

## Motherhood in migration

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## Motherhood in migration: schools as acculturation agents

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### ABSTRACT

Motherhood roles lie at the intersection of gender, professional, family, and social identities and are highly contextualized in culture, making them particularly relevant for acculturation success. We provide an empirical example of how schools act as acculturation agents, using the experiences of career-oriented migrant mothers whose children attend elite private schools in Santiago, Chile. This study contributes to consumer acculturation research and to research on matricentric feminism, which positions mothers' concerns as the starting point for theories, politics, and practices of empowerment. We employ Turner's notion of root paradigms to discuss how schools maneuver their unique institutional agentic power, acculturating career-oriented migrant mothers and their families into a cultural framework of female domesticity and intensive mothering.

### KEYWORDS



Motherhood; gender; acculturation; school; rituals; migration

## Introduction

A pressure cooker is a sealed vessel. It heats its contents slowly and unrelentingly, gradually increasing in pressure till the nature of its contents is altered. Similarly, time is a pressure cooker for some women. They want to make productive use of time, but ultimately they seem to be trapped inside time, unable to let out the steam as the pressure of time increases and changes who they are and how they live. (Cotte, Ratneshwar, and Mick 2004, 335)

Consumer acculturation agents are “individuals or institutions who serve as sources of consumer information and/or models of consumption behavior” (Peñaloza 1989, 116) and can have a positive impact on migrants. Acculturation agents can act as “consumption mentors, navigating new immigrants through the complexities of their host country's marketplace” (Schau, Dang, and Zhang 2017, 179). However, acculturation agents are not necessarily supportive and often impose their biases on migrants (Luedicke 2011, 20). For instance, consumer research has examined how sociocultural structures and patterns may limit migrants' acculturation agency (e.g. Üstüner and Holt 2007) and how relational forces configure interactions between migrants and local actors, restricting possibilities for acculturation (e.g. Luedicke 2015).

School selection, negotiation, and integration are seen as fundamental to the process of a family's acculturation and well-being, particularly for culturally heterogeneous families (Visconti et al. 2014). Oftentimes, the rules and norms involved in schooling are not immediately apparent to migrants, and schools act as intermediaries in the development of the cultural competence required to participate in this context (Reay and Lucey 2003; Cross and Gilly 2014a, 2014b). Consumer research has noted, for

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instance, that tensions may emerge between first and second generations of migrants, due to social pressure experienced by children at educational institutions (Visconti 2010; Visconti and Napolitano 2009; Sekhon and Szmigin 2011; Regany, Visconti, and Fosse-Gomez 2012). Noting that schooling has been generally reported as a difficult process for migrant families, Visconti et al. (2014) highlight the importance of studying schools as a meso-level force impacting the well-being of ethnically diverse consumers, noting that “academic performance often predicts future professional opportunities and access to material wealth (i.e. market citizenship)” (Visconti et al. 2014, 18).

Schools are shaped by governmental, political, social, and (in deregulated contexts) economic forces, consisting in highly complex institutions ingrained in local culture (Doucet 2011). Albeit unsystematically, research on migration has noted the influence of schools primarily as spaces of socialization in which relations between migrants and indigenes are set. We argue that schools also act as acculturation agents by taking the form of powerful institutional machineries that affirm local cultural expectations regarding successful schooling, extending these expectations over other core aspects of family life, such as gender roles, parenthood, and household practices.

Schools also act as acculturation agents not only for children but also for mothers, furthering the extent to which the acculturation projects of mothers and children intersect and ultimately shaping acculturation outcomes for entire families. Even migrant mothers who enjoy a privileged cultural and socioeconomic standing may find their acculturation process challenged by schools (Erel 2012), which suggests that the influence of schools in migrant mothers’ acculturation is rather broad. However, the current understanding of how schools may support, challenge, or constrain the unfolding of motherhood projects is at best incomplete. This issue is important because, in many cultures, “parents are not held equally responsible, and mothers are usually treated as the default parent [...] as well as the parent at fault” (Garey 2002, 20; see also Garey and Arendell 2001), particularly when it comes to schooling. We illustrate how schools shape migrant mothers’ acculturation process with the example of migrant career-oriented mothers undergoing acculturation, whose children are attending elite private schools in Santiago, Chile. We use the term “school” to refer not only to the infrastructure (i.e. the building children attend) but also to the people who operate in it (teachers, administrators) and the rules and rituals they create and implement. Schools are institutions, that is, legitimate and powerful social constructions (Lawrence 2008, 170).

This study adds to extant consumer acculturation research and to the emerging stream of research on matricentric feminism (O’Reilly 2016) by exploring how a dominant and all-encompassing institution and market actor functions as an acculturation agent that limits consumer agency in acculturation and promotes certain motherhood projects while hindering others. In doing so, this study draws attention to how school rituals, based on persistent cultural scripts (i.e. root paradigms) that inform motherhood roles reproduce and normalize expectations about gender and motherhood in the context of migration. A motherhood role is a set of tasks, norms, and behaviors that are expected, in a social context, of those women who have children (Biddle 2013). Migrant women must learn and develop cultural competence to perform the motherhood roles of their host culture. Matricentric feminism research (e.g. O’Reilly 2016) argues that despite the significant contribution made by feminist research both to theory and to women’s rights movements, there is still a need to further theorize the specific positions of women-mothers. Hence, understanding the acculturation process of migrant mothers is as important as understanding other intersectional subjectivities in gender research.

We draw from data collected through guided introspective interviews, online participant observation, and media archives to describe how schools operate as all-encompassing acculturation agents for migrant mothers in Santiago, Chile. We find that school rituals are founded on a root paradigm (Turner and Turner 1978) that we call *mamá profesión colegio* (Spanish for “professional school mom”). These rituals normalize certain motherhood roles and challenge others, sometimes supporting and at other times constraining migrant mothers’ acculturation.

In the following sections, we detail the conceptual background of this study, drawing from consumer acculturation literature and from research on motherhood and identity. We then put forth this study’s research methods and findings. Finally, we discuss the implications for consumer

research of understanding schools as acculturation agents. We conclude with suggestions for additional research on institutions and market actors that, through shaping the acculturation process of migrant mothers, may either elicit resistance to or promote certain motherhood and gender roles.

### **Acculturation agents in consumer research**

Migrating requires navigating multiple cultural references (Oswald 1999) and often entails identity reconstruction. Such transitions are dependent on contextual factors from the migrants' origin and host cultures and are systemically influenced by these cultures and their institutions, including the government, school and religious structures, ethnic communities, mass media, and the market in general (Luedicke 2011). The post-assimilationist view in consumer research has contributed to our understanding of migration-related identity transitions by illustrating the plasticity involved in the experience of migration and how consumption supports acculturation. In Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard's (2005, 163) words, "rather than tactical choices, immigrant identity positions as expressed in consumption seem like contingent interpretive responses to changing circumstances and situations."

In a foundational study on consumer acculturation, Peñaloza (1994) identifies home and host cultures as acculturation agents that inform and shape the behavior of migrant consumers and argues that agents and migrants interact in mutually adjusting ways. Following that study, which focused on Mexican immigrants acculturating to the United States, research has been conducted in several other contexts to examine other agents capable of shaping the process of consumer acculturation. This research has accounted for the broader sociocultural structures that operate as acculturation forces, including transnational cultures (Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005) and ideologies (Üstüner and Holt 2007; Lindridge 2009), and for specific categories of social and market actors that operate as sources of information and models of behavior for migrant consumers. For instance, advertising and media studies have extensively explored mass media, brands, and marketing communication as acculturation agents (e.g. Lee and Tse 1994).

