautician, artist and nursing, among others, a combination of vocational, professional and more intellectual pursuits. Asked why they desire more education, they cite independence, professionalism, knowledge, self-advancement and the ability to provide for their families. Their dreams, some not altogether different from their career aspirations, are just as diverse. They include a desire to help their families, a thirst for more

¹ DUA in Spanish is an acronym for “diversion, unidad y amistad” which in English translates to “fun, unity, and friendship.”

² The exact quote from the grupo DUA blog is “es llegar a ser reconocidos como organización juvenil líder que trabaja por su comunidad para irradiarse hacia el resto del área metropolitana de Bucaramanga.” (<http://grupojuvenildua.blogspot.com/>)

knowledge, a desire to become someone, and as one of them put it, “that my mother is proud of whatever I become”¹ (Participant #13). Another’s desire was “that I never lack money,”² to which I said “me too” and she laughed (Participant #12).

In the interview and observational data, one theme particularly stands out – that of family. Although children and adolescents, outside of school and perhaps work, socialize largely with their parents *and* friends (neighbours are included here amongst friends) within the barrio, for most of the adolescents that I observed, the parents’ influence, understated as it sometimes was, was the greater of the two. When I began the interviews, I was interested in the educational aspirations and dreams of these adolescents, as I thought they could potentially relate to the pedagogic aspects of the ZA program, among others. Instead, what they seemed to elucidate was the influence of their families, and particularly, the parents. While I call this influence “family ties” to acknowledge the influence of siblings, the family ties described in this paper refer largely to the influence of parents. From the interview and observational data gathered in Los Bambues, I identify two types of “ties”: *binding* ties and *liberating* ties, and posit that these ties are the most influential (among extra-individual influences) in engendering or limiting an adolescents’ career (and hence, educational) aspirations.

Both binding ties and liberating ties are eponymously named: one binds and the other liberates. Moreover, I see binding ties as familial relationships that restrict and “hold [one] to a particular [especially mental] state, place...”³ while liberating ties do the exact opposite: they “free [one] from constraints,”⁴ mental or otherwise. Adolescents that have liberating family ties are liberated emotionally, mentally and think more freely. Because less room is taken up on their minds for weighty familial issues, more room is availed for goals and aspirations that see beyond their present circumstances. A good degree of support is provided by the immediate family and adolescents are encouraged to pursue and work towards these goals and aspirations, with financial support provided to the best of the family’s ability. Those with binding family ties, on the other hand, have opposite characteristics. Their minds are more

¹ The direct quote from the interview is, “que mi mama sea orgullosa lo que me sea.”

² The direct quote from the interview is, “para que nunca me falta la plata.”

³ Definition #8, from dictionary.com.

⁴ Definition #3, from dictionary.com.

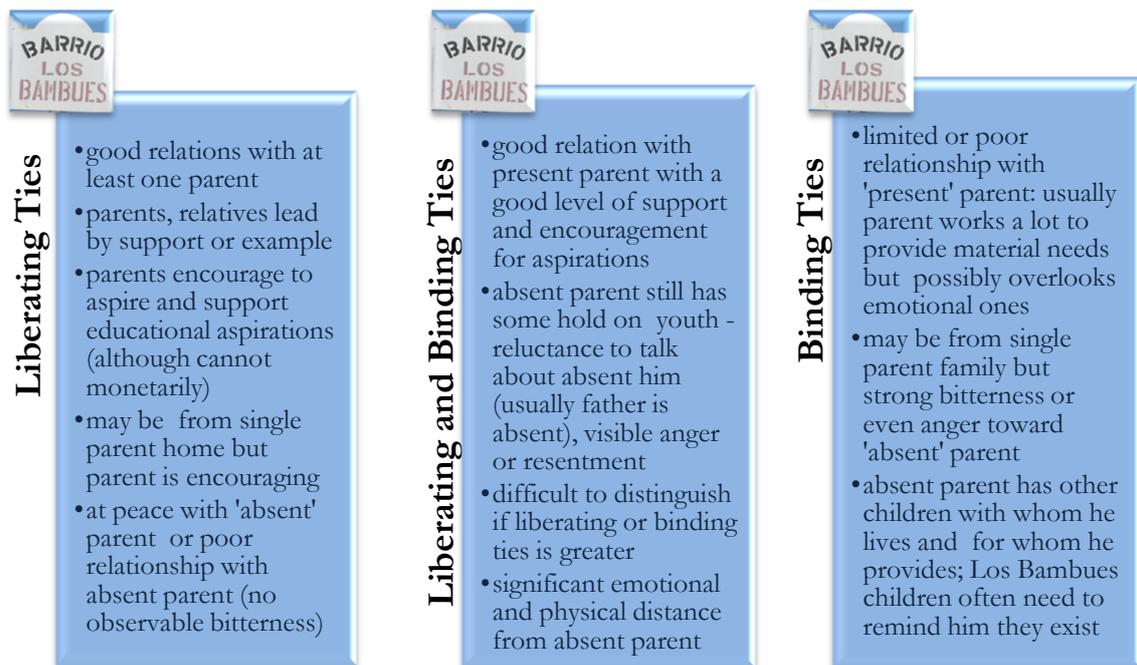
consumed with their family's circumstances, limiting their ability to think beyond the present and consequently limiting their goals and aspirations. Parents provide limited support and encouragement due to several reasons including too much time at work (trying to provide) and too little time at home; parent(s)' own emotional struggles; parents' resignation and limited ability to envision a different future; and parent(s)' limited connection with and to other *liberating* families.

Using interview and observational data, the following examines these ties, along with other potential influences, on Los Bambues adolescents' career aspirations.

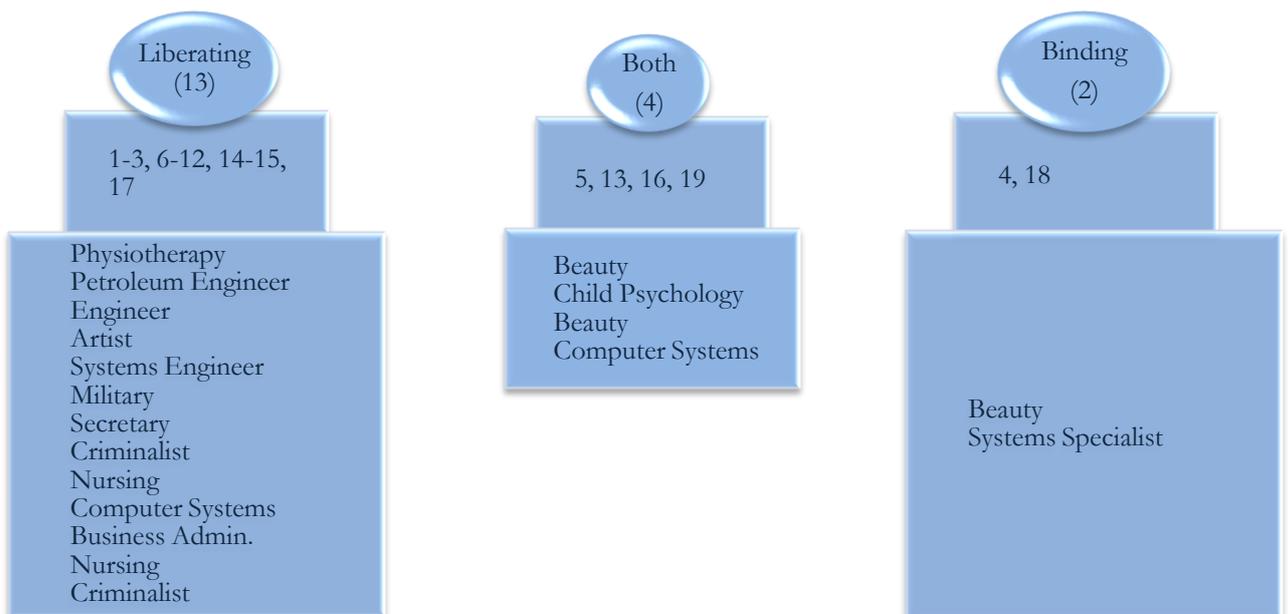
5.1. Family Ties and Career Aspirations of Los Bambues Adolescents

The adolescents in ZA, although self-selected, are an ambitious bunch. Many were invited to the group by friends and while some declined, those who eventually remained did so voluntarily. As I do not have pre-ZA data, it is not known to which degree the ZA program has impacted their career aspirations. However, I suspect that for those with liberating family ties, it has increased their field of dreams, while for those who were slightly liberated, it has pushed them to become even more so. For those with binding family ties, it has had little or no impact. It is useful to keep in mind that the program had only run for seven months in the barrio before I arrived and such program effects would be difficult to observe in such a short time span. Thus, the major observable influence on the adolescents' career aspirations is their family, with marginal influence from the barrio (and the friends and neighbours within it) and the ZA group. These other influences will be discussed next.

