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Bargaining Dreams and Myths: The Relationship between the Literacy Myth, the American
Dream, and the Immigrant Bargain

by

Brianny Paulino Feliz

Under the Direction of Michael Harker, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The following research thesis explores the ideologies surrounding the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain and how these terms affect the lives and literacy practices of American immigrants and their pursuit of higher education. Research from the field of rhetoric and composition and social and political sciences is surveyed as a means to define the relationship between all three terms and trace how their ideologies affect those from immigrant backgrounds. This thesis uncovers capitalistic ideologies present in the myth, the Dream, and the bargain that romanticize the role of schooling and labor in attaining upward mobility and have become inherent in the lives of American immigrants and those from immigrant backgrounds.

INDEX WORDS: The American Dream, Bootstrapping, The immigrant bargain, The literacy myth, Literacy studies, Meritocracy

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2022

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August 2022

DEDICATION

To my partner, Quincy, for his endless patience and for believing in me when I couldn't believe in myself. To my best friends, Jennifer and Jailene, for always being my cheerleaders. To my beautiful family, who served as the inspiration for this thesis and showered me with love and support. Most of all, to my parents, who taught me to follow my dreams and persevere. Thank you. This thesis is dedicated to you.

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1 INTRODUCTION

My interest in literacy studies began in Dr. Michael Harker's summer 2019 "Literacy, Learning, and Aging" seminar. This course introduced me to foundational texts in literacy studies, like those written by Graff, Street, and Brandt, that led me to reflect on my own literacy practices. The literacy myth is rooted in the idea that obtaining literacy will guarantee political, social, or economic power. Graff's literacy myth and Brandt's theories of literacy sponsorship reminded me of my upbringing as a Latina-American. I was raised to believe that literacy and education would guarantee me power, and that I was lucky to be in a country like the United States where someone like me could acquire a good education. After learning about the literacy myth, I started to dissect my own literacy practices to better understand how the literacy myth related to me and possibly others with similar upbringings. During my research, I found similarities between the literacy myth and the American Dream, and soon uncovered another term related to my literacy practices: the immigrant bargain. Research for this thesis was gathered in an effort to understand how these three terms, the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain, all relate to one another and affect the literacy practices of immigrants and their families, like mine.

My mother was born in Puerto Rico to immigrant parents from the Dominican Republic. My grandmother was fortunate enough to complete high school, though my grandfather never made it past the third grade. As a child, my mother watched as my grandparents struggled to make ends meet working housekeeping and security jobs. They taught her that without a proper education, one had to settle for more difficult jobs that required hard labor and little pay. Eager to make a better life for herself, my mother took my grandparent's advice and earned her bachelor's degree—giving it all the credit for her successes in life. Growing up, my mother

always taught me that acquiring education was the only way to prosper, just as her parents had taught her. She passed down the belief that education or literacy would lead to prosperity. In turn, my brother and I followed in her footsteps and attained bachelor's degrees. I, as well as many other minorities with similar upbringings, am a product of ideologies surrounding the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain. My literacy and education will guarantee me a "better life." My literacy and education will guarantee me the American Dream. My literacy and education will validate my family's immigration sacrifices.

Reading "The Literacy Myth at Thirty" by Harvey Graff in Dr. Harker's summer seminar was my first introduction to the literacy myth and its surrounding theories. In his article, Graff reflects on *The Literacy Myth*, thirty years after its publication. He argues that the myth is powerful because cultures participate in the ideologies surrounding it; myths gain acceptance by being grounded in some reality and are, therefore, not entirely false (Graff 638). My upbringing and my cultural background seemed to serve as evidence for Graff's literacy myth. I traced my literacy practices and realized that because of my upbringing in a Latino family, I was raised to believe that acquiring literacy and education was the only way to prosper and gain upward mobility. My family raised me to believe in the literacy myth, therefore, keeping it relevant and accurate in my life and my literacy practices. My sense of familiarity with the literacy myth led me to another term that I, as a Latina-American, was also familiar with—the American Dream.

The American Dream is often the catalyst for many immigration stories. In my family, it is what motivated my grandparents, aunts, and cousins to immigrate to the United States from the Dominican Republic. They hoped that coming to America would provide a clear path to a "better life"—the American Dream. Most members of my family would agree that they have fulfilled the American Dream because their children or their grandchildren are educated

American citizens who have achieved some upward mobility. I started to wonder if the literacy myth was so familiar to me because of my connection to the American Dream. I began to question how the American Dream related to the literacy myth. Could the two terms be synonymous? How is the American Dream, like the literacy myth, a myth? What are the effects of adopting the ideologies that surround the literacy myth and the American Dream?

While researching the relationship between the literacy myth and the American Dream, I came across another term called the “immigrant bargain” which, much like Graff’s literacy myth did when I first encountered it, also gave me a sense of familiarity. Steven Alvarez defines the immigrant bargain as “an intergenerational class-based expectation that working-class immigrant parents’ sacrifices be redeemed and validated in the future through their children’s achievement in US schools” (Alvarez 25). The immigrant bargain is what drove my mother to pursue her education and drive our family towards upward mobility. My mother saw how much my grandparents struggled to get by in a new country without a proper education; so, she decided to pursue one to make a better life for herself and her parents, validating their sacrifices. The immigrant bargain is a common narrative in immigrant families where children of immigrants are expected to validate their parent’s immigration sacrifices by pursuing education, the American Dream, and upward mobility for their family. The immigrant bargain was so familiar to me because it is one of the factors that drove the “education equals success” ideology throughout my upbringing, along with the literacy myth and the American Dream.

My familiarity with all three terms helped me realize that my cultural background granted me a unique perspective on literacy, the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain. I wanted to know why everyone in my family was so insistent on me pursuing an education. I looked around me and noticed that other Latinxs and minorities from immigrant

backgrounds also felt pressure from their families to acquire education. Why do most people from immigrant backgrounds believe in the literacy myth and reaching the American Dream through education? I, like many other minorities and immigrant families, value and have a unique understanding of literacy and education because of the literacy myth. I, like many other minorities and immigrant families, exist here in the United States because of the American Dream. I, like many other immigrants and their children, feel pressured to pursue education and validate my family's sacrifices because of the immigrant bargain. Upon realizing the connection between the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain, I developed my thesis topic and began my research.

The overall goal of this thesis is to explore the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain to better understand how these terms compare or relate to one another. As a means to understand the relationship between all three terms, I use research from the field of rhetoric and composition and social and political sciences. In chapter one, I define and discuss research relating to the myth, the Dream, and the bargain. Chapter one will ultimately aim to provide definitions for the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain to better understand them and reveal their relationship. In chapter two, I explore how the immigrant bargain serves as a narrative that drives ideologies of the literacy myth and the American Dream to become inherent in the lives of immigrants and minorities from immigrant backgrounds. I survey literature narrating immigrant experiences in the US to better understand and provide examples of the immigrant bargain driving ideologies from both the literacy myth and the American Dream in the lives of immigrants and their families. I conclude my research by summarizing my overall findings and proposing new questions for future research on these ideologies and their relationship in the lives of immigrants and their families.

2 CHAPTER ONE: UNDERSTANDING MYTHS, DREAMS, AND BARGAINS

This chapter discusses foundational works in literacy studies that define the literacy myth, works from social and political sciences that define the American Dream, and research that examines the immigrant bargain in the lives of immigrants and their families. Foundational works in literacy studies include work from Harvey Graff, Brian Street, David Barton, and Deborah Brandt. Literature from social and political science fields that aim to define the American Dream include work by James Truslow Adams; work published in a special issue of the *Šolsko polje* journal (Slovenian education journal) titled, “Education and the American Dream;” and work from political science scholar Cyril Ghosh. Steven Alvarez’s and Vivian Louie’s research on immigrants and their families helps to define the immigrant bargain and reveal its role and implications in the lives of immigrants and their children. As a means to understand how the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain all relate to one another, it is essential that I put the field of rhetoric and composition in conversation with the fields of social and political sciences to guide my research.