Consumer research on migration has shown that consumers actively recreate their identities during acculturation, implementing strategies with outcomes ranging from hyper-assimilation (when migrants decide to comply fully with social expectations and customs in their host countries) to experiencing a shattered identity (when consumers lack financial and social resources to achieve their desired identity projects; Luedicke 2011). Migrants can also develop hybrid identity projects by combining cultural elements from the home, host, and global cultures (Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005; Oswald 1999). For instance, Chytikova (2011) argues that even in contexts of constraint, consumers' creative use of marketplace resources can still allow them to recreate multiple hybrid identities and demonstrates how poor migrant women adapt their cuisine as a possible response to the constraints on both the home and the host cultures. Food consumption, however, is a mostly private consumption domain that awards more agency to the consumer.

While most research on acculturation emphasizes consumer agency, Luedicke (2011) suggests that under certain circumstances, migrants may not easily be able to bridge the logics of the home and host cultures due to the lack of economic, cultural, and social resources. Migration research has shown, for instance, how women with scarce capital (particularly economic and cultural) struggle to acculturate to new contexts. For example, Üstüner and Holt (2007) focus on the acculturation of poor rural migrants to an urban context and shed light on the profound frustrations that the dominant consumer culture can inflict upon the most vulnerable, as the lack of economic resources constrains consumers' possibilities and dominates their process of acculturation, forcing them to abandon personal ideals and ultimately leading to shattered identity projects (Üstüner and Holt 2007; Luedicke 2011).

Overall, consumer research has tended to focus on individual resources as forces of acculturation at the expense of accounting for other "unsolicited" acculturation agents, which are "not necessarily supportive and friendly as the close social peers" (Luedicke 2011, 20). Luedicke demonstrates that the

absence of “active, agentic influences of human beings and organizations” who “often impose their beliefs and values upon migrants” (2011, 234) is problematic and calls for a conceptualization of migrant acculturation “as a set of interdependent, consumption mediated social phenomena that occur within complex networks of sociocultural adaptation” (224). Our study draws attention to the force that all-encompassing, powerful institutions such as schools exercise in their role as acculturation agents. We find that schools impose a particular ideology of motherhood on mothers and on their children. Schools foster interaction between parents, who collaborate in reinforcing this ideology. Schools discriminate. Schools, by their power to build or kill careers, thus dominate the working mothers’ acculturation process in significant ways. In this sense, we provide insight into how a specific acculturation agent shapes acculturation projects. Yet this is not merely any agent but is one that dominates most of the lives of migrant mothers.<sup>1</sup> As an institution that has significant and long-lasting implications for family well-being, societal integration, and the reproduction and normalization of social scripts and practices, schools are profoundly influential in migrants’ acculturation processes.

### **Motherhood roles in migration and acculturation**

O’Reilly (2016), inspired by Rich (1977), proposed that motherhood is “fundamentally a cultural practice that is continuously redesigned in response to changing economic and societal factors” (16). She argues that motherhood is “the unfinished business of feminism” (2), as motherhood issues are often seen as antagonistic to the feminist ideals (particularly liberal and libertarian feminism) of freedom and equality for women, mainly because of its connection to biological existentialism (i.e. only biological females can bear children, which implies that 100% equality is biologically impossible) and to notions of domesticity.

Consumption and consumer culture contribute to the construction of stereotypical images of motherhood by disseminating “what mothers are, should care about and how they should behave” (O’Donohoe et al. 2013, 1). Social and cultural constructions about what constitutes a good mother proliferate in the marketplace (Thompson 1996; Prothero 2002), and although mothers from different social categories and cultures may be held to different expectations regarding motherhood (VOICE Group 2010a, 2010b), the general assumption is that children should be a mother’s priority and that mothers should provide the best for their children, even if definitions of “the best” may vary (Hays 1996, 86).

Notably, some women, particularly in societies where gender equality is emphasized, resist the interference of the market in everyday life and refuse to abide by stereotypical (Clarke 2007; Banister and Hogg 2008) or patriarchal (O’Reilly (2016) motherhood roles. Rather, they perform the role of motherhood in ways that counter or challenge these models (Prothero 2002; Hogg, Curasi, and Maclaran 2004; Layne 2000), often using consumption as a means to that end (Clarke 2007; Banister and Hogg 2008). But consumption may also generate ambivalence and challenge motherhood roles (Voice Group 2010a, 2010b), as certain consumption engagements represent “undesired selves” that mothers unwillingly assume (Banister and Hogg 2006). Vulnerabilities connected with motherhood are often lasting, as motherhood is a long-term experience that goes beyond the years of childhood dependence (Mansvelt, Breheny, and Stephens 2017) and subjects women to numerous transitional periods.

The enduring exercise of *doing mothering* is further complicated, as it entails relationships with many others (i.e. fathers, children, other members of the family, and a wider social network) who impose demands on mothers. Mothering thus involves constant identity reconstruction (Ritch and Brownlie 2016) and can be considered a “project” that lies at the intersection of several other roles, requiring “daily investments, practices, and discourses to approach or to avoid desirable or undesirable focal points of identity” (Castilhos and Fonseca 2016, 6).

Relational identities connected to motherhood and family life change over time and space (Hogg, Maclaran, and Curasi 2003; Maclaran, Hogg, and Curasi 2012). Amid transitions, identities are

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<sup>1</sup>We thank one of our anonymous reviewers for this insightful commentary on this study’s findings.

challenged, as one may need to assume new or different roles that are context-dependent and sometimes not easily apprehended. Major transitions across cultures, such as those entailed by migration, are disruptive and influence how a family and its individual members enact their identities, often by making new use of marketplace resources, and therefore, these transitions highlight the array of forces working to shape motherhood roles (Epp and Price 2008, 2011; O'Donohoe et al. 2013), whether those cultural scripts have been absorbed, reproduced, or resisted.

Symbolic consumption has been considered an acculturation resource for women preparing for motherhood in migration. Mothers' consumption helps them to share their cultural background with their offspring. These sharing experiences are a way to connect their biographical trajectories with those of their children and vice versa (Rojas Gaviria and Bluemelhuber 2010; Rojas Gaviria 2016). This implies that consumption practices mobilize expectations related to gender and motherhood roles, which are embedded in the social structures of a given society. Such expectations have been noted to influence migrant women's motherhood identities and roles (Peñaloza 1994). As gender expectations and *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984) in host societies influence women's consumption behaviors and performance of motherhood roles, they can also generate tensions within migrant families (Peñaloza 1994; Dreby 2010; Cross and Gilly 2013, 2014a, 2014b), challenging the successful acculturation of the entire family unit.

## Method

This study originates from an academic coincidence that brought four mother-researchers (Table 1) with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and diverse family structures to work in Santiago, Chile. The issue addressed in this study emerged from the researchers' realization that they had much in common with other migrant mothers regarding their perceptions of how schools are consequential agents in the acculturation of their children and themselves. In this section, we describe the methodological approach we followed in order to build the case of career-oriented migrant mothers in Santiago as an example of how schools operate as acculturation agents for migrant mothers.

