The Role of Pre-College Experiences, Environmental Elements, and Cultural
Resources and Knowledge on First Year College Experience and
Postsecondary Decisions for a Group of Latina/o Students

by

Magdalena Martinez

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Education)
in The University of Michigan
2009

Doctoral Committee:

  Professor Marvin W. Peterson, Co-Chair
  Assistant Professor Larry L. Rowley, Co-Chair
  Professor Lorraine M. Gutierrez
  Associate Professor Elizabeth B. Moje

Dedication

To my partner and husband, Jose Luis Melendrez. Your love, care and patience made it possible for me to pursue a Ph.D. To my children, Eva Magdalena and Alejandro Luis, you have inspired me to be more than I expected of myself. I hope I have widened the educational path for you and coming generations, because a love for learning should always be honored, encouraged, and celebrated.

To my mother, Alicia Martinez, who will likely never read this dissertation but her *esfuerzos* are represented on each and every page. To my five siblings, Rigoberto, Eva, Joel, Norma, and Jose Ramon. Your backs were my bridges through my education. I will always be grateful for your sacrifices.

<div align="center">Contents</div>

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Appendices

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding Latinos in College and Universities

Now more than previously the value of a college education defines the degree

of access and mobility to the economic, social, and political spheres in our society

(Carnevale, 2003; Martinez & Aguirre, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; 2005).

Latino students continue to be underrepresented in postsecondary institutions (León,

2003). Scholars and researchers have significantly contributed to our understanding

of the reasons why Latinos are underrepresented in colleges and universities

(Ballesteros, 1986; León, 2003; Llagas & Snyer, 2003; Olivas, 1986; Stanton-Salazar,

& Dornbusch, 1995; Santos, 1986; Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2002; Verdugo, 1986).

Among their findings, key factors that Latino youth must contend with include

academic preparedness, access to college-bound curriculum, financial aid, access to

college information, mentoring and advisement, and family commitments. For Latino

students who are able to make it through the educational pipeline to college they often

face additional challenges. Consider for instance, a report by the Pew Hispanic Center

found that Latino youth -- who are academically prepared to enter college -- are at a

disadvantage to completing a bachelor's degree when compared to other equally

prepared students. The report identified two important reasons: many enroll in less

selective institutions when compared to white peers and "[Latinos] have different

1

experiences than white students even when they enroll on the same campus" (Fry, 2002, p. vi). The report went on to discuss two of these key experiences: Latino students have "greater financial responsibility for family members, and [are more likely to be] living with family while in college rather than in campus housing" (p. 16). Not mentioned in the report are the mounting research on racially hostile college climates and unwelcoming environments and the potential influence on student experiences and persistence decisions (Aragon, 2000; Clements, 2000; Hurtado, 1994, Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Rhoads, 1999; Solórzano, 1998). Another assumption in many reports on the plight of Latino education is that home and family culture often deters academic success (e.g., language use, family and community commitments, strong ethnic identity). A new line of research looks at Latino students who, despite economic, political, and structural challenges, are high academic achievers. A look at these studies offer new insights into the role of Latino culture on educational experiences and the ways that students develop culturally based survival strategies (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gonzalez, Moll, Amanti, 2005; Hurtado, 2003; Orelleana, 2003; Yosso, 2006).

In postsecondary persistence literature, theoretical models assume student assimilation to campus and its academic and social spheres are important prerequisites for persistence; also known as integrationist models because they assume students must integrate into college to be successful (e.g., Tinto, 1987, 1993, Bean, 1980, 1983). Other theoretical frameworks on Latino college experiences bring to the forefront material, structural and cultural circumstances that students must contend with in order to achieve their postsecondary goals. Indeed, student

persistence is perhaps one of the most studied areas in high education. For at least three decades practitioners, researchers, and policymakers have sought to understand what factors contribute to the likelihood of students' decision to depart or continue in their college pursuits (Astin, 1972, 1982; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Spady, 1970; St. John, Cabrera, Nora & Asker, 2002). However, researchers lament the inability of persistence models to account for the complex reasons why students leave college. Even after academic preparedness (before and during college) is controlled for researchers find that students depart and the majority of students depart for non-academic reasons.

Traditionally, research on Latino students have found that pre-entry characteristics and external commitments are two major factors that influence postsecondary departure decisions. However, in the last two decades researchers who focus on Latino persistence have brought attention to the over reliance on conceptual frameworks that do not fully incorporate students perception of campus experiences and the role of culture, identity, and gender in shaping their experiences (Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora & Lang, 2001; Tierney, 1996). Others have also noted that many methodological tools strip away structural inequities and the role of past and present political, economic and social inequalities (Kramer, 1997). Scholars suggest we turn our attention to new approaches to understand the college departure of students of color (Attinasi, 1989; Attinasi & Nora, 1996; Berger, 2002; Hurtado & Carter; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2002; St. John, Cabrera, Nora & Asker, 2002; Stage & Hossler, 2002; Tierney, 1996, 2002).

Research Question

The focus of this inquiry is on first-year college persistence for a particular group of Latino students. My study aims to examine the first year college experience as understood by the students as they navigate college and new educational territory. Specifically, I focus on the following question:

How do pre-college experiences, environmental elements, and cultural resources and knowledge of a particular group of Latina/o students shape their first year of college and postsecondary decisions?

I focus on students who are the first in their families to attend college in the US and come from poor or working class backgrounds. The students entered college immediately after high school graduation. They are either first or second generation US Latinos and have primarily been educated in the US. They have high educational aspirations yet are at the greatest risk for college departure (Carnevale, 2003). They have faced school segregation, unequal access to educational resources, discrimination based on language use, immigrant status, or ethnicity. Nonetheless, they excelled academically and were resilient in the face of adversity.

Outline of Study

In *Chapter One,* I provide an introduction to my study and my central research question. *Chapter Two* begins with a background on the past and present circumstances of Latino students in the US. Specifically, I present information on the central characteristics thought to influence their postsecondary decisions. I also discuss the current national debate around immigration and college access for undocumented students since half of my participants were undocumented at the time of data collection. In *Chapter Three,* I present and examine two theory-based bodies

of literature. The first are integration theories on student persistence, which assume a high level of assimilation to college culture is necessary for success. The second are critical theories on student success and persistence, which view student achievement as an act of resistance and individual agency and examine the role of cultural resources. Issues of culture, gender, and race are privileged and examined along material, structural and cultural circumstances as it relates to academic experiences for particular groups. In *Chapter Four,* I present a conceptual framework based on the literature reviewed and highlight questions explored during the course of the study. *Chapter Five* highlights the research design and methods used for this study. In the remaining chapters, I discuss my findings and analysis, specifically *Chapters Six* and *Seven* present three case studies each, *Chapter Eight* I discuss all the cases across central themes and *Chapter Nine* summarizes my study findings, recommendations, and future directions for research.

Contribution to Scholarship

The goal of this dissertation is to have a thorough understanding of a particular and purposeful group of undergraduate students within particular postsecondary contexts. It is my hope that my findings and analysis will contribute to new frameworks to understand Latino students' experiences and the multiple reasons that shape their college experience and postsecondary decisions. Data for this study was collected through first person interviews with six participants and their families over a ten-month period. Specifically, the collection of individuals' stories about their educational experiences and perspectives comprise the data corpus. A qualitative approach was particularly useful for this inquiry because it allowed me to

examine the multiplicity of individuals' experiences as well as consider how cultural, historical, and political contexts shaped individual experiences as it relates to their postsecondary goals and decisions.

For practitioners the findings of this study provide important insights about first generation, Latino college students. Specifically, an examination of how students interpret their postsecondary experiences can help colleges and universities as they develop first-year programs, student aid programs, retention programs and consider curriculum changes. From a theoretical perspective having an understanding of how students navigate and negotiate their postsecondary experiences can contribute to new insights into how students construct their social identities, how they become resilient, and the strategies they employ. For policymakers, the findings of this study illuminate how issues related to immigration, access to financial aid, and educational resources have real and significant influences on the students' academic goals and success.

CHAPTER 2.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Victoria-Maria McDonald, one of a handful of historian scholars whose work focuses on the history of Latinos in higher education, states, "Of critical importance for understanding collegiate participation are the deeply rooted barriers of segregation and discrimination that have generally accompanied the Latino elementary and secondary experience" (2003 p. 16). In this section, I provide a brief overview of the current state of educational access and opportunities for Latino students, the role of immigration policy on educational attainment and access, as well as the factors believed to be associated with persistence.

Educational Access and Opportunities for Latino Students

Latinos are a heterogeneous people with distinct histories. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and numerous other Central and South Americans comprise the Latino tapestry. Suárez-Orozco and Páez (2002) accurately state, "the vectors of race and color, gender, socioeconomic status, language, immigrant status, and mode of incorporation into the US shape their experiences" (p. 4). They go on to describe that despite the unique characteristics of each group three themes weaves the panethnic identity of Latino and "are at the heart of the Latino experience in the US" (p. 8). These themes include the experience of immigration, the dynamic US relations with Latin America, and the processes of racialization as Latinos enter the US. At least two of these themes, the immigration experience and the process of racialization,

7

overlap with educational access and opportunities for Latinos. Historians illustrate the ways in which many past and present federal, state and local laws exclude Latino immigrant populations from access to educational opportunities and resources (Acuña, 1988; San Miguel, 1987). Issues of language use, immigrant status, and race are often at the heart of many discriminatory laws and inevitably the residue of these practices continue to shape the social, economic and political opportunities of Latinos in the US today.

In terms of postsecondary access, high school completion or its equivalent is a prerequisite for college admission. In 2000, high school non-completion rates for Latinos was close to 30%, compared to 7% for Whites and 13% for Blacks (Llagas & Snyer, 2003). The educational gap continues to widen and today Latino youth continue to live in segregated neighborhoods and attend racially segregated schools (Orfield, 1996). Reports also highlight discrepancies in teacher credentials, educational resources and opportunities between affluent and less affluent school districts (Falbo, Contreras, & Avalos, 2003; Orfield, 1996). To explain the educational discrepancies, other studies focus on cultural attributes of Latino students, families and their communities. For example, a National Center for Education Statistics report on the status and trends of Hispanic education found that household language and parental education are two significant predictors of Latino educational attainment. The report finds that Latino students who speak mostly Spanish at home are less likely than those who speak mostly English to have parents with at least a high school diploma. And while more Latino mothers have received a high school degree (50 %) when compared to 1974 (less than 40 %) the gap between the

percentages of white and Latino children whose mothers attained at least a high school education or a bachelor's degree was no less narrow in 1999 than it was in 1974 (Llagas & Snyer, 2003).

When country of origin is considered individuals of Mexican origin --- who account for at least 58% of the Latinos in this country --- are making the least education and economic gains when compared to other Latino immigrants. Based on the most current US. Census data, Suárez-Orozco and Páez (2002) illustrate in Table 1 how today individuals of Mexican origin continue to lag behind in terms of educational attainment and median income[1]. In sum, the quest for educational access continues to be illusive for the majority of Latinos, in particular those of Mexican origin (Moreno, 1999). Today more than ever, Latino educational attainment is paramount to the sociopolitical and economic well being of the US and more attention needs to focus on what works (Carnevale, 2003; Martinez & Aguirre, 2003).

---

[1] An exception is household income among individuals of Mexican origin, which is the second lowest across Latino groups. This fact is attributed to the high rates (when compared to Puerto Rican, for instance) of marriage in Mexican households. As such, household income includes two income earners versus one.

Table 1: Selected Characteristics of Hispanics by Type of Origin

	Hispanic	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	South/Central American	Other Hispanic
Total Population (Millions)	35.3	20.7	3.0	1.4	4.5	2.1
Median Age	26.1	24.2	27.5	41.3	29.9	28.3
Educational Attainment						
Less than high school	43.9%	50.3%	36.1%	29.7%	36.0%	28.9%
High school or more	56.1%	49.7%	63.9%	70.3%	64.0%	71.1%
Bachelor's or more	10.9%	7.1%	11.1%	24.8%	18%	15%
Median Earnings: 1998						
Male	$18,430	$17,385	$22,711	$22,864	$18,961	$21,146
Female	$12,910	$11,995	$16,444	$20,673	$13,309	$14,832
Household Income: 1998 (median income in dollars)	$28,330	$27,361	$26,365	$32,375	$31,636	$30,463

Adapted from Suarez-Orozco & Páez (2000).

Immigrant Status and College Attendance

Research on Latino students, in particular postsecondary data, seldom desegregates immigrant status. Understandably, as immigrant or residency status is often fluid, changes for many Latino individuals and depends on many circumstances. However, recent political debates on immigration and education access have prompted researchers to focus on how specific immigrant experiences and circumstances influence educational access, equity and success. In this section, I discuss two specific Latino college populations, those who are immigrants[2] and those who are unauthorized or undocumented[3].

Latino Immigrant College Students

Latino immigrants account for 47% of the overall immigrant population and are the largest foreign-born immigrant population[4] and comprise 30% of the immigrant undergraduate population (Erisman & Looney, 2007). A recent analysis by the Institute for Higher Education Policy used national student databases and confirms that Latino immigrants have the lowest educational attainment throughout the pipeline when compared to other immigrant populations (Erisman & Looney). While Latino immigrants do not necessarily face legal constraints due to residency, they do encounter other structural, political, and economic constraints that decrease their educational attainment levels. The authors suggest that key reasons for this discrepancy are limited English proficiency, Latino immigrants tend to be younger

---

[2] An immigrant is defined as a foreign-born individual who has obtained legal permanent residency to live and work in the US (Erisman & Lonney, 2007).
[3] I use undocumented rather than illegal which often dehumanizes individuals and their experiences. An undocumented immigrant is "a person who resides in the US but who is not a US citizen, has not been admitted for permanent residence, and is not in a set of specific authorized temporary statuses permitting longer-term resident and work" (Passel, 2006).
[4] In 2005, Black immigrants accounted for 8 % of the total foreign-born population; white immigrants, 21%; and Asian and Pacific Islanders, 24% (Erisman & Looney).

with more than half of them under the age of 24, poverty, expectations for educational

aspirations are lower, and gender and familial obligations.

Undocumented Latino College Students

Based on Census data and Current Population Surveys from March 2002, the

Pew Hispanic Institute estimates the number of unauthorized immigrants in the US. is

10.3 million (Passel, 2005). Further, it is estimated that 57% are from Mexico and

24% from other Latin American countries. It is estimated that 1.6 million are children

(or 14%) of unauthorized individuals and an additional 3 million children who are

US. citizen by birth are living in unauthorized families[5]. Exact figures on attendance

patterns of Latino undocumented students is virtually nonexistent at this point. Passel

(2003) estimates that roughly about 65,000 unauthorized immigrant who have lived in

the US. five years or longer graduate from high school each year of which a

conservative estimate of 13,000 go on to *public* postsecondary institutions[6]. It is

estimated that a significant percentage of this population, although foreign-born and

undocumented, is actually raised in the US. and attends American schools from a

very early age (Passel, 2006).

Technically, no federal law prohibits undocumented individuals from

applying to and attending public colleges or universities[7]. However, provision

---

[5] Families in this report were defined as nuclear families, consisting of: (1) married (or unmarried) couples with children; (2) married (or unmarried) couples without children; (3) other adults with children; or (4) solo adults. An unauthorized family had either a head or spouse who is unauthorized. A legal immigrant family does not have an unauthorized head or spouse, but has a head or spouse who is a naturalized citizen, and legal permanent resident alien, or a refugee alien.

[6] Passel (2003) uses California population figures to arrive at this estimate. California has about 40% of the undocumented students at all grades and levels as well as a relatively open and accessible college system.

[7] Plyler v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202 (1982) held that it was illegal for a state to deny school-aged undocumented children from the right to a free education (Badger & Yale-Loehr, 2002). There have been state propositions, most notably California Proposition 187, which attempted to prohibit

IIRRIRA β 505 prohibits states from extending undocumented individuals any postsecondary education benefit -- such as in-state tuition -- on the basis of the individual's residence in their state unless the state extends this benefit to a citizen or national residing in another state. This provision discourages the majority of Latino undocumented students who are unable to afford the out-of-state or international student fees. In response to this provision many state lawmakers have attempted to grant certain undocumented students eligibility for in-state tuition rates[8]. However, ineligibility for federal financial aid and grants continues to discourage undocumented students from applying to and enrolling in college. In spite of these political and economic constraints many undocumented Latino students attend college around the country, with the majority concentrated in high immigrant states (i.e., California, Nevada, Texas, Florida, New York, Arizona) (Passel, 2005).

Since 2001, federal lawmakers have been considering a bill known as the DREAM ACT or the Development, Relief, and Education For Alien Minors Act that addresses college and financial aid access to undocumented students. Specifically, the act would enact two major changes in current law: (1) allow for certain undocumented students who have grown up in the US to apply for temporary legal status and eventually obtain permanent state and become eligible for citizenship if

---

undocumented individuals from benefiting from public education. In this case the federal court held that the state law contradicted federal law and thus was "preempted" by federal law (Badger & Yale-Loehr).

[8] From 2001 to 2002, state legislation was introduced in thirteen states (Texas, California, Utah, Washington, New York, Oklahoma, Illinois, Kansas, New Mexico, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Georgia, North Carolina) to allow certain undocumented students in-state tuition rather than residency. To comply with IIRIRA section 505, Texas lawmakers based in-state tuition eligibility on enrolling in and graduation from a Texas high school rather and residency status. A similar law exist in California, however the benefit is not extended to the University of California campuses (only community and state colleges) (Badger & Yale-Loehr, 2002). Since then others state lawmakers (e.g., Nevada, Connecticut, Minnesota, and Massachusetts) are introducing bills that would either limit or expand access to this population (Mower, 2007; Spencer, 2007; Stahl, 2007).

they go to college or serve in the US. military and (2) eliminate a federal provision

that penalizes states that provide in-state tuition without regard to immigration status

(National Immigration Law Center, 2006). Opponents argue such a law would

reward illegal behavior and encourage others to enter the country illegally. Supporters

of the bill posit that such a law would provide economic benefits, reduce school

dropout rates, increase income, have a positive fiscal impact, and create a legal

workforce and reward good character (National Immigration Law Center). As of

2008, this federal bill is yet to become law, leaving thousands of undocumented

(prospective and current) college students in an indeterminate state. In addition to the

legal constraints and uncertain future in the US, undocumented Latino students face

many of the same obstacles as legal or US born Latino counterparts.

Factors that Influence Postsecondary Persistence for Latino Students

As a whole, Latino students represent approximately 10% of all college

students with the majority first-generation college students (Llagas & Snyer, 2003).

Civil rights legislation and subsequent institutional initiatives --- such as Equal

Opportunity Programs --- are the primary reasons Latino college enrollments have

increased since the 1960s (Leon, 2003; Olivas, 1986; Orfield, 1999). In light of this

increase degree completion has not improved over the last several decades. According

to researchers the reasons for this are multifaceted.

The earliest persistence study on Latino students can be traced back to 1976

when the National Chicano Commission on Higher Education lamented on the need

for additional research on Latino persistence:

> The rate of attrition for Chicanos is higher than for any other group. The data
> does not reveal the reasons for this attrition and while it is safe to assume that

attrition is due to a variety of socio-economic factors on the on hand, and to well-known structural limitations of educational institutions on the other, much research is needed in this area. (p. 25)

Six years later, Astin (1982) published his study on minorities, identified individual and institutional factors, and called for significant changes at the institutional, state, and federal level to help alleviate the appalling attrition rates among minorities. Two decades later the gap in educational attainment at the college level between Latinos and whites has increased from 9% in 1980 to 17% in 2000 (Martinez & Aguirre, 2003). Researchers, who specifically examine Latino persistence, have identified two central areas that influence their college-completion rates: student pre-college and institutional factors.

Student Pre-College Factors

Researchers have identified pre-college factors (e.g., high school grades, curriculum) to be related to Latino student persistence. Latino high school students tend to begin the process of considering college at a later time than white students and therefore are less likely to have taken high school curriculum that prepares them for college (Olivas, 1986). Consequently, Latino students may come from schools with minimal preparation for college and tend to have greater anxiety and stress over their ability when compared to white students (Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2003; Muñoz, 1986; Steele, 1997).

Scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Testing Program (ACT) have also been used widely to predict college success. However among minorities, including Latinos, Astin (1982) and Duran (1983) have found that high school grades are better predictors of first-year college grades. Furthermore, SAT and ACT scores explain the departure for whites but not for Latino

students (Astin, 1982). Arbona and Novy (1990) found that Mexican American students who held high educational expectations achieved high first-year college grades.

Family income is also a well-documented factor believed to influence Latino persistence (Astin, 1982; Leon, 2003; Olivas, 1986). Latino students tend to have lower incomes, which inevitably influence their ability to finance their college education. Other studies also examine how perceptions over finances and financial packages may influence college degree attainment (Muñoz, 1986; Nora, 1990; Olivas, 1986).

Support from significant others is a dominant theme throughout the literature on Latino persistence. Terenzini and associates (1994) report that family and friends play an especially important role among first generation college students in providing support for them to attend, persist, and succeed in college. Some studies have found that perceived family support predicts social adjustment and institutional attachment to college more strongly for Latinos and other ethnic minorities than for whites (Kenny & Perez, 1996; Maton, Teti, Corns, & Vieira-Baker, 1996).

Gender appears to be a factor that affects Latino groups differently. For instance, Astin (1982) found that being a woman was positively related to grade point average for whites, African American, and Puerto Rican but not for Mexican American. Further, Mexican American women were less likely to persist than their male counterparts. Other studies, however, have found that males experience greater levels of racial discrimination and therefore are at a greater risk of college departure (Barajas & Pierce, 2001).

The role of ethnic identification on college adjustment is also a factor that influences Latino persistence. In a study by Schneider and Ward (2003) they examined the role of perceived social support and ethnic identification on adjustment to college among Latino freshman attending a medium-sized liberal arts college in New York. The authors concluded that highly identified Latinos were less adjusted to college than less identified Latinos. In other studies a strong ethnic identification has also been linked to lower educational goals (Niemann, Romero, & Arbona, 2000). Conversely, other studies found that a stronger ethnic identification facilitated integration and mitigated perceived threats in mainstream college culture (Ethier & Deaux, 1990; Vasquez, 1982). While others (Young, 1992) found that external factors (e.g., work hours, domestic responsibilities) exert a stronger influence on college experiences than ethnic identification among females.

Institutional Factors

An often-cited reason for low college completion rates is the fact that Latino students are far more likely than any other group to be enrolled in two-year colleges. Close to 60% of first-time Latino college entrants enroll at community colleges (Martinez & Aguirre, 2003). There are significant in-group differences with almost half of Mexican origin students attending two-year colleges compared to Cubans, Puerto Ricans and other Latino groups who are more likely to enter four-year colleges (Fry, 2002). According to a report by the American Association of Community Colleges (1998) community colleges for many minorities are the schools of choice because of minimal entrance requirements, location of institutions, cost, and flexible course schedules.

Further, the over-representation of Latinos in community colleges, especially among Mexican origin students, has been attributed to prior schooling experiences (Astin, 1982; Ballesteros, 1986), financial constraints (Chacon, Cohen, & Strover, 1986), family and cultural values (Ballesteros, 1986), structural barriers (Karabel, 1972; Verdugo, 1986) and occupational aspirations (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). However, researchers find that when Latino students at community college are asked about their occupational aspirations 50 to 87% state they hope to transfer to a four-year institution and complete a baccalaureate degree (Bensimon & Riley, 1984; Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988).

While community colleges may appear to improve access to students who otherwise would not attend postsecondary institutions, attendance at community colleges significantly decreases the probability of persistence or degree completion among Latino students (Fry, 2002). Other studies point to the system differentiation between community college and four year institutions to explain the low completion rates among minorities. For instance, in his report on the status of minorities in higher education, Astin (1982) wrote:

> Two-year college is an appealing way to expand access because it is much less expensive than other types of institutions…Public and private sectors of higher education are characterized by a hierarchical ordering of institutions, with research universities occupying the top position in the hierarchy, four-year college in the middle, and two-year college at the bottom. Universities have substantially superior educational environments as represented by educational expenditures, libraries, financial aid, endowments, physical plants, faculty salaries, and residential facilities. The two-year colleges are at the bottom with respect to these resources and the four-year colleges fall in the middle. Minority students are disproportionately concentrated in those institutions with the fewest resources…These facts suggest that the educational opportunity provided to the typical black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, or American Indian student is not the equivalent of the opportunity provided to the typical White student. (p. 153)

Although Latino transfer rates are difficult to calculate given the variability in student mobility, Rendón and Valadez (1993) report that between 5 and 25% of students actually transfer successfully within four years of initial entry to four-year institutions. Access to postsecondary opportunities and subsequent degree completion for Latinos has remained illusive with the majority of first-time college Latino students concentrated in community colleges or less selective institutions (Martinez & Aguirre, 2003).

Unwelcoming college environments and a student's sense of belonging to campus are institutional factors found to influence a Latino student's adjustment and transition (Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). Particularly at predominately white institutions students of color experience greater anxiety and stress over their ability even when they are equally or more prepared then their white counterparts (Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2003; Muñoz, 1986; Steele, 1997). State and local laws and initiatives also appear to influence students' perception of institutional climate and culture, sometimes producing a chilling effect on students' aspirations and willingness to enter certain campus environments (Moreno, 1999).

The decrease in need-based college funding may also be a factor in Latino students' ability and willingness to continue college (Heller, 1997). Attendance patterns and type of institution also play a significant role in financial aid availability, with the majority of Latino students attending two year institutions and many enrolled less then full time, they receive limited financial aid than other students (Olivas,

1986). And while grants and scholarship have shown to have a positive effect

educational loans have had a mixed effect on persistence (Astin, 1982).

Summary

In this chapter, I discuss three relevant areas to my study. First, I provide a

brief overview of educational access and opportunities for Latino students and how it

shapes educational attainment. I highlight structural and cultural factors believed to

play a role in educational achievement. I also introduce the role of immigrant status

on college attendance for two Latino populations: Latino immigrants and

undocumented students. Past and current legislation are identified to provide a

political context of the current immigration and access debate. I transition to a

literature review of research that looked specifically at the factors that influence

postsecondary persistence for Latino students. There are two dominant themes in the

literature: (1) the role of student pre-college factors and (2) institutional factors on

student success and persistence.   In the following chapter, I discuss theoretical

frameworks used to research persistence (and that consider the two dominant themes

presented in this chapter). I also provide an analysis of two theoretical bodies of

literature: (1) integration perspectives on student persistence and (2) critical

perspectives on Latino student academic experiences.

CHAPTER 3.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I review studies and theoretical approaches to persistence from two perspectives. The first perspective, integration, centrally locates students' persistence decisions based on the degree to which students' leave their prior communities and incorporate into new campus communities. The second perspective, critical, focuses on the ways that structural, material, and socio- political and historical realities shape students' decision to persist.

Tinto (1993), Bean (1983), and Nora and associates (1996) offer models described as student integration models. These models highlight the central constructs in students' college experience and persistence decisions. Notably, they identify the role of pre-college characteristics on educational and degree goals and commitments and the interplay of campus and off-campus experiences on college persistence.

Tierney (2000), Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista (2005), Gonzalez (2000), Yosso (2006), and Bernal (2001) also identify student persistence and success as a dynamic interplay between pre-college characteristics, institutional and college related experiences and external commitments. However, these models incorporate and foreground experiences related to identity (e.g., race, gender, class), social capital (e.g., relationships, survival strategies on campus, networks), and cultural resources (e.g., informal knowledge, external experiences and commitments) and its

significance on student goals and success. While both approaches may appear at divergent ends, they inform each other and provide a richer picture of the experiences of Latino college students.

Integration Perspectives on Students Persistence

Early studies of student persistence/non-persistence (e.g., Cope & Hannah, 1975; Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Summerskill, 1967) suffered from two significant problems. According to Tinto (1987, 1993) they failed to provide a clear definition of dropout and they failed to move beyond descriptive statistics to a theoretical model that could explain the dynamic process of student departure. While the research community was fruitful in identifying pre-college (e.g., academic achievement, aptitude test scores), background (e.g., parental income, education, gender, age), psychological (e.g., motivation, efficacy, goals, stress) and institutional (e.g., size, selectivity) factors believed to be related to a student's decision to stay in or leave college, the relationship between these factors was unclear. In this section I will identify and discuss the theoretical underpinning of three models: the Student Integration Model (Tinto, 1993), Student Attrition Model (Bean, 1980, 1983), and a Student Adjustment Model (Nora et al., 1996). Findings from seminal studies are discussed and synthesized.

A Sociological Approach

Tinto's theory of individual departure (1987, 1993) builds on the work of Spady (1970) who developed a theoretical model of student departure based on Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide and Van Gennep's theory (1960) of rites of passage. He hypothesized that student persistence is analogous to rites of passage

22

from one community to another and incongruence between individual (e.g., student) and community (e.g., college) leads to suicide (e.g., individual withdrawal). Tinto described his model as an interactionalist approach that examines the longitudinal process of institutional student departure.

Tinto (1987) posits that students enter school with various individual attributes (e.g., family background, socio-economic, pre-college schooling experiences) that shape their goals and commitments, which subsequently influence the level of academic and social integration. The degree to which a student experiences academic and social integration affects the level of degree goal and institutional commitment which then affects the persistence/non-persistence decision. Studies using Tinto's model have used at least seven independent constructs: (1) student entry characteristics; (2) initial goal of graduation; (3) initial institutional commitment; (4) academic integration; (5) social integration; (6) subsequent goal of graduation; (7) subsequent institutional commitment and persistence as the dependent construct. Academic integration is composed of structural (e.g., student's academic performance) and normative (e.g., intellectual development which has been operationalized using behavioral and attitudinal factors) dimensions. Social integration refers to degree of congruency between the individual student and the social system; social integration has been operationalized to include formal and informal interactions with faculty, peers, and staff.

Of the seven constructs student entry characteristics, subsequent goal commitment, and subsequent institutional commitment are hypothesized to have a direct influence on the decision of student persistence/non-persistence. The following

reviews to what extent these constructs have found support in predicting the retention of students attending residential, commuter, liberal arts, and two-year colleges.

Student entry characteristics have been operationalized to include academic ability, race, gender, high school grade point average, parental educational level, and composite SAT score. These factors are hypothesized to directly influence student departure decisions, as well as students' initial goal of college graduation and commitment to the institution, which in turn influence social and academic integration.

Empirical studies confirm the proposition that *student characteristics* exert a direct influence on persistence using samples from students at commuter colleges (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983) and two-year colleges (Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986). However other studies have found that student characteristics exert a weak or insignificant affect on student persistence (Nora et al., 1996) using samples of students from residential colleges and liberal arts colleges (Brower, 1992).

When race and gender are considered, white male and white female student characteristics exert a direct significant influence on persistence; among Black males the influence is mixed while Black female student characteristics exert no direct influence on persistence (Stoecker, Pascarella, & Wolfe, 1988).

Initial commitment to the institution and the goal of college graduation are hypothesized to be directly influenced by student characteristics. Subsequent commitments are believed to be influenced by academic and social integration. In sum, the more a student is socially integrated the more likely the student is committed to graduate from that particular institution; the more the student is academically

integrated the more likely the student is to committed to the goal of graduation (Tinto, 1987, 1993).

Subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation has exerted a direct positive influence on persistence (Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995) using samples of students attending two-year colleges (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983) and residential universities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983). Studies of students at commuter campuses found no support for the influence of goal commitments to persistence (Allen & Nelson, 1989; Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992). In a single study, Pascarella and Ternzini found that goal commitment was not a significant factor in predicting persistence for females. Similarly, Pascarella, Dudy, and Iverson (1983) reported that goal commitment did not have an effect on persistence nor was it affected by academic or social integration among a sample of students attending a nonresidential university.

