

PROVING THEM WRONG: ACADEMICALLY RESILIENT FIRST-GENERATION
LATINAS IN COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

PROVING THEM WRONG: ACADEMICALLY RESILIENT FIRST-GENERATION LATINAS IN COLLEGE

By

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This study examined the educational trajectories of academically resilient first-generation Latinas in college. More specifically, the study focused on the factors that led them to become academically successful. The researcher of this study conducted a narrative inquiry analysis of the K-16 educational trajectories of five academically resilient college students, which served as counter-narratives to the existing deficit laden research regarding Latina students within the American educational system.

The study was guided by the following research questions: 1) What experiences contribute to the development of academic resiliency in first-generation Latinas? 2) What factors do academically resilient first-generation Latinas attribute their educational success? 3) What do the experiences that contributed to the academic resiliency of first-generation Latinas suggest for educational practice and policy? The data collection tactics applied in this qualitative analysis were: written autobiographical narratives of each of the five participants' educational trajectories, in-depth interviews, and a focus group interview with all five of the participants.

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) (Delgado Bernal, 2002) was used as the theoretical framework to analyze the race, gender and social barriers the participants encountered, while the Community Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso, 2005) in conjunction with the Academic Resilience Model (Morales, 2008; Gayles, 2005; Cammarota, 2004;

Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Valenzuela, 1993; Yosso, 2002) provided a theoretical approach to understand the supportive factors and mechanisms that the five students possessed and/or interfaced with, throughout their educational careers, that enabled their academic success.

The major findings of this study are that first-generation, academically resilient Latinas enhance their resiliency by the presence of various factors. For the most part their academic resiliency was increased by the presence of, and interaction with, the protective factors. Protective factors are the inherent strengths that the student possesses that allow her to mitigate the risk factors that may be present in her life. The protective factors were comprised of dispositional, familial and environmental factors. This included unwavering familial support, the intrinsic motivation to succeed, and ongoing support from teachers, administrators and peer networks.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to every young first-generation Latina who is told she is not smart enough, that she should play it safe, that she should not aim *too* high...

I tell you this: You ARE smart enough, do NOT play it safe, and ALWAYS aim for the moon!

Choose the road less traveled and that will make all of the difference!

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My dissertation could not have been completed without the unyielding support of many individuals. I would like to give them the proper recognition that they all deserve for always believing in me.

My Faith

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Family and Friends

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My Sisterhood: Omega Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.

I have been very fortunate to have an extended family, my sorority. Omega Phi Beta, Sorority, Inc. has been a constant support system for me for the past ten years. I want to thank some of my biggest cheerleaders, Millie, Mary and Jocelyn you were awesome! You have been there for me during my lowest moments, when I thought I was going to give up. Your random messages and talks really kept me going. I will be forever grateful! To my “amigas”, Yisel, Jacky and Zully, thank you for always keeping me in

your thoughts. For understanding what I was going through and for being amazing friends. Monserrat thank you for the support you gave me to get this done. To the rest of upsilon chapter, I love you all, SOLEIL!

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My Committee

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The Participants

Being able to interview five resilient young women taught me so much! Every time I spoke to any of you, I was reassured that my research was meaningful. Hearing all of your stories motivated me to complete my research. I was eager to share all of the amazing stories with the world. I know that all of you will be successful in every sense of the word. All of you will reach new heights and will in turn motivate other to follow in your steps. Thank you for trusting me and for contributing to my research. Without you this dissertation would not have been possible!

My Mentor and Friend

I purposely left you for last Dr. Christopher Catching! I do not have the words to be able express my gratitude. Your faith in me has been one of the things that kept me going. Thank you for pushing me to take that first class in spring 2008. You pushed me to take a risk and now almost four years later I have completed my dissertation. During the past five years you have been my rock, my motivation and my inspiration. I knew that I could always reach out to you at any point. Whether, it was because I had a question or I was having a tough moment and needed to talk to someone, you were always there. I believe that you were placed in my life to for many reasons, and I am grateful to be able

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CHAPTER I BACKGROUND, PURPOSE, AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

It is one of the more comical points within my family that I, the little girl who once refused to go to school is now researching and writing about the educational experiences of students. I was born in the Dominican Republic, where the educational system is distinctively different from the American educational system. Being born into a working class family in the Dominican Republic meant that education was generally seen as a luxury and not everyone was afforded the opportunity to attend school. My parents came to the United States, without me, when I was about one year old, and for four years my father's brother and his wife raised me. Looking back, I recall not understanding why my parents would leave and move to another country without me. I now understand that they felt that they were making a great sacrifice in order to provide me with a better future.

Schooling the Early Years

Education in my family has always been valued, yet being valued did not mean it was enforced. I am often reminded that, at five years of age, I refused to attend school. I would cry and throw temper tantrums until I won the battle. My first experience with schooling should have been in the Dominican Republic, but instead it was when I first arrived in the U.S. at the age of six. It was a complete culture clash. First, to be attending school and secondly, to be in a country where I was now the outsider. I did not understand the language and was unhappy with the lack of friends. My first two years of schooling were very tumultuous and I did not perform well academically. During the first two years of my schooling, I was placed in 'bilingual' classrooms. Yet, the language

barrier was not the only factor that contributed to my poor academic performance. I was very talkative in class and was often reprimanded by the teacher. I was often disruptive because of the lack of engagement and I recall feeling like the material was not challenging enough for me. Needless to mention this meant that my mother was often called for many parent-teacher conferences. After one of these visits, I remember having a conversation with my mother, and telling her that I wanted to be removed from the 'bilingual' program placed in a 'regular' class program. This was the turning point in my educational career, I became a different student, my grades were no longer mediocre, and I became an honor roll student.

My first year in a 'regular' class was not as positive as I would have liked. The excitement I felt was quickly deflated because not everyone felt the same excitement that I did, not everyone was as excited to learn as I was. That is when I realized that being the smart kid in the classroom was not cool, not cool at all! For the next two years, I struggled with finding my identity as a student. Despite this, I performed well in all of my classes and would eventually be placed in advanced standing by the sixth grade. This is when I reached a point of comfort, as a student. This can mostly be accredited to the fact that the majority of the students in my class were also very academically inclined and wanted to do well in school. Yet, surprisingly enough, the better I performed in school the less academically involved my parents became with my education. My parents expected that I do well in all of my classes. Therefore, there was little need for conversations regarding grades and my scholastic experience.

For many years, I did not understand why my parents never helped me with my homework. I would later learn that both of my parents have less than a high school

education. The lack of a strong educational foundation, coupled with a low proficiency in English pushed me to reach out to my peers and teachers for assistance with my schoolwork. My peer group was very strong: we were academically focused, driven, and heavily involved in academic clubs. The positive influence that we had on each other was extremely important to me. I depended on this support even more as the years progressed. As I entered the last years of junior high school, I was becoming a much stronger student. By the time I reached the eighth grade I was at the top of my class and now had a group around me that echoed my sentiments towards education.

High School Years

By the time I entered high school I was well-established student, I was enrolled in advanced standing classes and was inducted into various honor societies. My involvement in the honor societies was primarily by default, because I was a top student and it was expected. I remember being inducted into the National Honor Society and not having any of my immediate friends with me, this was an unfamiliar feeling. I was used to having my same four to five friends in all of my classes and activities, and for the first time in my late teen years, I felt that I was moving up the educational ladder without them. High school was an interesting time for me, from feeling like the schoolwork was extremely easy to experiencing the negative perceptions of some of my teachers. There was this one specific teacher that I remember vividly, she always spoke about her days in our hometown and how it had fallen from its graces. We were always confused with these references, and then one day it became clear. Our hometown was predominantly white during her younger years in the 70s. Yet, the 80s brought a new wave of emigrational patterns so that by the late 90s, while I attended high school, the town was predominantly

Latino and Black. This teacher who I admired for her witty approach to teaching and literature became a person I could no longer feel comfortable around, because I questioned her discernment of my peers and myself. Although she was a great teacher, this was not a person I could see as a mentor, someone who would assist in my educational development.

Looking back at my early school days I do not recall having any formal mentors, or teachers that I felt pushed me to excel academically. I truly believe that my peer network was one of the main reasons I did well academically, we pushed each other, and we made sure that we always did our best. As I entered my last year in high school, I had to start thinking about my future. What college would I attend? I honestly did not place a lot of importance on the collegiate process or selection, but more so on where most of my circle of friends would be attending. They were my support system and somehow I knew that it would be important to have them with me through college, as well. When I started having conversations with my guidance counselor about colleges, she was not encouraging about the types of schools I should be applying for. It was frustrating and baffling to be within the top fifth percentile of my class and not considered “college material”, how was this possible? This was a turning point for me: I decided to not internalize what I had experienced with my guidance counselor. I applied to a total of about eight schools and was accepted to all of them. I ultimately chose my college because it was close to home, affordable, and most of my friends were also attending the same college. The idea of attending college was frightening, I had no prior knowledge of what to expect, since I didn’t know anyone who attended college. Regardless of my fears,

I decided that I had no other choice but to take the leap. I would be the first one in my family to ever attend college and this idea alone motivated me.

College Years

I was fortunate to be accepted into a program for students who had very similar educational and economic backgrounds to my own. The Educational Opportunity Fund Program (EOF) was founded in 1968 in response to the educational inequities that many underrepresented students were facing, at the time, in the state of New Jersey. This program assists students with the transition from high school to college by providing one on one academic and personal counselor, workshops and other resources. The critical component of this state-funded program is the mandatory five-week intensive summer program. During this program, I was enrolled in a writing and math class that allowed me to have an understanding of what a college class would be like. This was a reality check for me: I realized that while I was a great student in high school, who I was not prepared for the caliber of work that would be required in college. I struggled to keep up with the work and at times felt discouraged. I began to rethink if college was really for me. I shared all of my struggles and fears with my academic counselor and he reassured me that what I was feeling was actually normal, that many students struggled and that I would be fine. He was right, a lot of my peers were in fact facing the same struggles and again, as a group, we pulled through. The summer program prepared me for what was to come that fall; I was familiar with the academic, social and environment aspects of college.

The beginning of my college career was rather difficult, I decided to live with someone that I met during the summer program and ended up not getting along. This

experience dampened my first year, I was not happy where I lived and found myself spending more time in other people's rooms. I also struggled with my classes, those first two semesters and faced many personal issues that were reflected in my grades that year. I received my lowest GPA that year; I soon realized that I had to make some drastic changes. I took some time to reflect on my first year and came to the conclusion that I needed to take ownership of my life and my college experience. I became very involved with the EOF program. I worked the summer after my freshman year, as a staff member, in the program. Being able to work during the summer with students that were experiencing the same struggles I had faced just a year ago, was an invaluable experience. I gained the confidence that I needed in order to help others, and in turn I ended up growing, as a person. I decided that I would become more involved on campus.

My second year in college marked another turning point for me. I became involved in the EOF student organization and in the Dominican student organization. These organizations exposed me to a network of students, faculty and staff that allowed me to expand my network. I began to realize that it was crucial to have a supportive network of peers and administrators in order to succeed in the college environment. As I became more involved, the better I performed academically. I began to enjoy college and realized that the more engaged I was in the university life, the better my grades. By the end of my sophomore year, I decided that I wanted to take my involvement to the next level. I started to look at other organizations that would expose me to new networks at the university level. I became involved with the umbrella organization for the Latino clubs on campus, this gave me the opportunity to network with new peers and I gained a new set

of skills. I was now, not only supported by my small group of friends, but also able to navigate within different circles.

At this time I began to look into Greek life on campus, but realized that I was not interested in any of the sororities that were on campus at the time. A group of us were looking into a particular sorority that was not currently on our campus, and we decided to formally begin the expansion process. This process would end up taking us about a year; in the spring of my junior year five of us were initiated into the sorority. We established the first chapter of the organization at my university and in the state. This involvement continues to be by far one of the most influential and rewarding experiences that I have encountered. I was now part of a large network of strong women from all over the county that possessed very similar values. Being part of this organization taught me an enhanced set of leadership skills. I experienced, firsthand, what it felt like to have ownership in an organization; it was different from my other student organization involvement. I was now representing my sorority and was a student leader on campus. My profile had to reflect what was expected of me; this pushed me to do better academically. My grades were now better than ever, I was finally a 3.0 student. My college experience underwent a complete transformation from my first-year to my junior year, I was engaged on the college campus and I was once again confident in my academic performance.

I was able to graduate from college as a successful student because of my campus engagement and my connections to faculty and staff. After college, I was accepted into a Masters in Social Work (MSW) program at the same institution. At this point I had a strong sense that working in higher education was my calling, I thoroughly enjoyed being involved on campus, working with students and above all, helping students succeed.

After receiving my MSW, I began to work full time at the same institution I attended for both my undergraduate and graduate degrees. Working on a college campus has been extremely rewarding, I am now seen as a role model to many students, who much like myself, never had someone who looked like them advocate on their behalf. I am now in the final stages of my doctorate in education; I will become the first in my family to earn an undergraduate degree, masters and now a doctorate. This achievement is an immense honor and with it comes great responsibility to pay it forward. I will continue the work that I do every day to assist students in their educational journeys, and ensure their success.

I shared my educational journey in order to set the tone for my dissertation. My own educational journey shaped much of the work that I have done as a researcher and higher education administrator. I am a success story, and stories like mine are rarely told. I am a first-generation Latina that came to this country with no prior education and very little understanding of the environment that I was in. Regardless of all of the barriers that I faced, I succeeded and achieved great academic success.

Statement of the Problem

In order to understand the educational experiences of first-generation Latina college students, we must first look at the current and historical status of Latinos in education in the United States. In 2009, the census bureau reported that the Latina/o population in the U.S. had reached 48.4 million, making Latinos the largest minority group. While the population is growing at an unprecedented rate, the educational attainment levels are not increasing at a proportionate rate. The rate of Latino college enrollment has only grown by (5%), far less than the enrollment growth experienced by whites (14%) and African

Americans (11%) over the last 20 years (Harvey & Anderson, 2005). The educational studies show that the further up the educational ladder one looks, the more Latinos fall behind in staggering numbers in comparison to other racial and ethnic populations in the United States (Fry, 2005; Harvey & Anderson, 2005). Though it is reported that college enrollment among Latino students have, in fact, increased, this growth has been mostly in community colleges (Harvey & Anderson, 2005). Nonetheless, while the college enrollment of Latino students are on the rise, a study of undergraduate data shows that Latinos are half as likely as their white peers to complete a bachelor's degree (Fry, 2005). There is a widening gender gap between Latinos and Latinas within education. "In the last decade college enrollment among Latinas increased by 70 percent, compared with 56 percent among Latino men" (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2009). According to the National Center for Education Statistic (NCES), the gap in bachelor's degree attainment between Latinos and Whites has widened from 14 to 25 percent during the period of 1971 and 2009.

For the purpose of this study, the focus was on first-generation Latinas and their K-16 educational experiences. There is little research currently available that focuses primarily on first-generation Latina students in college. Most of the research that exists on Latinos is positioned within a deficit approach, which mainly focuses on the barriers that Latinas face throughout their educational careers that hinder their success. While it is important to have a good understanding of the barriers, it is also vital to begin to look at the alternative: to delve into the supportive mechanisms present that prompt and nurture success. Latinas are succeeding in college and we must be able to share their stories.

Sharing their success stories provides educators with a better understanding of how Latinas can overcome the odds, despite the diminished expectations.

There is a need for educational research that provides an in-depth look at the educational path that Latinas at the collegiate level have traveled and what has led to their academic success. This research is important because it will better inform administrators in the K-12 and collegiate levels of the process by which first-generation Latinas are able to become academically resilient. This information will equip them with a tangible framework to use to implement better programs and initiatives that will serve Latinas: the fastest growing minority group of women in most colleges.

Since this study focused on a very specific population within the educational community, the following definitions will assist the reader in fully understanding the study: *First-generation Latinas*, for the purpose of this study, are those who self-identify as belonging to the Latino ethnic group and whose parents have not attended college in the United States. *Academic resiliency* refers to “the process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding” (Morales, 2008, p. 198). Both terms are at the center of this research and play key roles in this study.

This research study is significant because it sought to challenge the existing negative images and low expectations of Latinas in college. It is also important to highlight the individual journeys that Latinas face, as much of the current literature on Latinos in college covers both females and males. Although Latinas are graduating at a higher rate in comparison to their male counterparts, they encounter more obstacles.

These obstacles can lead many Latinas to develop strategies for becoming academically resilient. It is essential for educational researchers to include and highlight the process of Latinas becoming academically resilient in their literature. The expectation is that by highlighting the academic success of Latina college students, it inspires and triggers a paradigm shift amongst educators. This paradigm shift would set the tone for other Latina students to begin taking ownership of their future as they chart their path to educational success.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the experiences of five academically resilient first-generation Latina college students. The study intends to help educators gain a more advanced understanding of how to engender environments conducive to academic success for students in this group. This study relied on an in depth depiction of their educational trajectories and used qualitative methods designed to capture the students' lived experiences expanding from the inception of their schooling through the first few years of college. More specifically, it explored the various barriers and support mechanisms that they encountered and how they facilitated or hindered their process in becoming academically resilient. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What experiences contribute to the development of academic resiliency of first-generation Latinas?
2. To what factors do academically resilient first-generation Latinas attribute their educational success?
3. What do the experiences that contributed to the academic resiliency of first-generation Latinas suggest for educational practice and policy?

Organization of the Dissertation

This study includes five chapters. In chapter 2, I introduce the conceptual model and theoretical framework that guided the study, followed by a review of the literature on the educational experiences of Latinos/as, with a particular emphasis on first-generation female students. In Chapter 3, the research methods utilized in the study are provided. In Chapter 4, I provide the findings of the research study. I go in-depth into the lived experiences of academically resilient first-generation Latinas in college. I looked at their experiences and relationships internally, with their families, and environments. Lastly, Chapter 5 provides the discussion and implications for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Latinas face a myriad of barriers throughout their educational careers. Many of these barriers are deeply rooted in American culture and often negatively impact immigrants and their children (e.g. language biases and discrimination, etc.) (Suarez-Orozco & Orozco, 2002; Romo, 1984; Sapiens, 1979). In addition, Latinas encounter barriers that are intrinsic to the Latino culture (e.g. cultural conflicts, gender role and expectations, etc.) (Gloria et. al, 2005). Instead of being discouraged by these barriers, many Latinas utilize these barriers as motivations to become academically resilient and succeed in college (Morales, 2008).

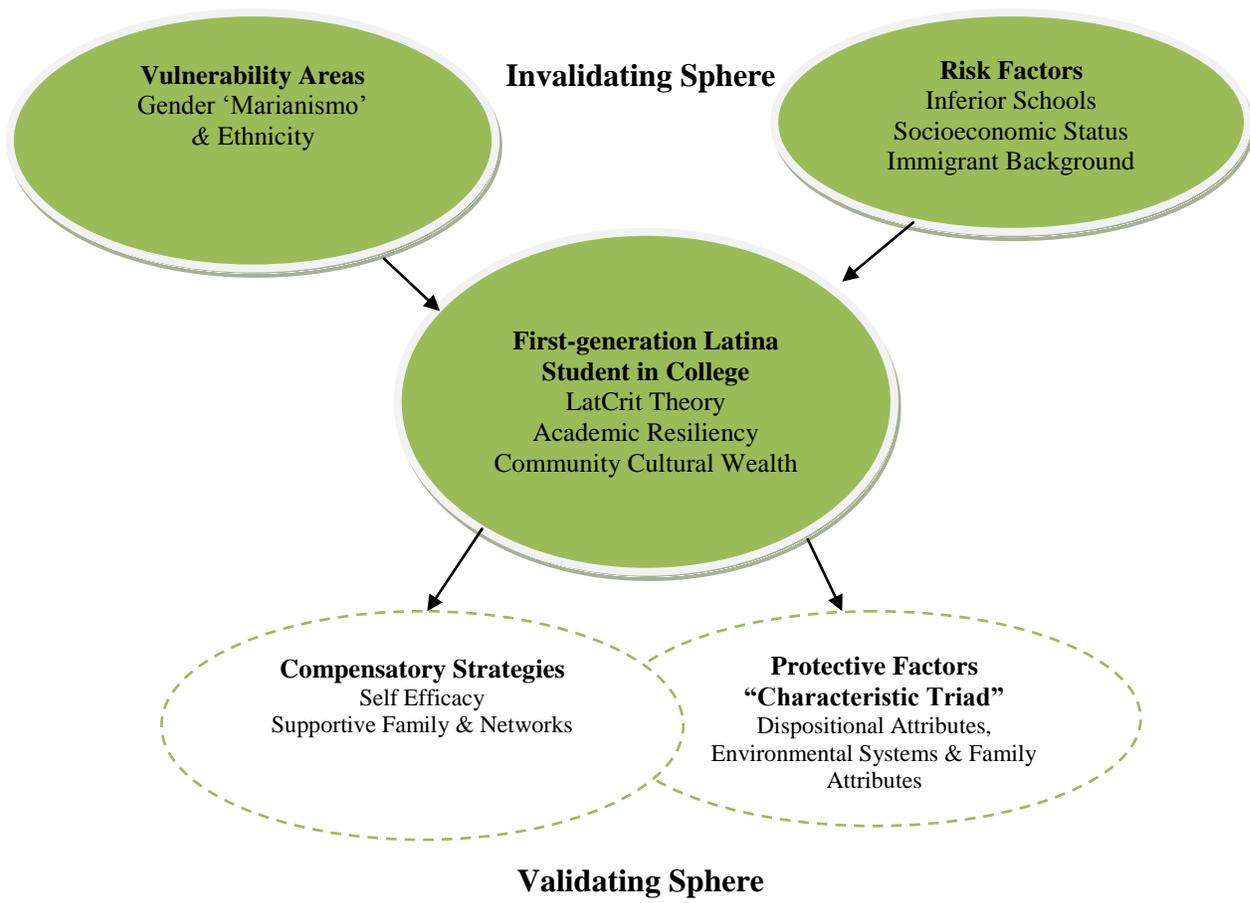
The research literature surveys the educational trajectories of Latinas within the United States, specifically in higher education and the development of their academic resilience. The review of the literature organized is based on the conceptual model that I developed for this study. The conceptual model developed is based on the theoretical framework guiding the study: the synthesis of LatCrit Theory, Community Cultural Wealth Model, and the Academic Resiliency model. The review of the literature begins with the theoretical framework, LatCrit Theory, the Community Cultural Wealth Model, and the Academic Resiliency model. The remaining four sections of the literature review are organized within the factors identified in the Academic Resiliency Model: risk factors, vulnerability areas, compensatory strategies and protective factors.

Overall, the review of the literature presents a research-based perspective on both the barriers, which I refer to as the *Invalidating Sphere* and the support mechanisms, which I

refer to as the *Validating Sphere*. Both the barriers and supportive mechanisms have been present throughout the educational trajectories of first-generation Latinas in college.

Conceptual Model

The resiliency process is the result of the interplay between all of the four components of the Academic Resiliency Model, risk factors, vulnerability areas, compensatory strategies and protective factors (Morales, 2008). The student is within, what I refer, to as the *Invalidating Sphere* she is exposed to *Risk Factors* that also connect to potential *Vulnerability Areas*. As the student progresses within the resiliency cycle she moves into what I refer to as the *Validating Sphere* where she is exposed to positive and reinforcing environment comprised of *Compensatory Strategies* and *Protective Factors*.



Theoretical Framework

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), originally derived from Critical Race Theory (CRT), and the Community Cultural Wealth Model paired with the Academic Resilience Model serve as the theoretical frameworks guiding this study. LatCrit serves as the main theory that is enhanced by the pairing of the Community Cultural Wealth Model and the Academic Resilience Model.

Latino Critical Race Theory in Education

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) is a theoretical framework derived from Critical Race Theory (CRT) that challenges the dominant liberal ideas presented by society, such as colorblindness and meritocracy. CRT originated in the legal field and was then introduced to the field of education. LatCrit and CRT both encourage researchers to take a critical look at institutional practices that continue to marginalize and oppress people of color and advantage Whites (Delgado Bernal, 2002;Yosso, 2005). Latino educational scholars feel that CRT does not address all of the issues that Latinos are facing. LatCrit theorists focus on an extensive list of issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

LatCrit Theory is essential, as the theoretical framework of this study, because it offers a way to engage in strong cultural and gender analysis (Delgado Bernal, 2002). This framework is extremely important because it not only gives us a critical perspective but it also offers a lens through which to envision a raced and gendered epistemology, in particular for Latinas (Delgado Bernal, 2002). LatCrit places the marginalized participant at the center of the analysis, which further strengthens the objectives of this narrative

research study because the population studied is often marginalized. In keeping with the narrative research design, the aim of LatCrit is to give a voice to the participants who would otherwise be excluded or silenced from educational research (Fernandez 2002, Yosso, 2005). LatCrit encourages educational researchers to look at the lived experiences of Latino students from a strengths-based perspective; this is in contrast to much of the current literature, which generally has a deficit-based perspective.

In summary, the central tenets of LatCrit call for educational research to focus on race and racism, to contest dominant ideology, implement social justice and social justice practice, to recognize experiential knowledge of Latino students and finally to view research via a historical lens (Villalpando, 2004).

Community Cultural Wealth Model

Tara Yosso (2005) presents a critical response to Bourdieu's notions presented within the educational research. More specifically, Yosso's critique focuses on the concept of cultural capital and how it has been used to explain the educational disparities between white students and students of color. She points out that Bourdieu's work around cultural capital lead researcher to focus on the deficit perspective regarding the capital of communities of color. Yosso (2005) states,

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital refers to the accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society...Cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor (p. 76).

She critiques the stagnant concepts of cultural capital that continue to overlook the different forms of capital accumulated by communities of color. She refers to these forms of capital as "community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005).