Initially, we delved into our own experiences. Using the researcher introspection technique (Rojas Gaviria and Bluemelhuber 2010; Gould 1995, 1991; Holbrook 1986), we acknowledged the need for self-reflection when starting out on this research project. The one author who has not yet experienced the Chilean school system firsthand led guided introspections through in-depth interviews with the other authors (Table 1). Introspection can be described as an auto-ethnographic narration of personal experiences of consumption (see Béji-Bécheur, Özçağlar-Toulouse, and Zouaghi 2012; Hackley 2016). This process is anchored in the idea that the effort towards self-discovery places

**Table 1.** Characteristics of informants/researchers.

Participant	Age	Family Structure	Cultural Background	Time in Chile
Amelie	38	Belgian husband and three young children: a son born in Belgium (8-year-old), a daughter born in Peru (6-year-old), and another daughter born in Chile (2 ½-year-old)	Born in Ecuador and raised in Colombia, in the last 15 years, she has lived in Belgium and in Peru before moving to Chile.	3 years
Barbara	43	Chilean-American husband and two children: a daughter born in the UK (6-year-old), and a son born in Chile (4-year-old)	Born and raised in Brazil, in the last 15 years, she has lived in the US, Singapore, and the UK before moving to Chile.	5 years
Clarice	46	Argentinian husband and three young children: two daughters (12- and 10-year-olds) and a son (6-year-old), all born in Argentina	Born in Brazil, she lived in the Netherlands for three years as a teenager. Undergraduate Studies in Brazil, MBA in the USA, and PhD in France. Lived in Argentina for 10 years prior to moving to Chile with her family.	3 years
Interviewer	36	Brazilian husband and two young children (a 2 1/2-year-old son and a 10-month-old daughter born in Chile).	Born and raised in Brazil, she lived in Canada for five years before moving to Chile with her husband.	5 years

the researcher in a privileged position to further contribute to theory (Hamilton and Taylor 2012), particularly regarding unpredictable individual experiences occurring in real time (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993, 351). As Shankar (2000) notes, understanding others is intimately related to understanding oneself.

Introspective interviews were conducted in English, lasted between 55 and 120 min, and were audio-recorded and transcribed, resulting in 51 single-spaced pages of text. All authors independently coded the interviews for emergent themes and then jointly merged codes to develop a shared interpretation of the dataset. Acknowledging the need to combine data obtained through introspection with other types of data to achieve a layered understanding of the phenomenon under study, we sought to challenge our interpretation of the researchers' experience with schools. Hence, we collected media archives discussing the Chilean school system and conducted a netnography following the recommendations of Kozinets (2010, 2015). While media reports can be informative of local cultural scripts and expectations regarding motherhood roles, online discussion forums can serve as "an online consumer acculturation platform where acculturation agents collectively teach new market entrants [...] protocols within generalized reciprocity norms." (Schau, Dang, and Zhang 2017, 185).

For media archives, we searched Google.cl using "schooling," "school choice," "educational system," "school admission," "educational reform" and related terms in English and Spanish. This search resulted in 59 relevant articles and blog posts with respective reader comments. Netnography was conducted on two Facebook groups populated by migrant and English-speaking families living in Chile ("Discover Chile" and "Discover Chile: English Speaking Moms") and one WhatsApp group in which Brazilian mothers acculturating to Chile discuss the admission process for local elite private schools. Three of the authors conducted participant observation in the WhatsApp group from February 2016 until May 2017. With informants' consent, we downloaded and archived all messages and files exchanged in the group from August 2016 to May 2017, for a total of 265 single-spaced pages of text, 69 photos, and 44 audio messages. In March 2016, two of the authors invited informants from the group to an informal focus group. Twenty Brazilian mothers attended the gathering at a café. The two-hour meeting was voice-recorded, and notes were taken by both researchers, who then shared their learnings with the remainder of the author team.

In the Facebook groups, we collected archival data spanning over three years (February 2014–April 2017). All authors also actively participated in those groups for three months (March–May 2017). Both groups were founded by the same community manager, Paloma, a Canadian woman born to Chilean parents who migrated to Canada in the 1970s. Paloma moved to Chile 11 years ago, married a Chilean man, and is the mother of two children of schooling age. She summarizes the goals of the Facebook groups as "bringing the English-speaking community together to have fun and help one another make the most out of our experience in Chile."

With the authorization of the group's founder to collect archival data, we searched the group archives using the following keywords: "school system," "school advice," "private school," "public school," "bilingual school," "admission processes," and "application." We focused on 25 threads, which contained 867 posts. In addition, we posted on the two Facebook groups, identifying ourselves as researchers and asking members to share their opinions and experiences about schooling in Chile. We published our first post on Discover Chile on 9 March 2017, and received 81 replies from 25 different group members. Another post was published on the English-Speaking Moms group on 22 March 2017, and received 271 replies from 54 different group members by March 25. One of the authors coded these data, guided by our conceptual background and following guidelines offered by Miles and Huberman (1994). Considering that not all participants in these groups are career-oriented mothers, we focused on those discussions, questions, and posts that foregrounded career-related aspects at the intersection between motherhood roles and acculturation.

Finally, the same author who conducted the introspective interviews conducted an in-depth interview with the groups' founder, Paloma, adopting the same guided introspection approach that was employed in the initial interviews with the researchers. This interview lasted 103 min and was audio-recorded and transcribed, resulting in 29 single-spaced pages of text. All authors conferred, debated,



and iterated between the entire dataset and our conceptual structure to develop an interpretation of the data. Individual authorization from original posters was requested for any direct quotes we use in this article, and all informants are identified with pseudonyms.

### ***Our informants: career-oriented mothers***

Although the same is not the case for all working mothers, the career-oriented migrant mothers who inspired this study understand their work to be not only a pleasurable and rewarding part of their lives but also a personal contribution to the advancement of society and of future generations. From our informants' viewpoint, the role of the working mother furthers gender equality and women's choice. Inspired by their own biographical circumstances, informants wish to share these gender equality ideals with their children:

I try to make my kids (especially my daughter) understand that everybody should have a profession. My mom came from a family with four girls, so, my grandfather used to say to them that "a husband is a not a job or a profession ...," and I truly want my daughter to grasp the meaning of this message. (Barbara)

Women's capacity to give birth, and hence the common deduction that women are naturally predestined to be childbearers by default and that all of women's efforts should converge on this noble task, play an important role in the normalization of gender differences in society. Such normalization is widely perceived as being at the roots of gender inequality. In fact, Crittenden (2002) argues that despite all the battles won by feminism, and even though the *glass ceiling* and the *sticky floor* are still significant barriers for women's professional success, it is the *maternal wall* (Williams 2001) that explains most of the pay gap between men and women. Mothers are therefore twice oppressed by patriarchy, once for being women and then again for being mothers (O'Reilly 2016).

Our career-oriented informants' daily routines are anchored in gender egalitarian values and thus include sophisticated long-term planning and the division of responsibilities within the household. Tensions often arise due to the clash between the intention to maintain a balanced household in terms of parental involvement in schooling and the rituals created and enacted by schools demanding the exclusive presence of mothers. For instance, WhatsApp groups that are used to share information related to school rituals are frequently gendered: "I am still grumpy that they won't let my husband on the class WhatsApp group, despite the fact that when I was signed up to it my Spanish was almost non-existent ..." (Louise, social media post). On a day-to-day basis, career-oriented migrant mothers see engagement in school life as being a substantial obstacle to their career progression. Local standards of motherhood involvement in school (e.g. weekday birthday parties, middle-of-the-day school meetings and celebrations, social networking during business hours, last-minute schedule changes) often seem incompatible with the motherhood role our career-oriented informants are used to performing. Yet as a matter of values, career-oriented mothers would prefer that their children not internalize that it is the mother who should take exclusive responsibility for nurturing the kids. Our findings thus serve as an empirical illustration that dwells at the intersection of motherhood and gender equality. In the next section, we further specify how the sociocultural script for mothering prevalent at elite private schools in Santiago favors intensive and active participation of the mother in school life and rituals.

### ***The root paradigm: mamá profesión colegio***

Inspired by a local press article, we use "*mamá profesión colegio*" to refer to the root paradigm that describes the local sociocultural script guiding mothers' behavior regarding children's education. According to McLaren (1999), root paradigms act as "master metaphors," combining symbols and rituals embedded in a specific realm of social life (McLaren 1999, 302). The term "root paradigm" was coined in Victor and Edith Turner's (1978) work, which considers culture as a changing entity, influencing axiomatic frames or deep myths that transform people and groups at critical

moments. *Mamá profesión colegio* personifies a mother facing several critical moments connected to her children's schooling – a mother who is enthusiastically devoted to school-related goals and activities, a mother whose prime occupation is to support her children's schooling (Urrejola 2010) and who abides by a school's every request. *Mamá profesión colegio* is a root paradigm in which elite private schools' ideals of prestige, compliance, and domesticity converge.

