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Zulema Valdez

To cite this article: Zulema Valdez (2016) Intersectionality, the household economy, and ethnic entrepreneurship, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 39:9, 1618-1636, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2015.1125009

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1125009

Published online: 05 Feb 2016.

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Intersectionality, the household economy, and ethnic entrepreneurship†

Zulema Valdez

Department of Sociology, University of California, Merced, Merced CA, USA

ABSTRACT

The literature on ethnic entrepreneurship emphasizes the role of ethnicity in facilitating group differences in enterprise based on access to ethnic-based resources. This treatment tends to conflate family-based resources with those of ethnicity. Using a framework derived from intersectionality theory, this qualitative study investigates how two aspects of the household economy, namely household composition and family ideology, shape intra-group differences among fifty middle-class Mexican-origin entrepreneurs. Findings reveal that household class and gender dynamics shape access to three family-based resources that facilitate enterprise: family labour, entrepreneurial capital, and inheritance; differences in entrepreneurial activity between family members exceed in some cases those observed between ethnic groups. This study reveals that intersectional dimensions of identity and collectivity influence entrepreneurial outcomes within ethnic households. This study encourages researchers to consider how multiple and intersecting dimensions of identity combine for a more complete understanding of American enterprise.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 3 February 2015; Accepted 11 November 2015

KEYWORDS

Middle-class minorities; ethnic entrepreneurship; family; Latinos; intersectionality

Much of the literature on ethnic entrepreneurship maintains that ethnicity facilitates entrepreneurship in large part by providing resources rooted in social capital. Social capital is defined simply as relationships between group members that engender solidarity, trust, and reciprocity (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Social capital fosters the development of ethnic resources, such as coethnic business networks, which facilitate ethnic enterprise (Light 1972). Researchers have convincingly demonstrated that for groups characterized as ‘entrepreneurial’, such as Koreans (Light and Bonacich 1988), Cubans (Portes and Rumbaut 2006), and Chinese (Zhou and Cho 2010), ethnic resources are crucial for entrepreneurship in the USA.

Singling out ethnicity as a salient factor in economic action or resource mobilization, however, has had the unintended consequence of inspiring...
research that overlooks or conflates resources that are more precisely situated within the family with those of ethnicity. For example, Sanders and Nee (1996) suggest that this approach often characterizes paid or unpaid family labour as an ethnic resource. And although this approach sometimes makes a distinction between class-based and ethnic-based resources (Light and Bonacich 1988; Portes and Rumbaut 2006), the former are generally reduced to individual-level human capital only, whereas ethnic resources often include a tacit social class dimension, such as resources generated by ‘professional’ coethnics (Portes and Rumbaut 2006, 87, 92). The primacy of ethnicity has hindered a consideration of other distinct dimensions of identity and collectivity, such as class or gender, and how they might combine with ethnicity to influence resource mobilization (Valdez 2011). After all, significant intra-ethnic group differences exist between men and women and the working- and middle-class that in some cases exceed the differences observed between ethnic groups.

This study redirects attention to the household economy to investigate how family dynamics shape access to family resources that foster ethnic enterprise. Kibria (1994) observed that the ethnic household economy, and in particular, a family’s composition and collectivist ideology, offers a critical context for the mobilization of family resources that facilitate economic incorporation. Regarding entrepreneurship, then, different family members within an ethnic household may experience unequal opportunities because multiple power relations and dimensions of identity, such as those rooted in social class and gender, shape family member’s access to family resources differently. By focusing on the household economy, this study shifts the emphasis away from ethnic group dynamics and to a consideration of family relationships within the household economy. Towards this end, I introduce an intersectional approach to examine the unequal access and distribution of three key family resources that facilitate entrepreneurship: family labour, entrepreneurial capital, and inheritance.

Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1988) depicts the American social structure as comprising three interlocking systems of power and oppression: capitalism, patriarchy, and White supremacy. Each of these systems is organized hierarchically along the dynamic classifications of class, gender, and race/ethnicity (Collins 2000). These systems are interdependent, posing a challenge to the pre-existing hierarchical ordering of each to capture the organization of multiple dimensions of oppression or privilege within the social structure (Collins 1997, 18). Ultimately, an intersectional approach holds that multiple dimensions of identity and power are created, maintained, and transformed simultaneously and in relation to one another (Collins 1997, 18; Weber 2001, 104).