The Community Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso, 2005) stems out of Critical Race Theory (CRT), it "...is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). This model is crucial in understanding the ways in which first-generation Latinas navigate barriers and embrace positive and supportive mechanisms. There are six forms of capital highlighted within this model. While, the different forms of capital can exist independently, they are not mutually exclusive, they often build upon each other (Yosso, 2005). The six forms of capital are the following: Aspirational, Linguistic, Familial, Social, Navigational and Resistant. *Aspirational Capital* allows for individuals to have the ability to maintain their hopes and dreams alive regardless of their life circumstances. This form of capital is invaluable in the lives of first-generation Latinas, as they tend to pave the way for the rest of their families. This form of capital allows them to maintain a positive outlook on life by not allowing their families' socio economic status or background to hinder their educational attainment. *Linguistic Capital* refers to the intellectual and social skills that are attained through communication practices within their families and or communities. More importantly, this form of capital asserts that students of color are at an advantage by virtue of having multiple language and communication skills. This form of capital negates the assumption that being bilingual is a deficit in education. *Familial Capital* embraces the cultural knowledge among the family; there is a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition (Yosso, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 2002). This form of capital also acknowledges the importance, the well being, and healthy connection within the community. *Social Capital* refers to the networks of people and community resources that are available to students;

they can be in the form of peer and social contacts that provide invaluable support and resources. This form of capital reinforces the notion of paying it forward, helping those that come after you. *Navigational Capital* are skills that assist students to successfully navigate through social institutions, such as a college or university. This form of capital is a major cornerstone of resiliency, possessing navigational capital indicates that a student has dispositional traits that will allow him or her to thrive in a hostile environment. Finally, *Resistant Capital* encompasses the skills and knowledge that are developed via "...oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). As it relates to this study, *Resistant Capital* can be seen in the ways in which first-generation Latinas assert themselves in beating the odds and proving people wrong.

Academic Resilience Model

Similar to critical race research, the idea of resiliency was originally researched in the field of psychology and later introduced to educational research. Academic resilience research is the study of high educational achievement despite the presence of risk factors that normally result in low academic performance (Garmenzy, 1991; Gayles, 2005; Morales, 2008; Rubin, 1996; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Resilience is defined as "an interactive and systemic phenomenon, the product of a complex relationship of inner strengths and outer help throughout a person's life span (Butler, 1997, p. 26). In simpler terms, resilience can be seen as the "in-spite of" response to adverse situations (Rubin, 1996; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Resilience research within education can be seen as a form of resistance, much like academic achievement (Gayles, 2005; Cammarota, 2004; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Valenzuela, 1993; Yosso, 2002). Gayles expounds on this concept as, "rather than focus on self-defeating behavior and cultural strategies

that reproduce and entrench social stratification, these studies situate academic achievement as a transformative act” (2005, p. 251).

There are four dynamics present in resilience theory: risk factors, vulnerability areas, protective factors, and compensatory strategies (Morales, 2008; Garmenzy, 1991). *Risk factors* are the circumstances over which the participants have no control such as inferior schools, culture of violence and/or lack of parental involvement. These factors are often seen in the educational research of Latinos and therefore these students are labeled as at risk (Morales, 2008). The *vulnerability area* is comprised of the participant’s gender and the historical role of that gender within the Latino culture. In the case of the participants of this study, their vulnerability comes from their gender and ethnicity, both placing them in a marginalized and oppressed space in education. Third, *compensatory strategies* are the tactics that the participants develop and later utilize to overcome their vulnerabilities. *Protective factors* are the inherent strengths that the student possesses that allow her to mitigate the risk factors that may be present in her life. Some of these factors are characteristics such as having a strong work ethic and having an involved and caring individual in their life. The resiliency process is the result of the interplay between all of the four components (Garmenzy, 1991; Morales, 2008). This process is vital for the academic success of first-generation Latinas in college. The protective factors of academically resilient first-generation are categorized by a characteristic triad, dispositional, family and environment.

For the purpose of this study, we take an in depth look at the three protective factors, the “characteristic triad” comprised of *dispositional factors, familiar and environmental factors*. According to Morales (2004), the interaction among the

“characteristic triad” within the protective factors results in the development of resilience within the lives of individuals (p. 7).

Critique of the Academic Resilience Model

While the Academic Resilience Model is helpful in analyzing the factors that enabled the participants to successfully navigate the American educational system, it did not present an adaptable way at looking at the various factors and their roles during the process. The binary presented by the model of negative and positive factors assumes that students do not possess agency while navigating the negative areas, such as the risk factors and vulnerability areas.

In order to successfully incorporate the Academic Resilience Model within the study, I developed broader categories: Validating and Invalidating Spheres that allow for the participant, to be at the center, determining the impact that the factors have on her educational career.

Invalidating Sphere

Risk Factors

Risk factors are the issues for which the participants have no control over much like the environment (i.e. inferior schools, culture of violence and or lack of parental involvement). These factors are often seen in the educational research of Latinos and therefore these students are labeled as at risk (Morales, 2008).

In 2003, it was reported that nearly forty percent of Latino/a parents did not possess a high school diploma in comparison to about four percent of white parents (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Gandara and Contreras also found “Latino mothers have much less education than other mothers from all other major groups...thus the lower

educational background of Latino youngsters' parents appears to be a significant factor in these children's early low academic performance, and continues to affect their achievement throughout their later education" (p. 19). As a result of lower education levels than other groups and their lack of knowledge about the schools, Latino/a parent may not be as involved in the overall educational experiences of their daughters (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Parents with higher education levels are able to provide more guidance and support to their daughters as they progress in their educational paths.

Cultural & Social Capital

The theory of social reproduction and cultural capital developed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu asserts that the culture of the dominant class is conveyed and renowned by the structure of schools. The major premise of the theory is that schools are active sites that breed social inequalities (Bourdieu, 2000). Bourdieu built his theoretical framework around the important concepts of culture, and capital. Both concepts are based on the notion that structures determine the chances that an individual has to succeed. The resources that are available to students are seen as the, capital while the orientation that the student has towards being able to use the resources is seen as *habitus* (Dumais, 2002; King, 2000). *Habitus* is formed by the various positions that an individual holds, within their family and their overall environment, this lends to the formation of the students disposition. This concept denotes that a marginalized student's race, class and gender do not determine their opportunities, but it does in fact play an important role. In the case of marginalized students, they begin to internalize the norms of the dominant group. Swartz (1997) highlights the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, "Working class youth do not aspire to

high level of educational attainment because, according to Bourdieu, they have internalized and resigned themselves to the limited opportunities for school success that exist for those without much cultural capital” (p. 197). This suggests that while many minority students are compelled to excel in order to overcome their current and past adversities, it remains a strong chance that they can possibly choose to conform to what is expected of them. This conformity is not a mere coincidence, “In spite of formal meritocratic practices, educational institutions can actually enhance social inequities rather than attenuate them” (Swartz, 1997, p. 191). The control of the allocation of status and privilege by the schools continue to suppress the growth and possible mobility of marginalized groups. These marginalized groups are constantly entrapped in a downward cycle that does not allow for any educational attainment beyond what is dictated by the educational institutions (Swartz, 1997).

If Latina students perceive themselves to be inadequate based on their ethnicity, they may, in turn, see higher education as an unattainable feat. It is important that we examine the importance of self-beliefs as it relates to the process of internalization for the Latina student (Gloria et. al, 2005, p. 205). It is interesting to see that, for the most part, their “beliefs” are not positive. Even when many Latina students surpass their issues with institutions of higher education, they are not necessarily changing their perception of education. Cammarota (2004) refers to a term “positive resistance” (Valenzuela, 1999) and this term suggests that while the students do, in fact, achieve academic success, they do not necessarily accept the values of the educational system. The student is utilizing their educational achievement and a strategy contrary to many of the societal oppressions that they experienced (Cammarota, 2004).

In American society, in order for a student to be academically successful, they have to internalize the values of the dominant group and begin to substitute their *habitus*. These particular cultural traditions are a reflection of what society deems as acceptable or unacceptable. The distinction is what leads to certain groups being privileged while others are marginalized. Upward social mobility from a marginalized status is attributed to an individual's *cultural capital*, which refers to non-financial social assets, many times attributed to educational attainment (Harker, 1990; Swartz, 1990). As a result, in order for students to be able to move the social-economic ladder they must acquire a certain amount of capital. Within the sphere of cultural capital, there are other forms of capital that individuals of the dominant group possess. Attaining cultural capital outside a student's home and community is only possible by the education that the student is able to attain. Unfortunately, the educational system in the U.S. does not facilitate the process for a student to attain all of the forms of capital. *Social Capital* is defined as the resources that are available to individuals that are part of certain social circles, which carry power and influence and is harder to attain (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Students from marginalized groups are continuously held to the standards of those students who are part of the dominant and thriving culture. This does not allow for education to serve its purpose, to assist marginalized groups in the acquisition of capital. Even when the parents of traditionally marginalized children do possess a certain level of education, they are still not able to provide the social capital the student needs (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987).

The demands placed on Latina students by the dominant group are not easily managed. They are either told to completely alienate themselves or succumb to the norms

of the institution. There are possible factors that can either worsen or ease the imbalance that some Latinas face as a result of the collision between their familial and academic environment. A major factor is the amount of capital that the particular Latina possesses (Gonzalez, Jovel & Stoner, 2004).

Vulnerability Areas

The vulnerability area is an aspect of the participant that may potentially become problematic. In the case of the participants of this study, their vulnerability area stems from their ethnicity, gender and their socio-economic status, all placing them in a marginalized and oppressed position in education.

Ethnicity

Latino students are more likely than other ethnic groups to be first generation college students (Santiago & Cunningham, 2005; Swail, Cabrera & Lee, 2004). Only half of Latino students come from a household where one parent had attended college and even fewer received a degree above bachelors, half of the national rate (Swail, Cabrera & Lee, 2004). Latino immigrants are less likely than their native-born counterparts to enroll in college. Many Latino immigrants who take on the language, norms and values of middle-class Anglo Americans are accepted into the majority society, provided that race or color is not an inhibiting factor (Sapiens, 1979). While these parents are urging their children to become good students and to advance within their studies, there are significant differences along the path to educational achievement. The Latino immigrant family thinks as a collective, if the student succeeds; they will in turn provide the family with the resources they lack (Suarez-Orozco & Orozco, 2002). This sense of collectivity

places a heavy burden on many Latino students, who feel they are responsible for the advancement of their family.

The cultural experiences of Latinos can pose a threat to the dreams of a better tomorrow for many immigrant families (Suarez-Orozco & Orozco, 2002). These students must become skilled in navigating the maze that is placed in front of them once they arrive in this country. This journey to become connected to the new culture can present several obstacles that not all students are able to overcome (Romo, 1984; Sapiens, 1979).

Language Barriers

There is a lack of connection between many Latina student and their schools. It is fueled even further when we begin to look at the history of discrimination that has existed in the United States. One of the most prevalent discriminatory practices that have taken place against immigrants has its roots within their English language deficiency (Sapiens, 1979). This is a deep-rooted issue in the history of the United States and it still affects current day immigrants. The language barrier creates a sense of exclusion from the education system for Latino/a parents and can be significant since they may not be able to communicate with the institutions their children attend. Non-English speaking parents often rely on their children to translate the necessary information that their schools provide.

Attaining proficiency in the English language along with other factors has proven to be instrumental in the success of these students. The understanding of the culture and resources is critical for both the families and students. As a result of the lack of support by their teachers in the k-12 educational system, many first-generation Latinos begin to internalize a feeling of being deficient and of non-belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). It

is reported that first-generation Latinos have the lowest college enrollment in comparison to second and third-generation Latinos in the United States (Fry, 2007).

Gender

As seen in the literature, there is tremendous pressure placed on the Latina students outside of school, creating a learning environment that is not conducive to success (Sy, 2006; Ceja, 2004; Cammarota, 2004). Among the most commonly cited obstacles to academic achievement for females is the issue of role conflicts. This manifests itself in a metaphorical ‘tug of war’ between familial/social obligations and the desire to excel academically (Morales, 2008). This so called *tug of war* between school and home can be a significant obstacle for many of these young Latina females.

Latina students may begin to develop distinctive personas that they have to manage; they are the daughters in their homes and the student at their institutions (Gloria, M., Castellanos, Jeanett & Orozco, Veronica, 2005). This dualistic relationship may intensify as their families question their student persona. The cultural stressors that these Latinas can possibly face can be overwhelming. In some studies, Latina students described the awkwardness of feeling both happy and guilty at the same time (Gonzalez, Jovel & Stoner, 2004). This constant struggle between their familial and student roles can cause some Latinas to perceive education as negative and impossible to manage. “Despite students developing bicultural or other coping skills to manage conflicting personal and environmental values this imbalance (i.e., cultural incongruity) increases the likelihood of academic non-persistence” (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez & Rosales, 2005, p. 203). While this imbalance is often present, other reactions exist concurrently, “Latinas are taking

their lives into their own hands, and leaving the expectations behind” (Gonzalez, Jovel & Stoner, 2004, p. 17).

The Latina student is placed in a position where she must choose between her own educational goals and the needs of her family. Within the Latino family there is a high demand for the children, especially the daughters, to remain committed to the home. The term *familismo* (Ry, 2006; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007) encompasses the overall cultural essence of the Latino family. This also places a heavy burden on the females in the home, within the realm of the family, the women are often held up to strict standards. Another ideal that is ingrained in the structure of the Latino family is that of *Marianismo*. This ideal denotes that the female must continue to enact their role of caretaker within the home (Sy, 2006). These values place a strong hold on the educational goals of the Latina student. For some Latinas, however, gender dynamics within families place restrictions that limit their potential (Cammarota, 2004). The female is placed in a very demanding situation, where she must tend to her family and her studies, her family always having the priority (Morales, 2008; Lopez, 2003).

Socio-Economic Background

Parental involvement differs based on familial socioeconomic status (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). The educational experiences of children is highly impacted by the involvement of their parents, the expectation is that parents are involved at all times. Gandara and Contreras (2009) stated that “the economic situation of parents, their schooling history, the neighborhoods into which children are born and raised-all have powerful effects on children’s aspirations and preparation for schooling before they even step inside a classroom” (p. 250). Cammarota

(2004) illustrates that the family's economic demands create an additional stressor for the Latina student. He states, "Yet, because her mother felt intense economic pressures, she also suggested that Cecilia find work to help support the family and contribute to the care of her younger siblings. Between her responsibilities at work and home, she had little time for school" (Cammarota, 2004, p. 63). Orfield (2000) states that, "Students in concentrated poverty communities and schools grow up without experience preparing them to function effectively in the middle-class settings of college ..." (p. 195). It is highly unlikely that a Latina student chooses to abandon her familial responsibilities in the process of her own betterment. The Latino family values the ideal of community, and this requires the female student to always place her family first, even before her own goals. According to Lareau (2000) there is a "gap between the relatively high level of involvement of middle-class and upper-middle class parents and the relatively low level of involvement of working-class and lower class parents" (p. 6).

Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) stated, "higher socioeconomic status parents are more likely to talk to their children about college...are more predisposed to make financial plans to pay for college...and are more knowledgeable about financial aid programs" (p. 124). The economic status of the family is a strong indicator of the route that the Latina students embarks on, if she is not highly determined and knowledgeable of the options, her familial background can possibly hinder her educational attainment. Since there are so many institutions, they each come with their own specific admissions criterion. Gandara and Contreras (2009) found that:

Latino students have far less information about the differences among postsecondary institutions, the differences in the likelihood of completing a degree at a two-year versus a four-year college, and the way in which it is possible to finance a college education (p. 228).

Moreover, this lack of knowledge influences her understanding of the differences between the many institutions of higher education that exist.

Validating Sphere

Compensatory Strategies and Protective Factors

In this section the literature that correlates to the compensatory strategies and protective factors are merged as both factors work interchangeably, as the Latina students reaches the validating sphere. Compensatory strategies are the tactics that at risk individuals develop and later utilize to overcome their vulnerabilities. Protective factors are the inherent strengths that the student possesses that allow him/her to mitigate the risk factors and vulnerability areas that may be present in his/her life. Some of these factors are characteristics such as having a strong work ethic, having an involved and caring individual in their life etc.

Dispositional Factors

Dispositional factors are inherent qualities that academically resilient first-generation Latinas possess that are relatively stable throughout their lives (Morales, 2004). There are various characteristics present within academically successful first-generation Latinas. Gandara (1995) acknowledges the students for their resilient actions and behavior, and student spirit in overcoming adversity and oppressive environments. Once educational expectations shift positively, it is possible for first-generation Latinas, in college, to begin the reconciliation process internally. They must first to come to terms with the societal factors; Latinas are more likely to succeed in school when they have a positive sense of self (i.e., self-esteem), resiliency (Morales, 2008) and self-efficacy (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, Rosales et al, 2005). Breaking down the negative perceptions

that Latinas possess regarding educational institutions can be achieved in many ways. Browns & Dobbins (2000) point out at the end of their research that work needs to be done to recruit more instructors of color, but also at the same time all instructors should be more culturally competent.

Familial Factors

In order to fully understand the background of Latina students in the United States, we must first begin with their core, the family. The framework of the Latino family can be simply defined with one word - closeness. The Latino family highly values each of its members and their priority is the betterment of the entire family, in other words it is believed that they must all look after each other. According to Morales (2004), “...family is of critical importance, since besides the direct influence on resiliency, (e.g. competency skills), the family also affects related personality and social milieu dimensions, thereby exerting indirect influence on stress resistance as well” (p. 15). At this point, many Latina students tend to hold in high regard their family and their support towards their educational goals (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, Rosales, 2005). In the literature, we begin to see more about the Latino family playing a different role in the college selection process from that of their white counterparts. This is due mainly to the limited knowledge that some Latino families have about college. It is evident in the research that even though Latino parents are extremely supportive of their children attending college, these parents for the most part did not attend college (Ceja, 2004; González et al, 2003; Tornatzky et al 2002; Gándara, 1995). Despite the limited knowledge by some Latino parents about college, their involvement has proven to be critical to the successful enrollment of their children (Perna and Titus, 2005). Even

though some Latino parents have not attained a high level of education they can help Latina students by placing education on a pedestal. This message that education is important will be internalized even though their parents may lack this higher level of education (Carter 2005; González et al, 2003).

Mother/Daughter Relationship

One of the most influential relationships within the Latino family is that of the mother and her daughter. In the Latino home, this relationship proves to be a determining factor in educational persistence for many Latina students. “Although mothers ... provided their daughters with the motivation to succeed in school, mothers sometimes communicated conflicting messages that encouraged both independence and subservience to their families’ needs” (Cammarota, 2004, p. 63). While, the mother–daughter relationship is seen as one of the most prominent, the ideals and opinions of the men in the family have a strong influence on the Latina student as well. The cultural norms that are being presented in the Latino home can be conflicting at times. “... Students had more difficulty rejecting the ‘girls aren’t supposed to be smart’ messages that seemed to bombard them because the messages often came from their fathers or husbands who were less discarded” (Morales, 2008, p. 204).

Environmental Factors

Academically resilient first-generation Latinas are surrounded by environmental factors that play a direct role in their lives. There are various environmental factors that will be discussed: Campus climate, supportive peer-networks, role models and mentors.

Campus Climate

Campus climate is one of the most influential areas within environmental factors;

a supportive campus climate propels the success of Latinas in college. Campus racial climate is defined by Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) as, “the overall racial environment of the college campus” (p. 60). Higher education researcher, Sylvia Hurtado (1992) has done extensive work looking at the campus racial climate and found that Latino students are more likely than their white counterparts to perceive the college environment as hostile and that “perceptions of the racial climate also differed by institutions, although it appears that dimensions of location and ethnic composition of the campus were confounded with group differences” (p. 546). Hurtado (1992) also found that, “no single element of the environment may work to produce racial tension on college campuses. It is a configuration of external influences (historical and contemporary), structural characteristics of institutions and group relations, and institutionalized ideologies” (p. 564). According to Hernandez and Lopez (2007) “in relation to Latino college students, the campus climate can facilitate Latina/o students’ transition to collegiate life and combat common problems such as feelings of isolation (p. 105).

Supportive Peer Networks

Along with an encouraging campus climate, academically resilient first-generation Latinas also benefit from being surrounded by supportive peer networks (Conchas, 2006; Stanton-Salazar (1997). There is a need for these students to find a community that they identify with and are able to interact with when on their college campuses (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). In addition to individual peer relationships, the research also illustrates that co-curricular involvement within their college campuses promotes academic resiliency for Latino students (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). Gibson,

Gandara, & Koyama (2004) stated, "Students' sense of fitting in and being comfortable in school and their decisions about applying themselves to their studies are constructed, negotiated, and reconstructed on an ongoing basis through their relationships with peers" (p. 5). Conchas (2006) stated, "Peer group influence can serve as a mediating factor that may promote either compliance with or resistance to school rules for success" (p. 96).

Role Models & Mentors

Research shows that it is highly essential that Latinas students become acclimated with their campus environments by way of meaningful affiliations. Morales (2004) states, "mentorship outside the family, in its many forms, is a recurrent theme in academic resilience literature" (p. 13). Another primary source of support for Latina/o students are faculty or staff mentors (Gandara & Osugi, 1994; Hernandez, 2000). Latina/o faculty and staff who have navigated and succeeded within the educational system are models of academic success for Latina/o students (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). The availability of mentors who are Latina/o faculty or administrators, however, is limited (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

Summary and Synthesis of the Reviewed Literature

As the review of the literature demonstrates, first-generation Latinas have endured countless social and educational challenges throughout their schooling. As the literature highlights, many Latinas have in fact become academically resilient and overcome the barriers faced. Overall, the educational research conducted on Latinas has predominantly been based on a deficit approach. The research has also not been as specific in the differences that exist between males and females and the influence that being a first-generation poses on their educational attainment.

It is reported that Latinas outnumber their male counterparts in terms of college enrollment and degree conferral (Harvey & Anderson, 2005). Latinas awarded degrees have increased at a more rapid rate and represent a larger portion of Latino degree recipients. It can be strongly inferred that the idea that Latinas are still being constrained by traditional gender-based roles and are not attending college. Overall, the educational research conducted on Latinos has predominantly been based on a deficit approach.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study uses a raced-gendered epistemology, focused on changing ways of thinking about traditionally marginalized individuals, more specifically female students (Creswell, 2007). I drew on a narrative research design because it possesses a strong link to the epistemology guiding this study. The purpose of this research design is to foreground the voices of traditionally marginalized women of color in college. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as a story, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Using narrative methodology I collected the stories by conducting in depth, open ended interviews with Latina college students and then using the LatCrit Theory along with the Community Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso, 2005) and the Academic Resilience Model (Liddle, 1994; Morales, 2004) to analyze and construct the data of five academically resilient first-generation Latinas at a major northeastern public research institution. By incorporating the theoretical framework in the methods of this study I was able to take an interdisciplinary approach to the research conducted.

Pilot Study

This research was informed by a pilot study that I conducted in spring 2010 that analyzed the educational experiences of academically resilient first-generation Latinas in college (Reyes, 2010). In the pilot study, I interviewed three Latina college students, pursuing an understanding of the factors present in their k-16 educational experiences and the role they played in their academic resiliency development. As a result of that study I was able to identify the overarching factors that influenced their resiliency development:

their disposition, their family and their environment. All of the participants had very distinct stories but they all presented similar themes as it relates to the factors present throughout their educational careers. The pilot study allowed me to focus my research questions. It also better informed the process the collection and analysis of the data.

Setting

The narrative study took place at the main campus of a major northeastern public research institution. The institution has three campuses in total, which are located in the northern, central and southern parts of the state. The central campus is comprised of a Liberal Arts College and 8 professional schools, which include pharmacy, nursing, engineering, business, management and labor relations, communications, planning and public policy and education. The overall enrollment of this institution is approximately 25,000 undergraduate students of which approximately 1,300 are Latinos.

Sample

In keeping with the qualitative research approach I selected a purposeful sample of five first-generation Latina college students. A “purposeful sample”, dictates that I purposively chose participants that provided an in depth understanding of the research problem being investigated (Creswell, 2007). The participants in this study were female students who identify as being first-generation academically successful Latinas ranging from their first to fourth year of study in college, with a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher and were highly involved on their campus. The participants were also chosen from different countries of origin, as this provides diversity to the overall outcomes of the study.

The participants were selected using a snowball sampling method. I drew upon various institutional stakeholders who identified cases of interest who were likely to be information-rich (Creswell, 2007). These stakeholders work within various academically focused departments that work very closely with many first-generation students of color. The departments that were contacted were the Educational Opportunity Fund Program (EOF), Academic Services the Ronald E. McNair Program (a post-baccalaureate program that serves low-income, first generation college students and students from groups historically underrepresented in graduate education) and the Center for Latino Arts & Culture.

After receiving the names of the potential participants from the various stakeholders, I personally reached out to the participants. I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the study. Once I contacted all of the potential participants and received an indication of those willing to participate, five participants were selected based on their profile (academic and university involvement). I formally requested for permission for them to participate in the study by having each participant complete a Human Subject Consent Form.

Data Collection

In order for a narrative study to be of high quality it should use multiple methods of data collection to build an in-depth storied experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The data collection process for this study underwent several phases for which three methods of data collection were implemented. The primary source of data collection was participant generated narratives. The secondary source of data collection was two semi-structured in-depth interviews. The third source of data collection was a

focus group interview, in which I gathered all of the participants to discuss their educational experiences. In addition, the college transcript of each of the participants was reviewed.

Phase I: Autobiographical Writing

The first phase of data collection was a participant generated narrative. Narrative inquiry assumes that the participants' realities are constructed primarily by narrating their own stories (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In keeping with LatCrit Theory, the theoretical framework of the study, it is crucial for participants to gain a voice, as they are often silenced within educational discourses (Fernandez, 2002; Yosso, 2005). The rationale for having the participants engage in autobiographical writing is to maximize the richness of the data that highlighted their lived experiences and it also served as a guide for the second interview. Narrative inquiry values the participant's expression of feelings in language therefore validating the way that they construct meaning rather than having the researcher impose her own interpretation of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This method required for there to be a great deal of openness and trust between myself and participant allowing for there to be a balanced power relationship (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

The participants were asked to chronicle their K-16 educational experiences in order to provide me with a detailed account of their educational trajectories. This allowed me to critically analyze each stage of their education and how it impacted them as a student. I instructed the participants to write their autobiographies after their first interview but before their second interview. This assisted me in developing more focused and specific questions for the second interview. Each participant was given a writing

prompt guide that was sent to her electronically. This guide asked them to reflect on their educational experiences and their interactions with their family as it relates to education. The participants were given a certain amount of time in which to submit a typed electronic copy of their autobiography to me. By having the narrative typed, I was able to more efficiently analyze the data. These autobiographies served as the foundation of the narrative that I constructed by integrating them with the in-depth interviews.

