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How Parents Think About the Education of Their Sons and Daughters: An Examination of Kurdish immigrant Parents in the United States

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How Parents Think About the Education of Their Sons and Daughters: An Examination of Kurdish Immigrant Parents In the United States

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ABSTRACT

The study seeks to learn how Kurds who currently live in the United States think about and manage their children’s education. Of particular interest is the ways in which the gender of their children might influence how parents engage with their children’s education. Based on 18 semi-structured interviews with Kurdish parents who live in Nashville, Tennessee, the study revealed that Kurds value education, which is not surprising given Kurd’s traditional support for education. But the parents feel more responsible for and take a much more proactive role in their children’s education than is typical of Kurds living in Kurdistan. The interviews suggest this is so because the parents are not only concerned with securing and education for their children but also making sure their children adopt a Kurdish identity. That is, parental investment in their children’s education is at least in part related to concerns for their children’s culture and national identity. Although parents perceive no direct discrimination from the Americans they live among, their preoccupation with the issue and the high bar they set for evidence of discrimination nonetheless suggests that they are well aware of the risks. The study also found that gender plays a role in parental investment, albeit not in a straightforward way. That is, even though parents support the education of both their sons and daughters, they are nonetheless guided by deep seated assumptions that, once they grow up, their sons and daughters will live very different lives. More, specifically, the parents operated on a taken-for-granted assumption that their daughters would live more circumscribed lives than their sons and hence needed a somewhat different investment during childhood.
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INTRODUCTION

Education in the United States has been considered a primary viable insulator against poverty and social inequality (Allen & Hood 2000), given that future socioeconomic status is partially determined by educational attainment (Wolniak et al. 2008). The more parents invest in the education of their children, the better chances children have to excel in academic achievement (Dumais 2002, Roscigno et al. 2006). Therefore, the ramifications of group disparities in parental investment, when they are found to exist, are great.

Several scholars have offered insight into what shapes parental investment in children’s education. For example, Becker (1991) suggests that educational returns shape parental investment and parents may invest more when they get enough education returns. In a deeper look into the question of whether educational returns or parental preferences shapes parental investment, Alderman & King (1998) argue that one of them or both could affect parents to invest resources in their children differently. Finally, Chin and Phillips (2004) are more definitive and suggest that different levels of parental educational investments result from resources, rather than social components. In other words, the factor that leads parents to invest in their children first is their available resources, not social factors like parent’s preferences.

Given the existence of racial and ethnic gaps across multiple academic outcome measures in the United States (Bali and Alvarez 2004, Kao and Thompson 2003), whether there is racial and ethnic variance in parental investment – and in what ways it may differ, if any – is an important question. To this end, prior research has been conducted on cultural differences in home socialization practices with regard to school learning (Schneider & Lee 1990), and some existing differences are now well-known to scholars. However, the dimension of language-minority status is under-examined in scholarly literature; many language-minority groups in the
United States are outright ignored in academic research (August and Hakuta 1997), including the Kurdish immigrants who are the focal group for this study. (It is imperative to mention that most of the studies that have been done about parental investment have focused on Latinos and Asian population in the United States and even though there are a few studies about Middle Eastern immigrant groups in this field of study, none of them examined the Kurdish population.) Given this omission, this study enriches the literature about parental investment among language-minority immigrant groups in the United States.

Having no independent home state and living in unstable political situations makes Kurdish people a special case even among immigrants from the Middle East region of the world. The group is centered in Kurdistan, which is a territory that overlaps with the political boundaries of four nations: Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq. That Kurdistan is divided between these four nations means that Kurdish immigrants to the United States may come from very different situations even within Kurdistan. Another reason that Kurds are interesting as a study population is that the group may be perceived (and received) differently in the United States than are other immigrant groups from the Middle East. Because Kurds have had a good relationship with the United States and they have been covered in the American media recently as a close ally with the United States in the ongoing fight against extremist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the group may be somewhat favored in the U.S. In turn, this may enhance them to develop their Kurdish identity and take advantage of it for their children’s education. Finally, as Ozaki (2011) mentioned, “the impact of global events is always intertwined in identity development,” so the social conditions from which Kurds emigrated may be dissimilar enough from those of other immigrant groups that their outcomes do not match those of other more-studied groups.
The purpose of this study to explore parental investment in children’s education in a Kurdish community in the United States and see how Kurdish parents think about and manage their children’s education. The study seeks to learn generally how Kurdish parents invest resources in their children’s education (educational items, cultural capital, and social capital). More specifically, I examine the role the children’s gender in play in parental educational investment and seek to learn something about the obstacles that Kurdish parents may face when investing in their children’s education.

LITERATURE

Sociologists who examine parental investment in education have given much attention to parental socioeconomic background, family structure, race, gender and their effects on quality and quantity of these investments (Aschaffenburg & Maas 1997, Downey 1995, Freese & Powell 1999, Steelman & Powell 1991, Teachman 1987). For instance, Aschaffenburg & Maas (1997) found that cultural socialization affects children’s educational attainment, and that parents who have higher education have children who have higher cultural capital. Occupational discrimination also may shape parental investment among minority groups. Schneider & Lee (1990) found the investment in science-oriented education among East Asian as a strategy to overcome the discrimination that face them in the labor market. Bonesrønning (2010) mentioned that parental effort allocations – at least to some extent – are responses to their children’s efforts, and vice versa. In order to invest resources in their children, parents must believe that there is a connection between those investments and children’s futures (Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, and Crowley 2006). As Bempechat (1992) notes, “Parent’s attitudes, expectancies, and beliefs about schooling and learning guide their behavior with their children and have casual influence on the children’s development of achievement attitudes and behaviors. Parent’s beliefs do not
necessarily have to be explicit. Often subtle aspects of beliefs and behavior-of which parents may be unaware-can be very influential” (Bempechat.1992: 33-34). In addition to the influence of parental attitudes about education, studies about parental investment in the form of educational resources have focused on household resources and the effects of access to them on children’s educational success. Scholars have found that family educational resources are significantly associated with academic success (Downey 1995, Roscigno et al 2006), although Teachman (1987) revealed that benefits of educational resources may vary by race, finding that they are less important in determining educational outcomes for African-Americans than for whites because educational resources are more highly correlated with indicators of family background for blacks than for whites. Different variables have been used by scholars to measure household educational resources. Educational objects in the home (specific place to study, whether there are computers, reference books, a daily newspaper, or a dictionary/encyclopedia in the home) and saving accounts for children’s educational futures are common variables that have been used by scholars (Downey 1995, Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell 1999, Roscigno et al 2006, Teachman 1987, Xu 2006, Steelman and Powell 1991).

Since educational resources play a role in academic success, the amount of these resources in minority group families and the factors that shape tendency to invest these resources should be highlighted. Min Zhou (2003: 219) states that “Although a portion of today’s culturally diverse children comes from middle-class backgrounds and are well protected by resourceful parents, the majority still face considerable risk.” And this may impede the parents in minority groups from providing educational materials and necessities that children need for their studies. Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell (1999) found that racial disparity in socioeconomic background and family structure affect African-American children to have less household
educational resources than their white counterparts. They also revealed that even though socioeconomic status is a predictor of racial disparity in educational resources, there is racial inequality in educational returns as well. Regardless of their available resources, this study showed that African-American parents do not have less ambition and aspiration towards education as their white counterparts have. Another study found that even though parents across three immigrant groups reported the importance of education for their children, they differ with regard to providing educational objects to their children. Specifically, researchers found that Portuguese parents are more likely than Dominican parents to provide educational materials to their children, while Cambodian parents are less likely than Portuguese and Dominican parents to provide educational objects to their children (Garcia et al 2002, Roscigno et al 2006) conducted a study about place and its effects on educational inequality. What they found was that inner-city adolescents, who are more likely to be minorities, have less educational objects and low educational outcomes. Families in the inner-cities also have low income, less parental education, more children per household and less educational investment.

As studies have shown, children in racial/ethnic minority groups are different in terms of possessing educational resources at home. The difference of these resources did not stem from parents’ intentions, but rather from various other factors. Family structure could be a factor that may affect parental investment. Roscigno et al (2006) pointed out that families with both mother and father are more supportive than families with just father or mother for children’s education because of their better income and providing educational resources. Socioeconomic background, family size, and parental education are the main factors that shape parental investment in educational resources among minorities. Findings from other studies demonstrated that providing
educational resources for children is negatively associated with family size (Downey 1995, Steelman and Powell 1991), but these studies did not mention race/ethnicity as a predictor.

Drawing from the above discussion, it is quite clear that parental investment through providing educational resources as a form of investment is shaped by several factors. While low family income may restrict parents’ ability to provide educational materials to their children, there are other factors whether parents are likely to be less or more concerned about providing educational items for their kids, including family size, parent’s education, and family structure. Anticipated educational returns also encourage or discourage parents from minority groups to provide educational materials for their children. Moreover, the impacts of educational items vary based on race and ethnicity.