The influence of subsequent commitments to the institution on student persistence has exerted a strong direct influence on student persistence for students attending liberal arts, commuter and residential colleges (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983). However, studies using students attending community colleges have yielded no influence or indirect influence on persistence (Allen & Nelson, 1989). When gender is included the results are mixed (e.g., Stage, 1988).

Studies using the Tinto model have been mixed. Overall, the model has been a strong predictor of persistence for white, full-time, male students attending commuter, residential, or liberal arts colleges. However, the model has been less

25

successful in predicting the persistence of females, students of color, and part-time students (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997).

In spite of these weaknesses, the Tinto model (1987, 1997) has brought some consensus as to the dynamic temporal process of students' postsecondary decisions. It has identified and tested constructs -- student characteristics, initial and subsequent commitments and goals, social and academic integration -- believed to exert a direct or indirect influence on persistence.

An Organizational Approach

Bean (1980, 1983, 1990) based his work of student attrition on models in the area of organizational turnover (Price, 1977) and attitude-behavior interactions (Bentler & Speckart, 1979; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Bean postulated that student attrition is parallel to turnover in work organizations in that students leave institutions for reasons similar to those causing employees to leave (e.g., satisfaction). From the behavioral perspective he suggests, "individual's behavior is the result of a cyclical process in which beliefs affect attitudes that lead to intentions that lead to the behavior in question" (Bean, 1990, p. 151). Following the assumptions embedded in these models (Bentler & Speckart, 1979; Price, 1977), he proposed four constructs had a direct or indirect effect on student intention to leave which is a precursor to the institutional departure decision. The constructs include (1) background characteristics, (2) organizational, (3) environmental/external, and (4) attitudinal.

Bean (1983) postulated that background factors (e.g., gender, parents education, income, race) precede the student's interaction with the organization and were included largely to "enhance the explanation of organizational and

26

environmental variables" (p. 26). According to Bean, such factors contribute little to the explained variance of dropout when information about organizational, environmental, and attitudinal factors is available.

Attitudinal and outcome constructs include variables such as the student's subjective assessment of his or her experiences with the institution, perceived quality of education, adjustment in college, confidence, loyalty and occupational goals. Bean's model presupposes these factors directly influence intent to leave (an attitudinal construct), which is hypothesized to be the best predictor of student persistence. Studies have found that intention to leave is a significant predictor of subsequent departure from the institution (e.g., Bean & Creswell, 1980; Bers & Smith, 1991).

Bean described organizational variables as the indicators of student's interaction with the institution (e.g., rules and regulations, interactions with peers, informal contact with faculty, membership in campus organizations). Bean posits that satisfaction with college leads to institutional commitment and subsequent intention leads to persistence or departure.

External factors are those which the institution has "little or no control" over (e.g., transfer, family commitments, family support and encouragement, finances). Lack of encouragement from others to stay has proven to be an important external factor which exerts both direct and indirect influence on satisfaction, intent, and persistence (Bean, 1983; Bean & Creswell, 1980; Metzner & Bean, 1987).

Bean's model highlighted gender differences among samples of students attending research universities (e.g., Bean & Bradley, 1986), commuter (e.g., Metzner

& Bean, 1987), and liberal arts colleges (e.g., Bean & Creswell, 1980); finding primarily that attitudinal (e.g., satisfaction, sense of development, stress), organizational (rules and regulations, interactions), and external (e.g., opportunity to transfer, significant other, finances) factors affect male and females differently. Unfortunately, studies have been less successful in predicting intention and subsequent persistence among students of color, due primarily to the homogeneity of the samples.

A Student Adjustment Model

Nora and associates (1996) developed a causal model of college student persistence, which integrated the theoretical frameworks proposed by Bean (1980, 1983) and Tinto (1987, 1993). They expand their model by including factors previously excluded, principally as it relates to college related and environmental factors. Their model posits three central constructs: (1) pre college factors, (2) college-related factors, and (3) environmental factors.

Pre-college factors include students' demographic characteristics, academic resources (skills, quality and rigor of their high school curriculum), social capital (knowledge of college process, networks, attitudes), and family background (education, support and encouragement, finances).

College-related factors are related to students' college experiences and include factors such as first year college grades, students' commitment to obtaining a degree, students' involvement inside and outside the classroom and students' perception of discrimination and campus climate.

Environmental factors are those believed to be external to the institutions that influence the students' college experiences. These factors have been found to be especially important to understanding students' of color persistence decisions (Nora, et al., 1996). These include factors such as family responsibilities, working off campus, and commitments outside of campus life.

The results of studies that use this model indicate that college related factors, such as institutional and goal commitments, are significant predictors of intention to persist; also significant persistence decisions were pre-college factors, such as finances and GPA. For students of color, the authors found that external factors, such as family responsibilities and working to support other family members, influenced their persistence decisions more so than for their white counterparts (students were less likely to persist when they had more off-campus responsibilities). The authors concluded, "when these two models were merged into one integrated model, a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay among individual, environment, and institutional factors was achieved" (Cabrera et al., 1992, p. 135).

Subsequent studies using the Student Adjustment Model have further modified the model to include constructs on perceptions of prejudice and discrimination (Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996), pre-college psychosocial attributes (e.g., self efficacy, motivation) (Nora & Lang, 2001), and active learning (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). Findings from these studies point to the influence of these factors in persistence and the institutional role in mediating social and academic factors through the development or improvement of mentoring and counseling services, engaging

pedagogical approaches, orientation programs, and student activities. With few exceptions the majority of research continues to focus on predominately white, full-time students attending selective, liberal arts, or residential colleges painting only a partial picture of today's college students. Further, the model does not account for the complexities of material, structural and cultural experiences and the role in students' educational trajectory and subsequent persistence. I turn to critical perspectives to examine how such approaches can enhance our understanding of students' postsecondary decisions.

Critical Perspectives

There is no one definition of critical theory (Morrow & Torres, 1995). Indeed, such a definition would be counter to the underpinnings of critical perspectives and a historical discussion of critical theory is beyond the scope of this section[9]. There are broad tenets, however, that help situate critical perspectives and offer some parameters for the purpose of this inquiry. Broadly speaking, critical theories are concerned with the way that history and the political economy of a nation exert domination, whether directly or indirectly, over the political, economic, social, and cultural lives and realities of citizens. An important project of critical theorists is to foreground these realities; specifically researchers focus on how these equities interplay with the realities of individuals. For instance, in educational research, critical theorists describe the structural systems of domination such as the hidden curriculums in schools that perpetuate capitalist ideologies and subjugate certain

---

[9] For an in-depth, metatheoretical and historical discussion of critical theories see The Convergence of Neo-Gramscian and Critical Theory, Part 4 in *Social Theory and Education: A Critique of Theories of Social and Cultural Reproduction* by Morrow and Torres (1995).

groups of students (Leistyna, Woodrum, Sherblom, 1996). Theorists also delineate

the intersections of college students' multiple experiences (based on gender, class,

race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language for instance) and the meanings they

ascribe to these experiences in- and outside of educational settings (Delgado Bernal,

2002; Solórzano, 1998). In the following section I review and synthesize three

theoretical perspectives --- reproduction and resistance, Latino Critical Race, and

Chicana Feminist theories --- that can enhance our understanding of persistence

among populations of color, in particular Latino students. I highlight their

contributions, limitations, and how they inform my own inquiry.

(Re)production and Resistance Theories

Reproduction theorists originally examined the ways that exploitative class

hierarchies were perpetuated from one generation to another. Most notably, Bourdieu

and Patterson (1977), and Bowles and Ginitis (1976) theorized that class hierarchies

were maintained because schools or state sponsored institutions promoted the

interests of the upper classes by reproducing a working class that is trained and

willing to take on subordinate work conditions in a capitalist society. Cultural and

social capital from these perspectives are viewed as the non-economic goods which

one group holds over the other and that perpetuate unequal distribution of power and

resources (Bourdieu, 1986). These theories suffered from two significant limitations.

First, these theories did not adequately explain the racial and gender differences.

Second, the theories assumed individuals were passive and did not resist oppressive

structures (Morrow & Torres, 1995). Resistance and cultural production theories

gained momentum (e.g., Holland & Eisenhart, 1990, Foley, 1990; MacLeod, 1995;

Willis, 1977) and offered researchers a framework to understand "not only external structural and ideological constraints, but also the subjective dimension involved in self-formation" (Morrow & Torres, 1995, p. 306). The mundane, day-to-day individual and group practices took on new meanings as researchers looked at ways that individuals' resisted oppressive structures and created and recreated cultural practices that sustained their ideology. Higher education researchers have incorporated tenets of reproduction and resistance theories to understand students' college experiences and decisions. Three relevant examples are Tierney (2000), Maldonado et al. (2005) and Gonzalez (2002) who consider the role of culture and identity in students' college experiences.

Tierney (2000) argues that in order to understand postsecondary decisions, particularly among students of color, one must approach it from the perspective of identity and power because, he theorizes, these are directly related to student achievement across the educational trajectory. He calls for a reconceptualization of culture with specific attention to the ways that power, identity, relationships and cultural assets are defined, understood and practiced at the local levels where students live. Issues of race and racism, gender, sexual orientation, poverty, and unequal access to educational resources are at the forefront of analysis in order to understand how student persistence operates in educational spaces.

In summary, Tierney identifies four central constructs: (1) identity; which goes beyond the dichotomous representation and instead focuses on how identity is defined and understood by individuals; (2) power; in particular how power is played out in local contexts such as in educational institutions and communities, (3)

relationships; how are these practiced and understood by students; and (4) cultural assets; what are they and how can they enhance students' educational experiences. He asserts that these constructs influence students' educational trajectory and subsequent decisions.

Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista (2005) also offer a critical framework to explain the college experience of students of color and their subsequent decisions. They draw from Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural and social capital as a way to understand how ethnic student groups in college teach and (re)distribute essential skills students of color need to survive in predominately white universities. Through these groups students of color become consciously aware of the capital that is valued, practiced, and transmitted among middle and upper-income groups. Maldonado et al. further contend that students take on these behaviors not solely for the purpose of individual attainment, success, or to reverse the cycle of oppression, rather as a form of collective struggle to bring about social change and they "elevate their own cultural identities and those of the ethnic/racial communities from which they come" (p. 612). Students of color are positioned as change agents who work toward self-empowerment and liberation (Freire, 1970). They posit that postsecondary decisions are shaped by students' ability to acquire survival strategies to succeed in college and their conscious effort to resist dominant social inequities through educational success.

In a similar study, Gonzalez (2002) looks at Chicano (male) students' experiences at a predominately white college. He puts forth a dialectical framework that positions students as cultural workers. Giroux (1992) identifies cultural workers as those educators, teachers, and artists who work to bring about social change and

Rhoads (1998) extends the idea of cultural workers to include activist college students. For these theorists, the dialectic process presents a praxis that will ultimately bring about a sense of self-consciousness, which they view as the thrust for social change.

<p style="text-align:center">Latina/o Critical Race Theory</p>

Latina/o Critical Race Theory offers another lens to understand Latino college experiences and postsecondary decisions. Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) is an outgrowth of critical race theories (CRT). In educational researcher, CRT offers a useful framework to examine the macro and micro conditions and individual responses to these conditions from specific racial and ethnic perspectives. Critical Race Theory emerged as a counterlegal scholarship to positivist and liberal discourse of civil rights (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In terms of research related to the education of students of color, CRT interrogates liberal discourse and educational scripts purported to advocate on behalf of the interests of student of color[10]. Racism is assumed to be a permanent fixture in US society and the aim is to unmask and expose the many incarnations of racism within educational structures. Critical Race Theory scholars open the door for the use counterstories, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories as important analytic tools to underscore the continued educational inequities and to give voice to multiple ways of knowing. This type of experiential approach is recognized as legitimate knowledge (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999; Yosso, 2006)

---

[10] Ladson-Billings (1998) illustrates how this is done in school curriculum by describing the way that White supremacist master scripts silence multiple voices and perspectives by reducing, for instance, Martin Luther King, Jr. to a "sanitized folk hero" who fought for a race-neutral society. This script, she argues, "presumes a homogenized 'we' in a celebration of diversity…Thus, students are taught erroneously that 'we are all immigrants,' and, as a result, African American, Indigenous, and Chicano students are left with the guilt of failing to rise above their immigrant status like every other group" (p. 18).

and integrates a transdisciplinary approach to research. The goal of any research, from this perspective, is to create a socially just society. Similarly, Latina/o critical theorists (LatCrit) take up CRT assumptions but they argue that any analysis of people of color needs to consider not only the realities of racism but also the intersections of other forms of subordination such as sexism and discrimination based on language, immigration, phenotype, and sexuality (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Latina/o critical race theorists recognize students of color have to deal with campus microaggressions on a daily basis (Solórzano, 1998). These microaggressions take the form of obvert to very subtle assaults on individuals based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or class. Researchers, regardless of their theoretical orientations, have well documented how students of color often face racially hostile and unwelcoming environments at predominately white institutions (Clements, 2000; Haro., Rodriguez, & Gonzales, 1994; Hurtado, 1994). Critical race researchers also center their analysis from the perspective of the students, the students' specific and local experiences, the students' understandings of race, ethnicity, gender, community and self-empowerment (Delgado Bernal, 2001, 2002; Fernández, 2002; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2006).

Chicana Feminist Theory

Chicana feminist theory is concerned with knowledge about Chicanas and how informal knowledge is constructed and legitimized from generation to generation. Specifically, informal knowledge is viewed as valid and important to

understanding how teaching, learning, and coping with larger societal inequities takes place in the private and public spaces that Chicanas reside in. The dynamic (informal) community and family knowledge, historically ignored by social scientists, is an important theoretical construct that Chicana theorists investigate to bring attention to the important pedagogical practices used within families. In educational research this cultural knowledge has been referred to as community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), mother-daughter pedagogies (Villenas, 2001), funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, Amanti, 2005), and pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Theorists assert that this knowledge is partially shaped by collective experiences and community memories. Furthermore, Chicana feminist approaches expose human relationships and lived experiences that are likely not visible from traditional patriarchal positions or a liberal feminist perspectives.

Delgado Bernal (2001) writes that a Chicana feminist epistemology is informed by and shares characteristics of endardkened feminist epistemologies in that it examines the role of race, class, gender, and sexuality on opportunity structures. However it is different than Black feminist thought or Indian discourses because a "Chicana feminist approach also validates and addresses experiences that are intertwined with issues of immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism, limited English proficiency, and the contradictions of Catholicism" (Delgado Bernal, p. 561). These culturally specific experiences, theorists assert, shape women's understanding of the world around them, how they are positioned, and how they respond. From this standpoint educational researchers look at the experiences of Chicanas from their lived perspectives and bring attention to the intersection of

multiple oppressive circumstances that inform Chicana students experiences and resistive practices as well as the role that informal home knowledge plays in their strategies for success. There are similarities across Chicana feminist theories and critical race theories; specifically the role that historical and present inequities play in individual experiences and how knowledge production is interpreted. Where Chicana feminist theorists depart is in their interpretation of identities. For instance, Chicana feminist theorists have put forth a number of theoretical constructs to understand how women live out these experiences and the ways that these experiences intersect. Mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1990), oppositional consciousness (Sandoval, 1991), multiple realities (Alarcón, 1990), and multiple subjectivities (Hurtado, 2003) are how theorists explain the ways that Chicanas negotiate, straddle, and live within different cultures, races, languages, nations, sexualities, and spiritualities (Delgado Bernal).

Chicana feminist theory is relevant to this review and study because Latinas have now surpassed their male counterparts in postsecondary enrollments. Yet despite this fact, Latina perspectives of their college education have not traditionally been included in educational research.[11] It has not been until the last eight years that researchers, primarily drawing from feminist perspectives, have focused on Latina perspectives and how they make meaning of their college experiences. From this body of literature two important distinctions (when compared to research of their

---

[11] A notable exception is Patricia Gándara's article, *Passing through the eye of the needle: High-achieving Chicanas* (1982), in which she looked at background factors and experiences held in common by Mexican American women who had completed J.D., M.D., or Ph.D. degrees. The focus of her study was on the early educational experiences and the role of family, particularly mothers, in their academic motivation and achievement. The women's perceptions of their college experiences were not discussed, yet it is an important article because it highlights Mexican origin women who successfully navigated through educational institutions while maintaining strong cultural ties to their families.

male counterparts) emerge. First, Latinas negotiate multiple experiences and these experiences have implications on their educational decisions. Second, their source of educational motivation, focus, and strategies are often derived from informal home knowledge.

Researchers find that, regardless of gender, Latina and Latino connection to their families and external communities is an important component to successful college transition, adjustment, and persistence. However, when using feminist perspectives researchers find that college experiences are mediated through gendered understandings and how they connect to external and internal communities. Delgado Bernal (2001) examined the strategies that Chicana students learn in the home and use successfully when confronted with challenges in college. Using Anzaldúa's (1990) theoretical construct of mestiza consciousness, Bernal Delgado focused on the ways that students balanced, negotiated, and drew from their bilingual and bicultural skills, commitment to communities and their spiritualities to help them succeed in college. Embedded in a mestiza consciousness is the assumption that identities are fluid, resilient, and oppositional (Hurtado, 2003). Delgado Bernal further focused on the internal transformational resistance in which individual behavior is subtle or even silent and might go unnamed as resistance. She theorizes that these subtle resistance strategies are learned in the home and community and serve as cultural knowledge that help Chicana students overcome challenges throughout their educational trajectories.

By looking at studies that specifically examine the role that gender, race, culture and class play in the educational experiences of Latina/Chicana college

students we learn that female students' critical consciousness is informed by (1) their gendered experiences, (2) informal home knowledge, and (3) relationships with family (primarily other women such as mothers). Further, we learn that their acts of resistance are often subtle and unnamed, but nonetheless are purposeful and strategic to achieving their educational goals (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Hurtado, 2003). Perspectives that do not incorporate a feminist lens miss these important distinctions between males and females. Studies on postsecondary experiences using Chicana feminist theories illustrate the multiple ways that cultural knowledge is understood and practiced among Latina college students.

Summary

There is consensus among researchers that persistence decisions are the result of a dynamic longitudinal process in which individual, institutional, and external factors exert an influence on students' postsecondary decisions. Theoretical models have provided researchers a useful method to identity and test factors. Tinto's model (1993) of student integration draws attention to the influence of student background variables on goals and commitments subsequently influencing the student's integration into academic and social spheres. Bean's model (1983) brings to the forefront the influence of external (e.g., significant others, finances) factors on students' integration, intent and persistence process. The Student Adjustment Model (Nora et al., 1996) converged these two models and incorporates additional constructs not fully captured in previous models (e.g., environmental elements, perceptions of climate, active learning, intrinsic attributes). I concluded that these models, while important in identifying key factors, provide a partial picture of factors that influence

student departure among Latino college students. To gain a better understanding of the structural, cultural, and social factors that influence college persistence I turned to critical perspectives.

My literature review included critical perspectives on students' college experiences, with attention to Latino college students. The theories I review respond to the call of researchers to consider new theoretical approaches that incorporate students' experiences and how they make postsecondary decisions within these contexts (Attinasi, 1989; Braxton, 2000; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2002; Tierney, 1996). Specifically, I discuss perspectives derived from reproduction and resistance, Latina/o Critical Race and Chicana Feminist Theories. These theories add to our understanding of how Latino students negotiate, balance, develop, and use survival strategies in college spaces. Moreover, this literature contributes to our understanding of Latino college students in at least two significant ways: (1) it brings attention to the ways that Latinos are active agents as they interpret their social, economic and political realities and make postsecondary decisions and (2) it highlights how they strategically organize (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Maldonado et al, 2005), resist (Gonzalez, 2002; Solórzano, 1998) and draw from a repertoire of survival strategies grounded in their culture specific experiences (Delgado Bernal, 2001; García, 2004; Gonzalez, 2002; Hurtado, 2003). The studies and theoretical insights reviewed in this section treat college success as an act of resistance on the part of the students and their families. Issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, culture, and power are at the forefront of such analysis and interpretations of students' experiences. Moreover,

societal and specific local histories and contexts provide important analytic frames to interpret individual and group experiences.

In *Chapter 4*, I discuss my conceptual framework and theoretical considerations for this inquiry as derived from my literature review in Chapter 2 and 3. I introduce and discuss the constructs used for this inquiry as it relates to the conceptual framework.

CHAPTER 4.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this chapter I put forward my central research question and sub questions based on my literature review. I also present and discuss a conceptual framework and theoretical considerations that demarcate my inquiry. I present my main inquiry constructs and related theoretical considerations.

Research Question and Conceptual Framework

The research literature established the importance of pre-college characteristics, external factors, college-related experiences, commitments and postsecondary persistence. Further, research that considered identity, gender, and culture established the significance of cultural resources and knowledge on Latino students' motivation, strategies to achieve their academic goals, and postsecondary decisions. A literature review on Latino college students and persistence theoretical models led me to consider the following central research question:

How do pre-college experiences, environmental elements, and cultural resources and knowledge of a particular group of Latina/o students shape their first year college experiences and postsecondary decisions?

To answer my research question I developed a conceptual model (Figure 1) that incorporates constructs identified in the literature. Specifically, I draw from the Student Adjustment Model put forth by Nora and associates (1996) and literature on Latino cultural resources as a way to shape my study.

Nora and associates base their model on Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Model and Bean's (1980) Student Attrition Model that posits that considers persistence as an interwoven set of interactions between pre-college characteristics and college-related experiences (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Nora and associates (1996) expand their model by also acknowledging the dynamic set of environmental characteristics and subsequent experiences that students bring with them and negotiate as they go through college and make postsecondary decisions.

The Student Adjustment Model (Nora et al., 1996) was appropriate for this inquiry because it emphasizes many of the external and internal experiences that students express as meaningful to their postsecondary decisions. Further, this model incorporates perceived inequities experienced during college and previously excluded from other models.

Figure 1.
Conceptual Model for Study
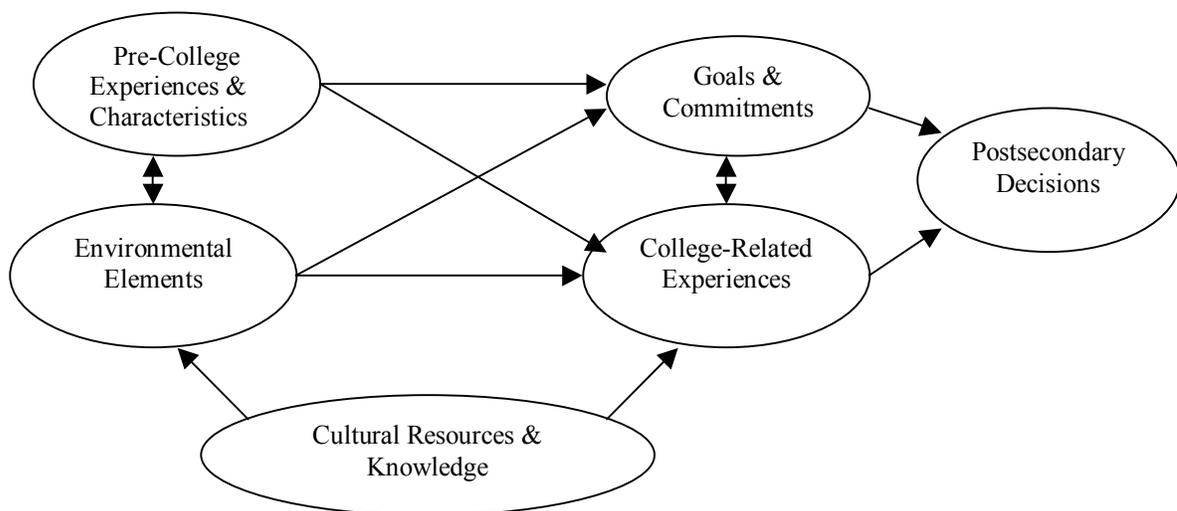
My inquiry expands current persistence research by foregrounding the students' experiences before and during college and how they make sense of these experiences during their first year of college and how it informs their postsecondary decisions. Specifically, I incorporate the construct of Cultural Resources and Knowledge. Although my conceptual model appears linear the constructs are mutually interacting and shaping. In particular, pre-college characteristics and environmental elements are conceived as mutually informing contexts that inform other experiences and contexts outside of campus spaces (e.g., home, community, family). Goals and commitments and college-related experiences, are conceived as part of the college experience, mutually informing, contexts that inform students college decisions as well. Thus, the postsecondary decision to continue or depart is represented as being a result of the college experience context but individuals inform their decisions based on the various contexts they live in and negotiate throughout their lives. Cultural resources and knowledge, similarly, are seen as informing both contexts. For each of the five constructs I identify and discuss the factors associated with each construct. While not inclusive, these constructs were the most salient in the literature review as it relates to Latino student persistence in postsecondary settings. The following sub-questions are derived from my central research question and the conceptual framework:

1) What pivotal pre-college experiences shape a particular group of Latina/o students' postsecondary goals and commitments? How do these students interpret their experiences as it relates to their postsecondary goals and commitments?

2) What pivotal environmental elements shape a particular group of Latina/o students' postsecondary goals and commitments? How do these students interpret these experiences as it relates to their postsecondary goals and commitments?

3) How do a particular group of students' pre-college experiences and environmental elements inform their college-related experiences?

4) What pivotal college-related experiences and challenges do a particular group Latina/o students confront their first year of college? How do they balance or negotiate these experiences?

5) What cultural resources and knowledge does a particular group of students draw from as they navigate their first year of college? How do these resources mitigate their first year college challenges and barriers and shape their postsecondary decisions?

6) Are there gender differences in how males and females interpret their first year of college? What are these differences?

Theoretical Considerations

Cultural Resources

My review of literature, specifically critical theories, revealed that a closer examination of the role of culture can provide an in-depth analysis of important factors that influence student postsecondary decisions. Culture, often cited as a determent to persistence, is not fully developed by current persistence models. Critical theories highlight Latino cultural resources and researchers posit that there these enable students to participate in academic settings and construct strategies for

adaptation and survival (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gonzalez, Moll, Amanti, 2005; Orelleana, 2003). Students' perceptions of campus climate are considered important analytic frames to understand students' postsecondary decisions and strategies for success (Gonzalez, 2002; Maldonado, Rhoads & Buenavista, 2005; Solórzano, 1998; Tierney, 2000). My study aims to examine how students' perceive and understand their culture within the context of their educational experiences and how their culture is used as a resource to achieve their postsecondary goals.

To situate my work I draw from Geertz's (1973) interpretation of culture in which culture is a system of shared values, beliefs, norms, assumptions and ideologies constructed in groups through various practices (e.g., verbal and non-verbal communication, rituals, artifacts, traditions, and myths). Culture gives significance to groups and provides members frameworks by which to construct systems of meaning and ways of organizing daily practices.

For this inquiry, I define a *Cultural Resource* as a culturally based asset (whether material or non material) that can enhance a student's undergraduate experience. Further, this resource is drawn upon during difficult times or in order to handle a situation that has not been previously confronted in a postsecondary or educational setting. A resource can provide relief or bring resolution to a difficulty or situation. These resources are often derived from life lessons, experiences and interactions with structural and material circumstances. For instance, marginality based on language use, immigration status, gender, religion, economic status, and ethnicity. Specifically, the literature identified three central themes related to cultural

resources that I identify as factors for my conceptual model. These include identity, narratives and counterstories, and relationships and networks.

Persistence models often treat identity as a dichotomous variable (e.g., minority/non-minority; white/non-white). Other studies look at specific racial or ethnic groups (e.g., Black, Latino, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Native American, Asian) and treat the constructs as fixed and static variables. Researchers point to the fluidity and dynamic nature of how individuals construct their identity depending on the context and resources available. For this inquiry, Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory is appropriate. From this perspective individuals' self-concepts derive from knowing that they are members of particular groups. Individuals attempt to maintain positive social identifies to groups they are members to (whether positive or negative). Tajfel hypothesized that the formation of social identities is the consequence of three social psychological processes: categorization, social comparison, and distinctiveness. Social categorization refers to the nationality, language, race and ethnicity, skin color, or any other social or physical characteristics that is meaningful in particular social contexts that can be the basis for social categorization and thus the foundation for the creation of social identities. The second is social comparison, which involves the characteristics of an individual group(s), such as status, that become significant in relation to the perceived difference from other groups. The third process involves the desire to achieve a positive sense of distinctiveness. From this perspective, ethnic and racial identities are equivalent to other forms of identities. Individuals draw on these identities depending on the context and other group identities present. In this inquiry, racial and ethnic identities

are considered along with other identities (e.g., gender, religion, immigrant status, socioeconomic status) students deem important to their experiences.

The second central factor is related to the use of narratives and counterstories as a means to (re)create, sustain, and circulate cultural resources and knowledge within groups. Specifically, Latino families pass on to their children important *consejos* and a culturally based *educación* to help them succeed in education and life; also referred to as pedagogies of the home (Villenas & Moreno, 2001), funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, Amanti, 2005; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg 1992), and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Valdés (1996) describes *consejos* as "spontaneous homilies designed to influence behavior and attitudes" (p. 125) and go beyond providing advise to solve a particular problem. Valdés also considers *la educación de los hijos (education of the children)* in a much broader academic sense to include personal development beyond academic learning. Espinoza-Herold (2007) describes, "*Educación* in the Latino family includes manners, moral values, and rules of conduct, in addition to aspirations and expectations for the future" (p. 262). While all families, regardless of race, may engage in similar practices historically mainstream educators and researchers have interpreted these Latino family practices as deficient or counterproductive to the academic motivation and success of Latino children. This study views such practices as an integral part to Latino student success.

Narratives and counterstorytelling in educational research is a method of recounting the experiences and perspectives of racially and socially marginalized people. Yosso (2006) suggests that using such an approach can raise critical

consciousness about social and racial injustice that directly affects communities of color. Indeed, researchers have continuously found that storytelling is an important component to learning about issues of structural inequality, teaching children how to navigate in such situations, and countering negative images portrayed by dominant media and society (Auerbach, 2002; Gándara, 1995; Flores, 2000; Olmedo, 2003, Villenas, 2001). Within this tradition of critical theories (López & Parker, 2003; Parker, Ddeyhle, & Villenas, 1999) stories are treated as valid and valuable knowledge that "merit serious attention as forms of social analysis" (Renato, 1993, p. 143). Flores (2000) posits that narratives and counterstories offer a "dimension of oppositionality" (p. 691), which allows marginalized and disenfranchised communities to create discourses about themselves they want in circulation. In doing so stories provide a "means of 'historical correction', sharing power within a culture, and have the resistive power and liberatory potential in their shifting of insider/outsider boundaries" (Flores, p. 692). In effect, counterstories offer critical reflection on the lived experiences and histories of individuals whose voices are often excluded in social analysis research.

The third factor is relationships and networks that provide cultural nourishment (Gonzalez, 2002). These relationships and support network may include family members, mentors, friends, and role models that may also serve as cultural translators and brokers. Cultural translators and brokers are individuals who pass on information about their personal experiences and knowledge of the dominant, white, middle class culture to help students navigate dominant spaces, such as schools and colleges (Madolodo et al., 2005; Moje & Martínez, 2007). Among women,

relationships with their mothers is seen as critical to the development of life goals and serves as the first site where they learn of larger social inequities and resistive practices.