Phase II: In-depth Interviews

By utilizing the participant autobiographical narrative as a guide, the second phase of data collection was in depth semi-structured interviews. This method of data collection allowed the exploration of several topics to help uncover the participants' views but otherwise respects how they construct their responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In-depth interviews allowed for the participants to provide information rich data about their educational experiences and how they became academically successful college students. According to Patton (1990), "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowledgeable, and able to be made explicit" (p.278). In keeping with the LatCrit Theory and the Community Cultural Wealth Model the participants' experiences were the essence of the study and were therefore substantially highlighted in the findings.

In order to maximize the richness of the data, there were two separate interviews conducted with each participant. The first interview was guided by a protocol that focused on getting to know the participants and gaining deeper insight on their cultural background and the role it played within their K-12 educational trajectory. Using my observation notes as a guide, the second interview protocol focused on the participants'

collegiate experiences. The protocol asked the participants to speak specifically about key figures and key points that they identify as being pivotal to the development of their academic resiliency. This process allowed the participants with the opportunity to reflect on their academic journey.

The interviews lasted approximately 1 to 1½ hours. All of the interviews took place on campus in convenient locations for both the participants and myself. Most importantly they were private and both physically and emotionally comfortable, which was conducive to a meaningful and genuine interview process as it seen as a formal conversation between the participant and myself (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of the participants and were transcribed verbatim. After the transcription was completed each of the participants were given the opportunity to look over her transcripts and identify any inconsistencies, if any between their recollection of the interview and the data. This process of member checking ensured that the data was consistent and genuine (Creswell, 2007). Following the suggestions given by Seidman (1998) properly managing the data from interviews was critical to the success of this study. The audio of the interviews and transcriptions were labeled by participant, date and interview number and then placed in a labeled folder for each of the participants. In this way the data was easily accessible at any point throughout the research process (Seidman, 1998).

Phase III: Focus Group Interview

The third method of data collection was a focus group that included all of the participants. Focus groups are considered to be moderated group interviews that take place among six to eight participants from similar background (Morgan, 1998). This

method was critical to the data collection process as it allowed for the participants to interact and discuss their thoughts about their educational trajectories. The discussion that transpired during the focus group was “the essential data” produced (Morgan, 1998, p. 1).

I was intentional about the structure of the focus group, the ground rules and the location. Setting clear ground rules allowed each of the participants to speak and not be interrupted. This validated their lived experiences, as women of color their voices are often silenced. The focus group was conducted in the evening to accommodate all of the participants during the second week of classes in the fall of 2011. Since it was a late evening and most of them were coming out of class, I provided pizza and drinks as dinner. The location was private which allowed for the participants to feel comfortable disclosing their personal stories and thoughts. The conference room was cozy and we sat around a table that created a sense of security since we were all facing each other.

Conducting the focus group allowed for me to see the interaction between the participants and identify patterns that otherwise would have gone unnoticed. The focus group interview questions were developed by incorporating the major areas covered in both in-depth interviews. The areas covered were familial involvement, the impact of their environment and their personal attributes that led them to be academically successful students. I served as the moderator for the focus group and facilitated the discussion among the group. A graduate student served as an assistant, she was responsible for monitoring the recorder and was able to take comprehensive notes for the duration of the focus group. This assistant facilitated my role, she allowed for me to become more in tune with the discussion (Krueger, 1998). I closed up the focus group with an open conversation about their thoughts and how it felt to discuss their personal

stories with students that shared a similar background. This conversation allowed for the group to connect on a different level beyond the structured questions.

Document Collection

Since the goal of the study was to highlight the lived experiences of five academically resilient first-generation Latinas, it was critical that some key academic records be analyzed in order to ensure that the participants were in fact academically successful and had the required academic credentials. Each participant was asked to provide copies of their college transcripts. Once collected, I placed the documents in each of the participant's individual file. By analyzing their academic records I was able to get a better sense of the academic achievements of the five participants, which chronicled their course taking patterns and activities (Patton, 1990). A document summary sheet was used to keep track of this information. Additionally, I developed a contact summary form for each of the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1984). This form served as a snapshot of data collected for each of the participants, it included all contact information along with any memos that may relate to the participant. This form ensured that I was able to recall all of the different instances when contact was made between the participants and me. This form included information about the initial outreach contact, the interview dates, times and locations, as well as any contact made after the interviews, and when the participants were asked to review the interview transcriptions. It also included the dates when the autobiographical writing was assigned to each of the participants and when they were submitted it to me. This process allowed me to be able to look back at all of the interactions with each of the participants and see how the study

progressed. It ultimately chronicled all of the communication that transpired between the participants and me.

Role of the Researcher

As an academically resilient first-generation Latina college graduate, and current college administrator at the institution where I conducted this study, I understood that I needed to be aware of my own personal experiences and biases. This awareness prevented me from using experiences as an interpretive lens on those being studied. In order to practice self-reflexivity, (process of awareness of self as the researcher) throughout the research process I maintained a journal (Creswell, 2007). In this journal I reflected on the overall goal and vision of this study and noted potential concerns or connections to my own experiences.

Data Analysis

Narrative analysis began by approaching the data collected in the study and analyzing it for the story elements, a chronology of unfolding events, and unfolding points or epiphanies (Creswell, 2007). The analytical process that was used in this study is best described by Creswell (2007) as being a spiral. The data analysis spiral suggests that the researcher moves in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach, which means that the data is continuously revisited and analyzed multiple times. The data analysis process for the study followed a three-phase plan: phase I, review of documents and transcription of in-depth interviews; phase II, analysis of in-depth interviews and autobiographical narrative; phase III, comparison across stories through a cross-case analysis that reviewed the autobiographical writing, individual interviews and the focus group data.

Phase I: Review of Documents and Transcripts of In-depth Interviews

The first step was to review all of the documents collected from each of the participants. This gave me a foundation in regards to the academic portfolio of each of the participants. Then the ten in-depth interviews were transcribed verbatim. An individual word document was developed for each participant that was comprised of the analysis of the academic documents and data from the first interview.

Phase II: Analysis of In-Depth Interviews and Autobiographical Narratives

Continuing with the narrative analysis process, all of the ten in-depth interviews were coded using an inductive scheme. According to Patton (1990) the process of inductive analysis is where the salient categories emerge from the data. This required for me to take the text apart and look for categories, themes or dimensions of information. In order to incorporate the theoretical framework of the study into the data analysis process, all ten interviews were coded using a deductive scheme developed in accordance with the conceptual framework of the study. First, a master list of codes was developed for the interviews for each of the participants. This list was developed based on the academic resiliency concept *Protective Factors*, which are made up of *Dispositional*, *Familial* and *Environment Factors*, based on the educational stories of each of the participants. The same coding scheme was used for both the first and second interviews of each of the participants. The codes from each participant were tested on the others to see similarities and differences. I also continuously wrote down notes in my research journal about the findings and the links to the research questions. After the data from the interviews and the autobiographical narratives were inductively analyzed a list of codes will be constructed for each of the five students based on all of the data compiled from their interviews and

autobiographical narratives. The data was evaluated in order to test the usefulness and centrality (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This required me to see the usefulness of the data is in answering the guiding research questions and if they are in fact central to the stories that will unfold about the phenomenon that will be described by each of the participants. This allowed me to analyze more closely the patterns in the experiences of each participant. I then went back to chunks of the data to reconfirm their relevancy to the codes and analyze the relationships between codes.

In order to successfully analyze all of the data collected, the three-dimensional space approach by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) was implemented. This approach called for the data to be analyzed for three elements: interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present and future), and situational (storyteller's places). Before starting the construction of the stories, I reviewed the autobiographies and conducted minor grammatical edits where necessary. Each story was constructed by looking at what each of the five participants wrote in regards to their K-16 educational experience. The stories were then organized by educational stages, by me, with minor input. This process required for the story being developed to be renegotiated between myself and the participants throughout the re-storying process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Phase III: Analysis of Autobiographical Narrative, In-depth Interviews and Focus Group Data: Comparison Across Stories

After the renegotiation process was completed, the autobiographical writing, interview and focus group data were organized on a thematic chart, this allowed me to look across all of the stories that were developed for the five participants and noted the common and disconfirming themes (Creswell, 2007).

Upon the completion of the analysis, a narrative was developed for each of the participants; this organizational concept was developed based on the research presented by Erik Morales that focused on academic resilience in his book *Promoting Academic Resilience in Multicultural America*. In order to give more depth to the narratives I decided to have their autobiographies serve as the introduction to the each of the participant narrative. The identified *Protective Factors*, more specifically, the *characteristic triad: dispositional, familial and environmental factors* of each participant served as the organizational template for the data analysis of the study for both the individual interview and focus group data. Under each of the areas of the characteristic triad, the emergent themes are listed supported by data from their interviews.

Validity Procedures

Throughout the study there were several processes in place in order to ensure the validity of the research. The following methods were used in the research process: Triangulation of the data, member checking, and peer review (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Triangulation across all ten interviews and the autobiographical writing for the five participants called for me to make use of multiple sources, methods and theories to corroborate the evidence being put forth in the data analysis process (Creswell, 2007). The second method was member checking, where the five participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts and the preliminary analysis and will give me their feedback so that any errors are addressed. This is crucial in keeping with the Community Wealth Model, which calls for the participants of the study to become the authors of their own stories, to have a voice in the research. Another method that was in place was to have the data analysis peer reviewed once it was completed (Creswell,

2007). Having colleagues with prior background knowledge on the research of students of color at the university review the research findings ensured that the research process was conscientious and comprehensive.

Ethical Considerations

In keeping with the narrative research design, it was key to conduct the research in a way that it is seen as dependable and steady, as it has the potential to shift the experiences of those whom we engage (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). There were several components that were addressed in the study that were put in place to ensure that the study was carried out ethically: anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent (Creswell, 2007). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym in order to ensure confidentiality and all of her information was maintained in private individual folders. In order to ensure that each participant was fully aware of the components of the study and of their rights, they were asked to read and sign an *Informed Consent Form*. This form addressed various important elements of the research process. It briefly described the goals and procedures that were utilized for the data collection of the study; the right of the participant to withdraw from the study at any point; and potential risks and benefits associated with the study.

Limitations

As with any research study, there were limitations that need to be addressed. As Patton (1990) notes, “there is no perfect research design. There are always tradeoffs” (p.162). Therefore, it was critical for me as the researcher to make evident the limitations that were present in the study. This study was limited mainly by sample size. There were only five participants, which limited the diversity of voices that could have been part of

the study. Despite these limitations, the narratives constructed for the five academically resilient first-generation Latinas serve as a powerful tool for other students of color, practitioners at the K-12 and collegiate level, and for parents that are seeking ways to assist their children in becoming academically resilient. These stories serve as evidence as to how and why students of color succeed at the collegiate level. By identifying the factors that were critical to the development of academic resiliency for each of the participants, there is a great opportunity to assist students in connecting with programs that may replicate these factors. These narratives also gave the participants the power to tell their stories; they were given a voice that allowed them to share their lived experiences, experiences often not heard because they are members of a traditionally marginalized group.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

“Never give up on what you believe or know is right. If others doubt you, desert you or oppose you use that as motivation. But keep positive. Earn their respect. By holding your nerve. And fighting to the end”. ~ Author Unknown

This narrative study aimed at focusing on the educational trajectories of five academically resilient first-generation Latinas in college. Since the Latino Critical Race Theory, the Community Cultural Wealth Model, and the Academic Resilience model guided this study it was crucial that the genuine lived experiences of the participants via their autobiographies were showcased. The participant’s profiles that I developed are followed by their own words. I then present my interpretation of the interview data to further enrich the narratives developed by each participant. The interview data is organized around the three protective factors in order to illustrate the role that each factor played in their lives. The *Dispositional Factors* are inherent characteristics that each of the participant possessed at any given time that resulted in their positive academic achievement. The *Familial Factors* are the characteristics demonstrated by the participants’ family that empower them to become academically successful. The *Environmental Factors* are the characteristics presented within the participants’ environments that lead to their academic success, most of which are present in their schools and communities.

Melissa

“Actually, it was never discussed but since I went to a high school in which 98% of the class [was planning on] attending college and were accepted, I went with it.”

I really enjoyed my time with Melissa; she was extremely energetic and friendly. Melissa was born in a major urban city in New Jersey and later moved to a nearby town. She is the first in her family to be born in the United States; her family is originally from Guatemala. Every summer until the age of 10, she traveled to Guatemala, accompanied by her grandmother, so she could experience life in America and in Guatemala. She made sure to let me know that her experiences within both countries showed her that these countries have two entirely different styles of living. She is an only child and her parents divorced shortly after her birth, and her mother subsequently moved to another house in the same town. Her uncle later came to the United States, as well, when she was 5 years old. Since then, her household consists of her mother, her grandmother, and her uncle.

Melissa Shares Her Story

My mother was about to graduate college when she had the opportunity to come to this country. She took that opportunity. Her high school completion did not count here; therefore, she attended night school to complete her GED. She did it in conjunction with my uncle. They both have their GEDs and learned the English language. My mother currently works at a major airport in New Jersey with Parking Services as a cashier. She has been working there for over 15 years. My uncle currently works as the Vice President and driver of a trucking company in a major urban city in New Jersey for over 7 years. My uncle has served the position of father in my household since he has been with me since I can remember. I have never had contact with my father after my parents' divorced which was his choice.

I grew up in a small town surrounded my major urban cities. Many ethnicities live in my town while I grew up, mostly Brazilians, Portuguese, Peruvian, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans. Before that my town was mostly composed of Polish and Portuguese people. I consider my neighborhood mostly an urban area due to the population of my town that is only one square mile long and range of ethnicities that can be found in such a small area. I grew up knowing all my neighbors. My house has a bodega on the first floor so many people are always gathered in the front and this is normal for me to see.

Elementary and Middle School Years

For elementary and middle school, I attended the public schools in my hometown. I was put in early pre-school as well before kindergarten two blocks away from my house. I had great experiences with my teachers. I was placed into gifted and talented classes for most of the time. Because the schools were small, I had direct communication with the administrative staff. Once I became part of the student council, clubs and such, I had more communication with them. I had the option of skipping one and half years of elementary school, but my mother refused because she felt it would affect my interaction with my peers. I had great interactions with my peers both inside and outside of school. I loved being surrounded with people since at home I was the center of attention most of the time. I had many friends from different ethnicities and in different circles. I was placed in different activities outside of school such as a dance classes, theater classes and music classes. I slowly became a well-rounded learning artist. I took various seminars during the summers as well. While in middle school, I attended summer program for performing arts for four summers since I was eleven and I received classes in dance, theatre, and music from professionals in the arts field. I excelled academically in school

as well. I was salutatorian for my 8th grade class and was the student speaker for graduation. I received the highest honors in Science, Music, and Math.

High School Years

For high school, I was accepted to a highly selective school, a public county school located in a neighboring town in New Jersey. I took the opportunity but I knew that I was going to leave my hometown friends who all attended my hometown high school even though I still lived in my hometown while I attended another high school. At first, I was hesitant about going to a high school thirty minutes away from my hometown and making new friends was something that at that time I did not feel comfortable with since I had an established circle. My high school is an acclaimed performing arts and science high school. My family was thrilled that I was attending it. I joined the dance and the musical theater department and I quickly created different circles of friends. My graduating class consisted of 60 boys and 60 girls, and I knew everyone of them. I had the best experiences at my high school ranging from musical theatre productions to organizing student council programs. Every summer during high school, I was in an artistic program. I had the opportunity to travel to the west coast to a major university and took summer dance intensives with various acclaimed artists. I was really active in my high school; I graduated with a 3.9 GPA and with honors in Performing Arts and Science.

College Years

My family influenced me to attend college. Actually, it was never discussed but since I went to a high school in which 98% of the class attending college and were accepted, I went with it. For my entire junior year, I wanted to pursue a career in Medicine, but I changed my mind during my senior year. I began to audition for Bachelor

of Fine Arts programs in dance and was accepted into my Arts School at my college. This decision came as a surprise to my family because they saw the arts more as a hobby rather than a career but they supported me regardless. Throughout my search of programs, my parents always went with me to visit and give me their opinion. Rutgers University was the best fit for me because of its program's reputation, location, and the fact that I was receiving the full college experience.

My first year I lived in the dorms and my second year, I lived in the apartments. I loved being away from home because it was a completely different experience living on my own. I was raised to be independent so this was a great experience for me. I had difficulty adjusting with my hectic college schedule in which I was taking 18 credits, 9 in which were active dance classes. After the first semester I missed home and started to frequently go home. Because my dance program is very small, [it] started with 17 women and now [is] graduating with 10, I have the opportunity to work very close to the faculty. One of the associate professors is my mentor and I work with him in various projects. The administration knows all of us by our names and has meetings with us, in which they get to know more about us such as our goals.

Just like high school, I have associated myself with various circles of friends in which we all share the same passion during college. I have had some instances in which I have lost friends but a lot of it has to do with my style of life that consists of an overflowing schedule. I have learned to set priorities in my life and to not only excel in my academics but to find true happiness in what I do. Throughout my college education, I have achieved dean's list for three semesters and I am in two honor programs. I also love to contribute back to my community and I joined a sorority in which I was able to

find ways and share the passion of giving with others. I became an active leader through this organization.

My next step is graduate school and I would like to pursue a Doctorate in Physical Therapy. I [am] double majoring because I felt that my passion was also in the sports. Dance will always be with me and I have full intentions to pursue it during my graduate schools years and beyond.

Melissa's Protective Factors

Dispositional Factors

Always the Good Student

Melissa did not hesitate to comment on her work ethic as a student and described herself as always having been a good student. She was very confident about her academic performance throughout her schooling, she was very proud of herself.

I was like a really good student. I really excelled in my academics. You know I had the option of skipping a year and a half, but my mother didn't take it. Primarily because she felt that I was going to be an outcast in development. I was pretty talented most of the time, which was like the special class outside of the regular class where we did like special things like you know other academics and arts. I graduated salutatorian from my 8th grade class.

Throughout her interview Melissa spoke about her very pleasant experiences as a student, She recalls having great experiences throughout her schooling. She developed a routine in order to complete her schoolwork despite a very busy schedule; she was able to manage studying and have free time as well.

I just did my homework and I didn't find it hard. I got home I did my homework, and then I had the rest of the day free. And if I had to study I would study a day before, two days before. I would just ask my uncle to test me and I felt good. I was never stressed about grades.

Melissa's did not speak much about her social life, she was more vocal about the impact that being "the good student" had on her. There were instances when Melissa mentioned being bothered by the label that she was given, not so much because of being seen as too smart but because others would try to exploit her. However, that didn't stop people from trying to get her to help them. Again, it was clear that Melissa saw her education as something she was in control of and would have liked to have seen others with the same motivating attitude.

I was known in the group of friends you know like the geek or whatever. But it didn't really bother me because I wasn't, I didn't really portray myself that way. But then they would try to like you know oh 'M' can you help me out and do my paper for me. And I'll just be like no I'm not doing it for you.

Melissa made sure to mention that she never did anyone's work; she believed that everyone should put in the work and receive the grade they deserved.

Focused and Driven

Melissa's dedication to her academics was very apparent in her interview; she reported her belief that she had to accomplish her academic goals in order to succeed in life. She also made it clear that she did well and enjoyed school because she was able to study what she was passionate about, this passion kept her focused.

I definitely had to go to school, graduate. Do something that I loved to do, that was one of the big things that they always would tell me. You have to do something you love to do that would give you a successful career.

Her thoughts regarding doing what you love were present throughout our conversations. She kept speaking about her positive experiences and how happy she was that she was able to make certain academic choices in her life.

Familial Factors

Devoted Mother

Melissa's mother came to the United States from Guatemala while she was pregnant with her. She believed that by coming to this country she would be able to afford her daughter a better future. Melissa was keenly conscious of all of the sacrifices that her mother continuously made for her. When discussing her mother's devotion, Melissa's entire demeanor changed. She became solemn and looked almost as if she felt guilty. However, when I asked her about this, Melissa reassured me that her mother never made her feel guilty for the sacrifices that she had made.

She would always tell me that the biggest gift [to her] would be, me having a successful career. You know, having my education in line, it was always imposed on me that it was always important for her... because growing up I didn't really understand why I had to do all of this, or why I have to do well and why it was important to sit down and do homework. So she would tell me all right "M" we got to do it, WE got to do this...

Melissa began to talk about her experiences with her schoolwork; she smiled as she recalls how her mother would help her. Since her mother was not fluent in English and was not able to understand the homework, she took the initiative to learn the language. Melissa raved about her mother's dedication to her success; she believed that her mother would do anything to make sure she did well in school.

She would sit down and do homework with me. She would try... she saw that I needed help so she took the initiative to go to high school to learn English. She put me in a lot of extracurricular activities so she tried to impose in me a sense of fun in academics. I started playing piano at the age of 5 and I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to practice and she would just tell me "M" it's going to help you later. You know to the point where I wanted to quit. [I would say,] "Mom I don't want to do this, I hate this." But you know, by using positive enforcement, I think she helped me.

Her mother's support and dedication was extremely powerful, her mother placed all her efforts on ensuring the Melissa would succeed in school. This dedication was not in vain; Melissa seemed to glow when she spoke of her mother. She was very appreciative of all of the support she was given and felt a great sense of responsibility to succeed and return the favor to her devoted mother.

Being the Only Child

As much as her mother's devotion was an asset to her academic development, Melissa believed that her being an only child was also critical. Melissa laughed as she speaks about all of the time and attention that she always received from her family. She was enrolled in multiple activities concurrently; she was told that school was her only priority. By having her academics emphasized as her main priority, she was able to focus on becoming an excellent student. Melisa knew that she did not have to work or do much around the house that would distract her from her academics.

Well I was the only child. So, a lot of the attention was to me. I lived with three adults and myself, which was four and my role was basically, you know, going to school. Doing extra-curricular activities and then coming home, doing homework you know ...

As the only child, Melissa felt very fortunate that she was able to access so many resources that were provided to her by her mother. She felt that she had no excuses; she

only had to focus on doing well in school and did not have many outside of school responsibilities.

Education as a Luxury

Melissa knew that her education was very important. Most of her extended family still resided in Guatemala. Melissa knew that not everyone there was able to receive an education. From a very young age Melissa knew that she was fortunate because she was able to go to school with no difficulty and continue her studies as far as she wanted.

...They would tell me that it was very important for me to receive an education because they had to go through so many struggles and that they wanted me to make sure that... I have a luxury of being here, of having an education here. This is completely different from Guatemala. That I should take advantage of it, so being as well rounded as possible was also a big thing with my family.

During the summer Melissa was able to spend some time with her relatives in Guatemala and she saw first-hand how education was seen as luxury. Melissa interacted with cousins that were in her same age group and she saw the differences between her schooling and that of her cousins.

So I was pretty much raised over there with the idea that education was very important. I saw the need to succeed in academics...I saw this through my relatives. Because of circumstances over there people don't have the opportunity; don't have the luxury of taking classes.

After spending extended periods of time with her family, Melissa became aware that she was very fortunate; she realized that she would be the first to be able to attend college. This realization was bittersweet for Melissa. While she was more than happy to attend college, she also knew that her cousins would not have the same opportunity as her. "I feel very happy... [about] being the first one in my family to go to college [and] to hopefully one day finish grad school". The acknowledgement of her privileges motivated Melissa to make the most of her education, to ensure that she did as well as she could.

She was very aware of her good fortune and wanted to let her family know that she was in fact grateful.

Environmental Factors

Selective Schooling

Throughout her elementary, middle school and high school years Melissa was enrolled in very selective schools. Since the area in which she lived did not have a great school district, her mother made sure that Melissa would attend the best schools possible elsewhere. As a result of her selective schooling Melissa developed a sense of educational commitment; she saw that pursuing a higher education was something that she had to do.

I never actually don't remember a vivid point where I was like 'I'm going to college'. It was just something that just went with the flow because of the high school I went to. Everyone pretty much just went to college. So it wasn't really like a discussion or a point in my life where I was like I'm going to college, it was just like going with the flow, one step after the other.

Melissa felt a sense of commitment to succeed; she believed that she had no reasons not to. She always looked around and saw students doing well in school and it became second nature for her to aim high when it came to her educational pursuits.

Supportive Networks: Teachers, Administrators & Friends

Melissa's academic journey throughout various selective schools allowed her to interact and develop positive relationships with teachers and administrators. The schools that Melissa attended were specialized schools; for the most part they were either performance arts or science-focused schools. While high school Melissa recalls one administrator that played a major role in her later pursuing dance as one of her academic passions.

The principal, I remember her vividly... She was amazing. She was such a great person. She loved the performing arts department and I was a musical theater and dance major there with a minor in Bio, you had to pick majors in high school, concentrations. She would always support us in musical theater; she would come to every show.

Since Melissa's mother had not attended college, it was difficult for her to assist in the college application process. Melissa did not resent her mother for this, and she was well aware that she had others that would be able to help her. Serving as one of her mentors, Melissa's musical theater teacher was critical to the success of her college application process. Melissa understood that she needed to learn as much as possible from her musical theater teacher.

My dance teacher and musical theater teacher, they both worked very close with me. I remember my dance teacher giving me all these schools that would help me out. She actually is a graduate from the program I am in right now. Umm... you know she told me to explore, helped me to apply first. So a lot of it was from her, I basically followed what she would tell me.

During the later part of our conversation about her educational experiences, I asked Melissa to speak more about her organizational involvement while in college. Melissa highlighted various experiences that she believed were very instrumental to her success in college. One of the experiences that she emphasized was her decision to join a sorority her sophomore year. She spoke of this experience with much excitement. Melissa has always been a good student but felt that she wanted to become well rounded and enhance her leadership skills. She believed that by joining a sorority she would be able to develop a strong support network and grow as a person.

I joined a sorority my second year and I became very involved with that--I was looking for something outside of my normal realm. For the last 2 years I have learned how to really feel comfortable in my schedule because I have been surrounded with different people. [This has] helped me gain confidence [in] public speaking [and] organizing programs on campus and this is really

important for me. I became active in the executive board, the president for a year [of my sorority.]

Melissa's experience with her sorority proved to be the most recent ingredient to her becoming an academically resilient student. She had become part of a network of women that were supportive of her academic and personal endeavors.

Summary of Melissa's Academic Journey

Melissa began her journey towards academic resiliency as a result of being exposed to a host of protective factors within her home and schools. The protective factors that were present embodied an all-encompassing supportive network, ranging from a devoted mother to Melissa's innate drive to succeed academically. Throughout her educational career positive and motivating teachers, administrators and peers surrounded Melissa. Her success was the product of all of her protective factors harmoniously working in concert with each other.