**Cultural capital and parental investment**

In addition to physical resources that parents may make available to their children, cultural capital is also a tool for school success that parents may share. Even though there are several definitions for cultural capital, DiMaggio (1982: 190) mentioned cultural capital as “instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed.” Cultural capital as a form of parental investment is associated with Bourdieu’s cultural reproduction theory. His theory of social reproduction and cultural capital posits that the culture of the dominant class is transmitted and rewarded by the educational system (Bourdieu. 1973). According to Jaeger (2009: 1944) “Bourdieu’s core theoretical argument is three-fold: Parents must possess cultural capital; they must invest time and effort in transmitting cultural capital to their children; and children must absorb this cultural capital and transform it into educational success.”
In contrast to Bourdieu’s perspective and as an alternative to the cultural reproduction model, DiMaggio (1982) has developed a cultural mobility model. Bourdieu believes that cultural capital enables advantaged students to be rewarded by schools (Dumais 2002). In contrast with this, DiMaggio (1982) posits that the educational return of cultural capital is higher for disadvantaged children than for advantaged children. Even though both sides agree about the important role of cultural capital in education and believe that cultural capital influences academic success, they differ in terms of who they see as benefitting the most from it. There is no consensus among scholars about the meaning of cultural capital. Lamont and Lareau (1988) noted that even Bourdieu, who coined the term, was not entirely clear about the meaning of cultural capital; thus, cultural capital has been measured and demonstrated in a number of different ways. While scholars have used various variables to gauge cultural capital, the most common indicators are participation in cultural activities such as museum, theatre, art gallery, sporting events, zoo, library, or taking cultural courses such as art, music, history (Aschaffenburg & Maas 1997, Dumais 2002, Xu 2006, De Graaf 1986, Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell 1999). If cultural capital is familiarity with dominant cultural codes and practice – for example, linguistic styles, aesthetic preferences, and styles of interaction (Aschaffenburg & Maas 1997) – minorities may be disadvantaged in this sense. Studies have found that, on average, African-American children are less likely than their white counterparts to participate in the kinds of activities that foster cultural capital (Eitle & Eitle 2002, Reynolds & Gill 1994, Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell 1999). Another study revealed that East Asian parents in the U.S. are supportive to their children to take cultural courses outside of school and pay the tuition fee for those courses (Schneider & Lee 1990). Even though they did not specify what they mean by after school activities, Moosa and his colleagues (2001) revealed that Arab parents as minorities in the U.S. believed that those
activities are not important for their children. Aschaffenburg & Maas (1997) found that participating in cultural activities inside schools have effects on educational success, yet Muslim parents worry about their kids taking classes in art, dance, and sex education in school and do not support their kids’ participation (Merry 2005).

There are several different reasons why some minorities have less cultural capital than the majority group. Reynolds & Gill (1994) demonstrated that African-American parents have generally positive attitudes toward their children's schooling and they have high expectations for their educational attainment. Hence cultural capital disadvantages among African-American families are not rooted in parental attitudes toward education but instead stem from other factors such as fewer socioeconomic resources and less parental education (Eitle & Eitle 2002, Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell 1999). Since Arab parents do not support outside school activities for their children, they believe that kids should spend more time studying. They also have greater difficulties providing transportation for their children and have fewer financial resources (Moosa et al 2001).

Taken together, studies have demonstrated that there is racial disparity in cultural capital among minorities and this difference may partially belong to parent’s desire but in general economic condition and parental education may play an important role when it comes to cultural capital. In conclusion, parental investment in their children’s education is linked to four major forms of capital; first, financial capital affects parent’s ability to purchase educational goods and services; second, human capital affects parent’s ability to assess and improve their children's skills; third, cultural capital affects parents ability to cultivate their children's talents; and fourth, social capital affects parents ability to learn about and gain access to programs and activities (Chin and Phillips 2004).
Parental involvement and parental investment

Since cultural capital has a broad meaning (as mentioned above), there may be a close relationship between parental involvement and cultural capital. There are some indicators that have been used to measure cultural capital and parental involvement as well. For example, linguistic and interactional style, language use, silence or talkativeness in class, feeling comfortable approaching the teacher, reading a story at bedtime, parents’ large vocabulary, and childcare arrangements to attend school events during the school day all have been measured as indicators for cultural capital (Carter & Wojtkiewicz 2000, Robinson & Garnier 1985). Some of these indicators have been used by scholars to measure parental involvement, as well (Jeynes 2003). Parental involvement is defined as a process of activating the potential ability of parents both at home and in school for the benefit of their children (Ho 2003). Studies about parental involvement as a form of parental investment have been conducted by scholars in the field of education. How often parents contact their children’s school, the extent to which they take part in organized school activities, and how much they interact with their children about academic coursework and performance are the indicators that scholars have used the most to measure parental involvement (Bogenschneider 1997, Downey 1995b, Jeynes 2003, Keith et al 1998, Roscigno et al 2006, Zhang et al 2011). Parental involvement is a controversial topic when it comes to its usefulness for children’s academic success (Hornby 2011). There are some scholars who rejected its positive effects (Robinson & Harris 2014); at the same time, many studies not only have showed its positive impacts on children’s educational success (Bogenschneider 1997, Keith 1998, Zhang et al 2011), but they also have demonstrated other favorable consequences of parental involvement. For instance, some studies have found that certain types of the parental involvement forestall behavioral problems (Domina 2005, Hill et al 2004). Also, when parents
are involved in their children’s education, the children subsequently develop higher levels of educational and career aspirations (Knowles, S.S 1998, Trusty 1999, Hill et al 2004). As Domina (2005: 235-236) pointed out, parental involvement is beneficial in three ways. First, it socializes children because parents in this way can convey the message that education is important, and this encourages children to value education. Second, parental involvement provides parents with a means of social control; it helps parents to know other parents, teachers, and administrators who may then discuss their children’s performance with them. Last, involved parents are privy to information about their children; parents are in the better position to solve their children’s problem when teachers tell parents their children are struggling.

In light of what mentioned above, it should be discussed how parents of minority students involve themselves in their children’s education. A meta-analytic study about parental involvement among racial/ethnic groups found that although the effects of parental involvement were apparent for all the racial groups under study, it is also clear that the effects of parental involvement were greater for some groups than for others (Jeynes 2003). European American parents are more likely to be involved in their children’s school and less likely to manage their children’s time use at home than both Hispanic and African American parents. They also have more educational discussions with their children than their Hispanic/Latino counterparts. Lee and Bowen (2006) claim that there are no racial and ethnic group differences in parents’ educational expectations or in their involvement in children’s homework. Schneider & Lee (1990: 372) examined cultural and socioeconomic characteristics as factors for educational success among East Asian students in the United States. They found that “East Asian parents' interest in their children's education is reflected in how they structure the learning environment, not in the amount of time they spend tutoring their children on academic matters or the number of visits
made to school.” A study found that there is a gap between parents and teachers perception about parental involvement, while teachers of Arab students perceived that their parents are not involved or do not be involved, mothers reported that they are involved and they want more advice from teachers to help them to be more involved (Moosa et al 2001). Garcia and her colleagues (2002) conducted a study about parental involvement in three different groups in the United States. What they found was that each of these groups of parents have high aspirations for their children to become respectable and productive members of society and they valued education. They also found that parents are different when it comes to parental involvement. The Cambodian parents are more likely than the Portuguese and the Dominican parents to have a low parental involvement in their children’s education. Low parental involvement in Cambodians may belong to their sociohistorical conditions that brought them to the U.S. and traditional Cambodian educational beliefs and what they practice. The study also found that Dominican parents are more serious than other two groups to have home rules. Racial disparity was also found in another study. Asian mothers were less involved than were black, Hispanic, and white mothers. Black and white mothers were not different in the school involvement and they were more involved than Hispanics. White fathers were more involved than Hispanic, black, and Asian fathers. Black fathers were more involved than Asians but not Hispanics. Asian and Hispanic fathers were involved equally (Bogenschneider 1997). Another study examined the effects of race, parent’s gender, and household income on parental involvement. What they found was that all these indicators are significantly associated with parental involvement in children’s education. Controlling for other factors, African-American mothers are more likely to be involved in their children’s education through helping them to do their homework than their
counter parts in other racial groups such as Asians, Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, Whites, Others, and American Indian (Hartlep & Ellis 2010).

In light of what studies found it is clear that racial disparity exists among racial/ethnic groups in parental involvement. There are various factors that shape this difference. School barriers, socioeconomic background of families, cultural background of groups play a role in racial disparity in parental involvement. Garcia et al (2002) showed that language comfort and immigrant group membership were the most frequent variables associated with group differences. Kim (2009) found that there are school barriers that prevent parents of minority students to be involved in their children’s education at the school level. Turney & Kao (2009) revealed that even though immigrant parents are less likely to participate in school activities than white native born parents, these parents may have different ways of demonstrating their commitment to their children’s education. Despite adverse economic situations and other social impediments, African-American and Hispanic families had enthusiastic attitudes about education and attempted to provide supportive environments for academic achievement in their young children (Stevenson et al 1990).

Taken together, studies have demonstrated that ethnic group minorities have different experiences in parental involvement as a form of parental investment in children’s education. Their differences in parental involvement stem from the school barriers that face them, English language fluency, cultural background of ethnic groups towards education, and socioeconomic background of family. Thus, each ethnic group may have its own strategy to involve in children’s education that may be different from others.

*Gender differences and parental investment*
While educational attainment and achievement is influenced by parental investment (Dumais 2002, Roscigno et al 2006), gender disparity in parental investment may produce gender inequality in education. Pasqua (2005) mentioned the important role of education for women and stated that investing in women’s education has high social returns in terms of fertility reduction, better child health conditions, and a more equal distribution of resources within the family. Thus, it is important to examine how parents invest their resources in their daughters and sons and seek to understand how they make their decisions to invest differently or equally in their sons and daughters. In addition, it should be mentioned what the previous studies found when it comes to gender disparity in parental investment among minority groups because these groups may have different perspective about gender and this perspective may reflect in making their decisions in parental investment in children’s education. Shedding light on having educational resources, cultural capital, and parental involvement and their effects on boys and girl’s academic success may clarify gender disparity in parental investment among ethnic/racial minority groups in the U.S. Gender has not been much discussed in the studies about parental investment among immigrant groups, while other studies on parental investment either did not mentioned gender or they mentioned it without referring to parents or children’s race/ethnic. There are studies that have examined gender and its effects on parental investment but they have done so without taking race/ethnicity into account (DiMaggio 1982, Dumais 2002, Steelman & Powell 1991, Xu 2006). There are other studies that have examined parental investment based on race/ethnicity, but without addressing potential gender differences (Eitle & Eitle 2002). Studies examined both race and gender in parental investment separately. In other words, there are studies that have examined parental investment and taken either race or gender as a predictor (Aschaffenburg &
Maas 1997, Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell 1999), while failing to account for the interaction of the two.