Cultural Knowledge

I define *Cultural Knowledge* as information that individuals are cognizant of and have gained through experience, association, or acquaintance with their specific culture and family. My literature review identified several important factors that I examine under the construct Cultural Knowledge. These factors include development of strategies for success (Delgado Bernal, 2001) primarily obtained from informal home knowledge and related to an understanding of culture, language, and inequities. Delgado Bernal (2001) states,

> Community and family knowledge is taught to youth through such ways as legends, *corridos*, storytelling, and behavior. It is through culturally specific ways of teaching and learning that ancestors and elders share the knowledge of conquest, segregation, labor market stratification, patriarchy, homophobia, assimilation, and resistance. This knowledge that is passed from one generation to the next…can help us survive in everyday life. (p. 624)

In addition to knowledge of the social, political, and economic inequities, language and bicultural understandings are skills students bring to bear on their experiences as they navigate postsecondary spaces (Maldonado, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Pre-College Experiences and Characteristics

Pre-College Experiences and Characteristics in educational research is traditionally described as a set of limited factors that do not take into account the multiplicity and varied meanings students ascribe to their experiences, in particular as it relates to their culture and assessment of educational opportunities. In persistence

research, pre-college characteristics are usually thought of in terms of individual attributes (e.g., student demographics, family background, and previous academic performance). These models seldom include the political and historical experiences that students contend with before and during their college years. My inquiry expands pre-college experiences and characteristics to include the ways that past and present immigration regulations and experiences, language use and experiences with language policies, religious practices, and access to academic resources shape students' experiences. Parental involvement, support and encouragement are also important factors under this construct.

Environmental Elements

Environmental Elements include factors external to the campus and researchers have traditionally thought of as out of the college's control (Bean, 1982, Arbona & Nora, 2007). For instance, hours worked off campus and family responsibilities are two environmental factors that have been found to have a negative affect on Latino student persistence because they "pull" students from social and academic involvement (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Under this construct, I also include involvement in and connection to external campus communities (family and community-based group) significant to students' college experiences.

Goals and Commitments

Students' Goals and Commitments have been found to be strong indictors of persistence (Nora et al., 1996; Tinto, 1993). Factors included in this construct include academic and degree goals and institutional commitment. Researchers have found that while academic goals may predict persistence, institutional commitment does not.

Among Latino students, in particular first generation college students, a commitment to improving family and community economic, social, and political conditions have been important to their educational goals, commitments, and postsecondary decisions (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Gonzalez, 2002; Yosso, 2006).

College-Related Experiences

College-Related Experiences are factors directly related to campus (inside and outside the classroom) experiences and interactions. This construct includes academic and social interactions with faculty, college staff and peers and extracurricular involvement in student groups. I expand this construct to include institutional climate factors that include perceptions of campus racial climate (Solórzano, 1998) and sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Postsecondary Decisions after the First-Year of College

The first year college experience is critical to a student's college goals and postsecondary decisions. Throughout this study, I use the term postsecondary decisions, which is broader than persistence, to draw attention to the material, structural, and cultural factors, inside and outside of campus, that shape a student's decisions and goals. The term persistence is often used in the context of large institutional studies that place the responsibility of degree continuation, modification, completion, or departure squarely on the student. The use of postsecondary decisions in this study aims to capture a student's interpretation of other factors that shape her first year of college and persistence, such as the role of language use, immigration experiences, and religion.

Indeed, researchers use several terms to discuss a student's decision to leave college: leave, departure, dropout, persistence and non-persistence. These terms are often used interchangeably. Tinto (1987, 1993) makes a distinction between *institutional* and *system* persistence or departure. *Institutional* departure, dropout, or non-persistence refers to the individual's decision to leave a particular institution to enter another institution either immediately or sometime down the road. Institutional departure at the community college level is difficult to appraise since many two-year institutions do not follow their students once they leave their colleges (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). It is estimated that students who depart eventually enroll elsewhere and earn a degree within five years (Choy, 2002), yet this does not tend to be the case for Latino students (Fry, 2004). Researchers find that Latino students are not as likely to complete a degree once they leave their first institution; instead they are likely to depart the system all together. *System* departure, dropout, or non-persistence refers to the individual's decision to leave the higher education system all together or not return or enroll in another institution. My study considers institutional and system departure after two semesters of attendance based on a student's completion of courses and a student's intent to continue after each semester. Another important distinction is between voluntary and involuntary departure. *Involuntary* departure refers to a student's decision to leave because of failing grades. *Voluntary* departure refers to a student's decision to leave in spite of having passing grades. It is estimated that less than 20% of student departures are due to involuntary reasons or grades thus the majority of departures are voluntary (Tinto, 1993). My study looks at voluntary departure of students who are academically qualified for college.

Specifically, I look at how students' interpretation of their experiences informs their decisions to continue enrolled, modify their goals or depart after their first year of college.

Summary

In this chapter, I present my central research questions and sub questions. I discuss the conceptual framework, which guided my research. I identify the central constructs and my rationale for including these constructs. In *Chapter 5*, I present the methodology used to answer the central research question. I also outline the purpose of the study and limitations to the study.

CHAPTER 5.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I explain how my inquiry was carried out. Specifically, I discuss the purpose of the inquiry, choice of research method, use of the conceptual framework in guiding the study, selection of respondents, collection, interpretation and analysis of the data, and limitations of the study. The design provided parameters prior to data collection. As discussed in the previous chapter, I used central components of the Student Adjustment model (Nora et al., 1996) as well as constructs identified in Latino student experiences from critical perspectives, mainly the role of cultural resources and knowledge. Through the research process I was open to design modifications that resulted from the interviews and my experiences with participants. This approach allowed me to design an inquiry that was interactive and iterative, thus providing me a view of the "social phenomena holistically" (Creswell, p. 182).

Purpose of Study and Rationale

The purpose of my study was to focus on the first year postsecondary experiences of a purposefully group of Latino students who came from poor or working class backgrounds and are the first in their families to attend college in the US. Specifically, I sought to understand how pre-college experiences, environmental elements, and college related experiences shaped their educational goals and decisions during and after their first year of college. I also paid attention to the role of

cultural resources and knowledge as they navigated new educational experiences and how these resources mitigated barriers during their first year. Specifically, I focused on the following central question:

> How do pre-college experiences, environmental elements, and cultural resources and knowledge of a particular group of Latina/o students shape their first year college experiences and postsecondary decisions?

In order to understand how educational experiences and postsecondary decisions were made by a group of Latino students my inquiry used a conceptual framework that incorporated constructs identified as important for this population of students. My inquiry was research driven and draws from existing theoretical perspectives on college persistence and critical theories on Latino cultural resources and knowledge.

My study aims to inform two audiences: policy makers and educational practitioners. The findings of this study will be of interest to policy makers who develop federal and local policies related to access for underrepresented students in higher education, specifically issues related to immigration, federal financial aid, and state merit awards. The findings in my study also inform higher education practitioners as they consider policies to encourage, support, and strengthen Latino student success in- and outside the classroom.

Method of Investigation

I used a qualitative research tradition for this study. A qualitative approach was particularly useful to this inquiry because it allowed me to examine the multiplicity of individuals' experiences as well as consider how cultural, historical, and political contexts shape individual experiences (Creswell, 2003). Data for this dissertation was collected primarily through first person interviews with six

participants and their families over a ten-month period. Specifically, the collection of individuals' accounts about their educational experiences and perspectives comprised the data corpus.

I used case study methods because it allowed me to examine contemporary phenomenon and its detail within a real life context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984). Further, a condition for my research was that cases were bounded by time and activity, and that I collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995). The cases in this research were comprised of interviews (individual and group) and observations with Latino students during their first year of college.

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. My inquiry followed the six general steps suggested by case study researchers (Merriam, 2001; Stake, 1995 Yin, 1984): (1) define the research question, (2) select the case studies; determine data gathering and analysis techniques, (3) prepare to collect the data, (4) collect data in the field, (5) evaluate and analyze data, and (6) prepare report. To aid with my data management I used ATLAS.ti (version 5.0), a qualitative software program. I uploaded primary data (audio and textual) and used the software to manage, extract, compare, explore, and reassemble meaningful pieces of data as I went through my collection and analysis phases.

Use of Conceptual Framework

I used the Student Adjustment Model (Nora et al., 1996) to aid in data collection for the interviews.   The model posits that four central constructs shape students college experiences and persistence decisions: (1) pre-college experiences,

(2) environmental elements, (3) goals and commitments, and (4) college related experiences. Through a review of the literature I identified the most salient factors for each construct but remained open to new themes and categories. My study focused exclusively on the experiences of a group of Latino students and sought to explore students' interpretation of these constructs. I situated this framework within the tradition of critical theories, specifically Latina/o Critical Theories (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano, 1998; Yosso, 2005). Latina/o critical theories bring to the forefront the political, social, and historical realities that individuals negotiate as well as the ways that individuals are active agents in their everyday lives. As such, I incorporated additional constructs, cultural resources and knowledge, to examine these experiences as well as Latino culture specific capital created and circulated in students' lives and their families. During the interviews I covered all of these themes.

In the interviews I covered meaningful experiences to the student and how they understood the structural, cultural, and economic circumstances of their families as they considered their educational pursuits and decisions. General themes from the literature provided a general starting point. As students covered meaningful experiences in their educational trajectory I noted culture-specific resources and knowledge they identified and the ways in which they integrated these assets into their postsecondary decisions and first year college experience. In the conceptual framework, I identified six factors related to cultural resources and knowledge based on the literature, however, I remained open to new themes. The interview questions broadly covered the following questions for each construct:

Pre-College Experiences: What were pivotal memories, events, experiences that students' identified as meaningful in their early educational histories? What role did others play? How did this shape their educational trajectory and decisions?

Environmental Elements: What were material, structural, cultural and political circumstances during formative years of their education and their first year of college? How did these circumstances or events shape their first year of college and postsecondary decisions?

Goals and Commitments: What were material, structural, cultural and political circumstances that shaped their degree aspirations, career and life goals?

College-Related Experiences: What significant experiences, challenges, barriers -- in and outside the classroom -- shaped their first year and their postsecondary decisions?

Cultural Resources and Knowledge: What cultural-specific assets were meaningful their first year of college? How did they understand their identity, language use, family, immigration histories and realities, and other markers of their Latino culture?

I also considered gender differences in the students overall experience. I created an interview protocol (Appendix C) to provide a general structure to the interviews. I interviewed at least one parent (Appendix D) in order to have a contextualized understanding of the students' cultural resources and knowledge. The protocols, however, was not used rigidly in all cases. Topics and themes emerged that did not fall precisely into the framework. I remained open to modifying the interview

59

questions to account for emerging themes and topics. Nonetheless, all the framework constructs were covered to ensure a cross case analysis.

Site for Data Collection

I collected my data in southern Nevada for at least three reasons. First, research on Latino college students is typically conducted at sites where they account for a large portion of the population and there is a history of local challenges, resources, and recommendations to improve educational conditions. Nevada is a state that has experienced unprecedented growth across the entire population and most notably with the Latino population. Latinos account for approximately 12% of the state's entire population; within a ten-year period, 1990 to 2000, the Latino (pre-college) student population more than doubled and now stands at approximately 40% of the entire student population (Nevada Department of Education, 2007). Furthermore, Nevada is considered to have one of the highest percentages of undocumented individuals with 40-54% of the foreign born population considered to be unauthorized (Passel, 2005).

Nevada's physical location and economy also presents unique challenges to the Latino population. For instance, low-skilled jobs in the service industry are plentiful, high school graduation rates are among the lowest in the nation, as well as college-going rates. In Nevada, approximately 51% of Latino students graduate from high school and of those less than 20% attend college immediately after graduation with the majority attending two-year colleges (Nevada Department of Education, 2007). My study illuminates the challenges first year Latino college students confront within these contexts.

Second, unlike our California neighbor who has a bountiful selection of public postsecondary institutions, southern Nevada is home to two public universities and one community college. In recent years access has been further limited as the local research university raised admissions requirements and eliminated remedial courses. Not surprisingly, the Latino population is severely underrepresented at all local public colleges in southern Nevada. Much can be gleaned from the experiences of Latino students who successfully graduate high school and attend these colleges despite the structural and institutional barriers.

Third, I have resided in Nevada for at least two decades and have a personal and professional commitment to understanding and improving the educational experiences of all students, in particular Latino. My previous work with local educators, community organizers, and student groups facilitated access to college students as well as positioned me as a creditable and trustworthy individual, which is critical to qualitative research.

Selection of Participants

The purpose of my study was to research the first year experience and postsecondary decisions of a group of Latino students. A purposeful sample was appropriate for this study. Criteria for selection were that the student had to be a recent local high school graduate, intend to enroll full-time in a four- or two-year local college her or his first semester, first to attend college, and from low- to middle class backgrounds. In addition, because of the central role that family plays in Latino educational experiences and decisions at least one parent had to be willing to be interviewed.

To gain access to a group of Latino students who met my criteria I contacted organizers of a local summer pre-college leadership program for recent Latino high school graduates. The leadership program targets local high school Latino students who have recently graduated or incoming high school juniors or seniors. In exchange for access to students during the program I volunteered to conduct a program evaluation of the 2006 program. Students for the leadership program stay on a college campus for five days and attend workshops and presentations on leadership and college readiness. Participants for the program are selected on a competitive basis and are typically college-ready, come from low- and working class backgrounds, and are the first to attend college in their family. In 2006, the year I recruited participants, program organizers received over 150 applications for 50 slots.

As a first step to recruit students I attended a parent informational session a few days before the beginning of the conference. I introduced my study, selection criteria and asked for student and parent volunteers. After my presentation, I circulated a contact sheet to gather basic contact information about the student (e.g., name, phone, email). Twenty-one recent high school graduates expressed an interest. Of the twenty-one, ten students were eligible to participate (reasons for ineligibility included attending out of state colleges, part-time enrollment, delaying enrollment, or no longer interested). Of the ten eligible students, seven were females and three males. For each of the eligible students I provided a consent cover letter (Appendix A) which restated the goals of the study and their rights as well as a consent form for participation in the study (Appendix B). The students reviewed and signed the forms at our first interview. By mid semester one female student was dropped from the

62

study (stopped showing up for interviews) and one decided to attend a private trade school; this left a total of eight eligible students. For the eight students the quality and depth of data collected varied and was often determined by the amount of time the student was willing to spend in our interviews. For example, a few students could only meet immediately before class and that often resulted in short interviews. By the second semester, due to time constraints and resources, I decided to focus on six student cases. I selected six students (three male and three females) whom I had the most collected data and for whom I had interviewed at least one parent.

<center>Informed Consent and Ethical Considerations</center>

All of the participants and their parents were informed of the voluntary nature of the study when I introduced the study at the parent informational session at the leadership program. The parent session was conducted in Spanish because that was the parents' primary language. I explained my study in Spanish as well and explained the purpose, voluntary nature (they could withdraw at any time), and any perceived risks, which were minimal. Upon my first interview with the student they were provided a cover letter and consent form to read and sign. I verbally repeated (this time in English) the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, and risk possibly associated with participation. I did the same (but in Spanish again) when I interviewed the parents. All of the participants were at least 18 years old.

I did not encounter any initial resistance from the participants as the nature of inquiry was framed as a study to gather information on what helps and hinders a student's college success and the role of family and culture. However, I anticipated some emotional responses to some of my interview questions. As I began gathering

<center>63</center>

data, I quickly realized that student and family immigration status or experiences were a sensitive issue. I encountered some reservations by those whose immigrant status was ambiguous. During these times I reminded them they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to and could withdraw or continue without any consequence. All decided to continue and share their personal stories of immigrating to the US. The concern stemmed not so much from a distrust of me but rather from the emotions that such memories evolved during the course of our conversations. As they shared their personal stories of education, immigration, and family life all the parents cried, laughed and were angered at different points. Such emotions cannot be separated from human experience and were taken into consideration as I collected, analyzed, and reported my findings. Steps were taken to ensure the anonymity of the participants. The case studies use pseudonyms selected by participants and I have altered any data that would allow an individual's identity to be traced back to him or her. Names of student programs they were a part of were altered or changed and actual college names were not used. The nature of social research is often one of unequal power and privilege between the researcher and the participants (Behar, 1996; Olesen, 2000). I made a concerted effort to be respectful, nonjudgmental and non-threatening during the course of my study.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

I used a variety of data collection approaches that are interactive and humanistic in order to ensure data saturation and triangulation (Creswell, 2003; Denzin, 1989). Over the course of ten months, I conducted individual interviews, group interviews, and observations with six students. In Table 2, I detail the specific

projected and actual number of student interviews, group interviews, and observations by case. I collected data in natural settings of the participants (e.g., home, college campus, restaurants/cafes frequented by students, and library) to develop a detailed understanding of the student and her or his environments (Creswell, 2003). In case study research it is also important to examine the phenomenon in different settings to have a richer analysis of multiple cases (Stake, 2006). In what follows, I describe specific data collection approaches and procedures.

Table 2. Projected and Actual Number of Interviews, Focus Groups and Observations by Case

	Student Interviews		Parent Interview		Group Interviews		Observations		Total	
	Projected	Actual	Projected	Actual	Projected	Actual	Projected	Actual	Projected	Actual
Chico	3-4	5	1	1	2	1	2	1	8-9	8
Elsie	3-4	4	1	1	2	1	2	2	8-9	8
Tomas	3-4	4	1	1	2	1	2	2	8-9	8
Lissette	3-4	4	1	1	2	2	2	1	8-9	8
Moroni	3-4	5	1	1	2	2	2	0	8-9	8
Valerie	3-4	5	1	1	2	1	2	1	8-9	8

Interviews

I developed structured and semi-structured questions for individualized interviews. Structured questions elicited concrete information about the student's family and the student's educational backgrounds. These were more descriptive in nature. The semi-structured interviews focused on conceptual questions about participants and their educational experiences. I had hoped to individually interview

each student three times during the course of the study. Interviews typically took

place on campus in public areas and ranged from one to two hours. After the third

interview, I realized I needed clarification on several issues and interviewed them at

least one more time. In total, I conducted twenty-seven individualized interviews

with six students. Students spoke English but some preferred to speak in Spanish. I

typically began the interview in English but in some cases I transitioned to Spanish in

order to build trust with the student and respect their desire to carry the conversation

in Spanish.

I conducted individual interviews with at least one parent for each student. In

total, I interviewed seven parents; six mothers and one father. All of the parent

interviews were in their homes and half the students (Lissette, Moroni, and Valerie)

were present during the parent interview. In the beginning of each parent interview I

re-introduced myself, the study, and gave them the option to continue in Spanish or

English. All preferred to continue in Spanish.

Group Interviews

Group interviews provided another level of data gathering of student

perspectives and their experiences they otherwise may not have considered (Fontana

& Frey, 1994). I conducted two group interviews. The first group interview,

conducted on a college campus during the third day of the Latino leadership program,

introduced my thematic questions and helped me refine questions for subsequent

individual interviews. Ten students attended the first group interview. The second

interview, conducted at the beginning of the second semester at a restaurant, allowed

for sharing of participant experiences of the research process and member check on

my preliminary findings. Five students attended the second group interview. The students in the study attended at least one group interview.

Observations

I had proposed to observe study participants on a typical day of classes at least two times during the course of their first year of college. Access to enter the classroom was difficult and varied by professor. As an alternative I observed students during ethnic student organization meetings. Because many of the students were involved in the same groups I was able to observe many of them simultaneously. Both observations occurred during the second semester, one at the beginning and one at mid point. The observations helped me build rapport and trust, confirm or further integrate preliminary observations, findings, or analysis of my data and discover patterns not easily identified or discussed during interviews (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). I observed five of the six students at least once during the course of the study.

I also invited students to share artifacts, mainly writings from their first year that were meaningful to them. I explained these artifacts were solely to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of their first year experience. I stressed I would not "grade" their work and encouraged them to submit academic and non-academic writings. Two students (Moroni and Chico) shared poetry they wrote outside the classroom, another (Elsie) shared scholarship essays, and others (Tomas, Chico and Moroni) shared course assignments. Two students (Lissette and Valerie) did not submit physical copies of their work rather we discussed extensively, in at least one

67

interview, specific course assignment writings that were meaningful to them. These artifacts were treated and chronicled as data.

<center>Data Analysis</center>

I employed three levels of data analysis. The first involved coding and analysis of each data source. The second level was analysis of the student cases. And the third was analysis of the six cases or cross case analysis.

<center>*Coding and Analysis of Data Sources*</center>

I began data coding and analysis informally after each data collection encounter. After each interview or observation I recorded my research thoughts, observations, and questions about a particular data collection encounter. As soon as reasonably possible I transcribed and coded the interviews, observation notes and my comments. In addition, student written artifacts were treated as textual data and coded. I used Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommendation for coding techniques and employed open, axial, and selective coding throughout my data analysis. Throughout the study the coding of data was an iterative and evolving process. As a first step I developed a master list of codes and identified segments of data that corresponded with particular codes. I used priori or pre-determined codes based on my conceptual model as well as inductive codes (developed directly by examining the data). I created approximately 255 (priori and inductive) codes and eventually organized the codes by families based on the conceptual model and major categories. Coding of the data broke down my data into discrete parts and I closely examined these parts, compared for similarities and differences, named main concepts, defined and

<center>68</center>

developed categories, and linked connections and categories within particular student cases and eventually across cases.

Written records of codes, data, analysis, and the research process were compiled in the form of memos. Broadly speaking, I had three types of memos: code, theoretical, and operational memos. Code memos included the actual products of my various codes throughout the research process. Theoretical memos included my notes on conceptual and analytical ruminations about the study or the interplay between codes, quotations, and theory. Operational memos included procedural steps and reminders to myself about the study. I created approximately 145 memos with the bulk belonging to theoretical memos. To manage theoretical memos, I created families of memos for each student case and then for cross cases; these families of memos were organized around major categories.

Case Studies

The purpose of my study was to look at the first-year college experience and postsecondary decisions of a particular group of Latino students. Therefore, the unit of analysis for each case study was a student. I coded all the research documents as described above. I created a case study for each student. Each case study was composed from student interviews, observations, and group interviews. Using the conceptual framework and literature review, I analyzed each student's story of her or his educational pursuits and meaningful events related to postsecondary decisions. Specifically, constructs and categories were examined with attention to the ways that material, structural, political, and cultural experiences, events, and histories shaped their postsecondary experiences and decisions. As a first step of case study analysis, I

created table shells (Yin, 1984) for each student with major framework constructs. This ensured that parallel data was collected for all cases and provided a visual representation of data collection and analysis. As my analysis evolved and matured I incorporated new patterns, themes, and categories. Eventually all the cases or students were combined into one table to aid further analysis.

After coding and preliminary analysis of the case studies, I combined cases into two groups: students attending a four-year university and those attending a two-year college. These two groups allowed me to do within case analysis, which is what I present in the Chapters 6 and 7. My decision to create two groups was based on the literature review. Researchers have identified institutional type as a central factor that shapes a student's postsecondary experience and ultimately her or his persistence (Astin, 1983; Leon, 2003; Tinto 1987). Unintentionally, the groups were also divided along gender and immigrant status; the males attended two-year colleges and were undocumented and the females attended four-year institutions and did not have US residency concerns. I used the two groups of case studies to recreate the students' narratives and also present commonalities and difference for the groups. In the two groups of case studies, I present each section by identifying the central themes and summarize how it relates to a particular construct and postsecondary goals, commitments and decisions.

Cross Case Analysis

In the cross case analysis my attention turns to understanding how the six cases relate to my central research question and sub questions. I focus on the students' interpretation of their educational experiences across cases and highlight

how social, material, and cultural circumstances shape their postsecondary experiences and decisions. The conceptual model was instrumental in guiding analysis and discussion. Discussion of cross cases is organized around the major constructs within the conceptual model with attention to how students filtered and negotiated their first year experience. I made use of tables and charts to demonstrate salient themes and highlight similarities and differences across all the cases.

Validity

To ensure construct validity I collected data over the course of ten months, used multiple sources of evidence (e.g., interviews, observations, and documents) and multiple informants (students and parents). Member checks were also used. For instance, participants verified facts and provided feedback on my preliminary interpretations. I also established a clear chain of evidence by describing my rationale, collection of data, coding and analysis, and the use of a qualitative software program to aid with management, retrieval, and reporting of data. Throughout the collection, analysis, and writing up of findings I engaged in peer consultation with researchers and practitioners familiar with my study and theoretical orientation. Finally, external validity for this study relies on the detailed accounts of individual cases.

Bias/Limitations

There are three notable limitations to this study and its findings. First, I focus on the first year college experience of a group of self-identified Latino students, traditional college-aged who enrolled full-time. The group of students represent but one slice of a diverse population. Indeed, national and institutional data suggest that

more and more college students, including Latinos, are delaying entry to college and attending part-time.

Second, my study includes the analysis of six cases and although multiple data sources were used to ensure triangulation additional cases can provide greater depth and nuance of the Latino first year college experience and postsecondary decisions.

Finally, by its nature qualitative research is interpretive and "data is filtered through a personal lens that is situated in a specific sociopolitical and historical moment" (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). I bring my bias as a researcher. My ethnic and professional identity, intertwined at times, informed aspects of this research. Mainly, my interest in the topic is a direct result of my own experiences as a first-generation college student from a working class Latino family. This analysis is my interpretation of what I heard, observed, and witnessed. It represents but one interpretative slice for a group of individuals whose lives are multifaceted. In an effort to be transparent to my participants and readers, I clearly identified my theoretical orientations and interest in this topic.

In the following Chapters 6 and 7, I present my analysis and findings. Both chapters present within case analysis and findings of the two groups described in *Case Studies* of this chapter. In Chapter 6, I focus on within case analysis and findings for students attending a research university and in Chapter 7, I present within case analysis and findings for students attending a two-year college.

CHAPTER 6.

WITHIN CASE ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS ATTENDING A

RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

In this chapter I provide an in-depth analysis of one group of students: those enrolled in a research university their first semester of college. As discussed in the previous chapter, I present the student cases in two groups based on key finding of my literature review; mainly that institutional type and gender matters when examining first year experience and postsecondary decisions. Less discussed in the literature is the role of cultural resources and knowledge on students' experiences and interpretation of their goals, commitments, and postsecondary decisions. To this end, I present in this chapter a detailed discussion of student cases using the main constructs identified in my research framework (i.e., pre-college, environmental, college-related, goals and commitments, and cultural resources and knowledge). Through a discussion of these constructs I present a picture of pivotal first year challenges and barriers as well as the ways in which their sense of cultural identity, knowledge and key relationships mediated and at times mitigated their first year difficulties and shaped their postsecondary decisions. Each section opens with an overview of commonalities and, if applicable, differences within groups.

Valerie

Valerie lives with both her parents and younger brother in a working class, racially mixed neighborhood. Prior to this Valerie and her family lived in apartments. In every interaction, whether at school, home or public places, Valerie carried herself in a professional and mature manner. She was always dressed and groomed as if she is going to an employment interview. She is trilingual (Spanish, English, and Portuguese) and describes herself as "patient", "quiet and shy, very shy". Yet in our conversations she always seemed eager and willing to share her stories and experiences. Valerie was born in Florida and raised in the east coast. Valerie is the first in her family to attend college. She graduated from a public high school and was enrolled in a dual credit program, which allowed her to earn college credits while in high school.

Lissette

Lissette attended predominately minority schools and has always lived in predominately Latino neighborhoods. Lissette was born in Texas and is the eldest of three children. Her two younger brothers are still in high school. She was raised by a single mother and has lived in the southwest since the age of two. Her mother is from Mexico and first arrived in the US as an undocumented immigrant. Since then she has obtained legal residency and has worked almost ten years at a local hotel in housekeeping and occasionally holds a second job cleaning offices in the evening. Through high school Lissette sometimes helped her clean offices. At the time of our interviews, her mother had purchased a home in a predominately Latino, working

---

[12]All student names are pseudonyms.

class neighborhood. Instead of sharing rooms with her mother, Lissette now has her own bedroom. Lissette is the first in her family to graduate from high school and attend college. She attended a magnet high school program for mathematics and science. Lissette describes herself as "caring, responsible and likes to take care of others." She is a tall with an olive completion, big brown eyes, and smiles often having had her braces recently removed.

<p align="center">Elsie</p>

At the age of two, Elsie along with her parents entered the US undocumented. Elsie's family first arrived to California and after about ten years they moved to the state in which they now reside. Elsie remembers her family lived in a predominately Latino, low-income neighborhood and then moved to a "nicer area" when she was about eight. Although her parents did not explicitly tell their children, she believed they were motivated to live in an area that offered "better schools." For her first four years of schooling, she remembers being in bilingual education and then transitioning to English immersion classrooms. Since then she and her entire family have obtained legal residency. Elsie received her permanent resident card her senior year of high school. She describes the day she received her card in the mail as very emotional and cried when she finally had her resident card in her hands. She is the eldest of three children; her parents divorced and feels that their separation was one of the most difficult experiences she has lived through. She lives with her mother and younger sister in a predominately white, middle class neighborhood. Her mother "fought hard" to purchase their first home and was committed to making ends meet after the

divorce. Consequently, Elsie's mother holds two jobs; she works in a hotel in housekeeping and as a nail technician.

Pre-College Experiences

There were at least three common pre-college experiences for Valerie, Lissette, and Elsie. All knew early that they would attend college and attributed their academic success to family support and encouragement.   In addition, early in their education they were intentional about building their high school portfolios to make themselves attractive college candidates. Finally, all the students in this group had access to school agents who facilitated college resources and information as they considered colleges and careers.

Parental Support and Encouragement

As the eldest of two, Valerie was encouraged at a very early age to do well in school and her parents did everything within their reach to help her achieve academically. Valerie describes an example of her mother's involvement in her day-to-day assignments,

> When I was younger it was easier for them to teach me and I remember my mom, she was always like, "I know I might not know, I might remember, so if you need help don't be afraid to ask me." And so one time I came home with fractions. The homework made no sense. I'm like, "Mom this is the notes I took in class. And this is the homework, it's got nothing to do with the notes, I'm lost." She sat there and she read the book and she's like, "ok this is what I understood from it, maybe you should try it like this."

As Valerie progressed through school, it became more difficult for her mother to help her because her mother worked evenings. Yet Valerie recognizes that, "She played very small parts, but there were plenty of small parts that made this whole picture."

Valerie's father also played an important role. An example of this is her father's commitment to take Valerie to the library everyday during middle school. He would wait outside in the car for fear of his asthma "acting up" and disturbing Valerie's concentration. Although her father was not intimately involved with the details of her schoolwork he would nonetheless ask everyday, "Is your homework done and what did you learn?"

Lissettee's mother **"**would get really mad if she saw bad grades or if [Lissette] told her something happened at school." Her mother would always go to her school's open houses and meet teachers. As an added prevention measure, her mother would encourage teachers to call her personally if Lissette misbehaved. "To this day, she still says that to [her] little brother's [teachers]" prompting him to plead with her, "Don't do that. It's embarrassing." Lissette admits that this simple act "pushed" her because her mother was "always expecting good grades" and good behavior otherwise she would have her "mom to worry about." Although her mother did not volunteer in school committees or in her classroom she attended basketball games, orchestra performances and band festivals, "she was good about that," explains Lissette.

Elsie's father would always walk her to school, attend all the open houses, and "go on every single school field trip." "He was very involved," recalls Elsie. Her parents would constantly remind her to do well in school.

> Don't do it for us, do it for you. Do it so you have a better life than what we had. We came here for a better life, we're living good, we want you guys to be better than us." And that's what's always helped me, that encouragement. Even though I don't get it as much anymore from them, I rarely get it from them, it was…they said it to me so often when I was little that it just-that's my mentality.