Below is a summary of the characteristics of the Los Bambues adolescents who possess these two types of family ties. It is worthy to note that all adolescents possess *some* degree of both types of ties. Thus, the summation classifies a tie as liberating or binding only if it is observable to a *greater* degree than the other. A few adolescents fall in the middle, where it is not clear which is the leading operative tie as they possess some degree of both.



The following chart then aligns the characteristics above with the adolescents (by participant numbers) and their career aspirations (a larger table, sorted by family ties, is available in Appendix 3). What follows is a further examination of these ties, and some justification for the categorizations.



Liberating Family Ties

The majority of the adolescents in the sample, some thirteen out of nineteen, display a larger degree of liberating ties than binding ties. Nine out of these thirteen come from two-parent families. Of these, eight have working fathers and stay-at-home mothers, two of whom have micro-businesses where they sell food, fruits, vegetable and confections; the other has a working mother and a stay-at-home father (to run a confections business and internet café) due to a disability. The bulk of the liberating functions are done by the stay-at-home parents – while one works, the one left at home provided the necessary support and encouragement, with the working parent providing, if at all, a minimal amount. An exception to this is the stay-at-home father where the working mother still does the greater share of encouragement – this father is depressive largely as a result of his inability to financially contribute to his family.

Furthermore, two of the adolescents (#14 and 17 respectively) from two-parent homes do not have great relationships with their fathers – one reports that her father does not talk much while the other reports that she does not get along with him because they have considerably contrasting temperaments. Both, however, have great relationships with their mothers. Instead of resentment, these adolescents demonstrate an acceptance and an understanding of their fathers, an approach which relieves them of anxiety over their situation and further liberates them.

The three adolescents from single mother homes (#3, 7 and 15 respectively) are also some of the most ambitious, a testament to the liberating efforts of these mothers. One's long-held ambition is to study Petroleum Engineering, to travel to other countries, and to 'find' herself a Canadian. Another has always loved computers and even the feeling of *electric shock* (her father, an electrician, is her role model) – she already owns two computers with which she runs an internet café and dreams of owning a big computer business. The last, who aspires to be a nurse, already knows in which hospital in Bucaramanga she wants to work. In other words, the amount of parents present in the home may not actually matter as much as what the present parent(s) actually does (do) and these single mothers appear to do a great deal of supporting and encouraging.

The liberating group also shows a little more variety (although, of course, there are *more* adolescents) possibly alluding to the strength of the ties and suggesting that adolescents are encouraged to think only as far as their imagination might allow them, without fear of challenge or commitment. The liberated adolescents show very little, if any, evidence of being bound by family circumstances. Where possibilities exist for the adolescents to be bound, especially by deficient relationships with absent or one of their present parents, they have been encouraged and have chosen to look beyond these present circumstances, and in so doing, they exhibit a greater degree of liberating tie.

Binding Family Ties

Two adolescents display a larger degree of binding ties than liberating ties. One of these (#18) is a brother of two of the interviewees in the *both* category. The main reason for this categorization is that, of the three children, the eldest child possesses the most significant level of resentment toward the absent parent. The second child possesses some while the last child possesses even less, almost to the point of negligibility. This is possibly because the youngest two have had less time to observe and process their family's circumstances in order to develop a similar level of anger or resentment. The last two are also girls and have a role model in their aunt who works as a beautician, their desired vocation. Their brother, on the other hand, does not appear to have one. His career aspiration of 'systems specialist' may be a new found one as a result of ZA's collaboration with an institute in Bucaramanga to provide free tuition for students wishing to study computer systems among other trades, a program he said he became interested because of a friend. The criteria of membership in the ZA program being fulfilled, prospective participants need to further submit an application and then be formally accepted into the program. They also need to have completed the 9th grade in order to be eligible and this adolescent was just about to enter the 7th grade – he fell behind the previous year because he was working instead of attending school. When I spoke with him, he had not yet applied so it is dubious that this newly acquired desire will become substantiated.

Further complicating things, this adolescents' 'absent' parent lives right *next* door with his *other* family for whom he provides and, according to the adolescent, his

family and this 'absent' parent remain on non-speaking terms. Being wary of the sensitive nature of the topic, I did not press too much for the intricacies of the plot as even I hurt for the adolescent as he *tried* to calmly oblige my questions; therefore, it is neither clear how many children this parent has in each home (i.e. if this adolescent and his siblings are *all* his children, although if only this adolescent was his child, it would explain why he holds the greatest amount of resentment toward this parent), nor for how long this living arrangement has been going on, though it appears that the other family is the first family (the eldest child, also an interviewee, is seventeen years old). The mother herself appears not to have completely dealt with the matter, to speak of her being able to help her children do the same. She was present at the interview with the adolescent and looked on as I asked questions, with a certain resignation and despondence. However, the children and mothers from both families, although perhaps not necessarily best friends, are friends (they are, after all, next door neighbours) and even spend time together. Evidently, this adolescent has yet to deal with the absence (and unaccountability) of his father and the queer living arrangement makes it even less certain that he will be able to do so on his own soon. Thus, he remains bound to his familial circumstances.

The other adolescent (#4) in this category similarly holds a significant level of resentment toward her absent father who lives outside of the municipality. She noted to me, "My father does not give me anything. My mother has to work hard to buy everything"¹ (Participant #4). Throughout my entire time in the barrio, I never met her mother as she was reportedly always at work. This adolescent is also the youngest of three siblings (although I only interviewed her), and lives in one of the poorest homes – a one-room wooden edifice – in the barrio. During the interview, many of her responses regarding her future prospects were ambiguous, as one who had never really thought much of them. She also had an affinity for the ZA social worker and is attentive and helpful during group meetings, to the point of helping to coordinate, serve and clean up snacks and refreshments. This suggests a particular longing for adult affection that she does not seem to receive to a great degree at home. While she is liberated to some extent because of her choice to be in the ZA

¹ Interview with adolescent #4. Direct quote in Spanish: "mi papa no me da nada. Mi mama tiene que trabajar dura para compra todos."

program which is, in essence, a choice for affection, it is ultimately this longing (and perhaps for love as well) in combination with the resentment that makes her more bound than liberated.

An element of Both

The four adolescents for whom no leading tie could be observed come from a single-parent (mother) home and this is perhaps no coincidence. Two of them are siblings and are the sisters of the one of the 'bound' adolescent discussed above (#5 and 16). Unlike their brother, they are not particularly bound. But they are not particularly liberated either. Their mother, like other mothers in the barrio, works a great deal to try to provide for them. This means larger periods of absences and lesser periods of support and encouragement, especially for career (and/or educational) aspirations. In fact, it was due to this absence that the youngest began to attend ZA meetings. And although she was not formally a member the previous year (due to age restrictions), she attended nearly all the meetings and plans to continue this year because she likes what is being taught in the group. Moreover, while there is some evidence that the mother does counsel the children in some way – the youngest relates to me her mother's advice that "men cannot touch one's personal things"¹ – there is less evidence that the mother encourages educational aspirations and liberates the children enough to dream (Participant #5). The aunt whom the girls look up to lives in Giron, but outside the barrio, so whatever she provides is likely to be insufficient.

The other two in this category also have poor relations with their absent parents. Participant #19's father lives in the country's capital city so that the emotional distance is complicated by a physical one. During the interview, his countenance changed negatively when the subject of the father arose. He only speaks with this father whenever he goes to the capital, which is seldom. However, this adolescent has very good relations with his mother whom he reveres even before God in his life, for according to him, "he who loves his mother loves God"². His immediate goal, something related to computer systems is also as a result of the ZA tuition-covered

¹ Interview with youth#5. Direct quote in Spanish: "mi mama me dijo que los hombres no pueden tocar las cosas personales de uno."

² Interview with Participant #19, Direct quote in Spanish: "el que quiere la mama quiere a Dios."

program mentioned earlier, although he views this step toward his ultimate goal, that of systems engineering. He is also more proactive – on one of my last visits to the barrio, I saw him and a two other adolescents on their way to the city to submit their applications for the ZA program. What is apparent with this adolescent is that he has been encouraged enough to dream, in large part due to his relationship with his mother. Unfortunately, this greatness of this relationship has not proven enough to override the influence of this absent father in his life, an issue which it appears he has not quite dealt with.

The last adolescent in this category (#13) is both emotionally and physically separated from her absent parent, who lives in neighbouring Venezuela and the subject, like the previous adolescent, remains a sore area of discussion. It is this wanting relationship with the father, operative, but not necessarily debilitating, that places her in the *both* group. Moreover, the ZA program seems to have had some positive impact on her. She dropped out of the school the previous year but reports that through the encouragement of both her mother and the ZA social worker, she would return to school this year to enter the sixth grade and begin her journey towards becoming a child psychologist. Should she remain motivated by both her mother and the ZA social worker, there is strong evidence to suggest that she will imminently display a greater degree of liberation.