There is no consensus among scholars about gender difference in parental investment and its effects on academic success. DiMaggio (1982) found that women are more likely than men to participate in high culture activities than men. Consistent with this, prior research revealed that even though there is no gender difference in going on cultural trips, girls are more likely than boys to attend cultural classes, they are slightly less likely to have educational resources at home; parents invest more cultural capital in girls than they do in boys (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell 1999). Aschaffenburg & Maas (1997: 585) found no evidence that the process of cultural transmission is gendered. “Although girls are more likely to possess cultural capital at the early ages, this gender difference disappears over time. More important, cultural capital plays the same role in making educational transitions for boys and girls.” Bogenschneider (1997) demonstrated that mother involvement and father involvement are equally beneficial for sons’ and daughters’ academic success. Mothers were more involved in their daughters’ schooling than sons, while fathers were involved equally for their sons and daughters. Educated parents were more involved in their children’s school than uneducated parents. Xu (2006) found that in most countries, sons receive more parental investments in technical skills, whereas daughters receive more social and cultural capital. Even though a meta-analysis showed that gender is not significantly associated with parental involvement among minorities (Jeynes 2003), a study about educational resources at home and their effects on the level of schooling found that educational resources are less important in determining educational outcomes among blacks than whites; educational resources do not affect black men to have a high educational success. For women, there are no direct effects, but there are indirect effects operating through educational expectations (Teachman
1987). As Read and Oselin (2008: 302) mentioned that “immigrants are less likely than U.S born Arab Americans to share schemas that promote women’s public-sphere activities”. They also found that even though Arab families in the United States support education for their daughters, daughters have low educational returns in the labor market.

In light of what is mentioned above, I should mention why parents may invest their resources in their sons and daughters differently. From an economic point of view and as mentioned before, Becker (1991) suggested that if parents are rational, we would expect that they invest more in children who are smarter and socially more “acceptable”. Because discrimination against women has been common in most cultures, he predicted that sons are more advantaged in parental investment than daughters; because sons are more rewarded in educational institutions and the labor market, daughters are less advantaged in parental investment. Consistent with this, Alderman& King (1998) pointed out there is a significant relationship between gender discrimination in educational investment at the family level and family income. When educational returns to males are higher in the labor market, parents may invest more in their sons’ education. Parents may invest less in their girls’ education when they see less educational returns to their daughters than their sons. But it should be clear whether less investment in girls is due to educational returns in labor market or it is because of parent’s preferences. In order to reduce educational inequality Pasqua (2005: 308) stated that “very little can be done in the short run when traditional social values are strong and parents have a preference for boys.” Since there is no evidence concerning gender issues in the Kurdish community in the United States (because there are so few studies about this community), shedding light on gender issue in Kurdistan will be helpful for gaining a better understanding of Kurds’ perception about gender issues in education. Even though female education rates (along with education rates overall) have steadily
increased in Kurdistan, education disparity between male and female is conspicuous. This is so, research has shown, because parents have traditionally invested much less in the education of girls than boys (Lazier 1996, King 2011, Aziz 2011).

METHOD

Before addressing the methodological details of this study, it is first necessary to describe the target population, which is Kurds living in the United States. Kurds have fled their traditional homeland, which encompasses Northern Kurdistan (eastern Turkey), Southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq), Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran), and Western Kurdistan (northern and north-eastern Syria) and relocated to the United States in several waves. The military conflicts have caused Kurds to be displaced from their homeland (Cummings et al 2011). According to a documentary produced by the Nashville Public Television in 2008, since 1976 there have been four waves of Kurdish immigration to the United States. The first wave of four waves goes back to 1976 and these Kurds were fleeing a failed revolution in Iraqi Kurdistan. The second wave that came to the United States was in 1979 and the greater part of this wave were Kurds from the Kurdistan of Iran. The third wave took place between 1991 and 1992, this wave included Kurds who desperately fled the genocidal campaign, known as Anfal, imposed by the dictator Saddam Hussein in the late 1980s. The last wave was in the period between 1996 and 1997 and this wave included Kurds from Iraqi Kurdistan. Even though most Kurdish people follow Sunni Islam, there are also minorities of Shi’a Muslims, Jews, Christians, Alevi, Yezidis, Yarsans, Zoroastrians, Babis and followers of different Sufi and Mystic orders. Compared to men, women in the Kurdish culture have their status and roles. Women look after the household and family, and they are expected to show respect and politeness to men. Women take care of the children, and men dominate, make financial decisions, and decide the partners to their children. There are still traditional forms of arranged, early and forced marriages, especially among the uneducated,
rural, and tribal population. Even among well-educated Kurds in other places in the world, many of them feel it important to follow the traditions, and tradition is even more important when they live in other countries than Kurdistan. For many decades, school attendance for Kurdish children has been difficult as a result of war and displacement, but girls have been disproportionately affected. Approximately 40% of women in Iraqi Kurdistan are illiterate, compared to 20% of men. In some rural zones and among the uneducated part of society, some families stop sending girls to school and sometimes force them into early marriages or to help with the household. This problem is decreasing, but it still exists. Over 26% between the ages of 20-49 years are married before they reach 18, and approximately 10% of girls between 15 and 19 are married. (Begikhani et al 2010, Jonsdottir 2012). Even though there is no data to show the exact number of Kurds in the United States, it is estimated to be 40,000 Kurds (most coming from Iraq) and a growing number have permanently resettled in the United States (Karimi 2010). Even though Kurds have spread out across the United States and settled in California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Texas and Virginia, the largest concentration of Kurds lives in Nashville, Tennessee. An estimated 11,000 Kurds live Nashville, where they have always worked to preserve their culture and their customs. In 1998, Muslim Kurds established the Salahaddin Center of Nashville, which includes a community mosque and a center to promote religious studies and education. The center also serves as a meeting space for the Muslim community. Kurds are far from the only immigrant population in Nashville; the city has welcomed and embraced countless refugees and immigrants, and now represents ethnic groups from all over the world (Karimi. 2010).

In order to gain a more thorough understanding of how Kurdish parents think about and manage their children’s education in the United States this study takes a qualitative interview approach. Such an approach is appropriate to examine people’s perspective about their
experiences and it is often used by researchers who examine the social meanings that people attribute to their experiences, circumstances, and situations (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2010).

The analyses presented in this paper are based on 18 interviews. Based on standard guides to interview studies, this number of interviews is sufficient to establish emergent patterns (Baker et al 2012). I used a semi-structured interview guide to collect the data. The areas pertaining to the parental investment that I explored in the interviews included: (1) educational resources that parents invest in their children’s education (2) cultural consumption and parents’ beliefs regarding investing cultural capital in their children, (3) parental involvement in their children’s education in school and home, and (4) parent’s perspective regarding children’s gender when it comes to parental investment and see if there is gender bias when it comes to parental investment. For more detail see the appendix for the interview guide in page (68-69).

Researchers studying immigrant populations have noted that people from under enumerated and socially excluded populations, such as refugees and isolated immigrants, are often difficult to engage in research projects. Hence, to gain access to such populations, the most effective method is snowball sampling (Cummings et al 2011, Ritchie et al 2013). Therefore, I used snowball sampling in this project to recruit the participants. The project design was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the researcher’s university.

The interviews were all done in Nashville, Tennessee, which has a fairly large Kurdish immigrant population. In order to recruit the participants, a Kurdish acquaintance of mine who lives in Nashville identified the director of Salahaddin center to help me to find Kurdish parents to participate in the study. I met the director first in his office in the center and I clarified the criteria of the study to him in order to help me to recruit participants. He introduced some Kurdish parents to me face to face in the center and he gave me the phone number of some
additional parents as well. In this way I could interview some parents of course after clarifying the purpose and criteria of the study to them in the center and others in their home and workplaces. Participants who I interviewed in their home or workplaces took my call first and we made schedule to do the interviews. Since some Kurdish markets are located close to the Salahaddin center, and similar to the director of Salahaddin center, the market owners, who are Kurdish, helped me to find some additional participants. In order to be eligible for the interview potential participants must have children of school age (K through 12) and have lived in the United States for at least 3 years. The interviews took place in locations chosen by the participants; the locations included the Salahaddin Center, their homes, and their workplaces. The interviews took place in August, 2014. The sample included 20 Kurdish parents. While both mothers and fathers were interviewed in two interviews, the rest of the interviews were performed with either mothers or fathers (see table 1). The Informed Consent Form, which fully described the research, ensured the participants that the interviews were private and confidential. Before starting each interview I asked participants if I could audiotape the interview. All the participants agreed to the audiotaping. The participants preferred to conduct the interviews in the language spoken in their country of origin, which is Kurdish. The average interview session lasted approximately 45 minutes.

**FINDINGS**

Based on the data analysis, four themes related to parental investment emerged in the interviews 1) investing in children’s education, 2) obstacles in the process of investing in children’s education, 3) gender differences, and 4) cultural education.

*Theme 1: Investing in children’s education*
Most of the Kurdish parents I interviewed clearly highlighted that they were actively investing their time, efforts, and money in their children’s education in different ways. It was clear that they thought education plays a crucial role in one’s life; they valued education and had educational aspirations for their children. They also understood that their responsibilities as parents involved taking an active interest in their children’s education. Their understanding of education clearly affected their decisions to invest resources in their children’s education, but they did so in somewhat different ways. Three subthemes emerged from the discussion of how they investing in their children’s education: A) Parental value and aspiration towards education B) parental responsibilities, and C) parental involvement.