This research will focus specifically on how all three terms, the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain, compare or relate to one another. The goal of this chapter is to survey literature that explores definitions of the myth, the Dream and the bargain to better understand them. In the first section, I discuss foundational works in Literacy Studies to define Graff’s literacy myth. In the second section, I trace definitions of the American Dream from Adams, who is believed to have coined the term in 1931, Ghosh, and the *Šolsko polje* journal. In the third section, I begin discussing the immigrant bargain and its role in the lives of immigrants and their families using Alvarez’s and Louie’s work with children of immigrants. I conclude this chapter by putting all three terms in conversation and exploring their relationship.

Chapter one will ultimately aim to provide definitions for the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain to begin exploring how the terms relate to one another.

2.1 Understanding the Literacy Myth

The Literacy Myth by Harvey Graff is cited by many scholars as the key to deciphering contemporary perceptions of literacy. In his article, “The Literacy Myth at Thirty,” Graff reflects on *The Literacy Myth*, thirty years after its publication. Citing from the new *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, Graff defines “literacy myth” as “the belief, articulated in educational, civic, religious, and other settings, contemporary and historical, that the acquisition of literacy is a necessary precursor to and invariably results in economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement, and upward social mobility” (Graff 635). The literacy myth is rooted in the idea that obtaining literacy will guarantee political, social, or economic power. He discusses “myth” as a method of analysis, understanding, and communication: “Like all myths, the literacy myth is not so much a falsehood but an expression of the ideology of those who sanction it and are invested in its outcomes” (Graff 638). Graff argues that the literacy myth is powerful because cultures participate in the ideologies surrounding it. Myths gain acceptance by being grounded in some reality and are, therefore, not entirely false (Graff 638). Graff’s work started an interdisciplinary movement that is responsible for the questioning of contemporary ideologies surrounding literacy and the birth of the New Literacy Studies.

In “Autonomous and Ideological Models of Literacy: Approaches from New Literacy Studies,” Brian Street outlines the central positions presented by New Literacy Studies (NLS) and explores what it means to think of literacy as a social practice. He explains the concepts of autonomous models of literacy, the idea that literacy will autonomously have effects on social

and cognitive practices, and ideological models of literacy, the idea that literacy varies from one context to another and from one culture to another (Street 1-2). Street elaborates further on the autonomous model of literacy:

The standard view in many fields, from schooling to development programmes, works from the assumption that literacy in itself—autonomously—will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. Introducing literacy to poor, ‘illiterate’ people, villages, urban youth etc. will have the effect of enhancing their cognitive skills, improving their economic prospects, making them better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their ‘illiteracy’ in the first place. I refer to this as an ‘autonomous’ model of literacy (Street 1).

Similar to the literacy myth, this approach to understanding literacy practices labels literacy as something that will have an autonomous effect on other social practices. Street’s autonomous model of literacy relates to Graff’s literacy myth as they both note literacy as a necessary precursor to access to some type of power or economic improvement. In a way, the autonomous model of literacy could be labeled as a literacy myth because it serves as a model or metaphor for understanding contemporary literacy practices.

David Barton begins his book, *Literacy*, by identifying an apparent crisis in education and its relation to reading and writing. He describes assumptions of power granted from education and notes the competing definitions people often have of literacy. Attempting to steer away from the limits of observing literacy in educational contexts, Barton instead chooses to examine literacy in everyday life. He discovers that “literacy is embedded in these activities of ordinary life” and is something that occurs in various contexts (Barton 4). He identifies literacy

as interdisciplinary because it is not just something that happens at school (Barton 5). Barton moves on to discuss the various metaphors used to describe literacy, like Graff's literacy myth, and discovers that "what is needed is not exactly a definition of literacy; rather we need a metaphor, a model, a way of talking about literacy" (Barton 14). He introduces a new metaphor: the ecological metaphor.

The ecology of literacy allows individuals to understand literacy as interrelationships between human activity and their environment; maintaining that when understanding literacy as a symbolic system, one is immediately forced to straddle the social and the psychological. Barton explains the connection between the social and the psychological as how "[w]e construct theories to make sense of the world [...] Everyone has a view of literacy; everyone in some way makes sense of it" (Barton 14-15). This can be related to Graff's mention of myth as method of analysis or as metaphor; myths gain acceptance by being grounded in some reality and are, therefore, not entirely false (Graff 638). Teachings from Graff, Street, and Barton identify that literacy is a social practice that is rooted in contexts and environments. People construct theories to understand their environments and therefore understand their literacy practices.

The book, *Literacy and Learning: Reflections on Writing, Reading, and Society* by Deborah Brandt, offers a collection of her work in the field of literacy studies. In the second chapter, "Literacy in American Lives," Brandt traces the changing standards for more and more people to do more things with literacy (Brandt 47). She comments on the tightening association between literacy and viability, both economic and political, and also how literacy has become a raw material that is becoming directly implicated in matters of productivity and economic growth (Brandt 47). Similar to Barton, Brandt also chose to examine literacy in everyday life. She aimed to uncover what it means "to acquire literacy at a time where there is so much at stake

around it” (Brandt 48). She interviewed 80 people living in or around Dane County, Wisconsin, collecting their recollections of how they acquired literacy in an effort to trace the changing standards of American literacy. She found that:

Literacy learning is conditioned by economic changes and the implications they bring to regions and communities in which students live. Economic changes devalue once-accepted standards of literacy achievement, but more seriously, they destabilize the social and cultural trade routes along which families and communities once learned to preserve and pass on literate know-how (Brandt 62-63).

Brandt’s identification of literacy’s relationship with the economy relates to teachings from Graff, Street, and Barton that identify literacy as a social practice that is rooted in contexts and environments.

Works from Graff, Street, Barton, and Brandt classify literacy as a social practice that is deeply rooted in contexts and environments. People construct theories to understand their environments and therefore understand their literacy practices. Graff argues that the literacy myth is powerful because cultures participate in the ideologies surrounding it, and it is, therefore, grounded in some reality (Graff 638). Students flock to universities to obtain literacies they believe will autonomously guarantee them access to power; thus, making them participants in the literacy myth. The literacy myth exists today because society as a culture participates in the ideologies that surround it, making the “myth” metaphor in the literacy myth a reality. The literacy myth is a social practice that involves a correlation between literacy acquisition and upward mobility toward political, social, or economic power.

2.2 Understanding the American Dream

James Truslow Adams is believed to have been the first person to both coin the term “American Dream” and use it in print in his 1931 book, *The Epic of America*. Adams writes

...the American dream, that Dream of a land in which life should be better and fuller and richer for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement... It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position (Adams 404).

Throughout the epilogue of his book, Adams refers to the American Dream as something that is obtainable by anyone who reaches the United States. He states that the Dream has “lured tens of millions” of people to the shores of the United States and that it “has been realized more fully in actual life here than anywhere else” (Adams 405). Here Adams highlights the American Dream as a driving force for immigrants coming to the United States. Adams is careful not to label the American Dream as something that promises riches, but rather social order, development, and recognition. This is interesting to note because contemporary understandings of the American Dream often include promises of upward mobility, especially.

The American Dream is also believed to have stemmed from Horatio Alger, Jr., who wrote books about young men who overcame poverty and achieved success in the early 1850s. In the book *Horatio Alger: Or, The American Hero Era*, Ralph Gardner provides readers with a detailed description of Alger’s life and writings. Alger’s most famous story, *Ragged Dick*, featured a poverty-stricken bootblack (shoe shiner) who overcame various challenges by

working hard and persevering through difficulties, a theme that would later “set a pattern for more than a hundred rags-to-riches tales” (Gardner 314). Based on the boys he encountered in real-life, Alger’s typical hero was an impoverished child who worked on the streets shining shoes or selling newspapers. Written for younger audiences, Alger’s books offered a glimmer of hope to impoverished children and taught them that with hard work comes economic success. Gardner comments on Alger’s influence on his readers: “The final sentence of each of his novels was punctuated with the satisfied sighs of millions of readers who sincerely believed that ‘if Ragged Dick could do it, so can I!’” (Gardner 307). In his stories, Alger espoused the “rags to riches” theme that is now central to the American Dream.