Elsie was a straight "A" student and while she acknowledges her parents encouraged her to achieve academically, she primarily credits her academic success to self-motivation; "I don't have an older brother that did it before me, my parents didn't go to college. I just didn't have someone to tell me to do it; I wanted to do it" she shares.

Early Educational Experiences

Valerie was an Upward Bound student for three years and during this time became familiar with the research university she eventually attended. She admits the program helped her with tutoring, but she left the program in the middle of the third year because as she describes, "I felt like I was being led towards the wrong thing and they weren't letting me see other possibilities." For her first two years of high school Valerie attended a predominately Latino school that is home to three magnet programs in finance, mathematics and science, and teacher education. Despite the opportunity to apply to these programs, Valerie decided to apply to a dual credit high school program, predominately white, located on a community college campus. Valerie sees herself as "not the brightest" and does not feel she is "naturally smart" but "I try and I study what I have to know and I'll know it." She sees her pre-college academic success more a function of her persistence and discipline.

Valerie had to overcome learning difficulties, "I had a problem reading when I was little. I didn't learn to read probably until the fifth, sixth grade. When I really learned to read and was reading well and could read any book was probably in the fifth grade." She believes she was able to overcome this difficulty primarily because her mother "loved to read" and used to read to her when she was younger. Her

mother also instilled in her the belief that self-initiative was key to successful

learning.

> My mom said, she could put all the pressure on the world on me didn't mean I
> was going to learn so what she said she's like, "I'm going to tell you
> everyday, 'what are you doing to better yourself?" So I'd say, "oh I tried to
> read this book but I don't understand this or this," and I'd underline it, and I
> still have the books at home, all the Disney books she brought me.

Valerie's mother would use multiple medias (videos, audio) to help Valerie overcome

her learning difficulties. An embedded learning strategy in her approach was that of

memorizing. Valerie believes memorizing data was key early academic success,

> And I'm the kind of people who I know what my capabilities are. I'm like I
> don't think I know this so I'm going to read up on it because I have to like
> write it three times or if I don't know how to spell a word, spelling tests were
> horrible, I hated them.

This memorizing of data strategy may also be a result of the teaching environment

Valerie was exposed to during her early. Unfortunately this strategy was not

sufficient her first year of college as she struggled to earn better than "C" grades.

Lissette considered herself a "really, really good student, probably up to fifth

grade." She was the "best [student] in math" but after fifth grade she began to be

aware that "there was more of a competition, like boys and girls smarter" than her.

Lissette went on to attend and graduate from a math and science high school magnet

program. While in high school she completed advanced placement courses. She also

joined ROTC "by accident" her freshman year, "I had an art class and didn't like it. I

went to change it and it was the only thing available." She didn't know what it was at

the time but her counselor assured her "you will like it, don't worry." By her senior

year of high school she was an ROTC company commander. She even attended a

mini boot camp in Washington state. Although she was recruited to join the military

she did not "give much thought to it." Her mother also discouraged her assuring

Lissette she could pay for college if that was the determining factor for enlisting.

> I thought about that [joining the military] but it wasn't too much of a thought. Because my mom she didn't want me leaving or anything like that. I considered it but I didn't really go into depth, oh yea I might do it. It was just a thought. But the recruiter kept bugging me about it.

Elsie, like Valerie, attended a predominately white, middle class high school

and earned an honor's diploma. She describes herself as "working hard" during her

high school years because she wanted to lay the foundation to be successful in

college. She describes her classes as "very, very rigorous" and she was also involved

in school clubs such as the Key Club and Multicultural Club, she "was doing

everything." Her mother would complain because she was "never home" and "never

around to help." Elsie would explain to her mother,

> Well, I'm doing this for my future. I'm doing this for my scholarship letters and my applications. [inaudible] I want to go somewhere good. I want to get scholarships. I want it to be easy when I get to college. I don't want to be struggling then so I'm working hard now.

Elsie, like Valerie and Lissette, also had institutional agents or individuals who

helped her move through the educational pipeline by providing information and

resources on educational opportunities. She explains her counselor was "really

helpful" and she went to her for "every little thing". The schoolteachers and

counselors were always there for her, she goes on to say, "[My counselor] helped me

with everything. My teachers were really good. Everything that I had questions for

they would always be there."

The Role of Peers

Valerie admits she has "always been very separated from people" or other Latinas and Latinos in school. In her view, her academic focus drew her closer to "whitewashed" peers. She describes such individuals as,

> You know they wouldn't say where they were from, like they weren't Mexican, no "I'm American." Because they were born here and although their parents were Mexicans or from another Hispanic country, they wouldn't acknowledge it very much. And so I was, I was I guess more drawn towards them because I wanted to see where were they going.

Valerie felt Latino students were going "down the wrong path" while "whitewashed" peers were working toward graduation. Her friends in high school did not want to be "the statistic of Latinos that don't graduate" so "they were trying to copy what the other people were doing, the statistic that was graduating." The "other people" were white students. She acknowledged that even academically gifted Latinos were not excluded from "going down the wrong path". Valerie recounts a story of a Latina student who was in English honors with her but got involved with drugs,

> I don't remember her last name but she was in class and she always talked about using drugs and I'm like, "I'm not speaking to you anymore." I looked at her and I'm like, "I'm not going to talk to you anymore." And she's like, "Why? Why aren't you?" We were the only two Latinas in class because we were in an honors class, honors English, only two Latinas and she says, "Why aren't you going to talk to me?" I'm like, "Because you use drugs and I don't want to associate myself with that or be your friend and have someone say I might use drugs because I'm your friend….[I]t's either you or me and I choose me.

Valerie recounts several instances in high school where she had to put herself first and dissolve friendships with other Latino students.

Lissette, like Valerie, surrounds herself with "goal oriented" students who are "trying to get their work done." She described how she "stopped talking" to a group of friends because "they didn't care" about their first semester of college.

And I'm like, "What the heck. I feel like I'm trying really hard and they're not." But then now…like one of my friends she declared her major already, and first semester she didn't have it, and now it seems like they're trying to get their work done and they're more like goal oriented. I like that.

Elsie also surrounded herself with peers who were in honors or advanced placement courses. For the students in this group it was important to have friends who were goal oriented and academically ambitious. They learned early on how to play the academic "game" and highlight in their narratives the explicit purpose of their involvement in high school clubs, courses, and peer groups. In their academic spaces and environments such behaviors and discourses were commonplace and expected of students in order to do well in high school, college and beyond. Their efforts paid off when they were awarded a state-funded merit scholarship and additional private scholarships to attend college.

Goals & Commitments

The students in this group were highly motivated to finish their college degree. Their high school years were the time when they considered careers and college majors. In considering degrees the two factors played a pivotal role in their decisions: the extent to which a specific major will translate into monetary rewards and assessment of academic abilities. All considered applying to out-of-state institutions but decided to attend the local university to stay close to family. In some cases, the students enrolled simultaneously in a four- and two-year college to achieve their semester goals.

Valerie is highly motivated to complete a college degree; "Well it's kind of what everything's based on, the whole world. If you're not educated then you don't go anywhere." Valerie is well aware of social and economic mobility associated with

an education. Initially she was motivated to complete a nursing degree within four years but by the end of her first year of college she decided she would attend part-time and complete in "maybe eight years." Valerie is open to other careers, but primarily wants to pursue something in the medical field. Initially a change in her career would be a result of the perceived level of "responsibility" or "lawsuits". By the end of her first year of college a change in her career was a result of college affordability; "sitting down thinking I wouldn't have a way to pay for college" so instead of pursuing a nursing degree Valerie was hoping to pursue a certificate to be a medical assistant first, then a nursing degree. Her mother also encouraged her to complete a program that would allow her to work while she pursued her nursing degree.

Valerie is not wedded to one particular institution; rather she attended two institutions her first year of college. She began at a research university her first semester, but after struggling to pay her tuition and fees and realizing remedial math classes were not offered at the university her second semester she decided to attend a community college. The two-year college is closer to her home (less than five miles versus fifteen miles to the university) and allows her to be closer to her brother's school. This was an important factor since Valerie is responsible for picking him up everyday and taking care of him. Regardless of the institution, Valerie is committed to completing a certificate and then a degree.

Lissette began considering college and specific majors early in high school. By the time she was in the tenth grade she decided to "back out" of a career in the medical field because "[i]t was too much work, I guess. I don't know laziness,

thinking that I might not be able to do it just cause there's not too many [individuals] that do get ahead of it or actually survive in the that field." Instead she decided to pursue a career in hotel administration, with a focus on meeting and events planning, "there's a lot of jobs here and facing more reality I really want to get down to a job and making money," she explains. Early in high school she also considered applying to universities out of state but her mother did not want her to leave the state. Before graduating from high school Lissette decided she would attend the local research university. Her first semester she enrolled and completed twelve credits, and her second semester she enrolled and completed eighteen credits, six of which were at the local community college. Like Valerie, Lissette was not wedded to one institution, rather evaluated her career aspirations and finances and made the decision to simultaneously enroll in two institutions.

Lissette has a strong desire to complete her bachelor's degree in four years. She admits, "most are [finished] in 5 years, I want to finish in 4 years. Hopefully nothing will stop me, hold me back." When prompted to explain what would hold her back, she explains perhaps an illness or something out of her control. At every conversation she would reiterate her desire to complete "as quick as possible" so she could go on with life. "I wanna get settled," she explains, and "before [my] junior year work in [the] hotel industry." Her major requires her to complete a certain amount of work experience in the hotel industry. By her second semester she was working up to thirty hours a week at a hotel in fulfillment of this requirement. Lissette was formally admitted to her major and as such is required to meet with an academic

advisor at least once a semester. Her advisor provides her with specific degree advice and she appears to feel confident in her ability to complete the required coursework.

For as long as she can remember, Elsie's career goal has been to be a lawyer. As a young woman, her mother wanted to be a civil rights attorney but feared "she would be killed" if she practiced in Mexico because, according to her mother, the country is so corrupt. Her undergraduate major is political science. When asked why she decided to pursue a degree in political science she explains attorneys she knows suggested the major. Early in high school she briefly considered attending out of state colleges. In the end she decided to attend the only local research university and live at home with her mother and younger sister. Elsie was accepted to the honor's college and is the "only Latina" in her cohort. Her first and second semester she enrolled and completed thirteen credits (including an honor's seminar each semester) and also worked an average of thirty-five hours per week at a local law firm.

Elsie is strongly committed and motivated to finish her undergraduate degree, and sees it as a stepping-stone to her ultimate goal to attend law school. Elsie's new found religious commitment to the Latter Day Saints faith, however, is equally important to her and she often acknowledges that if she "found the right one to marry" she would consider "putting off law school" to begin a family because in the LDS faith "family is the most important thing on earth." Elsie, however, does not believe she will marry in the near future because there are few prospects in her religious ward that is comprised primarily of white, male college students. While she is open to interracial dating, she prefers to meet and marry a Latino Mormon with an

education. Other than marriage Elsie does not believe anything will derail her from her career goals.

Environmental Elements

For the students in this group pivotal environmental factors include family responsibilities -- such as taking care of younger siblings -- and the need to work outside the home either to supplement their college funding, contribute to household income, or in fulfillment of degree requirements. For Valerie these two factors appear to have influenced her attendance behavior and short-term academic goals and commitments. In addition to these two factors, Elsie's church responsibilities also played a significant role in her first year goals and commitments. All began their first semester enthused about their classes and learning. By mid point they began to feel the "stress" of balancing schoolwork, family responsibilities, and in some cases, work.

Family Responsibilities

Valerie has a younger brother, Mike, who will be attending sixth grade, middle school in the coming year. She spends a considerable amount of time preparing him to successfully transition to middle school. Valerie laments the fact that her mother does not have the time to help her brother because of her work schedule. In fact, both her parents work non-traditional days and times in the gaming industry. For instance, neither is off on the weekends and their days off are not always consecutive. The day shift is a rarity and highly sought after, especially by parents with school-aged children. Instead her parents usually work night, swing, or graveyard swifts. Valerie admits, "For a while there I felt like I was the only one

taking care of him." When asked about her goals during the first semester of college,

Valerie shares that preparing her brother for middle school is a major goal.

> And to get my little brother through the fifth grade because he's having, he's
> now, just really weak. But it's hard, like my room, it looks like a classroom
> because I'm just trying to teach my brother about the, all the reading, writing
> stuff. Every day we teach a little of something, concentrated math. I couldn't
> believe he's fifth grade and he doesn't know what a fraction, how to, like all
> the things you can do with fractions and he didn't know any of it. So that's my
> goal too.

Valerie has reason to be concerned about Mike's ability to progress through middle

and high school. Latinos are less likely than other student groups to graduate from

high school and they also have one of the highest dropout rates in the district. In

response to this reality, Valerie has taken on a mentor and tutor role with Mike.

When she probed her brother as to what he was learning at school she "was

concerned of what kind of stuff he was doing for six hours a day." In response

Valerie confronted Mike's teacher and then her mother.

> So I sat down my mom and I told her look, this is what he has to know and I
> went to the school before I talked to my mom and I got a curriculum book and
> I asked "is there something that the state requires them to know certain
> things?" She gave me this green book and I'm like, thank you. She told me
> [inaudible] and I started looking through that book and I realized when I
> started talking to him that he didn't know, he didn't know most of the things
> that were in there.

When I visited with Valerie at home her room had been converted into a classroom

with posters of US maps, multiplication tables, and her brother's previous work.

Posted next to her desk was a weekly schedule that delineates study and tutoring

times for Mike. She also included religious education. Her family does not attend

religious service regularly but Valerie feels her brother should be "well-rounded" and

know "what is out there" in terms of faith and religion. Her intense involvement with

87

her brother's education has blurred the lines between sister and mother. At times Valerie provides advise to her mother on how to talk to Mike about his education.

> So I'm trying to get him to just realize he's his own person. And it's really hard because as a parent sometimes you're like "but look what your sister did. Your sister went through," I'm like, "mom don't compare him because it's putting him down." And my mom she, like she doesn't have the time to sit down with him and do all that that she did with me

In raising her brother, Valerie is mindful of individual differences in abilities and the importance of parental involvement for school success. Yet in all my interactions with her she did not fault her parents rather was always empathetic and felt a strong responsibility to raise her brother since her parents were consumed with working to make ends meet on a month to month basis. And although Valerie did not work throughout high school and her first year of college she was intimately aware of all the family financial responsibilities and expenses. So much that it played a significant role in her goals and attendance behavior during her first year of college.

Like Valerie, Lissette has strong familial bonds. But unlike Valerie, she is not as intimately involved with raising her younger brothers. As a single parent, Lissette's mother works full time and sometimes holds two jobs. Despite this fact her mother maintains a close watch on all three children, in particular she presses good behavior and grades. An example of this is her daily calls (usually around three in the afternoon) from work to ensure her sons are home from school and are working on their homework before they play video games. Lissette is more in a support role and sometimes helps with homework, "we're always talking about school and stuff and I help him out with math or whatever." For instance, one of her brothers is considering a dual credit program (on a college campus) for his final two years of high school. He often asks Lissette questions about college courses and scholarships, "because I know

there's scholarships for [high school] juniors, and he's like, 'Tell me about that. Give me information about that." Other times Lissette acts as a mediator between her brothers and mother because they are "still a little bit scared" of their mother. Lissette explains that having strong relationships with family is important for her success, both academic and personal.

> I mean friends could come and go, because they do, they come and go. Like these five friends, I hadn't talked to them all first semester, and all of a sudden like they called me and we started hanging out again. But my family, I live with them, we have to be strong.

Lissette also spends a considerable amount of time with her boyfriend of eleven months but says they both are highly motivated to complete their postsecondary education and would not consider marriage until after graduation.

Elsie also takes on the responsibility of caring for her younger sister when she is not at work or school. Although Elsie admits, early in her education her parents provided her with academic support and encouragement, she feels they no longer provide her the support and encouragement she needs to achieve her academic goals. By her second semester she felt unmotivated and unable to manage her time as effectively as she had the previous semester. Her LDS faith, however, provides her with meaning and direction during difficult times.

Elsie is a recent LDS convert. Through her co-workers she become familiar with the church and within six months of starting to work at the law office she was baptized into the faith. All of her co-workers, including the attorneys, are members of the LDS faith. During our meetings she would often provide testimonies of how her newfound faith has put her on a "straighter path" and gives her meaning and direction she previously lacked. "I love the environment….I see myself being more giving,

more generous, more patient now. I think it really helped my life," she shared in our first meeting. Elsie also mentions how the church leaders push higher education and attributes her ability to stay focused to church peers who are also college students. In fact, college students who are Mormon have access to a Mormon Institute, which offers additional resources and a "safe haven from the pressures, trials, and challenges of the world." Workshops and classes to strengthen their faith are offered throughout the week. Her first year of college, Elsie visited the Institute several times a week. In addition, a male home teacher would "check in" and provide her with additional religious teachings. In all, Elsie would spend at least five days of the week involved with church activities, teachings, and responsibilities. By her second semester she admitted that the Institute and other church activities primarily provided her a social outlet and began to decrease her involvement in some church activities. However, she remained involved in the Institute because it "helped [her] a lot" and it provides a physical space close to campus where she could study. Elsie often shared the positive role the LDS church has on her personal life and her academic goals. In particular the church's focus on education and family values resonant with her. In addition, one of Elsie's short-terms goals is to have her younger sister baptized into the faith.

Financial Responsibilities and Work

The summer before her first year of college Valerie was optimistic and excited about attending college. She was awarded a couple of private scholarships and is a recipient of a state merit scholarship that pays up to six years of undergraduate studies. She was hopeful that these scholarships would cover her college expenses. However, by the middle of her first semester she was worried about maintaining

eligibility for her state merit scholarship and seriously considering finding part-time work to help her family financially.

Although Valerie was awarded a multi-year, merit scholarship it pays approximately 80% of her tuition to attend a state university. The other 20% she had to pay, plus books and student fees. Remedial courses are not covered under the scholarship, which she had to take. Her out of pocket college expenses were close to nine hundred dollars per semester. Valerie was also aware of the everyday costs of going to college and felt pressure to minimize financial stress on her family. She shares how the act of driving to and from college adds up.

> Yeah because it's hard thinking that they [her parents] have to go all the way back and then come back and then my dad's, we have big cars, my dad has a Frontier Nissan and it sucks gas like crazy. Every five, like every five minutes my dad's like, "Oh look at the gas, it's gone." Because he went and came back, went and came back. "I put $25 yesterday, $25 the day before." I'm like wow, this money's just adding up. And I know my mom's account and how much they make and I know all this. I'm like putting a lot of stress in the financial part of the family.

By the end of her first semester she dropped a course because she was not satisfied with a "C" grade. Consequently she became ineligible for the scholarship for the following semester. Valerie decided to transfer to the community college and she also began to consider a certificate in medical assisting. She rationalized that she could earn a certificate and find a job while she worked toward a nursing degree. She felt she could take her prerequisite courses at the community college for half the price of what she would pay at the university. At this point she began to seriously consider working (outside the health field) to finance her education and to help alleviate some of the family financial stress.

When asked if she had considered applying for federal financial aid Valerie responded, "I don't qualify for anything. I did all the FASFA applications and they said nothing." Valerie was referring to need-based grants. She qualified for loans but did not want to get loans for fear of "something going wrong" and she would have to pay more. It appears Valerie was not aware of the process and repayment options for federal loans, specifically the lower interest rates and deferred repayment options that would allow her to attend school full- or part-time.

By the end of her second semester Valerie began to work full-time at a casino. When asked what the main motivator to finding a job, she responded it was to help pay her parents credit cards, "I want to just help pay off some of those credit cards. I helped raise their minimums. I know that me working, my parents-putting six hundred dollars on each one will knock them out quickly." By the end of her first year of college Valerie was planning on working full-time to finance her education and she had lost hope of becoming eligible for the state merit scholarship, "Oh, I'm not counting on it, at all. And actually I think it's more stressful for me to think I'm going to fail this class and lose it again and not get it back, to just not have it." In the end Valerie preferred to work than run the risk of losing the scholarship again, although the program allows students to be reinstated once during the course of their eligibility. Consequently, Valerie's goals had changed significantly from her first semester. She was planning to enroll in a certificate program at the community college and hold off on her nursing degree.

Lissette was not concerned about working her first semester of college. Although Lissette had worked periodically in high school her mother assured her she

could finance her college education with or without scholarships. Her mother "had her back" and would pay any expenses not covered by the scholarships. Unlike Valerie, Lissette did not express a concern about family finances despite the fact that her mother is the sole wage earner. Nonetheless, Lissette expressed an interest in working for two reasons. First, she wanted to have spending money for leisure activities, later to pay her car insurance. Secondly, she had a requirement of work experience for her major. By her second semester she was working at a restaurant as a hostess and cashier. She averaged thirty to thirty-five hours a week. When asked if she thought it interfered with her schoolwork she felt she "was lazier when [she] didn't have a job." In fact, she cited that the majority of her friends work full-time and attend college full-time. In her view having a job forced her to organize her time efficiently. Her priority continues to be finishing her degree in four years and if work interferes with her academic goals she would leave her job.

Elsie began working full time the summer before she began college. She works at a law firm that primarily serves Spanish-speaking clients. Elsie is the only bilingual person at the firm. She views her job as a way to learn more about a career in law. Her primarily motivation for getting a job was to save for college tuition. Even though her tuition was covered through scholarships for the first year, she wanted to save enough to cover all of her college tuition for the years to come. She does not depend on her parents for her personal expenses or college funding. However, by her second semester Elsie used her college savings to help her mother pay for outstanding debt her father accrued adding additional stress.

> Well, like I said, it's been hard this semester. It's really hard. Because I'm working full time, going to school full time, and taking care of my mom and

things like that. So it's been really hard. But…maybe that's why too I don't feel as motivated right now…With all these things that my mom is putting on me I feel like-I feel so tired all the time, I feel stressed out.

Elsie worked her first year and foresees herself helping her mother while trying to save for college.

College-Related Experiences

Two pivotal experiences shaped this group of students' first year of college: involvement with student groups on or close to campus and keeping up with their coursework. Regardless of the student group, their involvement was motivated by a desire to have their identities (whether ethnic, racial, gender or religious) validated and honored in educational spaces. Their interpretation of these experiences shaped their career goals and relationships with family and peers as well as how and what spaces they navigated on campus.

Involvement in Student Groups

The summer before Valerie's first semester she became active in three student groups: MEChA, a Chicano and Chicana student organization; ASOC, the Association of Students of Color; and the Latino Leadership Alumni group. At the time of the interviews, these groups were critical and vocal of the university's lack of structural diversity and meaningful diversity programs to recruit and retain students of color. This was a significant event in Valerie's experience because this was "my first time that I actually in my whole life had stood up for something." Her involvement brought issues of equity, campus climate, and sense of belonging to the forefront of her college experience. In her view, students of color on campus are "not being noticed, almost being ignored." Specifically, the students were requesting that

94

college administrators provide them with a space on campus where they could gather and meet. Valerie explains,

> If we had a file cabinet or something in a room where it could safe and respected, then I think we'd feel more included into our school and I think feeling like you belong helps you, I don't know, helps you like concentrate on other things that are more important. And I think like the feeling of belonging is even in a pyramid of, you now I remember I attended a nursing class, the pyramid's upside down with the basic needs and feeling of belong[ing] is a basic need of life.

Valerie highlights having a space were they can feel "safe and respected" which she believes is an essential ingredient to belonging and "helps you like concentrate on other things that are more important."

As an Upward Bound high school student Valerie was familiar with university spaces and "saw that it was basically a school for rich people or white people." Her involvement with the student groups validated her experiences and gave her a place where she could voice her concerns. More importantly the student groups and its members provided a model of how ethnic pride can co-exist with academic ambition, which Valerie had not experienced prior to college. As the first semester progressed Valerie's attention shifted to trying to keep up with her coursework.

Lissette was also involved with MEChA as well as the National Organization for Women. She held leadership positions with both organizations and attended campus meetings on a weekly basis her first semester. She describes her involvement as a natural progression since she "was always into activism" but "didn't know it was called activism" she "just felt something." That "something" was born out of her lived experiences growing up with a single mother and having to learn how to survive financially and emotionally. These experiences provide her a sense of empathy to similarly positioned students, specifically women of Mexican origin. During her first

semester of college she and a handful of other students organized a donation effort in which they collected clothing, school supplies and toiletries for families in one Mexican border town. They collected the items on campus, drove to the Mexican town and delivered the supplies and clothing directly to the families. Such "activism" had a profound impact on Lissette and her continued involvement with issues related to immigrant families. These experiences were often carried into classroom discussions and presentations. In at least two occasions Lissette presented on the work she and other students were doing with *Mujers de Juarez*[13].

Like Valerie, Lissette was critical of the college campus climate. She especially felt a tension between previously attending a majority Latino high school and now being a minority at a predominately white university. Throughout her first year she commented on being the only Latina in most of her college classes. Her first semester she describes her minority status in her classes as "weird", she explains, "Well, it was awkward, 'cause being a Latina it was going to classes and being the only one in like [among] all these white people. It's weird but I'm like trying to make the best of it."

A further consequence of her minority status was that she seldom talked in class for fear her peers would not "have her back" if the discussion cascaded into racial issues. Lissette also felt her white peers had an advantage in class discussions because they knew and used "big words" so before speaking up she wanted to make

---

[13] Since 1993, almost 400 women and girls have been murdered and more than 70 remain missing in Cuidad Juárez and Chihuahua, Mexico. Many national and transnational organiations have sought to bring attention to policy makers and governemnts in order to stop the voilence and work to find the killers. Congressional concern for the unsolved murders of women in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua has been building steadily in the House of Representatives since mid 2003.

sure her comments were "correct". She explained that because she and other Latinos had to negotiate two languages it was "not as easy to sometimes volunteer during class discussions."

When asked if she felt she was a part of the campus community, initially she felt she "kind of" had school pride. She offered her attendance to basketball games as evidence of her college pride. By her second semester though she felt the university was "just serving [her] school purpose." Like Valerie, her marginality status was intensified on campus and thus both turned to activist student groups to create meaning of their experiences and find spaces where their multiple identities (i.e., women, children of immigrants, working class background) were legitimized. Interestingly, by the end of Lissette's second semester she was no longer involved with the Chicano organization because she "didn't like the direction the organization was going in." She cited a lack of collaboration with other groups and her desire to be a leader not a follower, "If I'm going to do something, when it comes to activist-minded, I'll do it on my own that comes from heart. I don't want to be a follower." Instead her activism was carried out in community-based efforts, such as collecting letters in support of immigration reform, an initiative spearheaded by a local Spanish radio station. Lissette remained strongly committed to issues related to her Mexican ethnic identity although her involvement was not limited to campus activities.

Her first year of college Elsie was involved in two student groups: the Latino Leadership Alumni and the Mormon Institute. While neither group was formally affiliated with her postsecondary institution, both were specifically for college students. Elsie did not see students in the Latino Leadership group as close friends yet

they shared personal experiences and obstacles to achieving their educational goals. Elsie took on a leadership position within the group and also expressed an interest in eventually taking on a vice president or president role. At meetings students share college resources and information as well as plan community-based activities targeted at Latino youth in middle and high school. Like Valerie, Elsie also saw her involvement as a way to build her college portfolio by surrounding herself with goal-oriented Latino students.

The Mormon Institute is within walking distance to campus and is primarily for single Mormon youth, aged 18-30 years old. Before and after class, Elsie would spend time at the institute either taking religious classes or socializing with other Mormon college students. When asked if she felt she belonged on campus she highlights the role of the Institute; "I have a safe haven at the Institute, I take religious classes there, I like going there, I have friends, I like being in school…[in my] free time I go there or the library." In other discussions about the LDS faith she highlights how finding a partner and starting a family is a priority for church members. While the church has strict rules about courting and dating the Institute appears to serve as a space in which males and females can observe and evaluate potential spouses. On several occasions Elsie mentioned her openness to interracial dating, and while the church does not forbid interracial marriage neither does it encourage it. Indeed, Elsie acknowledged, "white guys want white girls."

Keeping Up with Coursework and Adjustment

Valerie did not complete all the courses she was enrolled in her first year. Both semesters she began with four courses, or twelve credits, but by mid point

would drop one course and consequently was able to "put more quality into the work [she] was turning in and then did better [in courses she kept]." She was not failing the classes she dropped, per se, rather she was unsatisfied with her mediocre performance. In high school Valerie had successfully completed several college course as part of the dual credit program. A strategy she felt had served her well was memorizing information and replicating it for tests and assignments. Unfortunately, this strategy did not appear to serve her well at the university. For instance, she describes her difficulty memorizing for a psychology class,

> But it's just…the amount of stuff I have to do, and each class requires so much reading, especially-I took psychology over, I had gotten a C, and it just doesn't click, I don't remember the people. That's mostly what psychology is, just memorizing what people discovered, theory. And I couldn't remember who did what and what they proved.

She was retaking a course she had previously completed as part of her dual degree program in high school. It is unclear if the reason was because she wanted to earn a better grade or if there was something about her high school (dual degree) courses that she felt did not equate to college courses. Throughout our conversations the issue of memorizing would resurface each time we discussed her courses and her progress. She would describe how in high school she could memorize information for tests but now it was more difficult to do so for college courses. Beyond initial advisement for course selection Valerie did not receive or seek out guidance on college expectations, strategies for college success, or how to balance multiple courses or reading for comprehension. At one point Valerie sought out tutoring for a composition course (which she was retaking) but "got in a big argument" with the student tutor because she did not agree with her suggestions.

The pressure from course expectations and dropping classes increased Valerie's stress level. Unfortunately, Valerie's stress manifested itself in ways that further isolated her from her peers and the institution. She describes the stress as "driving [her] crazy" and was at her doctor's office "two times a week" because of her asthma.

> [To the doctor] I'm like, "What is this?" She's like, "Stress." And I gained like ten more pounds and that makes my asthma act up more because I can't move around as much. And so everything just piles up. And then I still have schoolwork, and all these other problems.

Valerie did not maintain active in the student groups that may have reduced some of the stress and could have provided her with potential peer support and advise. She was only on campus for classes and had little contact with faculty, administrators, and peers outside of class. A consequence of her dropping one course each semester was that she lost her state scholarship despite her overall grade average (which was above average). In the end, Valerie was "not counting on [the state scholarship], at all. And actually I think it's more stressful for me to think I'm going to fail this class and lose it again and not get it back." Instead she began working full-time to pay for her tuition and rededicated herself to taking care of her brother and preparing him for middle school.

Lissette successfully completed all the courses she was enrolled in her first year of college. She met with an academic advisor at least once a semester to check in on courses she needed. She felt comfortable asking questions about course requirements and wanted to insure she could graduate in four years. Although she was overwhelmed by the course work at different periods she continuously reaffirmed

her ability and motivation to "do it." When asked how she felt after her first year of college she responded,

> Good. I felt like…when I was stressed when I was also taking finals I felt like, "Oh my gosh, it's so hard," because I was rushing everything and studying and couldn't go out or nothing. I didn't go out for like three weeks straight. Even if I didn't study I just felt like I had to stay at home just in case I felt like studying. [laughs] And then I felt like, "Oh my gosh, [inaudible] this is so hard." But then after finals I'm like, "I have to. I'll be able to do it."

For Lissette giving up her weekend leisure activities was a sacrifice since she enjoys spending time with friends and family every weekend. Her strong desire to graduate in four years, in her view required her to "seriously stay on track" and stay focused on her courses especially during finals. During her first year of college she sought out tutors and met with study groups. An example of this is when she was struggling with her Japanese class she sought out a tutor who helped her with assignments and prepare for tests. Lissette's involvement in student groups also provided her with an added layer of support as students often suggested which professors to take and which to avoid.