From this perspective group-based resources that engender enterprise materialize from distinct yet interdependent identities, which intersect and
fuse with ethnicity to shape resource acquisition. Likewise, relationships and dynamics within an ethnic household, which are often circumscribed by class and gender, determine each family member’s access to family resources. Attention to the intersecting dimensions of power and identity decentres ethnicity as the principle determinant of group-based resources to reveal the interdependence of class and gender on trajectories of ethnic enterprise. Findings reveal that differential access to family resources by gender and class shapes divergent patterns of business ownership, regardless of ethnicity. The study demonstrates that, by situating differences in privilege and oppression among family members within larger systems of social class and gender stratification, an intersectional approach offers a more complete understanding of American enterprise in the USA.

The household economy

In her study of Vietnamese American households, Kibria (1994) finds a relationship between two aspects of the household economy, namely, household composition and a collectivist family ideology, and consequent resource mobilization that influences economic integration. Specifically, she finds that more heterogeneous households, as measured by the number, age, and gender of family members, benefit from access to a more diverse opportunity structure in the American economy. She also observes that Vietnamese American households share a family ideology of collectivism, or familism, which encourages family members to prioritize the economic interests of the family as a whole over those of any one individual. Within heterogeneous households, family members united by this collectivist ideology develop a ‘patchwork’ approach to economic integration by providing one another family-based resources and engaging in a variety of economic activities (Kibria 1994, 82). Similarly, in a qualitative study of fifty Latino/a college aspirants, Ovink (2014, 266) argues that Latino/a familism, ‘in which family and collective needs are privileged above individual ambitions’, influenced the mobility outcomes of Latinos/as differently across gender. Like Kibria (1994) and Ovink (2014), scholarship on ethnic enterprise indicates that familism, defined as family ideologies and practices that privilege collectivism, characterizes ethnic households and influences their socioeconomic incorporation.

The literature on ethnic entrepreneurship focuses primarily on the role of ethnicity in generating group-based resources (i.e. ethnic resources, ethnic enclaves, ethnic economies, and the like). As such, it tends to conflate resources that originate in the family with resources that specifically pertain to ethnic affiliation. Studies that offer a more precise examination of the relationship between family membership and ethnic enterprise reveal the development of family resources that can be distinguished from ethnicity but that nevertheless increase opportunities for entrepreneurship (Aldrich
and Cliff 2003; Sanders and Nee 1996). In particular, kinship ties foster social capital in the form of solidarity, trust, and reciprocal obligations (Kim and Hurh 1985; Sanders and Nee 1996). Social capital generates family resources that encourage business, such as family labour, family business experience, and financial capital in the form of gifts, loans, or credit (Sanders and Nee 1996). Family labour helps ethnic entrepreneurs: Light and Bonacich (1988) note that three quarters of ethnic-owned businesses are categorized as ‘family-owned with no employees’, meaning that family members provide the labour. Quintessential entrepreneurial groups like Cuban-origin entrepreneurs have capitalized on family labour and borrowing strategies to great effect, reflected in participation rates that far exceed those of most other native-born and foreign-born groups in the USA, including non-Hispanic whites (Portes and Yiu 2013, 75).

Although family-owned businesses that depend on family ties and networks for resources that promote business are not unique to ethnic minority groups, social capital stemming from family and extended kin networks is more common among some ethnic minorities for whom cohesive kinship networks and family ties are characteristic of their cultural traditions (Bonacich 1975; Valdez 2008, 956). Danes and colleagues (2008, 230) suggest that ‘family appears to be more important in ethnic businesses because of the collectivist orientation that characterizes non Euro-American cultures’. Recent studies suggest that this claim may also apply to Hispanic entrepreneurs (Kidwell, Hoy, and Ibarreche 2012), who tend to consider family economic concerns in collectivist terms and to rely on family for financial and social support (Chang et al. 2009; Tienda and Rajmaman 2004; Valdez 2011). Nevertheless, identifying family labour as an ethnic resource masks the role of family in generating this resource and conditioning its access.