Cyril Ghosh, like Harvey Graff in *Literacy Studies*, is an influential force in the scholarship of the American Dream. In the second chapter of the book *The Politics of the American Dream*, titled “What is the American Dream?,” Ghosh offers a preliminary definition of the term and traces the origin and “the context of the term’s circulation” (Ghosh 27). Ghosh comments on existing literature on the American Dream: “a wide body of scholarship treats the central components of the Dream, its relationship with inequality, [and] with upward mobility” (Ghosh 28). The origin of the Dream is traced back to Adams, yet Ghosh is convinced that it actually stemmed from the Horatio Alger ethic. The Horatio Alger ethic “is etched in the popular imagination as adventure stories about young boys who start off in abject circumstances but manage to overcome their lack of privilege and achieve some kind of unexpected success” (Ghosh 30). Written between the 1850s and early 1900s, the Alger ethic works embody “claims about character, ambition, and bootstrapping” (Ghosh 30). Ghosh then notes, “the Alger narrative became popular as celebrating a myth of success” (Ghosh 30). Ghosh also notes that this “myth of success” is associated with “hard work and strength of character” (Ghosh 30).

Here, the American Dream encompasses ideas of upward mobility, economic success, and pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps.

Bootstrapping is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as “to make use of existing resources or capabilities to raise (oneself) to a new situation or state; to modify or improve by making use of what is already present” (OED Online). In his book, *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, Victor Villanueva discusses the bootstraps metaphor and the implications it has for people of color, especially in the education system. As a person of color himself, Villanueva combines both autobiography and theory to tell of his own experience as an academic growing up in the United States with the bootstrapping mentality. He argues that the individual concern of “pulling one's self up by the bootstraps” shows the limitations of liberalism that dominates American ideology (Villanueva 121). Such limitations are situated on assumptions that social change is an individual concern based on morality and persistence. Similar to Ghosh's myth of success, Villanueva also identifies bootstrapping as somewhat of a myth: “Individual desires and the ability to meet those desires are not simply dictated by the individual's tugs at his bootstraps, nor are they simply matters of luck” (Villanueva 55). Villanueva posits that there is more to achieving the American Dream than tugging at one's bootstraps. Used most commonly in the phrase, “pulling oneself up by their bootstraps,” bootstrapping involves putting in hard work to achieve some form of success. It involves using readily available resources, like those Adams would argue are accessible to anyone in America, to move oneself up in society—upward mobility. Bootstrapping is essential to the American Dream as it is a necessary precursor to achieving the Dream; those who tug at their bootstraps and put in the hard work will reach the Dream.

A special issue of the *Šolsko polje* journal titled, “Education and the American Dream,” attempted to further existing discussions on the American Dream. Adams’ definition labels the American Dream as a driving force for immigration; therefore, the international perspective provided by this special issue offers a gateway for fully comprehending the American Dream’s influence on a global level. An article by Robert C. Hauhart titled “American Dream Studies in the 21st Century: An American Perspective,” contributes to the *Šolsko polje* journal’s special issue by discussing American perspectives of the American Dream. Hauhart begins by tracing preliminary definitions of the American Dream from Adams’ 1931 book, *The Epic of America*, “...the American *dream*, that dream of a land in which life should be better and fuller and richer for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement (Emphasis in original)” (Hauhart 12). He notes that absent from Adams’ definition is any mention of upward mobility, “while Adams does not address upward mobility directly, it is implicit in his formulation that the American Dream is of a country where each and every one may prosper” (Hauhart 13). He unpacks the idea of prosperity and labels it as a “success ethic [...] where one can ‘pull oneself up’ [in society] by one’s bootstraps” (Hauhart 13). Hauhart, like Ghosh, traces ideologies involving upward mobility, economic success, and pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps and finds that they are all directly associated with notions of the American Dream.

A common theme in discussions centered around the American Dream from Adams, Ghosh, Villanueva, and Hauhart is bootstrapping to achieve success or upward mobility. Adams’ definition labeled the Dream as a driving force for immigration and as something that is attainable to anyone on US soil who works hard. Hauhart pulls a definition from Adams’ 1931 book and makes it a point to note the absence of upward mobility, a trait he believes is necessary in defining the American Dream. Ghosh, Hauhart, and Villanueva also note hard work and

bootstrapping as a factor in attaining the American Dream. Hauhart mentions “success ethic,” an idea that with hard work, one can pull oneself up in society by one’s bootstraps, which can be compared to Villanueva. Similarly, Ghosh discusses “myth of success,” an idea where hard work and character determines someone’s ability to succeed and reach the Dream. The American Dream is a social practice that drives US immigration and involves a relationship between hard work or bootstrapping and upward mobility or economic success.

2.3 Understanding the Immigrant Bargain

The immigrant bargain is a popular narrative among American immigrants. Citing Robert Courtney Smith, Steven Alvarez defines the immigrant bargain as “an intergenerational class-based expectation that working-class immigrant parents’ sacrifices be redeemed and validated in the future through their children’s achievement in US schools” (Alvarez 25). In the article, “Brokering the Immigrant Bargain: Second-Generation Immigrant Youth Negotiating Transnational Orientations to Literacy,” Alvarez explores the bargain through his work with second-generation Mexican Americans in New York City. In his research, Alvarez investigates how the immigrant bargain affected the literacy practices of three second-generation students at the Mexican American Network of Students (MANOS). He explains:

The immigrant bargain and the promise of the self-actualized American Dream understood as upward mobility within a meritocracy both predicate an intense work ethic with promises for future success. MANOS parents tactically employed the immigrant bargain to reaffirm their authority in educational matters for their children, promoting family involvement in this way (Alvarez 25).

The immigrant bargain serves as an often-unspoken promise between children of immigrants and their parents where children are taught to understand US schooling and education as a clear path for success and upward mobility.

Necessary to the immigrant bargain is what Alvarez describes as bifocality. Citing Vertovec, he writes, “Immigrants develop a dual frame of reference, or ‘bifocality,’ in which they ‘constantly compare their situation in the ‘home’ society to their situation in the ‘host’ society abroad”” (Alvarez 25). Since the immigrant bargain relies on parents’ immigration from their home country to the United States, this bifocality is vital for children of immigrants to understand their parents’ sacrifices and use it as motivation to pursue education and upward mobility. Alvarez continues, “through immigrant bargain sacrifice narratives, second-generation youth both identify with how hard life can be for their parents while also comparing their own struggles to that of their parents” (Alvarez 25). The bifocality implicit in the bargain works to motivate children of immigrants to actualize their parent’s aspirations for them and redeem their sacrifices. Alvarez comments on the concealed pressures of the bargain, “the immigrant bargain is a story about what motivates students, about the stories of family and sacrifice. When implicit messages about the immigrant bargain become miscommunicated in families, however, meeting parents’ expectations can create aspirational pressures for children” (Alvarez 26). The hidden pressures from the immigrant bargain drives children of immigrants to validate their parents’ immigration sacrifices by pursuing education and actualizing the American Dream for themselves and their families.

In the book, *Keeping the Immigrant Bargain: The Costs and Rewards of Success in America*, author Vivian Louie shares her research on second-generation Dominican and Colombian immigrants. She writes, “The children interviewed for this book had kept the

‘immigrant bargain,’ a term coined by Robert C. Smith to capture the hope of immigrant families that their children would do well in school and succeed, a feat that would make up for the parents’ sacrifices with migration” (Louie 6). In her book, Louie examines 76 children of immigrants and studies the effects of the bargain in their lives and their decisions to pursue higher education. She writes:

Keeping the Immigrant Bargain was so named to invoke the idea that not only had the children honored the bargain with their immigrant parents, but in the process the immigrant families had in some measure kept their end of the bargain with their new country. In short, the next generation had assimilated linguistically and was poised for some degree of individual mobility through schooling. These families shared an abiding faith in the ideals enshrined in the American Dream (Louie 21).