This section has provided an account of the circumstances that determined the categorization of Los Bambues adolescents as possessing either liberating, binding, or both ties (in cases where neither tie is observable to a greater extent), suggesting that these ties greatly influence an adolescent's ability to dream or to aspire towards something. Indubitably, there are other influences, although to a lesser degree than familial, which can enable this ability as well – these are discussed next.

5.2. Barrio Effects

The classification of Los Bambues as a barrio, at this point, requires further clarification. I also purposefully use *barrio*, the Spanish equivalent of *neighbourhood*, so that the reader remains mindful of the context in which I write. Los Bambues is self-contained in its own right: it contains three mini markets where food, fruits and

vegetables are sold; two confectioneries, owned by two adults interviewees; two internet cafes, one owned by one adolescent interviewee, the other owned by parents of two other adolescents interviewees; vendors of phone minutes; and a few mini beauty salons. In short, one need not leave the barrio but on occasions. Despite these amenities, the barrio is not a neighbourhood in the conventional North American or European sense with resources such as schools, public libraries, local health centers, community centers and places of worship, among others. Los Bambues contains none of these. The nearest school is in another barrio, some minimum fifteen minutes walk away. Churches (Christianity and Catholicism being the dominant religions) are in Giron while libraries and pseudo community-centres are located even farther off in Bucaramanga. The barrio does have a “cancha,”¹ although this is not altogether unique as these are ubiquitous in Latin America. The barrio could perhaps at best be described as a *self-contained micro-displacement camp within which structures (homes) have been erected and micro-businesses have been opportunistically planted to provide some basic amenities and services for the inhabitants*. Given this scarcity of resources in the barrio, *barrio effects* in Los Bambues – that is, the effects which are a consequence of the barrio and the resources (human or otherwise) within it – thus refer largely to the effects or influences of friends and or neighbours.

Los Bambues' immediate surroundings is not so jarringly different from theirs that when people look out their window, they behold a sea of luxury high rises that serve as constant reminders of the materialities they do not own. It is the lowest-income barrio amidst a cluster of low-income barrios in a relatively low-income municipality. But the adolescents interviewed do not reflect this statistic. As they demonstrate, being in a low-income, higher risk barrio neither signifies automatic participation in high-risk activities nor limits one's goals for oneself. And while certain high-risk behaviours do exist – I did meet a pregnant fifteen-year-old – they represent the exception rather than the rule. This is not to categorize Los Bambues adolescents as being blissfully ignorant of their circumstances. They are certainly aware of what they do not have, they just seem to put a greater value on what it is that they do

¹ A “cancha” is a football/soccer field, usually of concrete but varies depending on geology. The one in the barrio is hardened earth on what used to be a field where plants grew.

have: family and friends. And it is the ties with these families that seem to have a greater influence on them.

There is some evidence of barrio effects on adolescents' career aspirations in Los Bambues. Most obvious is the earlier mentioned participant #18 (characterized as having binding ties) who wants to become a systems specialist upon encouragement from a friend who had similar aspirations. The other bound adolescent (#4) cites her friends (actually her next door neighbours) as influences for her desire to become a beautician. Another adolescent (#9) cites her friends as motivators for her desire to become a secretary (see Appendix 3). Adolescents also socialize with their friends and neighbours, but the space where this socialization occurs is often just outside their front steps such that parents and adult neighbours are sometimes included in these socialization processes. Although the study does not test for the relative strengths of these barrio effects, it does understand that they exist, but it suggests that they exist largely overshadowed by familial influences. Also, the influence of friends on the adolescent mentioned here lean toward the generation of more positive outcomes – were they to lean toward more negative outcomes, these influences might be stronger. What does emerge from these two adolescents is that barrio (or friends' and neighbours') effects appear more pronounced for adolescents with weaker family ties (when one's family ties are *less than* liberating) and are especially pronounced when those ties are binding.

The attempt here is not to dismiss the effects of friends or neighbourhoods on children and adolescents. The fifteen year old girl certainly would not be pregnant without *help* from her boyfriend who also lives in the barrio. However, it is to question the assumption that neighbourhoods (or barrios) significantly determine one's aspirations, sometimes to the point of overriding familial influences. I suggest that perhaps too much credence is given to the effects of neighbourhoods, but more importantly, that generalizations of neighbourhood effects on children and adolescents ought to be contextualized as neighbourhoods vary quite considerably, particularly when one begins to traverse continents and cultures. What is true of the Los Bambues *barrio* would most likely not be true for a North American or European *neighbourhood*, but may offer some insights into similar *barrios* in Colombia or Latin

America where cultures, languages and the definition of a barrio are a little more convergent. The next section ventures outside of the family and the barrio and considers other possible effects on Los Bambues adolescents' career aspirations.

5.3. Beyond the Family and the Barrio

ZA and the Acknowledgement of Family

The importance of family is not lost on the ZA program as social workers actively try to include adolescents' families in program activities. Recognizing that families hold a unique position to be able to liberate or bind adolescents, they include parents in periodic meetings, plan parent/adolescent outings, and have a joint parent/adolescent project (where adolescent and parents work together to nurse a plant). They also have a productive bag making group for parents and maternal extended family members. At joint meetings, parents and adolescents learn how to understand, communicate with and relate to one another. Parents also share ideas on 'best practices' with other parents, further deepening those social ties and learning bonds. Unfortunately, most of the parents that show up to the meetings are women – at one such much meeting, I counted seventeen mothers and three men. Reasons for this as are not very difficult to imagine. They include working fathers, single mothers, and uninterested fathers (either for lack of interest or due to a gendering of child rearing roles). Gender issues notwithstanding, the ZA program clearly understands, as evidenced through their program activities, the importance of deepening and enhancing liberating family ties in adolescents' developmental processes.

Beneath Family Ties: Parents' Participation in Community Organizations

Having illustrated above that certain circumstances permit some families to be more liberating while others remain bound, and that adolescents from more liberating families are more encouraged to aspire and to dream, the question may be asked, "Where do these parents (the majority being women) *learn* how to liberate, i.e. from where do they get their ideas?" After all, we learn largely from examples that arise out of our closest surroundings, and if those surroundings exemplify poverty, then poverty constitutes the majority of what we learn.

But it is not very difficult to imagine that parents, being themselves poor and uneducated, encourage their children's educational pursuits so that they can rise out of that poverty and live not as they (the parents) have lived. The mothers with whom I spoke told me of their desire for their children to become better than them, to have a good education and a good job so that they can leave the barrio. *All* parents want the same for their children – that is, the very best – but it is the differences in access to resources that separate what some can and cannot provide for them. Parents use their own life experiences – they try to impart mistakes that they have made and lessons that they have learned from such mistakes in the hope that their children will not repeat them. Televisions or other modes of media are also possible sources of instruction but most televisions are usually tuned to 'telenovelas' (soap operas) which are more escapist than didactic. Nevertheless, all these instructional sources (parents wanting the best for their children, life experiences and media influences) were observed in Los Bambues.

Moreover, another major source was observed, that being the influence of organizations that work in the barrio. In Appendix 4, I have done a very crude rating of the 'activism' of the mothers (from 1 to 5 – 1 being the most, 5 being the least) based on my observation of the mothers that were present most often in the communal room where meetings occurred. Two observations stand out: the diversity of career aspirations for those rated 1 and 2, and the presence of the two binding ties at the bottom of the chart. Not surprisingly, the mother of adolescent #4 – one of those classified as exhibiting greater binding ties – was present at none of the three parent meetings of ZA that I attended.

Despite the many reasons that exist for why some parents are more 'active' than others, the chart does appear to support the suggestion there is a difference between parents (mothers) who are more active than those who are less or not at all. These organizations are possible sources of social ties, new ideas and encouragement – in turn, the women impart these new ideas into their children thereby increasing their breadth of thought and allowing for greater creativity and diversity. The ZA group is an example of such an organization: its inclusion of parents in its programs, along with its recommendations of parental love, support and mutual respect and

understanding between parents and adolescents helps parents better relate to their children. However, ZA cannot be credited with influencing the liberating ties of the families noted above – its concerted effort to include parents really only began towards the end of the first phase of the program, around November 2010. The Catholic Sisters, who have been working in the community for more than a decade, along with other longer-term organizations (i.e. Organizacion Feminina Popular and Acci3n Social) have been more significant sources of parental influence.

Before Family Ties: Adolescents' Individual Agencies

Indisputably, adolescents' individualities also influence their career aspirations, these influences being particularly evident in the actual career choice. Pre-existing family ties, individual (or biological) propensities play a tremendous role not only in one's ability to become liberated, but also in one's ability to remain liberated. As alluded to at the beginning of the *discussion* section, adolescents' reasons for higher education, and motivations to study (Appendix 3) include many acknowledgements of the self and demonstrate many potential accrued benefits to the self. While these reasons are self-focused, they are not self-absorbed. Instead, they point to a desire to become self-sustaining and self-reliant, without dependence on parents or partners.