**Family resources: family labour, entrepreneurial capital, and inheritance**

The collectivist family ideology that characterizes ethnic minority households supports ethnic entrepreneurs’ access to three key family resources that facilitate enterprise: family labour (Light 1972; Zhou 2006), entrepreneurial capital (Aldrich and Cliff 2003; Aldrich, Renzulli, and Langton 1998), and inheritance (Valdez 2011). First, ethnic entrepreneurs often rely on family labour rather than hiring non-family wage workers. Family labour is based on reciprocal obligations and trust between family members who perceive their labour as contributing to the collective good of the household (Light and Bonacich 1988; Sanders and Nee 1996; Tienda and Rajmaman 2004). The use of family labour is well documented among diverse groups, including Hispanics (Chang et al. 2009; Kidwell, Hoy, and Ibarreche 2012; Tienda and Rajmaman 2004).
Second, several studies show that ethnic entrepreneurs view family labour as a ‘training system’ (Bailey and Waldinger 1993, 432) that ‘socializes’ family members to become business owners themselves (Aldrich, Renzulli, and Langton 1998, 291). Aldrich and colleagues (1998, 291) suggest that a family history of enterprise acts as a resource, or ‘entrepreneurial capital’, which increases the likelihood of becoming an entrepreneur, either by starting one’s own businesses or inheriting the family business. Entrepreneurial capital, defined as experience derived from a family history of business ownership, facilitates the reproduction of business ownership through a process of socialization wherein the children of entrepreneurs come to recognize ‘self-employment as a career’, and ‘see self-employment as a realistic alternative to conventional employment’ (Aldrich, Renzulli, and Langton 1998, 2950). Entrepreneurial capital appears especially effective among middle-class (Goldthorpe et al. 1969) and adult male children (Fairlie and Krashinsky 2012).

Third, the intergenerational transmission of wealth through inheritance fosters entrepreneurship within middle-class families. Inherited wealth is generally tied to class background because middle-class families are more likely than working-class families to possess assets that can be transferred to descendants from one generation to the next. Additionally, middle-class entrepreneurs are more likely than working-class entrepreneurs to have established profitable and stable businesses that can be passed down to adult children (Valdez 2011). Like entrepreneurial capital, inheritance is a family resource that disproportionately benefits middle-class and adult male children (Conley and Rywicker 2005).

The interdependence of social class and gender

Studies of ethnic minority households suggest that they are almost uniformly marked by familism (Chrisman, Chua, and Steir 2002). However, more recent studies indicate that this attribution is not always deserved. Social class may influence families’ propensity towards a familistic or individualistic ideology. For example, in their qualitative study of 1.5 and second generation Mexicans in the USA, Vallejo and Lee (2009) found that Mexican-origin respondents who were poor as children but transitioned to the middle-class as adults were more likely to express a collectivist ideology in their patterns of giving to poor kin, and the ethnic community at large. By contrast, the respondents who grew up in middle-class households expressed an individualistic ideology consistent with that of non-Hispanic whites; they were less inclined to give back. Similarly, Sanders and Nee (1996) found less reliance on family labour among entrepreneurs that possessed high human capital, which they used as a proxy for social class. Consistent with these findings, Valdez (2011) observed that working-class Latino/a entrepreneurs were more likely to rely on family labour than their middle-class counterparts. Middle-class Latinos/
as were also more likely to pay family employees or hire non-family workers. Taken together, this research suggests that social class may mediate a collectivist orientation among Latinos/as that in turn influences the accumulation or distribution of family resources that facilitate enterprise.

Social class is not the only social group formation that affects access to family-based resources in the pursuit of entrepreneurship. Gender intersects with social class to shape the distribution of resources within families and across households. As Abrego (2009, 1070) and González de la Rocha (2001) observe, Latino/a family members ‘negotiate external conditions’ by distributing family resources unequally and ‘often … on the basis of gendered norms and expectations’. For example, expectations that women and children will contribute their family labour to the family business are stronger than for men. Scholars should take care not to interpret a gendered division of labour among family members solely in terms of its contribution to the collective benefit of the household, as doing so ignores the unequal social and economic value placed on gendered contributions and the salience of gender stratification within households. In a recent study of Latino/a students’ college trajectories, Ovink (2014) proposes that familism is itself gendered. She argues that traditional patriarchal family structures foster gendered socialization processes, leading Latinos and Latinas to interpret the meaning and value of college differently under a framework of gendered familism (Ovink 2014, 265).

Gendered ideologies are often transmitted intergenerationally from parents to children, thereby influencing the next generation’s ‘attitudes regarding work and family issues’ (Goldberg et al. 2012, 816). As Lam and colleagues observe (2012), Mexican-American children tend to reproduce the egalitarian or traditional views and behaviours they grow up with in their own families as adults (Lam, McHale, and Updegraff 2012). In sum, the intersecting factors of class and gender condition the distribution of entrepreneurial capital and inheritance within families. Therefore, family resources that promote enterprise are more accessible to middle-class men than to working-class men or women of either class (Valdez 2011). To clarify the unequal access of family-based resources that promote entrepreneurialism, scholars must take into account the class and gender dynamics occurring within ethnic households.