**Parental Values and Aspirations Regarding Education**

Not surprisingly, how parents value education shape the way they think about and act on their own children’s education. Most parents talked about how important they thought education was and some, like Dana, who had two sons and two daughters, linked their educational aspirations for their children to their coming to the United States:

“Education is important for everyone. In fact, when I came to the USA, one of my goals was to provide better education for my children…it was my goal. And thanks to God, they are successful so far…”

We can clearly see that he starts with a statement showing how important education is for everyone regardless of what type of education. While sharing a general commitment to education, the parents still pointed to somewhat different reasons why education was so important. Some of those reasons were instrumental – a good education, leads to a good job – whereas others were more symbolic – education builds character and is intrinsically rewarding.
Mardan, for example, who came to America in 1992 and had two sons and two daughters, displayed both instrumental and symbolic reasons in the following quote, where he shows his commitment to education, links education to high-status professions, but also expresses how important it is that children get to choose for themselves and follow their inclinations:

“Well, parents always like their kids to be better than themselves, but it is not good to tell what to be, a parent cannot do that. I talk about it that being a teacher is good or a doctor or lawyer, as you know this exists in our culture that we usually like to have our kids in higher status, but I give the choice to the children themselves, so they know in what they can be successful…”

It should be noted that when he says “our culture” he means Kurdish culture. Like Mardan, most parents I talked to derived their educational aspirations from Kurdish culture, and this culture, they maintained, valued education not because it could bring riches but because it built character; that is, maintaining a good character is more important than whatever profession you pursue. For instance, when I asked Hassan, a 52 year old father with four children, about the role of education, he told a story of a friend who dropped out of school for business and money. The friend became rich, but because he lacked education, his standing in the community was undermined. This is the lesson Hassan drew from the story:

“…Economic is a part of it but in terms of character and status education is so important…if you study and become an educator at a university, you may not make the money that a mechanic makes, but your character inspire people and people are proud of you. Your character and your name stay forever, but money will not…”
The parents’ aspirations for their children was a strong motivator for their investment in their children’s education and they hoped that their goals for their children would inspire them to do so well in school. That is, the Kurdish parents saw a clear link between their educational aspirations for their children and the children’s ability to do well in the world. When the participants were talking, they generally sounded filled with hope and desire for their children’s educational attainment. Rebaz, who is forty three and a father of one daughter and two sons said:

“It is my hope for them to study and finish their school. I hope they get a good degree in order to help themselves and other people as well.”

Similarly, Hiwa, a father of three daughters and two sons who came to America in 1992, talked passionately about his aspirations for his children which, in this case, also aligned with his aspirations for the Kurdish people to be recognized for their achievements:

“…I want them at least finish the college and obtain bachelor degree. I tell them they should finish their study at colleges, and it is better if they get a chance to study their masters and PhD. I tell them keep trying to become a doctor, scientists, and even astronaut because we as Kurds do not have an astronaut. Regardless of their gender, I tell them about NASA. Sometimes, I open the NASA website to them for encouragement, no one knows that, if they study hard, they may be interested in becoming an astronaut.”

Taken together, the parents’ ambitions for their children expressed both instrumental and symbolic goals, but no one inked educational achievements primarily to monetary rewards. On the contrary, they were much more concerned with respect, status, and social position both in relation to their own culture, as some of the quotes above indicate, and in relation to their host country, as I will discuss more below.
**Parental responsibilities**

Another subtheme drawn from the main parental investment theme, is parental responsibilities for their children’s schooling. Almost all the parents expressed their responsibilities in this regard as a requirement to help meet their children’s educational needs. One of the mothers I interviewed, Nasrin, 49 years old with two daughters and four sons, was herself illiterate but nonetheless was strongly committed to her children’s education; in fact, she considered it her most important goal in life to ensure the educational success of her children:

“In fact, in my entire life I have been a supporter for them and their father as well, we provide the support because we want them to be successful and achieve good degrees. We need to provide their necessities in order for them to be successful in their studies. Our entire life is to help them, we do anything we can for them to be successful…”

It is quite stunning for such a women to have such an understanding that surpasses her illiteracy, stating that their *entire life* is for their children and they do *anything* they can. She further said:

…We facilitate everything for them, prepare food, do the laundry, if they have a problem in school, we solve it for them when they come back. We do these so they keep themselves focused on their studies.

Bakhtyar, a father of seven children, shared this ambition and had devised a plan for how to accomplish it; in his view parents should serve as the primary guide of their children’s education and clearly convey the importance of education to their children. He said:

In the beginning of their school, parents should sit with their children and talk to them about schooling and education, they should tell them about the important role of education in their future, and they should inform them that education is useful for
themselves and the people who surround them… Personally, I gather my children in the beginning of every school year, and tell them how to start their studies and set their goals for that year… parents are the primary guides that should encourage their children to study…

Rebaz, similarly, emphasized that it was the parents’ responsibility to ensure that the children do well in school. As he stated:

…parents should spend some times with children and help them to do their school work. They should not leave their children alone…they should put efforts in to their children’s education and they should not leave it to say that this is the teacher’s responsibilities, rather it is their own responsibility – I am a father and it is my responsibility and I fulfil it myself.

It is noteworthy in the above quote that the father puts parents’ responsibilities ahead of teachers’ responsibility when it comes to their children’s schooling. It seems that Kurdish parents are more concerned about parents’ responsibilities than they would do back home, which is probably because of their living outside of their homeland. It was evident when they talked about their role as parents in America that they thought their responsibilities were different here than would have been at home, where they came from. More than a quarter of the participants talked about the challenges involved in teaching their children about their cultural values and ensuring that they attain an education; back home, these two goals do not conflict with each other, but here they do, since the cultural values that permeate the American educational system are different from those the parents want to teach their children. Hence, they are more concerned and more alert to the education process here than they would be at home. Mardan (49, 2 sons and two
daughters, came to America eighteen years ago), who is an educated man with a bachelor degree expressed it this way:

There is a huge difference between here and Kurdistan. In Kurdistan we do not call it ‘teaching’ alone, we call it ‘teaching and educating’ which is quite more meaningful and sacred, but in here it is solely the ‘teaching’ by which I mean it is good for teaching to be progressing but what about the education? So, this a huge difference…

We first need to clarify what he means by education and by teaching. What he means is that schooling in Kurdish culture involves more than just the teaching of facts; it also addresses ethical, cultural, and civic issues, thus making Kurdish education as much about basic human values as with practical schooling. Especially, when those human values may be different in the Kurdish culture. What this means is that Mardan is not modelling his involvement in his children’s education on his own father’s actions; rather, he is trying to find a way to honor his commitment to education in a system that, according to him, teaches but does not educate:

“…When I was a student (in Kurdistan), I don’t think my father visited the school more than two times in a year [for parent-teacher meetings]. And despite of this, thanks to God, both the ‘teaching’ and the ‘education’ went well. And the teachers were really good teachers who deserved to be called teachers”

What is important here is not the extent to which the Kurdish and American systems of education are objectively different in this regard but instead Mardan’s experience of this difference between teaching and education. It is a difference that Mardan sees permeating not just the educational system but also larger communal life. He says:
…If it was in Kurdistan, you would be sure of the school environment, cause in there, education exists outside as well, it exists on the streets. If two kids are to be in a fight, a man would come up to stop their fight and would advise them about the repercussions. But it’s not as such, may he see those two fighting men in here, he may be walking by and do nothing.

Another participant, Wshyar, a father of seven children (4 boys and 3 girls) who has lived in the US for 17 years, expresses a similar concern even as he praises the American educational system:

“…American education is the top one but if you do not educate your kids yourself, they are going to be deprived from it as in the schools they only teach not educate. In here there is only teaching not educating but in Kurdistan there is both…”

It is against this background that we can understand the sense of responsibility that pervades the Kurdish parents’ accounts of their children’s education. It is not that they do not trust the American schools to teach their children well, on the contrary, but instead that they consider that education insufficient. Even though Wshyar clearly appreciates the education system in this country, he is critically aware of its shortcomings and considers it his responsibility to complete his children’s school by adding and *educational* component to the school’s *teaching*.

This is also, at least in part, the reason why the parents I interviewed emphasized their own responsibilities more than the schools’ when it comes to educating their children. Hazhar, a father of two sons and two daughters who came to America in 1992, was quite clear that, in his view, the main responsibility of education fell on parents:

“Believe me, the role of parents here is actually more than the school’s role. I mean, here, it is teaching…not educating. They just teach, they do not care about your children’s
education. You have to do it at home, give much advice to them, take care of them, mmm… that is the main role of parents actually. We have to take care of them too much. If you ignore them, they will not be really successful at school.”

While the parents I interviewed all thought their children’s education was their responsibility, generally agreed that the American educational system for the most part did what it was supposed to do – teach their children – and also that education involved more than schooling, they took somewhat different positions on their direct engagement with the schools. Some, like Aram, a sixty two years old father of four sons and three daughters who came to America in 1991, saw a connection between parents’ efforts to stay in touch with teachers and the quality of education their children received.

“I ask the teachers to let me know if my children do anything wrong, if you ask about your children. If parents keep in touch with their children’s school, the teachers and the school will take more care about the children. When they communicate with their children’s school, schools do their work, and parents can monitor their children as well. The children will be under school and parent’s control. In this way students are obliged to study. And this actually depends on the parents and it is a big support for children’s success in school.”

His points was not so much that parents should pressure schools to teach their children but instead to ensure the teachers that they were on the same side and together they could make the children study.

Parents articulated their responsibilities not only in terms of the efforts and time they devoted to their children’s education, but also highlighted how they provided educational
resources and necessities for their children and emphasized how important those resources were for their children’s success. Here the parents talked about their efforts to provide a designated study space at home, a private room, computers, books and library and the like. Almost all parents said that they provided those necessary materials for their children. Nasrin, the illiterate mother who I referred to above, said that:

Kids cannot learn in noisy environments, rather they need to have a special place. When my kids come back from school, after eating and rest, they should have a quiet and calm place they can study in. and for sure we have provided such a place for them which is the room upstairs. Not having such a facility will affect their learning processes.

She further said:

…We have a home library and I do think that having a library at home will help children learn better in contrast with television that does the opposite … We have computers, actually we need to have them as today things are done using the computer, besides it facilitates their studies.

Most of the parents I interviewed shared Nasrin’s emphasis on the importance of provided educational resources for their children at home. In the next section I will discuss in more detail how the parents stay involved in their children’s education.