Chile is known for having adopted strong neoliberal views in its economy since the 1970s, when it was under the leadership of dictator Augusto Pinochet. Consequently, the Chilean educational system is loosely regulated, resembling a free market (Bellei and Vanni 2015). According to Canales, Bellei, and Orellana (2016), while in 1980, 15% of Chilean students attended private schools, the number had jumped to 60% by 2014, demonstrating that the presence of public education has been drastically reduced in the country.

An important ingredient of this deregulation process has been the universal voucher system, developed by Nobel Prize in Economics recipient Milton Friedman and adopted in Chile during the 1980s. Friedman (1955) argued that the state can better serve educational needs by fomenting a highly competitive market rather than by protecting a deficient public monopoly, by empowering parents with educational vouchers, allowing them to choose the best option for their children. In his view, a producer of educational services would then be competing to attract students and would therefore need to offer higher-quality and more cost-effective education.

As consumers in a market, parents may choose among different types of schools in Chile, either public schools or private schools that cater to the country's middle classes and social elites (Valenzuela, Bellei, and de los Ríos 2014; Elacqua et al. 2012). However, Friedman's market logic focuses on rational economic choices, neglecting any other social factors that may influence school-choice behavior, such as families not choosing schools for solely academic reasons (Canales, Bellei, and Orellana 2016). Rather, parents prefer certain schools over others to ensure that their children interact with their socioeconomic peers rather than across socioeconomic strata (Schneider, Elacqua, and Buckley 2006).

Although differences between public and private schools are considered significant in many countries (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore 1982), in Chile, this differentiation is even more fine-grained (Sepúlveda 2014). Zimmerman (2016) maintains that admission to elite higher education in Chile is tightly connected to having attended elite high schools; this, in turn, raises the number of firm leadership positions held by students later in life by 50% and the likelihood of having incomes in the top 0.1% of the distribution by 45%. He maintains that these effects are “larger for students from high-tuition private high school backgrounds and near zero for students from other backgrounds” (1). Thus, acceptance to the “right” school is a prestige signal in Chilean society and has become a topic for cultural debate:

I have a friend that whenever we are in a school activity enjoys telling me: “Did you know that X's daughter has been put on the waiting list?” [...] The most awful thing about this is that I have the impression that the school has 30 places and they give 20 to some of us who are already attending the Playgroup [entry education level for 3-year old children], and put 10 in the waiting list, only to give a signal to parents saying, “It was an effort accepting you and we do not believe you are as good as the others”. (Comment on the blog *cucoterapia.cl*, visited May 16, 2016)

As this blog extract exemplifies, prestigious private schools, reputed as having “that special quality which endows select schools with an aura of distinction” (Tatar 1995, 93), are legally allowed to select students without governmental interference. Hence, schools' admission processes are often opaque, and the criteria for selecting students are rarely divulged. The outcome of this process is a highly discriminatory selection system in which, rather than striving to increase their students' learning outcomes, private schools might simply compete by trying to attract promising children, presumably those who are considered brighter or easier to teach. Survey evidence from the 1990s suggests that private schools use parent interviews, entry tests, and other tools to select students with characteristics (such as socioeconomic background) that positively influence achievement (Parry 1996; Gauri 1998). Some private schools may also not accept students from what they consider *atypical* families,

such as those including only a single parent or divorced parents (Elacqua et al. 2012; Raczyński, Hernández, and Lattz 2010). This implies that a system conceived to provide a choice of schools for parents has paradoxically led to the schools giving preference to a stereotypical type of family. In seeking to secure their investment, elite private schools have become powerful actors demanding compliance from parents.

*Mamá profesión colegio* involves not only prestige and compliance but also evokes ideals of domesticity. Taking inspiration from the classic notion of true womanhood (Welter 1966), Doucet (2011) defines domesticity as the assumption that mothers should be the parents in charge of children's education. This exclusivity evokes patriarchal ideals "that a woman's proper place is in the home, overseeing children's activities, while her husband works outside the home to provide financially for the family ... even while children are at school, mothers should be centrally engaged in managing their experiences" (Doucet 2011, 407).

Strong patriarchal values continue to define clear-cut gender boundaries in Chilean society (Guzmán and Mauro 2004a, 2004b). Despite some progress in terms of gender equality for younger generations and the more educated portions of the population, Chileans still express a clear association between men and their duty to provide economic subsistence for the family unit, as well as an "identitarian fusion" (Guzmán and Mauro 2004a, 239) that associates the essence of women with their role as mothers.

As part of the effort to reduce the gender gap in the workforce, in 1996, Chile introduced a full-day school system, significantly increasing the hours that children spend at school. This initiative was based on a stream of research in labor economics which suggests that increasing the amount of time children spend in school provides women with greater opportunities to access the labor market (Contreras, Sepúlveda, and Cabrera 2010). Nevertheless, these incentives have not translated into an increase in female workforce participation (Manley and Vásquez Lavín 2013); the rate of female participation in the labor force in Chile is stagnant at around 47.7% across socioeconomic classes and age ranges, one of the lowest in Latin America (OECD 2014). This gap is all the more astounding given that Chilean women have a higher level of education than those in other Latin American countries (Contreras and Plaza 2010), suggesting that cultural factors such as motherhood expectations may partially explain the low rate of women in the workforce (Puentes 2015).

In fact, economic research has shown that low levels of participation among women in the workforce are tightly connected with cultural models of the family and men's and women's social roles – gender stereotypes transmitted by kinship as well as by the presence or absence of a working or career-oriented mother in the previous generation. There is evidence that in Chile, women who are more conservative in their sociocultural opinions show less participation in the labor market (Contreras and Plaza 2010). Pervasive cultural discourse also props up the high cost that working mothers are presumed to impose on their families, as 54.6% of Chileans believe that family life suffers when women work full-time (Observatorio de Género y Equidad 2012). Contreras and Plaza (2010) also maintain that men perceive women's professional life as secondary to the role they have within the family, preventing them from adequately fulfilling their expected duties as mothers and wives. These authors' study shows that in keeping with this prevalent attitude, having a partner diminishes a woman's participation in the labor market, thereby illustrating a negative association between traditional gender and motherhood roles and participation in the labor market.

The root paradigm of *mamá profesión colegio* is thus infused with notions of domesticity, prestige, and compliance. This root paradigm is endorsed by schools through rituals, as we detail in the following section.

## Findings

In examining how schools operate as acculturation agents, the example of career-oriented migrant mothers acculturating to Santiago, Chile, suggests that schools shape the acculturation of migrant mothers by actualizing the root paradigm of *mamá profesión colegio* through a series of school

rituals, which are infused with the ideals of domesticity, prestige, and compliance. In doing so, schools normalize that motherhood role and challenge alternative ones, thereby shaping migrant mothers' acculturation outcomes. Mothers whose roles are challenged by the structural and relational forces generated by schools find that continuing to pursue their motherhood project threatens their own and their children's acculturation success. In contrast, migrant mothers who embrace the motherhood roles promoted by schools find a fast-track avenue for acculturating to the host culture.

### ***How elite private schools bolster the mamá profesión colegio paradigm***

The example of career-oriented migrant mothers suggests that elite private schools endorse the root paradigm of *mamá profesión colegio* through creating and implementing rituals of three types: initiation, maintenance, and socialization. These rituals are infused with key characteristics of that root paradigm: domesticity, prestige, and compliance. Here, using examples from our dataset, we detail and illustrate each of these rituals and its consequences for the acculturation process of migrant mothers. Table 2 summarizes these findings.