**Mexican-origin enterprise**

The Mexican-origin population in the USA is large and growing. Recent census figures show that this population increased by over 50 per cent between 1990 and 2010 (from thirteen million to twenty million). Mexicans are the largest Latino/a ethnic group in America; almost 60 per cent of Latinos/as identified as Mexican in the 2010 census (US Census 2012). Although migration patterns are expanding across the nation, three-fourths of this population remain
concentrated in the southwestern region (US Census 2012). Recent census figures show that 2.3 million US firms are Latino-owned, with a growth rate in the last decade that is twice the national average, generating almost 3.5 billion dollars in revenue (Kidwell, Hoy, and Ibarreche 2012).

Mexican-Americans are marked by considerable socioeconomic diversity, and recent scholarship draws attention to the understudied Mexican middle class. These studies examine middle-class incorporation as measured by racial and ethnic identity formation (Jimenez 2009), patterns of giving back to family and community (Vallejo 2012), professional employment and the workplace (Flores 2011), and wages, income, and self-employment (Valdez 2008). This research is primarily concerned with the extent to which Mexican-Americans incorporate into the US middle-class and whether their mobility trajectory follows a pattern typically associated with European-origin immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century or cultivates new patterns.

Regarding Mexican-origin entrepreneurs, there is some evidence that highly skilled or middle-class Mexican immigrants and their descendants are disproportionately more likely to engage in entrepreneurship than the working class (Valdez 2008). Yet beyond this, little is known about the characteristics that facilitate entrepreneurship within Mexican-origin families or how class and gender combine to shape intra-group differences. This study provides an explicit examination of the intersectional consequences of class and gender for the distribution of family resources that facilitate ethnic enterprise among this understudied group.

**Research design**

The study uses an intersectional methodology that requires comparisons among groups of individuals who belong to different social categories. This method of analysis is called intracategorical complexity, or simply, the categorical approach (McCall 2005). It accepts as imperfect existing socially constructed categories of difference (e.g. class and gender) as well as their linked classifications (e.g. men or women within category of gender) while also acknowledging that these categories capture some shared experiences of oppression and privilege ‘along multiple and conflicting dimensions’ (McCall 2005, 1173). This study employs the categorical approach to investigate differences in family resources among family members within Mexican-origin middle-class households. I compare access to family resources by class and gender, examining the different experiences of men and women who grew up in working- or middle-class households.

The data are drawn from life history interviews with middle-class¹ Mexican-origin entrepreneurs who live and work in El Paso, Texas. El Paso is a critical site for the study of middle-class Mexican-origin entrepreneurs, as it offers a
geographically concentrated area of Mexican settlement, a necessary ingredient for the formation of ethnic economies and entrepreneurs (Logan, Alba, and McNulty 1994, 694). Though the entrepreneurial participation rate of the Mexican-origin population is low relative to other ethnic groups in the USA, El Paso boasts a large and heterogeneous Mexican-origin population. The size and diversity of this population is reflected in its entrepreneurs, making it possible to identify and interview an adequate sample of middle-class men and women entrepreneurs for this analysis. Data were provided by the ongoing *Paso del Norte Entrepreneurship Oral History Project*, a joint venture between the University of Texas at El Paso and the Kauffman Foundation. The oral history interviews used in this sample were conducted in 2009–2012 by trained Mexican-American undergraduate and graduate students who attended the University of Texas at El Paso. Permission to use data was generously granted by the director of the Oral History Institute. IRB approval for this project was granted by the institutional review board of the author’s university.²

The project team conducted a non-random, purposive snowball sampling protocol whereby several community leaders, business owners, and other contacts were asked to identify and recruit an initial group of entrepreneurs. The sample is comprised of fifty prominent, first, second, or third generation middle-class Mexican-origin business owners, thirty-five men and fifteen women, who work in a variety of industries from personal services and retail to professional or financial services and engineering, and who have owned their businesses for at least five years. The diversity of industry is both a reflection of long-term settlement and ethnic concentration within a geographic location that also benefits from transnational economic activities on both sides of the US–Mexico border. The average years in business for men was twenty-six years; for women fifteen years. The average age for men was sixty years old; the average age for women was fifty years old. Most entrepreneurs reported some college education or better, with more men reporting some college, technical/vocation training, or a bachelor’s degree than women (57–43%, respectively), whereas women (43%) were more likely to report earning a graduate or professional degree than men (24%). The male respondents were more likely to be married than women were (77% versus 67%), and reported more children on average than their female counterparts (2.8 versus 1.9).

The interviews ranged in length from approximately forty minutes to over two hours, and they followed a general interview guide format which included a combination of forced choice and open ended questions on demographic characteristics, parents’ educational and occupational background, their own education and work experience, their reasons for starting a business, their past and current social class and socioeconomic status, and their expectations for the future. Although the interview was offered in
English and Spanish, all but one respondent selected English. Entrepreneurs are identified using first names only, and although their businesses are described in detail, the names of the businesses have been withheld.