**Parental involvement**

To the participants in my study, an active involvement in their children’s education represents the most basic parental responsibility and a necessity to ensure that their children have a successful life. But they chose somewhat different ways to be engaged in their children’s education. Most commonly they reported an involvement in their children’s homework: some helped their children complete the work whereas others focused more on monitoring their work.
Many parents also communicated with their children’s school. Hence, parental involvement in children’s education took place both at home and at school.

Sahwnm, a mother with a master’s degree who taught mathematics in Kurdistan before she came to America in 1999, was actively involved with her children’s education both at home or at school.

“I push my children and care about them more than necessary. I like it when they come back from school and ask for help with their homework especially with mathematics homework as I myself am a teacher of mathematics, I taught back in Kurdistan. I like to be engaged with them. And they sometimes get bored and say, mom please here is home and there is school, do not make our home a school. I even take them to Sunday schools. But I sometimes say I should wait in order not to make school boring for them and ultimately react to it negatively.”

She further elaborated on her involvement with the school; she was very active with the school not only in checking homework but rather getting involved with the school activities and she considered volunteering in those activities as well.

“I participate in every meeting, I do not miss out a single of them. I even sometimes know what is going on in the meeting but I still choose to go, I think there may be something new that I should know. I always interact with their teachers whether emailing or making phone calls. Specifically this year, I have all their phone numbers and a list on my refrigerator’s door. They answer any of our calls. Sometimes they have something that they need a translator to and they call me as I know two to three languages. I
volunteer to translate from English to Kurdish or to Arabic. And even translating letters for parents when the teachers cannot reach the parents by phone calls or visits.”

Shawnm is unusual only in the extent and scope of her involvement—no doubt her own educational achievements play a role here—but not in her commitment to be involved.

Other parents emphasize their readiness to assist our children with their school work whenever they need it, even though their ability to do so varies. That is the case with Hazhar whom I already mentioned said:

They mostly do the homework by themselves though we have not deprive them from our help. I tell them if you need my help, ask me for it. They actually rely on themselves and if they need it, I help them at the night time because I do not have that much time during the day. I always ask if they have homework or if they have done it. And I ask them to show me how they did the homework. The oldest one actually, she is in high school, she does her works by herself, and she relies more on herself instead I care about others.

Even though Hazhar’s children do not their father’s help with their homework and even though he may not have the skills required to help them, he insists he is involved by constantly asking the children about their homework. Hiwa, similarly, keeps reminding his children about their homework and works hard to instill in his children the habit of doing their work on time. Hiwa, in a delicate Kurdish Kurmanji dialect, spoke:

I, daily, remind kids of homework whether they have it or not because I want them to do the work on time not in the last minute before they go to school, because that time is breakfast time not doing school works. This helps them to do their homework and it
becomes their habit. . . Even though I am flexible with them, but I am serious about doing their school works.

Hiwa knows, or perhaps hopes, that his seriousness and his evident caring will foster his children’s engagement with their study. And he does not entertain the possibility that his sternness will have the opposite effect than intended on his children’s learning because he strongly believes that when learning become a *habit* then learning is everlasting. That is why he says:

> My children know me and they know that ignoring homework is not acceptable.

With evident pride, Hiwa also talks about his engagement with his children’s school:

> “They invite us when there is an event in school. They call or send a letter by our kids. We go to those events. I myself go to the school with my children at the beginning of every year. I like to see the face of the teachers and to talk to them. There is a meeting in every two or three months. I go to those meetings as well ... I went to the school last year, the teachers were happy about it and said, we wish every parents were like you.”

Although several of the fathers, like Hiwa, were actively involved in their children’s education, many others said that because they had to work the day-to-day involvement was part of the mothers’ responsibilities. Dler, fifty years of age, a father of three daughters and two sons, who came to America in 1993, said that:

> Their mom helps them to do their homework. That is their mom’s job, I do not do that because I work and provide money to live on. As I told you before, their mom does not work, she does ninety percent of works that are related to the kids. Parents should help their kids to do their homework… If you do not care about them, they umm, play games
ummm, and those things. You have to care for them, encourage them, direct them, and teach them.

In accordance with this Wshyar shared his experience and stated:

…When we came to America, at the beginning just I worked alone in my family, I told my wife, you should become a mother of school (it means just take care of kids), thank God, it has worked so far and it has been productive.

The most common arrangement was that the mothers and fathers divided their responsibilities in the way that mothers are more engaged with their children’s education while fathers are responsible for make money for the family.

**Theme 2: Obstacles to Parental Educational Investment:**

Another main theme that emerged from the interviews was the obstacles that Kurdish parents face as they try to ensure that their children get a good education in America. The two most pervasive obstacles to emerge from the accounts, even if the parents did not always refer to them as obstacles, were perceptions of discrimination and competing distraction.

**Perceptions of Discrimination**

We learn from the interviews that more than three quarters of the parents came to the conclusion that discrimination is not an obstacle to their children’s educational success; that is, according to the participants, they have not been discriminated against while living in the U.S. Rzgar, who is forty five of age, has lived in America for 23 years, and has four daughters and three sons, commented on the question of discrimination in this way:

“Actually, this country is different from other countries. Take education as an example, if someone has a good degree, there is no difference between him/her with others. The
board of education or any other educational institutions do not discriminate between
original Americans and those who came from other countries…I do not see any
difference between Americans and Kurds in here…even companies when they need
employees, they do not look at you to see whether you are a Kurd, an Arab or an
American. In fact, they look at your educational level, they look at your résumé. They
accept those who have good résumé…I am quite sure of what I say that companies look at
people in this way…”

Given the scholarship in this area, which clearly demonstrates the persistence of
discriminatory practices in the educational system, Rzgar’s insistence that discrimination is rare
in the United States and banned formally by the law and that, at any rate, based his conclusion on
his own “experiences and the experiences of those who I know.” He was not an unusual case for
thinking this way, as several of the other participants thought the same. Hassan, for example,
invoked the idea of America as an immigrant nation and concluded, like Rzgar, that the
opportunities for immigrants are the same as for native-born Americans; he said:

America has its owners and all are immigrants. No one is the homeowner in America and
no one is stranger. Without any differences, whatever is possible for American children,
it is possible for my children as well. Sometimes, there are more help for immigrants
because they say these people do not know places and we should support them. Just look
at the homeless people they are Americans not immigrants. Everything here depends on
individual’s capacity…

Despite this overt commitment to the American Dream by most of my participants – that is, the
idea that anyone who works hard can make it – and the insistence that discrimination plays no
part in the educational prospects of their children, there is nonetheless tension and contradictions
in their statements about this. This is especially evident when the parents addressed
discrimination in schools. What the Kurdish parents understand is that they have not been
discriminated against by teachers and administrators in their children’s school. Parents not only
did not complain about schools, but they also appreciated schools and praised their children’s
teachers. Wrya, a forty five years old man, a father of two sons and two daughters, who came to
America in 1991 said:

Actually, majority of them is good… they do not discriminate between kids, as we have
sat with them and talked to them, they do not discriminate and differentiate between
Americans or Mexicans with other kids...my son (Hunar) for instance, studies in a school
here, it is close to our house, his Black teacher is so good. He doesn’t differentiate
between a Mexican, a Kurd, and Somalian. That is so good. I have never gotten a
problem with them.

Another Kurdish father shared his positive views about the school. Zana, a young man of 29, a
father of two daughters, who came to America in 2008, was especially impressed by what he
termed the “open-minded” attitude towards minorities, especially with regards to religion. As
Zana stated:

They respect everyone, and they are very open-minded towards the minorities, I mean for
example in the high schools if students ask for doing the prayers, they let them do it. I mean
they are open-minded and if you have anything you can go to them, and they listen.

This statement indicates that the schools are sensitive to the needs of minority children and
generally respectful towards the parents. As he said, “They respect everyone… if you have
anything, you can go to them, and they listen.” And yet, Zana’s use of the term “open-
mindedness” to describe how the schools treated him and his children nonetheless convey some tension. That is, even though Kurdish parents conclude that they have not been discriminated against, it is evident from their comments that they focused mostly the absence of formal discrimination. As we see from Hiwa’s comment below, the parents’ insistence that they are not discriminated against could be read as a lack of understanding of how discrimination works in the United States:

“Discrimination is ban in America by law, if someone feels that he/she is discriminated, that person can sue. This is the country that works based on law, they do care about law, and it is not working who you know. Law is working…”

But the passionate way in which they talk about the legal prohibition against discrimination in America, suggests that the unspoken measure they use to evaluate discrimination in America is not a society free of discrimination but instead one where discrimination is everywhere. Hiwa’s further elaboration on the issue is illustrative:

“… I have been here for 22 years, I have communicated with people (Americans) and schools, I worked as translator, and I know what is going on... Having freedom and no discrimination here makes me happy. When I go to somewhere and stop in the line, Americans and others come and stop behind me.”

His conclusion that America is free of discrimination because Americans would stand in line behind him suggests his and others views of discrimination have been formed in relations to a very different social system than the United States. From an American perspective, the bar the Kurdish parents set for discrimination seems excessively high, but in being so it possibly says
more about the historical treatment of Kurds before coming to America than the current treatment of them and their children as immigrants.

This reading of the parents’ perspective on discrimination in America gets support from other statements as well. Shawnn, for example, mentioned the case of the president of the United States when she was talking about discrimination against minorities in general. How could there be discrimination against foreigners, she pondered if “Even the president is not American in origin.”

Another father, Mardan, pointed to NASA as an example and mentioned that Iranian scientists work there. This example convinced Mardan that:

“Americans don’t care who is who, you see in the NASA there are Iranian scientists.”