#### ***Initiation rituals***

In addition to being institutions in the conventional sense of the term, elite private schools in Santiago can be considered powerful market actors. Demand for placements largely exceeds supply, and operating as deregulated market actors, schools devise their own mechanisms for selecting, among prospective students and families, those who will enter the school. One such mechanism is the admission process, which we consider an initiation ritual that targets not only children but also (and arguably mostly) mothers.

Migrant mothers begin their involvement in the admission process even before arriving in Chile. In the social media groups we observed, questions are asked pertaining to the philosophies of different schools, the languages that are taught, locations, fees, or the day-to-day environment at different schools. These questions denote the expected active search behavior of someone exercising choice when confronted with an important consumption decision. Once migrant mothers learn that the admission process for elite private schools in Santiago requires the payment of high, nonreimbursable entry fees representing significant investments and creating barriers for parents to shift from one school to another, they tend to intensify their search for information about specific schools. Yet reactions from other migrant mothers who are well into the acculturation process often raise warning signals that the admission process, rather than resembling an agentic consumption decision, plays out quite differently in the local context. Take Paloma's description, for example:

The first thing is the whole application process, I mean that is the most ... I feel so bad for these moms, it is super stressful, it is stressful for the parents, it is stressful for the kid. It is like the biggest job interview of your life, but the kid is 6 years old, is 5 years old and now, it is being imposed on them at an earlier and earlier age. Because schools are so competitive and because parents feel that if they do not get their kids into the "right school," that is going to affect the rest of their lives, they are now encouraged to put their kids in the playgroups. Used to be that schools did not have playgroups, but because of the business they realize: "oh now we have to put them into playgroups," now you got kids who are 2 or 3 years old battling it out to get into the "right school" because if they do not get into the playgroups, there is no way that they are going to make it into the elementary school because the spots are often reserved for siblings and for the kids that are coming from the preschool. And they tell you this, the director will tell you this or the people that are working at schools will tell you, "If you do not put them at the playgroup, chances are super low that you make it into the school." It is a marketing strategy, it is a brilliant marketing strategy, it is sad, because education should not be a business, super sad, but that's the reality. So parents are shocked, that is the initial thing, the moms cannot believe how difficult it is and what they must go through to get their kids into this "right school." They are not used to this indifference; that's what I heard a lot about by expat moms or foreign moms that are here for good. The indifference that the staff at the school would have for your enquiries, and in fact many of them would be offended if you have your own list of questions for the school, and now moms are often advising other moms, when somebody says, "I am going through the application process," "Do not ask too many questions," like that's a piece of advice that is given to foreign mothers. We are so used to asking questions ... So now moms are advising, "If you ask too many

**Table 2.** Schools as acculturation agents – enforcing the paradigm of *mamá profesión colegio*.

School Rituals	Initiation rituals	Maintenance rituals	Socialization rituals
Consequences for mothers' acculturation	Integration ↔ Segregation	Fulfillment ↔ Guilt	Unity ↔ Divisiveness
Dataset examples	<p>"I think that is also this thing, a kind of mystical thing, that you must enter these wonderful schools and you are the elite, and as you know, the elite is always limited, you can have this massive elite education, it will always be something quite luxurious, because not everyone can have it. [...] So, I think that it's better for them to limit themselves, and it becomes a desire to be in that place or a dream place to be, and I think that this plays a lot around that, like being part of the club, being part of the good ones, the smart ones. So, every time I go with [my son] and he is wearing the school uniform, and if by coincidence we meet someone, they would say, 'Oh, you are at the [school name]! You must be so smart!' Everyone admires him." (Amelie)</p> <p>"[...] that's why we decided to put [daughter] in Playgroup, because in Playgroup the kid doesn't have to go through any test, just their parents. The kid actually doesn't have to show up at all; in my case, I just showed up with a picture of her. [...] But the parents need to go. A friend of mine that applied a year before gave me some key questions, and I practiced them with my husband with an Excel spreadsheet, because I am not a native speaker and I wanted to give perfect answers, and also, I didn't want [husband] to interrupt me when I was talking. So, I wanted us to be exactly on the same page. So, we actually trained in the answers. And they weren't exactly the same questions, but three of them were completely the same." (Barbara)</p> <p>"[...] contacts and networking are very important for the school, so you need to know someone. So, what happens is that if you already have five kids at the school, and your father-in-law is the dean of the school, maybe your sixth kid who has Down syndrome will get a place. I know that for a fact,</p>	<p>"If I don't advise before 8 am. in the morning that someone else is going to pick my son up, they don't consider it. Even if you call! What about if you suddenly have a meeting? You should say, sorry I can't, because nobody can pick up my son!? So you run all day!" (Francisca)</p> <p>"In my son's school, [mothers] would help with the ... they have a small store for buying school uniforms that, it's managed completely by mothers of students, so you can volunteer for that, you don't get paid for participating. Usually you could participate a couple of hours in that store. Also, they have many activities that they can't handle without mothers, so like, if you want your kid to go to the pool and have swimming lessons, you should bring them to the pool yourself. You must take him out of the class, you help him to get dressed, you stay with him during the lesson, and then you must bring him back to class. If you are not there, they can learn how to swim." (Amelie)</p> <p>I think the problem here in Chile specially, I don't know about other countries, it's socially accepted that the mom shouldn't work [...] School is a part of it, and it's a big contribution, of course, [...] like you have to stop what you are doing, like today [...] a lady called me to tell me that my daughter has poop herself. And [...] she asked me if I could go and change her, and I said that yes, I can, but I am working and I am very far away, and she has extra clothes there, clean underwear, so she could have changed her. She told me that she can't, because they were in school and she wasn't authorized. And I asked her if I can authorize her by phone, but she said it is not possible." (Barbara)</p> <p>"I was a working mom and ended up becoming a stay-at-home mom (working at my own company and time) because of what you mention. (Marcela)</p>	<p>Being a [stay-at-home] mom in Santiago is super fun (laughs). Is super fun, as fun as you like it. It's not a choice that I would want to take, but what I have learned, because this year I haven't worked officially in the university so I have been working from home, so I spent half my time working and my other half time with my kids. So, I know who are the [stay-at-home] moms, and they have lots of fun, a lot. They all have someone who helps them with the kids, and they form like a club [...] And they go and have coffee, have lunch together and do shopping together, they volunteer at the school decorating, at the store, they are well known in the school, they are like ... like official helpers.' (Amelie)</p> <p>"Yeah, like they'll have the delegadas, so there's the expectation for delegadas, but it's all within the parameters that are set by the school, and so this is the level of involvement that is acceptable, and anything more is frowned upon, and we don't need it, we don't want it. And, especially for moms who are stay at home, homes that would love to have a more active kind of role, it's very frustrating." (Paloma)</p> <p>"These are people that in my words are authentic, they're real people in the sense that they come from Montreal like me. I lived in the suburbs, I wasn't rich, I wasn't poor, I would go to school with kids whose parents were lawyers and kids whose parents were a like clerk or a janitor, and it was, <i>no era tema</i>, it wasn't an issue. And now, these parents are dealing with a lot of these top private schools, they've got a lot of snobbery, and it's very unsettling for them, because they don't consider themselves rich in any way and they don't like this idea of being with people who think that they are better than others because of how much money they have." (Paloma)</p> <p>"One time I met this mom, that when her baby was one-year-old she hired a ... they call it a "psychopedagogist," I don't know, it's like a teacher, to</p>

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued.