I focus on three family-based resources: family labour, entrepreneurial capital, and inheritance. Family members’ access to these resources within their households is at least partially contingent on each member’s social location. Family labour contributes to the household income overall and to the maintenance of the business (Valdez 2011). Entrepreneurial capital, or a family history of business ownership, facilitates entrepreneurship by influencing the adult children of entrepreneurs to pursue business ownership (Aldrich and Cliff 2003; Aldrich, Renzulli, and Langton 1998). Entrepreneurial capital typically includes exposure to or experience working in the family business (Aldrich, Renzulli, and Langton 1998). A final family resource is inheritance in the form of wealth, assets, or passing down a family business (Oliver and Shapiro 2006).

I situate the findings of family-based resources within the context of the household economy. The household economy includes household composition, or the number of family members within a household, the class and gender affiliations of family members, and their family ideology (Kibria 1994). In keeping with previous literature, I consider households that include a spouse and children and those with greater numbers of family members to be more heterogeneous (Kibria 1994). Such households are associated with an increased likelihood of family members’ engagement in diverse economic activities (including entrepreneurship), which correlates with positive economic progress. With respect to ideology, I examine whether the family discourse and practice includes familism and traditional gendered expectations. An ideology of familism is more likely to characterize working-class families than middle-class families. Familism is also more common among households that adhere to the traditional gendered expectation that mothers and wives should provide reproductive work in the home but not engage in paid labour outside the home, what Ovink (2014) has termed gendered familism.

Findings

The household economy: household composition and family ideology

Ray’s story illustrates how the household economy and family resources facilitate entrepreneurship. Ray, the owner of a trucking company and brokerage firm for third party rentals that generated over ten million dollars in revenue, was a middle-class entrepreneur from a large, working-class family of five boys and two girls. His father worked for wages in blue-collar occupations throughout his work history. The family struggled financially so his mother worked as well, first as a garment factory worker and later as a sales clerk. Although his
mother ‘had’ to work, Ray’s parents enforced traditional gender norms. They insisted that their daughters stay home to help raise their brothers but encouraged their five sons to excel in school and go to college. At the time of the interview, Ray and his brothers were employed in professional occupations, including two business owners and two managers of large companies. His sisters were both ‘stay-at-home moms’. Ray acknowledged that his older sister had the potential to succeed in school and work: ‘[My eldest sister] was probably the smartest of us all, but she didn’t go to school simply because she was helping raise the kids, her brothers’. Although she eventually enrolled in junior college as an adult, her education was cut short when she left college to marry and have children. For Ray, growing up in a working-class household with a diverse family composition and traditional gender ideology fostered his social and economic development and that of his brothers. The opportunities for education and employment that Ray and his brothers enjoyed eluded his sisters.

Ray’s sisters carried out traditional gendered responsibilities and reproduced those expectations when they married and started families of their own. It is not clear whether or to what extent they too could have achieved the educational and economic success that their brothers enjoyed had they challenged those expectations. However, Ray made it clear that he and his brothers were encouraged to embrace school, whereas his sisters were not. Ray believed that the emphasis his family placed on traditional gender norms contributed to his sisters’ decision to become ‘stay-at-home moms’. A similar account is offered by José, a fifty-one-year-old electronics manufacturer, whose entrepreneurial father and stay-at-home mother fostered an entrepreneurial spirit among their six sons, all of whom own businesses, whereas his only sister did not.

Teresa, a Latina entrepreneur, reveals the obstacles faced by young women who grew up in households like Ray’s or José’s but attempted to challenge their family’s traditional gender ideology. Her office supply and furniture retailer/distributor firm was recently named Hispanic Small Business of the Year by the Texas Association of Mexican-American Chambers of Commerce. Teresa grew up in a large working-class family (three sons and five daughters) with parents who encouraged their sons to graduate from high school and pursue college degrees. By contrast, Teresa and her sisters were expected to marry and start families of their own. As the youngest daughter, Teresa’s aging parents assumed she would care for them at home. As Teresa grew up, her parents repeated the constant refrain: ‘Tú te vas a quedar aquí, – You’re gonna get married and be here … but No te nos vas a ir– You are not going to leave [us].’ Though Ray’s eldest sister experienced a different set of expectations from Teresa, who was the youngest in her family, the gender ideologies of their households were similar. For young women raised in traditional households, the discourse surrounding the gendered
care-taking responsibilities assigned to family members operated to constrain girls’ mobility.