Moving beyond these proclamations about the absence of formal discrimination in the United States, it was evident in a few of the interviews that something looking like discrimination sometimes intruded upon daily life. A father told his story of how he was accepted as a case worker to work for a company despite not having a degree—it was his knowledge of four languages that got him the job. Karwan, a forty four years old man, a father of four sons and one daughter, who came to America in 1992 appreciated his job but still recognized that there is discrimination against Kurds in some cases. As he said:

There are people who discriminate against us but legally there is no difference. There may be people who ask ‘what you are doing here?’

Wshyar too acknowledged that there was some discrimination against Kurdish students in schools and said:
Of course there are some cases of discriminations, I do not say that all of them love Kurds and immigrants, but due to the active law, they cannot discriminate against students.

Taken together, then, the parents’ refusal to think of discrimination as an obstacle in their educational aspirations for their children does not as much signal ignorance of how discrimination enters the educational trajectories of many minority students in the United States as it suggests parental appreciation for the absence of the kind of formally sanctioned discrimination that would make it impossible for their children to become doctors and scientists and live good lives.

**Competing Distraction**

Another subtheme under the heading of obstacles refers to the many competing distractions that threatened to interfere with their children’s studies. This is not a new theme in the educational literature, but it may be that the concern is more serious for immigrant parents who live far away from home and are less familiar with American culture. In the case of Kurds in the U.S, the parents I interviewed clearly showed their fear about their children’s life. All of them, albeit in somewhat different ways, expressed some fear in relation to the lives their children were exposed to in America. Therefore, they tried hard to monitor their children and implement firm rules about what their children could and could not do. Hazhar mentioned his efforts to control who his children were friends with:

“Me, myself, I do care about their friends, not become a friend of everyone, not communicate with everybody, and try to communicate with ourselves (Kurds)… these do affect…”

He further elaborated and mentioned the cause of his concerns and said:
The community and condition here make me to be more concerned about my kids...you cannot say that I keep my kids in this multicultural country. Our culture pushes us to be more concerned about our kids, otherwise, there is not a problem. Hispanics and Americans do not care about that. In my opinion, I believe that if you communicate more with them, they attract your kids toward themselves. When you communicate with them and learn their culture and norms, it is difficult to control your kids.

Nasrin, similarly, worried that her children would end up with “bad friends.” It is clear from her comment that her worries are not simply normal parental concerns for children but instead are linked to the fact that, in the United States, they do not “live among [their] own people”:

“…In Kurdistan you live among your own people, but here you live among many different people, it is like there is a gun appointed towards them. Therefore, we always tell them and advise them especially when they are small, be aware, do not communicate with bad friends…”

Many other parents, too, constrained their children’s relationship with others, including romantic relationships. Hemn, a father of two daughters and three sons, who came to America in 1992, spoke about his efforts to prevent his children from forming romantic attachments. He said of his son that he has not had a girlfriend yet despite studying in college for eight years. As Hemn said:

I told him you are not allowed to bring a girl to this house. I do not allow any girl to come to this house because I do not allow my daughter to bring any boy to this house.
He also talked about his requirement for his daughter to get married with a Kurdish boy if she wants to get married. As he stated:

It was my requirement for my daughter to get married with a Kurdish boy and she did it. It was my requirement and I told her if you want me to keep my relationship with you as a father, you have to get married with a Kurdish boy.

It is evident, then, that Kurdish parents not only restrict their children’s friendship with others, but also have strong concerns about who they date and marry. Hemn’s threat to deprive his daughter of his fatherhood if she did not marry a Kurdish boy was unusual in its severity, but several other parents expressed similar concerns and hence tried to monitor their children’s friendships. To justify his efforts to limit his children’s relationship, another father, Karwan, said:

When they were small, I told the kids to not have American friends…I told them in their early age... Americans are not like us, American girlfriends as you know, if they are married with you and not agree with you even for small things, they get divorced. Religion also is matter…

Another father went further and tied his concerns around his children’s romantic relationships to his own status and dignity as a parent; to allow his daughters and sons to have boyfriend and girlfriend would undermine his own position, Dler articulated:

I am not talking about the legal things, but I do not accept things that people do. For instance, I do not accept that if my sons and daughters have their boyfriends and girlfriends. No one accepts it if that person has dignity.
It is very clear in the above quote that this father is not just concerned about his children, but also about how his children’s actions would reflect back on him as a father. The prospect of their children leaving their culture behind, start dating and acting like Americans, and in the end marry a regular American was one of the greatest concerns that the parents had about raising their children in America. This concern also foreshadows the discussion below about gender differences in parental investment in their children’s education.

**Theme 3: Gender differences in parental educational investment**

There is a lot evidence that the gender of children still plays a huge role in how parents bring them up. And, although most formal barriers against gender equality have been removed, not educational and economic institutions are still gendered in fundamental ways. But when it comes to parents’ educational investment in their children, it is no longer clear that parents automatically favor boys over girls. Because the Kurdish parents I interviewed come from a culture that is much more gender traditional and much more clearly demarcated by gender I wanted to explore to what extent the gender of their children made a difference to the parents in terms of educational investments. Two subthemes emerged from this discussion: 1) Equal education for both, and 2) But boys and girls are still different.

**Education for both**

My first impression was that Kurdish parents do not discriminate at all between their sons and daughters. Almost all the interviewed parents articulated that when it comes to education, what is good for the boy, is good for the girl too. Rzagar, a father of three sons and two daughters, stated:
Personally, for me they are both the same. However I concern about my sons, I should do the same for my daughters. However I attempt to help with the boys, I have to attempt the same with the girls because both are my children. I have to be concerned for both and there is no difference between them.

For Rzgar, when it comes to education his children are the same; whatever he is doing for the boys he is doing for the girls as well. Hiwa, similarly, said:

…I do not differentiate between boys and girls, they are my kids, and we visit their schools equally.

Yet another Kurdish participant, Heshu, also emphasized that she treats her children the same. I interviewed Heshu and her husband (Bakhtyar) together in their house; they had three daughters and four sons. When she was talking about her concerns around her children’s visits to movie theatres and sport events with friends, I asked whether she had different rules for her daughters and sons. She said she had not:

“There is no differences between boys and girls, what is the difference if they have problem.”

It is clear that this mother is worrying equally about her children’s vulnerabilities as they leave the house. When I asked Bakhtyar whether he would support his daughters taking a music course outside of school, he indicated that he would. He articulated:

If they are serious to do it and they like it, it is definitely fine because my daughters are free like my sons.
When it comes to their children's homework, the Kurdish parents I interviewed thought that girls are keener on studying than boys and also have better study habits. Wrya said that his daughter is more curious than his son for studying or doing homework:

“Girls care about their studies more than boys and they are better in doing schooling...boys do their schooling well as well but they are not like the girls...girls are not engaged in playing games, boys do play games and watch more TV, that is why I think girls do better at schools...My daughter is curious, she likes her school, she comes to me so I listen to her while she is reading but boys hide themselves (laugh)...they do not like their schools, I have to tell them to study...”

It should be noted that even though this father praises his daughter and her seriousness about schooling, he does not ignore his sons. On the contrary, while he is eager to listen to his daughter while she is reading, he see it as his responsibility to push his sons to take care to their schoolwork.

*Boys and girls are still different.*

When it comes to educational investment, the parents I talked to indicated that they support their children equally and make no differences among their children based on gender. Given the fairly traditional gender culture they come from, this was a somewhat surprising discovery. But as I probed further, it became evident that the parents were nonetheless guided by a taken-for-granted assumption that their sons and daughters would live very different kinds of lives. Dana, for example, talked about which kinds of jobs were appropriate for women and which kinds were not:
“I encourage girls to become teacher, especially, in elementary schools because it is better for them. I think they cannot do other jobs like working in Kroger and others like Walmart”

When I asked him why American women can work in the places he mentioned, but not Kurdish women, he replied:

We are not American. And I believe that we should be fair about the equality between men and women but it is impossible to provide one hundred percent of equality between men and women because God…umm what I should say, it is impossible to see men and women as similar. Their capabilities are not similar.

It is a revealing answer in that he is simultaneously expressing support for gender equality and concluding that such equality is not possible because men and women are not the same. His answer is also telling in that he apparently sees no contradiction in his observation that American women apparently have the capabilities that he says Kurdish women do not, as if God created Kurdish and American women differently. It is based on statements like these that I conclude that the parents do indeed differentiate between their sons and daughters even despite their own assurances to the contrary.

Another father, Hassan plainly articulated that he loves and supports his daughters more than his sons because of girls are weaker. When he talked about parents’ responsibilities to support their children in education, he said the following:

…I love my daughters more than my sons because girls need more their parents than boys do. We always say girls are weaker, therefore, we should help girls more than boy.
His assumption that girls need their parents more than boys is clearly rooted in a Kurdish culture that take gender differences for granted. His further elaboration makes this clear:

“If there are people who say boys and girls are equal, it is just theoretically true, in practice it is not true.”

It is in part this deep-seated assumption about difference that fuels the parents’ unease around their children’s cross-gender relationships with American children and youth. As long as their children are surrounded by other Kurdish children, it is as if this assumption provides enough protection for their daughters. Shawnm, for example, mentioned that she has sent her daughter to participate activities in the mosque even though she was one of only very few other girls among many boys.

“I took my daughter to the mosque in past, they had a football team. In order to have communication with the Kurds to preserve the culture, religion, language and those issue …, they had Kurdish achiever team. There were not a good number of females but she still went. Even if there was only her friend, she still was going. I did not care and didn’t say that there is no female student, you should not go, no, it was ok and she went”

In some ways it is noteworthy that she let her daughter be alone with boys, but given the context of the Mosque and the shared commitment to preserve Kurdish culture, she apparently concluded that this was a safe and healthy environment for her daughter. Other parents more clearly expressed concerns around the gender mixing and lack of oversight in American environments, especially the schools. Hazhar, for example, was clearly concerned about leaving his daughters without a guardian, he said:
Both boys and girls should be taken care of by parents. Actually, girls should be more concentrated because as you know the American system here… especially, at high school they have a mixed system, boys and girls study together. Actually, a small mistake if boys or girls make, it destroys their future. If we look at boys and girls from our culture’s perspective, girls are different from boys.