School Rituals Consequences for mothers' acculturation	Initiation rituals  Integration ↔ Segregation	Maintenance rituals  Fulfillment ↔ Guilt	Socialization rituals  Unity ↔ Divisiveness
	<p>because I discussed with a neurologist, she told me that the situation was absolutely dramatic for all of her patients, because all of them get discriminated [against]. Even those that have physical and no intellectual syndromes." (Amelie)</p> <p>"[The kid] won't be accepted because you have so many kids that are buying for that same spot, why are you going to pick the one who's asking about how many years have you been in business and how are your kids performing and where are they going to university, and you are essentially asking questions that you think are important for you to decide if this school is right, they say 'You're here, why are you asking if this is a great school, if you don't believe it then why are you here, we don't have time to answer these questions?'" (Paloma)</p> <p>"I think that one other big shocking factor for a lot of foreign mothers is the idea that you can't simply just come here and put your kids in a public school. A lot of these women are women that would've put their kids in a private school in their own countries, and it's the shock that 'What do you mean there aren't any good public schools here [...]?' At the end of the day, it comes down to, 'I'm going to use my kid as a guinea pig for my own personal beliefs and philosophy and political standings, and at a detriment to my child if indeed I do put them in a public school as a way to stand up to the system, but then my kid will suffer.'" (Paloma)</p> <p>"I am also starting to look for [schools]. But to me, location is crucial, because my husband and I both have jobs that sometimes require extremely extended hours. We will need help of a nanny to pick [the children] up or even hiring a van. Up until now, the only certainty I have is that I want to postulate at [School], but can you recommend other schools in [neighborhood] that are relatively close to [supermarket name]?" (Carla)</p>	<p><i>Amelie:</i> Do you remember what facts/feelings made you take that decision?</p> <p><i>Amanda:</i> Guilt, tired, the feeling of always running [sic]."</p> <p>"For instance, next week it's going to be the last week of school. They just told me yesterday that the kids that use the school transportation, they will have to leave at noon and not at 1:30 pm., and without any explanations, nothing." (Barbara)</p> <p>"[...] you know, my school—you do still have this impression that there are a few parents that are perceived as indifferent, they're parents that you don't see very often [...] instead of being understanding, and I'm a delegada so I see the inside [...], there is still that impression that the people who don't show up are the people who just couldn't be bothered, as opposed to being more understating, maybe there're extenuating circumstances, maybe they just couldn't because of work obligations, "No, no, no, nothing comes before your kids' education, you should make the time," and so you do have this critical attitude and this assumption that the ones who don't show up to the activities, to the events, are the ones who are indifferent and just couldn't be bothered in general, and I think that that could be extended to other private schools." (Paloma)</p>	<p>tutor him and to help the kid to study twice a week since the age of one until the age of three, to [enter] Santiago College. Because she wanted her son to go to Santiago College, and that was the only way, in her eyes. But imagine that she is happy with that, she is not suffering, she is not protesting, she doesn't feel bad at all, but as an outsider, you look at that and you would say, come on!" (Amelie)</p>

questions, they would take note as you being like difficult client,” this one is going to be a difficult client, look at all the questions they are asking, we have all these other people that are clamoring to get in, why are we going to accept a difficult client that has all these questions for us?” (Paloma)

As Paloma describes, migrant mothers instruct one another on how to navigate the admission process and its nuances, because they realize that it is up to the schools to decide whether their children will enroll in an institution, not the other way around. Thus, from the very beginning, migrant mothers are confronted with two fundamental aspects of the root paradigm of *mamá profesión colegio*: *prestige* should motivate participation in the admission process, and one cannot go through it without *compliance*. Hence, a mother who wants her children to join an elite private school should not “ask too many questions” or “be a difficult client.”

Whereas local mothers seem to be subjected to the same requirement, our informants’ perceptions about themselves and about other foreign mothers highlight migrant mothers’ gap in cultural competence (Cross and Gilly 2014b), which is further heightened for those women whose partners in parenthood are not Chilean. Closing this gap requires developing knowledge of the implicit rules and expectations related to schooling in Chile, but it is difficult to do so from the outside before undertaking the initiation ritual.

Unfamiliar with the cultural script and wishing for more agency regarding school choice, many migrant mothers find themselves starting battles they are unlikely to win. The ritualistic admission process requires parents to line up at the school gates at 5:30 am. to pick up application forms, stand among other parent-candidates in crowded rooms for introductory talks, train children to succeed in the admission tests, and prepare proper answers to the questions asked in parental interviews (comment on the blog [cuicoterapia.cl](http://cuicoterapia.cl), visited 16 May 2016). Migrant mothers, unaware of (or in disagreement with) the rigidity of many such requirements, frequently question them, sometimes indirectly (e.g. venting on social media groups) and sometimes more bluntly (e.g. suing the school). For instance, upon learning that most schools ask for pictures of the children and the family at the beginning of the admission process, a migrant mother inquires, “Why do they ask for pictures? To eliminate people who do not fit the standard?” (Helena, focus group). Upon developing the cultural competence that is needed to navigate the admission process, migrant mothers manifest their perception of how the school enforces the root paradigm:

[People don’t complain because] they don’t like to bother other people. I really think that is also because of the way the school system is, where the school is the boss and, as my friend says, it is the school that chooses the family and not the family who chooses the school, so you don’t want to piss off the school because they are the boss, so you obey. (Barbara)

In sum, through creating and enacting initiation rituals such as the admission process, elite private schools have reworked the market to become the most powerful actors when it comes to deciding where children will study. For mothers used to having more agency in what pertains to their children’s well-being and development, the realization that their agency is limited in the local context may be unsettling, and their reactions may threaten their acculturation success. More pointedly, developing the necessary cultural competence to succeed in the admission process may lead to acculturation success through integration for mother and children, whereas failing to perform the rituals based on the root paradigm of *mamá profesión colegio* may challenge mothers’ and children’s acculturation, leading, in extreme cases, to segregation. Career-oriented migrant mothers find that the admission process challenges their motherhood role:

We went to an interview in one school and we didn’t get accepted as a family. I think it was my fault, because they asked us about what we miss the most about Belgium, and I was too honest and said that I missed the school system. [I said] that I missed the possibility to leave my kids at school early in the morning and pick them up in the afternoon after having worked, the fact that I didn’t need a nanny, that they wouldn’t risk watching TV the whole afternoon because school is over and you aren’t there, because you have to work. And I thought it was brilliant, and they looked at me very awfully, as if it was a bad answer, and they were writing everything down (laughs), not good. And when we went out of the test, [my husband] instinctively told me, you know what, please don’t say that ever again (laughs), because I think we are not going to be accepted. (Amelie)

Such clashes have produced uncomfortable moments for the career-oriented migrant mothers we studied. For instance, Amelie found it perplexing how the school admission interviewer reacted to her willingness to assume the role of a career-oriented mother. Reflecting on the subject, she notes:

It is strange, because I think ... if I fail, the school authorities [...] have put me in a situation where I am wrong, where I am not good enough, but I don't really think so. I think I am a super mother, and I am very proud of it. I mean, I take care of them heavily, I know them by heart. I have been a super good mother; they have been super well educated. And their father too! But all the pressure is on me, not on their father. We have done a terrific and wonderful job but [my] public image, maybe here, in Santiago, would be I am a very bad mom. I am not doing everything I could do, that's for sure. But I am not convinced that [doing that] would help my kids more. (Amelie)

Our career-oriented informants tend to consider their professional achievements as a positive aspect of the motherhood roles they have been performing and feel disconcerted when schools do not seem to value their professional roles in the admissions process. Arguably, this is a first shock between their motherhood roles and the root paradigm, and it comes as a realization that their current roles are being challenged for diverging from local expectations.

### **Maintenance rituals**

The root paradigm that informs the role of *mamá profesión colegio* requires a mother to be involved in school activities to an optimum extent. Schools usually expect parents to answer every call for involvement, yet they recoil at mothers who take every opportunity to tell the teachers, "If I were you, I would teach the class in this and that way" (Urrejola 2010).