Despite the pressure from her parents and siblings to follow a traditional path, Teresa disobeyed her family’s wishes; she moved away from home, forged her father’s signature on her college and loan documents, and enrolled in college. As a result of this disobedience, her parents disowned her. Although the intervening years were difficult, Teresa benefitted from good mentoring in college, and she eventually graduated with a teaching credential. Soon after, she landed a job as a teacher and then became a school principal before starting her own business. Teresa’s efforts to earn an education and land a good job required her to challenge and ultimately reject her family’s traditional values. Although she eventually overcame the restrictions of gendered familism to become a middle-class businesswoman, Teresa’s turbulent road to mobility was unlike that of male entrepreneurs, whose education and work trajectories were supported by their family and household dynamics. These examples illustrate how gendered expectations within working-class families mediated the educational and entrepreneurial opportunities available to men and women differently.

Unlike entrepreneurs who grew up in working-class households, Cecilia, the owner of a temporary employee service and executive recruiting agency, was raised in a large, middle-class, and entrepreneurial household. Cecilia’s account highlights a key difference by social class in family ideology regarding education: in middle-class households, children were generally encouraged to earn a college education regardless of gender. Cecilia’s middle-class parents expected all ten of their male and female children to pursue a college education, which they viewed as a marker of middle-class culture and success. Likewise, Alejandra, a thirty-two-year-old second generation Mexican restaurateur, characterizes her parent’s educational expectations as ‘very traditional’, by which she meant their middle-class belief that all of their children would attend college. Although Alejandra expressed to her parents a desire to attend culinary school in Italy (which she eventually did), her ‘very old school’ parents encouraged her to instead ‘pursue a career in a university’. She followed suit and earned a bachelor’s degree in communications with a minor in business.

Middle-class parent’s traditional gender norms sometimes shaped their children’s occupational choices and decisions regarding work/life balance. For example, Cecilia’s parents strongly encouraged their daughters to pursue ‘pink-collar’ jobs in nursing or teaching. By contrast, they advised their sons to earn business degrees in preparation to take over their father’s multiple businesses. Moreover, Cecilia’s parents expected their daughters to marry and have children, which they believed should take priority over college or work. Cecilia followed her parent’s wishes faithfully and pursued a teaching career. She worked as a teacher until she married, when she
took her parent’s advice and quit teaching to focus on being a good housewife and mother. But her marriage did not work out and Cecilia and her husband filed for divorce. Without an income of her own, she struggled financially and turned to her father for help. He offered her a job as an employee in one of his businesses. After working for a short time, Cecilia decided to start a business of her own with her father’s financial support. Although Cecilia eventually became an entrepreneur, her experience was very different from that of her entrepreneurial brothers due to their divergent gendered pathways.

Ray’s, José’s, and Teresa’s experiences illustrate that men benefit from a household economy marked by traditional gendered expectations and familism. Moreover, class and gender intersect to shape access to education and business opportunities such that girls in working-class households are expected to forgo college while their middle-class counterparts like Cecilia and Alejandra are persuaded to attend. Nevertheless, lingering traditional expectations prioritize their gendered roles as wives and mothers, leading Cecilia and other middle-class women to quit work or school when they got married or had children. These findings suggest that class and gender stratification are embedded in the traditional household economy, producing different social and economic opportunities for men and women family members from working or middle-class backgrounds. No matter the social class of their families, women faced greater constraints to their socioeconomic mobility and integration than men did.

**Family labour**

Household composition and a gendered familism were factors influencing observed gender differences in entrepreneurs’ access to family labour. Specifically, entrepreneurs who were married or had more children increased their access to family labour. Yet differences in the use of family labour appeared to be associated with traditional gender expectations regarding the contributions of spouses and children. In other words, women’s labour was more likely to be perceived as ‘family labour’ that was readily available to their entrepreneur husbands whereas men’s labour was often perceived as their own.

In the case of Gustavo, a seventy-one-year-old third generation Mexican entrepreneur who took over his father’s glass firm, the business was his mother’s idea initially. ‘… the Korean War [started] and there was a lot of work … That’s when my mom told [my father] ‘you need to go in on your own’. Gustavo admits that ‘she was the one that ran the company in those days’; yet, he referred to the business as his father’s alone. Gustavo also self-identifies as the owner of ‘his’ business, describing it as a ‘one man show’. At other times, however, he refers to his wife’s contribution (to bookkeeping, emotional support, working long hours alongside him) using the
personal pronoun ‘we’. The ease with which Gustavo referred to the business interchangeably as ‘his’ or ‘ours’ was more commonly observed among men than women, underscoring their recognition of themselves as business owners and their wives as family labour.