Furthermore, adolescents' individualities can be either inhibited or stimulated by family ties and barrio effects, as evidenced by the two adolescents with binding ties whose individualities appear inhibited by their familial affairs, despite, perhaps, a desire not to be. Moreover, it is not the objective, in this sub-section, to delve into the 'nature vs. nurture' debate; instead it only recognizes that a person's individuality is a formidable force in their developmental process, indicating instead, a collaboration between nature *and* nurture.

The above discussion has taken a look at the various influences on Los Bambues adolescents' career aspirations, from families, to friends and neighbours, to parents' community involvement, and to their own individualities. What now follows is a look at useful theories that help connect these observations to broad literature and academic studies, and how these observations support or refute those studies.

6. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND DISCUSSION

Recent developmental theories have emerged through influence from earlier theorists whose works they have built upon, corroborated or refuted. One of these is Watson's behaviourist (or social learning) approach which emphasized observable behaviour over unobservable ones (Shaffer, 2000). He posits that human behaviour is founded upon "well-learned associations between external stimuli and observable responses (called habits)"; thus, children's developmental processes are defined by their environment and by the relationship with those closest to them (ibid, p. 44). Based on research with animals, Skinner furthered this and proposed that children learn by repeating acts that produce more favourable outcomes (i.e. rewarded acts versus punished acts) over less favourable ones. Bandura (1977, 1986, 1992, as cited in Shaffer, 2000), however, rejects a proposition based on animals. To him, humans are cognitive beings who can willingly subject themselves to immediate punishment if they foresee a future reward for actions that, in the present, elicit punishment. Children's cognitive ability not only allows them to reproduce behaviour that they have learned through observational learning, but also to influence the environment that influences them. These theories, in some way or another, have gone on to shape the theories and perspectives employed below.

6.1. Ecological Systems Theory

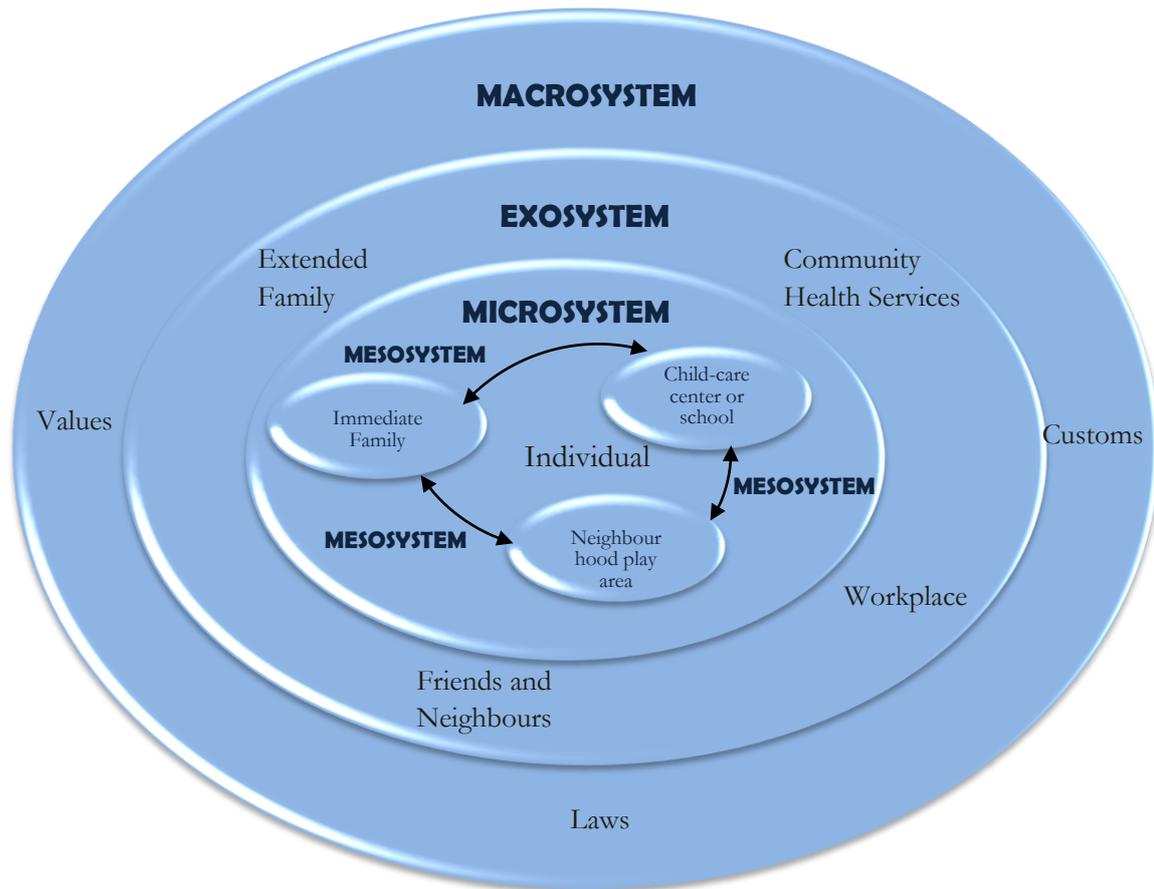
Following from the contributions noted above, among others, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST), one of the most influential theories in recent times, views child development in the context of five systems or *layers* of environment that affect a child's development through interactions between and within layers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, as cited in Shaffer, 2000). Below is a summary of those systems.

- **Microsystem** – The layer closest to the child that contains the immediate setting in which the child lives, i.e. the family, peer-group, neighbourhood, child-care center, school, etc. Here, bi-directionality (the act of influencing and of being influenced) is at its strongest as the the child helps to construct his/her settings and is not a passive recipient of the experiences within them.

- Mesosystem – The relationships between the microsystems, i.e. family relations vs. school relations, family vs. neighbours, etc.
- Exosystem – The social systems that do not contain the child but that affect their experiences in the microsystem. An example is a parent's workplace.
- Macrosystem – The outermost layer which comprises the cultures, values, laws, customs and resources that govern a child's environment. For example, countries that prioritize children's needs and services impact the support that children receive in the inner layers.
- Chronosystem – Added later to recognize the importance of the temporal dimension in all systems, i.e. timing of migration, relocation, sibling's birth, political events, etc can have a profound effect on a child's development.

Paquette and Ryan (2001)

The theory was later renamed the *bioecological systems theory* (bEST) to account for the interaction of one's own biological disposition with the systems (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). In short, in bEST, development is not dependent on either environmental situations or biological nature – instead, it is a result of the influence on and by the systems (Berk, 2005). Although the model falls short by not adequately describing those biological aspects, it remains a useful tool in helping to illustrate the complex nature of the environment that influences and is influenced by development (Shaffer, 2000). The following addresses how the EST's applicability in barrio Los Bambues.



Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystem, Berk (2005).

6.1.1. Ecological Systems Theory in Los Bambues

While the EST helps to consider the multiple influences in a system, it is not a one-size-fits-all concept. In Los Bambues the macrosystem classification holds but the exosystem, the mesosystem and the microsystems are not as clearly delineated as in the EST. As alluded to in the earlier sub-section on *barrio effects*, there is no formal child-care center – children are kept with neighbours or relatives while the parent is away. Many live with extended families members (i.e. adolescents from eight or eleven person homes), forming a part of the meso-system. Some work in the barrio, right in their living rooms, contradicting the existence of a workplace exosystem outside of the meso-system. Although there are some community health services, most are located in Bucaramanga, with a few in Giron – none is located in the barrio or close by. In the macrosystem, departmental cultures and identities replaces ‘customs’ as a consequence of the considerable diversity within Colombia where people identify more with their region and or department than with the nation.

In any system, structural inequalities are often at play against disadvantaged peoples and Spencer's phenomenological variant of the EST (PVEST) model accounts for the structural issues, cultural factors and individual experiences and perceptions that might make adolescents experience similar events and settings differently (Spencer et al., 1997; Lee et al., 2003). Spencer (2006) reprimands that researchers fail to consider underserved or poor adolescents' unique developmental experiences in their socially and culturally distinct contexts; they attribute research results (i.e. on academic achievement) to personal attributes (i.e. lack of motivation) rather than to the relationship between mesosystem interactions and poverty or other forms of structural inequality. Issues of adaptation and resiliency (against environmental or structural inequities), particularly as related to socially supportive constructs are also seldom addressed and to this end, this paper supports the view that more inclusive, context-based frameworks and perspectives – applicable to contexts such as barrio Los Bambues with varying ecosystem arrangements – are necessary to stimulate more context-based discussions of the human development process (ibid.).

Using the EST's construct of the microsystem, the following subsection takes a look at literature conceptualizations of the family and the neighbourhood, and how these correlate or contradict with the discoveries in Los Bambues.