Cathy

“When times get hard in school, I just think about my family and the reason why I am here today; thinking about this makes me more eager to fight for my goals and pushes me to do better.”

I was pleasantly surprised when I met Cathy. When we met for the first time, I realized that I had interviewed her older sister for my pilot study a year earlier. Cathy very much like her sister was extremely focused and goal oriented. She is among the handful of Latinas students in the school of engineering. She was born in Peru and spent most of her earlier school years in her native country. At the time of her first interview she was finishing her first-year in college but was already certain about her future career goals.

Cathy Shares Her Story

I grew up in surrounded by my grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, many other family members and close family friends. While growing up, my parents instilled in me the value of family, the characteristics of respect, responsibility, love, determination, humbleness, and many others. I grew up in a middle class neighborhood, surrounded by other families who had kids my age and who became close friends. Due to the economic crisis in Peru, it was and it still is very hard for older people to find a job. Even though my parents obtained a college degree in Peru, due to their age they could not find jobs. My mom graduated college with a degree in Industrial Engineering and my father graduated with a degree in Economics. Since my parents could not find jobs, my mom stayed home with my sister and me, while my dad joined his nephew in a family business away from home. I grew up in an urban neighborhood, having a school across my house, markets close by and different stores. My community in Peru was formed of individuals who worked in different places but overall were from the same social class.

Pre-college Years

I attended Kindergarten around my house. I spent my first through fourth grade in an all girls' catholic school in Peru. During the year 2002, my father obtained a phone called from the US Embassy saying that his application for a resident visa to the USA was approved and that he had to schedule an appointment immediately. Due to the economic crisis our country was facing, my parents did not think twice and accepted the visa because they strongly believed that they could not let this opportunity pass them by if they wanted a brighter future for my sister and me. I was only nine years old and did not fully understand what was happening but one thing was clear to me, I was leaving

behind my grandparents and everyone else in my family and I was going to a new, strange place, where I was going to live for the rest of my life.

When I came to the United States, I lived in a major urban city in New Jersey. This place was very different than what I was used to; people from different races lived around us and restaurants ranging from Arabic food to Spanish food were only one block away. Everything was new to me, the language, the place, not knowing where to go, having no friends around and especially leaving my family behind was the hardest thing I had to face. I knew that although everything was different, I had my parents and sister and we supported each other in every possible way.

Where I live is not a safe city, but to me it was my first home. When we arrived here we lived at my uncle's house for one year, then when our finances was more stable we moved out to a new place in Paterson. Due to the fact that they did not understand the language and that they had no previous experience working here, my parents obtained jobs in factories like many other immigrants do. They worked endless hours at the beginning and came home to get a few hours of sleep. They always worried about being laid off, and continuously worked over time whenever it was possible. We lived from paycheck to paycheck but always had the basic necessities. Since my parents had to work, I learned to be more independent and responsible at a young age. I did all my schoolwork and any work around the houses without my parents telling me to do. I might not have had a wonderful childhood because I matured faster than I expected but my experiences made me a strong young woman who continues her harder to be recognized as something more than an immigrant.

When I came to the USA, I attended an elementary school in a major urban city in New Jersey. I came in 5th grade and was put into a bilingual class surrounded by other kids who were still struggling to learn English. The classes were in Spanish while we had Basic English classes to learn the language. I caught up pretty fast and learned the language. While still having a Hispanic accent, I was transferred to a regular classroom during 7th grade where I was the new kid all over again. I worked very hard in all my classes and become well known by the other teachers, vice-principal, and the principal. I obtained many awards during elementary school such as Student of the Month, Academic Excellence, Honor Roll, and during 8th grade I was chosen to be in the Junior Honor Society in my school. I graduated from elementary school in 2nd place, and got accepted into a small academy inside one of the high schools in my city that focused on the sciences.

Although my high school was a bad school, my science academy had competitive classes and different programs. I became friends with other students who like me were from a Hispanic background and wanted to do well in school to have a better future. In school, I took as many honor and advance placement classes as they offered and graduated number 3 from my class of 257 students.

During my freshman year in high school, I obtained my first job at a coffee place and helped my parents around the house by buying my own stuff and supporting them when they needed some financial help. Even though my parents did not want to accept my help, I felt that it was my duty to repay them somehow everything that they gave up for me to come to this country. Even though I was not obligated to work, I felt it was my

duty to help my parents who were struggling with the bills. I had to grow up pretty fast; I knew that any time lost would never come back again and that my parents needed help.

College Years

Due to my outstanding performance during high school and my willingness to do better, I obtained many scholarships and recognitions from my town and was able to finance my first year in college without asking my parents for money. My hard work during high school gave me the opportunity to be accepted into my current college where I struggled at the beginning being away from home and surrounded by other students who came from a higher social class. My first semester was a bit hard because classes were so big and I did not know many people. I worked very hard and completed my first semester with a GPA over a 3.00. I became close friends with people who were from my same background, and we helped each other through classes and homework. I also became involved with the organization where I found a family; people, who like me, were working towards a better future. Through the [organization for Latinos in engineering] I have developed leadership and communication skills that are necessary to succeed in the workforce. This organization has given me the motivation to perform well academically. Seeing upper class students obtain internships instilled in me the desire not only to succeed, but also to be an example for others to follow.

I have faced many obstacles and I have had to grow and mature faster than others but I have learned from all my experiences and I continue to learn every day of my life. I want to make my parents proud and at the same time, I want to be able to repay my parents for all their hard work and the sacrifices they made for me to be in the position I am today. My motivation to do well in school comes from the memories of the day I left

my home and family in Peru. Even though I was young, seeing the sadness in my family's faces created in me a goal which was to make them proud and I was going to do so by obtaining a better education in this country and given back to my family. My performance in my current classes are well but I think that I have to spend more time on projects and studying due to my poor educational background while I was living in my hometown. My future goals are many; I aspire to work for NASA, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, or any other prestigious company in the future. I want to obtain internships in the next summers to start practicing my major. In the future, I want to work for a company and for them to pay for me to continue higher education. I have already looked at different companies who offer this kind of opportunities for their employees and hopefully I can be one of those people. When times get hard in school, I just think about my family and the reason why I am here today; thinking about this makes me more eager to fight for my goals and pushes me to do better.

Cathy's Protective Factors

Intrinsic Motivation: Wanting To Disprove Stereotypes

Cathy pointed out that she doesn't recall why she has always been the 'responsible' one. She reports that knowing that she always had to do her best and making sure that her parents never had any reasons to reprimand her were always at the core of her motivation.

During K -8 I feel like I [was] always responsible. I always got everything done on time. And my mom was always making sure that I was doing everything that I was supposed to do. I don't remember anytime where my teacher had to call my house because I didn't do anything. Like that was never the case. And it's always been like that in my house.

Cathy was also very well aware of the stereotypes that she would face due to her ethnicity. She made sure to discuss how she used this negative perception of Latinos as motivation to perform beyond all expectations. Since Cathy is an aerospace engineering student, she was among a small number of female students in her major of which only a handful are Latinas. Cathy felt a sense of obligation to show others that she can in fact succeed in the field of aerospace engineering despite preconceptions about her gender or ethnicity. She constantly stated that, “The fact that I am Hispanic and a lot of people don’t believe in Latinos having these degrees-engineers- doctors etc. Cathy continued to speak about her experience as one of the few Latinas in her cohort and how she believed her professors perceived her. She always kept her goal in mind and would not allow anyone to deter her from reaching that goal. “Even though a lot of people including professors don’t believe you’re going to do as well because you’re Hispanic, I don’t let them stop me from reaching my goal”. Overall, Cathy was very aware of the negative perceptions and expectations that are associated with her being Latina in her intended profession. She did not allow others to influence how she perceived herself. She believes that she will succeed regardless of what is placed in her way.

Familial Factors

Supportive & Encouraging Parents

According to Cathy her parents have always played a major role in her academic success. Both of her parents were able to attain a college degree in their native country of Peru. Since her parents knew first-hand the value of a higher education they were well aware of the importance of choosing certain majors. They always pushed Cathy to pursue a field that she would enjoy but that would allow her to have a great career after college.

They also knew that she would have a better chance at succeeding in a field like engineering.

Well, my dad always said that we had to do something related to science and math. Ever since we were little we had to do really good with math. My mom, she really liked math so she put that in us like she helped us in math and we were always good at it. So my dad always said when I was in high school, I went to a science and math oriented high school and he always said once you go to college you have to do something related to math or science... It was that you do engineering; you're going to have a good job in the future!

When I asked her how her family perceived education, she answered,

...When we talk about education, like you have to go to school, you have to go to college. That's going to be the only way. They also told me you have to think that this is the only thing that no one is going to be able to take away from you. Like if I give you a thousand dollars, that can be gone by tomorrow. But the education that they are giving me is never going to be gone. You're going to school, there's no, I'm not going to college. You have to!

Her family has held her to a high educational standard. She feels that her parents always pushed her to do well in school. Even though her parents did not attend college in the United States they knew that she had to attend college, it was the only way for her to ensure having a well-paid and secure career.

Cathy also began to realize that she was fortunate to have her parents constantly encouraging her. She began to talk about her roommate and how her relationship with her parents differs in regards to her education. Cathy points out that her parents always inquire about how she is doing but also make sure to ask about her academics.

It's funny because when my roommate and I are together and she calls her mom and her mom is like how are you doing, do you need anything else, when are you coming home. My parents are like how are you and how are classes, which is the second question. She always tells me is that all that they call you for. And I tell her pretty much. Like if I have an exam they know when my exams are going to be and they always call me.

Cathy's parents are very involved with her schooling, they know that her intended career is quite competitive and therefore try to make sure that she always does her best. She understands that her parents want her to push herself in terms of the courses that she takes.

Sense of Familial Responsibility

Cathy is very aware that she will be among the few in her family to graduate from college in the United States. Her family in Peru is very dependent on the success of her and her older sister. Cathy is expected to assist her extended family that is less fortunate and is not afforded the same educational opportunities that she has been provided with in the United States.

I'm going to be among one of the first ones to be out of college from my family. So they're expecting a lot from me. So they're on my back to make sure I am going to do what I am suppose to do.

Cathy further explained that the expectation for her to succeed goes beyond her immediate family; it also impacts her extended family in Peru. She feels that by her graduating from college she will be able to help her extended family.

...Of course... my parents expect me to do good in college and help them. Also, my family in Peru has high expectations] because going to the university there is expensive and they work paycheck to paycheck and maybe [when I graduate, I can] help them come here in the future.

Overall, Cathy felt a strong sense of commitment to her family and a sense of gratitude for their continuous support while she pursued her college degree.

Environmental Factors

Strict Academic Foundation: Early Private Schooling

Cathy went to private schools in Peru where she was exposed to very strict policies regarding their dress code, their behavior in the classrooms and her academic

performance. These expectations were in place for the major part of her elementary and middle school schooling. She pointed out that the expectations in her schools in Peru were dramatically different from what she experienced in the United States. She believed that her private schooling taught her to be disciplined as a student. This discipline became a factor once she began public school in the United States.

So basically a private school, a catholic private school, its like they are very strict. Like your hair has to be in the back, your nails have to be proper, your shoes have to be shiny, you have to wear uniform every day, it has to be cleaned, there is no makeup, its only girls, everything was really strict. So that was basically grades 1 through 7. When I came here into public school, it was like you can do what ever you want; you can come however you want; as long as it doesn't interfere with the very liberal [dress] codes that they had.

Cathy experienced a difference in her the academics when she arrived in the US. She recalls some instances when she felt that she was ahead of her classmates and that her schooling was more rigorous in Peru. Another major difference that she was able to observe was the interaction between teachers and students. Cathy began to realize that her teachers in Peru had a deeper investment in the learning process of their students, which went beyond just her grades.

Umm... I guess I'll say that math was a little more advanced than what it was here. When I was here in 7th we were doing things that I had already done in 6th grade in Peru and it was like oh wow I know this! In 8th grade it was the same thing. Also, the teachers [in Peru] cared more about your grades and they knew you on like a personal basis. So if they knew if you were doing badly, they would call your house right away. Whereas here, your grade is this and your parents are coming to pick up your report card this that, and that's when they are going to find out.

She always saw herself as a good student that followed the rules and paid attention in class, she knew no other way to be, but this attitude was not common among her US schoolmates and reflected another difference that she observed between her educational experience here and in Peru.

I guess you can say that I never have been like ‘oh well I’m not going to do this, I’m not going to do it’. So I basically was the kid sitting in class and I never got in trouble for anything.

During her younger school years Cathy was exposed to very strict expectations that she was able to carry with her to her later school years in the US. This academic discipline was yet another factor that continues to play a major role in the student that she is today.

Supportive Teacher & Networks

In addition to having a supportive family, and learning how to function in a strict and high expectation school, Cathy felt that she has other supportive networks that have helped her succeed in school. She recalls the first teacher that she was exposed to in the US as soon as she arrived from Peru. Cathy felt that her teacher was instrumental to her successful educational development because of his continuous encouragement. Since she entered the US educational system rather late, in the 7th grade, she could have easily fallen behind but that fortunately was not what happened. Cathy again realized that just because she was enrolled in bilingual education, it did not mean that she was not intelligent. Cathy was attending one of the worst school districts in the state and her teacher was well aware of this. Since Cathy did not have much control over which school she would be able to attend, her focus would be more on being the best student in the school.

I would say my 7th grade teacher, because that was the first year that I had here and I was in a bilingual class. So I was taking half the classes in English and half in Spanish. He always pulled me outside and told me that I was doing better than everyone else in class. He would tell me that I didn’t need to be in the bilingual classes, for them these classes were for slow learners and that I didn’t need this. Also, that in my hometown there were no good schools for me, to tell my parents if they can to send me to a private school.

Cathy’s educational experiences K-16 exposed her to both private and public schooling, which later on facilitated her college process. Cathy understood the importance of having

a supportive network around her as much as possible, because she was very aware of the obstacles ahead. She anticipated that she would encounter some language barriers and low standard schools.

Cathy was intentional when she decided to join a student organization in college. The organization that she joined focused on assisting Latino students on campus that were majoring in engineering. Cathy sought out this organizational involvement because she understood the value of having a peer support network.

...[I joined my organization] because I knew that everyone [in the group is] Hispanic and [they are majoring in] engineering and [they] motivate each other to do well... Now I am the historian and community service chair.

Cathy's involvement with the student organization in college afforded her the opportunities to network with other Latino students. This was very important to her; she felt a sense of comradeship and support that she saw as being critical in her engagement at the college level.

Summary of Cathy's Academic Journey

Cathy's academic journey was heavily impacted by the presence of various protective factors. Within her protective factors Cathy's journey showcased the importance of her dispositional, familial and environmental factors. Cutting across all of the three protective factors, we saw that Cathy was exposed to more than one supportive network. These networks, along with the other protective factors, assisted Cathy in overcoming many of barriers that a first generation Latina may potentially face within the educational system in the United States.

Samantha

“Every experience and anecdote has greatly contributed to every aspect in my life, leading me to be where I am now, the first Latina generation to be in college.”

At the time of her interviews Samantha was a third year student, she is a very independent and vocal student. We found it difficult to schedule our meeting times due to her hectic work and class schedules. Samantha was born in New Jersey and is of Ecuadorian decent. She comes from a family of strong women; she is the only child and was raised by her mother, grandmother and aunt. She lived in Ecuador for the major part of her childhood; she vaguely recalls her life in the United States. In speaking to Samantha I found it fascinating how poised and eloquent she was, she always made it a point to highlight her work ethic. She has been supporting herself for the last couple of years while in college.

Samantha Shares Her Story

My life has certainly been fast paced and full of interesting experiences that have made me into the person I am today. I believe we were always economically stable with not a lot of luxurious and grand commodities, but always with the necessary things for a comfortable living. I could say we were middle class, we had our rough times like any other family but we always had a secure home and food on our table. My mother has always worked and has always been the main source of income. My mother finished high school in Ecuador, considered going to college but she was lucky enough to get a good job in which she still works until this day. She works in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ecuador, it is a public position and in Ecuador public positions are not highly paid jobs but definitely satisfied our needs. My mom had to look over the entire household not just for me. My father wasn't really present for the first 17 years of my life, so I don't have a

lot to say about him when I look back at into my memories. He also finished high school in Ecuador and when he was 22 he left to the US, came to New Jersey and has been here ever since. He has always worked in public transportation like bus companies, taxi companies, and during the past 7 years he has been a truck owner. My father's job is rough and he hasn't always been too economically stable.

Education in my household was always seen as something important; it came first before any other side activity. My mom was very strict with me in that aspect and expected the excellence from me; just getting good grades were not enough. My mom has a very strong personality and she likes things to be perfect, so every time that I didn't get good grades or slacked in school she would make sure I did them right no matter what, she never hit me though. Education was the key to success. My father never had anything to do with my education; the few times I would talk to him he just wanted to know how I was doing and if I was passing.

The area and environment I grew up most of my life was pleasant. I lived in the capital of Ecuador, which is Quito, an urban area. I lived in the south side of the city, which was a humble area in comparison to the northern side of the city where wealthier people live. My community during the first couple years of my life was very calm and amicable, for the most part I like to think it was safe, of course not as safe as a lot of the suburban areas here in the US but safe for being a third world country. Growing up in a third world country one has a different aspect and view of safety as well as appreciation for things, from my personal opinion. Throughout the years the southern part of Quito has become a little more dangerous. The neighborhoods that I have lived here in the US have

been middle class and safe communities part Caucasian and most of the time a large Hispanic community.

Pre- College School Years

In total I attended five schools between grade school, middle school, and high school; this was due to all the moving around. They were all good and safe environments, most of the time I was in an all girls' catholic school, which was quite an experience. My relationship with teachers during grade school was great; I was a shy kid for the most part. Later in middle school and high school my relationships with teachers were not so good, because I did not agree with the way they taught or the way they treated students. My personality during this time had changed completely, I was super outgoing and really friendly, but despite that, teachers didn't really like me. As people would say here [in the United States], I was like the "class clown". Teachers are not fond of these types of students, but I had excellent grades so I managed through middle school and high school.

College Years

When I finally got to college, I was more on my own and I was still adjusting to the drastic culture change, language, and environment in general in the US. My relationships with professors are good but it seems like the professor- student relations aren't too strong at my college. Average days in college for me during my first 2 years were more relaxed; it was all about school and friends. During my sophomore year I realized that life is not just school and friends, so I decided and needed a job. I have been working ever since, putting in as many hours of work because I had to take care of bills and any other necessity that I had. My mother lives in Ecuador and her income is not enough to cover my expenses and my father helps me with a little when he's able to. So a

regular day for me is class, work, homework, and social life. I believe sometimes work and education come hand in hand to me right now, none with a higher priority because although I know education is very important, I also know that I have to be able to have a source of income to live my day by day. Sometimes it gets frustrating because a lot of the people I'm surrounded by don't struggle the same way I do. Keeping up with my social life can get a little over whelming at times. So far, I believe all my hard work and my prior education have paid off and that is why I am where I am today. My academic performance is not as great as it used to be in prior years because of all the other things I have to take care of. My motivation to do well in school is to become successful, to be the first in graduating college, to make all the sacrifice and hard work worth something. More specifically, to not let down my family especially my mother, that has always tried to do her best for me. Ultimately, the motivation was the self-satisfaction that one day I will become a professional. Academic success to me is learning something new every day that will contribute to my life and good grades, which could be the key to open up a lot of job opportunities. My future plans after college are not defined as of now, I used to have a clear set of goals of my life, but lately I have other views of life. There are so many things I want to do after college like: go to law school, get a job that will give me benefits and help me get my masters, peace corps or go back to Ecuador and help out the rest of my family.

Samantha's Protective Factors

Dispositional Factors

Always have been focused

Samantha knew that she wanted to pursue her college career in the United States and made sure that she did what was necessary in order to reach her goal. Since most of her schooling took place in her native country of Ecuador, Samantha knew that she would have to work really hard to be able to attend college in the US. When she realized that she would have to do a lot of catching up in order to be a viable candidate for colleges.

I had already gone so far, like, for somebody to come tell me that I can't do that, No. That's just not happening, and that's [just] not me. Like, I've always [been] a good student throughout high school. And yeah, maybe I didn't have like, all of these AP classes because I didn't have a chance to do that, and honors or whatever. And my SATs were not bad, but they weren't like excellent either. So maybe I think that's [why by looking at] my SAT scores...he didn't think I could get into an Ivy League school.

Samantha has a very confident demeanor; she is very mature and made it evident throughout the interviews. When discussing her work ethic she mentioned how she always had a clear sense of what her responsibilities were while in school. She knew that she had to be focused and had to do well in her classes.

...I did a little bad my freshman year, and then I realized, you know, I'm here for a reason. So then, I started trying to actually study and go to class. And it got me to a 3.0 [cumulative GPA].

While she did not perform as well as she would have liked her first-year as a college student, she realized that she had to change her approach. She mentioned having a reality check, when she recalled that her priority was to do well in school. Samantha went through great lengths to be able to come to the United States to study and to attend

college. Samantha mentioned that she felt like she didn't have to place much effort on her schoolwork before college, this mentality quickly changed.

I was pretty much a nerd. It was like a reality check, and that just couldn't happen. I mean, I sacrificed so many things for me to come, [to the United States] and just mess it all up No. So then, that was something that motivated me to do better because right now, it's [about] me. It's not about satisfying my mom anymore or my family in general.

While it was very important to Samantha to make her family proud, she was very clear that her academic success was most important to her. Her motivation primarily stemmed from a sense of commitment to her own growth and development. She also realized that she would have to be extremely disciplined since she was basically on her own in this country.

...This time, nobody's monitoring me. So I have to make sure I do [well in school]. And coming here, I was like, I'm good. I feel mature, I feel confident, like I could do this. So, I came with that mindset and that definitely did get me through it ...

Samantha mentioned that she began to self-monitor her academic performance, which allowed her to be a successful student. As a result, she developed an even stronger work ethic.

Even though Samantha seems to be a highly successful student to most, she believes that she is "average". I asked Samantha to describe what kind of student she sees herself as; she did not hesitate to admit that she could be doing better. She was conscious of all of her responsibilities and realized that she should be focusing more on her studies but also had to juggle other responsibilities. This conversation was very insightful as it highlights the impact that having multiple responsibilities as a student has on their academic performance.

I think I'm would be [considered] an average student. I'm not a 4.0 [cumulative GPA type of student, but I'm not failing all my classes. I do what I have to do, you know, to be at an average [student]. And well, right now, my goal is to not go below 3.0 [cumulative GPA] just because, to get into grad school [you need a good GPA]. I mean, you have [to have a But maybe if I didn't have to work so much, it would be better. But then sometimes---I actually do better when I'm busier than when I'm just hanging around watching TV and sleeping all day. So I think I'm more productive when I'm busier. But sometimes I would like to, just not have so many responsibilities] 3.0 [cumulative GPA] for a lot of the schools and also to apply to jobs.

Samantha's academic performance allowed me to see beyond the grades and cumulative GPA. I was able to get a deeper understanding of the complexities that exists for students like Samantha. She was not only responsible to doing well in school; she had to also think about her future and how she cannot solely focus on her academics.

Independent Personality: I do what I have to do

Samantha was very vocal about being very independent; she made it very clear that while her mother was supportive she is not able to provide her with the guidance and resources that she needs. She was very appreciated of her mother's support but her mother is still living in Ecuador and the distance makes it very difficult for her to assist Samantha as often. When we began to speak about the college application process, Samantha walked me through her experience. She gave me her step-by-step process, she mentioned being very ignorant to the entire process and how quickly she had to catch on. She was able to seek out the resources that she felt were necessary on her own, she would speak to her friends at school about college but for the most part she did all of the research on her own.

So, all this stuff [colleges, admissions processes], I did research online. I researched every school, everything about schooling, college, SATs, etc., everything... then once I knew what these things were, then the counselor would guide me, "Okay. This is the next step then, and then this," and whatever...but basically, I did everything on my own. He [guidance counselor] would just tell me

like, "You should probably have a certain amount of applications by this date," and whatever, and stuff like that.

I remember asking Samantha about her experiences throughout the college application process. I wanted to know how she managed to navigate all of the different areas that are involved when applying to college on her own. She began to recall other instances throughout her childhood where she realized that she had to be self-sufficient in order to accomplish a task.

...I'm an only child. I like to do things on my own. I don't like to be asking everybody, and I like to find things out on my own. And usually, I don't know everything. You get me? I didn't want them to be like, "Oh, so, but how do I do this?" and "How is that?" And I felt like it might've been kind of annoying for me, you know, to ask them all this stuff. So, I did it on my own. And everything turned out well.

Samantha perceived asking for help as something that would bother others, she felt that it was her responsibility to figure things out on her own. Her high level of independence would later prove to be one of her strongest assets.

Balancing work and school commitment

I spent a lot of time talking to Samantha about her day-to-day life as a college student and her responsibilities outside of the classroom. She immediately began to speak about her need to work in order to pay for her living expenses. Since most of her family is still in Ecuador and she does not have a close relationship with her father, Samantha does not have another choice but to work. Her tone changed when we were father into the conversation and when I began to ask her how having to work impacted her.

It doesn't really bother me. It's something that a lot of people have to do, and if it gets to where I have to be, and it keeps me stable, then it's not a problem. Sometimes it could be a little bit of a problem just because of the people I'm surrounded [by].

Samantha mentioned that many of her friends do not have the need to work in order to pay for their living expenses. We spoke about some instances when her friends did not understand why she was not able to go out and socialize as much due to her work schedule. She felt as if she should not have to explain her situation and that her friends should just respect her priorities.

Samantha works a lot and is practically working full time at her current job. She explained that she was used to a certain lifestyle while living in Ecuador with her mother. That her mother would provide her with anything that she needed. She felt that she would be able to successfully manage her work schedule and school. "...Right now...I'm a server ...I put in as many hours as I can...these past weeks, I put [in] 40 hours, and then another [week], I put 30 hours, and, as many as I can". Samantha was adamant about working and attending school at the same time and not having to compromise one for the other. Samantha admitted that she believes that she should spend more time outside of class studying but she finds it hard to manage at times. Her commitment to providing for herself did not waiver and at times this did impact her grades.

But with school, and work, it goes around my school schedule. It works out. I don't really put in a lot of hours for school, like besides my classes. I don't, unless I have to do a paper or something that's due. If not, unless when the exam comes, I'll study. But besides that, I'm working... and then the time that I have free, I don't really feel like studying because being a server, like it's tiring... I come home late, and you've been up all day, running around.