The expected level of involvement often comes as a second shock for the career-oriented migrant mothers involved in our study, as they feel pressure from the school in the form of constant demands for participation in a series of school routines, often during working hours, which we aggregate under the label of "maintenance rituals." With different levels of intensity, private schools in Chile count on the daily presence of mothers to support certain activities such as cooking lessons, volunteering or fundraising, and field trips, all of which presuppose a certain level of domesticity. Moreover, like in many other societies, mothers are expected to drop off and pick up children and to be available upon being called to be at school during school hours, with the underlying assumption that they will not be working outside the home. As noted by Doucet (2011, 407), this paradigm casts the mother as the default parent for all matters relating to the schooling experience, leaving little room for the fathers' involvement and alienating those mothers who cannot be as available and involved as the school wishes them to be.

Foreign mothers in particular, who are often distant from family members and do not count on a close network of local friends for support, are burdened by the numerous calls for involvement by schools. Some of these mothers feel that if they cannot meet all these requirements, their children's well-being at school will be compromised. Career-oriented migrant mothers often feel they cannot comply with all calls for involvement, given their work-related demands and the lack of a solid social network. These informants report feeling exhausted and trapped, and they are surprised by reactions from local working mothers who do not complain when navigating schools' requirements:

Clarice: A lot of comments that you hear from mothers that don't work – they are usually Chilean mothers – are like, "Oh, it must be very difficult for you, I don't know how can you do it, because you work." And sometimes you feel like you shouldn't complain, like yesterday. A lot of mothers, even the ones that do work, said, "But the school told us, the school sent us a note today [Wednesday] that classes are suspended on Friday, so why are you complaining?" So the mother that made that actual comment, she works.

Interviewer: Do you know what she works at?

Clarice: No, I'm not sure, but I know that she doesn't have like a strict schedule. [...] [But] a lot of the moms have told me that workplaces aren't forgiving and that they must take vacation days to do that.

Interviewer: So they sacrifice ...

Clarice: They sacrifice, but I think they feel like they must do it.



As the school enforces the ideal of a compliant and domestic *mamá profesión colegio*, career-oriented migrant mothers may try to perform that role despite the various constraints it entails, demonstrating how intense the pressure coming from the school can be for an acculturating mother. In social network discussions, several career-oriented mothers recount how they decided to adjust their professional roles to accommodate the school's calls for involvement, either by quitting their jobs, changing careers, or assuming alternative working arrangements (e.g. working part-time, working from home), thereby flattening the multidimensionality of their identity projects. Those migrant mothers who do not abide by the availability requirements find that their well-being – and that of their own children – may be challenged in the process. One participant-researcher, for instance, had to reassure her son of her caring for him, given that he was concerned by her absence at the school and felt abandoned. She recalls explaining to him that other mothers do not work and have more time, but that did not mean she loved him less, and that she was always there with him, even if not as visibly as more available mothers during school time. Her son mentioned that when he grew older, he would choose a profession that would enable him to be at school and work at the same time, like a school teacher, so his children would not suffer from his absence as he suffered from hers.

Through poignant experiences such as this, our informants perceive how symbolic their absence from the school becomes when the root paradigm promotes domesticity, prestige, and compliance and when mothers are expected by the school to be present on demand. While fulfillment can be achieved through involvement in schooling, guilt is a prevalent negative consequence of failing to perform in this school ritual, and it may lead migrant mothers to reassess the extent to which their acculturation has been successful.

### **Socialization rituals**

School rituals may spill over into families' social lives, and the formation of social networks is a significant aspect of schooling for children and parents (Doucet 2011). We aggregate under the label of "socialization rituals" all the activities schools promote or facilitate to integrate children and families but which do not necessarily involve education (e.g. playdates, social media groups for mothers, birthday parties). One of our informants reflects upon the moment when she realized the influence her engagement in school-promoted socialization rituals would have on her (and her children's) acculturation:

When we arrived here [my husband] was a little bit concerned about the social life [...]. And then his colleagues explained to him that here in Chile, what would happen to us is what happens to all families and it is that our social life would be the school's social life. So we would not need an extra social life, because this would take up so much of our time, of our life, that it would be more than enough. [...] But what they didn't explain was that you need the woman to make that happen. [...] [M]oms go shopping together, they have lunch together, they have a cup of coffee, and they are the ones that are really close friends, they invite the other family members and have fun on Sundays and Saturdays. But if you don't join the club during weekdays, you are not allowed to participate [...], somehow you need to organize yourself in such a way that you can participate during weekdays. [...] I have tried to invite many kids to my home on the weekend [to avoid working hours], but I haven't been very successful [...] until later on I realized that it was because I was not joining the coffee with the moms! One mom kindly told me that I should go have coffee with them first, and once they got to know me, we could organize something with the kids. (Amelie)

As this quote illustrates, Amelie, a career-oriented migrant mother, failed to perform the socialization ritual according to the cultural script. Upon reflecting on the reasons for this failure, she is able to develop certain cultural competences that may support her acculturation project. One-on-one conversations, hearsay, popular media, and introspection all merge into the development of such cultural competences. As the school experience is perceived to fundamentally shape family socialization, our informants report how they have tried to maximize their socialization efforts and perform the behaviors the schools seem to promote and expect from mothers.

In addition to prompting socialization rituals, schools often promote certain parents to leadership positions that come with perks, "to circulate at the institution without problems and have access to the "power circles," meaning, the dean or the director, ... coordinators" (Urrejola 2010). Those

women who align with the root paradigm of *mamá profesión colegio* by performing motherhood roles that are domestic, compliant, and prestige-oriented tend to be preferred for assuming those positions. One working mother, for instance, commented on a social network how her candidature for being a room mother was rejected by the school, because she was a working mother. For her, this opportunity was important, as she was facing a divorce, and she perceived having more time at the school as an opportunity to show custodial and emotional involvement to her children during difficult times. As she explained, she felt that working prevented her from being a “good mom:”

I was recently separated (a year tops) and dad wasn't participating. I wanted to make sure my son knew I cared and it was important for me to be part of his world. I ended up switching jobs and volunteering as often as I could. But I felt horrible, dismissed, like the job was there only to good moms. (Ignacia, social network post)

As Ignacia's experience suggests, the socialization rituals created and enacted by schools may ultimately foster divisiveness among women, who find themselves being labeled (and labeling others) as “good” and “bad” moms. Other aspects of divisiveness that were apparent in our dataset were implicit and even palpable tensions between stay-at-home mothers and career-oriented mothers as well as between Chilean and migrant mothers (derogatorily referred to as “*gringas*”). Conversely, schools may support the acculturation process of career-oriented migrant mothers who, despite constraints and sometimes in a subversive manner, perform motherhood roles that align with the root paradigm and are celebrated in school rituals. These mothers find unity and support as they become involved in socialization rituals performed at the school.

## Discussion

This study shows the dominant role that powerful and all-encompassing institutions, such as schools, can play on the acculturation journey of mother-migrants and their families. We introduce the empirical example of career-oriented migrant mothers whose children attend elite private schools in Santiago, Chile. In doing so, we show how school rituals (initiation, maintenance, and socialization), which are infused with the root paradigm of *mamá profesión colegio*, dominate migrant mothers' acculturation experiences, challenging their career ambitions and social life. In this section, we further explain how our findings advance research at the intersection of motherhood and consumer acculturation and open avenues for further research.

### *Schools as structural and relational acculturation agents*

Prior research on consumer acculturation has examined several acculturation forces, but our study is the first to examine in detail how schools influence the acculturation process of migrant mothers. Schools are powerful institutions capable of shaping the sociocultural structures in which they are embedded while at the same time being shaped by them.