It is evident that Hazhar struggles with the “mixed system” which in his view poses dangers to his daughters, but he also struggles a bit with articulating how he thinks about gender differences; he is neither invoking God nor nature, but still emphasizes that “from our culture’s perspective” boys and girls are not the same. Even parents that proclaim to treat their boys and girls the same sometimes still confirm the ambivalence that mark so many of the parents’ decisions and conclusions regarding their children’s gender. Karwan, for example, said that when his son asked to participate in boxing, he of course allowed him to, and he also said he would do the same if his daughter asked.

“My son likes to participate in boxing, I allowed him to go. It is the same for my daughter. There is no difference between boys and girls. I love my daughter more than all four my sons. Whatever she likes to do even if it is sport, I support her…”

But when he say that he would let his daughter do whatever she likes “even if it is sport” he reveals and reinforces the assumption that sports is a questionable activity for girls to engage in.

**Theme 4: Cultural education:**

The final theme to emerge from the interviews was the importance of a cultural education. I have already briefly touched upon this issue above, both in terms of the meaning of education and around gender issues, but here I will discuss it in greater detail. Two parents
concerns fell into two inter-related subthemes, 1) Keeping culture and national identity, and 2) School is not enough.

**Keeping Culture and National Identity:**

In light of scholarship in the area it is not surprising that immigrant parents are worried about retaining their culture and national identity. This is so especially in relation to their children, many of whom were born and raised in the United States. More than half of the participants directly mentioned something about their concerns for national identity and culture, including especially religion, language, food and, as I discussed above, gender relations. When I asked the parents if there is anything that makes them especially concerned about their children as a result of living so far away from their homeland, they had lots to say. Bashdar, a thirty seven old man with one daughter and two sons, listed the components of culture that should be the point of parent’s concerns. As he said:

> If you live in Kurdistan, you would not be worried about your children for what they learn. But our concerns here are religion, and learning Kurdish language for our children.

Many of the parents spoke Kurdish at home with their children so as to ensure that the children are able to speak their language. It is not so that they are trying to prevent their children from speaking American English, but instead that they want to ensure that their children remain Kurdish in a cultural sense. The parents’ concerns around religion are similar as Bashdar’s explanation makes clear:

> “You would hear the prayers from the mosques if you are in Kurdistan. My brothers and sisters go to the mosque and children would learn from them to go to the mosque as well. But here, there is no one to teach them. If you do not teach them, they would not learn…”

If you live in Kurdistan, you would not be worried about your children for what they learn. But our concerns here are religion, and learning Kurdish language for our children.
As this comment makes clear, religious practices in Kurdistan pervade the culture so thoroughly that it would be impossible for children to grow up and not understand what is expected of them whether or not their parents have taught them about religion. But living in the United States means living without that kind of communal support, which means the burden is greater on the parents to make sure the children are taught what is necessary.

Food, similarly, is as much about culture as it is about religion. Hence, Kurdish parents care about their children’s food when they must eat outside of home. The Kurdish parents tell their children at an early age to eat no food that is not Halal in Islam. As Dana stated:

My first concern about my children is their food. They have to eat clean and Halal food…I do not let them eat pork. I tell them that we are Kurds and Muslim. There are things that American do, we do not have to do because our religion does not accept it.

Rebaz, another, said the same thing:

“My children do not have problem with food because at an early age we tell them to not eat pork. It is in their mind and they know we do not eat pork.”

When I asked Aram whether he has any concerns about food for his children in America, He said:

They know which food is Halal and which is not, actually I told them when they were small. Thank god, my children have liked Kurdish food so far.

From these and other comments it is clear that the Kurdish parents I interviewed have made a concerted effort to socialize their children according to the culture and religion that they themselves grew up with.

In terms of language, the Interviewed Kurdish parents passionately highlighted the necessity of Kurdish language for their children. Almost all participants talked about the Kurdish
language and the responsibility they felt to teach their children. Shawnm passionately talked about how important it was for her that her children learned to speak Kurdish:

“we are Kurdish, our father and grandfather are Kurdish, we came from Kurdistan and live in different culture… I have not done anything if my children grow up here and not know Kurdish language. If they do not know Kurdish, it means that I am a failing mother because in my opinion my language is essential…”

To Shawnm, it was evident that language was a central piece of her national identity and also that she treated her ability to teach her children their mother’s language as a maternal obligation. Hemn, similarly, shared his concerns for his children’s language but also reveals that it can be difficult for parents to prevail in their language ambitions for their children. As he said:

they are good so far to speak Kurdish but I want them to learn writing and studying in Kurdish as well… they speak with each other by English at home but when I am there, I tell them by Kurdish by Kurdish.

He was so concerned about the language issue that he said: “If there was a Kurdish school, I would send them to that school to learn Kurdish language.”

Given how long many of the participants had lived in the United States – most more than 20 years - it was a bit surprising to see how committed the parents were to raise their children as thoroughly Kurdish. Even though there was no indication in their statements that they ever planned to move back to Kurdistan, about half of them nonetheless talked about their children’s success in America as a way to help their nation. In some cases, like the following statement by Nasrin, it seemed as if any success by their children would not only help the children live good lives but also help “their nation”:
“We do not want anything from our children, just be successful in their schooling and help their nation…It is a good thing for children to study and achieve a degree in America, which helps them manage their lives.”

She said further that:

This degree can be useful for them to be successful in their own country.

When I asked her to clarify what she means by country, she stated:

“By country I mean Kurdistan. It is useful for America as well because we live in here. But when they go back to Kurdistan, it would be very useful, and we will help them so they can be useful for our country”

Although she did not specify exactly how the children’s success would benefit Kurdistan, she talked about her children’s going “back to Kurdistan” as if it were a self-evident future development. When I asked Hassan about his expectation for his children in the future, he thought back to when his oldest son started college:

“I wanted my son, my biggest son to become a lawyer. It was my ambition... I told him to study it but he said I want to become a doctor. As you know doctors have a higher status here in this country. I am happy with it because doctors are important and they serve people. We can use it in our country in the future. If a day comes and he can help our people in our country. It was my hope if my children can serve my nation. If I could not do it, hopefully, my children can treat at least two Kurdish children in Kurdistan.”

It is remarkable to see how this father integrates his dual ambitions for his son and for his nation. It is as if the ambitions were the same, and if one was possible, so was the other.

School is not enough:
There is lots of evidence that parents worry about the kinds of activities that children engage in outside of school. But there is also evidence that extra-curricular activities can help children build cultural capital which in turn can facilitate children’s future career ambitions. Considering the Kurdish parents’ commitment to education, but also their concerns around a cultural education that focused on Kurdish values and traditions, I also asked them about the extent to which they supported their children in cultural activities outside of school. More than half of the participants said that they supported their children in whatever activities they wanted to pursue. Since they believed that school was not enough anyway, it made sense to them to support their children’s participation in different activities outside of school. Hiwa, for example, shared his perspective on taking extra courses outside of school, something he strongly supported:

“It is important for kids if they take extra course outside of schools, I support boys and girls to take those courses because school is not enough, if kids have a talent, there may be not opportunity in the schools for progress that talent.”

Here Hiwa links his support for educational opportunities outside school to his understanding of the limited capabilities of schools to help students develop all their talents. He referred to his brothers’ children as a successful examples of the value of extra courses. Therefore, he said:

We are proud of them and I am looking forward to see my kids to do those challenges.

Nasrin, similarly, encourages her children to get a broader education than they can at school. When I asked her whether she supports her children to take extra courses such as art, history, or language courses, she said:
Oh yea a lot, I do for sure. I encourage them to take language course so they learn other languages. I have a daughter who is into it and I support her to take courses to learn Arabic, Mexican, or French language or any other languages.

Several of the participants mentioned that they send their children to a mosque which also serves as a community center; there the children can engage in not only religious studies but also a number of other educational activities. As Hazhar said:

On Sunday and Saturday, my kids have activities in the mosque. I take them daily with myself to the mosque. My oldest daughter also weekly goes to the mosque on Saturday and Sunday, there are activities in the mosque, they have voluntary works and classes, they have field trips, picnics, visiting churches, and they work for the mosque voluntarily as group.

To the parents who send their children to the mosque, which was most of them, it is evident that it serves an important educational and cultural role in the parents’ efforts to ensure that their children are well educated. Hazhar also talked about summer break and elaborated:

It is the same during the summer break. We have more connected them to the mosque actually. Boys will be busy with soccer, Sunday school, and memorizing Quran and those classes. Girls also have the same activities.

Similarly, Rebaz told me that he sent his children to a religious school I asked him if he supported his children to take extra courses; he said:

I send them to religious school, they teach them how to pray and read Qur’an.

When it comes to more popular cultural activities, the parents were more hesitant in their support, but several of them said that they let their children do various cultural activities, such as
Zoo, movie theatres, and sport activities. Wshyar, for example, thought it important to let his children get a break from their studies every often. As he said:

These things and activities are like protector for kids study, at the same time, you have to know how to manage the time, how to arrange the time.

It is noteworthy how this father praises cultural activities and mentions their positive effects on his children’s education. He specifically mentioned his sons’ participation in sport activities and his engagement with them. Wshyar said:

My son Karzan was interested in sport. For example, when he had training, I went with him. One of my son was interested in taekwondo, he got black-belt. There were some activities in Islamic center, it was interesting.

Shawnm talked about the Zoo in similar terms:

“We have zoo’s membership. We go to there…kids like to watch animals, they walk and run. Me myself, I exercise there as well (laugh)”

Another participant, Rzgar, told me about a recent movie experience with his daughter. He said:

… Two weeks ago, my daughter said I want to go to watch a movie with two of my friends but there is no one comes with me. I said I will come with you. I do not like watching that movie at all, but I sat there for two hours until she watched it and we came back…I usually go with my kids if I have a time.