By her second semester of college Lissette was simultaneously enrolled at two institutions. She continued her full-time enrollment at the university and added two courses (one was a remedial math class) at the local community college. Her reasoning was purely financial since her merit scholarship did not pay for remedial courses. In addition to her course work she was working an average of thirty to thirty-five hours per week at a restaurant. Her work and school schedule made it difficult to participate in campus activities as she had her first semester. Yet, ironically she spent more time on the university campus her second semester because

101

she found it easier to study in the library than home and also minimized her commute time to and fro work.

Elsie worked mornings and took her classes in the evening. During her first semester her last class ended at 9:45 pm. By her second semester she was working fewer hours and leaving campus by 7:00 pm. When asked about her fist semester classes, Elsie responded, "It's nothing hard" and "it's really fun reading." By midpoint in the semester Elsie was falling behind in a few classes and felt she "got lazy" with her assignments. The added responsibility to help her mother financially ruled out the possibility of part-time work or focusing on school exclusively.

Like Lissette, in the classroom Elsie's minority status was intensified as topics of race, ethnicity, and immigration were discussed or debated. Elsie felt further isolated because of her gender as she felt some professors perceived males as smarter and consequently were called on more often than females. For this reason, she seldom participated in class discussions. In class lectures theories of race, equity and gender gave her new frameworks for understanding her own experiences and challenged her beliefs about who can succeed and under what conditions. For instance, several times she expressed her frustration with other Latinos who did not do well academically since everyone, in her view, had the same opportunity to succeed. Upon further probing and after lectures in her women studies and sociology classes she acknowledged that early influences and economic background play a significant role in the choices individuals made. Specifically, she gave a hypothetical example of a low-income black women and middle-class white male; the white male goes to college because he and his family have resources to prepare and reinforce higher

education choices whereas the black women grows up with limited economic resources, maybe gets pregnant, has a harder time at school, and it is less likely she will attend college. Through her classes and lectures Elsie appeared to develop a new level of social awareness on issues related to race, class, and gender. As Elsie was exposed to new theories in her classes she tried to acculturate what she was learning to her own life experiences and the LDS faith as illustrated in the following quote.

> I don't know why, during class one day I just got this idea in my head that maybe there wouldn't be any like talk about sexism if men and women were like…I don't know, if men really were what women needed in life. Then there would be no need for the woman to like be fighting to get better wages and education, better jobs, better everything. I think that if men were really the head of the household and really were the head of the family unit then there would be no need for the woman to be out there working and going to school and trying to be independent because she would have what she needs [inaudible] in her life.

Despite the tension between what she was learning in college and the LDS church Elsie successfully completed all of her college classes and was planning to complete nine credits during the summer.

<center>Cultural Resources</center>

Valerie, Lissette and Elsie draw from many cultural resources during their first year of college, two central experiences standout: negotiation and (re)construction of their identity and their interpretation of their mothers' teachings through the use of stories on independence, persistence, and discipline.

<center>*Negotiation and Re(construction) of Identity*</center>

Growing up Valerie's sense of ethnic and racial identity was ambiguous because of her mixed background (Columbian and Brazilian). She did not have a strong ethnic identification to either side or to a pan-ethnic group, such as Hispanic or Latino. This was primarily because of her father's resistance to being considered

<center>103</center>

Hispanic or Latino. He would say, "I'm not Hispanic because I'd have to speak Spanish to be Hispanic." To which Valerie would respond, "I didn't know if I was Hispanic or Latina or any of that because my father said he's not Hispanic, what am I?" Valerie's experience with other Latinos at school, the absence of Latino history in school, and the negative media portrayals of Latinos further isolated her from identifying as Latina. She describes herself as being "completely confused" when it came to identifying with a particular racial group. It was not until she attended a summer leadership program for Latino students and became active in college student groups that Valerie began to reconsider her ethnic and racial identity as a source of positive group identification (Tajfel, 1981), but still remained at times unsure of where she "fit in".

> But they [student groups] do discuss like where the labels [come from]. We've had like these introductions and then we have icebreakers and one of them was what do you label yourself and what do you identify with. So some of them were saying they don't identify with Hispanics because like I said, it was something started just to classify a bunch of people and I thought I'd already known that, it sounds like "yeah that's kind of how I feel". But I'm Latina and then the feminists say "I'm a Latina with an 'X'" or "Chicana with an a 'Ch'", so I'm not sure if I classify as a Chicana but I know that I still want to be in the whole, I'm interested in seeing, I'm still a student so I figure I fit in there.

Valerie is critical of labels such as Hispanic and prefers a self-imposed identification such as Latina or Chicana. She is clear, however, that whatever label she chooses to take on it must be associated first with being a student "I'm a student so I figure I fit in there." Identification with a positive group label is important to Valerie, specifically a label that is associated with educational persistence and drive. Her identity is a resource in so far as it provides her that positive group marker and educational drive.

104

Similar to Valerie, Lissette's sense of identity -- whether ethnic, racial or gender --- arise from the circumstances in which she finds herself and is context driven. While at times Lissette felt her minority status put her at a disadvantage during class discussions (i.e., negotiating two languages or peers not having her back on racial issues) she nonetheless did not feel conflicted about strongly identifying as a Latina, Chicana, or Mexican. The specific label she chooses varies depending on the context. In the classroom in the presence of white peers she identifies with a pan-ethnic label such as Latina, while among other Latino peers she may further differentiate by identifying as Chicana or Mexicana. Yet, when asked to describe herself using three words she did not choose an ethnic or racial label like other students in the study, rather she selected adjectives such as caring, responsible, and driven.

Her decision not to draw on an ethnic or racial label may have been a result of my own ethnicity (also of Mexican origin), focus of study (Latino college students), or because of Lissette's physical characteristics (brown complexion, dark eyes, and often wore a green, red and white T-shirts with big letters that read "Mexican") were obvious markers of her ethnic identity. Unquestionably -- from the clothes she wears on campus to the student groups she chooses to be involved (i.e., MEChA) -- she proclaims her Chicano, Latino, or Mexican heritage. And unlike Valerie, Lissette does not seem to deliberate on whether her ethnicity conflicts with her academic self or goals. On the contrary, she draws from her Mexican cultural rituals and insights to bridge her home and school knowledge.

Elsie's sense of identity is derived from two sources: her Mexican ethnicity and LDS religion beliefs. She arrived in the US at the age of two and has never returned to Mexico. Like Lissette, the specific ethnic or racial label she chooses to identify depends on the context. Elsie, like her mother, sees Mexico as a "very corrupt place" where people have limited opportunities. At times it seems she tries to negotiate or reconcile her racial and ethnic identity along with her LDS beliefs. For instance, the majority of her friends on and off campus are white Mormon students who have limited experience with other racial and ethnic groups. She often learns about her native country through church members who have completed missions in Mexico. In one instance a former white male missionary explained to her "Mexicans [in Mexico] take marriage lightly" suggesting this may be a reason why Mexican families have social and economic difficulties in Mexico and in the US. Missionaries in the LDS church are respected and viewed as providing a worldly view to church members since many of them have traveled abroad. And although Elsie spends considerable time with white church members at Institute, she also frequents Spanish wards that are predominately Latino families located in the Latino neighborhoods. Elsie acknowledges it is a "different environment," especially when dances are organized; in the Spanish ward "people are happy, people go to dance not just stand around like the white ward."

Elsie also maintains active in the Latino Leadership Alumni student group because she believes it is important to remember where you came from and maintain a sense of ethnic identity. Although she does not consider these students close friends, they nonetheless serve as important cultural translators through their own life

106

narratives and advise about college. In this regard, as she negotiates her identity she seems to draw from both groups, the LDS members provide her with mainstream information and may give her a place to practice mainstream skills, thus potentially accumulating mainstream social capital. The Latino student group seems to validate who she is ethnically and racially and nurtures her emotionally.

Counterstories and Consejos

Valerie's maternal grandmother is the primary storyteller in her family. Her grandmother uses her life as an example and tells narratives of gender, sexuality and violence. Valerie's grandmother shares her difficulties in life with an abusive partner, oppressive governments and employers, and overcoming poverty. Her stories and narratives encourage her to put "yourself first."

> And I just listen a lot to her [grandmother]. A lot of stories, but mostly about putting yourself first and sometimes in order to help somebody you have to help yourself first so even though you're helping out someone, but you're going to let yourself fall, that's not very helpful right there. And she's taught me a lot of the whole teach yourself to fish, not just be given fish because one day when that person can't give you anything you're going to go hungry sort of thing. And a lot, a lot of stories and a lot of morals in it.

Independence is a thread across many of the *consejos*. Valerie's mother and grandmother especially value financial independence and provide advice and role model how to be responsible with personal finances.

Closely tied to stories about independence are *consejos* about guarding her virginity. The issue of sexuality in Latina homes is intertwined with religion and purity (Hurtado, 2003; Wolf, 1958). Valerie and her mother do not consider themselves religious, they nonetheless hold fast to many of the Catholic teachings. In Valerie's case stories on guarding her virginity started when she was "fifteen or sixteen when they start considering you a woman" and her grandmother "started

107

telling me about situations where we don't want to put ourselves in." Valerie admits that those stories "prick in your mind and you think about them forever." Consequently Valerie seldom dates or goes out to parties "because I got crazy people all over." Yet the issue of sexuality is complicated by the fact that Valerie is also encouraged to show her "curves" and wear feminine clothing. Her grandmother is a seamstress and "a great designer" who fixes Valerie's clothes to make sure they are formed and tells her "if you have curves, go ahead and show them off." In this respect her sexuality is a source of power that Valerie has control over. Many times stories and advise about independence and sexuality were interconnected, such as her grandmother leaving her husband in Columbia and raising three daughters on her own in another country. *Consejos* about the importance of independence and honoring your sexuality (whether through virginity or showing your curves) found their way to Valerie's goals, both personal and academic, and were sources of strength when difficult times arose her first year of college. Many of these *consejos* were often reinforced through her participation in ethnic student groups such as MEChA and ASOC.

Lissette bears witness to the difficulties, challenges, and hopes of immigrant women through her mother's life and stories. At the age of sixteen her mother crossed the border undocumented from Mexico many times. From a young age Lissette witnessed her mother's hard work and has been motivated to aspire for goals that were unattainable for her mother. Lissette shares how her mother uses her narratives of perseverance and ingenuity to encourage them to aspire for high educational goals and financial independence. For instance, her mother often shares her border crossing

stories and how she would outsmart immigration officers when she either crossed the Rio Grande, climbed tall US/Mexico fences, or simply walked through immigration check points. She crossed so many times illegally that young people in her town would seek her out to help them cross (rather than a smuggler or *coyote*). But she never charged them a fee; rather she welcomed the company as sometimes the journey was long and lonely. She crossed frequently because she worked as a nanny in a US border city and on breaks would go back to see her family and take gifts, money, and stories of her new life in the US. Her life in the US was a sign of financial independence as well a way to break from traditional female roles. Her mother's stories often include themes of equity, fairness, and persistence, which find their way into Lissette's academic goals and extracurricular activities.

Another important theme across her mother's stories is on disposition or how to behave. For instance, an important lesson embedded in many of her stories is how to nurture relationships.

Mother: Han sido muy buenos chamacos.	They have been very good kids.
Interviewer: Porque?	Why?
Mother: Ellos ven como vive uno, entonces ellos agaran parte de eso. Ellos han visto que yo soy buena con mi vecino, con mi famailia, con mis padres. Pues ellos tambien tiene ese amor hasias ellos … Ellos han sabido querer a la gente por media de que yo los quiero tambien. A mis hermanas, mis amigas, [gente] de trabajo, la gente me rodean, ellos son buenas gentes tambien.	They see how one lives and they learn from this. They see that I am a good person to my neighbor, my family, my parents. Then they have that self love…They have learned how to love other people by observing the way I love them. My sisters, my friends, [people] from work, the people that surround me, they are good people too.

Lissette's comments about whom she selects to associate with on and off campus--whether they are goal-oriented or activist minded --echo her mother's advise on seeking relationships that can nurture her. As an example Lissette decided her second semester that the ethnic student group did not align with her activist goals and she felt "people are not doing it from their hearts."

> I don't want to talk bad about them, but I just feel like everybody's following what one person wants. And I don't think that's the way it should be. I think everybody should have their input and everyone should do like what they believe. I feel like a lot of people are not doing it from their hearts, they're just doing it like to follow and to be an organization.

Like the other females in the group, Elsie's mother often shares stories, narratives, and *consejos* about how to succeed and achieve life goals. Yet the stories and *consejos* at times are contradictory to the LDS teachings. Elsie describes her mother as "a fighter" and financially independent. A telling story was when her mother ruthlessly fought to keep their home after her father left the family and large amounts of personal debt. Embedded in her mother's stories are beliefs about the role of women, specifically her opposition to male domination and aspiring for financial independence. These views are in sharp contrast to the philosophy of the LDS faith and the role of women. Elsie struggles with this tension as she shares a paper she wrote about sexism and the need for an education.

> I know me personally that's why I want to go to school, that's why I want to have a career and be very independent because I don't rely on any man. I don't want to rely on any men, because I don't trust them. Sometimes I don't trust them, but I just want to be secure myself, because you can't trust in somebody else for you to have a good life, I think. So that's what one of the papers was about, that if the world really had good, reliable men that we women could rely on, have good men in our lives, then there would be no need for us to fight for all those things that we're fighting for.

The LDS teachings and what it means to be a good LDS woman appear at times to be in direct contradiction to her life experiences (and her mother's) which are informed by dramatically different historical, economic and political realities then the majority of the LDS members. In another example, her mother often speaks of using *coraje* (rage) as fuel to help her achieve the unachievable, such as making it own her own and pursing a vocational trade. This emotional state of consciousness can also be interpreted as a metaphor to her reflection and objection to her condition as a woman under patriarchy (Behar, 1993).

Relationships and Networks

Relationships and networks are important for the students in this group, in particular their involvement with college student groups. For instance; through their participation in a summer Latino pre-college leadership program they connected to individuals who were able to offer them with critical information on courses and campus. Valerie shares how her view of leadership in the context of being a college student shifted after listening to a keynote by a Latina educator during the summer Latino leadership program.

> And it's like she said be a servant leader, even though you won't become known and the person you are leading might surpass you, that's a good thing because that's, you're not just, you know, "I'm the leader, follow me," you're, "why don't you come up and be a leader with me and that way we can all be leaders." And it made more sense than just follow me. And I thought that's what we need.

Valerie was also motivated to join student groups on campus and connect to other leadership opportunities as a result of her participation in the leadership program.

Lissette describes how she has "really good friends" at the university after attending the leadership program, "And it's good that they're involved at [the

university] like you have people you can rely on if you need help. Like if I wasn't in MEChA then it would have been really weird here because there are so few Latinos." She goes on to share that, " If it wasn't for the conference I won't have know what classes to take, like how to do certain stuff." One particular Latino college administrator took an interest in making sure Lissette was prepared her first semester and advised her on what specific classes to take and stressed the importance of speaking to her department advisor. Ethnic student groups and its members were also very important to her, especially the summer before her first year and her first semester at the university. Lissette was involved with the student groups and participated in campus demonstrations, took on leadership roles, and met with students on campus on a regular basis.

Off campus, Lissette's mother continued to play a significant role in her goal development and decision to continue college. Although her mother did not attend college she was active in supporting and guiding Lissette during her first year of college. For instance, Lissette often practiced her presentations before her mother and selected topics that her mother had expert knowledge, such as the purpose of a *Quiñcenera*[14] in Mexican culture and *Mujers de Juarez*. Lissette describes her mother as her "biggest role model." When asked if her relationship had changed during her first year, Lissette explains how their relationship was strong during her first year of college but nonetheless needed to be strengthened in order for her to do well in school,

---

[14] The Quinceañera or Quince años is a young woman's celebration of her fifteenth birthday, which is commemorated in a unique and different way from her other birthdays.

Well, definitely like my mom's and my relationship need to be strengthened. Well, it is at times and then we mess up and we make arguments or whatever, but I know that when we're arguing or we're mad at each other, it does really affect me, because I'm worried about it, I'm frustrated. It does, because I don't even want to do my work or nothing. It bothers me.

Her mother serves as an emotional anchor and Lissette often confides in her about her academic stress and concerns. Her mother in return reiterates her trust in her ability and encourages her to carry on.

Like Valerie and Lissette, Elsie straddles multiple worlds as she navigates her first year of college. Her first year of college LDS members dominated her social sphere; and while most of them were also college students key advise came in the form of how to be a good LDS member. Latino students whom she interacted with through student ethnic groups often provided her with specific advice on how to overcome college obstacles. Elsie explains how she admires a Latino graduate involved with a Latino student group.

Elsie: Do you know [name of student]? He's in the alumni [Latino leadership group].

Interviewer: Did he just graduate?

Elsie: Yea, he just graduated. I admire him a lot. And I told him, we get along, joke around and I told him. I don't know if he took me serious or what. I really admire him.

Interviewer: Why?

Elsie: Because he told me some of the things he has been through and it's amazing how he graduated in four years. And he has aspirations to go to law school.

The individual she refers to is well known among first year Latino students because of his involvement on campus and his willingness to share his personal narrative of being a first generation college student and a former gang member. Other Latino

students similarly provided Elsie and other first year Latino students with stories of persistence and ways to succeed in college. In this respect, Latino students – while not close friends – served as cultural translators for Elsie her first year of college.

<div align="center">Cultural Knowledge</div>

Through their lived experiences and those of other family members this group of females are aware of the inequalities that exist in society. Stories and narratives on immigration, justice, and gender inequities create a sense of collective experience and become sources of information that push them to activism.   They are critical of systems that oppress, exclude, or minimize the important differences in groups of people.

<div align="center">*Knowledge of Social Inequalities*</div>

Valerie critiques school curriculum and texts that do not include her history or that of Latinos leaving her to question, "where do I fit in?" Her first year of college she noted, "So we don't have classes, we don't have professors who represent the students, buildings aren't named after people of color in that school." For Valerie and Lissette their awareness of social problems, in particular issues related to gender inequities and capitalism, goes beyond their immediate surroundings and cross the border to Mexico. Valerie shares,

> What's happening in Juarez, isn't just Juarez's problem, it's their police but then we have companies down there, American companies that are responsible for the people who work there and people disappear and they're like "ok, just find someone to replace them, it's ok. They're just another person. There's someone there to replace them."

Valerie makes reference to the violent crisis in Chihuahua, Mexico where since 1993, almost 400 women and girls have been murdered in Cuidad Juarez. Valerie and Lissette became very involved in efforts to bring community awareness to this

particular issue and volunteered to collect resources for affected families in Mexico. Lissette brought this knowledge and awareness to her college classroom through class discussions and writing assignments.

Elsie credits her broader critical awareness of educational and social inequalities to her participation in the Latino pre-college leadership program. Before attending the Latino pre-college leadership program, Elsie did not understand "the big picture" of inequality in US society.

> Elsie: It [Latino pre-college leadership program] opened up my eyes to so many different things I never thought about before.

> Interviewer: Can you give me an example?

> Elsie: For example, I have a friend that went to it [Latino pre-college leadership program] a couple years ago and we were discussing it afterwards or before. Actually, before I went. And one thing I told him was I don't understand why there's my family and like all the different [Mexican] families all came at the same time, we were all in the same situation…How come I don't see people struggling up there for better things [in school and in middle class jobs], and we got into an argument and I'm like, "No, you don't get it, you don't get it," and he's like, "You don't get it. You're not looking at the big picture." And just all of the talks that we had at the conference opened up my eyes to all those things.

For Elsie, like Valerie and Lissette, it was the first time she had attended a program focused on Latino student achievement and positive ethnic and community identity. Several times during the course of their first year and our meetings they returned to what they learned during the program and how it continued to motivate them to achieve their academic goals.

For the females in this group their assessment of social inequalities appear to inform their interpretation of educational experiences. They draw from culture specific resources and knowledge at varying degrees and under different

circumstances. All were cognizant that their ethnicity, gender, and immigration status (for Elsie) play a significant role in their educational pursuits and how they interact and are perceived by others in college spaces, such as classrooms, public areas, and group meeting places.

<div align="center">Bilingual and Bicultural Knowledge</div>

All the females in this group are fluent in Spanish and English. In fact, Spanish was their first language. Valerie also speaks Portuguese. For all the females Spanish is an intimate language shared at home with family and friends. Yet they also acknowledge their Spanish skills are assets; particularly as the Spanish-speaking population in their state continues to grow. For instance, Elsie describes how she is the only Spanish-speaking individual in the law firm where she works. Because the firm is located in a predominately Latino community the majority of clients are Spanish-speaking so Elsie is in high demand. She acknowledges that there are some colleagues at the firm who speak Spanish but they do not know "how to talk to Spanish-speaking clients" in a culturally relevant way. In Elsie's view, it is not enough to know the language but you must also understand how it is used culturally, especially across working- and middle-class clients.

Lissette also sees her Spanish as a resource for her career in hospitality and event planning. In college, she often weaves her Spanish language and cultural knowledge in her course assignments. "I kill two birds with one stone" she says when she describes how she used a MEChA presentation on *Mujers de Juarez* for her communication and computer science courses. Lissette also elicits her mother's

<div align="center">116</div>

expert knowledge on Mexican cultural traditions, such as *Quinceañera*, for other course writings and presentations.

For Valerie it was not until her participation in the Latino pre-college leadership program that she came to see bilingual and multicultural knowledge in educational spaces as assets or resources. Prior to this, she seldom saw models of successful Latina students in school or in popular media. For Valerie her knowledge of multiple languages (Spanish and Portuguese) and her culture is important in so far as it helps her "become successful."

> Interviewer: So at the end of the leadership conference, what did you think?
>
> Valerie: I thought that we all need to remember where we come from because that's a big part of who we are later on. And I feel like I have to get more in touch with my parents' side of where they come from and find out what I could do to not become part of that statistic [of those who dropout of high school or college]. Just become successful.

In college spaces and among Latino peers Valerie's bilingual and bicultural knowledge are what linked her to ethnic student groups whom she attributed much of her critical awareness of campus environment and sense of belonging (or in her case, not feeling as she belonged). Although her Columbian and Brazilian background made her an anomaly among her Latino peers, their collective experience in the US and more recently in the Latino pre-college leadership program connected her to a broader network of individuals she could depend on as she navigated college and beyond.

Summary of Findings

My findings in this chapter confirm previous research. Mainly that academic success for Latino students is a function of interrelated cultural, structural, and

environmental factors. In all the cases the students attributed their early success to hard work and discipline, although they also recognized the important roles their families, high school preparation and teachers and counselors played in helping them through the educational pipeline. Indeed, institutional agents were key in helping them identify college-bound programs, resources and encouraging them.

Once in college this group had similar yet different first year experiences. Contrary to persistence models (e.g., Tinto, 1987) that assume integration to campus is a function of the congruence between institution and student, the students in this group found counter spaces, on and off campus, that validated their environmental and cultural realities (such as family commitments, concerns over finances, and work). To be sure, today most college students face similar challenges however what makes this group of students' experience distinct is the sociopolitical context that they navigate on and off campus. For instance, the females in this study faced racially hostile and sexist campus environments, as well as pressures from their families to contribute (whether emotionally or financially) to the well being of their families. Ironically it was these adversities on and off campus that provided a source of motivation, discipline and resolve to achieve their postsecondary goals. To be sure, each student made decisions based on their particular circumstances and available resources and knowledge. For instance, by the end of her first semester Valerie modified her college goals because of concerns over family financial stress and her commitment to raise her younger brother. By her second semester she transferred to the local two-year college. Lissette relied heavily on her mother (emotionally and financially) as well as other Latino peers involved in ethnic student groups. Elsie

weathered her first year by maintaining strong ties to her religion and Latino peers. Both remained committed to their degree goals and planned to continue enrolled full-time. In Lissette's case, she enrolled simultaneously in two colleges and was open to doing so in the future if it helped her complete her degree quickly. Again, institutional commitment or congruence with one particular institution was not a prerequisite for their continued persistence.

My findings also posit that cultural resources and knowledge are integral pieces to the student success puzzle in college, indeed through the educational pipeline. In this chapter I identified the ways in which ethic identity, family narratives, counterstories, language knowledge, and immigrant experiences inform the students' postsecondary goals and decisions. Cultural artifacts, in the form of involvement in student ethnic groups and activities related to these groups, provided meaning and mediated their first year experiences. In many cases, these cultural artifacts, which took the form of networks, relationships, and assets, mediated their first year experience and at times mitigated difficulties faced on campus.

CHAPTER 7.

WITHIN CASE ANALYSIS FOR STUDENTS ATTENDING A TWO-
YEAR COLLEGE

In this chapter I provide an in-depth analysis of the male students who

attended a two-year college. I begin the chapter with a brief introduction of Moroni,

Chico and Tomas. Similar to the previous chapter, I present a detailed discussion of

the students in this group and use my research framework to delineate pivotal

experiences. I highlight structural and policy obstacles confronted by the males and

underscore how these realities informed and shaped their short- and long-term

postsecondary planning and decisions. I present an overview of commonalities and,

if applicable, differences within the group of students.

Introduction of Students[15] Attending a Two-Year College

Moroni

In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) Moroni is an angel

who visited the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1823. It is common to see the angel Moroni

on the top of LDS temples across the country. Moroni, a first year college student,

related the story of Moroni the angle as he described his commitment to his Mormon

faith. He and his family are active members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-

---

[15]All student names are pseudonyms.

Day Saints (LDS)[16]. Moroni is eighteen years old and is a modest and shy young man who sometimes looks down when he speaks to people. A consequence of his shyness is his repeated stuttering, yet his stuttering never interferes with his ability to artfully communicate his beliefs about education, life, and religion. His extensive reading on issues related to morality, principles, and ethics separates him from many of his peers. Moroni and his family are from Mexico and arrived in the US when he was eight years old. His parents, sister, and Moroni are all undocumented immigrants. His father works in construction sites where he removes dangerous materials. His mother occasionally takes care of children and his sister is a junior in high school.

Chico

Chico is a writer. He writes about his experiences as a Mexican immigrant, love, injustices he sees around him, and what it means to be a teenager in today's culture. He often shares his thoughts and writings on an on-line community where his peers share comments, encouragement, and advise. Chico is friendly, outgoing, and "not afraid of a lot of things." He was born in Mexico and arrived in the US at the age of seven along with his parents and older sister. He feels lucky that his family did not have to endure a difficult border crossing from Mexico to the US; they arrived by plane on a visitor's visa and overstayed their visa. Chico has not retuned to Mexico since leaving as a child. His parents recently divorced; Chico alternates between living with his mother and father. At the time of our conversations he had

---

[16] Latino membership has increased 35% since 1995, and Spanish speakers now account for 130,000 of the 5.5 million US members of the Church of Latter Day Saints, according to church figures. (Launder, 2006). It is estimated that by 2020 the Latino population will comprise 50% of the Mormon membership in Utah (Solórzano, 2005).

recently moved in with his father who purchased a home close to Chico's college campus.

Tomas

Tomas has been in the US for less than five years. His mother, younger brother, and Tomas were reunited with his father who has lived in the US for over ten years. This is not Tomas' first time living in the US; he lived in California from age three to seven and then returned to Mexico with his mother and older brother. He decided to return to the US his senior year of high school specifically for the purpose to attend college after graduation.   Tomas is a soft-spoken young man, yet speaks confidently about his life goals and reasons for coming to the US at a later time in his life. He lives with both his parents and a younger brother in a two-bedroom apartment in a predominately Latino immigrant community. His father works in construction and his mother stays home.

Pre-College Experiences

Moroni, Chico, and Tomas share at least two central experiences that shaped their educational trajectory: they came to the US from Mexico with their families early in their education and they grew up with both parents in the home. Further, despite their family's limited financial resources, all the males in this group were strongly encouraged by their fathers to focus on their studies and not to work. Like the females in this study, the male students credited their parent's support and encouragement for their academic success. Moroni and Chico attended selective vocational high school programs. Tomas attended a vocational high school in Mexico and then a public high school in the US.

122

Moroni's family lives in a three-bedroom apartment in a predominately Latino immigrant community. The family of four often has newly arrived family members from Mexico living with them. This year it is one of Moroni's male cousins. Moroni's father is a construction worker even though he received a bachelor's degree in agricultural engineering in Mexico. Because of his undocumented status he is unable to practice or take jobs that can draw from his training. Moroni also mentioned his father did not want to practice because the field required working with pesticides and he was afraid of the effects on his fertility. Moroni describes his father as a former atheist and anarchist and now a Mormon but jokingly admits, "He's pretty mellow about it. He's not as influenced by religion as much as me." His mother on the other hand is "more into the Mormon church than [his] dad."   Moroni's mother did not graduate from high school and instead began a vocational program in nursing while still in Mexico. She did not complete the program because she married. Moroni's mom takes care of other people's children but most of the time is at home.

Moroni's parents highlight that one of the central reasons for leaving their home country was so their children could have access to a US education and additional career options. They encourage their children to excel academically. Yet, Moroni admits that he does not always feel supported.

> Moroni: Like my parents, and stuff. I love my parents but I always felt like I needed more support from them but I didn't thought about that before the conference. And I realize that that's a problem for other people too.
>
> Interviewer: Can you give me an example?
>
> Moroni: Sure, like when I would get home from school and stuff and I would get a B or something in class they would be like well next time get an A. And

that would make me feel bad. But like on the other hand they were always supporting me and taking me places and giving me time to study and stuff.

Moroni seems conflicted about how he interprets parental encouragement and support; on the one hand he would like more direct involvement beyond "next time get an A" yet on the other hand he recognizes that providing time, space, and exposure to places outside the home also make up how his parents support and encourage him academically. Another important mode of support in his case was the fact that Moroni was not required to work outside the home to contribute to the family income. Rather he was responsible for keeping his grades up and maintaining household chores.

Moroni's case is also unique in that his father attended and graduated from a university in Mexico and provides him with college knowledge. His knowledge is not so much on the nuts and bolts of degree requirements or financial aid, rather his father provides Moroni with emotional support and encouragement to be a critical and thoughtful thinker and writer. Counter to findings that parents, in particular Mexican immigrants, defer to teacher authority his father stresses that grades are less important than the ability to communicate beliefs and experiences. For instance, during his first semester of college, Moroni talked to his father about his English class. Specifically, he was unhappy with a grade (B-) he received in a paper on mortality and respect. His father consoled him by reminding him that learning was not measured by a grade rather by the personal internal growth of a person. Moroni feels that hearing about how his parents strived as students in Mexico helps him make meaning of his US education. .

I think the most important thing that my parents did was when I was younger they talked about their education and stuff. I think that's the most important

124

thing. They can't really tell me what to do right now when I run into problems because we're in different situations, but like this period of going on and striving to the end, it's the same thing everywhere.

While his parents do not have the college knowledge of attending a US college they nonetheless provide encouragement through their own educational experiences.

Chico's parents did not attend college, although his mother completed vocational training in Mexico and proudly displayed her certificate of completion so her children would aspire to higher goals. Chico lived with both his parents and sister until they separated during his junior year of high school. When they separated he alternated between his mother and father's home. His mother lives in a small apartment and father in a home he recently purchased. Despite the family's limited income they always tried to live "in the nice side of town" to increase their children's opportunities and quality of life. Chico shares,

> I always thought I wasn't in gangs I wasn't involved in bad things because I didn't want to. But then lately I've been noticing that they, ever since we moved into the US, they have always been looking for us to live in the good side of town. Because of that I feel that I was less pressured.