At the beginning of the conversation about her balance between work and school, Samantha was very confident that she was managing her responsibilities as best as possible. Towards the end of the conversation she began to acknowledge that it was in fact difficult to manage working many hours and doing well in school.

But maybe if I didn't have to work so much, it would be better. Then sometimes I actually do better when I'm busy than when I'm just hanging around watching TV and sleeping all day. So I think I'm more productive when I'm busy but sometimes I would like to, you know, just not have so many responsibilities.

Ultimately, Samantha's strong commitment to being independent weighed heavily on her academic performance. Even though she is still a very successful student she admitted that she would probably do better if she didn't have to work.

Role Modeling: They look up to me

Samantha comes from a family of strong women, she spoke about the presence that women have in her household. She felt it was her responsibility to serve as a role model to some of her relatives.

They [my cousin and aunt] look up to me because, I moved out of the house to go to college. I came to another country, and their expectations are for me to graduate and have a good job. I've never been a rebellious child...for the most part I have been good. So, they do look up to me. I've always worked. So, [they get] presents here and there from me. If they need advice, like, when my cousin has schoolwork I help her when I can.

In addition to her feeling that she had to succeed for herself, Samantha was very adamant about being able to assist her younger relatives. She believed that she had to pay it forward; because she has benefited from having other women support and guide her throughout her life. "So, right now, within my cousins, I'm going to be the first one to graduate from college, and I feel like they do feel like proud". Serving as a role model to those who follow in her footsteps became a major motivating factor for Samantha. At times she mentioned how her family would keep her going, even though she was far from them. She knew that they were always thinking about her and how proud she was making them.

Familial Factors

Mother's Supportive & Strict Educational Expectations

Samantha was very vocal about the role that her mother played in molding the woman that she has become. Her mother had very high expectations and would not allow Samantha to fall short. Samantha recalls her mother's rules and as she thinks back to her younger years, she realizes how much she appreciated her mother's strictness.

Well, my mom, she's very strict. I had to have everything neat. School was priority over anything...grades are very important, and I could not go below an A and stuff like that. ...My mom did play a big role in my education; just because she was always there to [check on me] if I was leaning towards bad grades. She'd put me back in place... that was really something that helped.

Samantha soon realized that even though her mother was extremely strict regarding her education that it was for her own good. She knew that her mother wanted her to have the best future possible and that it would be possible by having a good education.

...It was just kind of given that after high school, what's the next level? The next step, I mean. It's college... Maybe it's just [the] little things. Like, obviously when talking about, "Oh, what are you going to become later on? What you want your career to be?" To get to that, you need college education. So, it was kind of just a given really.

Her mother's expectations taught Samantha that she can achieve anything that she set her mind to, that she was capable of being an excellent student. This thought process became her motto and she would later remind herself of what she was taught by her mother. This was the beginning of Samantha's self-monitoring; she became more independent and focused.

When I got older, I guess, you know I already knew how it was. So, she didn't really monitor me as much, but she made sure that [I completed all of my schoolwork], "Oh, you did your homework? She was always there, talking about school and being aware of what I'm doing.

Since Samantha spent most of her educational career in Ecuador and around her mother, she had developed a very strong work ethic. This work ethic would later prove be a valuable resource as Samantha would be on her own for her senior year in high school and her college career.

I'm thankful she was supportive, even though she had no clue probably what I was doing and stuff. But she always has my back...she tried her best in trying to make me feel some sort of support...not even guidance or like help, but just moral support kind of.

Throughout college Samantha was on her own, she recalls how important it was for her to have her mother's support even if it was at a distance. She knew that her mother was not knowledgeable of the college system but she was always there to lift her up and encourage her.

Environmental Factors

Good Schools: Private and White schools

Along with having a supportive family and an intrinsic motivation to succeed, Samantha's educational achievement was also impacted by the schools that she attended. She attended different types of schools throughout her educational trajectory. Samantha began her educational career in the US; she lived in California in a suburban neighborhood. She did not vocalize her perception of what constituted a good school. When she was describing her neighborhood she often emphasized that it was predominantly white and therefore, her parents believed that it would be a good school system.

[When] I came to California [I went to a] public school... it was coed and I stayed there for three years and a half, the town that we lived in was in the suburbs...it was calm there too. It was an Armenian neighborhood...there [were] a lot of Armenians in school.

Samantha did not recall many details of this period of her life, but she was very aware of the type of school it was, it was predominantly white. Samantha made the automatic assumption that a school is 'better' because it is white. Later on in Samantha's educational career she would again be enrolled in a "better" school that happens to be in an upper middle-class white neighborhood.

...Just because it was white, and the neighborhood looked good, and school was expected to be in a better environment I guess...it's a small town. It's a white neighborhood, [mostly] Italian people. My family is from [two urban cities in New Jersey]. But the year that I came here, he purposely moved out of there because he didn't want me to go to school there. He thought that I was going to go crazy.

Samantha was not keen on the idea of attending high school in a town where she could not relate to any of her peers. She felt very out of place and did not understand nor support her father's rationale for moving. Her father believed that Samantha should not be exposed to the environment that he was previously living; he was in an urban area with mostly minorities.

Samantha recalled the private school that she attended in Ecuador and how it shaped her view of education. While living in Ecuador Samantha only attended private schools and later would understand the value that this educational environment would have.

[When] I moved back to Ecuador, my first year, I had to go to [a] private school, because in Ecuador, we were kind of like middle-class, and so, usually, private school is where kids go, and public school is just really, it's bad.

Her mother was well aware of the quality of education that Samantha would receive in a private school versus a public school. Samantha found the private school she attended to be really strict and did not give students many choices. The school had very high expectations of all of their students and would expose them to advanced areas of studies.

I felt like we were disciplined more [in the private schools]. Like we had to study a lot. Like, we had 18 subjects, and we all took physics, chemistry...there wasn't a choice. You had to take it, and you have to know it and you have to pass it. Period.

The discipline that Samantha was exposed to throughout her schooling in Ecuador afforded her many skills that she would later implement. Samantha immediately became aware of the difference that existed between the school culture in Ecuador and the United States.

The Advantages of knowing the Language

Even though Samantha spent most of her childhood in another country, she was introduced to the English language at a very young age. She studied in the United States in the beginning of her school and then continued to study English once she returned to Ecuador. I was fascinated to hear about her proficiency with the English language, and how it impacted her education in Ecuador and the United States.

...[Throughout] my whole high school experience over in Ecuador, I was always very confident in everything, and my grades made me confident [and understanding] the English Language made me confident. The teachers were always, you know, working with me...

Samantha's understanding of the English language provided her with a sense of confidence, she felt as though it allowed her to do better in her classes. This confidence would later assist her in her transition into senior year of high school in the US.

Once again, Samantha's confidence and work ethic played a major role in her academic success. Since she had a good grasp of the language she was able to catch on rather quickly to the new environment. Also, Samantha believed that she was more focused than most of her classmates and therefore excelled.

In my English class, I felt like I was going to have a little bit more of a problem. I mean, I did learn vocabulary and just, and slang and all this stuff. But overall, in

high school, it wasn't a problem. It was definitely not a problem. I did well in my English classes and like I said, I just felt like these kids don't even care. So, I mean, I was accustomed to paying attention in class, and we have homework, and I'm going to do it [laughter] because I'm expected to. But these kids don't even care about homework.

Even though Samantha was a new student in her high school, she did not feel intimidated. Initially, she had doubts about her ability to be able to be engaged in the classroom but shortly realized that she was far more advanced than she expected. In addition to her ability to understand the English language, she did not feel as challenged during her senior year of high school in the US. Samantha was also very surprised by the interactions that students had with their teachers, she was not used to the laid back environment. She believes that her disciplined educational foundation was a major factor in her overall academic success.

Summary of Samantha's Academic Journey

Samantha's academic journey was permeated by various protective factors. Within her protective factors Samantha's journey illustrated the importance of her dispositional, familial and environmental factors. While analyzing all three of the protective factors that were present, it was evident that her Samantha's experiences within different educational systems afforded her the opportunities to develop an affirming work ethic inside and outside of the classroom. Samantha's relationship with her family and played a major role in the decisions that she made while in college, she had a sense of accountability to her family. Overall, the most prevalent factor that I was able to identify was Samantha's dispositional factor. Samantha is a very determined and strong individual that defies the odds; she is committed to advancing in any given environment.

Mariana

“I feel that I can be so great and am capable of better than what I have done in the past but I have to push myself a bit more every day. Failure is not an option for me. That is my motivation!”

Mariana is a very strong and independent young woman. I have observed her interactions with others for a couple of years; she was very particular when it came to sharing her personal life. I was very eager to learn more about Mariana because she is extremely private and I was very interested in getting to know her better. At the time of her interviews, Mariana was a third-year student. Throughout both interviews, Mariana’s words were very powerful; she spoke with a lot of emotion. She is of Dominican and Puerto Rican descent, but grew up mostly around her mother’s side of the family, which is Dominican. She has an older brother that she has developed a strong relationship after the passing of her father. She emphasized her low-economic status and how her family struggled to maintain the household.

Mariana Shares Her Story

To start off, my family has always consisted of bittersweet circumstances and relationships. My family has always been pretty poor. My father was in the army but was discharged in the 1990s from injuries and he collected Social Security benefits. My mother was diagnosed with epilepsy while she was pregnant with me so she could no longer work. We depended on my father’s social security checks and when he died it was my mother who continued to receive his benefits. Yet when I turned 16 they took my mother’s check away and we only received 724 dollars a month for both of us, and I had to work to maintain myself. I was one less thing for her to worry about and I’ve been maintaining myself ever since. My mother didn’t complete junior high school and my

father completed high school. Throughout my childhood into adolescence the importance of education was always instilled in our home by my father as my way out of the poverty that we lived in. After his death, my mother encouraged me to go to college but if I had not gone it wouldn't have made a difference as long as I worked. Pursing a higher education was my goal and I knew I had to do it on my own.

Pre- College School Years

My earliest memories related to education were of my father pushing us to do well in school. He used to study with me and help me with spelling and check over my work. He spoke English and my mother didn't so she was never too helpful. She did make sure we went to school every day and we were clean, fed, and healthy. Since I was in the first grade I always received honor roll every marking period all the way through my senior year in high school. The only times I did not was when my father died, a week before I started middle school I didn't do too well my first marking period. After that I continued with to make honor roll. My father was always the one to check up on it, and make sure our homework was done; he was my only social support. But that was only for 11 years because after that I was the only one who cared truly about my studies. I had to figure it out on my own. My mother was just from a different generation and different culture where education wasn't a priority. She never downplayed the importance of education or presented it in a negative light but she wasn't as vigilant as my father was. All she expected was that I graduated high school, it was expected that I got straight A's or high honors of some kind. She didn't even know how to read English but if she saw any red mark on the progress report she yelled at me because she assumed I was failing something. She always "threatened" me, you better not be failing anything in Spanish. I

never failed a class until college anyway, but that's because I wasn't prepared in mathematics, but that's another story.

Along with my familial circumstances, my surrounding environment was definitely an influence in my life. I grew up in a neighborhood and city definitely considered urban. There were a lot of black, Hispanic, Portuguese and Italian people. I lived downtown or at the border so all the black and Hispanic people lived there and were generally poor, with lots of drug dealers, gang shootouts and prostitutes. Uptown was more Portuguese and they were better off economically compared to Hispanics, Haitians and Blacks. My grade school was 2 blocks from my house; it was downtown and around that time it was not as dangerous as it is now. Then middle school was by the bridge, which is the border of midtown, and downtown, it was a mix of black and Hispanic kids. It was kind of dangerous because high school kids would come with gangs to start drama.

High school consisted of at that time 7 houses that were all considered [my] High School. I went to Jefferson house, which was the unofficial arts school at the time (now officially the arts school) because it had the dance studio, the theater, dark room, the music studio. I loved it! I loved school; I think it was because I was the youngest one in my family and I was always bored at home, so I loved going to school to have something to do. I loved doing the work and getting good grades so it worked out. I was always, I guess what you would call the "teacher's pet" but not in a brown noser way. I really liked helping the teachers, staying busy and learning as much as I could. Same in middle school I was in the library club where I learned about Harry Potter and I would stay after school and read. In high school I was in every club and I really got along with my

guidance counselor (who I still talk to), the administration secretaries, and especially teachers.

College Years

When it came to friends, I have a close-knit group. I am not exactly someone who knows “everyone” but the friends that I do have and consider friends are awesome. Most of them just graduated because I have a tendency of getting along with older people than myself. In every job that I have had, I have been really close with my supervisors and the direct staff I constantly interacted with. In terms of professors, I can honestly say this semester is the first time my professors know who I am and can really say great things about me and vice versa. I have realized the importance of having rapport with people you interact with and maintaining those contacts. That is a skill I have been sharpening throughout my college career.

One thing that I can say I have done all my life has been waking up early to take advantage of the whole day. I wake up at seven am every day because I either work or have class. Then it's none stop until with class and work. Then I had meetings occasionally but not the whole semester because I wasn't as involved as I had been in the past. After meetings I would have to do homework and study. Depending on how many assignments and when it's due I would be looking at going to bed around 2-4 am. Then I would wake up again at 7 and do it again without taking a break or a nap.

Attending college is not only about going to class; it has turned into a full out lifestyle. The time commitment that it requires is one that the people back home take for granted and do not consider. I have had a lot of pressure from family who expect me to do well in school like if it's a sure thing. Yet I haven't had any social support who has

stood by me to just check on me whether I'm good with stress, if I'm feeling okay, if I need help. My success has been implied rather than worked for which I think lends to the fact that I don't usually celebrate my own victories. It's a bad habit I've been working hard to get out of because I've learned time and time again that I can only depend on myself in the end. While in college I have had many emotional breakdowns. I've felt the pressure of being an adult and having no help or directions but I'm so proud of myself because I've worked so hard for what I have. And I have been so blessed this year with the many opportunities that will help me reach goals that I never imagined. I enter my senior year with the desire to end with a great GPA, graduate with honors and have several options lined up. Like graduate school, a full-time job, or a Fulbright ETA grant. I believe in options because I don't want to be in the same predicament like as my parents, they did not have many choices. I want to be free to choose because I have worked for those options.

I feel that I can be so great and am capable of better than what I have done in the past but I have to push myself a bit more every day. Failure is not an option for me. That is my motivation. If I fail I will go back to [my hometown] to nothing that is not the life I want. I will continue to pursue my dreams even though they may not make sense to my family or friends. Academic success is putting forth every effort to do your best. That means studying as much as you can, asking for help from peers, tutors and professors. It means being diligent and not procrastinating, it means staying healthy mentally, physically and emotionally. It means planning for your future based on your achievements in the present and the achievements you hope to accomplish. My goals include applying to either the Rutgers Social Work or College Student Affairs Master's

program or NYU or Columbia University. I am in the process of preparing for deadlines in the spring of 2011 and I am looking forward to every second of it. Since I love and appreciate the value of higher education and I want to incorporate my love mentoring and the college-prep youth population, I would like to pursue a doctorate. I want to become a Dean of Students at a university because I want to have the ability to oversee departments that have deep effects on the quality of education and overall college experience to all students. No matter where they came from or what they have been through. I am interested in the factors that prevent the access of urban students into higher education. Also, for those who have accessed higher education, what factors make it difficult for them to stay, and for those who are able to graduate, what factors attributed to that. My goals are reshaped to some extent overtime but the underlying mission won't change. I will continue to pursue a higher education and academic success.

Mariana's Protective Factors

Dispositional Factors

Self-Sufficient: Independent Nature

Mariana has a very tough exterior and rarely showed her emotions, when we began talking about her upbringing she was very hesitant at first. She began to share her story and the trials and tribulations that she had endured, and why she is so independent.

I was basically in charge of myself. When my mother had me she became ill, and she couldn't work anymore. So, basically, she didn't do much, and she really couldn't because she was not physically able...then after my father passed away, she was not mentally all there...I really had to rely a lot on myself.

Mariana had to take responsibility for herself at a very young age; she developed a strong independent nature as a result of her situation at home. She began to realize early on that she had to work hard in order to move ahead and that she had to do whatever was

necessary to succeed. Mariana also felt that she was always more mature than other children her age, she believed that this was most likely due to the fact that she surrounded herself with older individuals. She stated, "...I've always been around people that were older than me. And yeah, that's basically [how I was] growing up". As a result of being around people that were older than her, Mariana became accustomed to being on her own and not asking for help. She believed that she would be able to manage her life the best she knew how, she felt as if she did not need anyone. She would continue to have the mentality of doing things on her own and not having anyone to help into her college career. Mariana recalls one of the first times in college that she realized she was alone, that she did not have anyone in her family to support her. Mariana attended a five-week summer program for low-income students. While she would later praise the program for all of the support she received, it showed her how different her experience was from her peers.

Their families would visit them, or they would go home, and they would have at least, that support socially and economically. None of that happened...that was a challenge but I made it through. It was a big transition of having to worry about yourself, even though I kind of did it, but [this time] it was to a greater degree...

Mariana's journey has been filled with moments such as this, where she realizes that she had to continue to be responsible for herself. She often refers to the "lack of social support" as one of the major reasons she has developed into the person that she is today.

Mariana is extremely self-sufficient, she is fully aware that she must remain focus.

The lack of social support...I guess that's why I've become so self-efficient and anti-dependent person. I hate depending on people, which could be a bad thing because even when I really do need help. I don't ask for it [help] because I've had to deal with it alone anyway... I sometimes sit down and think about it, Damn... Like, I really got to do this, and I don't have anyone to ask [for help]...

Mariana often felt upset about the lack of support she received from her family, but at the same time she saw this as an opportunity for her to grow. In addition, to being a full time student, Mariana had to work in order to pay for her living expenses.

I work like 30 hours each semester. Which is crazy for a full-time student, especially when both jobs are 9-to-5. So, it's amazing to squeeze that in...nobody maintains [me] ... and that's my only way of living.

Mariana's independent nature and self-sufficiency would prove to be one of the major contributing factors of her academic success. She developed problem-solving skills that allowed her to navigate the different paths she pursued.

...I've had my ups and downs, but I figured it out... I take [it as it] is ...everything happens for a reason, and everything works out how it's supposed to. So, if it doesn't happen today, it will happen eventually. If it wasn't meant to happen, it wasn't meant to be.

Mariana did not allow the obstacles to deter her nor distract her from her goal; she remained focused. As our conversation progressed, we began to discuss in more detail her academic journey. It was imperative that we discuss pivotal moments in her past that she saw as triumphs or defeats. Mariana quickly indicated that she rarely perceives situations in her life as defeats; it was clear at that moment she has a very positive outlook on life. This positive outlook is quite impressive, mostly because of all of the hardships that she has endured.

I was supposed to go to the gifted and talented academy in high school, and I didn't go for the sake of the distance, and I didn't have a car, and my mother didn't have a car and I would have to walk in the snow... But the distance was really bad then I didn't like the environment. A lot of kids were very snooty because they *were* in the academy. But I had graduated top ten percent anyway. So, it worked out... made the best of what I had, and it worked.

Mariana was able to learn from an early age that she did not have to succumb to her environment. She had an internal locus of control that remained constant at all times that

kept her focused. Mariana's view of her environment was distinct, she was well aware of her surroundings but she would not allow it to dictate her future. "I feel like the actual experience is what you make of it, because a lot of people didn't like it high school, I made the most out of it."

Mariana remained focused on the ultimate goal; she knew that she would have to become resourceful in order to persist.

I think just the different things I've been involved in. I'm the type of person...I see connections in everything, and I've seen that everything somehow connects to something else, and they overlap or they mesh together. And I feel like, everything is like a precursor to something else, and it just builds on the last thing and it builds on the next thing. Like, it's just all worked out. Everything seemed like progression to me, and it's brought me to where I am.

Mariana would continue to maintain this perspective on life as she entered college; she immediately began to make connections. The connections she developed with staff and administrators would later prove to be major motivating factors in her academic journey.

Breaking Stereotypes

Mariana was very outspoken about not enacting the stereotype, she refused to be labeled and type casted as "one of those" or to conform to certain roles. She had plenty to share when we began to speak about her role and what was expected of her in the home. As a young Latina, Mariana was well aware of some of the erroneous perceptions and norms that were being imposed on her. "...My mother would be like, "Oh, you have to learn how to cook and clean." It sounds so cliché. Oh, my God ". Mariana was very vocal, she felt as if she had to make sure that her family understood that she was different. She felt as if she had no other choice but to have a tough exterior in order for her family to respect her decisions. Mariana references various instances when she felt

that she was ostracized by her family for being vocal about her freedom to be the person she wanted to be.

What century are we in? Like, are you really telling me this? and then she would always make fun of my brother's wife because she couldn't do any of that, and it's always been the whole gender expectation. And that's with my aunts too. And if you were ever --- I was actually kind of like the black sheep because I would speak up a lot, and I would be known as the lovely "B word," just because I would not keep my mouth shut, or I would always question something.

Mariana accepted that she was seen as an outcast in her own family, she felt that she had no other choice. Mariana was very proud of her challenging personality; she believed that it allowed her to become the person that she is today. She laughed throughout this section of the interview, she felt that this personality trait allowed her to grow and actively seek out resources.

Academically Inclined

Being academically focused was a one of the strongest traits Mariana felt she possessed. Mariana recalled many instances where she thoroughly enjoyed being in different academic settings, even at a very young age Mariana enjoyed learning. Being a good student became second nature for her; she didn't feel as if she had to go out of her way to excel.

[I was on] honor roll all the time. Apparently, I was always in the library. I didn't really realize that till like, recently.... I started looking back at the diplomas, and I'm like: Oh! I have a library certificate...

Mariana was conditioned to see school as her priority; she maintained a very serious attitude about her academic performance. To Mariana, school was a place you go to learn, she did not give in to the distractions.

... In elementary school, I was scared of, being bad, doing bad because it was said, that you had to do good in school... I wouldn't mess around and do anything that would jeopardize it.

Mariana did not take education lightly, she understood the importance and the impact it would have in her life.

Familial Factors

Involved Father

Mariana's father was heavily involved in her schooling when she was growing up. She recalls how invested he was in both her brother's and her education. Her father was fluent in the English language and therefore, would be able to help his children with homework. She believed that her father's grasp of the language played a major role in her early years of schooling.

Well, when I was younger... the focus [was] that we did well in school. Like, my father would curse my brother out to make sure that he knew how to do math, because math was so hard for all of us ... but he enforced that a lot, and with me, he helped me out a lot as far as studying, because he spoke English, and my mother didn't. So he was more hands-on role with education.

Mariana valued her father's involvement in her education; she was able to develop the discipline that she has now towards her education as a result. Mariana began to hint at the fact that her mother was not very involved in her education. As our conversation progressed she spoke in more detail about her thoughts regarding her mother's role in her education.

Not wanting to be her Mother

Mariana knew at a young age that she wanted a different life; she witnessed what her mother endured and wanted to experience the complete opposite. She believed that her mother was a good person and tried to do her best, but Mariana envisioned a different future for herself. When Mariana began to speak about her relationship with her mother

and the perception of that she held of her mother, it was apparent that she wasn't keen on feeling the way she did.

I always wanted to be that [successful] because I saw how my mother was, and I don't want to be that...other people want to be like their parents.... I'm not saying it in a blaming way, because there are a lot of things that I guess, she didn't know about or she didn't think she was capable of. But I never wanted to be like that [like my mother]. So I was always trying to find a way to be different or to be the complete opposite, whether that was being the over shiner...

The idea of wanting to become the opposite of what her mother was motivated Mariana; the images remained vivid in her mind. In a very incongruous way, Mariana's mother served as a motivation of what not to be.

Proving her Family Wrong

According to Mariana, her family cared for her and meant well but she felt that they weren't the most supportive. She often found herself becoming very defensive around her family, she felt very out of place when she was with them. Mariana's challenging personality would once again surface. She saw her families' lack of support and encouragement as an opportunity to prove them wrong.

... My brothers and my cousins played a large role in a lot of things that I thought, or I believed, because they were older, and they [have] experienced more than I have. But every time I would go through it [experiences], I would always break their version of it.

She was very proud of the fact that she proved them wrong; Mariana sought out the challenges and came out victorious. She continued to challenge the misconceptions and limitations that her family imposed on her. When Mariana began to consider college, she saw it as yet another opportunity to conquest a challenge. She would be the first member of her family to attend a four- year college. This was a great opportunity that she did not want to dismiss, she wanted to not only prove to her family but also to herself that she

would be able to successfully graduate from college. “I saw it [attending college] as a challenge. Like, really it's not that bad. Like, I just want to see: Is it really that bad? And it wasn't”. Mariana’s self-efficacy would prove to be a major motivating factor in her academic success. She would continue to overcome her families’ negative persuasions in relation to her pursuing a college degree.

Environmental Factors

The Good Kids: Positive Peer Network

Although, Mariana’s environment was less than perfect, she managed to surround herself with other like-minded individuals. Her peer-network consisted of individuals that were academically focused, mainly due to the fact that they understood the purpose of schooling. “I was always with the good kids... the good-behaving kids ...that followed what the teacher said, paid attention, did their work when they were told”. Mariana did not consciously select her friends; she realized that she seemed to be more connected with certain type of students. Upon her realization that her peer network’s characteristics were in line with her own, she now understands why she meshed so well with them. For the major part of her educational career prior to college, Mariana was in advanced placement classes. She recalls that she had classes with the same group of students throughout high school. Another similarity that Mariana noticed was that the same students were also involved in similar co-curricular activities.

By the time I reached senior year, I was in English AP, which we all had ...[it was] mostly [the same] people that were like in other stuff I was involved with. So, I was really around people [who were] involved in stuff with.

Mariana’s peer network allowed her to be surrounded by individuals that promoted academic excellence. Although, Mariana’s school environment was far from being

positive, she was able to find a group that she felt secure with. Having a positive peer-network proved to be invaluable for Mariana, since she was subjected to the education of failing school system. She was grateful to have other support networks outside of her family, other people that saw the same value in education.

Teachers and Counselor that Challenged Me

In addition to having a positive peer-network, Mariana had other individuals that she believes impacted her academic achievement. Mariana had several teachers that saw her potential; they were intentional about the way that they interacted with her. While many of her classmates disliked these particular teachers, she saw that these teachers were not trying to be unnecessarily difficult, but that they believed that their students could do better. Mariana once again took on the challenge, this time it was in order to prove to herself and to her teachers that she was capable of meeting their expectations. Mariana mentioned a few specific teachers that had an impact on her high school career.