Ray, mentioned earlier, enjoyed easy access to family labour from his wife and children that was often reported by male entrepreneurs. When he started his business, Ray’s wife worked as an unpaid employee helping to establish the business and later managing the books and accounts. Even after the business began generating a profit large enough to provide the family with a middle-class income, Ray’s wife and two of his five children – a son and a daughter – were still expected to work in the family business, although they now received wages for their work. Similarly, Teresa’s son and daughter both worked for wages in her business, which generated a middle-class income for the family. Yet Teresa’s husband was never expected to help with the family business; instead, he worked in an unrelated occupation outside the home. Teresa’s husband’s absence from the family business is typical of Mexican-origin entrepreneurial families, where husbands tend to work in jobs unrelated to their wives’ businesses (Valdez 2011). Nevertheless, Teresa characterized her business as ‘family-owned’, as most women entrepreneurs did; those who did not typically were unmarried or did not have children, or if they had children, were too young to work in the business or worked elsewhere.

**Entrepreneurial capital**

The entrepreneurial capital that the children of entrepreneurs are exposed to may spark a desire to start businesses of their own (Aldrich and Cliff 2003). As Rick, the owner of a trucking company stated plainly, ‘once you have it in your blood, you see it [as a plausible economic activity]’. Traditional gender expectations, however, shaped the ways in which entrepreneurial capital influenced adult children’s entrepreneurial participation. Like Rick, Cecilia recognized that the entrepreneurial capital she enjoyed influenced her to become a business owner, stating:

> When you grow up in a family that has their own business, it definitely can be an influence on you as to what you choose to do because you’re around it, and you see it, and you kind of live it.

Yet, unlike her entrepreneurial brothers and many of the men in this study, transferring her entrepreneurial capital into business ownership was not direct or straightforward. The gendered realities and household dynamics of Cecilia’s middle-class family limited her ability to own a business until after she accomplished her parent’s gendered and classed expectations of earning a teaching credential, starting a career in teaching, quitting that career after getting married and having children, and then ‘failing’ to maintain
those expectations after her marriage dissolved. Cecilia noted this as she completed her thoughts on entrepreneurial capital by adding, ‘… but the main influence for me to go into business was getting a divorce’. Her story suggests that for middle-class women, entrepreneurial capital may not transfer into business ownership as directly as that enjoyed by middle-class men.

Beyond family-based entrepreneurial capital, some of the male entrepreneurs in this study gained entrepreneurial capital from their experiences working in small, family-owned businesses owned by non-family coethnic mentors, or what might be typically understood as an ethnic-based resource, in keeping with the ethnic entrepreneurship paradigm. Though not the focus of this paper, I have suggested elsewhere that ethnic-based entrepreneurial capital can facilitate entrepreneurial activity but that such resources may be disproportionately available to coethnic men (Valdez 2011). In other words, this latter form of entrepreneurial capital may be better understood as an ethnic and gendered resource.

**Inheritance**

In keeping with previous research, Mexican-origin men and women entrepreneurs raised in working-class or middle-class households revealed differences in their attitudes and practices regarding inheritance. Those who grew up middle-class often mentioned their plans to leave their businesses to their children, whereas those from working-class backgrounds were less committal about this, suggesting instead that their children pursue their own dreams. When Latino or Latina entrepreneurs spoke of a desire to pass down their businesses to their children, sons were often explicitly referenced. As mentioned earlier, Teresa employed her son and daughter in her family business. Teresa’s daughter may have been overqualified for her position in bookkeeping, since she held an advanced degree in business administration. Teresa even referred to her daughter as her business ‘consultant.’ In contrast, Teresa’s adult son had no prior business experience and graduated from high school only, yet he held a management position in the business. Despite differences in her children’s human capital, Teresa stated unambiguously, ‘should we decide to retire, we know that our family business, rather than just closing the doors – it means so much to us that my son would be here to continue it’. Like Teresa, Latina/o entrepreneurs were often explicit in their plans to pass down their businesses to their sons even as they expressed the hope that their daughters would continue to work as employees. Cecilia’s story also confirms gender differences in inheritance among entrepreneurs who grew up middle-class. As mentioned earlier, her father agreed to provide her with financial support for her business, but she did not benefit from an inheritance as her brothers did – each of whom inherited one of their father’s businesses upon graduating from college. In fact, and as a
condition of his financial support, Cecilia’s father required her to divide any profits she made from her business equally among her four sisters, three of whom were salaried workers and one a stay-at-home mom. The family-based resources that Cecilia received from her father were significant when compared to most middle-class women entrepreneurs. Still, gender affected the unequal distribution of wealth and assets within her family and household. It is clear that such gender disparities set the stage for unequal opportunities in enterprise among members of the same household, by class and gender.