6.2. Family and the Neighbourhood

Family

The family – “a network of interdependent relationships [where] each person influences the behaviour of others in direct and indirect ways” – is perhaps the most important part of the microsystem Berk (2005, p. 72). Direct influences are those from parents and siblings while indirect influences arise from grandparents or relatives who may enhance or inhibit parent-child communications. Diverse forms of the family – single parent, remarried parents, gay/lesbian parents, employed mothers and dual-earner families – now also affect family relationships and children's development (ibid.). Similarly, parenting styles within families are crucial to development, and Baumrind (1967, 1971, as cited in Shaffer, 2000)'s parenting typologies (listed below) help demonstrate what these effects might be. Appendix 5

contains a more detailed chart that indicates how these typologies impact childhood and adolescence.

Parenting Style	Description
Authoritative	Restrictive, adults set many rules and expect strict obedience, adults rely on power not reason to get compliance
Authoritarian	Flexible, democratic, warm parents provide guidance and control but allow child some decision-making ability
Permissive	Accepting adults who make few demands of their children and seldom try to control their behaviour
Uninvolved	Adults who have either rejected parental role or are too overwhelmed by own problems to parent

Adapted from Shaffer (2000) [sources: Baumrind, 1977, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994]

The Neighbourhood

The neighbourhood, like the family, is an important part of the immediate setting in the EST. With the diversity of influences in a child's developmental process (from the microsystem and beyond), perspectives of neighbourhood impacts on the developmental process are necessary. To better understand some of these impacts, the concepts of social organization and collective efficacy are considered.

Neighbourhood *social organization* refers to the degree to which neighbourhood residents can maintain effective social control and work towards a common good (Wilson, 1995). Wilson (1995, p. 528) goes on to identify two dimensions of this as being "a) the prevalence, strength, and interdependence of social networks and (b) the extent of collective supervision that the residents direct and the personal responsibility they assume in addressing neighbourhood problems." Embedded within this, then, is the concept of *collective efficacy* which combines neighbourhood social cohesion (how much neighbours trust one another and share common values) with the willingness to intervene for the common good (how much neighbours can rely on each other to monitor youth and ensure order) (Sampson et al., 1997). Thus, neighbourhood social organization as whole depends on the levels of: local friendship ties; social cohesion; residents' participation in formal and informal associations; density and stability of formal organizations; and informal social controls (Wilson, 1995). In research, low levels of social organization and collective efficacy have been linked to negative health outcomes as well as homicide, crime and high incidence of violence, among others (Sampson et al., 1997; Cohen et al., 2008).

Socio-economic Status, Family and the Neighbourhood

Another important concept in the understanding of families and neighbourhoods is socioeconomic status (SES). SES combines three variables – years of education, prestige and required job skill – to measure social status and income in order to determine a family's social position and economic wellbeing (Berk, 2005). SES levels are further associated with family functioning. Those in skilled and semi-skilled manual jobs tend to have many children, have them earlier, and raise them with differing values and expectations (ibid.). Higher SES fathers tend to be more involved in child-rearing and household tasks while lower SES fathers tend to focus more on the provider role (due to necessity or gendered beliefs) (Rank, 2000). Higher SES parents grant children freedom to explore and set for them higher goals when they're older and their children perform better in school throughout childhood and adolescence (Bradley and Corwyn, 2003). Lower SES parents often feel powerless outside the home (i.e. at work) so that they try to regain this authority through the exertion of control when they're at home. Higher SES parents who, at work, can make decisions independently and persuade others, teach these skills to their children (Greenberger et al., 1994). Greater economic security of higher SES parents allows them more time, energy and material resources to contribute to their children's development processes. Higher SES parents are also more interested in stimulating and nurturing ideas due to years of schooling and learning about abstract ideas and thoughts (Uribe et al., 1994).

Additionally, neighbourhood resources (or the lack thereof) have a greater impact on lower SES families (Berk, 2005). Residence in low SES neighbourhoods has been positively associated with higher rates of adolescents' criminal and delinquent behaviour which diminish their chances or desires for success (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000). In higher SES neighbourhoods, families depend less on their immediate surroundings and have greater mobility to move outside of them in pursuit of educational, social or leisurely activities (Berk, 2005). After school programs, in low SES neighbourhoods, have also been associated with better academic performance and psychological adjustment (Posner and Vandell, 1994, 1999). Along with the parenting styles mentioned above, neighbourhood constituents such as supportive peers, teachers and supportive environments

including flexible employment or extra-curricular schedules promote high achievement during adolescence (Berk, 2005).

The SES literature essentially indicates that poverty is a significant barrier to development. Children from poor homes and neighbourhoods have been found with lower levels of cognitive development and academic achievement, with a higher likelihood of dropping out, being mentally ill or behaving antisocially (Poulton et al., 2002; Seccombe, 2002). Poor development is particularly acute in poor housing complexes and dangerous neighbourhoods where such circumstances make everyday life more challenging (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Poverty-related stress also weakens the family structure, making the already difficult task of parenting even more so (Evans, 2004).

In light of all these studies, how does Los Bambues compare?

6.2.1. Family and the Neighbourhood in Los Bambues

Family

Although this study does not focus on parenting per se, the earlier discussion suggests that most parents in the barrio are either authoritarian or permissive. Studies abound that associate authoritative parenting with high academic achievement (Steinberg et al., 1992; Aunola et al., 2000) but some have begun to challenge this accepted wisdom. Park and Bauer (2002)'s study of parenting practices and academic achievement amongst multiple ethnicities find that the association holds for the majority group (European Americans) but falls apart for the others (Hispanics, African Americans and Asian Americans), demonstrating the inaccuracy of applying this association to *all* ethnic groups. Others suggest that this implies that cultural factors may also be at play (Spera, 2005). In Los Bambues, the presence of authoritarian and permissive parenting coupled with ambitious adolescents also challenges this wisdom. Moreover, what seems often overlooked in the discussion of parenting and achievement are the additional resources that parents (authoritative or otherwise) are opportuned with or are able to draw upon to further assist them in their roles. Kotchick and Forehand (2002) discuss how extra-familial social and contextual factors (i.e. the neighbourhood, community resources, culture as

mentioned above, etc) can help mould parenting behaviour, and advise researchers on parenting to consider these factors in their work. In Los Bambues, where insufficient community resources limit the efficacy of parenting, such a consideration is essential.

The position that peers, especially during adolescence, have more influence than families is usually based on the assumption that adolescents spend a greater amount of time outside those families (Duncan and Raudenbush, 2001). This does not hold in Los Bambues, where in contrast, it appears that adolescents spend a greater amount of time *with* and around their families. This was especially evident during December and January, their summer vacation. When school began, the time spent at home only decreased by the amount of time spent at school. Morning students studied from 7am to noon and afternoon students studied from noon to 6pm. The rest was spent at home with families or friends, but nearly always in the vicinity of the home. The barrio itself as a physically bounded entity, the absence of a neighbourhood play area, next door neighbours as close friends, unemployment and lack of community or after school programs are all reasons for why they had nowhere to go.

Certain studies also suggest that even in adolescence, families (especially parents) retain their influential edge over peers and that family-level variables associate more strongly with individual outcomes than neighbourhood-level variables (Bryant et al., 2006; Duncan and Raudenbush, 2001; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000). In Latin America, the family, lower SES ones included, are important as they provide emotional support and affection, particularly during the emotional adolescents years – in Colombia, some eighty percent of adolescents live with their immediate family (Martínez, 2007). These studies align more with the observations in Los Bambues, particularly because the assumptive departure point – that adolescents spend less time at home – is the opposite. It therefore follows that parents in the barrio remain very influential (especially for those adolescents with at least one stay-at-home parent, some eighteen out of the nineteen participant sample) and it is no surprise that these influences, through their liberating efforts, contribute to the breadth of aspirations of those adolescents.

The Neighbourhood

The Latin American culture, in particular, has been conceptualized as being collectivistic, where individuals are more likely to have interdependent self-views and value harmonious relationships (Cordero, 2011). This collectivism has also been noted to relate to greater familial support (ibid.). While the concepts of social organization and collective efficacy were not directly measured in this study, barrio Los Bambues does appear to be strongly collectivist. There was an unspoken *open door* policy – neighbours passed freely between homes, and borrowed everything from kitchen utensils to sugar. Small children of single working parents were kept with neighbours until parents returned, and parents often watched out for other children. There was also, generally, high social cohesion, although those who were a part of a group (i.e. of an NGO project) tended to have stronger ties, particularly with members of the same group. Nevertheless, the observation, in literature, of positive correlates of socially cohesive neighbourhoods – lower levels of high-risk indicators – appears true in Los Bambues, especially in the light of its ambitious adolescents.