Chico describes himself as a "*chiqueado*" or "mom's boy" always close to her and taken care of by both his parents. He believes he has learned to be a strong man through his parents' example. For instance, he credits his mother for his awareness of gender equality. He shares, she "raised me as a feminist even though she didn't know it." Chico also speaks passionately about his relationship with his father and is astonished at his father's love, care, and consideration for his family given that his father did not have examples of compassionate males in his youth. Chico often channels his thoughts and feelings about his life through poetry and short stories. He has written several poems about his father and older sister. Chico's sister is also a

source of inspiration for him. Although he feels they are not "as close as before" he knows he can go to her for anything, anytime.

Tomas' parents have less than a high school education. His mother completed sixth grade. As the middle child of eleven, from the age of eight she had to work mornings at a factory making shoe soles and attended school in the afternoon. His father completed the tenth grade, and with no parents to provide for him he began working in a large Mexican city. In the US, his father works in construction while his mother stays home. His parents' experiences led them to commit to do everything possible for their children to have an education. Tomas' parents, in particular his father, are very protective of him and do not allow him (even at eighteen years old) out of the home after dark. When asked why, he shared they are fearful for his safety. He recalls how his father or mother would always take him and pick him up from school everyday in Mexico and the US. When teased by peers, Tomas recalls his father telling him those students were envious of the care and attention he received. Since Tomas does not drive in the US his father continues to take him to college or occasionally he takes public transportation.

Tomas and his family are members of The Light of the World Church. The Church is described as having a "Mexican nationalistic orientation and has an authoritarian form of church government; it strongly adheres to Old Testament teachings, is legalistic and upholds high moral standards; and its members are known for their industriousness and honesty" (Holland, 2007). Indeed, his parents' holdfast to the church teachings, which have shaped how they raise their children. Family and marriage are central to the church teachings and youth are encouraged to get married

126

after six months of courting or separate. In fact, Tomas' eldest brother stayed in Mexico when the family moved to the US because he married following church doctrine.

Tomas and his family live in an apartment in a predominately Latino immigrant neighborhood. When asked to describe his home, Tomas quickly explains that he is not concerned about the physical place as much as his family being together. In this regard, his physical home is seen as a temporary station until he can improve his life through education and work.

Early Educational Experiences

Since arriving in the US, Moroni has attended predominately minority schools in his neighborhood. Moroni attended a vocational high school program. He remained in his home school for the academic core classes and attended the career/vocational program half the day during his junior and senior years. The selective vocational program purports to offer "curriculum [that] allows students to select a Career/Technical field for intensive study, preparing them for the workforce and higher education."

Moroni completed the environmental horticulture science program that he describes as the "landscaping maintenance" program that would allow him to "get a job later." Moroni describes himself as a "poor student" and confesses he needs to "focus and stuff cause when my teachers are like, 'oh you're doing good' then I get good grades but then like they're not paying attention to me I'm not doing so well. Or when I'm doing poorly in my class they pay attention to me and I do good." Despite

his academic self doubts and perceived lack of motivation he admits that the lowest grade he has ever received is a "C" in one class.

Chico began the second grade in the US. At the time he did not speak English but he quickly acquired English. Indeed, so well were his language and academic assimilation that in third grade he was placed in the GATE Program[17]. He did not, however, continue in the program because the following year his family moved to a neighboring state. The experience of being identified as a GATE student early in his academic experience, nonetheless, had an impact on Chico as he proudly shared this with me. Chico bashfully shares that after that he had "almost perfect" grades until the eighth grade where he received his first C in science. "You don't want to know about my ninth and tenth grade," he slyly admits. "[In terms of grades] 'C' was sometimes the best I could get…I guess I didn't have the motivation that kept me going. I didn't have the discipline to keep me going," Chico shares looking down. In fact, he attributes his periods of academic successes and failures to motivation and discipline almost exclusively "rather than the environment." Yet during this period his parents also went through a series of breakups. In spite of his perceived lack of motivation Chico graduated from a magnet school program and was awarded several merit scholarships, including a state scholarship that required at least a B+ overall grade point average.

When asked to describe his friends in high school Chico says, "we were known as the Asian group." He goes on to share, " I never really hung out with the Mexican crowd. I did have some Latino friends…Actually until I graduated from

---

[17] GATE stands for Gifted and Talented Education and is for eligible students in grade school. The purpose of the GATE program is to offer enriched and accelerated learning opportunities to meet the particular abilities and talents of academically gifted students.

high school I started speaking more in Spanish." However, he does not believe his peer group choice was intentional rather serendipitous; "one of the girls who was friends with the Asian group introduced me to them." In high school, Chico was also a part of student council and the Hispanic Club although but admits he "was not that involved" in the club. His senior year he also participated in a Mexican ballet folkloric group because his parents were dancers in Mexico and thought it would be fun.

Tomas' early education began in the US; he completed kindergarten and first grade in California. Soon after his family returned to Mexico. He recalls always being a good student and early on concerned about learning not just making the grade. His earliest memory of learning is when his parents taught him how to read before he entered kindergarten. In Mexico he attended public schools that emphasized math and science. In fact, he feels his education in Mexico put him at an advantage from his US peers when it came to math and science. He remembers always being the top student in all of his classes through high school. Tomas recalls his summer breaks typically included a review of the previous school year subjects because he didn't want to forget what he learned and wanted to be ready for the next year. In Mexico Tomas' parents did not require him to work to contribute to the family income; rather he was told to focus on his studies. Tomas nonetheless worked with family members, on and off, from age ten until he arrived in the US at the age of sixteen.

Tomas attended a vocational and technical high school program in Mexico where he focused on nursing. He was one of the top students and respected by his

peers and teachers. At times his peers would tease him because he was the teacher's preferred student and was often called upon to demonstrate nursing skills. His junior year of high school he and his mother entered the US on a visitor's visa. They initially arrived in California and after two weeks of attending a large, urban public school Tomas returned to Mexico alone because he did not like the school environment. Following his departure, his family decided to move to a neighboring state that offered better job opportunities and smaller public schools. Tomas was reunited with his family and began a new public high school in a new city; he immediately saw a difference in the school setting and decided to stay. He was enrolled in English as a Second Language classes and quickly connected with other recent immigrant students, the majority being from Mexico. His credits from Mexico were accepted and Tomas promptly adjusted to his new learning environment, earned good grades and the respect of his new teachers. Within a semester, Tomas was also recognized as the top English Language Learner in his high school. In less than two years he graduated from high school and was eligible for a state merit scholarship to attend a local college or university.

<div align="center">Goals & Commitments</div>

The students in this group are highly motivated to complete their college degree. However, because of their immigration status, they modify their career goals and their postsecondary options are limited.

For Moroni, his goals and commitments, life and academic, are shaped by two central experiences: his Mormon faith and his immigration circumstances. Moroni has been an active member of the LDS community since childhood and admits that,

"I think a large part of my goals and stuff are based on what I think I need to be a good member of the church." Yet at times he is doubtful,

> Moroni: I guess there's a bad side to that, but I try to make the most out of it.
>
> Interviewer: What do you mean a bad side to it?
>
> Moroni: Because it's wrong to do what other people expect you, or to only do what other people expect you to do, and when it comes to like church and stuff. Like I can't decide what is true or not true, like what is true is true. All I can do is accept it.

In spite of his doubts he remains wholly committed to following the doctrine of his faith and ready to give two years of his young life to a mission. In fact, getting ready for his mission and his goals after the mission were central topics during our conversations.

During his first year of college Moroni attended a two-year college and hopes to transfer to a four-year institution. He paid in-state tuition during his first year of college. His intended major is architecture. When asked what drew him to this field he said, "I like drawing and designing things. I just like to look at buildings. I think it would be a good feeling to draw something and then see like built." During his first semester he started with much eagerness; he wanted to excel academically and as a community member.

> I want to be an A plus student. I want to be an honor student. Like I don't know too much about the honor program at [the community college] but I want to be one. And I wanna be like also doing other things, like community service or something.

Moroni received several merit scholarships as well a state merit scholarship. Yet, he was clear to communicate to me that he was not using the state funded scholarship but was instead drawing from the private or school funded scholarships. It was unclear as to the reason for this decision, although during a conversation with his

parents they were adamant about their personal financial responsibility and not drawing from state and federal resources or funds, a criticism often asserted by anti-immigrant groups. Prior to leaving for his LDS mission Moroni had successfully completed 24 college credits.

Like Moroni, Chico's goals are shaped by his immigration realities. Chico describes aviation as his "dream career." In fact, he was enrolled in the aviation program in high school and successfully completed the majority of the curriculum. His aviation studies came to an abrupt halt when he leaned he had to be a legal resident to continue in the pilot instruction, an essential and final component of the program. His immigration status also placed limitations in terms of his college choices. His first choice for college was a four-year research university but without federal financial aid he could not afford to attend full-time instead Chico enrolled in the local two-year college and hopes to complete an associate of science that can someday be transferred to a four-year college. His intended major is architecture, but admits, "I'm not that interested in it. I will probably change it." When asked what other careers interest him he states he is not sure "I really like aviation but I'm not sure if that's reachable" because of his immigration status. Instead he is "aiming at a lower field." Although Chico was unable to complete the aviation program while in high school he nonetheless completed high school and was awarded a state merit scholarship. It appears that although Chico's career aspirations were squashed before he even left high school he is determined to push forward in an uncertain future and complete a bachelor's degree.

His first semester Chico was highly motivated to get good grades. A main reason was because he did not want to disappoint his family; "for me not to go to school… I feel that would be a big disappointment [to my parents]. I feel that all of their efforts would be wasted. And then I wouldn't want to let myself down. Because I know that I can do better than $7.50 an hour." His first semester he completed twelve credits and by his second semester was "more motivated to get straight A's." However, by his second semester he felt he "couldn't do both" attend school full time and work full time. By the middle of the second semester he stopped attending two classes; one professor asked him to drop the class and the second class he stopped going and failed. When asked what he might have done differently his second semester he responds, "Wake up on time. Also I was really bad at emailing my professors, letting them know that…or asking them what we did. I was really bad at that. And the times I went, I would procrastinate on the homework, so it wasn't as good as it could've been." Chico accepted responsibility, in his view, for his lack of "motivation and discipline" and was keeping from his family his second semester grades for fear of disappointing them. Despite his unsuccessful second semester grades he felt he had not "hit rock bottom" and did not want to drop out. When probed on what specific barriers he confronted his second semester he admits, "I feel like I've been under pressure for twelve years regarding like immigration." By the end of his first year he was at risk of losing his state scholarship and was preparing to re-take his second semester classes during the summer.

Early in his life Tomas expressed an interest in a career in medicine. Specifically, he would like to be a surgeon. His senior year of high school he was

133

considering a surgical technician certificate as a way to achieve his goal. That same year his counselor and teachers explained to him the necessary steps for medical school. Tomas now aspires to complete a bachelor's degree in biological science. His first year of college he completed university-transferable courses toward an associates degree in science. In Mexico he attended a vocational high school program where he focused on nursing. He was well into his program when he, along with his mother and younger brother, decided to join his father in the US. The decision to leave close to completing his vocational career was daunting but Tomas was confident he could equally succeed in the US and achieve his academic goals.

Like the other males in this group, he was limited in his postsecondary choices, and attended the community college his first year because it was affordable and lax in its residency requirements. His first semester of college he enrolled in fifteen credits and successfully completed all his classes. Tomas has mastered the necessary English skills to take mainstream college courses, yet he often cites his language insecurities as a major barrier. In a short time, though Tomas has translated his language insecurities into a source of motivation to pursue his academic goals. He is highly committed to his educational goals and sees life as limited without an education.

Interviewer: ¿Como ves tu vida sin estudio?	How do you see your life without an education.
Toams: Se me hace muy limitado. Veo la mayoría de la gente, va al trabajo, regresan, tienen unos límites. No son tan libres como alguien que estudió. Avanzan un poquito pero no mucho.	It is very limited. I see the majority of people, they work, return, they are limited. They are not free like someone with an education. They advance a little but not much.

Tomas' experience of living and studying in Mexico further attests to his belief that education is a necessity in order to move ahead in life, whether in the US or Mexico. He sees his limited English skills as an obstacle that can and will be overcome with persistence and practice. The only obstacle that can interfere with his academic goals, in his view, is if he were found out and deported to Mexico.

Environmental Elements

At least two central experiences dominate the lives of the males in this group. First, they are all undocumented individuals. Chico and Moroni arrived in the US at a very young age and have been primarily educated in US public schools. Tomas entered and left at varies points early in his education but finally graduated from a US public high school. Almost on a daily basis, whether at school, work, or in everyday interactions, the males in this group have to traverse a myriad of barriers because of their immigration status. They have learned to be visible while invisible at the same time. During their first year of college their immigration status was a difficulty because of college residency requirements and ironically a source of strength. The second experience that binds these students (and closely tied to their immigration status) is their need to work to fund their education and help their families. For Moroni, a third pivotal experience was preparation for his Mormon mission.

Immigration Status

Moroni does not see a prospect or pathway to change his immigration status in the near future. When asked where he saw himself in the future he states "if I don't have my citizenship papers by like 25 I'm just gonna go [to Mexico] cause I don't want to live like this." When asked why 25 years old he provides his rationale,

135

I just think, I was going to wait 10 more years but I can't go back to Mexico when I'm 28 or older than that 'cause I need to be young enough to …like before I get married. I can't take a whole family over there. I don't know that much about how the economy is or how to work and live over there.

Moroni recognizes that a move back to Mexico would require a significant adjustment to everyday life. Culturally, he has been raised and schooled in the US and acknowledges that "he doesn't know much about" the Mexican economy, work, or life. The ambiguity of his immigration status and the fear of deportation constantly weigh on how he proceeds with his life goals. There is no question as to his desire to continue living in the US, yet he does not want to "be hiding [his] whole life." After his first semester Moroni appeared to have considered other options to continue his academic goals in the US legally. When asked how he thought his immigration status might change in the next two years he stated, "Well, they say that the laws are going to change by like August, I think…. If not, then maybe I can go to Mexico and get a…what's it called? Student visa. Maybe. I don't know." His immigration status after his mission will determine how he will proceed with his academic and work goals. If he is legal then he can get a good "office job", if he is undocumented he will have to work "in construction"; if he is legal he can apply for financial aid and other schools, "like Harvard"; if he is undocumented he is likely to work full time to pay for his school and attend school part-time. When asked what would change his goals beyond his immigration status, he states if he were to have a religious "awakening."

> Moroni: I think that in some respect I don't understand what I am or who I am, and I have not yet found that out. And so if I find out in real life that I enjoy very much to do a certain thing or that there is a need for a certain type of person around the world, then I would go for that.
>
> Interviewer: Even if that meant not pursuing an education?
>
> Moroni: Yeah.

While Moroni is concerned about his education translating into monetary rewards he is also and maybe more concerned about choosing a career that fulfills his religious convictions. At this point in his life he aspires to obtain a bachelors degree in architecture or agriculture and eventually a doctorate.

Chico is an undocumented resident. It was around the sixth grade that Chico became aware of his immigration status. His parents would tell him that if asked by someone what his nationality was to state he was a US citizen, "but [he] didn't deny to be Mexican." It was not until his junior year of high school that his immigration status became a real hindrance as he considered his career options. First, he was unable to take part in the pilot instruction to complete his high school magnet program. Second, he was unable to apply for federal financial aid to attend a four-year institution. Chico lowers his voice when he speaks about his immigration status and sadly admits that his "immigration status has placed a lot of barriers" when it comes to his education. He shares with some relief that he has a "good social security number" although he has not received a work permit. The "good social security number" has enabled him to successfully negotiate a legitimate driver's license and full-time employment. Other individuals in his circumstances, he says, have not been as fortunate and sometimes go to others states to get their driver's license. Even then individuals may be limited in the type of jobs they can get because often employers request state identifications.

Chico has a keen understanding of the national immigration debate and legislative bills introduced in Congress. In particular, he is familiar with the DREAM

Act[18] and was "really, really hoping it would happen" so he could attend college legally. At first he was optimistic about the possibility of benefiting from the DREAM Act, but now feels his immigration status will not change, at least not in the next five years. The only other way to become a legal resident would be to marry a US citizen but he "doesn't see marrying for the purpose of immigration." He has been told by individuals familiar with immigration laws "there's not much you can do, just wait it out." Going back to Mexico is not an option. Chico admits he only knows American schools and although he speaks Spanish fluently his primary language is English. When asked if he feels an allegiance to one country he quickly answers, "The US. Because I've lived here for so long that I feel that this is my home. Even though I'm from Mexico and I don't deny my heritage, I don't deny anything, I don't feel that Mexico is my home."

Tomas is also an undocumented immigrant, but unlike Moroni and Chico, he left and re-entered the US at different points in his life. Tomas' experience is also distinct because he spent considerable time living and going to school in Mexico. His recent experiences of life in Mexico frame his academic and life goals. For instance, while he may have been able to attend medical school in Mexico he sees greater social and economic returns in the US for a career in medicine. He is critical of the Mexican government and sees little economic and social mobility regardless of the amount of education an individual completes. He feels in the US he can have greater

---

[18] The DREAM Act would permit certain immigrant students who have grown up in the US to apply for temporary legal status and eventually obtain permanent status and become eligible for citizenship if they go to college or serve in the US military. The Act would also eliminate a federal provision that penalizes states that provide in-state tuition without regard to immigration status. See Chapter 2 "Latino Immigrant and Undocumented College Students" of this dissertation for additional information on the Dream Act.

opportunities despite his immigration status. Tomas and his family, like the other

male students in this group, are hopeful that immigration laws will change and allow

them to legally live and learn in the US. They all believe that the US should have

strict immigration laws, but should also allow model immigrants, such as themselves,

a legal pathway to residency and eventually citizenship.

Tomas admits he finds it difficult to connect with US-born Latinos (of

Mexican origin) because they treat recent immigrants different; US-born Latinos in

his view are more American than Mexican. He feels that US youth are much more

liberal than Mexican youth and consequently that influences their motivation to study.

Intervierer: ¿Allá como es?	What is it like over there?
Tomas: Allá, no se, se preocupan un poco más por sus estudios. Es que es más difícil que encuentren trabajo. No es más llamativo el trabajo y por eso estudian. No ganarían mucho en el trabajo y prefieren estudiar.	Over there, I don't know, they worry a little more about their studies. It is more difficult to find a job. It is not that attractive to work and that is why they study. They would not earn a lot of money and they prefer to study.

He feels that US-born Latinos have many educational doors open to them, but often

do not take advantage of these opportunities because they prefer to work and make

money. Tomas laments the fact that he and other undocumented immigrants do not

have the same opportunities, although he admits he has more opportunities in the US

than in his home country. He see issues of language and immigration status as

barriers he can eventually overcome. He has no intention of returning to Mexico and

sees his life in the US.

Financial Responsibilities and Work

Moroni works sporadically, but for the most part did not work when he attended high school or his first year of college. This decision, however, was related to his immigration reality. The summer before his freshman year of college Moroni went on a job interview.

> Yea, like today I went for a job interview and my friend was there too and they asked us for our social security card and you could see both of them together and mine was all fake and stuff and all worn and that made me feel me bad. And she was… the boss was really nice about it. And she said just come back when you have your papers and stuff. But I can't be like hiding my whole life.

Moroni knows he can easily get a job in construction or landscaping, but he also knows such jobs are physically exhaustive. His father has also discouraged him from obtaining physically draining jobs; rather he encourages Moroni to focus on his studies. This economic reality is always at the forefront since the entire family depends solely on the father's income. Moroni expressed a strong desire to work to help contribute to his family income, but his parents successfully persuaded him to focus on his studies and prepare for his upcoming LDS mission.

His first semester of college Chico worked full-time at a local car dealership where he ran errands, such as organizing cars and driving vehicles to lots. He was earning approximately $8.50 an hour. His primary reason for working was to save for college. Although he was awarded scholarships the monies only covered tuition. He has to pay the additional fees and books. Chico knows his parents can help him pay for college but would like to become financially independent and less of a financial burden, "I know my parents, my father, they'll be there to provide for me as much as they can, but I don't want to depend on them. I've already depended on them for 17

years. I know that I can count on them, but I want them to save up for themselves."

Further, he works to save for the coming years as state and future scholarships may be

uncertain due to his immigration status. His first semester he attended college in the

mornings and then went straight to work and got home around ten in the evening. Not

surprisingly, this left little time for homework and study time.

By his second semester he had a new job at a motorcycle store as an assistant

in the repair shop. Although the hourly pay was slightly less Chico was excited about

the hours (10 am to 7 pm) because he believed the new job would leave him more

time to study in the evening. By this point Chico was also helping his father pay the

utility bills and was repairing his father's motorcycle. He was saving little for college.

As a result he began a second part-time job as a sales associate for a financial group.

When asked what motivated him to get a second job Chico explains,

> What motivated me was…there's expenses. I mean there's a lot of things. I
> want to buy myself a bike [inaudible] I want to fix it. I want to help my dad
> with some expenses because he's paying, I don't know how much more than
> he used to. Right now I'm paying the phone bill, I'm paying the Internet, and
> sometimes at the end of the check I don't have that much.

Although he was less motivated about school he was hopeful his two jobs would help

him save money for college and develop a "game plan" to continue college.

Tomas did not work his first semester of college despite the fact that he did

not receive the state scholarship because of residency requirements[19]. His father paid

his tuition and books for the first year. An enormous economic sacrifice since the

family is solely dependent on the father's income. It was his father who insisted

---

[19] To be eligible for the state merit scholarship students must reside in the state at least two years prior
to graduation. Tomas' father had been claiming Tomas for at least five years in the state that made him
eligible. At the time of our interviews he was providing such evidence to become eligible for the
scholarship.

Tomas enroll regardless of the scholarship outcome. In spite of their economic status, Tomas followed his father's advice and did not work his first semester. By the second semester, however he began working at a fast food restaurant on the condition that he would work only on weekends. He was able to pay some of his educational expenses not covered by his scholarship, which he eventually was granted.

<p style="text-align:center">Moroni: Getting Ready for His Mission</p>

His first semster of college Moroni spent a significant amount of time preparing his application for his missionary appointment. The application process requires prospective missionaries to submit letters of recommendations, questionaire about religious education, physical and dental exams. Because few men from his Spanish-speaking ward have completed missions, Moroni went outside his ward to learn about missionaries' experiences.

For Moroni his participation in the LDS church provides him with skill-building opportunities that can be carried over to other aspects of his life. In particular the church's focus on young men preparing for a mission. In the LDS Church young men between the ages of 19 and 25 who meet minimum standards of worthiness[20] and preparation are encouraged to consider serving a two-year, full-time proselytizing mission.[21] In early May, Moroni received his mission call[22] to serve in

---

[20] Among the standards that a prospective missionary must demonstrate adherence to include regular attendance at church meetings, personal prayer, study of the Standard Works, adherence to the law of chastity, adherence to the Word of Wisdom, and payment of tithing. The Word of Wisdom is the common name of a section of the Doctrine and Covenants, a book that consists of what many LDS churches consider to be revelations from God; the Standard Works of the LDS Church consists of several books that constitute its open scriptural canon: The Holy Bible, Book of Mormon, LDS doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2007).

[21] In 2007, approximately 30% of all 19-year-old LDS men became Mormon missionaries; from LDS families that are active in the church, approximately 80-90% of 19-year-old men serve a mission (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2007).

Oklahoma, a state he has never visited. Prior to his appointment Moroni's focus revolved around three areas to prepare for his mission: getting ready financially, physically and spiritually.

The average yearly cost for an LDS mission is ten thousand dollars. Traditionally, families are responsible for securing missionary funds but in 1990 the LDS church developed a missionary fund to redistribute monies to missionaries who may need more or less assistance. Although his family has been contributing to the fund throughout the years Moroni will be heavily relying on the fund to help finance his two years of missionary work. Less than six months to his departure he had saved for only six months of his missionary expenses. In addition, Moroni was responsible for obtaining appropriate attire for his mission; ten white shirts, dark pants, ties, and "thick walking shoes". One weekend he and his family traveled to Utah to purchase his clothing and to visit the LDS temple.

Getting ready physically is another component that Moroni worked on prior to his departure. Specifically, missionaries walk or bike. Moroni usually rides his bike to school twice a week, traveling an average of sixty miles round trip. During other times he would participate in bike rides with church members, once taking a five-day bike trip in which he biked from four in the morning until dusk. These physical excursions typically involve a spiritual component as well.

> Moroni: Well…it [bike ride] started out just an activity for us to do. Then along the way we had like some spiritual experiences I guess. Like in one town called Oderville we stopped to have a testimony meeting and we all [shared] our testimonies and the three of us strong and stuff.
>
> Interviewer: What's a testimony meeting?

---

[22] After application to the church and the requisite approval, prospective missionaries receive a "call to serve" or an official notification of their location assignment.

Moroni: It's like when you take time to tell what you feel and what you believe in, and some people tell like a short story about what they-why they feel the way that they feel.

Prospective missionaries also attend temple[23] for the first time to receive their Endowment[24] if they have not already done so. Moroni received his Endowment a few weeks before he was scheduled to leave for his missionarly training. Prior to this rite of passage Moroni eagerly talked about attending temple and the importance of this ritual. Although Moroni would like to fulfill his mission abroad he is unable because of his immigration status, "I did want to go abroad. Everybody wants to go abroad. Everybody wants to learn a new language and get to see a new culture and stuff, but it wasn't an option for me." The LDS church is aware that he is undocumented and "have a special arrangement" between the government and active LDS members who are undocumented immigrants to stay in the country while they fulfill their missions thus decreasing some of the fear associated with deportation.

College-Related Experiences

The students in this group were involved in Latino student groups, yet for different reasons. For Moroni and Chico, it was a way to sustain their Latino/Mexican identity and connect to resources on campus; in addition for Chico it was a place where he felt he had a "political voice" on social issues. For Tomas, he was involved because he viewed it as a place where he could access resources for college success. Adjustment for these students also varied; Moroni appeared to have an easier time

---

[23] A temple differs from a church meetinghouse, which is used for weekly worship services.
[24] The Endowment is a gift of "power from on high" that has several meanings in various contexts of LDS theology. Regardless of its form, the Endowment is considered to be a heavenly gift (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2007).

transitioning and adjusting whereas Chico struggled and referred to college as a "loner place". Tomas had difficulties adjusting because of his limited English skills.

Involvement with Student Groups

Moroni's interaction with campus peers appears to be an extension of his church network. That is, when asked whom he interacts with on campus, he says, "he talks to two girls" whom he knows from church. Other interactions occur as a result of extracurricular activities on campus. Specifically, Moroni is a member of the Latino Association on campus and participates in fundraisers and regular meetings. Overall, Moroni initially shared he felt part of the campus community and did not feel isolated from the college culture. He used various campus spaces to study before, during and after class. He is familiar with the various student services offices and uses them as needed. While Moroni is aware of racial tensions on campus he did not feel he had experienced such tensions personally. Although by his second semester he admitted he seldom participated in class discussions because his peers often remarked his "ethnic comments were novel."

Chico is involved with student organizations on campus. Since his participation in a Latino pre-college program he has been involved with MEChA (Moviemento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan). In particular MEChA is a place where Chico feels his political views can be heard, supported and debated. In this way MEChA serves to legalize his experiences and his evolving identity as a college student. "I feel like I have a voice" and "If you are involved with MEChA people automatically have an assumption about you being politically active, very intelligent, [and one who] knows what happens around," are ways Chico describes his

involvement with MEChA. Chico's participation is unique because the organization does not exist on his campus but on the four-year university. Chico makes a special effort to be a part of the organization and attend the weekly meetings across town from the college he actually attends.

Chico is not involved in student groups on his community college campus nor does he spend time on campus other than taking classes. In fact, during his first semester between classes he would drive to the university (approximately 15 miles from the college) and "hang out at the student union." He feels the community college is a "loner place." And although he gets "very lonely" on campus Chico sees it as helpful, " I see it more as a positive because if I was more social there would be more distractions. So between classes I can do my homework, but if it were more social I'd probably be going out to eat and there would be many more distractions." Consequently he has not created a "close bond with students." When asked how the community college is different than the university he shares that the two-year college is more professional and students are older whereas the university is more social and younger.

Chico is motivated to be involved with the university Chicano student group for two primary reasons. First, he wants to be a part of a group that is vocal about social issues, especially as it pertains to his own experiences. In this way the group serves to validate his lived history and that of other individuals similarly positioned. Secondly, he is preparing himself to attend a research university by becoming a part of a student group and familiarizing himself with campus spaces, students, and faculty.

Tomas, like Chico was involved with MEChA. However, Tomas was involved for different reasons; he was not so much interested in finding a group to sustain his ethnic identity as much as a place were he could have access to resources for college success. While he was interested in the social agenda of the group it was clearly not the primary reason for his involvement. When the student organization changed its weekly meeting time to the evening, Tomas did not continue his involvement because his parents did not allow him out after dark.

Tomas was aware of other Latino student groups but did not participate much once he began his first semester of college. Instead, most of his time was spent with his girlfriend at the time. She is also a recent immigrant and attending college. He felt she did not have the support of her parents, so he went out of his way to help her with classes and familiarizing her with campus. He helped enroll her in four of the five classes he was taking, shared his class notes, and tutored her for tests. By the second semester, or after close to six months of courting, they broke up. He attributed their breakup to her leaving school to visit her home country for a few weeks. He was hurt and disappointed in her decision to leave after he had advised her to stay in school and postpone her trip.

Keeping Up with Coursework and Adjustment

Moroni shares that he seldom interacts with faculty in- or outside the classroom,

> Well, I try to pay attention in class. I try to get involved, try to answer the questions that she asks in my head…but sometimes I can't…I don't know how to say them, to phrase them properly. So most of the times I don't raise my hand or anything.

By the end of his first semester he admits that when he did speak up in class his comments were often perceived as novel and unique because of his ethnicity. There

were times when instructors initiated interaction, and asked Moroni to come to office hours. For instance, during his second semester Moroni's English instructor asked to see her regarding one assignment. He complained that "she doesn't understand my writing" style which is more creative than what was expected in a second semester English class. This interaction occurred after the fact that Moroni had sought out tutoring for English "because I wanted it to be a good paper." After his interaction with the English instructor it appeared that Moroni was discouraged to seek out future tutoring. Yet while Moroni's interactions with faculty are minimal he spends considerable time reflecting and writing his assignments regardless of the class. At one point he submitted some of his writing for consideration in a book and was invited to submit for the final publication. He decided not to have his work published because he was ambivalent about his identity as a writer, artist or poet and got a "weird feeling" about "other people thinking that it's good" and judging the quality of his writing.

Moroni feels the community college is a stepping-stone or holding place until he can become a legal resident and attend elsewhere (preferably a selective institution) to achieve his long-term academic goals of earning a doctorate. His experience was markedly different than Chico who had difficulty adjusting and balancing work and school.

Chico's first year outlook was optimistic while at the same time he was skeptical of the quality of professors he would encounter. For instance, when asked what his expectations were for his first semester Chico responded, "I think it's going to be a laid back environment where it's going to give me the option if I actually want

to give 110% in my class. I don't feel I'm going to be pressured." When probed who would pressure him, he shares, "By teachers. It's all going to be up to me. So I think it's going to be a laid back environment. I've heard that many professors talk to the board. The students won't receive much attention. I don't expect the best teachers." Chico did not have lofty expectations of his professors and believed his first year success (or failings) would be a result of his motivation and discipline. His college peers shared their experiences and described an environment "laid back" perhaps code for easy and professors who were uninterested in their students. Chico appeared to welcome his independence from teachers and parents who dictated his academic life in high school.