This father solved the problem of how to accommodate his daughter’s wish to go to the movies when none of her friends was available to go with by joining her himself, even though he had no interest at all in the movie. Another father was talking about how he was trying to ensure that his children engaged in leisure activities that also have an educational component; Zana said:
In our leisure times, we mostly go outside, because my kids like place like mountains and caves, aquarium and zoos, and we go to such places, and they are places where the kids get informed about something not to go somewhere that there is a river flowing and that is it!

Taken together, the parents’ varied comments about extra-curricular activists demonstrate that, to them, school is not enough.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to provide understanding of how Kurdish parents in the United States think about, manage, and invest in their children’s education. The findings are positive when it comes to parental investment in children’s education: the Kurdish parents in this study expressed the importance of education and indicated that they value it and they have hopes and aspirations for a better one for their children.

One explanation for valuing or having aspiration towards education may be associated to the parents’ experiences back in their homeland. In other words, parent’s experience with deprivation from education may encourage them to invest their resources in their children’s education. Since they were deprived or there was lack of opportunity for them to finish their study, Kurdish parents may try harder to compensate for their children what they had been deprived from. In this study, only seven of the parents had bachelor or master degrees. For whatever reason, the rest of the participants did not finish their educations. Some parents mentioned that, due to sociopolitical situations, some of the parents were deprived from education. This was the case for Aram, an old father who became a member of a Kurdish revolutionary group against deposed Iraqi president Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist regime and did not have that opportunity to finish his education. He said:
The political situation was bad in that time, and the Kurdish revolution started, I became a part of it, and I could not finish my study.

Positive understanding towards education may encourage parents to invest their resources in their children’s education. This is similar with what Bempechat (1992) highlighted and stated that parent’s attitudes, expectancies, and beliefs about schooling and learning guide their behavior with their children and have casual influence on the children’s development of achievement attitudes and behaviors.

Contrary to the assertion of Collignon et al. (2001) who suggested that minority groups have difficulties to understand the education system in the U.S, it seems that Kurdish parents have a different experience and demonstrate an understanding of the system. However, they questioned the compatibility of the functionality and philosophy of the system with what they considered an ideal education. They understood the American education system to be merely teaching, not educating; the parents distinguished teaching as technical training, while education was nurturing personal growth. Mardan thought so and said that he sees a big difference between what is teaching and educating in here and what it should be. He thinks the education system should be a guardian to the children not just a means of transferring information through abstract teaching. He says:

I was a student [in Kurdistan] I don’t think my father visited the school two times in a year

Because back in there, he thought, the teachers were not only teaching, but also parenting in their own parent’s stead. That is what the Kurdish parents meant by educating, which is more of a liberal arts education. In the absence of what they think education system should be, they make it
an imperative on themselves to invest more and allocate more efforts in their children’s education. Hence, they are obliged to be more engaged and involved with their children’s schooling.

The study found that, in addition to being involved with their children’s education at home, Kurdish parents in the United States are also well involved with their children’s schools. Aside from the previously mentioned importance that Kurdish parents place on involvement with education, it also seems that this involvement indicates that Kurdish parents are welcomed by the schools as the parents reported having a good and constant relationship with them. Zana pointed that out and said:

They respect everyone…if you have anything, you can go to them, and they will listen.

This is the same with what Hornby (2011) suggested that the increase of parental involvement with school is dependent upon how welcoming the school staff are. While Kim (2009) found that parents from minority groups in America are less involved in their children’s schools and their being from minority groups causes them not to be welcomed by the schools, this was not the case with Kurdish parents in my study.

A possible factor in the level of parental investment in my sample might be the family structures of interviewees, which are typical of the Kurdish family system. Bogenchneider (1997) revealed that family structure is positively associated with parental involvement: students in families with both biological parents benefited from higher parental involvement than students from either single-mother or mother-stepfather households. All parents in this study reported that they live with their partners and children together. These families also reported a gendered
strategy to take care of their children’s education, which is that fathers work and mothers take care of children, as Dler mentioned:

Their mom helps them to do their homework. That is their mom’s job, I do not do that because I work and provide money to live on. As I told you before, their mom does not work, she does ninety percent of tasks that are related to the kids.

Even though the Kurdish parents did not mention direct discrimination, their preoccupation with the issue was a good indication for discrimination. Probably Kurdish parents do not report discrimination whether consciously or unconsciously because their lives in the U.S is better than what they had in their country. This is true, if we look at the issue from the Ogbu’s analysis (1987) of immigrant minorities. The Kurds as a minority could be categorized in his voluntary minority group because most of them came to America to have a secure and better life. As Ogbu said, the immigrant parents believe that the structure of opportunity in their country is contrast with the structure of opportunity in the U.S. thus when they face discrimination, they rationalize it. And they also appreciate their relationship with schools because it is better than their previous country.

The major finding in this study was that even though parents support education for both their daughters and sons, gender stereotypes still stir their minds when it comes to parental investment. One possible explanation for this can be that all the parents were the first generation of immigrants who came to the U.S. Hence, gender stereotypes back in their home country may still shape their views. The gender biases usually occur among parents in Kurdish culture, which may be rooted in a cultural understanding of female and male capabilities and skills, each to fit to specific tasks, assignments, or activities. The interpretation for gender stereotype among the Kurdish immigrant parents is similar with what Pasqua (2005) found that very little can be done
in a short run to reduce gender inequality in parental investment when traditional social values are strong and parents have preference for boys. This may not be the same case with the Kurdish parents but rather for a deeper rooted understanding of male/female roles in society.

Similar with the finding of this study, Read and Oselin (2008) revealed that Arab immigrants support education for their daughters but they use female’s education as a resource not for economic mobility, but to ensure the proper socialization of children, solidarity of the family, and ultimately the maintenance of ethnic and religious identity. Contrary to the widely held assumption that female education will equalize gender power dynamics, their results highlight how and when women’s education may reproduce patriarchal gender relations.

This study also revealed that the Kurdish parents have concerns about their cultural and national identity when they invest their resources in their children’s education. It may be that lack of academic focus minority cultures in the American schools may encourage parents of minority groups to care more about their culture. Kurdish parents’ concerns about their own culture comes in accordance with what Cote & Bornstein (2000) suggested when they said: as American society becomes increasingly ethnically diverse, it is imperative for researchers recognize that immigrants do not immediately and forever relinquish the beliefs and behaviors of their cultures of origin and adopt those of the dominant ethnic group. Kurds, like other ethnic groups, appear to keep their ethnic and national identity while they live in other countries. This was the case for Armenian, Vietnamese, and Mexican parents when they concerned themselves about their ethnic identities in their children (Phinney et al. 2001).

Kurdish nationalistic identity may be an added motivation that encourages the Kurdish parents to be more adamant about teaching children to value their ethnic identity. Since Kurds do not yet have an independent country despite pushing for the establishment of one for many years
(Aziz 2011), it is possible for the Kurdish people to keep their national identity as a reaction to this desire for the independence that has been denied thus far. This sentiment was quite clear among the interviewees, who always focused on helping their nation whether it was clear that they intended to go back to their homeland or not.

CONCLUSION

This study makes an important contribution to our understanding of parental investment in general. Especially, when it comes to the effects of parental investment on academic successes, it is imperative for the scholars to see how parents perceive their responsibilities in their children’s education, as this study found parent’s perceptions about their responsibilities may be a priority factor to invest in children’s education. It is a contribution of the study that showed how Middle Eastern families integrate into American society.

The study is not without limitations. First, like most of the qualitative work, the small sample size cannot let the findings to be generalized. Second, English language is not the researcher’s first language which might have influenced the articulation of the meanings and explanations of the concepts. Despite of these limitations, the study is still useful, especially, when it examined an invisible ethnic immigrant group in academic studies in the U.S.

The findings of this study may direct scholars in the future to examine parental investment in different ways. The future study should look at the immigrant status and see if time spent in the U.S affects parents to differently invest their resources in their children education. Where the parents came from may affect parental educational investment. Therefore, the future study should differentiate parental investment among the Kurdish parents who came from Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria. While this study revealed gender as an issue in the Kurdish culture, it is
imperative if the future study examines fathers and mothers perspective about children’s education separately when it comes to parental investment.
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Appendix

*Interview Guide:*

1. How do you evaluate your children’s school performance?

2. How do you evaluate their passion to learn?

3. In your opinion, what are things that help your children to come up better with schooling?

4. How do you see education in the United States as an instrument to move ahead in adulthood?

5. How do you see your role as a (mother or father) in your children’s education?
   What is your responsibility that assists your children to be succeeded in schooling?

6. How do you see the parent’s role to help their children to do their academic coursework and performance at home?

7. Tell me your opinion about the usefulness of each of these educational items at home for your children:
   - Having place to study
   - Home library
   - Computer,
   - Magazine, Newspaper, Encyclopedia, etc

8. May you tell me something about your relationship with your children’s school?

9. What is your perspective about your children’s school administration (boss, teachers, and administrators)?

10. How do they respect you because of your minorities’ status?
11. How do you help your children if they face a problem in school?

12. Tell me some advice that you give to your children?

13. How do you participate in your children’s school activities?

14. How do you see your children’s school reputation (Rank)?

15. May you explain to me whether you want change your children’s school?

16. How do your children spend their time at home? How do they spend their time outside of home? How do they spend their time in summer?

17. How do you monitor your children’s school homework and their attendance in school and school activities?

18. May you tell me if you have some rules at home in order to organize your children’s time outside of school, such as limited time for watching TV, chore requirements by parents, and going out with friends?

19. Tell me something about your leisure time with your children. Where do you go in your leisure time with your children?

20. Is there anything that prevents you from spending more time with your children outside of home?

21. Explain to me whether you support your children to take some art, language, history, music classes outside of school?

22. Is there anything that makes you be concerned about your children’s upbringing because they do not live in your homeland?

23. What is your ambition for your children? How do you want your children end up with schooling?

24. What kind of job do you expect for your children in adulthood?