The bargain upholds schooling as a clear path for success, upward mobility, and essentially, the American Dream. Keeping their end of the bargain through migration was not an easy feat for immigrant parents; some endured downward mobility in their transition to the US: “The downwardly mobile immigrant parents lost the deference, authority, and autonomy of their old lives and felt they would never regain them. Their children found it painful to watch this process unfold” (Louie 33). The immigrant bargain maintains that parents’ sacrifice their old lives in their home country to pursue a better life in the US, especially for their children.

Like Alvarez, Louie also notes a bifocality or dual frame of reference as a necessary part of the immigrant bargain. She writes, “The immigrant bargain begins with the parents’ journey and the degree to which they succeed (or not) in the United States... A dual frame of reference is crucial to both processes” (Louie 23). The dual frame of reference allows children of immigrants to understand their parents’ sacrifices and hardships in immigrating and use it as a driving factor

for their success in the US. Louie explains that immigrant parents sacrifice their home country, "...on behalf of their children by coming and staying here. The expected exchange is that the children will do well in school and get ahead in the United States" (Louie 31). Validating or redeeming parents' immigration sacrifices by exceeding in school is understood as how children of immigrants can uphold their end of the bargain. Louie writes, "the children's schooling success...validated their parents' decision to migrate and undertake their difficult journeys" (Louie 6). The dual frame of reference drives children of immigrants to uphold their end of the bargain by pursuing education and upward mobility; it serves as a pressure or constant motivator that drives their achievements.

Mention of the American Dream is also present in both Alvarez's and Louie's findings on the immigrant bargain. Alvarez mentions the "promise of the self-actualized American Dream understood as upward mobility within a meritocracy" as an element of the bargain (Alvarez 25). Louie also mentioned families sharing "an abiding faith in the ideals enshrined in the American Dream" (Louie 21). The American Dream functions as a driving force for immigration where immigrants migrate to the US in search of the Dream, something labeled as only feasible in the US. Louie writes, "Gain was regarded not only as possible in the United States but as more possible here than anywhere else in the world" (Louie 39). The immigrant bargain maintains that parents sacrifice their home country to migrate to the US in hopes of finding a better future for them and their families, something promised by the American Dream.

Both Alvarez and Louie note immigration sacrifices, pursuing education, bifocality or dual frame of reference, and pursuit of the American Dream as relative factors of the immigrant bargain. Alvarez describes the bargain as an expectation where immigrant parents' sacrifices are redeemed and validated through their children's future achievements in school. Louie's research

noted immigrant families' hope that their children would fare better in the US and essentially reach the American Dream. The aspirational pressures for children of immigrants to succeed and uphold their end of the bargain is also a common component to the immigrant bargain. Based on the definitions of the bargain provided by both Alvarez and Louie, the immigrant bargain is a narrative and an often-unspoken promise between immigrants and their children where children are expected to redeem their parents' immigration sacrifices by pursuing education, upward mobility, and actualizing the American Dream.

2.4 Understanding the Relationship between the Myth, the Dream, and the Bargain

The literature surveyed in this chapter suggests that a definition of the literacy myth includes mention of acquiring literacy as a necessary precursor to access to social, economic, or political power. Literacy is classified as a social practice that is deeply rooted in contexts and environments. People construct theories to understand their environments and therefore understand their literacy practices. The existing definitions of the American Dream categorize it as a social practice that involves a direct relationship between hard work or bootstrapping and upward mobility. Followers of the American Dream believe that people who immigrate to the United States will have access to the American Dream and the upward mobility and economic success that comes with it. The immigrant bargain is an often-unspoken promise where children are expected to redeem their parents' immigration sacrifices by pursuing education, upward mobility, and actualizing the American Dream. Alvarez and Louie note immigration sacrifices, bifocality, and pursuit of both education and the American Dream as relative factors of the immigrant bargain. All three terms overlap and relate to one another in the lives of American immigrants.

The American Dream has long been a motivator for immigrating to the United States. Adams 1931 definition describes the American Dream as a dream that has “lured tens of millions” of people to the shores of the United States and “has been realized more fully in actual life here than anywhere else” (Adams 405). Many American immigration stories begin with a vision of the American Dream and follow with incredible journeys filled with sacrifices and the sole goal of reaching the US and making a better life for themselves and their families. Because of its influence on immigration, those most affected by the American Dream and its ideologies are immigrants and their children. Usually part of their parent’s Dream, children of immigrants are often expected to uphold their parent’s American Dream and literacy myth ideals through the immigrant bargain.

The immigrant bargain is the material and ideological transaction that reveals itself as a driving force for ideologies of the American Dream and the literacy myth in the lives of immigrants, especially children of immigrants. It is a metaphorical transaction where parent’s sacrifice of leaving their home country and immigrating to the US for a better life is redeemed by their children’s promise to attain education, gain upward mobility, and essentially actualize the American Dream. Alvarez explains, “Parents used the immigrant bargain to teach their children about the difficulties of life and migration and as a means to pressure them” (Alvarez 31). He continues, “MANOS mentees appreciated the sacrifices the migrating generation had performed in order for the next to gain a better footing in the United States, and, subsequently, in life” (Alvarez 32). Through use of the immigrant bargain, children of immigrants are expected to uphold their parent’s American Dream and literacy myth principles.

The immigrant bargain reveals both migration to the US and attainment of an American education as currencies that are exchanged between immigrants and their children. The

implications from the immigrant bargain sustain US schooling and education as a clear path for success and upward mobility. This can also be compared to ideologies from the literacy myth where “literacy is represented as an unqualified good, a marker of progress, and a metaphorical light making clear the pathway to progress and happiness” (Graff 640). Acquiring literacy as part of the literacy myth or attaining an American education as part of the immigrant bargain is understood as a path to success, upward mobility, and ultimately, the American Dream. Children of immigrants often have their parent’s immigration sacrifices looming over them. Unable to actualize the American Dream themselves, immigrant parents look to their children as substitute. Children of immigrants are taught to believe in the ideologies of both the American Dream and the literacy myth, making them inherent in their lives.

3 CHAPTER TWO: BARGAINING DREAMS AND MYTHS

The goal of this chapter is to discuss how the immigrant bargain works as a catalyst to drive ideologies of both the American Dream and the literacy myth in the lives and narratives of American immigrants. The literature discussed in this chapter provides examples from immigrants affected by the Dream, the myth, and the bargain. Discussing the experiences of American immigrants and their children will provide a better understanding of the many sacrifices immigrants make in migrating to the US and the role the immigrant bargain plays in their lives. I sought to focus solely on literature that reviewed the experiences of immigrants and their families because they are most affected by the immigrant bargain and, therefore, carry the burden of the American Dream and the literacy myth. This chapter explores how the ideologies of both the Dream and the myth are driven to become inherent in the lives of immigrants and their children through the bargain. By surveying research that seeks to explore the immigrant bargain and research that narrates immigrant experience in the US, this chapter will aim to answer the question: how does the immigrant bargain work as a transactional narrative that drives ideologies of the literacy myth and the American Dream to become inherent in the lives of immigrants, especially children of immigrants?

This chapter aims to trace the effects of the immigrant bargain in the lives and literacy practices of immigrants and their children to better understand how ideologies from the American Dream and the literacy myth become inherent in their lives. In the first section, I discuss the challenges of American immigration and how immigrant parents drive ideologies of the Dream and the myth through the bargain and immigration sacrifice narratives. The second section discusses the aspirational pressures implicit in the bargain and traces ideologies from both the Dream and the myth from the literacy narratives of first- and second-generation

immigrant scholars. The third section discusses the assumptions of the myth, the Dream, and the bargain and the problematic effects of chasing after their implied promises. I conclude this chapter by discussing the cycle of chasing Dreams and myths and how these ideologies remain inherent in the lives of immigrants and their families.