He was so structured, and he knew his stuff... People actually like, tried to get in his class because he challenged you in a way that, it wasn't like, something that you couldn't reach, but he made you work in a positive way. Whereas, some teachers would make it so impossible, or wouldn't give you enough motivation to actually do anything, or you could do it like five minutes before class.

Mariana sought out the challenging teachers; it allowed her to push herself beyond her customary academic performance. As the academic challenges continued, Mariana was once again reminded of the future that awaiting her. She began to think about life after college and what it entailed.

Another individual that had a major impact on her educational career was her high school guidance counselor. Even though Mariana had the grades, she was hesitant about college. She understood the importance of a college education but also faced many

challenges that could interfere with this goal. She did not want to share with her guidance counselor her doubts about college, but soon realized that not applying to college would not be an option. Her guidance counselor would continuously reach out to her in order to discuss her college applications. In a way, Mariana felt that her guidance counselor gave her the extra nudge that she needed in order to begin the college application process and to see a college education as attainable.

She was like, “You work so hard. Like, you have all these good grades. You’ve done all these good things. Then you’re not going to go to college?” Like, she kind of made me...she was like, “You better go!”

According to Mariana she had a very out of the ordinary relationship with her high school guidance counselor, her counselor implemented unorthodox strategies in order to get Mariana’s reaction. Mariana was not accustomed to having individuals around her that would hold her accountable to her actions. Her guidance counselor saw her potential and would not allow Mariana to lose out on the opportunities that her future had in store. Mariana would soon realize that her counselor had her best interests in mind and soon after embarked on the college application journey.

After I had [a] talk with my guidance counselor, and she sat me down and gave it to me for real, I started doing my own research [for] scholarships and College Board... I started going through the different steps that you needed to.

The college application process was extremely complicated and difficult for Mariana; she was determined to figure it out on her own. Mariana realized that while it was difficult it was not impossible and she was extremely grateful to her guidance counselor for her persistence. Being challenged by her teachers and guidance counselor would produce a very positive outcome in Mariana’s life. She realized the power that having relationships with knowledgeable individuals had on her future.

I think it's really important to interact with faculty and administration and staff because these are people that can help you, or that can give you advice on anything that you may need. These are usually older people that have been through the education system or are going through it. So they can always lend advice, and not even educational only [also] professional advice, obviously, since they're in these positions.

Mariana became highly aware of her surroundings and the resources available. She believed that this awareness allowed for her to fill in the gap that was left by her family's lack of knowledge, in relation to the college process. As a result of this newly acquired awareness, Mariana developed a keen understanding of the importance of developing relationships and utilizing her resources.

Supportive Educational Networks

Once Mariana was accepted into college, she was able to take part in a state funded college access program for low-income students. The program required for the admitted students to participate in a five-week summer institute, during this time they live on the college campus and are enrolled in college courses. The purpose of the program is to assist students with the transition of high school to college. Since the students are enrolled in college courses, they are able to take the math course in which they placed into. Mariana was able to benefit immensely from this program; she saw this program as her life jacket. She was able to begin her college education before most students; this allowed her to work on her deficiencies.

Thank God for the [state funded program]...I feel bad for kids that don't come in [through this program]. If it weren't for [this program], I literally wouldn't have learned the stuff that I was supposed to [learn] in high school...it offered your math placement and a writing prep class, depending on where you were placed in the fall.

She realized immediately that her prior education did not properly prepare her for college. Fortunately, she was able to take the proper courses in the summer that prepared

her for college that coming fall. Mariana was able to benefit from the other resources that the program provided. She was exposed to the college culture, while attending the program she was able to get a sense of what she would be experiencing in the fall. She developed meaningful relationships with other students with similar backgrounds. This allowed Mariana to see that she would have a support network once her first semester commenced.

I think [this state funded program] was just the best thing that could've ever happened [to me], just because it eased the transition [from high school to college]. You were already used to the workload to some extent, and it was pretty good. The only thing is that it was a very big culture shock in the sense that [in the state funded program] a lot of people that looked like you...

Mariana thrived in the summer program; she continued to develop the relationships that she would continue to assist her throughout college. She embraced the many resources that the program provided her, she knew that in order to succeed in college that she would need all the support possible.

Intentional Involvement

Mariana was very strategic in her approach when deciding what to become involved while in school. She surveyed the environment and then decided on what she would join and contribute her time to. She believed that you have to become involved in activities that have tangible benefits. Mariana believed that her being involved allowed her to enjoy school.

I think being involved really helped a lot. ...It made school fun, in the sense that I was doing stuff that I was interested in, and it made me want to go and become more involved...

Since Mariana was only involved in activities that she enjoyed and had an interest in, she looked forward to attending school even more.

Once Mariana began college she decided to research the organizations on campus in order to decide what she would commit to join. She quickly realized that her college campus was quite large and found herself isolated from others that were culturally similar to her. She sought out different groups and soon found her niche. Mariana was excited to be around other students with similar cultural backgrounds, she no longer found herself alone.

I started becoming so much more involved... I found out where all the Spanish people were. That really helped ...not that I only hung out with Spanish people. It's just like, it made me have some type of comfort, and then I could go out there and go outside my comfort zone.

On a large college campus groups of students that are not large in number often feel isolated. For Mariana, it was imperative and crucial to her becoming engaged with her surroundings. Finding her niche, her groups allowed her to put her guard down and to flourish as a student leader on campus.

As Mariana's college career progressed, she diversified her involvement. She realized that while it was important to be around students that shared similar backgrounds, she wanted to venture out and do other things. Mariana felt that she wanted to give back, to contribute to a greater good. She decided to join an organization that focused on community service.

I'm a part of [a service-learning program], which is with the AmeriCorps. I love community service. I've always done community service...this is a chance of doing constant community service, rather than service days that are just like one-day-type of events. This coming year is going to be crazy because I'm trying to do everything under the sun before I leave [college].

As her senior year approached, Mariana wanted to make sure that she took full advantage of all of the opportunities that were available to her.

Summary of Mariana's Academic Journey

Overall, the presence of various protective factors had a powerful impact on Mariana's academic career. The two most significant protective factors were dispositional and environment. Mariana had a very independent and committed personality; she was able to take advantage of the resources that were afforded to her. She was very strategic and was able to navigate the complex educational system. Mariana showed throughout the study that her self-efficacy would not yield to the deficiencies of her home and school environment.

Linda

"I believe if we really want something bad enough in life we can accomplish it... when we do not give up we achieve the impossible."

Linda was a pleasure to interview; she was so positive and full of energy. The more I was able to learn about her, the more I felt a deep connection with her. Her story was one of determination and commitment. As the only member of her immediate family to attend college, she was very aware of her obligation to succeed. Linda made sure to take advantage of all her of her resources. She was eager to be part of my study, she excited about sharing her story. She was born in Cali, Colombia and came to the United States at a very young age.

Linda Shares Her Story

Education is the gateway to success. Out of the ten children my grandmother had my mother was the eighth child. She was born to a family who did not have much; sometimes even getting food for the whole family was a struggle. Although by the time she was born things were looking better from grandparents it was still not enough to maintain such a big family. Most of my mother's siblings were lucky to have even

finished high school. Only two of her brothers actually went on to pursue a higher education. My mother only managed to graduate high school, as much as she wanted to go on to college money was still a big issue in her family. Therefore instead of going on to higher education she decided to settle down and begin a family with my father.

My father was the second out of three children. Neither of his parents or siblings went to college.. My father's family was not a rich family but they were far better off than my mother's family. His family believed more on finding professional positions in the corporate world rather than seeking a higher education. Therefore, my father dropped out of school when he was only fourteen years old and began to work out in the field. Years later he decided to go back to school and get his high school diploma because he realized the importance higher education really had on society. As a result, my parents decided that they did not want me to turn out like them. Therefore they decided to move the family to America where they knew I would have a better educational opportunity.

When we first arrived to the country we settled down at my aunt's house that was already living here. At first the process was difficult because my parents did not know how to speak English and finding a job was not easy. When they were finally able to find a job my father was working two shifts while my mother worked at night so she could take me and pick me up from school. They both worked in factories, my father worked with my uncle while my mother worked in a factory where they made tools for dentists. After a year of being in America my father decided to go back to Colombia while my mother and I stayed back. Things were difficult at first after my father left financially; therefore my mom began to work two shifts.

Pre-college Years

When I entered grade school I was very scared because I did not know what to expect and did not have any understanding of the language. My grade school was a predominantly white school with one or maybe two minority students in a classroom. Since I did not know English I was put in a program called ESL, English as a second language. The program did not help me much, instead I learned English by watching cartoons, which allowed me to grasp the language better. School was difficult since my mother could not help me because she had no understanding of the language. Therefore, I became very independent when it came to doing my schoolwork. My mother tried her best to help me but it was very difficult due to the language barrier, but she still supported me every step of the way, which helped me a lot. In grade school I got along well with my teachers and pulled good grades but I kept very much to myself. When I entered middle school I was still a shy little girl pulling good grades but actually began to make friends and talk to people. Now that I knew how to speak the language it was not as difficult making friends. All my teachers loved me and were very supportive. Once again my school was predominantly white, there were times in which I felt there was no one like me or that even understood what I had gone through.

Most of the friends I had made were financially well off while my family still struggled with money. Knowing I could not have some of the things that my friends had kept me motivated to do well in school. It was not until my eighth grade year that my mother was finally able to pay rent for our own house. We lived in our house with one of my cousins and my mother's new boyfriend, the financial help from her boyfriend helped out a lot. At this point we lived in Toms River but my mother did not like the educational

system there and therefore kept me in Jackson schools where I went for grade school. Even though there were not many Latino students in the school it had a better educational system thus my mother decided to keep me there. It was not until high school when I finally began to see more Latino and African American students in my classes.

At this time my mother had a better grasp of the English language but I never went to her for help because I was already accustomed to doing everything on my own. My first two years of high school were not a challenge because I was already used to good study habits from the previous years. The only difference now was that, I now had a job and was more involved in school. My junior and senior years of high school were much more difficult. I was trying to balance step practice, work and community college classes that my school provided for me for free. It was not easy but my mother kept me motivated because she kept telling not to be like her, stuck working in a factory her entire life. During my senior year in high school I realized I wanted to become a doctor, but I had no idea how the college application process worked. Fortunately, with the help of my guidance counselor, my step coach, my physics teacher and my mom's boyfriend I was able to do what I needed to do to get into college.

My guidance counselor helped me in telling me what I needed to have in order to apply to college. My step coach and physics teacher helped me find colleges that were for me and helped me find scholarships that I could apply for. My mother's boyfriend helped my mother and I apply for financial aid, which was a crucial part of whether or not I could go to college. My current college was not even an option I considered when it came to picking colleges. I did not know anything about any college and only applied to places where people told me to apply. My friends told me to apply to my current college, so I

did and I ended up choosing it because it gave me the most money. Even with all the financial aid I received it was still not enough for me to go to my current college because I still had to pay for housing. My mom was thrilled when I told her I wanted to become a doctor therefore she did whatever it took for me to get into college. As a result she took out a loan under her name in order for me to go to college.

College Years

The idea of me going to college and becoming a doctor as well was a big deal in my family. No one in my family had gone to college and yet alone medical school. Everyone in family was thrilled on the idea and told me they supported me every step of the way. Once I entered college it was nothing I expected it to be, because it was nothing like high school it was far more difficult. In high school I was able to understand things naturally, and even though I studied it was not much. Although in college it was a different story, I realized that in order for me to get A's I needed to work hard and study constantly. Unfortunately, I did not get the 4.0 I wanted my first semester at college but I did better than I expected. Even though I did not have the grades I wanted I still utilized my time at college wisely. I joined organizations that focused on the things I was interested in and enjoyed doing as well, because succeeding is not only what you have on paper but the experience you have with it as well.

School has always been a major part of my life. My whole life I have thrived to succeed not only for myself but for my family as well. I want to be a role model for my younger family members, and show them that we can achieve anything we want to as long as we put in the work. At this moment in time I have all the support from my family, and the only person stopping me is myself. I want to become a doctor after I accomplish

all the required schooling because as difficult as this career path is it is not impossible. I believe if we really want something bad enough in life we can accomplish it. Academic success to me is not just getting good grades but getting involved and helping others that have gone through the same experiences you have. Academic success is when things get tough we do not stop but keep going even if the grades do not show it should not matter as long as you stay motivated. When we do not give up we achieve the impossible.

Linda's Protective Factors

Dispositional Factors

Highly Motivated

Linda was initially very timid; she was finding it difficult to speak about herself. She did not self-identify as being resilient and therefore believed that her educational trajectory was “average”. Once I went more into detail, I explained that being resilient is not about having the highest grades, or the best GPA but rather about the obstacles that she overcame in order to succeed. This disclaimer gave Linda the clarification she needed; she immediately opened up about her educational history and the many factors that have been present. Linda began to share her view on education, how she developed her worth ethic. Linda was born in Colombia, and arrived in the United States at a very young age. She began her schooling in an ESL classroom; she felt as if she was not being challenged enough. Linda recalls having a conversation with her mother about her schooling, she was very aware of the impact that remaining in ESL would have on her learning. From a very young age, Linda took initiative and took control of her education.

I was in ESL [English as a Second Language] for two years, and they [teachers] wanted me to do a third year, but I told my mom to tell them not to because it wasn't really helping. So it was like, I wasn't learning anything. I was just there. It was just like time off class. I really did try to study a lot. Like, something I

looked forward to [was] getting good grades. So if I don't see them there, I [would] try everything possible to get [them]. I did really well in school. I maintained A's maybe one or two B's and then, I would get placed into the advanced math and science classes. In high school, I got into all honors classes.

Due to Linda being proactive about her education, she was able to receive a better education. She would later prove that she was highly motivated and academically focused. Her hard work paid off as she maintained a very good GPA and was placed in honors classes. Linda enjoyed learning, she found school to be fascinating and always made sure to perform to the best of her ability. Pursuing a college education was something that Linda always desired, she knew that it would be difficult but that would not deter her. She was used to facing challenges throughout her life, she was able to figure out ways to achieve her goals. Graduating high school and being accepted to a college was yet another challenge.

I wanted to go to college for myself...I always said my whole life I was going to college. [I said] I don't know how I'm going to do it, because I realized money was a big issue but I'm going to go.

Linda knew that this new challenge would be rather difficult; she knew that finances would be an issue. Yet again, Linda did not succumb to the challenge that was before her. Linda began to see her challenges as a way to motivate herself; she believed that it was all happening for a reason, that it was "preparing" her.

There's nothing else you could do as hard as it gets, you've just got to keep going... at the end of the day, I guess it just prepares you because life isn't easy. So sometimes, I'm just like, you know what? This is nothing. This is just preparing me.

Linda's ability to view obstacles and challenges as transitory assisted her in her educational career. She maintained this attitude throughout her time in high school and would continue to push herself while in college. Linda was cognizant of the difficulties

that would be ahead because she wants to become a doctor. For Linda becoming a doctor is extremely important, she is determined to attain this goal. Once again, Linda has set her mind to a new goal, becoming a Doctor. “Being a doctor is just something I want to do. Like, I have so much passion for it, so much drive to do it...like I don't care if it takes me 10 years to do it...I just want to do it”. Due to her resilient nature, Linda is able to pursue a career in medicine. She believes that her will and determination will allow her to reach her goal.

Not Wanting to Fail

Along with being a motivated student, Linda was also very focused on her academic performance. When she began college, her priority was doing well in her classes. She knew that she had to maintain a good GPA in order to pursue her medical career in the near future. She did not want to be distracted and consequently, opted to not be involved in any activities outside of the classroom. “First semester, I didn’t go out much. I was just like I came here for school. So I’m just going to do this and my GPA was up there”. As a result of her self-discipline, Linda did very well her first semester in college. She had very high expectations of herself and failing was not an option. Her classes were very demanding, she recalls having a difficult time with one of her math classes. Linda was determined to do well in this class and studied as much as possible in order to receive a good grade in the class.

...For [pre-calculus]...I’m so dedicated not to fail this class because I was like, failing! I don’t want to fail this class...I don’t want to fail first semester already, ruining my GPA I was like, I don’t want that!

Linda's focus did not dissipate as time progressed, she was continuously aware that she was in control of her performance. She knew that in order for her to succeed she had to access the necessary resources.

I mean, I guess, dedicated more than anything because I do fall. Because I don't get perfect grade sometimes, it's just like, what happened? But at the same time, I know what I'm here for. I know what I want, and the only person stopping me is myself. Like, all the resources are out there. If people back then could do it where there was nothing out there like, a computer in our own room before, they had to go to the library...if they managed to do it, why can't I?

Over time, Linda began to realize that she had the resources that many people before her did not have. She came to the conclusion that if others succeeded with minimal support and resources that she had no excuse. Linda's motivation was strengthened by this realization.

Wanting to be a Role Model & Mentor

Linda is the first in her family to attend a four-year college, with this accomplishment came a great responsibility. Linda felt that she had an obligation to serve as a role model to her family. Since her family is very attentive as it relates to her education, she believed that she could motivate some of her family members to also pursue higher education.

I just want to be a role model in my family. Like, if I can do it, I feel like then they'll say, "You know, maybe we *should* do it too." Like, "We won't give up." Then they see someone else doing it; they get, then, motivated to do it.

She believed that role modeling is the best approach in motivating others to achieve. Linda also believed that it was not just about being a role model, but that it is important to serve as a mentor. She realized that it was important to not only focus on her family but also on other students with similar backgrounds that need someone to look up to.

Since Linda is interested in the medical field, she is aware of how difficult it can be to remain positive and motivated. According to Linda, many minority students discontinue their interest in the sciences because they are not encouraged. She believes that it makes a great difference in a student's life to have a mentor that is constantly encouraging them.

But then I found out it was just like a mentoring thing. Because a lot of Latinos, a lot of minorities, they just drop [out] when they go into professions in the sciences, in math, like anything in the stem field. [I am] going to work as a mentor to keep these kids from dropping [out of the STEM majors]. I would love to have someone telling me, "Don't drop," ...you have to motivate yourself here in college because it's up to you now, having someone there motivating you would definitely help.

She realized that it was crucial for certain groups to have a support system in order to succeed. Linda wanted to be the person that would encourage others to succeed because she knew it was possible. She found that it rewarding to help others, it also motivated her to continue achieving since she now had other people looking up to her.

Break the Stereotypes

Linda faced many obstacles, even though she was a very focused and determined student. She had to quickly adjust to a new environment at a very young age when she first came to the United States. Linda quickly realized that she was different from many of her classmates and that some people had negative perceptions of Latinos. She often struggled when facing negative situations that surrounded her ethnicity; she questioned her willingness to continue to pursue her dreams. Then she realized that regardless of her situation she had no choice, she had to continue her studies. Linda became even more motivated by the idea of breaking the stereotypes that existed about Latinos.

... I do go through obstacles, and sometimes I don't want to keep going, I just want to give up, I don't want this anymore. I'm like, if other people were

successful without even going to college, why do I have to go to college? But at the same time, I'm like, yeah, they did do it but it was harder. Regardless of what I do, it's going to be hard. So, why not go to school? Like, I just want [it] so bad, I guess [I am] passionate too. I want this so bad; I don't know how to explain it. I just want to show that it's possible. Like, I don't want to be one of those stereotypes anymore...

Linda knew that attaining a college degree would be one of the most powerful tools that she could attain that would allow her to combat the negative stereotypes. The stereotypes that Latinos aren't academically inclined, that Latinos do not succeed in this country. She knew that she was able to achieve something that many wish they could; she had the opportunity to attend college. She kept reminding herself that she had to succeed to prove many wrong and at the same time to motivate many others.

... They say many Latinos don't go to college... no one really in my family went. It's like, I just always saw myself there [in college]. I had no reason for me *not* to go. So, I was like: Why not go? If I can go, why not do it? There are so many people that don't go because they don't have the opportunity. If I have it, when I take it?

Linda took full control of the opportunity that she was granted to attend a great four-year college. She knew that this would equip with the tools that she needed in order to debunk the myths and stereotypes that exist about Latinos. This desire to break stereotypes existed before she entered college, she felt this way in high school. She would often talk to her friends about college and would push them to think outside the box, to think about applying to colleges.

I wanted to see more people like me up there. I didn't want to be the only one, I don't like being in the spotlight...I don't like the stereotypes [that exists] most people think [that] Latinos don't go to college, or if they do, they don't go to four-year [colleges]. There are not many of us who actually go four-year [colleges] or even go to graduate school. I didn't like that; I wanted it to be different.

Linda knew the facts and wanted to change it, she wanted the numbers of Latinos in college to rise. She had an internal desire to create change, to motivate other Latino students to push themselves beyond what is expected of them.

I would joke around and be like, “Come on.” I’d go, “We don’t want to keep the stereotype. You don’t want to be doing the same thing everyone in the past has done. Sometimes, I would bring up the whole Martin Luther King [dream speech, all of his work]; he didn’t do that for any reason. They would agree, but they just were so lazy. They were like, “I don’t want to.”

Many of her friends were not as motivated, they did not value education the same way she did. Linda often complained about the attitude of her friends and how “lazy” they were, that they didn’t care that they were reinforcing the stereotypes.

Familial Factors

Reciprocity towards Mother

In addition to her own desire to succeed, Linda was extremely motivated by the idea of making her mother proud. Linda’s mother was supportive of her educational endeavors and facilitated Linda’s life in order to allow her to focus on her schoolwork. Linda was very aware of the sacrifices that her mother made for her; she knew that her mother had her best interests in mind.

... I don't really have much of a role in my house... my mom really does everything...I mean I could help out if I want, but it's really her just doing everything. I can help out just, with my brother, helping him with homework and stuff...or if she comes late, [I] help with household chores. But other than that, it's not like much ...

Linda’s role in her home was simple, she did not have to do much and she realized how much that allowed her to focus on school.

Linda spoke very fondly of her mother; she recalls how proud her mother would be when she did well in school. She knew that her mother was not fortunate enough to focus on her education, Linda felt obliged to succeed as a way of thanking her mother.

My mother...just seeing her every time I brought home a good grade, she would just be happy, I guess, because she didn't have a chance to do it. I want to do this not only for me, but also for her.

She was aware of the implications that having an education would have on her future, she wanted to make sure that she had a good career. She saw firsthand the implications of not having an education; her mother had a job, which was very different from a career. Linda saw how difficult it was for her mother to work long hours in a meaningless job. She wanted a better life for herself and for her mother; she would like to be able to return the favor one day.

I just knew if you went to college, you got a better job...I don't want to be just something simple, like working in a factory. Because I've seen my mom, my mom also influenced me too, just seeing her working so hard, working [long] hours and still not being able to make ends meet. I was like, I don't want that, I want to be able to go to school [and] get a good job, and [then] she won't have to work anymore after all she's struggled. I want to do everything then and help her out.

As the years passed it became very clear why her mother pushed her to pursue a college education. Although Linda faces difficult times while in college, she is motivated by many factors that are present in her life.

...Now I see why my mom really want[s] me to go to college, why *I* want to go to college...So even when it does get[s] hard, I just think of [why] I'm doing it. I want to become a doctor [and] this is what it takes. I'm going to do it. I have to suck it up sometimes and just do it.

Once again, Linda was determined to succeed, she knew it would not be easy but she did not shy away from the difficult moments.

High Familial Expectations

When discussing Linda's family's role in her education she had a lot to say about this matter. Linda's family have been very vocal about their expectations towards her, they are always reminding her how proud they are of her. Linda was flattered but at the same time she internalized their compliments, she began to feel pressured. She knows that her family means well but at the same time they make her anxious and self-conscious. Linda is the only one in her family in college, therefore, her family is constantly checking in on her.

My family looks up to me because I want to be a doctor, and no one in my family has become a doctor. They really don't want to see me fail they support me 100%. Even my uncle, he went into a store and he saw, medical books, and he just bought them to give them to me...and if I don't do it, I don't know what's going to happen...they would be very disappointed.

Linda felt a very strong sense of obligation for her family; she knew that she could not disappoint them. They had very high expectations of her and she believes that they would be devastated if she did not reach her goal of becoming a doctor.

Linda's parents are no longer together and her father does not live with her. Even though her father is not always around, when he calls he checks on her. Her father reiterates what the rest of her family would often tell her, that they know that she will do great things and will be successful one day. Linda's father expected a lot from her, he knew that she had the potential and would always remind her.

My father, he really loves seeing that I'm doing well in school. I don't really talk to him as much. He's really worried about how I do in school, that's something he always manages to bring up when I do talk to him, "How are you doing in school?" And I'm like, 'I'm okay right now.' He's like, 'Why? You should do better,' or you know, 'you're better than that. Like, come on. We want to see you succeed,' and I'm like, 'I know, I know. I know. I got it'.

Linda is constantly reminded of the expectations that her family have, she has to focus on school and succeed. At the same time, these expectations have often made Linda nervous, she knows that she is capable of excelling but is worried about disappointing them.

Sometimes I feel like my family put[s] so much pressure on me, especially [since] they know I want to be doctor...Like, they have me on this high pedestal, and I'm just scared [to] not meet their expectations, I don't know what's going to happen.

Her family placed Linda on a "pedestal", she knows that she has a lot to prove and is expected to become a doctor one day.

Environmental Factors

"Good" Schools: White Schools

When we began talking about the type of schools that she had attended, Linda would often say, "white schools". I asked her clarify what she meant by "white" schools instead of saying she went to a good school. Linda saw "white schools" as being synonymous with a good school. She was not even aware that she was making this connection between race and quality of education. When I asked her to elaborate on her experiences in the "white schools" Linda began to recall how she often stood out among her classmates.

...[I went to] predominantly white schools. Like there [were] not many people that were Spanish or black in the school, not many Spanish or black teachers...it was just weird, sometimes I'd just feel like I didn't fit in.

Linda was aware that she was different from her classmates but didn't think that it would affect her as much as it did. At the time she did not understand why her mother insisted on enrolling her in a school that the student population did reflect her background. Her mother insisted that they were better schools. Her mother did not wanted her to receive a superior education and she felt as if the "white schools" would do a better job at educated

Linda. In order to provide Linda with the opportunities to attend the better schools her mother would have to make some arrangements.

My mom didn't want me going to other schools...she saw the other [schools]...I moved around a lot, but like, the school system, she didn't agree with it, and like, she heard many stories about [the] stuff that happened in the schools, and she decided to keep me in the same school.