Elliott et al. (2006)'s work "Good kids from bad neighbourhoods: successful development in social context," a multi-neighbourhood study in Denver and Chicago to determine neighbourhood effects on individual successes, captures the essence of my discovery in Los Bambues. While their main hypothesis – that some neighbourhoods are better than others for promoting positive development and preventing dysfunctional health issues – holds true (they discover that more advantaged neighbourhoods, on *average*, have modestly higher rates of successful development), they also discover *significant* variations in individual successes *within* neighbourhoods, suggesting that individual success depends on the quality or effectiveness of the resources (limited or plentiful) within neighbourhoods (i.e. families, schools, friends and community organizations) along with the individual's own attributes and choices. Disadvantaged neighbourhoods are not necessarily *bad* for raising children, and affluent neighbourhoods not necessarily good – quality, they discover, is not determined by SES or poverty, but by the neighbourhood's organizational, cultural or physical arrangement (ibid.). In neighbourhoods where the major available resources are families, friends and community organizations, it must be the quality of these resources, along with the adolescents' own agencies, that

determine their desire for success. And in Los Bambues where adolescents spend more time with their families, it is the quality (or otherwise) of these families that appear to have the greatest impact.

A Neighbourhood Resource: Parents' Participation in Community Organizations

As demonstrated, community organizations, where they exist, can be an important neighbourhood resource, not only for its participants, but for that participant's circle of influence. Community groups can become a sphere of activity when the conventional political landscape is limiting as women find it easier to participate in these fora as not only are they less aggressive, but they are also more proximal to their homes – an important consideration for stay at home mothers (Waylen, 2007). Thus, cooperation among women is an important and an effective empowerment tool. Informal groups that mobilize for issues of nutrition, food, and education contribute to a higher living standard for women, their families and their communities, and government and organizations that work through such groups increase the chances that resources are channelled to the most vulnerable members of these communities (UNICEF, 2007). In Los Bambues, participation in community organizations is seen to deepen social ties, especially among members of the same groups. For instance, the single mother of the pregnant girl noted earlier was less involved and as a result, had less social ties from which she could benefit. What's more, adolescents from Los Bambues seemed to benefit from parents' participation in community organizations. Such organizations become a source of new ideas and or facilitate the development of new ideas, ideas which can be credited with equipping parents to liberate their children and allowing them to aspire for success.

This sub-section has examined the Los Bambues microsystem, and has demonstrated that despite often disparaging depictions of lower SES families and the neighbourhoods in which they reside, positive parental influences; neighbourhood friendships and ties; and the presence of community organizations have allowed Los Bambues to contradict such depictions, suggesting that lower SES families (and or neighbourhoods) *can* be positive influences on adolescents' developments and

desires to succeed. Using the idea of plasticity, the following section further contributes to this assertion.

6.3. Plasticity and Positive Youth Development

Adolescent research, as evidenced above, much too often focuses on problematic behaviour. However, the field is changing as researchers have begun to focus on capabilities as well as positive [aspects of] youth development (PYD), where researchers are concerned with providing adolescents with “opportunities, challenges, and new experiences” (Cotterell, p. 224, 2007). Instead of viewing young people, especially in lower SES settings, as societal problems that need to be overcome, PYD views them as societal resources with “potentialities” that can be actualized (Damon, 2004).

The PYD perspective has its roots in the biological idea of the plasticity of ontogeny where plasticity refers to “the potential for systematic change in the structure or function of attributes of an [organism]” (Lerner and Steinberg, p. 9, 2009). Similarly, the plasticity of human development is the idea that “particular instances of human development found within a given sample or period of time are not necessarily representative of the diversity of development that might potentially be observed under different conditions” (ibid., p. 10). PYD, thus, originated from interest among developmentalists in understanding the plasticity of human development and the relationship between individuals and their ecological environments (Lerner, 2005).

While there still remains a large focus on problematic adolescent behaviour, the emergence of the PYD perspective (and as a result the focus on plasticity, diversity and individuality) and the ability of adolescents to influence their own behaviour means that this problem-oriented viewpoint is now seen as just *one of* the possible periods in an individual’s developmental process, not the *only one* (CCAD, 1996). Initially, PYD began with a change in the language used to describe adolescent behaviour – it now seeks to validate such a change with multiple frameworks to allow researchers and practitioners alike to engage more effectively with the PYD perspective. Among these are: the Search Institute’s internal and external

developmental assets; the National Research Council's personal and social assets; and the five Cs model¹, which are highlighted in the accompanying footnote.

6.3.1. Plasticity and PYD in Los Bambues

The previous subsection (section 6.2)'s declaration of the possibility of adolescents in Los Bambues to positively develop and to desire to succeed, despite being from lower SES families and neighbourhood, is, in essence, an affirmation of PYD. Plasticity and PYD are intermingled with family and neighbourhood effects. The availability of supportive (or quality and effective) families, peers, schools, neighbourhoods, organizations, programs and policies could “actualize [adolescents'] potential for plasticity” and engender change in more positive directions (Lerner and Steinberg, 2009, p. 10). Efficacious internal and external developmental assets (including quality families and neighbourhood resources) provide, in spite of SES, those very different conditions that engender PYD. What's more, such conditions also optimize PYD as they provide a “good fit” between the individual and the developmental and ecological assets found in their context (Benson et al., 2006).

Implications for Individual Agency

Underlying (but important for the understanding of) the PYD perspective is the idea of individual agency, a recognition of the initiative-taking potentialities of adolescents (Smith, 2007). An individual's “inherent” developmental strengths, including social competencies and positive identities, work bi-directionally with external ones (i.e. quality of resources in their contexts) to promote PYD (Benson et al., 2006). What was observed in Los Bambues, then, is a confluence of the efficacy of the barrio's familial and neighbourhood resources *and* the strength of the characters of the adolescents themselves. The self-direction cited as a rationale for many of the career choices indicates that while their families may provide the liberating environment for them to think freely, the outcome of that thought process is largely their own.

¹ Benson et al.'s (Benson et al., 2006; Scales et al., 2006) developmental assets classify various criteria – positive relationships, opportunities, skills, values and self-perceptions – that contribute to an adolescent's positive development. The NRC and IOM report (Eccles and Gootman, 2002) on community programs identifies the skills, knowledge and personal and social assets required to function well during adolescence and adulthood. The five Cs – competence, confidence, connection, character and caring – were conceptualized as being positive outcomes of youth development programs; a sixth C, contribution, was later added to signify the onset of adulthood as an adolescent contributes to themselves, their family, their community and their society (Lerner et al., 2000; Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

7. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER DIRECTIONS

This paper began with the aim of elucidating upon the career aspirations of a case of adolescents in barrio Los Bambues, in the metropolitan area of Bucaramanga, Colombia. To do this, I wanted to know how the families of these adolescents contributed to their career aspirations; how the barrio itself contributed to these aspirations; and which, of the extra-individual factors, was most influential. I discovered that while some families ties liberated adolescents to freely dream and aspire, others bound adolescents and significantly prevented them from aspiring toward a goal, and the rest were somewhere in the middle, as neither tie was observable to a greater degree. Furthermore, families, among other extra-individual factors, were the most influential. The adolescents in the sample, it appears, were in general, some well-adjusted and typical young people living in some very atypical conditions.

The discoveries suggest a rethinking of the idea of strong neighbourhood effects, particularly in light of contextual differences among neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the adolescents in the sample ultimately belie the idea that lower SES families and neighbourhoods beget lower SES, high-risk-behaviour seeking adolescents and adults, an indication that such neighbourhoods and a desire for success may not necessarily be mutually exclusive. Moreover, the focus on lower SES or disadvantaged neighbourhoods *and* negative outcomes is becoming a thing of the past as studies of positive youth development (PYD) in these neighbourhoods emerge that refute the “single story” that adolescents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods only grow up to repeat the same cycle in which *they* grew up. That these studies also document the conditions for this PYD, with close attention to the impact of contextual and macrosystem issues (i.e. of structural inequality) is an added step in a *positive* direction.

Since, generally, there are more adolescents that exhibit positive behaviour than those that exhibit delinquent behaviour, more studies ought to be devoted to these positive behaviours to widen understanding about the conditions that favour them. The incidence of positive adolescent development in Los Bambues, therefore, sends a

strong message to decision-makers of the need to pay closer attention to such favourable conditions so that they may be supported and strengthened.

Given more time and less constraints, a multiple case study (i.e. of adolescents in the other barrios in which Zona Afecto operates) would have been employed to illustrate the issue from multiple perspectives to discern if the observed themes hold for all cases. While the noted career aspirations of these adolescents are not necessarily indicative of their *future* successes, they surely do indicate a desire for success which is particularly telling. One of the interviewee's siblings, her eldest brother (a young man of 22 years, who I did not interview), has a job and lives *outside* of the barrio, a triumph that attests to the efficacy of his familial (to a greater extent) and possibly neighbourhood resources. If he is any indication, his sister also has a very good chance of at least succeeding in *leaving* the barrio. In any case, it would be interesting to return to Los Bambues in some ten years (when adolescents are in their mid- to late-twenties) to perform a follow up study to see if some of the adolescents' aspirations have been actualized in spite of the structural and preventative barriers that poor people often face (Gomez, 2004).