3.1 Driving Dreams and Myths

The United States is often referred to as a melting pot of people from many different countries and cultural backgrounds. 2019 data from The American Immigration Council website reported that “One in seven U.S. residents is an immigrant, while one in eight residents is a native-born U.S. citizen with at least one immigrant parent” (“Immigrants in the United States”). It can be assumed that because of the promises of the American Dream, migration to the US is very common though arduous. The book, *Children of Immigration* by Carola and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, discusses the different challenges immigrants and their children face throughout their immigration and assimilation journeys:

Indeed, by any measure, immigration is one of the most stressful events a family can undergo. It removes family members from many of their relationships and a predictable context: community ties, jobs, customs, and (often) language. Immigrants are stripped of many of their significant relationships—extended family members, best friends, and neighbors. They also lose the social roles that provide them with culturally scripted notions of how they fit into the world (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 70).

These are just some of the many sacrifices immigrant families make in deciding to migrate to the US and pursue the American Dream. For many, it is a sacrifice worth making to ensure that their children have a chance at faring better in the US and reaching the Dream.

Despite the many hardships immigrants face throughout their journeys, most still remain hopeful for the future: “Immigrant parents also typically bring with them a sense of optimism about how their hard work will open new opportunities. Hope is in the heart of every immigrant. Possibilities for the future—especially for their children—appear obvious” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 87). C. and M. Suárez-Orozco note, “Immigrants frequently leave behind a host of difficulties, and although in the new land other challenges are ever present, the old troubles may make the new ones tolerable. This dual frame of reference acts as a perceptual filter by which the newcomers process their new experiences” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 87). Immigrants maintain their optimism through a dual frame of reference where they compare their challenges from their previous lives with those they now face; “comparing the ‘here and now’ with the ‘there and then’” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 87). A dual frame of reference allows immigrants to face the challenges that come with immigration by remaining hopeful that their sacrifices will be well worth it once their children redeem those sacrifices in the future through education.

Steven Alvarez also describes immigrants as having a dual frame of reference where they compare their situation in their home country to their situation in the US (Alvarez 25). Immigrant parent’s sacrifice narratives of leaving harsh conditions behind in their home country to seek a better life in the US are regularly shared with their children as a means to invoke the immigrant bargain. Steven Alvarez writes, “[they] were sensitive to the narratives of their parents’ educational hardships. They also understood that their parents rhetorically used their personal history narratives in order to teach their children the important lessons about living responsibly and studying hard” (Alvarez 31). By sharing sacrifice narratives and invoking the immigrant bargain, immigrant parents teach their children to see *value* both in their parent’s sacrifices and

in American education—driving ideologies from both the Dream and the myth. The immigrant bargain itself is driven by immigrant parents and works as a transaction between immigrant parents and their children where immigration to the US and pursuit of success or upward mobility are exchanged goods.

The American Dream promises everyone on US soil who works hard enough access to upward mobility; immigration to the US is understood as a worthy sacrifice because of this. Mobility is an alluring quality of the Dream and is considered as only possible in the US where, “A person’s work and educational levels determine much of his social experience. A defining feature of class systems is the idea of mobility; with sufficient effort (pursuit of education and hard work) and opportunities, a person can move up the social ladder” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 93). Immigrants are hopeful that once they arrive in the US, they will be free to chase after the American Dream and make a better life for themselves and their children by climbing the US class system. Since pursuit of an American education is understood as necessary to upward mobility and the American Dream, “The parents’ attitudes toward education are passed down to their children” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 125). Education is labeled as the key to achieving upward mobility and success in the US: “Formal schooling has become a high-stakes goal for the children of immigrants. For many of them, schooling is nearly the *only* ticket for a better tomorrow” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 124). For children of immigrants, acquiring education is also understood as the way to redeem their parents’ immigration sacrifices.

The immigrant bargain works to drive ideologies surrounding the literacy myth and the American Dream in the lives and literacy practices of children of immigrants. Children of

immigrants are expected to understand their parents' immigration to the US as a sacrifice that can only be redeemed by acquiring an American education and achieving upward mobility:

Immigrant parents and their children are very aware of the importance of education to their future success. We asked immigrant parents: 'How do you get ahead in the United States?' and a reference to education was by far the most frequent response. A Dominican parent noted that the way to get ahead was by 'studying, learning English, going to college, and becoming a professional.' A Chinese parent eloquently told us: 'The only way to do it is to do well in school... Knowledge is the most lasting thing. If you have an education you can have a more fulfilling life and nothing can defeat you. Material things are short-lived no matter how much you own. Only knowledge can last forever.' (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 125).

For immigrant parents, education is understood as a clear path to success and upward mobility in the US. It is also important to note that acquisition of English literacies is especially desirable for immigrant parents to ensure their family's successful assimilation into the US. Correspondingly, the literacy myth is the idea that the acquisition of literacy or education is a necessary precursor to success and upward mobility (Graff 635). The immigrant bargain works to drive literacy myth and American Dream principles in the lives and literacy practices of second-generation immigrants.

For decades, many American immigrants have made the decision to migrate to the US in search of the promised American Dream where "life should be better and fuller and richer for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement" (Adams 404). With immigration comes many sacrifices, which for many, are worth making to guarantee their children have a chance at faring better in the US. Immigrants use a dual frame of reference to

remain optimistic about their futures and as a way to invoke the immigrant bargain onto their children. Since pursuit of an American education is understood as necessary to upward mobility and the American Dream, immigrant parents urge their children to acquire education to redeem their immigration sacrifices. Just as the American Dream serves as a motivator to inspire immigrants to migrate to the US, the immigrant bargain works as a motivator to inspire second-generation Americans to pursue an American education and acquire English literacies.

Comparable to the bargain, the literacy myth is the belief that the acquisition of literacy is a necessary precursor to success and upward mobility (Graff 635). The immigrant bargain serves as a transactional narrative that reveals itself as a driving factor of the American Dream and the literacy myth in the lives of first- and second-generation immigrants.

3.2 Bargaining Dreams and Myths

The immigrant bargain drives ideologies of the American Dream and the literacy myth in the lives of children of immigrants. Immigrant parents immigrate to the US in pursuit of the American Dream and adopt ideologies of the literacy myth where an American education is understood as the key to success and upward mobility in the US. Through the bargain, immigrant parents push their Dream and myth principles onto their children, making them inherent in their lives and affecting their literacy practices. C. and M. Suárez-Orozco comment on the effects of the bargain:

We have found that many who successfully ‘make it’ clearly perceive and appreciate the sacrifices that loved ones have made to enable them to thrive in a new country. Rather than wishing to distance themselves from parents, these youth come to experience success as a way to ‘pay back’ their parents for their sacrifices. At times, they experience a form of ‘survivor guilt’ as a result of the deprivation that their parents and other family

members have suffered in order to move to the new land. Among many such adolescents, success in school means not only self-advancement and independence, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, making the parental sacrifice worthwhile by 'becoming a somebody' (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 113).

This survivor guilt creates pressure for children of immigrants to work hard and redeem their parents' immigration sacrifices. The dual frame of reference drives children of immigrants to uphold their end of the bargain by pursuing education and upward mobility; it serves as a pressure or constant motivator that drives their achievements. Children of immigrants understand acquiring education or pursuing upward mobility as the only way to succeed in the US and 'pay back' the sacrifices their parents made for them.

The immigrant bargain works as a metaphorical transaction between immigrant parents and their children where parents' immigration to the US and their children's pursuit of success are exchanged goods. This expected transaction creates aspirational pressures for children of immigrants. Keeping their end of the bargain by migrating to the US is not an easy feat for immigrant parents; though, the pressure to succeed and lead their family toward upward mobility is also not an easy task for children of immigrants. Vivian Louie observed this effect on one her students:

Alejandro did feel some pressure to succeed, which he linked to being Latino. He knew that Latinos are stereotyped as academic failures and wondered whether that would affect how others saw him and what they expected of him. As an immigrant, he also faced the weight of his Dominican parents' expectations for him to do well. He did not think that native white Americans had such strong external or internal pressures (Louie 115).