Linda's mother was not flexible when it came to her education; she wanted to ensure a better future for her daughter. The school system in Linda's hometown did not meet her mother's expectation. Linda was enrolled in another district nearby; she used her aunt's address as her home address for school purposes.

[I would] have to get up at 5:00 in the morning so she could drive me to my aunt's house, to take the bus there...Where I lived, it was like, half were senior citizens [and] the other half was like mostly, black and Latinos. The other school was a mostly [a] white school...

Now reflecting on the decisions that her mother made about her schooling, Linda is grateful. She realizes that she received a better education in the schools that she attended in comparison to the schools in her hometown.

Supportive & Encouraging Individuals

Linda had a support network outside of her family, there were many individuals that she gave credit to for helping her succeed. She felt that having a support network was critical.

...Having people around me just motivating me, telling me I can do it, just gets me back up. Or just even telling me, like, 'Oh, you're going to become a doctor,' this and that, or like just telling me good stuff about myself. Like if they see me like this, why am I not seeing myself like this? [And] after hearing them say all that, I don't want to prove them wrong. If you know I can do it, why can't I do it? If everyone around me is telling me I can do it, then the only person holding me back is me!

Linda expressed how much she depended on the support that she was given; she felt that it kept her going. Linda mentioned that she did not seek out the support; she had individuals around her that took an interest in her. She felt very fortunate that there were individuals that were invested in her success. Among her support group were some of her teachers, guidance counselor, mother's boyfriend and academic peer network.

Linda mentioned that for the majority of her schooling, that most teachers liked her. She would notice that they would invest time in speaking to her in order to push her to participate in class. They would speak to her about her shyness and encouraged her to take more ownership of her learning.

Well, most of my teachers liked me, but it wasn't until middle school [that] my English teacher noticed [that] I was really she [and] she was the type of teacher, [that] if you're shy, she's going to make you talk. So she really picked on me [and] it kind of opened me up a little bit. I think it was eighth grade, she would sit with me after school and she'd ask me to talk to her, "Why are you so shy? Why this and that." And then she actually opened me up a lot...

The interactions with her teachers allowed Linda to view her education differently. She no longer felt as if she should only listen in class, but that she needed to be more involved. Linda became a more active student. She also mentioned other teachers that she interacted with in and outside of the classroom. Linda was involved in her school's step team; her step coach was also her French teacher. She formed a special relationship with this teacher due to the amount of time that she spent with her. Linda recalls that this particularly teacher was among the first to tell her that she would be very successful one day.

My French teacher, who was also my step coach, she would see me in the classroom, and she also saw how I was socially. So like, she saw both sides of me, and she was the one who actually told me like, 'you're going to be something good in life. Like, don't just be something, easy'.

Linda recognized that she was in fact a good student, but having one of her teachers tell her that she would be “something good in life” resonated with her. Linda began to think about her future more seriously; she fully embraced her teacher’s encouragement. Once Linda realized that she wanted to become a doctor, she shared it with some of her teachers. Initially, she was not confident that this was a realistic career choice. Her support network would once again prove to be invaluable; Linda would continue to receive unconditional support.

... At first, I didn't know what I wanted to be, and like, [becoming a] doctor, I thought that would be too [far fetched] for me... But she, she always told me, "You're going to a doctor..." She was like, 'You have so much going for you', and she really motivated me and supported me. If I ever needed a teacher recommendation, she had it for me [and] I didn't even have to ask... when I applied for college; she already had it [ready] for me. I was like, 'what? I didn't even ask you for one yet'.

It became very important to Linda to have individuals that were readily accessible to assist her. She saw the value of having teachers that would not only encourage her but that were able to assist her in navigating the college process. Linda was able to learn about the many resources that were available in order for her to finance a college education.

...My physics teacher, wow! I owe a lot to him too. Because I didn't know anything about, college or scholarships or anything, because, [I am] first generation [and I] don't know much about that. He went online and looked up every scholarship I could apply for, and then he sat with me after school and he was like, 'this is what you have to do. Go apply'. He said, "Most likely, you could get something." He's like, "I know how you are as a student. I've seen your grades." So, like he helped out a lot too.

Linda’s physics teacher went beyond his assigned duties, he insisted for her to research options and be well informed. Linda felt that this one of the pivotal moments in her realizing that attending college was feasible and that she can in fact do it. She began to

understand the process with each conversation that she had with her teachers. Linda would meet with guidance counselor to discuss her college applications and what steps she should be taking. Her guidance counselor was also very proactive, which Linda believes made a great difference.

So, one of my guidance counselors was the one who actually sent us the letters, and he would call me back to the office like, "You need this, this and that." But other than that, I really didn't know how to do anything...I was considering [applying to a community college]. You know, money's a big issue. So I was like, well, why don't I just go there, my guidance counselor then said, "You're better off going to a four-year school. Like, with your grades, you're better off just going."

Linda decided that she would definitely attend a four-year college, but was not confident about being able to afford it. Since no one in Linda's family had ever attended college, she had very little information about the financial aid process. She was very intimidated about the entire financial aspect of college, she felt as if she could never afford it.

Once again, someone in her support network assisted Linda with another aspect of the college process. Her mother's boyfriend was very knowledgeable of the financial aid process because he was a college graduate. He understood the nuances that were associated with the process and therefore assisted Linda.

...My mom's boyfriend, he played a big role, especially in [understanding] financial aid. We didn't know how to apply for financial aid or loans. So he did all of that. Like, if it wasn't for him, I don't think I'd be in college right now... he went to [college], and he is white too.

Linda pointed out that her mother's boyfriend happens to be white; she also spoke about his family and their educational background. She realized that having an educated family creates opportunities for individuals; she saw the role his family played in his educational attainment. Linda diligently followed his instructions and successfully completed the financial aid process.

All his family had gone to [college], his father's a doctor, his mom's a nurse and he's an engineer and his sister is a doctor. So they all went through it, and he really knew how to do it, and we didn't know what he was doing half the time. He'd tell us like, "You need this. Do this, do this." And we were like, "Okay." We didn't even ask for why. We were just like, "Okay. Like, you know what you're doing."

Linda realized that attending and graduating college was feasible, she overcome another hurdle in her educational journey. She was conscious that even though she was applying to college and completing the financial aid process, she would encounter other obstacles in the future. Linda began to think about her present situation in college and how she instituted similar practices to those she used in high school in order to move ahead. Linda realized that while her high school was academically rigorous, she would have to be equipped with as many resources and support networks as possible. One of the many networks Linda surrounded herself with was an academic peer network. Linda realized early on in her college career that it would be a difficult road ahead that she needed to be surrounded by like-minded individuals that believed in being academically focused. Since Linda's goal is to become a medical doctor, she knew that her coursework would be challenging and that she would have to seek out as much support as possible. Linda found herself surrounded by other students that were interested in similar careers and were taking most of the same classes.

...Most of my friends, they're mostly interested in doing the same thing I am. Most of them are in my classes or in the same tutoring stuff I'm in. So, we help each other out [with] studying, because we don't know how to ask our teachers, or we don't have time to ask our teachers. So it's like, we kind of just help each other out, and it's like, if one of us needs help, it's like, 'Oh, okay, well, this is how you do it'.

Being part of a supportive academic peer network afforded Linda with the opportunities to connect to students that were just as driven as she was. Linda leaned on her network

for the additional support that she might have needed in order to understand the material of certain courses. The additional support outside of the classroom was invaluable for Linda, she realized that while it was important to connect to professors that having peers around her was also critical to her success.

Selective Involvement

As a result of her positive experiences with her peer academic networks, Linda decided that she wanted to seek out other similar opportunities. She became involved in student organizations and programs that were comprised of students with an interest in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) majors. Linda's mentality regarding resources continued to propel her forward, she not only took advantage of the resources but she was now taking on leadership roles. She decided that she would become a mentor for other students that were seeking the support; she wanted to pay it forward.

I got involved in [a STEM support program]. I didn't really do much for it, but I actually applied for an ambassador position [for the STEM support program], and I got it. [Another organization that I decided to join is an organization for minority student interested in pre-health]. So like, I was like, okay. I want to do that.

At the time of her interviews Linda was a first-year student and was already mapping out her college involvement. She was conscious that her time would be limited due to her demanding major. Therefore, Linda was very selective regarding her involvement on campus. She wanted to ensure that she would not compromise her academic performance by become over involved.

Well, now, I realize [that being involved in] a lot of [organizations] is not good. It's like, I really just have to focus on things I really wanted to do. I know [this organization] is definitely something I'm going to consider because they even said [that] they're considering giving me an [executive board] position, and that

looks good. So I was like, okay, especially in something I want to do, is really good. So, that's definitely there.

Linda immersed herself in various opportunities that allowed her to continue to network with students, faculty and staff. Linda was able to strategize her desired experiences and this allowed her to become fully engaged within her college environment.

Science Support Program

The final resources that Linda mentioned throughout her interviews, which assisted her, was a science support program. This program provided Linda with the academic support that she needed in order to do well in her science courses. Linda believed that this program was critical in her success mainly due to the structure and support that the program offered her. Even though Linda was a focused student, she felt that she needed the additional academic support in order to understand the material of her science and math courses. Linda registered for this program with the understanding that she would have to abide by their strict participation requirements. The program provided her with a staff person that she had to meet with and update on her academic progress. While the program required Linda to give up a lot of her time, she understood that the benefits outweighed the sacrifices that she was making.

... They control your life. They're just a tutoring program with like mostly science and math classes, and basically, it's another class, and you don't get credit for it, but it's like basically taking another 4 or 5 credit class, it's that time consuming and if you don't go, they start threatening you, "Oh, you're going to get a flag, and if you don't get this, you'll probably get kicked out of the program, and you can't do it anymore." The fact that many people stay [it's] because, they help you a lot if you're going to go apply to [medical] school, they've gotten many kids to go [to medical school]. So it's like, they know what to do to help you out, and it's helpful...

Linda recognized the value of the program and understood that she would reap the long-term benefits if she remained committed. It was important for Linda to have a blueprint

to reference. She trusted the program because they had assisted many students before her. Her goal is to attend medical school and she knew that the program would prepare her for that venture.

They give you opportunities to go to [visit medical] schools, [they also have programs where you can meet] people who've gone through [you also get to meet] deans from other schools...it really just gives you like, an idea of what this career is [like]. Going [into the] to the health professions is not something easy, and they really show it to you.

It was very important for Linda to be exposed to the field, she wanted to be able envision what medical school would be like. Very much like her collegiate experience, Linda would once again be the first in her family to pursue an advanced degree. Linda realized that this time around she would be more proactive, she wanted to ensure that she was well informed regarding the medical school process.

Finally, Linda found motivation in knowing that she was not alone, that she had others around her that understood her struggle. She found a program that not only supported her academically but also personally.

Like, they really motivate you, and they give you support, and it's like, they just help you out, like to really stay focused in the class. And they let you know, 'Yeah, it's hard, but it's possible. You're not the only one that's struggled. Like, everyone can do it. You've just got to put the time in it'.

She has been able to achieve more than she ever imagine because of the strategic choices that she made during her first-year. Linda took control of her education; she knew that she had to find ways to compensate for the lack of prior knowledge regarding the college experience.

Summary of Linda's Academic Journey

Linda's academic journey was permeated by various factors; she had a very strong sense of self-efficacy and therefore, moved ahead academically. Linda attributed

much of her success to the strong support networks that surrounded her throughout her educational career. She was conscious of some of the educational deficits that she was exposed to, and managed to move from awareness into action. As she moved further up the educational ladder, Linda became more strategic in her choices. She realized that she had to become proactive and take control of her education.

Comparisons across Stories

In this section, I highlight the larger themes that stood out within the data derived from the autobiographical narratives, the individual interviews, and the focus group. I developed the larger themes by looking across the data of all five of the participants. Only one of the major themes encompassed all five of the participants. The other themes highlighted below were only relevant to three to four of the participants.

Dispositional Factors

Goal Oriented

One of the major themes that resonated throughout the focus group was most of the participants were really focused on their goal. They felt that they have worked really hard throughout the years to achieve success. During the focus group conversation, Cathy spoke about her future plans. She spoke about her goals to become an aerospace engineer and how she is working towards that goal. Cathy understood that she had to work even harder than most students because she is female and Latino background. She pointed out that, that there are not many Latinas in the field that she interested in but that will not deter her, she is focused.

I have these goals in my life that I want to accomplish. I'm an aerospace engineer so I'm hoping to get an internship by next summer and start getting them throughout the rest of my college years...I'm hoping to work for a big company.

Big companies in the aerospace field, those are the big ones I hope I can work for and they have programs for Latino people in those companies.

Cathy is familiar with the steps that she must take in order to achieve her goal, she knows what she wants and how to get it. Maintaining her goal in mind was very important for Cathy, she believes that knowing what you want is a major factor in achieving that said goal. Similarly to Cathy, Linda was very clear as to her goals after graduating from college.

Linda was a just starting her second year in college at the time of the focus group and was already certain about her career goals after college. Linda knew from an early age that she wanted to pursue a career in Medicine. She understood the complexities of the field but would not allow the difficulties to deter her. Both Cathy and Linda are well aware that they will be among the few Latinas in their fields. Even while in college they both discussed how they were often among the few that looked like them in the classroom. Linda asserted that she would continue to pursue her goal because it is something that she wanted to accomplish.

I want to go to medical school. I know it's going to be really hard but I want to go to med school, people ask me all the time what's your back up? No I'm going to medical school, I don't care if it takes me five years, I don't care if it takes me 6 years, I am going to medical school. I want to become a pediatrician...

Being able to pursue her passion was very important to Linda; she mentioned how motivating it was for her to know that she will one day reach that goal.

Mariana was a senior at the time of the interview and therefore had more time to think about her goals after college. Even though, Mariana was older her thoughts about her future were in line with that of Linda and Cathy. All three participants were very thoughtful and detailed about their post-college plans. They understood the importance of

being meticulous about planning ahead. Mariana's demeanor was different mainly due to her personality; she was very serious and direct about her goals. Mariana will be graduating this year and would like to pursue a Masters Degree. She had been exposed to the field she is interested in while in college. She realized that she wanted to become a college administrator due to her interactions with administrators as a student. Mariana is very familiar with the steps that she must take in order to achieve her career goals. She has the option to either begin a full time job at a company where she interned last summer or to enter graduate school. Mariana knew that she had to have several options after graduating; she did not want to take any chances. She was leaning towards attending graduate school part-time in addition to the full time job, because it will ultimately lead to her career choice of becoming a college administrator.

...I will be graduating May 2012. I had an internship this summer and got hired full time for next year...it's a 3-year graduate program with full benefits and all that good stuff and I also want to apply to graduate school. I want to finish my Masters while I am in that program for 3 years and then head toward my ultimate goal of getting my PhD and becoming a Dean.

Mariana goals became apparent as she continued to speak throughout the focus group; she was very assertive about the choices that she has been making. She conducted her own research in regards to the different options that she would have and knew that she had to make the best decision. Ultimately, Mariana knew that she wanted to pursue a graduate degree that would prepare her for career in higher education.

Familial Factors

Education is Non-Negotiable

Most of the participants were extremely goal oriented; but some were also heavily impacted by the role their families played in their education. Samantha spoke about

education not being an option but an obligation in her home. She was conditioned at a young age to do well in school; her mother would often monitor her schoolwork.

Education in my house was a must, I would have homework and stuff and my mom would actually check, she would actually be on top of it until high school but later on it really depended on me but she kept track of it though...

As she reflected on her current ethic towards her education she realized that it all stemmed from her earlier years. Samantha's educational commitment was rooted in the expectations set forth by her mother at a very young age. In Cathy's case it was also a matter of education not being optional, it was expected for her to succeed academically. Similarly to Samantha, Cathy's mother had a major role in her education. Her mother was an active participant; she would assist Cathy with her schoolwork as much as possible.

Well, education in my house. It was the same but it was pretty much mandatory in a way. When I was in Peru my mom actually stayed home. So she would actually sit with me and do homework.

Cathy was surrounded by positive messages about education in her household. She never felt that not pursuing a college education was an option. Cathy's goals of becoming an engineer derived from conversations that she held with her parents at a young age. Education in Mariana's home was seen as important and non-negotiable as well but she did not receive the same type of support and encouragement that Samantha and Cathy had. Mariana's experience differed because of her circumstances at home, she was forced a very young age to take care of herself. Even though the enforcement was different in her household was different, the expectations were still the same. Mariana was expected to figure things out on her own.

Education was just something that had to happen, you had to go to school. How well you did and other stuff, it was encouraged in the sense that you had to go to school every day but if you needed help or something you had to figure it out on your own.

Mariana attributes much of her success to the fact that she had to learn at a very young age how to be responsible for your own success.

Reciprocity towards Family

Family continued to play a major role in the decisions that most of the participants made, one of the major themes that came out of the conversation was “paying their families back”. The participants spoke about their sense of obligation to succeed because they owed it to their families. They understood the sacrifices that their parents and families made in order to afford them with better opportunities and future. Samantha pointed out that she always kept in mind all of her mother’s hard work to ensure that she had a great education.

I think my mom was a big part of it; she was the biggest motivation for me to do well in school. It was always engraved like school was what the ultimate goal, it was really what I wanted to do so I did well and I just wanted to make her proud because she worked hard, a single mother, and I just wanted to do well with whatever I can.

Samantha’s motivation to succeed is tied to her desire to make it up to her mother, to pay her back with her success. Linda has a similar story, raised by a single mother, and saw first hand how difficult it was for her mother to raise her. She knew that in order to be able to help her mother in the future she must move forward and eventually come back to help. “...She always told me ‘you don’t want to be stuck like me you don’t want to be working in a factory every day to pay a house’”. Linda was certain that she did not want to endure the same hardships her mother faced. Cathy’s situation was slightly different, her parents were college educated, yet they were forced to work in factories once they arrived in the United States. Both Linda and Cathy acknowledged their parents’ hard work and felt compelled to reward them by becoming successful.

...Looking at how my family is living now and seeing that my parents have so many difficulties and work so hard. That's my inspiration, giving back to my family, take my parents out of [my hometown] and taking them somewhere else.

Cathy knew that her parents made the conscious sacrifice to leave their country and their professions in order to give Cathy and her sister a better future in the US.

Environmental Factors

Type of Schools

Most of the participants spoke about the types of schools that they attended throughout K-12. The types of schools they attended all differed, some were private, and others were public, some were in an urban environment and others in a suburban middle to upper class neighborhood. The conversation surrounding the types of schools that they attended allowed for the participants to think more critically about their environments. More specifically they were able to think about the culture of the school and caliber of education that was available to them. While some of the participants lived in urban neighborhoods, they were able to attend smaller, selective schools. This was the case for Melissa; her mother wanted her to have a different experience and had Melissa apply for admissions into a highly selective county school. Students from other neighborhoods that were mostly from middle to upper class homes surrounded Melissa in the new school. This opportunity to interact with students that were academically focused motivated Melissa to continue to be a great student. She realized that she was at a slight disadvantage due to her earlier schooling and wanted to make sure she did not fall short in comparison to her peers.

Well I went to a county high school and it was predominantly white and that really prepared me because everyone that went there was motivated academically, I didn't want to be the girl in the class with the bad grades.

Melissa was grateful that she was able to experience a different type of schooling; she knew that her chances of succeeding were positively impacted as a result of her selective schooling. Cathy had a similar story; she attended an overpopulated high school in an urban district. Since she was interested in the sciences she was able to apply to be part of a highly selective STEM academy that was housed in the same high school. Even though the general high school and the STEM academy shared a common infrastructure, they provided very distinct educational opportunities to their students. Cathy was surrounded by students that were focused and motivated just like her, and she felt supported by the teachers. The students in the academy were separated from the general population and were able to receive a different education. They were also responsible for assisting the school with raising their test scores.

My academy was small and they tried very hard and the principal was the head of the science department so if it wasn't for that academy our ranking would be lower than it already is and pretty much the top percent of my high school was like the whole academy and we thought they could get extra points from HSPA and other tests we take.

The types of schools that both Cathy and Melissa attended impacted their perceptions of education and their work ethic to an extent. They were highly motivated students prior to attending these schools, but they stated that being in the environment allowed them to appreciate the quality of education that they were being given.

Summary

Overall, the focus group data illustrated that while there were similarities between the factors present for all of the participants there were also some differences. All of the participants were impacted by their dispositional, familial and environment factors. The level of influence of each factor varied per participant. The final chapter will provide the

discussion, conclusions, implications and suggestions for future research. Chapter V will bring the study full circle and will highlight the overall themes that came out of the research study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Study

This study was prompted by the need for educational research that provides an in depth portrayal of the educational trajectories of college-level first-generation Latinas and the impact that their experiences have on their academic success. This study was guided by the following research questions: 1) What experiences contribute to the development of academic resiliency of first-generation Latinas? 2) What factors do academically resilient first-generation Latinas attribute their educational success? 3) What do the experiences that contributed to the academic resiliency of first-generation Latinas suggest for educational practice and policy? The literature reviewed for this study showed that there is a negative perception of the educational attainment of Latinas in the United States. The literature covered the span from the relationship between Latinos and Schooling in the U.S., the roles that Latinas play in the Latino household and the impact these roles have on their educational attainment. Hence, I began this study with an interest in the educational experiences of first-generation Latinas who do make it to four-year U.S. colleges and universities and succeed academically. The stories shared in this research study shed light on the diverse range of the first-generation Latina academic experience in the U.S. and highlight the influence of their protective factors on their educational trajectories. More intentionally, the goal of this study was to investigate the educational experiences of first-generation Latinas in college.

In this chapter, I present the following sections: discussion, conclusion, and implications. This chapter allows for the reader to get a better sense of the overall study.

Discussion

There were several themes that emerged across the cases that highlight how the five first-generation Latinas overcame numerous barriers and reached academic resiliency. The major themes that were present were the following: *Family as a Source of Support and Motivation*, *Dedication to Achieve Academic Excellence*, *Motivation to Serve as a Role Model*, and *Intentional & Selective Schooling*. The following section is organized by each of the themes that surfaced from the study.

Family as a Source of Support and Motivation

Cathy, Melissa and Linda were able to on to become academically resilient, in part, because of the support and dedication that their families provided. Melissa and Cathy “...often look[ed] to their families when making decisions (e.g., college attendance, long-term educational attainment) as a function of their strong values for family and community (Gloria, Castellanos & Orozco 2005, p. 175).

Another facet of the Latino family that has a major impact on Latina students is that of their immigrant experience. All of the participants were first-generation students in college [although Cathy is not a first generation college goer. Her parents are both college graduates in their country of Peru] with parents that immigrated to the United States in hopes of a better future. Carola Suarez- Orozco and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco depicts a very vivid image of children of immigrants. In their chapter entitled *Remaking Identities*, they state that, “These [immigrant] youth must creatively fuse aspects of both cultures-the parental tradition and the new culture- in a process of transculturation that blends two systems that are at once their own and foreign” (Suarez- Orozco, Suarez-

Orozco 2001, p. 113). This *transculturation* allowed for Cathy and Melissa to navigate the road between their families and their educational goals.

Once children become aware of the sacrifice that their family endured, there is a sense of obligation on their part to succeed as a form of gratitude (Gandara, 1995; Suarez-Orozco, 2002; Tornatzky, Cutler & Lee, 2002). In Cathy's case, both of her parents had a college education from her native country of Peru, but that education became irrelevant once they arrived in this US. Cathy saw first-hand the dramatic change in their lifestyle because her parents' education could not be used and were relegated to working in factories. Cathy felt that she had to succeed since her parents had given up their own dreams and goals to ensure that she had a better education and future. For Melissa, her mother was not formally educated in Guatemala; she received further education in the US in order to assist Melissa with her homework. Melissa understood that her mother made certain choices in order to afford Melissa a better future

For all of the participants there were high expectations for academic performance. The research shows there to be a high correlation between high expectations and academic resiliency (Gandara, 1995; Morales, 2004; Suarez-Orozco, 2002). Cathy and Melissa are good examples of this relationship. In addition, their high regard their families and their families' support of their educational goals seem to have helped them achieve academic success (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, Rosales, 2005, p. 204). The findings presented in this student differs from the current research dictates that for the most part Latino families do not support girl's educational aspirations because they are expected to first and foremost help around the home (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Gandara & Contreras, 2009).

The idea of *giving back* to their families was a strong motivator for Cathy, Melissa, Linda and Samantha to succeed academically. They did not see their academic achievements as just an individual success; they believed that they were obliged to pass down the torch of education to their younger counterparts or take advantage of opportunities that other family members did not have (Valverde, 2008). Cathy grew up in a household where education was consistently and constantly discussed, but she was also aware that this was not the case for all her younger relatives. Cathy remained very connected to her family and Peru and knew that they were looking up to her and expected her to succeed. Since Cathy's family admired her educational drive, Cathy knew that she owed it to them to thrive academically. Cathy was also committed to achieve because she wanted to be able to contribute monetarily to her family in Peru. She knew that the only way she would be able to assist them would be by having a good career, possible only with a college education. In Melissa's case, she traveled to Guatemala every summer and was able to see first-hand the environment in which her extended family dwelled. Melissa was always very conscious of her responsibility as a student because she knew the direct impact that her success would potentially have on her extended family in Guatemala. They viewed her success as their own; they looked up to her and were, in turn, motivated to pursue their own education (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007).

According to Morales (2004) the research shows that when students are academically resilient they are able to have those characteristics transcend beyond just their academics. All of the participants were very independent in nature and highly self-sufficient outside of the classroom. They exhibited very strong goal-oriented behavior

that allowed them to navigate beyond the barriers they faced along their educational paths. These barriers were mainly due to language and socio-economic status.

Dedication to Achieve Academic Excellence

Linda, Cathy, Melissa and Mariana exhibited very strong dispositional factors; they were committed to their own success in addition to having the support of others. This attitude is referred to as “achievement motivation”; they internalized this idea of success and were able to successfully move forward (Ford, 1996; Gordon, 1995; Weiss, 1969). Cathy was around family members that valued education, but she knew that having a commitment to education was something she ultimately had to value herself. Cathy opted to study a very male dominated major, aero-space engineering, and she knew she would face numerous barriers due to the fact that not only was she among the minority by virtue of being a woman but also because she is Latina. She was often the only female student in her classes and experienced a lack of comradeship with her peers. Cathy was not intimidated by this, however, she was motivated by the fact that she excelled in her classes and in many instances performed better than her white male counterparts. Melissa always saw herself as a good student, and she thoroughly enjoyed school. Melissa internalized the idea of being the “good student”; she knew that both teachers and her peers viewed her as such. Being the good student became a motivator for Melissa, she knew that she had to succeed no matter what obstacles came before her. Cathy and Melissa both understood that it was imperative for them to become academically successful and that they must take control of their own educational paths. In doing so, they left many of the negative expectations behind (Gonzalez, Jovel & Stoner, 2004).