Discussion and Conclusion

An intersectional approach to ethnic entrepreneurship deemphasizes the intractable, ubiquitous, and at best partial explanation of American enterprise as rooted in ethnicity, focusing instead on how multiple dimensions of identity, collectivity, and power relations affect entrepreneurship. From an intersectional perspective, the availability, access, and distribution of family resources are contingent upon the social location of each family member within a household. This approach reveals the interdependent, intra-group effects of class and gender on entrepreneurship within the family and household, regardless of ethnicity. By investigating multiple comparisons across class and gender, this study uncovers how complex relations affect the life chances of Mexican-origin entrepreneurs who are differently positioned within the highly stratified American economy.

This study underscores the need to move beyond the primacy of ethnicity in generating group-based resources that facilitate enterprise. It poses a challenge to the traditional approach, which tends to emphasize the role of ethnicity in fostering influential resources, often conflates ethnicity with social class, and considers gender additively rather than intersectionally. That approach fails to consider how non-ethnic social group formations, such as social class and gender, combine to shape economic integration in significant ways. An intersectional approach calls into question the presumption that ethnic minority families are uniformly characterized by a collectivist orientation. By highlighting stratified relationships that exist within ethnic minority households, this study reveals that oppression and privilege are reproduced from within, conditioning differential effects on the life chances of individual family members.

Findings demonstrate that the structure of the household economy has different effects on family members’ economic opportunities and outcomes based on their distinct social locations. In particular, a diverse household composition and collectivist family ideology facilitates entrepreneurship by providing opportunities and family-based resources that increase family members’ likelihood of entrepreneurial activity. Yet in a given household,
different family members will engage with entrepreneurship differently. Family roles and responsibilities, especially those associated with traditional gendered expectations, influence the distribution of opportunities and resources within a household. Even as a diverse and collectivist household economy may facilitate enterprise, this structure tends to favour men’s entrepreneurial outcomes over women’s.

Notably, daughters’ and wives’ care responsibilities and the expectation that they should privilege marriage and childrearing over paid labour contribute to the social and economic advancement of boys/sons and men/husbands within families. With respect to family resources, wives and children are more likely to lend their family labour to their husbands/fathers businesses than husbands and children lend to their wives/mothers businesses. In addition, boys garner entrepreneurial capital from more sources than girls do, and sons are more likely to inherit the family business than daughters. As a consequence of household arrangements rooted in gendered expectations, the family resources that facilitate entrepreneurship – family labour, entrepreneurial capital, and inheritance – are unequally distributed by gender; accordingly, middle-class men benefit more from family-based resources than do middle-class women, even when that help is couched in a discourse of collectivism or the overall good of the family.

By shifting the explanatory emphasis from ethnic resources to family resources, I expose the influence of class and gender on men’s and women’s economic outcomes; these important lines of difference are commonly conflated with ethnicity or considered in an additive rather than intersectional way by the traditional approach (Valdez 2011). Yet like ethnicity, these distinct social group formations are rooted in larger systems of stratification that comprise the American social structure. I demonstrate how individual and collective class and gender identities shape access to family resources and support. These dimensions of identity do not influence family resource allocation through additive processes or within a particular ethnic group only; instead, their effects occur simultaneously and in relation to one another.

Ultimately, an intersectional framework reveals that middle-class Mexican-origin entrepreneurs differ in their access to family resources based in part on their gender and class background. Differential access to resources is produced by intersecting gender and class dynamics at the individual, group, and structural level as individual identities correspond to distinct family roles and relationship dynamics within the household economy. An intersectional approach exposes gender and class differences in access to family resources, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the unequal opportunities and outcomes experienced by middle-class Mexican-origin entrepreneurs.
Notes

1. I use a broad definition of ‘middle-class’ including possessing a college degree or equivalent, reporting earnings or household income in the middle to upper-middle ranges of the national distribution, owning a house and other financial assets and/or savings, and married (with or without children) (Oliver and Shapiro 2006).

2. I am not affiliated with this research project or team, although I discussed at length the research design and protocol with the project director and suggested for consideration some additional questions.

Acknowledgements

I thank Tanya Golash-Boza, Nella Van Dyke, Laura Hamilton, Philip Kasinitz, Mary Romero, and three anonymous reviewers for comments and suggestions. I thank Kristine Navarro-McElhaney, director of the Oral History Institute at UTEP for permission to use these data.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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