The implied pressures from the immigrant bargain motivates children of immigrants to validate their parents' immigration sacrifices by pursuing education and actualizing the American Dream for themselves and their families. Many children of immigrants carry the burden of their families and the immigrant bargain to pursue higher education and move up the American class system.

The book, *Immigrant Scholars: In Rhetoric, Composition, and Communication*, offers readers the narratives and memoirs of first- and second-generation transnational scholars. In the third chapter, "Desi Girl Gets a PhD: Brokering the American Education System with Cultural Expectations," author Ashanka Kumari shares how her parent's immigration from India and pursuit of the American Dream affected her literacy practices as a first-generation American. She writes, "while my parents understood my getting an education as a path toward upward career and class mobility, I understood it as a responsibility to my parents, a way to create my own financial and job security, a way to carry our family name forward. Pursuing an education became a cultural value beyond my parents' expectations" (Kumari 59). Kumari's parents wanted her to pursue an American education because of the promises of the American Dream and the literacy myth—immigrate to America, receive an education, and acquire English literacy to gain upward mobility. Kumari herself, on the other hand, recognized her parent's many sacrifices in immigrating to the US and adopted their beliefs in the myth and the Dream as a motivator to pursue an American education—the immigrant bargain.

The immigrant bargain maintains that Kumari's parent's sacrifices be redeemed and validated through Kumari's hard work and achievement in US schools (Alvarez 25). Throughout the chapter, Kumari shares how her father's stories of sacrifice and wish to achieve the American Dream influenced her to work hard, "[...] however, my dad's wild dreams for me and my family taught me to engage competitively in my pursuits and do the best work I could possibly do"

(Kumari 62). She even credits her parents for her decision to pursue a college degree and notes that they taught her to believe that continuing her education and receiving a college degree would set her up for the best life (Kumari 58). She concludes the chapter by noting that in her pursuit of a PhD, she engages “excitedly in all of my academic and personal pursuits to carry forward my parents’ legacy and my redefined ambition for a ‘better’ life” (Kumari 75). By invoking the immigrant bargain, Kumari’s parents drove ideologies from both the Dream and the myth, making them inherent in her life and affecting her literacy practices.

In the fifth chapter, “A Right to My Language: Personal and Professional Identity as a ‘First Generation’ Teacher-Scholar-Rhetorician,” author and book editor Dr. Letizia Guglielmo describes how her being a child of Italian immigrants shaped her literacy practices and identity. She writes, “I don’t know the precise moment when I [...] recognized the value of academic achievement and fluency in English, but both were reinforced and rewarded by my parents” (Guglielmo 105). Guglielmo continues, “Perhaps this knowing was part of the immigrant bargain Steven Alvarez explores [...] The significance of this narrative for many immigrants, immigrant children, and children of immigrants cannot be understated” (Guglielmo 105). Guglielmo notes that her academic achievements growing up were incentivized by her parents as a means to reinforce the immigrant bargain. She recognizes that her literacy practices, like many other immigrant children, were influenced by forces like the immigrant bargain where she was taught by her parents that to gain upward mobility, she must acquire literacy and education.

Educational attainment as currency is shown in Guglielmo’s recounts of her early literacy practices. She writes, “My educational attainment within a US education system—particularly in terms of literacy and language acquisition—would not only signal assimilation and acceptable citizenship, but also solidify an ‘upward mobility’ toward middle-class status that performed

Americanness both for myself and my parents” (Guglielmo 105). In other words, Guglielmo’s characterizations and understandings of literacy reveal how her identity and educational attainment became a type of currency in an American economy of Dreams and myths. This currency is part of a distinctly capitalistic ideology meant to perpetuate overly simplistic understandings of the role of schooling and labor in attaining success, happiness, or upward mobility—the American Dream. Those participating in the immigrant bargain subscribe to the idea that immigrating to the US and teaching their children the *value* of education will guarantee them and their children upward mobility within the meritocracy of the US, pushing the drive for the Dream and the myth.

3.3 The American Economy of Dreams and Myths

It is believed by many American immigrants that those who immigrate to the United States and acquire literacy or education will gain access to the American Dream and the upward mobility or economic success that comes with it. Immigrant parents choose to migrate to the US because of the promises of the American Dream and the literacy myth, immigrate to the US and acquire literacy to reach success. The immigrant bargain is a transactional narrative where children are expected to redeem their parents’ immigration sacrifices by pursuing education, upward mobility, and actualizing the American Dream. It is the material and ideological transaction that reveals itself as a driving force for ideologies surrounding the literacy myth and the American Dream in the lives of immigrants, especially children of immigrants. The immigrant bargain exposes both migration to the US and attainment of an American education as currencies that are exchanged between immigrants and their children, revealing the American economy of Dreams and myths.

In the American economy of Dreams and myths, the US is imagined as a meritocracy where all have equal opportunities for success. Pursuers of the American Dream, mainly first- and second-generation immigrants, are persuaded by the promises of meritocracy to participate in ideologies surrounding both the Dream and the myth. These capitalistic ideologies romanticize the role of schooling and labor in attaining upward mobility. The immigrant bargain, usually enforced by immigrants onto their children, is the transactional narrative that upholds this romanticized reality of chasing Dreams and myths to reach upward mobility and the American Dream. The implications from the immigrant bargain sustain American citizenship and educational attainment as currencies that are exchanged for success and upward mobility. The Dream, the myth, and the bargain all overlap to become inherent in the lives of first- and second-generation immigrants, especially. Each of these terms depend on a meritocratic system where all have equal chances at prosperity and upward mobility—the American Dream.

In his article, Alvarez argues that those “unversed in the immigrant bargain’s power for probing the bifocality implicit in the narrative must recognize how the intergenerational story both motivates and constrains students to establish attitudes and goals toward US schooling as they envision their families’ transnational trajectories” (Alvarez 26). The implications of the immigrant bargain serve as a motivator for adopting the principles of the Dream and the myth, driving first- and mainly second-generation immigrants to chase Dreams and myths in the American meritocratic economy. This is something Alvarez explains can create aspirational pressures for children and affect views about goals and the merits of education. He proposes a critical literacy approach to understanding the bargain:

Literacy researchers must challenge the individualizing trap of meritocracy. Assessed through examination or achievement, meritocracy is a system of individual advancement

through structure. The individualist rhetoric of meritocracy combats all notions of literacy as a social practice for community building and instead affirms an all-out competition where rivals allegedly have an equal opportunity to literacy and upward mobility. A critical literacy approach opens literacy events to reading the gaming of merit, making explicit the structured inequalities of the meritocratic system while also challenging dominant literacies and the status quo (Alvarez 26).

The trap of meritocracy sheds light on the individualistic rhetoric that reinforces the belief that achieving success is as simple as attaining an American education. Approaching the overlap of the ideologies surrounding the Dream and the myth using the lens of critical literacy reveals the myth of meritocracy and exposes structural inequalities.

In the American economy of Dreams and myths, attaining education as part of the immigrant bargain or acquiring literacy as part of the literacy myth is assumed to be the clear path to promises of the American Dream. Alvarez argues that some of the structured inequalities first- and second-generation immigrants face, “is due to more systemic social constraints such as racism, poverty, and irregular legal status” (Alvarez 29). The trap of meritocracy feeds off individualism and fabricates equality by ignoring societal forces that reinforce inequity. A common theme that strings these terms—the American Dream, the literacy myth, the immigrant bargain—is imagining the United States as a true meritocracy where all have equal chances of success. The myth of meritocracy promises dreams that are essentially unachievable for all because of systems of inequality.

Individualism, as discussed by Alvarez, can be compared to Villanueva’s mentions of liberalism in his book, *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*. Villanueva writes:

I offer these scenes to suggest the limitations of liberalism, the ideology that has at its base the belief that change is an individual concern, a matter of pulling one's self up by the bootstraps, that all that is needed is to provide the conditions that will facilitate the pull, enough elbow room. It is America's dominant ideology (Villanueva 121).