Intentional & Selective Schooling

According to Garmenzy (1991) “school climate” as a proactive factor has been linked to academic resiliency. The schools that students are enrolled in play a major role in the performance of students. Cathy, Melissa and Linda were exposed to intentional and selective schooling for the major part of their k-12 education. In Cathy’s case, she was enrolled in private schools during k-7th grade in Peru. Cathy possessed a very strong educational foundation by virtue of being in high quality private schools for a number of years. The academic discipline that she was exposed to early in her educational career later became a critical factor in her academic success when enrolling in public schools in the United States. In Melissa’s case, her mother was very aware of the importance of placing her in the right schools and programs. Melissa was enrolled in public schools for elementary and middle school, but while in these schools she was placed in advanced classes. Melissa was exposed to the brightest students and rigorous academic curricula. This exposure allowed for Melissa to, “...live bi-culturally, and move between the home and the school worlds” (Morales, 2004, p.12). Linda was enrolled in a predominantly white school district; in which her classes were for the most part honors. Her mother was very intentional in having her attend schools that were ranked higher than the schools in her actual hometown.

Throughout their journey to become academically resilient all of the participants were able to enhance their social capital, by connecting with outside resources. Unfortunately, the social capital provided by their families was not sufficient for college success, so connecting with teachers and administrators who could help was critical (Saunders & Serna, 2004;Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez & Rosales, 2005, p. 204). As a result

of various studies Vasti Torres (2006) suggests that faculty-student relationships are instrumental to the academic success of Latina students, “The students at three urban institutions repeatedly referenced mentors...and faculty as making the difference in their college experience” (p.306). Cathy, Melissa and Linda benefited greatly from the relationships they developed throughout their educational careers with school administrators.

Implications for Practice

Findings from this research study lead inherently to practical implications for several stakeholders with an interest in the academic success of first-generation Latinas in college. Thus, recommendations for parents, K-12 educators, and postsecondary administrators and faculty are offered in this section.

Parents

The parents of first-generation Latinas play a major role in the educational development of their daughters. Their involvement within their daughter’s education should begin at a very young age since the relationship with education is a growing process. As the parental involvement with their daughter’s education is strengthened, the value of education rises in the eyes of the child. Based on the findings of this study, Latina student’s sought out the support of their family in various ways. For the majority of the participants, their families’ were the primary support mechanism that assisted them throughout the educational journeys. Even though only one of the participants had parents with prior college experience, having a collegiate experience did not seem to be a discerning factor, but instead, it was the ongoing support that most of the participants received.

K-12 Educators

First-generation Latinas are often immigrants and will tend to have language barriers once they enter the US educational school system. This continues to be a major issue that needs to be discussed among educators. There are different schools of thought regarding the structure and format of bilingual education in the US. One school of thought believes that the curriculum for bilingual education or English as a Second Language (ESL) should be in Spanish and students should gradually begin to be introduced to the English language. The other school of thought believes that there should not be any form of bilingual education or ESL, which all students in the US should be taught in English. This topic came up during various discussions with the participants and they were pretty much all on the same page. The data showed that the participants that faced language barriers when attending US schools, preferred to be taught in Spanish and then gradually introduced to the English language. They believed that it was imperative for them to understand the basics of writing, math and science in order to learn the material once they were introduced to them in English. Another area of concern among the participants that should be considered is the caliber of work that is given to students who are placed in Bilingual or ESL programs. They felt that when they were in the non-English speaking classes that the level of work was not at the same level as the work of their peers in the English speaking classes. This was a major problem for some of the participants because they were made to feel that having a language barrier was equated to not being smart. Interesting enough, this was not the case for the three participants that faced this barrier. They were extremely bright and focused students. This was evident

was they were eventually placed in regular classes also known as the English speaking courses and they integrated seamlessly and excelled in all of their subjects.

Postsecondary Administrators and Faculty

Hurtado & Carter (1997) also frame another very important observation, they state,

Attinasi (1989, 1992) found that students become integrated not because they share values and orientations of the majority of students at their colleges, but because the specific collective affiliations they form help them acquire the skills to negotiate the social, physical, and cognitive geographies of large campus environments (p. 329).

It is highly imperative that Latinas students become acclimated with their campus environments by way of meaningful affiliations. A source of support that tends to draw very strong results is faculty and staff (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). The ideal would be to have established networks of Latino faculty/staff and students; this may be accomplished in the future if the current generation of Latina/o students overcomes the barriers that they currently face in their institutions of higher education. It is imperative that Latinos become a reckoning force in the area of education, even more specifically in higher education. Our future leadership in higher education needs to represent the population that it is serving.

Contribution to the Literature

This study showcased the lived experiences of five academically resilient first-generation in college. Most of the educational literature is based on research that looks at Latino students from a homogenous viewpoint. Based on my study, it is evident that Latinas face different barriers within the educational realm in comparison to their male counterparts. At the same time, while they face more barriers they are succeeding academically at a much higher rate. My research also focused on the educational

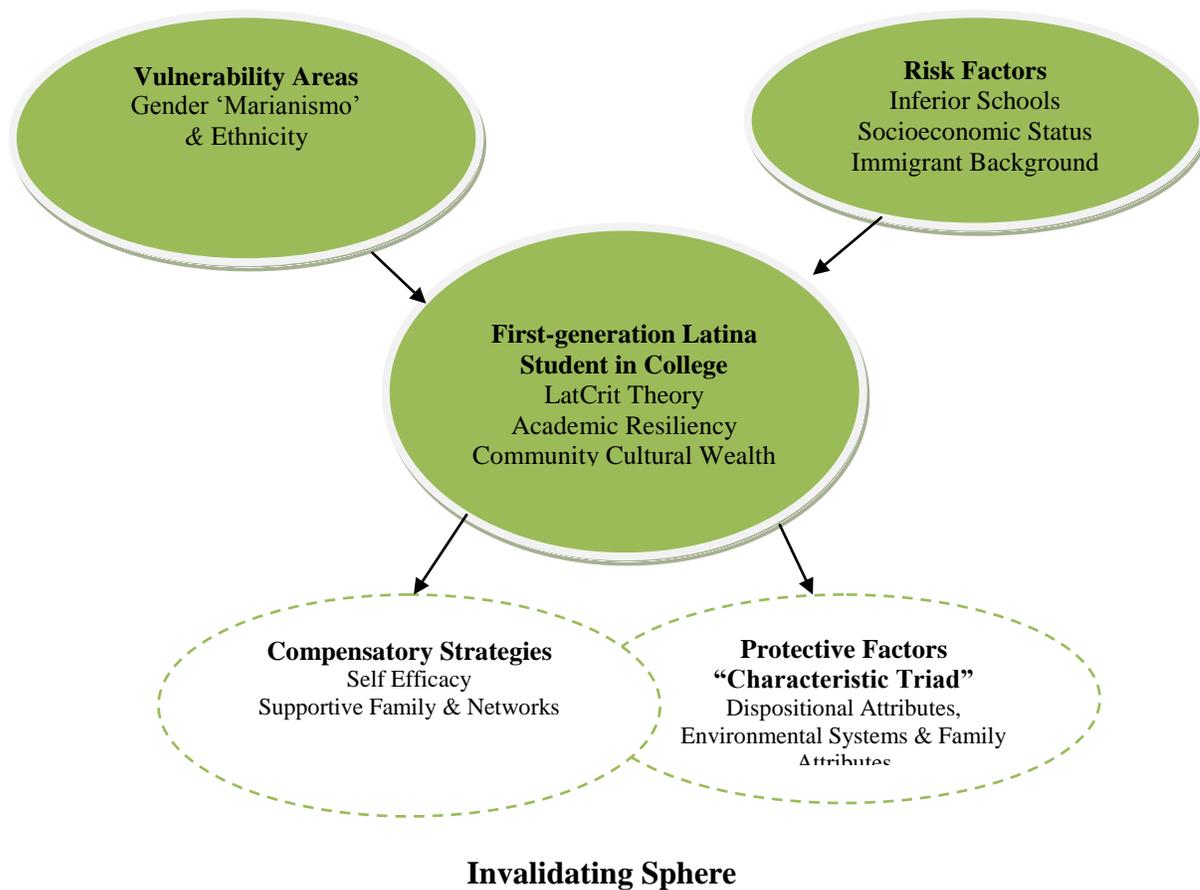
achievements and not the deficits that these students faced. Another aspect of my research that is critical to the educational literature is that I specifically analyzed the role that being first-generation played in their educational careers.

Academic resiliency is a relatively new concept in the educational literature. The current literature has only been able to focus on students of color in general and not specifically on first-generation Latinas. It is important to be able to distinguish the process of becoming academically resilient as it relates to different ethnic groups. By using LatCrit Theory and the Community Cultural Wealth Model I was able to critically dissect the unique factors that were associated with the participants' ethnicity and gender.

Overall, the current research on Latinas is based on a superficial analysis. The research does not look at Latinas as being a multi-faceted and complex group of people. My research was able to highlight the intricacies that are present in the everyday lives of Latina college students. Those complex variables ended up being key factors that fueled their academic resiliency. In addition, the conceptual model that I developed for the purpose of this study allowed me to look at the different factors that are present within the educational trajectories of first-generation Latinas. There was much thought given to the positioning of each of the factors in relation to each other. The negative factors, which I called the invalidated sphere, were placed above the subjects of the study, the first-generation Latinas. The positive and supportive factors, which I called validated sphere, were below the subjects. The conceptual model presents a different way of analyzing the existing literature. It challenges the existing literature that posits that the gender of an individual will dictate their educational trajectory. While it was evident that the gender of an individual will impact their educational outcome, it does not necessarily

mean that it will have a negative outcome. Based on the model I developed it can be seen that the participants were able to have agency over their educational careers. Many of the participants in the study were aware of their environments and were able to make intentional and thoughtful decisions throughout their lives. These decisions had favorable educational outcomes. Whereas, gender is seen as a hindrance to reaching educational achievement, in my study the participants proved that their gender was not a deterring factor. My conceptual model is complex and multidimensional and it will add a much-needed perspective to the current research literature on first-generation Latinas.

Validated Sphere



Implications for Future Research

This study was conducted at a large public-research university. Thus, the educational experiences of academically resilient first-generation Latinas at other institutional types including, private four-year institutions, private liberal arts colleges, Hispanic-serving institutions, women's colleges, and community colleges are necessary. The research methods and data collection protocol used in this research study could be implemented and would likely produce new knowledge regarding the educational experiences of academically resilient first-generation Latinas.

Future research may also look at specifically at ways of re-framing education among the Latino family. It can be deduced that some of the issues that many Latina students develop are due in part to how their family views the US educational system. It is of the essence that while researching that the findings are implemented. Many of the research that was cited in this study brought forth many key issues that are not necessarily being addressed in the Latino community. Another point that is not being addressed in depth is the impact that the Latino population can possibly have on their own community if they were properly equipped. If the proper measures are taken we would be able to see a rise of Latinas investing in their own communities. This can bring monumental changes as it relates to their perception of the feasibility of educational attainment. These Latinas students will then in turn become mentors to the younger Latinas that will in turn be able to follow in their steps. In order to fully engage Latina students they must be re-educated and educational attainment needs to become part of the norms of their communities. The Latino community ought to begin to see education not only being a means to an end but instead, as a way of gaining new insights. This can only

be accomplished if the current leadership in education comes to terms with the fact that major changes need to occur within their institutions.

Conclusion

When I was conducting the research study, I was working full time as a college administrator, which allowed me to fully immerse myself in the research. Some of my work focused on women of color students at the university and therefore, I was able to witness first-hand the interactions and stories that Latina students shared with their peers. At the beginning of the research study, I assumed that I would know most of the stories that the participants would be sharing. I was biased due to my own personal educational background, and soon realized that their stories did in fact share similar themes but their stories could not be generalized. This realization reaffirmed the rationale for my story; it is imperative that these students are given the platform to have their stories told as individuals.

In the end, all of the participants showcased their resiliency in different ways. For the most part their academic resilience was heightened by the presence of and interaction among protective factors. These protective factors were comprised of dispositional, familial and environmental factors, which included unwavering familial support, intrinsic motivation to succeed, and ongoing support from teachers, administrators and peer networks. These narratives will serve as evidence that students of color are in fact succeeding at the collegiate level.

Final Thoughts

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?

...Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do...and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. (Williamson, 1996, p.190-191)

The text above is from the book *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"* by Marianne Williamson (1996), I selected this excerpt because I found it to be extremely relevant to my study for many reasons. Throughout the process of collecting, analyzing the data and writing up the findings there were some prominent themes of strength, endurance and self-discovery that resonated with all of the participants. While the participants in this study faced many barriers throughout their educational careers they were able to succeed because they realized that they were “powerful beyond measure” (Williamson, 1996). Most of the participants also recognized the impact that their success would have on those that come after them, other younger Latina students that look up to them and admire their success, they “let [their] own light shine, [they] unconsciously [gave] other people permission to do the same” (Williamson, 1996).

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Appendix A
Participant Recruitment Email

Participant Recruitment Email

Looking for Participants for my Dissertation Study!

*Are you a first-generation Latina in college?
Do you have a 3.0 Cumulative GPA or higher?
Are you involved on campus?*

If you answered **YES** to all of the three questions above, you can be a potential participant!

This study will take an in depth look at the educational journeys of academically successful first-generation Latinas in college.

At the completion of the study each participant will be given a **\$25 Visa Check Card!**

If interested in participating please email, Rosanna Reyes, XXXXXX@echo.rutgers.edu

Appendix B
Follow Up Email

Follow up Email

Hi XXXX ,

Thank you for showing interest in my study. Just to give you more information, my study is going to be made up of autobiographical writing, interviews and possibly a focus group. The total time commitment should be about 5-6 hours for over a couple of weeks. Once you are selected you will receive more detailed information.

I have some preliminary questions that I would like to ask before making my participant selection.

1. What is your class year?
2. What is your current cumulative GPA?
3. What is your country of origin? Where you born in the US?
4. What are you parents highest level of education?
5. What is your campus involvement? Please list some of the activities/groups you are part of.

If you can please respond no later Sunday, April 10th. Again, thank you for your interest. It is greatly appreciated.

Best,

Rosanna Reyes

Appendix C
Interview Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

Academically Resilient First-Generation Latinas in College

I am a doctoral student in the department of Educational Theory Policy & Administration in the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, and I am conducting interviews for interview study for my Qualitative Methods in Education II course. I am studying: the process by which first-generation Latinas develop academic resiliency.

During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions that will highlight your educational experiences from k-12 and collegiate. This interview was designed to be approximately an hour and half in length

However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

This research is anonymous: anonymous means that I will record no information about you that could identify you. This means that I will not record your name, address, phone number, date of birth, etc. There will be no way to link your responses back to you. Therefore, data collection is anonymous.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. Upon completion of this project, all data will be disposed.

If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only the results will be stated. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to your personal identity unless you specify otherwise.

You are aware that your participation in this interview is voluntary. You understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, you wish to stop the interview, you may do so without having to give an explanation.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. You will be received a visa check card in the amount of **\$25 Visa Check** Cards for your time and assistance.

You understand if you say anything that you believe may incriminate yourself, the interviewer will immediately rewind the tape and record over the potentially incriminating information. The interviewer will then ask you if you would like to continue the interview. The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team. The recording(s) will include identifier that will be recorded but pseudonyms will be assigned upon transcription and will then be used in the data analysis. The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet with no link to subjects' identity and will be disposed immediately after the analysis is complete.

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact me at:

Rosanna Reyes
XXX College Avenue
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
XXXXXX or call (XXX) XXX-XXXX

Participant Initial

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers (which is a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect research participants).

The IRB Administrator at Rutgers can be reached at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
 Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
 Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
 3 Rutgers Plaza
 New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
 Tel: (848) 932 0150
 Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be offered a copy of this consent form that you may keep for your own reference. Once the study is completed, you will be given the opportunity to receive a copy of the results.

Once you have read the above form and, with the understanding that you can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, you need to let me know your decision to participate in today's interview.

| | |
|--|------------------|
| | |
| Participant Name (Please Print) | Signature |
| Date | |

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| | |
| Signature of Principal Investigator | Date |

Please sign below to indicate that you agree with this interview being audio taped. The researcher will not use the recording for any other purpose other than this study.

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| | |
| Participant Name (Please Print) | Signature |
| Date | |

Appendix D

Interview 1 and 2 Protocol

**Interview Protocol: First-generation Academically Resilient Latinas in College
Interview #1**

Opening Statement:

Hello, first I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. As you already know, this interview is part of my doctoral dissertation study. The purpose of the first interview is to ask you a series of questions that will focus on getting to know you better and also and gaining a deeper insight into your cultural background and the role it plays within your educational experiences. *Give some background on Academic Resilience*

A) Familial Factors

Household & Gender Roles

Can you describe your interactions at home?

- a) How would describe your role in your household?
- b) What expectations were there about what you would do around the house?
- c) How would you describe the differences in expectations for women in men in the family?
-gender roles regarding household responsibilities and or gender expectations for school, dating, career, etc.?
- d) Do you have any relatives that are in college or graduated college?
- e) In what ways did your parents involve themselves in your schooling experience?

B) Environmental Factors

Culture & Schooling:

- a) Can you remember a specific time when a positive attitude led to doing well in school? Where do you think that positive attitude came from?
- b) Did you ever hear any conflicting messages between your home and school about education?
- c) How do you think they feel about the educational decisions you have made?

Your Educational Experiences Prior to College:

- a) Where did you go to school?
- b) Where were your school for k-12 located (i.e. neighborhood, city, state, country?)
- c) Experiences with teachers, administrators (i.e. principals, guidance counselors etc
- d) Academic experience (e.g. type of classes/groups you were in; grades, etc.).
 - a. Talk about the classes you enjoyed, and didn't enjoy and why.
 - e) Interactions with peers (i.e. inside and outside of school).

- i. Where these individuals in school with you? In your neighborhood? How did you know the kids you hung out with.
- ii. What was their background (gender; race; socio-economics, religion, etc.).
- iii. How did they do academically?
- iv. Did these individuals impact how you viewed education? What relationship, if any, is there between your interactions with your friends (and who your friends were) and how you viewed education?

College Educational Experiences:

Please discuss your college experience thus far.

Now let's talk about your College admissions Process:

- a) Who influenced you to attend college;
- b) When did you first start thinking about going to college? What role if any did your family play in that thinking?
- c) What role does your family play in your decision-making process in college?
- d) How did you learn about how the college admissions process works? What role if any did your family play?
- e) What influences were you exposed to that aided in your decision to attend college?
 - Parents/Siblings?
 - Teachers?
 - Guidance Counselor?
 - School Administrators?
- f) Did you have any friends applying to college at the same time?
- g) Did you ever face any discouraging moment? If so, can you explain. What did you do to deal with it?
- h) What supports did you have as you undertook this process?
- i) What was the hardest thing about applying to college?
- j) How did you end up coming to Rutgers?
- k) What did your family think about you applying to college?

This concludes the first part of the interview. In part two of the interview, we will discuss your overall educational experiences ranging from K- College. If you have any questions in the interim, please feel free to call me at or email me at XXX@echo.edu. Thank you for your time!

**Interview Protocol: First-Generation Academically Resilient Latinas in College
Interview #2**

Opening Statement:

Hi again, this is the second part of a two-part interview process. The purpose of the first interview was to ask you about your background in general, and the role that your culture plays in your educational experience. In the second interview, we will be discussing your overall educational experiences ranging from K-College and how you build academic resilience.

Now we are going to speak about your college experiences:

- a) Tell me about your initial experience when you arrived at Rutgers?
- b) Can you describe an academic occurrence that stood out to you?
 - i. What happened?
 - ii. Who was involved? How did you feel when you first came to Rutgers?
- c) Tell me about your current status as student?
 - i. Have you selected a major? If so, what is it? How did you decide on that major?
- d) Tell me about the types of courses that you have taken-content areas etc?
 - i. Which classes have been your favorite and why
 - ii. Which classes have been your least favorite and why
- e) Have you faced any challenges as a student at Rutgers?
 - i. Academically
 - ii. Personal/Social
 - iii. Did you overcome them? And if so, how?
- f) What, if any, special support programs have you participated in at Rutgers?
 - i. Can you describe what it does?
 - ii. How/why did you get involved with it?
 - iii. How would you describe the nature of your involvement?
 - iv. In what ways has it actually been a support for you?

Collegiate Experience:

Social and Co-curricular Experiences

- a) Tell me about your experiences in your living environment during college?
 - i. Where all have you lived since coming to RU?
- b) Tell me about the residence hall environment.
 - Your RA
 - Who lived in the residence hall (race/ethnicity socioeconomic background, etc.
- c) Can you tell me about your roommates since you have been in college? (What have been their race/ethnicity, socio-economic, religion, etc.)
 - In general, how have you gotten along with your roommates?

- d) Can you tell me about a time when you think differences related to race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, religion--any of those kinds of differences--had an impact of relationships with roommates?
- e) Are you involved in any activities outside the classroom? What kinds of activities are you involved in outside the classroom?
 - Student organizations
 - Leadership positions
 - On-campus employment
 - Community Service initiatives
- f) Not counting your friends and other students, who do you interact with outside of class? Under what circumstances?
 - academic advisors/counselors
 - administrators
 - faculty/staff
- g) Talk to me about your economic situation right now.
 - i. Do you have a job?
 - If so where do you work, what do you do?
 - How many hours a week?
 - ii. How do you feel about having to work and be a student?

Academic Resilience

Just the fact that you're a student here at Rutgers tells me you've been academically successful.

- a) What kind of student would you describe yourself as?
- b) What do you think has been important in your becoming so successful?
 - i. What has worked against your being successful?
 - ii. What has been key in overcoming this?
 - iii. What has been discouraging to you as a student?
 - iv. What has been encouraging?
- c) Do you have anything else that you would like to share about your college educational experiences?

This concludes the last part of the interview process. If you have any questions please feel free to call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or email me at XXX@XXX.edu Thank you for your time!

Appendix E
Focus Group Consent Form

Focus Group Consent Form Academically Resilient First-Generation Latinas in College

I am a doctoral student in the department of Educational Theory Policy & Administration in the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, and I am conducting this focus group as part of my dissertation study. I am studying: the process by which first-generation Latinas develop academic resiliency.

During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions that will highlight your educational experiences from k-12 and collegiate. This focus group was designed to be approximately an hour and half in length

However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

This research is anonymous: anonymous means that I will record no information about you that could identify you. This means that I will not record your name, address, phone number, date of birth, etc. There will be no way to link your responses back to you. Therefore, data collection is anonymous and the only people that will know that you are part of this study are the other participants in this focus group, which will also sign a Consent Form and will be asked to practice discretion.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. Upon completion of this project, all data will be disposed.

If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only the results will be stated. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to your personal identity unless you specify otherwise.

You are aware that your participation in this focus group is voluntary. You understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, you wish to stop the interview, you may do so without having to give an explanation. There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study.

You understand if you say anything that you believe may incriminate yourself, the interviewer will immediately rewind the tape and record over the potentially incriminating information. The interviewer will then ask you if you would like to continue the interview. The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team. The recording(s) will include identifier that will be recorded but pseudonyms will be assigned upon transcription and will then be used in the data analysis. The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet with no link to subjects' identity and will be disposed immediately after the analysis is complete.

If you have any questions about this study, you can contact me at:

Rosanna Reyes
115 College Avenue
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
XXXX@XXX.XXX.edu or call (XXX) XXX-XXXX

Participants
Initial

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers (which is a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect research participants).

The IRB Administrator at Rutgers can be reached at:

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You will be offered a copy of this consent form that you may keep for your own reference. Once the study is completed, you will be given the opportunity to receive a copy of the results.

Once you have read the above form and, with the understanding that you can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, you need to let me know your decision to participate in today's interview.

| | |
|--|------------------|
| | |
| Participant Name (Please Print) | Signature |
| Date | |

| | |
|--|-------------|
| | |
| Signature of Principal Investigator | Date |

Please sign below to indicate that you agree with this Focus Group being audio taped. The researcher will not use the recording for any other purpose other than this study.

| | |
|--|------------------|
| | |
| Participant Name (Please Print) | Signature |
| Date | |

Appendix F
Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Protocol
First-Generation Academically Resilient Latinas in College

Introductory Statement: Hello, first I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. As you already know, this interview is part of my doctoral dissertation study. The purpose of the focus group is to ask you a series of questions that will focus on getting to know you better and also and gaining a deeper insight into your cultural background and the role it plays within your educational experiences.

Ground Rules: During this focus group I will ask that everyone is respectful of what is discussed; everyone's opinion is valid and should not be argued. Please do not interrupt each other and give everyone a chance to speak. It is extremely important that you feel comfortable sharing and that we are able to hear all of the different experiences that you share.

Any questions before we start?

Opening Question: I would like for everyone to please share with us, your name, your class year, and nationality.

Familial Factors

1. Tell me about your socio-economic status of your household
2. How was education viewed in your household?
3. What are your earliest memories related to education and schooling?
4. What involvement did your parents have with your education?

Environmental Factors

5. Please tell me about the neighborhood(s) that you grew up in?
6. Describe the schools you attended (Grade, Middle and High School), what type of schools were they?
7. Can you remember a specific time when a positive attitude led to doing well in school? Where do you think that positive attitude came from?
8. Who influenced you to attend college?

Dispositional Factors (Personal Inherent Traits):

9. How do you feel about your academic performance?
10. What motivates you to do well in school?
11. How do you define academic success?
12. What are your plans after college?

Academic Resilience

Just the fact that you're a student here at Rutgers tells me you've been academically successful. Let's talk a bit about this process.

13. Can you describe your educational journey thus far? How it began and how you ended up here?
14. What kind of student would you describe yourself as?
15. Have you faced any challenges as a student at Rutgers?
 - a. If any, how have you dealt with them
16. What do you think has been important in your becoming so successful?

Ending Question: Do you have anything else that you would like to share about your educational experiences? Or anything in general.

This concludes the last part of the study. If you have any questions please feel free to call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or email me at rreyes@XXXX.edu Thank you for your time!