Chico, however, was not prepared for the isolation and "loneliness" he confronted during his first year. "College is a loner place," he shared when asked how he would describe his first year. Although many of his high school peers attended the college he felt he did not "really know anybody, everybody has a different schedule and we don't have time to hang out in the halls." What also made the setting a "lonely place" was the "professional environment" where the student population was older and whiter than his high school.

In the classroom race and ethnicity issues were often discussed, debated, and analyzed. Specifically issues of immigration reform and "problems" related to illegal immigration. In one example students viewed a documentary about illegal Mexican crossings and were asked to divide into groups to make a case for or against immigration. Understandably, Chico did not actively participate rather withdrew inward as a way to protect himself and his dignity. Chico describes how his group

149

"leaned more toward it's not a problem but it seems like most of the class was against it [immigration]."

>Interviewer: So how does that make you feel?

>Chico: It doesn't make me feel mad, angry or happy or anything because the only one getting affected is me. So I just listened to them and viewed it as that's their opinion. I can't hold it against them.

>Interviewer: What do you think at a personal level?

>Chico: It's bad because, I don't like it because a lot of times they have to sacrifice themselves they die. And sometimes they go through 4, 5, 6 days in crossing the desert and then when they get here it just gets worse. I don't like the way that is but then I wouldn't be able to stop it because the system is wrong. And I can't tell them "hey don't cross" because we eventually came too. It would be like I crossed but you can't cross.

While his peers discussed immigration in terms of it creating economic and education problems, Chico viewed immigration as a crisis because of the human toll on lives of those who cross. He went on to describe that the one person in his group who was most vocal against immigration was a Latina who felt her "family had followed the rules so others should." His feelings of loneliness coupled with some students' overt anti-immigrant sensibilities contributed to a difficult college adjustment and transition. In another class, students were asked to present an artist and their work's significance. Chico describes how he had to persuade the professor to allow him to present a Spanish-speaking artist. After some pleading the professor reluctantly agreed. By the end of his first semester Chico also had difficulty balancing full-time work with school. He struggled to complete his math class and barely earned a passing grade. By his second semester he did not attend class regularly because he had difficulty "getting up in the morning" and was asked by one of his professors to

drop the class. His goal was to retake courses he failed during the summer to get back on track.

Like Moroni, Tomas did not think his first year classes were difficult. When asked to reflect on his first year he explains, "*No pense que me iba ir tan bien mi primer año. Yo pense que iba ser mas dificil, pero no lo fue.''* [I didn't think I would do well my first year. I thought it was going to be more difficult, but it wasn't.] Like Chico, he did not have high expectations of his professors; he explains, "they're not bad but there're not that good either." Instead, Tomas felt the most difficult aspect of college was adjusting to his new surrounding, in particular connecting with peers and finding spaces on campus where he did not feel discriminated. At times, he attributed his feelings of isolation to his limited English skills and students and professors who sometimes were "intolerant" of others whose primary language was not English. He shares that he rarely spoke up in class for the same reason, and when topics of diversity and immigration were discussed felt "uncomfortable." Even in classes were there were other Latino students, Tomas felt they often sided with other American students instead of Latino immigrants. He tries to reassure himself by saying, "*Me digo, porque me siento asi, no debe de importar. Yo me quiero mejorar y estoy aqui para la escuela.*" [I tell myself, why do I feel that way, it should not matter. I want to improve myself and I am here for school.]

It is clear that at times Tomas does not feel part of the campus community. Yet he sees it as challenge he can overcome; he feels that while he has not adapted socially, the opportunity to attend a US college (and the potential long-term economic and social returns) outweighs the drawbacks of feeling isolated. By attending a

151

smaller two-year campus he also feels he can prepare himself socially to attend a larger university. He explains, *"Me siento fuera de lugar aquí, pero me sentiría mas fuera en una universidad. Me quiero acostumbrar al colegio primero y después ir a la universidad."* [I feel out of place here, but I would feel more out of place at the university. I want to get use to college first and then transfer.]

<div align="center">Cultural Resources</div>

The males in this group, like the females, draw from three central experiences or resources as they maneuver through their first year of college: (1) their sense of ethnic, racial, or regional identity, (2) narratives and *consejos* shared by family, and (3) relationships and networks. Their identities, like the females, is context driven yet always encompasses the role of ethnicity and race as contested within the larger US culture and society. The students in this group also see their parents as knowers and value their experiences and draw from these examples to make educational decisions. Their relationships and networks are often an expression of their identity and their interpretation of important narratives and *consejos* shared by significant individuals in their lives.

<div align="center">*Identity*</div>

Moroni's identity is primarily connected to two experiences: his Mormon religion and his Mexican ethnicity. The two intersect at times since his religious education and involvement have been largely in Spanish and with other Mormons of Mexican origin. He admits that religion is the "most important" part of his identity.

> I think that's the most important one of all. Like being Mormon, like I think it dictates in what I believe in basically. How I act, the people I hang out with. My political stance is pretty much based on my religion too. So I think that's the biggest part of my life.

<div align="center">152</div>

He was raised Mormon and his parents joined the church when he was one. Moroni also prefers to identify as a Mexican immigrant rather than Latino or Hispanic.

> Moroni: I don't like, immigrant is something I would use. But Hispanic and Latino I don't like those labels.
>
> Interviewer: Why not?
>
> Moroni: Cause I think there are people from a whole bunch of Hispanic that are from Guatemala. I don't [know] other countries. And they have their own culture like they have their own food and stuff like that. I don't think we can compare, even though we speak the same language I don't think we can compare to groups like that. I think it would be like saying that all Europeans are the same or something.

In his academic work, Moroni often draws upon his experiences of being raised Mexican and Mormon in the US. Topics for class papers and discussion often revolved around his religion, such as morality, mortality, and love, and his experiences growing up Mexican in the US, such as language use and Latinos in the US.

Chico is also vocal about his ethnic identity in educational settings as well as among his peers. Although, he rarely spoke Spanish in high school and was a part of the "Asian group" of students on campus. A turning point for him was his participation in a Latino pre-college leadership program geared to prepare Latino students for college. Chico describes himself as a "Latino Mexican American." He writes,

> Latino because I speak Spanish … Mexican because I was born in Mexico, my *familia* is Mexican, *teniendo sangre mexicana en mis venas* [I have Mexican blood in my veins], and I grew up in Mexico until I was 7 years old; and American because I speak English, I studied in American schools since 2nd grade now graduated from one, and grew up with the American culture.

Chico is involved in MEChA which shapes how he constructs his student and ethnic identity. Chico shares, "If you are involved with MEChA people automatically have

153

an assumption about you being politically active, very intelligent, knows what happens around." Chico further differentiates his view of ethnic identity by social class as he explains that he likes the "*fresa*" (strawberry) talk. Among Latino youth "*fresas*" are Latinos who are middle class and above and are described as "preppy" or mainstream. Often these individuals have an easier time transitioning and navigating mainstream institutions and settings (Moje & Martinez, 2007). Chico explains, "I don't know why, but I like the way certain Mexicans talk. I like change, the way I dress, the way I talk. I am constantly changing. When I heard them [other MEChA students] talk I said 'I'm going to try that.'" Like Moroni, Chico incorporates his sense of ethnic identity into his classroom learning and it is often a source of inspiration and motivation.

Tomas does not like to identify with Latino, Hispanic or even Mexican; rather he prefers to identify with the city he was born and raised, Guadalajara. He explains,

Me identifico con la ciudad en la que nací, en donde viví...Yo no me considero como parte de todo México, se me hace muy distinto. La manera de ser de la gente y la actitud y todo me gusta más de la ciudad donde vivo. Y porque las otras ciudades no me agradan, por eso me considero de mi ciudad.	I identify with the city in which I was born, where I was raised... I don't consider myself part of all of Mexico, I think it is very distinct. The way that people are and the attitude and I like everything more about the city where I lived. And because other cities do not please me, that's why I identify with my city.

Tomas admits that most of the time in educational spaces it is necessary for him to identify as Latino or Hispanic. Unlike Chico he does not necessarily look to student ethnic organizations to validate his ethnic or racial identity or experiences of growing up in the US. The fact that Tomas had the facility to enter and leave the US at different points in his life seems to play a significant role in how he interprets his

identity in the US.   In fact, he identifies more often as an international student in educational settings and does not seem conflicted about US assimilation.

Counterstories and Consejos

Moroni's father often shares stories about his involvement in a "communist group" and how he once had to hide from authorities because of his protests to "have running water" in underserved Mexican villages. Another time his father and friends (while in college) hijacked a bus to bring attention to their social justice causes. Moroni believes that his father "knows a lot" and has fun "discussing politics and religion with him." Both Moroni and his father are active in sharing narratives about their experiences with each other. Moroni illustrates as he notes that he has received an "American version" of history,

> He went to college and stuff so he knows a lot about history. He knows history but the way he was taught in Mexico, so that's another thing we discuss. The Mexican American war like I was taught the American version and he was taught the Mexican version. So I have fun discussing it. I don't know if he does, but we discuss it anyway.

Another form of sharing narratives and *consejos* is through music. Moroni's father often writes and sings *corridos*[25]. His father writes about love, relationships and famed lawbreakers or "nacrotraficantes".

> The ballads are about things that he, like soap operas, people loving each, other girlfriends...ah, there's one about a girl that likes her brother's friend and there's one about a guy who *es un nacrotraficante* [he is a drug dealer] and the police get his son and tells him that if he doesn't give up they'll kill his son and stuff. And he wrote one to my mom and one when my sister was born. I don't remember them...but. And he wrote one when they were ten years married. I read that one. I liked that one.

---

[25] A *corrido* is a Mexican ballad or folksong in the form of a narrative. Various themes are featured in Mexican corridos, and corrido lyrics are often old legends about a famed criminal or hero in the rural frontier areas. Some corridos may also be love stories. Contemporary corridos written within the past few decades feature much more modern themes (Hernández, 1999).

His fathers' *corridos* are often laden with moral lessons and *consejos* on disposition and persistence. In particular *consejos* about education are circulated often and directly. Not just the formal education but also *educación* (Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Villenas, 2001) which include manners, moral values, and rules of conduct at school and home. Moroni's father shares that it is his children's responsibility to obtain an American education and give back (*darle algo*) to the country that has given them so much.

Moroni's father: Ellos tienen la responsabilidad de salir adelante, de aprovechar lo que otros no tienen así que tiene que estudiar. La idea no es que sean… no es un obligación que saquen la máxima calificación, pero si es obligación, que tienen que hacer un esfuerzo de acuerdo a su nivel. Yo le digo a [Moroni] que haga el esfuerzo según su capacidad del esfuerzo que tiene que hacer que tiene que ponerle ganas porque tenemos un compromiso con este país de darle algo de lo que nos a dado.	They have the responsibility to succeed, to take advantage of what others do not have so they have to study. The idea is not that, it is not an obligation to get the maximum grades, but it is their obligation to make an effort in accordance with their ability. I tell [Moroni] to put forth the effort according to his ability, that he has to give it his all because we have a debt with this country to give something of what it has given us.

Moroni and his father are in agreement that they owe the US, despite the current political climate that positions undocumented immigrants (such as themselves) as "criminals" and undesirable. This fact does not disrupt the *consejos* that are shared and transmitted in Moroni's family.

Chico's parents have high expectations of him and communicate this through stories and narratives of their own lives. His mother completed a vocational career in Mexico and was a physical education teacher for seven years and then worked at an airline for about five years before moving to the US. Her carefully framed vocational diploma always hung in their home. She explains that she hopes her educational

156

achievements in Mexico will inspire her children to aim for higher academic goals in the US. Chico's mother often shares stories of her life in Mexico and how her own father held her to high expectations and standards. Chico's mother explains that as a middle class family in Mexico, women were also expected to prepare for a career. As a male, Chico has especially been made aware of the gender inequalities in society through his mother's life and stories. In fact, he attributes his feminist awareness and identity to her and tells the following religious story to illustrate the importance of women,

> Well she told me the story that Eve was not made up of Adam's feet to get stepped over. She wasn't made out of his skull to be put over. She was made out of his rib cage, you know, close to the heart. An essential part of the body. Below the shoulder for protection but right next to the heart for love. So that's one of the things that stuck to me.

Chico speaks movingly with his peers and in his classroom assignments about the important role of strong women in his life. For instance, in an English assignment he writes about Lourdes[26], a Chicana professor.

> [Lourdes] a Chicano/Chicana professor at [the university], has been someone I've looked up to for close to three years now. [Lourdes] is politically conscious, a feminist, a Chicana, and a very dear friend of mine. When a question swims in my conscience [sic], she always knows the exact words to better help me understand. Lourdes is my unofficial Persontor (a feminist term derived from mentor used by will), whom I can look up to no matter the question or subject.

Lourdes was also an unofficial advisor to Latino student groups that Chico was involved.

Chico also explains how his father has taught him to be compassionate and loving toward himself and others, this despite his father's difficult and sometimes violent relationship with his own father in Mexico. "It's amazing to me," says Chico,

---

[26] Pseudonym.

157

"he comes from a life which he is able to step out. He's given me a very different life than his." Like Moroni, Chico's parents offer *consejos* on how to succeed and point to the opportunities afforded to them in the US, yet they are critical of the current political environ, especially related to immigration reform.

Like Moroni and Chico, Tomas' father plays an important role in his life and shares stories and *consejos* on life and achieving his goals. In particular, Tomas' father often pushes him to finish what he starts and not to leave things at mid point.

Interviewer: ¿Que clase de consejos te da?	What type of advice does he give you?
Tomas: Que siga adelante, que termine la escuela, que no deje las cosas a la mitad. Que no vaya a haber algo, por ejemplo que me enamore, que haga que deje las cosas a la mitad. Que siempre siga adelante y que después que termine todo voy a ver el fruto de las cosas y voy a estar libre para poder [realizar mis metas.]	To push forward, to finish school, not to leave things at mid point. That I am not distracted, for example if I fall in love, that I would leave things at mid point. To always push forward and when I finish I will see the fruits of my efforts and I will be free [to achieve my goals].

Like Chico's father, Tomas' father grew up under very difficult circumstances without much adult supervision or encouragement, yet he was able to translate his obstacles into lessons on how to raise his own family. Consequently, intelligence in his family is not only measured in terms of academic achievement but in how well one is able to take care of his family. That is, how resourceful a person can be to sustain a strong family unit. In Tomas' view, his father's life in the US is an example of endurance and persistence in the face of significant economic and social obstacles. Tomas translates these examples and advise into educational drive and feels it is possible to succeed despite his language and immigration hurdles.

158

Relationships and Networks

Moroni's central relationships and networks are connected to the Mormon Church. In fact, it was a brother from church who encouraged his father to immigrate to the US over ten years ago. And it was local church members, once in the US, who helped the family transition and adjust to their new environment and culture. Moroni's family relied on other Latino members of the Mormon Church as a resource to immigrate and transition to the US. Moroni's father credits the Mormon Church for teaching him and his family how to be "good citizens" from volunteering with the Boys Scouts and donating to blood banks to eating healthy as a family.

Moroni's relationships and networks in and outside of college are always somehow connected to his religion. In the past, his church networks and relationships were with predominately Latino individuals, this despite the fact that the majority of church members are white. But after he was "invited" to complete a mission this changed. Moroni acknowledges that only a few members in his church ward go on to college and fewer go on to serve church missions because of the monetary commitment and loss of wages. The fact that Moroni and his family made the decision (and sacrifice) for him to go on a mission has exposed him to non-Latino networks and relationships with high-ranking (white) church leaders and other members. As a result Moroni was invited to attend other meetings and presentations outside of his regular church ward attendance where he was exposed and encouraged to consider a variety of career options. For instance, right before leaving for his mission he considered other majors as a result of a church presentation.

> Moroni: I wanted to major in landscape architecture, but now I want to see what I can do in agriculture.

Interviewer: So a four year degree in agriculture.

Moroni: Mm-hmm. And it'd be cool too if I could get a doctorate degree.

Interviewer: How did you become exposed to what opportunities are available in that area?

Moroni: Well, I've always been interested in agriculture, and my dad is an agricultural engineer…and in April I [attended] the LDS General Conference and somebody talked about the importance of education and stuff, and mentioned some things about agriculture.

Interviewer: Now tell me about this, what meeting was it?

Moroni: LDS General Conference. Every six months we have a conference where the prophets speak, and the apostles speak, and we can…they talk about expressing LDS [inaudible] world issues.

Interviewer: So at this last General Conference they talked about a career in agriculture, so that prompted your interest again in the field?

Moroni: Yeah.

Interviewer: What did they say?

Moroni: He was talking about the importance of educated people in the world, and that we need to educate ourselves and [inaudible].

Interviewer: So what did they say about the field itself?

Moroni: The field itself, he just mentioned it briefly. He just said how important it was. He mentioned it as one of the options that we had.

The fact that he was also "called" to be a missionary appears to be the beginning of a new circle of network and relationships exclusively with other Mormon men. Before departing Moroni was excited to receive letters from his mission president who will likely play a significant role in the next two years of his life. Because few men in his Spanish-speaking ward go on missions he has received more attention than other young missionaries preparing to leave. He admits feeling a sense of pride and responsibility to represent not only his family but his Latino ward too. Moroni's experience with the Mormon church appears to encompass two spheres of networks

160

and relationships; on the one hand other Latino members (whom they regularly attend church with) provide a sense of affirmation in terms of their immigrant experiences on a day-to-day basis while non-Latino members (mostly white) provide a window to the US mainstream culture. Moroni appears to draw from both of these networks and relationships as he negotiates his educational settings and develops his life and academic goals.

Like Moroni, Chico's central relationships and networks are an extension of his identity. His first year other students involved in the Chicano group were a part of his everyday life. He attended weekly meeting at the university, volunteered for planned activities, demonstrated for social justice issues and went out with them socially. In addition to these individuals, there were faculty and administrators who served as formal and informal advisors to the group. Other Chicano/Latino professors and administrators provided a compass to mapping campus resources and college life. Chico knew them on a first name basis and often spent time with them outside the classroom and in social settings. At the community college Chico also knew Latino academic advisors whom he meet his senior year of high school through his participation in the Latino pre-college leadership program.

Outside of campus life Chico looks to his older sister who "oriented" him during his senior year of high school and introduced him to others who were in college and could provide guidance and motivation. Yet, when Chico began to struggle with his class attendance and relationships with professors he did not seek help from his peers, advisors, nor family.

Tomas' network of support primarily includes his family and other Latino immigrant students. In particular, his parents play an important role in grounding his US educational experiences, including his first year of college. For instance, although it was difficult for him to adjust to college socially he interprets such isolation from a broader societal perspective of living in the US and feels this experience reflects the isolation many immigrants experience as a result of being in a new country and learning a new culture. As a result a strong family unit is critical to his social survival. Other immigrant Latino students also serve as an extension of his support network and often provide encouragement during difficult times. One particular female friend serves as a sounding board for Tomas when it comes to academic issues. His friend, a former high school mate, is also a college student at the same campus and often checks in on him.

Tomas often seeks the advise of a campus academic counselor who is Latino. He has developed a friendship and he will often drop in "just to talk." Tomas first met the academic counselor at the Latino pre-college leadership program and has kept in touch with him. At one point Tomas shares how he was considering another career but his counselor encouraged him to stick to a science related degree.

Cultural Knowledge

For Moroni, Chico, and Tomas their life experiences and family stories provide them a filter by which to position themselves and their broader educational goals. In particular, their parents often shared knowledge of social inequalities through stories, *consejos*, and other cultural modes of communication (such as *corridos*) that in turn this group of students drew from as they made postsecondary

decisions their first year of college. In addition, they drew on their bilingual and bicultural skills in educational settings as a way to validate their ways of knowing.

Knowledge of Social Inequalities

Moroni's father shares stories of social unrest in Mexico and how his socialist ideals often got him in trouble the law. Stories of social justice and the role of the people were a common theme. In fact, his father sees leaving Mexico to the US as an act of resistance against the oppressive Mexican government and unequal opportunities. His father explains that while educational opportunities may exist in Mexico, economic equality is illusive.

Moroni's father: Tenemos oportunidad en México de estudiar, pero no tenemos igualdad para ejercer la profesión como en Estados Unidos.	We have the opportunity to study in Mexico but we do not have the equality to exercise that profession like in the US.

Moroni and his family recognize there inequities exist in the US, but they constantly compare social and economic injustice with that of Mexico and feel the US is one step closer to achieving (economic) equity than Mexico. For instance, Moroni's father shares that even though he has a college degree in Mexico he was unable to support his family on his income, which was equivalent to fifteen dollars a week. It was this "*necesidad*" (necessity) and "*la hambre*" (hunger) that forced the family to leave Mexico. Consequently, Moroni is very critical of the Mexican system but feels a strong "responsibility" to "to got back and help people" in Mexico.

Moroni: I don't want, I feel I have a responsibility to go back and help people. I think there's a lot of bad things going on [in Mexico]. If more Mexicans were to go back from the US things would change.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example?

Moroni: Like the way the police behaves, politicians. The more people who live in the US, when they go to Mexico it's like taking US to Mexico. There

163

are some principals and values that apply to all countries, like working with transparency, when government accounts for what it does.

While Moroni recognizes there are inequalities in the US, he feels these are barriers he can overcome through persistence and resilience. Even with the ambiguity of his immigration status, Moroni does not "blame" the US for wanting to protect its borders; instead hopes "good citizens" such as him are eventually rewarded through legal residency. Moroni does not see himself as a victim of such circumstance; rather he sees himself as someone who can fix social ills by putting to use his American education here and in Mexico.

Chico's ethnic identity and immigrant experiences are sources of inspiration. But unlike Moroni, Chico is very critical of the US and the xenophobic culture. Chico's mother is a central character in teaching him how race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation injustices intersect at various levels within social institutions. She pushes him to be analytical about accepted narratives whether in educational spaces or popular culture and media. Chico's awareness of social inequalities found there way into his classroom assignments and he often drew from these experiences.

Like Moroni, Tomas is critical of the Mexican government. But unlike Moroni who has not lived in Mexico for some time, Tomas draws on his recent life in Mexico and can speak to specific events that led him to the US. For instance, Tomas and his family does not feel that Mexico has given them anything. His father often comments that Mexico did not allow them to improve their lives and instead pushed them out. In the US, they have embraced new opportunities in spite of their undocumented status. Tomas is not oblivious to the inequalities in the US and almost on a daily basis he has to conceal his identity in certain settings, and he knows there

are groups of people who are violently opposed to his existence in the US. This may explain why Tomas' parents are adamant about their children not being out after dark. Interestingly, they are more critical of US-born Latinos when it comes to discrimination related to language and immigration status and feel US Latinos should show more compassion and understanding toward undocumented immigrants. Like the other two males in this group, Tomas often interpret these experiences are sources of motivation and perseverance.

Bilingual and Bicultural Skills

Moroni draws from his bilingual and bicultural skills in educational settings to help him achieve his academic goals and to help his family navigate American mainstream culture. In college he joined Latino student groups to sustain his Mexican identity. In class assignments he often and intentionally draws from his language and cultural knowledge as a way to make sense of his assignments and new theoretical knowledge. For instance, based on his bilingual experiences he was motivated to research the role of language acquisition in early childhood development for one of his courses. He sees his knowledge of multiple languages and his Mexican culture as a strength he can use to have a deeper understanding of his courses and themes covered.

At home Moroni serves as a language and cultural interpreter for his parents on a variety of school, legal and religious issues. Ironically, Moroni's bilingual and bicultural skills at times isolate his parents. For instance, Moroni's father comments that his children's (English) language and American culture acquisition has left them behind (*nos quedamos atras*).

> Moroni's father: Ya ellos nos cargan porque nosotros nos quedamos atrás por el idioma, por los estudios, porque se nos empolvaron los estudios.
>
> Now they carry us because we stayed behind because of the language, the studies, or because our studies became dusty.

This reversal of roles often places a higher level of responsibility on Moroni as his family depends on him especially when it comes to immigration issues. Another site where bilingual and bicultural skills are reinforced is his church ward.

Moroni's family attends a Spanish-speaking Mormon ward. Spanish literature, talk, and cultural practices dominate and consequently Moroni often associates Spanish-use with his religion and home. He describes how he can code-switch between English and Spanish for his religious education but prefers Spanish.

> Moroni: We are allowed to have like three books, and those are Loyal to the Faith is one of them, *Jesus San Cristo*, and the other one is *Nuestro Legado*, Our Legacy in English. And one of them talks about the principle that we believe in, the other one talks about Christ, and the other one talks about the history of the church.
>
> Interviewer: So these are the only three books you can take with you and read during the two years.
>
> Moroni: Yeah.
>
> Interviewer: And you mentioned them in Spanish, will you be reading them in Spanish or English?
>
> Moroni: Well, I have them in Spanish, so I think I'm going to take the Spanish ones. And if my companion has them in English, then it's Ok, like I can switch back and forth.
>
> Interviewer: Do you feel comfortable reading one language more than the other?
>
> Moroni: Well, no. I'm fine with both. I guess it'd be hard for me in English, because I spend all my church time in Spanish. It's like when you're learning, or after you've already learned English, it's still hard to remember words like kitchen or something that you only use at home in Spanish.

Just as Moroni can "code switch" with two languages, he can go back and forth culturally depending on his surroundings. He has been socialized to be bicultural since arriving in the US, negotiating two languages and two cultures.

Chico also draws from his bilingual and bicultural skills in educational settings. Although he did not speak Spanish in high school, he finds himself often speaking Spanish in college and looking for opportunities to present his Latino/Chicano culture in his assignments. Although he felt some professor were less an enthusiastic about this. In one example he chose to discuss a Latino artist, Gerardo Mejia and was met with resistance from the professor.

> I did a song called *Sueña* [Dream]. It's really cool. He [the artist] is talking to a younger person, telling them not to give into everybody's negative influence and just believe, keep on going. That song is very powerful and that's why I chose it. And it's in Spanish. At first I asked him [the professor] if I could do a song. And he said it would be best in English and then I told him it's a very good message and I'd like to present it. I will translate it. At first he was skeptical, he was saying "No" because he said that everybody else won't be able to feel the power. And then I was telling him, "if I translated it and people actually read it the message will get through no matter what." And so I did do the presentation. The whole time he was skeptical and from me feeling his doubt, it just kind of motivated me. And my two friends said, "you know you should just do a song in English *para que no estés peleando con el* [so you won't be fighting with him]." But I was, "No." It just motivated me so much that that was the best presentation that I've done.

Although Chico was discouraged from presenting his chosen artist, he insisted and prevailed. The artist, Gerardo Mejia, is an Ecuadorian American rapper turned recording executive. He is known for his *regeton* (Spanish hip hop, rap) style music. Similar to Moroni, Chico does not see his language and cultural knowledge in conflict with his educational goals and when allowed draws from these resources in classroom and campus settings.

Tomas prefers to speak Spanish and is often insecure about his English skills in educational spaces. Unlike Moroni and Chico who were raised in the US, Tomas' early education was in Mexico and feels he was prepared better than his American peers in math and science subjects. Consequently, he believes learning English is the most important aspect of his American education. At the same time Tomas filters his course and campus experiences through his recent immigrant understanding and sees his language and cultural knowledge as resources to achieve his academic goals. In one example he was asked by an American student to tutor him in Spanish; Tomas was able to use his Spanish in educational spaces as well as practice his English skills with a native speaker. At home, like Moroni, Tomas' family depends on him to translate, linguistically and culturally, different aspects of American culture and language.

<div align="center">Summary of Findings</div>

Latino (males) high school graduation and higher education attendance are much lower when compared to their female counterparts. My findings in this chapter help explain what cultural and structural experiences shaped the educational trajectory of this particular group of males and led them to graduate high school and attend college. Similar to their female counterparts in the previous chapter, parental support and encouragement were key to the males academic success, but unlike the females the fathers appear to have a central role in shaping their son's goals. In all the cases, the students spoke of their fathers' commitment to helping them get through school and later college. They strongly discouraged their sons from working outside of home despite the family's limited income. Like the females, the students in

this chapter graduated from selective vocational programs and early in their education were identified by teachers and counselors as students who exhibited academic potential.

The males in this chapter, unlike the females, had limited college options because of current (immigration) policy. My findings indicate that this policy obstacle alone shaped several factors related to their postsecondary experience and decisions. Their immigrant status dictated what colleges they could attend, what financing options were available and careers they could pursue. The students were hopeful immigration policy would change and they could become "legal" but their postsecondary goals and decisions were often modified depending on their perception of the likelihood for immigration reform.

On campus the males, like the females, faced a racially hostile environment and sought out counter spaces on and off campus. My findings support research that posits student ethnic groups can help students of color adapt to college life (Buriel, 1980; Guiffrida, 2003). For this particular group of students (two males in this chapter and one female in the previous chapter) their religion mitigated some of the obstacles faced on campus. Additional research is warranted on the role of religion and Latino college students. In this chapter I identified and discussed two pivotal factors that shaped postsecondary decisions for these students: current immigration policy and religious commitment. Chico attributed his modification of college goals to his uncertain immigrant status and Moroni left the system all together to complete a church mission. Tomas was the only student in this group who did not modify his goals and planned to continue college full-time.

In this chapter, I also discussed the cultural resources and knowledge this particular group of students drew from as they confronted challenges and assimilated new classroom learning. My findings posit that first year college survival for his group of students was a function of many factors, including connecting to other Latino peers and campus personnel, finding counter spaces were they felt they "belonged" and cultural knowledge are circulated and validated.

The next chapter will compare and contrast all six cases, looking for similarities and differences among the students. The final chapter will offer conclusions based on the cross-case analysis, as well as a review the relevance of the conceptual framework used, implications for policy, limitations, and productive areas for future research based on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 8.

CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

In Chapters 6 and 7, I discuss commonalities and differences within the two groups. In this chapter, I begin by summarizing the postsecondary decisions for the six students. Then I bring together all the cases and discuss pivotal findings related to the students' pre-college experiences, environmental elements, first year of college experience, and their interpretation of cultural resources and knowledge. I highlight how these constructs informed the students' postsecondary decisions. My findings posit that all the constructs were significant; most notably that first year campus experience (e.g., facing racially hostile campus, interactions) and environmental factors (e.g., caring for family members, concern over finances, immigration policy) mediated the students' postsecondary decisions. Further, cultural resources and knowledge offered a lens from which to interpret their goals and challenges as well as examine the ways these resources mitigate some of the obstacles they confronted on campus and in the classroom. Finally, in this chapter I provide a summary of the cross cases and examine the constructs as outlined in the Conceptual Framework to evaluate their relevance to the students' experiences in this study.

Postsecondary Decisions for the Six Students

The students in this study persisted from semester one to semester two of their first year of college and had intentions of continuing their college goals, either by

enrolling in year two or temporarily departing and returning at a later time. Their decisions were influenced by a myriad of issues related to material, cultural and structural circumstances. Three students (Elsie, Lissette, and Tomas) were certain they would enroll full-time or persist full-time to their second year. Two students (Valerie and Chico) did not have intentions of attending college full-time their second year. To be sure, Valerie was *not* failing her courses rather she was unsatisfied with her grades. Chico stopped attending a half of his classes his second year and faced material and policy obstacles that ultimately led him to modify his postsecondary plans. The third student, Moroni, committed to completing a two-year mission for his church and consequently departed the system all together. He had a strong desire to return and pursue his college goals after completing his mission.

<center>Pivotal Pre-College Experiences on Students'
Postsecondary Goals and Commitments</center>

In Figure 2, I highlight three pre-college constructs that were salient for the students in my study: (1) early parental involvement, (2) early education engagement with schoolwork and school (institutional) agents, and (3) involvement in college-focused programs in high school and within the community.