Liberalism sustains that change is as simple as tugging at one's bootstraps in the same way that individualism paints success as simply attaining an American education. Villanueva writes, "Individual desires and the ability to meet those desires are not simply dictated by the individual's tugs at his bootstraps, nor are they simply matters of luck" (Villanueva 55). Both liberalism and individualism take part in the Dream and the myth and further reveal the myth of meritocracy that serves as the foundation of these ideologies.

In his article, "American Dream Studies in the 21st Century: An American Perspective," Hauhart explores the catalytic effects of the American Dream. Despite Adams' original definition of the American Dream as "...a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position," the US is not a land where all are equal (Adams 404). Hauhart comments on Adams' original definition of the American Dream:

James Truslow Adams' conception of the American Dream envisages a level playing field of opportunity for all. However, numerous studies of educational institutions and workplaces in the United States suggest that both formal and informal cultural barriers exist that prevent many Americans from achieving their American Dreams, most particularly ones that incorporate upward mobility as a core goal (Hauhart 19).

Believing in the original definition of the American Dream has catalytic effects that mask the barriers that restrict achieving upward mobility. Chasing Dreams and myths oversimplifies and obscures the true nature of the US and illustrates it as a nation where all can succeed equally.

In his work on American perspectives of the Dream, Hauhart notes that, “The American Dream has come to centrally rely on an expectation of intergenerational upward mobility [...] as many immigrant families testify to the desire for a better life for themselves and their children as the primary motivation for coming to the United States” (Hauhart 15). Immigrants and their families are influenced by the promises of the American Dream to believe that the US is a true meritocracy where all can succeed equally. He comments on meritocracy in American schools:

Education has long been identified in the United States as one of the principal routes—if not the primary route—to upward social and economic status (Sorokin, 1959). However, while education may be a route to upward social, economic and cultural mobility, schools are not ideally meritocratic, if they are meritocratic at all (Deresiewicz, 2015; McNamee and Miller, 2013) in the way in which the school process helps or hinders those from class origins other than the middle-class professional groups that dominate them (Hauhart 20).

Hauhart recognizes the myth of meritocracy and explains that classism is another factor that hinders success for chasers of the Dream or the myth. Believing in the myth of meritocracy or the promises of the Dream and the myth are “problematic because everyone cannot participate equally nor can most start over” (Hauhart 15). Participants in the American economy of Dreams and myths, mainly those who subscribe to the ideologies from the Dream or the myth, are at risk for the catalytic effects of these beliefs.

Hauhart's work describes some of the catalytic and problematic effects of the American Dream. He identified that “Young people in the United States have long been told that to prosper economically they need to obtain a college or university degree. Overwhelmingly in recent decades, high school graduates have flocked to US higher education in response” (Hauhart 17). Because of the pressures of the immigrant bargain, children of immigrants are often those students who flock to universities to chase Dreams and myths. Hauhart continues, “Hochschild notes that individualism in the United States infuses the Dream with the idea that success results from actions and qualities under one’s control, thereby placing the onus of failure on each person” (Hauhart 15). The individualistic rhetoric discussed by Alvarez is shown here again. Hauhart writes, “The twin emphases of competitive capitalism and American individualism that form the backbone of the American cultural ethos quietly buttress the American Dream’s urgent exhortation to prosper in ways that are antipathetic to individual success as a person and destructive to social stability” (Hauhart 17). Individualism and the trap of meritocracy are shown once again as evidence for why the American Dream does not work for all, further revealing the myth of meritocracy.

Education as liberating and the assumption that a college degree would be enough to achieve success or upward mobility is also discussed in Louie’s work. She writes:

A key assumption of the parents and children we interviewed was that once the children had a college degree, they would have a clear path to material success. The links between a college education and higher earnings, better jobs, and enhanced social status were clear among the families. But how did the children experience college and see their trajectories? This question stems from the debates about whether education, and especially higher education, is indeed a great equalizer (Louie 116).

Education as a great equalizer or as liberating is an assumption that helps drive the ideologies surrounding the Dream and the myth in the lives of immigrants and their children through the bargain. Most choose to immigrate to the US because of the promises of the American Dream, but there are concealed inequalities delaying their achievements. Louie notes that most of her research “respondents saw higher education as an invaluable tool of upward mobility, but not necessarily adequate by itself. The playing field would still remain uneven for them, owing to race” (Louie 124). While acquiring education can aid in the pursuit of upward mobility, social inequalities and the myth of meritocracy still remain.

The idea that education is liberating is a common component in ideologies surrounding the Dream, the myth, and the bargain. Graff comments on the implications of the myth:

Myths can be expressions of collective desires, of the many and the few, of their differential agency and power. Perhaps the literacy myth expresses a hope that literacy alone is enough to end poverty, elevate human dignity, and promote a just and democratic world. A less benign reading is that the literacy myth is a means through which to obscure the causes of social and economic inequalities in a Western society at least by attributing them to the literacy or illiteracy of different peoples (Graff 645).

Graff explains that the literacy myth expresses a collective desire or hope to end social and economic inequalities. In the same way, the myth of meritocracy exists to express the collective desire for a land where all may prosper equally.

Graff describes myth as a method of analysis, “Like all myths, the literacy myth is not so much a falsehood but an expression of the ideology of those who sanction it and are invested in its outcomes. For this reason, the literacy myth is powerful, resistant to revision, and longstanding” (Graff 638). Myth as a method of analysis can be applied to the myth of

meritocracy where the US is only imagined as a place where opportunities are equal for all. Those invested in the outcomes of meritocracy, like those chasing Dreams and myths, keep the myth powerful and reveal the underlying capitalistic ideologies. These capitalistic ideologies romanticize the role of schooling and labor in attaining upward mobility and sustain principles of the American Dream and the literacy myth through the immigrant bargain. The American Dream and the literacy myth can only exist in a true meritocracy.

Meritocracy is at the foundation of theories surrounding the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain. The immigrant bargain reveals both migration to the US and attainment of an American education as currencies that are exchanged between immigrants and their children in the American economy of Dreams and myths. It serves as a transactional narrative where parent's sacrifice of immigrating to the US for a better life is redeemed by their children's promise to attain an American education, gain upward mobility, and essentially actualize the American Dream. The implications from the immigrant bargain romanticize US schooling and education as a clear path for success and upward mobility within a meritocracy, triggering the overlap of the literacy myth and the American Dream in the lives and literacy practices of first- and second-generation immigrants. Actualizing the American Dream relies on the US being a true meritocracy where success and upward mobility is accessible for all, no matter their social backgrounds. The literacy myth depends on acquiring literacy, and literacy alone, to create a clear path to success and upward mobility within a meritocracy. Each of these terms—the Dream, the myth, and the bargain—are disguised as metaphors because they all rely on a truly meritocratic society. They are disguised as myths and dreams because they reflect aspirations for American culture that all yearn to be true.

3.4 Chasing Dreams and Myths

The immigrant bargain is a transactional narrative that drives ideologies from the Dream and the myth in the lives and literacy practices of children of immigrants. Immigrant parents use sacrifice narratives to instill their beliefs in the American Dream onto their children and invoke the immigrant bargain. Pressured by their parent's sacrifices, children of immigrants flock to colleges and universities in pursuit of the success their parents and the literacy myth promised they would gain once they acquire literacy and education. It is what drove scholars like Kumari and Guglielmo to pursue higher education and redeem their families' immigration sacrifices. It is an ongoing cycle that plays into the American economy of Dreams and myths where the US is disguised as a meritocracy where all have equal chances of success. The immigrant bargain is the driving factor for the Dream and myth, causing children of immigrants, especially, to chase Dreams and myths. These capitalistic ideologies romanticize the role of schooling and labor in attaining upward mobility and success. It is important for chasers of Dreams and myths to understand the catalytic effects of adopting these ideologies and the societal forces against them that hinder their mobility within America. Until all can takeoff from the same starting line, meritocracy will remain a myth.