I note that community organizations are potential sources of new ideas that parents transmit to their children, using these ideas to help to further liberate them. These ideas may also, along with individual preferences, be a reason for the actual career choice that the adolescents aspire to. How do parents, having gained new ideas from community groups, transmit these ideas unto their children? Do they consciously do so through words or harangues or do they subconsciously transmit them through deeds? These are avenues for further research that could offer more insight into family ties and adolescents' career aspirations.

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PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE FIELD



Los Bambues from the street.



Entrance to the barrio (left) and path to the communal room (right) – the communal room is in the direction of the arrow.



The communal room: the hub of activity where lunch programs and group and meetings occur.



The communal room kitchen (left) and WPF food rations in the pantry beside the kitchen (right).



Artwork by parents of adolescents in ZA productive bag-making group.



Artwork by parents of adolescents in ZA productive bag-making group.

APPENDIX 1a – Adolescents' Interview guide (English)

About you

- Name, single, children, age
- How long have you lived here?
- How many persons live in your house?
- Do you believe in God? Do you go to church?*
- Do you have a computer? Do you have facebook? How frequently do you use the computer?*
- Your best friends live here in the neighbourhood or they're from outside (i.e. school?)*

Work

- Do you have a job?
- If yes, how much do you earn monthly?
- If not, how do you get spending Money? Who gives you Money if you want to buy something?

Education

- Do you study?
- What grade are you in? When do you begin your studies? How much time is left until you finish (high school)?
- What do you want to do after high school?
- Do you want to go to university? Why? Why not?*
- Who most motivates you to study?
- What do you want to study after high school?
- For you, what does more education mean (at university, an institute, whatever place of study)?
- What is your biggest dream in your life?
- Who has the most influence in your life? When you want to do something, to whom do you listen to the most?

Boyfriend (or girlfriend)/ Sexuality

- Do you have a boyfriend? Do you have a child? Are you pregnant*
- Why do you think there are many adolescents in the neighbourhood that have boyfriends/girlfriends? When do you want to have children?

About Zona Afecto

- For how long have you been in the group?
- Why are you in the group and what do you do in it?
- Have you been to all the meetings? How often are there meetings?
- What do you like most about the group? What aspect of the group do you like the most?
- What have you learned from the group?
- How have you changed since you started participating in the group, i.e. in thought or mentality?
- What do you not like about the group?
- Is there something to improve about the group?
- Will you continue to participate in the group this year?

*Questions added later, **Questions modified

APPENDIX 1b - Adolescents' Interview Guide (Spanish)

Sobre ti

- Nombre, soltero, hijos, edad
- Hace cuanto tiempo está viviendo aquí?
- Cuántas personas viven en su casa?
- Cree en dios? Va a la iglesia? *
- Tiene una computadora? Tiene facebook? Con qué frecuencia usa su computadora? Sus mejores amigos viven aquí en el Barrio o son de afuera (escuela)? *

Trabajo

- Usted tiene trabajo?
- Si responde si, cuánto gana mensualmente?
- Si no, cómo obtiene dinero para sus gastos? A quién le da dinero si quiere comprar algo?

Educación

- Usted estudia?
- Está en qué grado? Cuando empieza sus estudios? Cuánto tiempo falta para terminar?
- Qué quiere hacer después de bachillerato?
- Quiere ir a la universidad? Porque? Porque no? **
- A quién le motiva a usted para estudiar más?
- Qué quiere estudiar después de bachillerato?
- Para ti, qué significa más educación (en la universidad, en el instituto, en cualquier lugar)
- A quién tiene la mayor influencia en su vida? Cuando quiere hacer algo, a quién te oyes más? *

Novios/Sexualidad

- Tiene un novio? Tiene un hijo? Está embarazada? *
- Porque piensa que hay muchos jóvenes en el Barrio que tienen hijos? * Cuando quiere tener hijos?

Sobre el grupo

- Hace cuánto tiempo está en el grupo?
- Porque está en el grupo y qué hace en este grupo?
- Ha ido a todas las reuniones que han tenido? Con qué frecuencia tiene reuniones?
- Qué le gusta más sobre el grupo? Qué aspecto del grupo le gusta más?
- Qué ha aprendido en este grupo?
- Cómo ha cambiado desde su participación en el grupo? Por ejemplo, en pensamiento, mentalidad?
- Qué no le gusta sobre el grupo?
- Hay algo que pueden mejorar o cambiar en el grupo?
- Va a seguir participando en el grupo este año?
- Qué es su gran sueño en su vida?

APPENDIX 2 – Compressed Interview Data

#	AGE	SEX	HOUSEHOLD (HH)	HH #	CAREER ASPIRATION	WHY?	WHY MORE EDUCATION	MOTIVATORS TO STUDY
1	20	F	Parents, Brother	4	Physiotherapy	Likes children	Independence	Self, nieces
2	14	F	Parents, Sister	4	Engineer	Likes the career	Professionalism	Parents
3	17	F	Mother, Brother, others	11	Engineer	Always wanted to	Provide for family	Self, mother, desire to travel
4	12	F	Mother, Siblings	4	Beautician	Friends, Neighbours	Does not know	Mother
5	11	F	Mother, Sister (16)*, Brother (18)	4	Beautician	Aunt	Learn more about beauty	Self; Aunt*
6	19	M	Parents, Brother (8)	4	Artist	His dream	Take care of disability	Self
7	19	F	Mother, Sister, Nephew	4	Systems engineer	Father who is an electrician	Learn more about systems	Parents
8	18	M	Parents, Brother (6)	4	Military	Dream	Bilingualism	Self
9	13	F	Parents, 2 Sisters (10)	5	Secretary	Likes the career	Learn more	Parents; siblings; friends
10	17	F	Parents, 2 Sisters	5	Criminalist	Calls her attention	Help parent, move forward	Parents
11	14	M	Parents, 2 Sisters (12), 3 Relatives	8	Nursing	Finds it interesting	Independence	Older sister and mother
12	14	F	Parents, 2 Siblings, 3 Relatives	8	Computer systems	Don't know	Self-advancement	Older sister and mother
13	14	F	Mother, 2 Brothers	4	Child Psychology	Likes children	Success; give children future	Mother, sister, brother
14	13	F	Parents, Brother, Grandma	5	Business Admin.	Calls her attention	Help family	Self, mother
15	13	F	Mother, 3 Siblings, Broinlaw, 2 Nephews, Grandma	8	Nursing	Likes the career	To be someone in life	Mother; father sometimes
16	13	F	Mother, Siblings (5, 18)	4	Beautician	Aunt	Learn more about beauty	Self, aunt
17	13	F	Parents, Sisters	5	Criminalist	Calls her attention	Learn more, in general	Self
18	15	M	Mother, Sisters (4, 16)	4	Systems specialist	Friends	Finish high school	Friend (who studies systems)
19	17	M	Mom, Aunt, Grandma	4	Computer systems	Closer to dream of engineering	To be someone	Mother

*Numbers in brackets are sibling participants.

APPENDIX 2 – Compressed Interview data cont'd

#	AGE	SEX	HOUSEHOLD (HH)	HH #	DREAM
1	20	F	Parents, Brother	4	Physiotherapy, help parents, adopt a child
2	14	F	Parents, Sister	4	Professionalism, help family and grandparents
3	17	F	Mother, Brother	11	Travel; to be in the newspaper
4	12	F	Mother, Siblings	4	Work in 'beauty'
5	11	F	Mother, Sister (16), Brother (18)	4	Learn all related to beauty
6	19	M	Parents, Brother (8)	4	Singer or graphic artist
7	19	F	Mother, Sister, Nephew	4	Big computer business; help her mother; be a good mother
8	18	M	Parents, Brother (6)	4	Be in the military
9	13	F	Parents, 2 Sisters (10)	5	Does not know
10	17	F	Parents, 2 Sisters	5	Help parents
11	14	M	Parents, 2 Sisters, 3 Relatives	8	Self-advancement; own family
12	14	F	Parents, 2 Siblings, 3 Relatives	8	Family, big house, pool, "that I never lack money"
13	14	F	Mother, 2 Brothers	4	Be someone important: "that my mother is proud of whatever I become"
14	13	F	Parents, Brother, Grandma	5	For her cousin to recuperate; buy a house for her parents
15	13	F	Mother, 3 Siblings, Broinlaw, 2 Nephews, Grandma	8	Help her family
16	13	F	Mother, Siblings (5, 18)	4	Beautician or "model"
17	13	F	Parents, Sisters	5	None
18	15	M	Mother, Sisters (4, 16)	4	Does not know; not thought of it
19	17	M	Mom, Aunt, Grandma	4	System engineer