As a steady stream of critical studies in the sociology of education has noted, the interests of dominant groups in a society shape schools, which in turn reproduce, sustain, and disseminate certain roles and “status cultures” back into society (Ballantine and Spade 2015, 27). By adopting Turner's notion of a root paradigm to examine schools as acculturation agents, we show how school rituals endorse the paradigm of *mamá profesión colegio*, infused with notions of domesticity, prestige, and compliance. This root paradigm defines what performances elite private schools expect of those mothers who want their children to attend these schools and succeed in them. Not coincidentally, this is the prevalent cultural script for female roles in Chile, a society that largely believes women should limit themselves to the roles of mothers and wives (Guzmán and Mauro 2004a).

Strongly anchored in the local culture, the root paradigm is unfamiliar and not readily evident to migrant women. Nor is *mamá profesión colegio* fully compatible with the role of a career-oriented mother, further complicating the acculturation process of these mothers and their children. Considering this and the fact that the school one (or one's children) attends is closely associated with one's

social class, social networks, and future career opportunities, it is evident that schools operate as pervasive and all-encompassing acculturation agents. In other words, as schools endorse the root paradigm in initiation, maintenance, and socialization rituals, they perpetuate structural aspects of the local culture that migrants are presented with during the acculturation process, and they influence what positions migrant mothers – and their children – will possibly occupy in that society.

In addition to taking part in the shaping of (as well as being shaped by) the sociocultural structure of society, schools also operate as acculturation agents by shaping relations among migrants and indigenes. As schools infuse the root paradigm into every encounter children and their parents have with the institution, they shape how migrant mothers relate to members of the community. As migrant mothers attempt to place their children in a school or support their children's education through engagement in maintenance and socialization rituals, they engage in several interactions with other mothers, who may have diverse levels of cultural competence and who perform motherhood roles that may differ from those of the migrant mothers. As acculturation agents, schools shape these interactions in ways that may highlight the inadequacy felt by migrant mothers regarding the root paradigm, potentially leading these women to feel "othered" or divided. Conversely, some migrant women may find value in the numerous opportunities offered by schools to relate to members of the community. These encounters may lead migrant mothers to extend and strengthen their local network and to catalyze the development of their cultural competence.

When it comes to entering a largely privatized school system, migrant mothers are clearly at a disadvantage in the process. They may not have as much agency as they might prefer when choosing a school for their children in a host society where the government plays only a small role in distributing opportunities for children's education. Hence, our findings illustrate how consumption may act not only as a symbolic resource that facilitates or hampers consumer acculturation (VOICE Group 2010) but as a powerful force influencing the integration of migrant mothers in a host society. Even those migrants who are willing and who have the necessary resources to engage in the type of consumption that would facilitate successful acculturation (e.g. enrolling their children in private elite schools) may find themselves segregated or may experience guilt and isolation upon encountering a powerful institutional actor in an unfamiliar market.

### ***Schools as dominant and all-encompassing acculturation agents***

As this study demonstrates, schools play a paramount role in family acculturation experiences for those migrating with children at an educational age. In contexts where education is not regulated by the state, school selection entails a high-involvement consumer decision with serious and lasting consequences, as children and parents should expect many years of continued engagement and negotiation with the school. O'Reilly (2016) maintains that "with privatization and deregulation [as is the case in our context], many of the services once provided by governments – such as schooling, education ... have now been downloaded to mothers ... [who] are now also responsible for how their children fare under neoliberalism" (57), which increases anxiety even further. As a long-term engagement, schooling provides families with emotional ties and sociocultural references, and children often struggle with interruptions imposed upon this process by migration. An important part of the family well-being, hence, depends on ensuring that children will succeed in the school experience *despite* migration, which often turns schooling into a full family enterprise whose CEO of choice is the mother.

Our context illustrates how the root paradigm promotes intensive mothering practices based on the fundamental assumptions that "the mother is the central caregiver," that "mothering is more important than paid employment," and that "mothering requires lavishing copious amounts of time, energy, and material resources on the child" (Hays 1996, 8). Schools promote, through rituals, these intensive mothering practices, which are highly compatible with the root paradigm of *mamá profesión colegio*. In general, there is an internalized assumption that intensive mothering practices will aid in providing children with the required social, emotional, and intellectual resources they need to thrive in contemporary society.

In this manner, school rituals also shape relations between parents (usually mother and father) in ways that reinforce the ideology of intensive mothering. Although many of our informants adhere to the neotraditional family model (Peskowitz 2005) and appear progressive (both parents are educated and have the ambition of building passionate professional careers), in practice, these mothers end up assuming the heavier load of childrearing while trying to cope with various undesirable and unattainable expectations regarding mothering.

We argue that the cultural script *mamá profesión colegio* is promoted by schools and other multiple market actors, including compliant consumers, thus dominating and shaping possibilities for ambitious and qualified career-oriented migrant women. A consequence of this force is the flattening of these women's identity projects. Although our participants do not give up on their personal identity projects as migrants with shattered identity projects do (Üstüner and Holt 2007), they feel limited in their career progression, social life, and well-being. These limitations are attributed to the imposed and unattainable duty of trying to become a *mamá profesión colegio*. Our research shows that dominant acculturation agents leave little room for individual migrants to protect the multidimensionality of their identity projects. This is contrary to what was observed in other consumption contexts, such as food consumption (Chytкова 2011). Thus, the vulnerability of these migrant women-mothers resides on them being subject to the unrelenting pressure of an institution that imposes significant demands on their productive time, and impede them from developing multifaceted identities. This study's discussion of schools as such powerful acculturation agent opens the path for future research on schooling and its intersection with the world of consumption for mothers, fathers, children, families in general, and societies at large.

### **Future research directions**

This manuscript sheds light on the role of the school as a powerful institution dominating motherhood acculturation paths of ambitious career-oriented women. Future research might be expanded to other types of migrant mothers. For instance, migrant mothers who are not invested in a professional career may find, in school rituals, other types of tensions and support related to their particular life circumstances. In the course of our investigation, we have found, for instance, that some stay-at-home migrant mothers feel pressure to school their children at an age younger than what they consider to be appropriate. These women also perceive the school as a source of social pressure, and they note how schools – and the society that shapes and is shaped by them – end up labeling such women as “bad mothers” for not willingly relinquishing control over their children's education to professionals and institutions from an early age. An equally interesting path of research consists of inquiring what happens when migrant fathers perform intensive mothering and what are their challenges and negotiations and their creative endeavors to survive under the root paradigm of *mamá profesión colegio*.

Similarly, studying the different mechanisms migrant mothers may put in place to cope with the tensions coming from school rituals might complement the study of migrant mothers' acculturation process. For instance, further research may examine how certain consumer-related strategies such as compensatory consumption and outsourcing can be employed by migrant mothers who attempt to successfully ensure the integration and success of their children in the host culture. Studying school rituals of non-elite school institutions might also be fruitful for expanding our understanding of the role of schools as an acculturation agent for migrants who are less equipped with resources and capital. Such research would complement our findings and those of Doucet (2011), which consider how certain public schools in the United States accommodate diverse marginalized families.

In a similar vein, this conversation should be extended to examine practices of family well-being. School rituals have important outcomes for consumers and their well-being. Potentially discriminatory, abusive, intolerant, or uncaring actions performed during school rituals can considerably and negatively impact the quality of life and general well-being of families. Further research should examine how families deal with unattainable expectations and pressure generated within educational institutions in which they choose to enroll their children.

Finally, as noted by Peñaloza (1998), agents and migrants interact in mutually adjusting ways. Indeed, we found some initial evidence of social transformation happening in the context of the elite school system in Santiago. One of our informants, for instance, sees how there are more working mothers with children in her youngest child's class than there are in her older children's classes. We also encountered debates on social media about the possibility of transgressing cultural norms and placing children in public schools with the purpose both of improving these institutions in the long run and of offering the children a more diverse socioeconomic context in which to socialize. Another opportunity for future research thus consists in examining these social transformations and eventually isolating the impact migrant parents may have on reshaping school rituals and eventually also the root paradigm of *mamá profesión colegio*.

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