Graff discusses myths as expressions of collective desires and describes the literacy myth as, "a means through which to obscure the causes of social and economic inequalities in a Western society at least by attributing them to the literacy or illiteracy of different peoples" (Graff 645). Graff's view on myths can also be applied to better understand the American Dream and the immigrant bargain, where both terms are also described in fantastical terms to express a collective desire. Meritocracy, or the belief that all have equal opportunities to succeed, can also be understood as the collective desire of those who participate in the ideologies surrounding the

Dream, the myth, and the bargain. Meritocracy, like the myth, Dream, and bargain, is also “a means through which to obscure the causes of social and economic inequalities in a Western society” (Graff 645). The myth of meritocracy reveals what many yearn to be true, equality for all. Villanueva mentions that America’s dominate ideology is that “change is an individual concern, a matter of pulling one’s self up by the bootstraps” (Villanueva 121). A catalytic effect of chasing Dreams and myths is that many are persuaded to believe they are capable of enacting change and achieving upward mobility within the meritocracy of the US simply by pulling at their bootstraps. Pursuers of the American Dream are sold false promises to obscure them from seeing the real reasons they cannot easily reach the Dream—inequalities.

Chasing Dreams and myths involves immigrant families, who in search of a better life and the promises and the American Dream, immigrate to the US leaving their home country behind. Eager to make a better life for themselves and their families, immigrants use the immigrant bargain to share sacrifice narratives and instill their beliefs in the American Dream onto their children; teaching them that with hard work and bootstrapping comes success. The children are also encouraged by their parents to pursue hard work through education and the promises of the literacy myth teach them that the acquisition of literacy will lead to success and upward mobility, just like the American Dream. The literacy myth is the myth that education is a great equalizer. The American Dream is the myth that the US is a meritocracy where all can gain upward mobility equally. The immigrant bargain is the transactional narrative that keeps these myths and ideologies present and inherent in the lives and literacy practices of American immigrants. Chasing after the successes promised by the Dream and the myth is considered as the only way to redeem their parents’ immigration sacrifices. This cycle of chasing Dreams and

myths keeps ideologies surrounding the American Dream and the literacy myth inherent in the lives of immigrants and their children.

4 CONCLUSION

Research for this thesis was gathered in an effort to understand the relationship between the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain, and especially how these terms relate to my personal literacy practices and those of individuals with similar upbringings. As a Latina-American, I have a unique relationship with the ideologies surrounding the myth, the Dream, and the bargain. The American Dream is responsible for enticing my family to immigrate to the US from the Dominican Republic in search of a better life. My initial encounter with the literacy myth led me to dissect my literacy practices to better understand how it related to my cultural upbringing as a Latina-American pursuing higher education to achieve upward mobility. The immigrant bargain was the popular narrative that was often weaved into conversations about future success and the path an American citizen with immigrant roots like me should take to attain it. For this thesis, I sought to understand why pursuing higher education was so important for my family and those around me with similar upbringings. Through my research, I uncovered a cycle that has been plaguing immigrant families since the birth of the American Dream—bargaining Dreams and myths.

Since its establishment, the American Dream has served as a driving force for immigration. Many American immigrants have been persuaded by the promises of the American Dream to make the difficult journey to the States, to pursue a ‘better life’ for themselves and their families especially. The American Dream promises anyone on US soil an even playing field where, with enough hard work or tugging at bootstraps, anyone can become successful and gain upward mobility. The backbone of the American Dream relies on a meritocratic society where, like Adams states, “... each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the

fortuitous circumstances of birth or position” (Adams 404). Conveniently absent from the original definition of the American Dream is any mention of inequalities and how they affect the promises of the Dream. Usually unable to reach the full potential of the American Dream, immigrant parents look to their children to continue the pursuit.

Immigrant families who bargain Dreams and myths subscribe to the idea that acquiring literacy or higher education will autonomously guarantee them access to success and upward mobility. The literacy myth is the belief that acquiring literacy will guarantee access to upward mobility, power, or success. Graff argues that the literacy myth is powerful because cultures participate in the ideologies surrounding it, and it is, therefore, grounded in some reality (Graff 638). Usually unable to attend universities themselves, immigrant parents instill their beliefs in the literacy myth onto their children. Immigrant children in turn flock to universities to obtain literacies they believe will autonomously guarantee them access to power; thus, making them participants in the literacy myth. The literacy myth advertises the idea that acquiring literacy or education alone is enough to acquire power or upward mobility. The myth is that education serves as a great equalizer that can autonomously open doors to success, despite the many societal forces that aim to hinder this achievement. Often using a dual frame of reference to compare their situation in the US with conditions in their home country, children of immigrants may view their educational attainment as a way to redeem their parents’ immigration sacrifices.

The immigrant bargain is the transactional narrative that reveals immigration to the US and educational attainment as currencies that are exchanged between immigrant parents’ and their children. It is a metaphorical transaction where parent’s sacrifice of immigrating to the US for a better life is redeemed by their children’s promise to attain an American education, gain upward mobility, and essentially actualize the American Dream. By sharing sacrifice narratives

and conjuring a dual frame of reference, immigrant parents invoke the immigrant bargain, passing down their literacy myth and American Dream principles onto their children. These principles can often cause aspirational pressures for children of immigrants to succeed and uphold their end of the bargain. The immigrant bargain drives the ideologies from the Dream and the myth in the lives and literacy practices of second-generation immigrants, making it inherent in their lives. Chasers of Dreams and myths must understand the capitalistic ideologies present in the Dream and the myth that romanticize the role of schooling and labor in attaining upward mobility. All three terms rely on an American meritocratic system where all are able to succeed equally regardless of inequities.

Researchers and scholars in the fields of literacy studies and rhetoric and composition must challenge the ideologies surrounding the myth, the Dream, and the bargain. The trap of meritocracy reveals the individualistic rhetoric that reinforces the belief that achieving success is as simple as attaining an American education. Approaching the overlap of the ideologies surrounding the Dream and the myth using the lens of critical literacy, like Alvarez suggests, reveals the myth of meritocracy and exposes structural inequalities. Exposing the myth of meritocracy or the risks of bargaining Dreams and myths will provide those from immigrant backgrounds a better understanding of the multitude of inequalities that can hinder their successes. Researchers and those with immigrant backgrounds should challenge the inaccurate and archaic implications of the literacy myth and the American Dream.

Future research on the literacy practices of American immigrants could further determine the extent of which these terms affect first- and second-generation immigrants. Research on how the immigrant bargain benefits or fails children of immigrants would also be constructive to better understand the effects of chasing Dreams and myths in their lives. Further investigation is

also needed to identify how best to break the cycle of bargaining or chasing Dreams and myths. Analysis attempting to better understand the many inequalities that prevent the promised outcomes of the literacy myth and the American Dream would also be valuable. Although this thesis considered the effects of the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain on immigrants and their families specifically, it would be beneficial to explore how ideologies from these terms affect the literacy practices of other demographics, if at all. Since my overall thesis concluded that all three terms depend on a meritocratic system, further research is needed on the possibility of the US one day becoming a true meritocracy where these terms could be reality.

Bargaining Dreams and myths reveals the relationship between the literacy myth, the American Dream, and the immigrant bargain in the lives and literacy practices of immigrants and their children, especially. The immigrant bargain is a transactional narrative that drives ideologies from the Dream and the myth to become inherent in the lives and literacy practices of immigrants and their children, especially. It is why many individuals from immigrant backgrounds, like me, feel pressured to attain higher education and gain upward mobility within the American economy of Dreams and myths. Actively participating in the chase of Dreams and myths without considering the myth of meritocracy and the societal forces against them can have catalytic effects. The three terms, the myth, the Dream, and the bargain, glamorize the acquisition of power, success, or upward mobility in America. Achieving the promises of the American Dream requires more than just hard work, tugging at bootstraps, or educational attainment. It is important for chasers of Dreams and myths to understand the catalytic effects of adopting these ideologies and the societal forces against them that hinder their mobility within

America. Until all can takeoff from the same starting line and there is true equality, meritocracy will remain a myth.

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