APPENDIX 3a – Adolescents' Family Ties

#	AGE	SEX	GRADE	HOUSEHOLD (HH)	HH #	CAREER ASPIRATION	WHY MORE EDUCATION	MOTIVATION TO STUDY	FAMILY TIE
1	20	F	7	Parents, Brother	4	Physiotherapy	Independence	Self, nieces	Liberating
2	14	F	HS	Parents, Sister	4	Engineer	Professionalism	Parents	Liberating
3	17	F	7	Mother, Brother	11	Engineer (Petroleum)	Provide for family	Self, mother, desire to travel	Liberating
4	12	F	7	Mother, Siblings	4	Beautician	Does not know	Mother	Binding
5	11	F	6	Mother, Sister (16), Brother (18)	4	Beautician	Learn more about beauty	Self, Aunt*	Both
6	19	M	7	Parents, Brother (8)	4	Artist	Take care of disability	Self	Liberating
7	19	F	7	Mother, Sister, Nephew	4	Systems Engineer	Learn more about systems	Parents	Liberating
8	18	M	6	Parents, Brother (6)	4	Military	Bilingualism	Self	Liberating
9	13	F	9	Parents, 2 Sisters (10)	5	Secretary	Learn more	Parents, siblings, friends	Liberating
10	17	F	9	Parents, 2 Sisters	5	Criminalist	Help parent, move forward	Parents	Liberating
11	14	M	10	Parents, 2 Sisters (12), 3 Relatives	8	Nursing	Independence	Older sister and mother	Liberating
12	14	F	8	Parents, 2 Siblings, 3 Relatives	8	Computer Systems	Self-advancement	Older sister and mother	Liberating
13	14	F	HS	Mother, 2 Brothers	4	Child Psychology	Success; give children future	Mother, sister, brother	Both
14	13	F	HS	Parents, Brother, Grandpa	5	Business Admin.	Help family	Self, mother	Liberating
15	13	F	10	Mother, 3 Siblings, Broinlaw, 2 Nephews, Grandma	8	Nursing	To be someone in life	Mother; father sometimes	Liberating
16	13	F	4	Mother, Siblings (5, 18)	4	Beautician	Learn more about beauty	Self, aunt	Both
17	13	F	4	Parents, Sisters	5	Criminalist	Learn more, in general	Self	Liberating
18	15	M	HS	Mother, Sisters (4, 16)	4	Systems Specialist	Finish high school	Friend who studies systems	Binding
19	17	M	10	Mom, Aunt, Grandma	4	Computer systems	To be someone	Mother	Both

APPENDIX 3b – Adolescents' Family Ties, Sorted by 'Family Ties'

#	AGE	SEX	GRADE	HOUSEHOLD (HH)	HH #	CAREER ASPIRATION	WHY MORE EDUCATION	MOTIVATION TO STUDY	FAMILY TIE
1	20	F	7	Parents, Brother	4	Physiotherapy	Independence	Self, nieces	Liberating
2	14	F	HS	Parents, Sister	4	Engineer	Professionalism	Parents	Liberating
3	17	F	7	Mother, Brother	11	Engineer (Petroleum)	Provide for family	Self, mother, desire to travel	Liberating
6	19	M	7	Parents, Brother (8)	4	Artist	Take care of disability	Self	Liberating
7	19	F	7	Mother, Sister, Nephew	4	Systems Engineer	Learn more about systems	Parents	Liberating
8	18	M	6	Parents, Brother (6)	4	Military	Bilingualism	Self	Liberating
9	13	F	9	Parents, 2 Sisters (10)	5	Secretary	Learn more	Parents, siblings, friends	Liberating
10	17	F	9	Parents, 2 Sisters	5	Criminalist	Help parent, move forward	Parents	Liberating
11	14	M	10	Parents, 2 Sisters (12), 3 Relatives	8	Nursing	Independence	Older sister and mother	Liberating
12	14	F	8	Parents, 2 Siblings, 3 Relatives	8	Computer Systems	Self-advancement	Older sister and mother	Liberating
14	13	F	HS	Parents, Brother, Grandpa	5	Business Admin.	Help family	Self, mother	Liberating
15	13	F	10	Mother, 3 Siblings, Broinlaw, 2 Nephews, Grandma	8	Nursing	To be someone in life	Mother; father sometimes	Liberating
17	13	F	4	Parents, Sisters	5	Criminalist	Learn more, in general	Self	Liberating
5	11	F	6	Mother, Sister (16), Brother (18)	4	Beautician	Learn more about beauty	Self, Aunt*	Both
13	14	F	HS	Mother, 2 Brothers	4	Child Psychology	Success; give children future	Mother, sister, brother	Both
16	13	F	4	Mother, Siblings (5, 18)	4	Beautician	Learn more about beauty	Self, aunt	Both
19	17	M	10	Mom, Aunt, Grandma	4	Computer systems	To be someone	Mother	Both
4	12	F	7	Mother, Siblings	4	Beautician	Does not know	Mother	Binding
18	15	M	HS	Mother, Sisters (4, 16)	4	Systems Specialist	Finish high school	Friend who studies systems	Binding

APPENDIX 4 – Rating of Parental (Maternal) Activism in Los Bambues, Sorted by ‘Activism’

#	AGE	SEX	GRADE	HOUSEHOLD (HH)	HH #	CAREER ASPIRATION	WHY MORE EDUCATION	MOTIVATION TO STUDY	FAMILY TIE	ACTIVISM
6	19	M	7	Parents, Brother (8)	4	Artist	Take care of disability	Self	Liberating	1
8	18	M	6	Parents, Brother (6)	4	Military	Bilingualism	Self	Liberating	1
9	13	F	9	Parents, 2 Sisters (10)	5	Secretary	Learn more	Parents, siblings, friends	Liberating	1
10	17	F	9	Parents, 2 Sisters	5	Criminalist	Help parent, move forward	Parents	Liberating	1
3	17	F	7	Mother, Brother	11	Engineer (Petroleum)	Provide for family	Self, mother, desire to travel	Liberating	2
13	14	F	HS	Mother, 2 Brothers	4	Child Psychology	Success; give children future	Mother, sister, brother	Both	2
14	13	F	HS	Parents, Brother, Grandpa	5	Business Admin.	Help family	Self, mother	Liberating	2
15	13	F	10	Mother, 3 Siblings, Broinlaw, 2 Nephews, Grandma	8	Nursing	To be someone in life	Mother; father sometimes	Liberating	2
19	17	M	10	Mom, Aunt, Grandma	4	Computer systems	To be someone	Mother	Both	2
1	20	F	7	Parents, Brother	4	Physiotherapy	Independence	Self, nieces	Liberating	3
2	14	F	HS	Parents, Sister	4	Engineer	Professionalism	Parents	Liberating	3
5	11	F	6	Mother, Sister (16), Brother (18)	4	Beautician	Learn more about beauty	Self, Aunt*	Both	3
11	14	M	10	Parents, 2 Sisters (12), 3 Relatives	8	Nursing	Independence	Older sister and mother	Liberating	3
12	14	F	8	Parents, 2 Siblings, 3 Relatives	8	Computer Systems	Self-advancement	Older sister and mother	Liberating	3
16	13	F	4	Mother, Siblings (5, 18)	4	Beautician	Learn more about beauty	Self, aunt	Both	3
17	13	F	4	Parents, Sisters	5	Criminalist	Learn more, in general	Self	Liberating	3
18	15	M	HS	Mother, Sisters (4, 16)	4	Systems Specialist	Finish high school	Friend who studies systems	Binding	3
7	19	F	7	Mother, Sister, Nephew	4	Systems Engineer	Learn more about systems	Parents	Liberating	4
4	12	F	7	Mother, Siblings	4	Beautician	Does not know	Mother	Binding	5

APPENDIX 5 – Parenting Typologies and Their Impacts on Childhood and Adolescence

Parenting Style	Description	Childhood	Adolescence
Authoritative	Restrictive, adults set many rules and expect strict obedience, adults rely on power not reason to get compliance	High cognitive and social competencies	High self-esteem, excellent social skills, strong morality or prosocial concern, high academic achievement
Authoritarian	Flexible, democratic, warm parents provide guidance and control but allow child some decision-making ability	Average cognitive and social competencies	Average academic performance, more conforming than those of permissive parents
Permissive	Accepting adults who make few demands of their children and seldom try to control their behaviour	Low cognitive and social competencies	Poor self-control and academic performance; more drug use than above adolescents
Uninvolved	Adults who have either rejected parental role or are too overwhelmed by own problems to parent	Low cognitive and little or no social competencies	Very poor academic performance, hostile, selfish and rebellious

Adapted from Shaffer (2000) [sources: Baumrind, 1977, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994]