In five of the six cases the student was raised in a two-parent household until at least junior high school; Lissette was raised by a single mother and Chico and Elsie's parents divorced once in they were in high school. Regardless of the family structure in all the cases students were encouraged from a very young age to do well academically and attend college. A commonality was the expectation of "good grades" and "good behavior" in school. Early in their children's education parents helped with homework and were involved by attending open house, going on field

<center>172</center>

trips, or helping in the classroom. But as the students moved through upper grades parents felt less knowledgeable with homework and less empowered to stay connected with schools. Issues of language differences, cultural insensitivity, and material circumstances were often barriers that further isolated parents from their children's education. Moroni's father poignantly states, "*nos dejaron atras* [they left us behind]." The parents' focus instead turned to sharing virtues and *consejos* on persistence, disposition and motivation (López & Vázquez, 2006). School engagement for this group of parents took forms often not recognized by schools and teachers, yet all the students expressed their parents continued to be engaged in their education even when they were not visible in educational spaces (Perez Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005).

Figure 2: Pivotal Pre-College Experiences for Latina/o Students
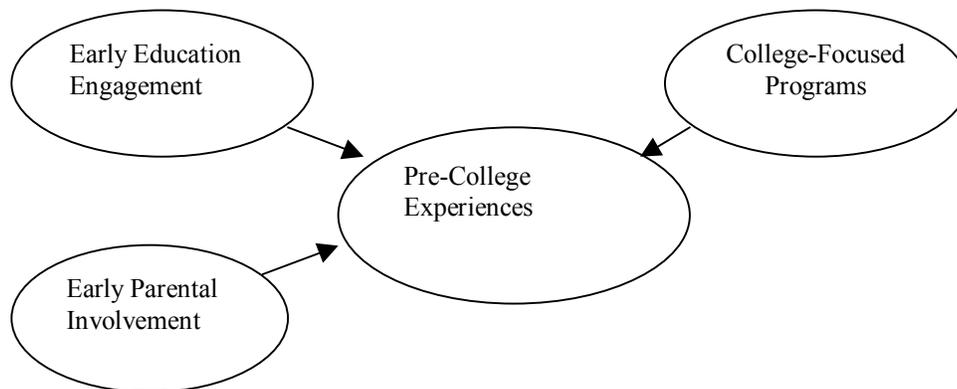
For the males, the support from their father seemed to be very important and they discouraged their sons from working in order to focus on their studies in high school. All the males appeared to have a strong relationship with their fathers and often described them as "caring", "compassionate", and "intelligent" regardless of their formal educational attainment. The same pattern was found among the females

in the study, with the mothers acting as the main character who encouraged them to do well in school and strive for high academic goals.

In all the cases the students in my study considered themselves good students early in their education and were encouraged by teachers. All attended selective public high school programs (magnet or vocational-focused). Valerie and Elsie attended predominately white, middle-class high schools while Lissette attended a predominately minority school, but she was a minority in the magnet program. All the females took advanced placement or honors courses in high school. All the students also received public and private scholarships for college. Moroni was the only student who did not use his state-merit scholarship as a way to prove he was not a financial liability to the state.

A direct result of taking college-bound high school courses was the exposure to institutional agents who guided them as they began to consider college degrees. Stanton-Salazar (1997) posits that the student who exhibits the proper motivational disposition will influence the chances that institutional agents (such as teachers and counselors) will identify the student as having talent thus providing the encouragement and moral support to develop high expectations. Stanton-Salazar and Dornbush (1995) suggest "that supportive ties with institutional agents represent a necessary condition for engagement and advancement in the educational system and, ultimately, for success in the occupational structures" (p. 117). For students in my study, teachers and counselors instilled high academic expectations and positioned them to take part in additional enrichment programs to prepare them for college, such as shadowing programs, leadership opportunities, career fairs and financial aid

workshops. Interestingly, all viewed their academic success primarily a function of hard work and discipline. Intelligence, therefore, was viewed not as something innate but a skill that was developed and practiced. In particular, Valerie spoke poignantly about her learning difficulties early on and how she overcame such difficulties with her mother's help.

The females in my study were much more intentional about preparing for college than the males. This group of students prepared for college by taking rigorous courses, surrounding themselves with academically talented students and participating in extracurricular activities to build their academic portfolio. An example was the intentional decision to surround themselves with "goal-oriented" or "white-washed" peers so they could learn how to move through achievement space (Gee, 2000). As a form of cultural capital, Gee suggests that teens accrue skills, attributes, attitudes, and achievements as capital as they build their portfolio to compete in educational spaces. Gee describes teenagers of the new millennium as a "portfolio generation" because from early childhood they begin to engage and chronicle their learning and extracurricular activities in order to be competitive in the new, fast capitalist economy. In Gee's view, the new capitalist economy is no longer defined by fixed qualities such as intelligence or qualifications rather by the capacity to compete and thrive on new and evolving experiences, such as those obtained through extracurricular activities. Valerie and Elsie surrounded themselves primarily with white peers, while Lissette severed ties with friends who were not goal-oriented. The exception among the males was Chico who was a part of the "Asian" crowd but did not necessarily connect these relationships with his academic success or goals.

The students also attended a Latino pre-college leadership program for Latino community youth. They spoke passionately about their experience in this five-day program which encourages them to aspire for high postsecondary goals, promotes ethnic and racial history and pride, and instills a sense of community commitment. The students maintained contact with Latino peers who attended the program and adult facilitators and mentors who help organize workshops and presentations.

<div align="center">

Pivotal Environmental Elements on Students' Postsecondary
Degree Goals and Commitments

</div>

My study found there were at least three central Environmental Elements that appear to shape the students degree goals: (1) family responsibilities, (2) concern over finances, (3) and immigrant experiences (Figure 3). In Table 3, I demonstrate religion was also a significant theme for at least half of the students (Elsie, Moroni, and Tomas). Students modified or stayed on track with their degree goals depending on their level of concern.

Figure 3: Pivotal Environmental Elements for Latina/o Students
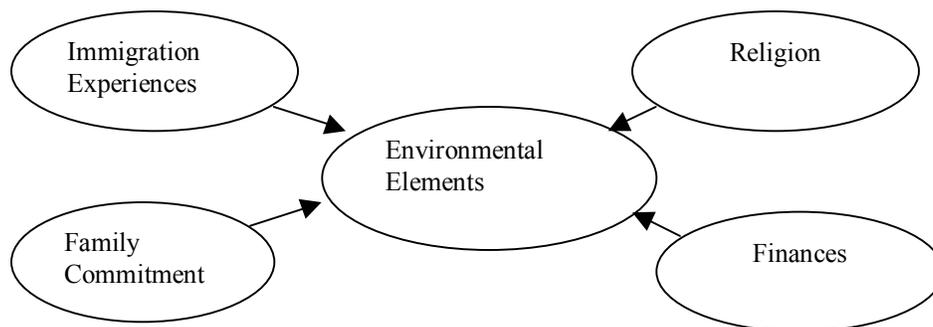
Family responsibilities are defined as taking care of other family members. All the females took care of younger siblings. I qualitatively evaluated their level of involvement from high to low; a high level of involvement included taking care of siblings on a daily basis (picking up from school, cooking), a moderate level of involvement included taking care of siblings occasionally or no more than three days a week, and finally a low level included taking care of siblings no more than a couple of days a week. These family responsibilities were often positively interpreted as a way to contribute to family stability and were a source of inspiration.

Table 3. Environmental Elements and Degree Goals after First Year of College

Case	Family Responsibilities	Concern over Finances	Religion Involvement	Concern over Immigration Status	Degree Goals after 1st Year of College
Valerie	High	High	Low	Low	**Modified**
Lissette	Low	Low	Low	Low	**Stable**
Elsie	Moderate	Moderate	High	Low	**Stable**
Moroni	Low	Low	High	Moderate	**Modified**
Chico	Low	High	Low	High	**Modified**
Tomas	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	**Stable**

Valerie had a high level of responsibility and took on a parental role with her brother. She would spend hours tutoring him, was the contact person at his school for any issues related to him, cooked for the entire family and cleaned their home. Elsie was also responsible for a younger sibling but this mostly consisted of picking her up from school a few times during the week and at times helping with homework.

Lissette had the lowest level of responsibly with occasionally providing help with homework and seldom picked her brothers up from school. These differences may have been the function of several factors. For instance, Lissette's siblings were older than Valerie and Elsie's and therefore required less supervision and time. However, Lissette was also the only student who was raised by a single parent and I would have expected as the eldest she would have taken on a parental role with her brothers. Lissette's mother appeared to maintain a strong level of involvement in all her children's day-to-day activities despite the fact that she sometimes worked two jobs to make ends meet. It is difficult to conclude that this factor alone contributed to Lissette's low level of family responsibility or if other factors, such as maturity level, family structure and neighborhood conditions, played a more significant role. Moroni and Tomas had younger siblings but were not responsible for their care. Both had mothers who stayed at home, consequently their family responsibilities often included home chores. Chico had an older sister and no younger siblings.

Closely connected to family responsibilities was concern over finances, either to help contribute to family income or to self-fund their college education. Again, the level of concern ranged from high (a student clearly drew a link between their concern over family finances and their ability to attend college), moderate (a student had concerns over family finances but felt they may be able to finance their education), and low (the student had concerns but was confident she or he would be able to pay for college). Two students, Valerie and Chico had a high level of concern over their family's finances and their ability to pay for college, despite the fact that they initially received a state scholarship. Elsie had a moderate level of concern after

she had to draw from her college savings to help her mother pay for attorney fees to save her credit after her parents divorce. Lissette, Moroni, and Tomas had a low level of concern about their ability to finance their education. Although all were state scholarship recipients, Valerie, Chico, and Tomas had concerns about maintaining eligibility. For Chico and Tomas is was related to their immigrant status. Moroni declined his state scholarship.

Only the females in the study were able to apply for federal financial aid yet their families did not have a clear understanding of how financial aid worked and were fearful of owning the government money. Lissette was the only one who applied and accepted federal financial aid. Elsie and Valerie relied exclusively on state and private scholarships to fund their education. Recent research highlights the significant drawbacks and missed postsecondary opportunities because students and their families do not have a thorough understanding of the role of federal financial aid (Venegas, 2007). For Valerie this was especially relevant since she eventually become ineligible for the state scholarship and relied on her parent's credit cards to fund her college tuition and books. This fact added to her heightened concerns over her family's finances and their ability to fund her education. Eventually, Valerie entered the workforce to "bring down [her parents] credit card balances" which had been used for college books and fees.

For three of the students (Elsie, Moroni, and Tomas) religion was a central environmental factor that shaped their degree goals. Their level of involvement ranged from low to high. Elsie and Moroni, both members of the Mormon church, had high levels of church involvement and often spent at least three to four days a

179

week involved in some church activity. Elsie was willing to modify her academic goals or leave college if she married and Moroni temporary halted his postsecondary goals for two years in order to fulfill his Mormon mission.   Tomas' involvement was moderate and maintained a strong connection to his church but did not attend activities outside of regular service. He admitted he intentionally began to distance himself from church his first semester because more of his time was focused on college courses.

A third pivotal environmental element, and the most salient for the males, was their immigrant status. The level of concern was low (not concerned it would affect their education), moderate (at times concerned it may affect their college goals, but felt they could pursue their goals in another country if need be), or high (draws clear links between precarious immigrant status and degree goals). Chico was the only student who had a high level of concern over his immigrant status as it related to his educational goals, whereas Moroni and Tomas had moderate levels of concern. Whether through first-hand account or that of their parents all the students bear witness to an immigration experience. For instance, Valerie and Lissette are US born but their parents' emigration stories of entering undocumented provide meaning and a sense of coherence to important life experiences, such as their education (Falicov, 2002). As expected, their level of concern was low as for Elsie who is a permanent resident.

My analysis of environmental elements illuminated the reasons why these students may have modified their educational goals; all distinct and related to their particular circumstances and contexts. By the end of their first year of college, three

students (Valerie, Chico, and Moroni) had modified their degree goals. Valerie and Chico both had a high level of concern over their family's finances compared to the other students.

Valerie's decision was heavily based on concerns over for her family finances. Even with a multi-year state scholarship, which covered close to 75% of all costs, Valerie was consumed with worry about how her family would pay for the remainder. Not having understood how federal financial aid works, she declined all grants and loans. Valerie, when compared to the other students, also had the highest level of family responsibility; she was involved with her younger brother's day-to-day care and his school activities. She eventually reasoned that leaving the research university to attend a two-year college closer to her home was a better choice because she took care of her brother and could save on transportation costs. However, the decision to attend a two-year college may significantly increase the time to completion or decrease the likelihood of achieving her ultimate degree goal.

Chico was also concerned about his family's finances and because he is undocumented he could not apply for federal financial aid. In addition, he was concerned about the stability of his state scholarship. He was able to obtain a "good social security card" and a legitimate driver's license which opened up new employment opportunities. Ironically, this fact may have contributed to his modifying his semester goals since his priority was on getting a "better job" and was often in transition or looking for that next job. Chico, when compared to the other students, had the highest level of concern over his immigrant status. It appeared that the national anti-immigrant sentiment and the unlikelihood of immigration reform played

a significant role in Chico's college goals and his reasoning for modifying his short- and long-term academic plans.

Moroni, on the other hand intentionally and purposefully departed the postsecondary system for two years to complete his Mormon mission. Moroni and Elsie both were very involved in their religion, however missions for women are voluntary. Moroni is undocumented and his level of hopefulness fluctuated depending on the national narrative and his parent's optimism. Like Chico, Moroni has been in the US since he was a child and acknowledged repatriating would be difficult but not impossible. His strong commitment to his faith may have mitigated the stress and uncertainty that came with his precarious immigrant status. Perhaps for this reason he remained, above all, strongly committed to his religious convictions which ultimately shaped his short- and long-term educational goals. Additional research on the role of religion and how it mitigates college experiences can provide new insights into the college decisions of strongly religious Latino students.

The Role of College Related Experience on First Year Experience and Postsecondary Decisions

I defined first year college-related experience by the students' interpretation of the campus environment, their transition and adjustment, their involvement in student groups and quality and frequency of peer, faculty, and college personnel interactions (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Pivotal College-Related Experiences for Latina/o Students
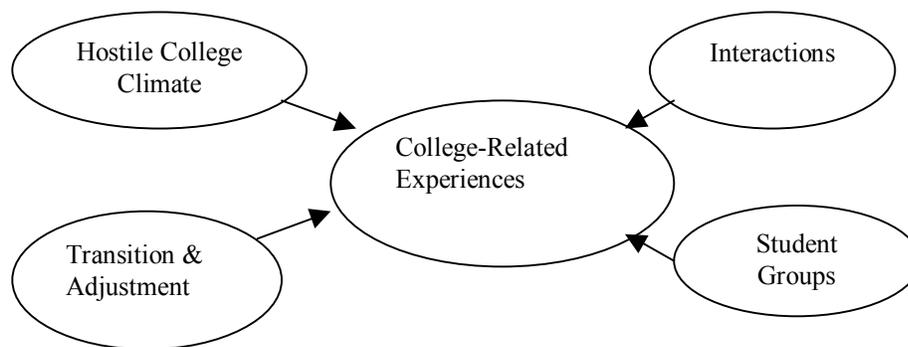
The students, regardless of institutional type or gender, clearly identified instances of racially hostile campus environments. A hostile campus environment was defined as cases in which the student felt harassed or assaulted by college representatives or peers based on overt or subtle comments related to the student's race, ethnicity, immigrant status or language. These assaults may have been physical, verbal, graphic or written.

Two students, Valerie and Chico, often reported instances in which they felt the physical, epistemological and social college environs did not represent them or their experiences. Valerie spoke poignantly about the connection between campus environments and a sense of belonging. Chico highlighted instances in which students and professors made negative comments about immigration and ethnicity. In every meeting, Valerie and Chico talked about some form of racial microaggression (Solórzano, 1998) experienced on campus or in the classroom. Solórzano (1998) affirms that students of color often confront racial microaggressions on a daily basis. Not surprisingly, Valerie and Chico the most difficulty with college transition and

adjustment. Closely connected to this theme was the quality and frequency of interactions with faculty, peers and college personnel. Both had low levels of interactions with peers, faculty, and college representatives. Valerie seldom interacted with peers outside the ethnic student groups. Similarly, Chico only spoke to faculty under negative circumstances (asked to drop classes, to make a case for his topic) and other than faculty and peers involved in the ethnic student group he did not have much interactions with others.

Lissette and Tomas also felt their particular colleges were hostile, although reported such instances with less frequency than Chico and Valerie. Their level of difficulty with transition and adjustment was also moderate. Elsie and Moroni seldom identified racially hostile environments and also had a low level of difficulty with their college transition and adjustment. Lissette, Elsie, Moroni, and Tomas also reported moderate interactions with faculty, peers and college advisors throughout their first semester. In addition, Moroni and Elsie had frequent interactions with other Mormon college students. There appears to be a clear link between a student's perception of campus environment, transition, and campus interactions. Indeed, research confirms that a student's perception of a hostile college environment often leads to greater difficulty with campus transition and adjustment and affects the quality of interactions (Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996).

The students were involved in at least one ethnic or racial student group either on or off campus. I defined a high level of involvement as a student who regularly attended meeting, helped plan and participated in activities, and took on leadership

184

positions. Lissette and Elsie had a high level of involvement in their respective

student groups. Valerie, Moroni, Chico and Tomas were also involved but attended

meetings with less frequency, selectively participated in activities and did not take on

leadership positions. I questioned whether a high level of involvement in student

groups, in this case racial or ethnic groups, mitigated stress experienced as a result of

hostile environments or difficulty with transition and adjustment. Gonzalez (2000)

posits that Latino students' marginality is intensified in college; consequently they

become involved on campus as a way to create meaning of the contradictions and

marginalization. They look to campus spaces and groups to liberate themselves.

Summarily, Solórzano (1998) suggests that racial microaggressions often make

students feel inadequate in terms of academic performance and are pressured to speak

for their particular ethnic or racial group in classroom discussions. In response

students may create counter spaces on campus, become involved in ethnic groups,

enclaves or leave college all together. Indeed, Valerie, Lissette, and Chico spoke

about the need for campus spaces in which they could "have a home" for their student

groups. For this particular group of students it is difficult to say with certainty

whether their involvement counteracted their perceptions of hostile campus and

facilitated transition and adjustment. Indeed, the ethnic student groups provided a

place where their collective struggles could be discussed, validated, and transformed.

Additional research can provide new insights into the role of ethnic student groups on

students' perceptions and ultimately their postsecondary decisions.

By the end of their first year of college all the students communicated an

interest in continuing their postsecondary plans (Table 4). Lissette, Elsie, and Tomas

planned to enroll full-time. Moroni departed the system to complete his mission and Valerie and Chico planned to enroll part-time. For Valerie and Chico there appears to be a link between their perceptions of campus, transition and adjustment, campus interactions, and their intent to enroll for year two. Indeed, it seems reasonable to presuppose that the perception of a racially hostile campus environment, difficulty with transition and adjustment and few interactions with faculty, peers and college personnel played a significant role in their attendance decisions.

Table 4. College Related Experiences and Enrollment Intent for Year Two

Case	Perception of Hostile Environment	Difficult Transition & Adjustment	Campus Interactions	Involved Student Groups	Enrollment Intent for Year Two
Valerie	High	High	Low	Moderate	**Part-Time**
Lissette	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High	**Full-Time**
Elsie	Low	Low	Moderate	High	**Full-Time**
Moroni	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	**Depart System**
Chico	High	High	Low	Moderate	**Part-Time**
Tomas	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	**Full-Time**

The Role of Cultural Resources and Knowledge on College-Related Experiences and Postsecondary Decisions

My cross case analysis illuminates the specific issues related to students environmental elements and college related experience that played a role in their degree goals and enrollment intent. There were four commonalities for Valerie and Chico; (1) high concern over finances, (2) perception of hostile campus, (3) difficulty with transition and adjustment, and (4) low level of

campus interactions. Moroni did not share any commonalities with Valerie and Chico. His decision to depart the system was based on his religious commitment and responsibilities. By the end of their first year Valerie, Moroni, and Chico modified their degree goals based on these experiences and their enrollment intent for year two (Table 5).

Table 5. Degree Goals after First Year of College and Enrollment Intent for Year Two

Case	Degree Goals after First Year of College	Enrollment Intent for Year Two
Valerie	**Modified**	**Part-Time**
Lissette	Stable	Full-Time
Elsie	Stable	Full-Time
Moroni	**Modified**	**Depart System**
Chico	**Modified**	**Part-Time**
Tomas	Stable	Full-Time

I considered how a student's cultural resources and knowledge mitigated these challenges and if it played a qualitatively different role in the experiences of those students who did not modify their educational goals and planned to enroll full-time in year two. Initially it was difficult to identify students' cultural resources and knowledge and draw clear links. Indeed, all individuals possess some sort of resources (whether aware of it or not) that are drawn on during times of stress and ambiguity. I identified specific cultural resources outlined in my framework, but had

difficulty making sense of others. To aid in my analysis, I employed Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework.

Yosso identifies community cultural wealth as the cultural knowledge, resources, skills, abilities and contacts that students of color draw from as they traverse unmapped educational spaces and experiences. In response to previous explanations of cultural capital (i.e., Bourdieu & Patterson, 1977) Yosso highlights human agency that people of color create and practice, via community cultural wealth, in order to counter systemic, material, and social inequalities. Community cultural wealth in the lives of marginalized groups, she argues, often goes unexamined or misinterpreted in educational research. Using the community cultural wealth framework allowed me to make sense of additional resources or forms of capital that students use in educational settings. Specifically, these include aspirational, linguistic, familial, navigational, social, and resistant capital (Figure 5).

Figure 5. A Model of Community Cultural Wealth. Adapted from Yosso (2005).
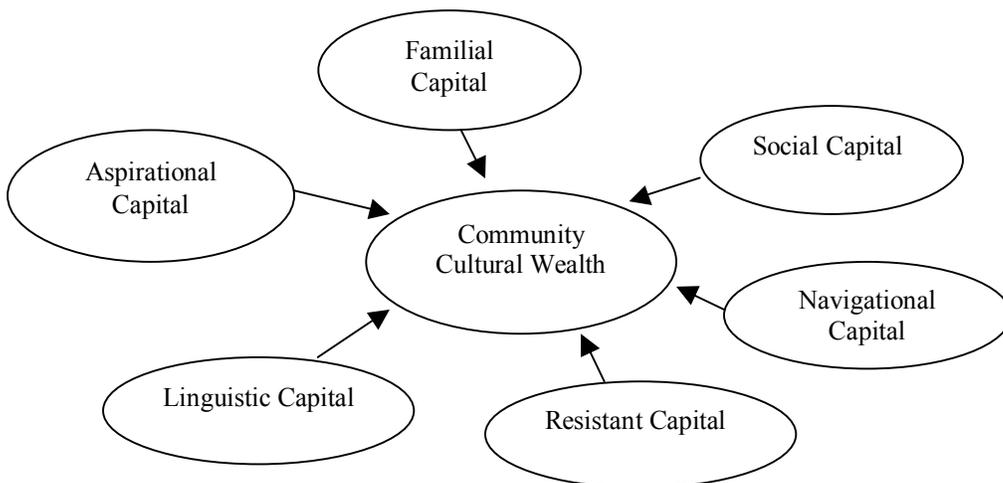
Yosso posits that the various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, rather are dynamic processes that build on one another to form community cultural wealth. Consequently, in the following discussion it may appear that certain aspects of the students' experiences are duplicated, however each section aims to underscore the ways in which the students and their families, intentionally and consciously, created spaces of optimism, change, and opposition. Further, I identify commonalities across students and highlight the ways in which their resources mitigated their first year challenges and barriers.

<p style="text-align:center">*Aspirational Capital*</p>

In all the cases parents were intentional about sharing stories and narratives that would instill a culture of hope (Gándara, 1995). The parents passed on aspirational capital or "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" and to "dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77-78). To understand how aspirational capital may have mediated students' experiences, I looked for dominant themes within specific culturally based *consejos, educacion*, narratives and counterstories that served as sources of inspiration and guidance during the students first year.

For all the students the most prevalent stories revolved around how and why their parents decided to leave their home country and enter the US. Specifically, stories of *how* they emigrated to the US provided an important chapter in their lives that informed the way they perceived themselves, their families and their life goals. For instance, Elsie, Moroni, Chico, and Tomas entered undocumented as young

children and learned through their parent's stories to maintain their dignity and high hopes for a better future. Whether they entered by "plane and overstayed [their] visitor's visa" or "crossed the desert" students and their families often spoke of the dreams and aspirations that motivated them to leave their family, friends, and familiar spaces.   For Valerie and Lissette who are US born, they too bear witness to the border crossing through their parents stories who entered undocumented before they were born. Stories of jumping tall border fences and hiding underneath vehicles as they crossed the border put their own experiences into perspective and inspired them to achieve more than their parents. This constant reference and stories of where their parents were at their age served to inspire and motivate the students who believed that through "hard work" and "discipline" they could achieve their academic goals. The males, who were undocumented at the time of the interviews, maintained a steadfast belief that at some point they would be "legal" because they were "good citizens."

Family stories were instilled with important virtues and their parents encouraged them to apply these qualities to their personal and educational lives. By passing on aspirational capital, whether it was *consejos* about persistence, motivation or disposition (López & Vázquez, 2006), parents' knowledge was legitimized and the students thought it was important to the development of their educational aspirations and goals. There were no qualitative differences between students; all placed a high value on the parents' stories and felt it was a central part of their educational aspirations and helped them make sense of their higher education experiences.

Linguistic Capital

Yosso (2005) describes linguistic capital as more than just knowledge of an additional language; rather it recognizes individuals as "engaged participants" who gain "intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style"(p. 78). Actions such as translating (linguistically and culturally), teaching and tutoring family members are seen as enriching and contributing to students overall knowledge (Orellana, 2003).

In the classroom and on campus linguistic capital played a role in at least two significant ways; (1) some students intentionally and consciously used their linguistic capital to acculturate new knowledge in the classroom and (2) it connected all the students to Latino and non-Latino peers. Outside the college environment some students recognized their linguistic capital was a private commodity that could help them achieve their life goals. There were qualitative differences across the students (Table 6). Most notably, all the students, except for Valerie, drew from their linguistic capital in at least two significant ways.

Table 6: Linguistic Capital

Case	Acculturate New Knowledge	Connect to Peers	Private Commodity
Valerie		Yes	
Lissette	Yes	Yes	Yes
Elsie		Yes	Yes
Moroni	Yes	Yes	
Chico	Yes	Yes	
Tomas	Yes	Yes	

The students used their linguistic knowledge to connect to Latino peers and create a sense of collective identity in educational spaces. Similarly, their language and cultural knowledge often connected them to non-Latino peers who were interested in learning Spanish or about their home country. Lissette, Chico, Moroni, and Tomas actively sought out ways to bring their linguistic capital into the classroom via presentations or writings. Lissette and Elsie also recognized their language skills were an asset in the workforce. They acknowledged that linguistic knowledge included social and cultural aspects inherit in language use and that this knowledge was instrumental in helping them obtain their current jobs. In this respect, the students used their linguistic capital in intimate ways (with family and friends) and viewed language as a private commodity that could be used as to help them achieve their goals.

A student's sense of identity surfaced as a theme that explains some of the differences across cases with linguistic capital. In all the cases their sense of identity was interpreted and enacted in relation to power relations within a larger social, historical and political context. In this respect their identities were not fixed rather dependent on the context and the associations within that context. The students in the study negotiated and (re)constructed their identity or identities depending on their social, academic or personal goals and circumstances. Moje and Martinez (2007) highlight that identities are often context driven and operate within relations of power.

> Identities are neither completely fluid nor are they cast in stone; rather, they could be considered chapters, defined and enacted contextually, in lifelong and larger stories that individuals enact. However, identities are also acted out, or enacted, in spaces… within relationships… and in particular time periods.

> Consequently, they are more than just stories we tell about ourselves, because they are also enacted, lived out in real time, and thus open to public scrutiny. In sum, theories of identity - especially social identities - are also theories of power relations: enactments of self always produce power and are always produced in relations of power. (p. 210-11)

My findings illustrate that the students expressed their ethnic identity was important in so far as it provided a collective experience (especially in contested spaces) and a source of motivation to aspire for higher educational goals. Lissette and Chico were steadfast about their strong ethnic identity, in particular as it related to their activism around social justice issues. Prior to attending the Latino pre-college program, Valerie did not identify strongly with a particular racial or ethnic identity, but after witnessing how a strong ethnic identity can co-exist with educational ambition she reinterpreted her ethnic identity and became active in student groups on campus and adapted racial and ethnic identities.

For Elsie and Moroni their religious and ethnic identities were equally salient. In Moroni's case, both were intertwined closely since he and his family attended a predominately Mexican, Spanish-speaking church ward. However, his decision to fulfill a religious mission exposed him to predominately white, middle-class peers which with time may differentiate his ethnic and religious identities causing him to renegotiate his identities and possibly educational and life goals. For Elsie, a recent Mormon convert, her ethnic and religious identities are not as seamlessly connected as Moroni's. She sees both as distinct and separate, each connecting her to different individuals, spaces, and resources. For instance, Elsie expressed a strong need to stay connected with Latino students to learn from them college survival strategies. Her active involvement in the Mormon church connected her primarily to groups of

white, middle-class college students whose identities revolved around Mormon values and gendered roles.

Tomas' recent immigrant experience shaped how he took on his identities. In educational spaces he identified both as an international student and Latino, Hispanic, or Mexican. Among his immigrant peers he identified with the specific region of Mexico where he was born and raised. Unlike other immigrant students who were raised in the US from an early age or US born Latinos, Tomas did not necessary absorb the negative stereotypes of Latinos and underachievement. Rather he was more critical of the role that class and government plays in attaining one's educational goals. In this respect, Tomas' interpretation and response to the structural, cultural, and language barriers experienced in the US served to reinforce the importance of an education (specifically a college degree) without the threat of losing his ethnic identity (Ogbu, 1987; Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Additional research on context-driven identities may help explain the specific ways in which linguistic capital is interpreted by the students and how it mediates college experiences.

Familial Capital

Yosso (2005) suggests that a sense of community history, memory, and commitment to community well being encompass familial capital which informs student's emotional, moral, educational and occupational consciousness. Extended family members, from this perspective the concept of family consists of a broad understanding of kinship and can include non-family members who share a culturally based bond. To understand how familial capital played a role in students' interpretation of their educational experiences, I looked for stories they and their

194

families recreated that instilled messages of community history, memory and commitment to community well-being. Students' interpretation of familial capital was shaped by (1) gender, (2) stories and memories of ancestors and (3) political and local realities. Between the two groups I found gender differences, but within the same gender groups there were no qualitative differences.

Valerie, Lissette, and Elsie were often reminded of the rich lineage of "strong women" in their families and a postsecondary education was seen as a step to maintain that ancestral legacy. Their mothers and grandmothers shared herstories (Gutierrez, 2004) which spoke to the need of a formal education to avoid "*golpes*" or difficulties in life. Valerie's mother reminded her often, "*Nunca se olvide de donde uno viene, desde las cosas pequeñas, desde mi abuela hasta mi mamá. Es lo que la va llevar a ella abrirse caminos nuevos y aguantar los caminos malos*" (Never forget where you come from, the little things, from my grandmother to my mother. It is what will open up new roads and help her put up with bad roads). Lissette was also reminded regularly by her mother, "*Ni uno mismo se da cuenta de todo lo que uno sabe*" (One does not even recognize all that one knows*)* when she shared stories of her mother and sisters overcoming difficult times with relationships, jobs, and life in general. For the females remembering the women in their family before them and their sacrifices was an important symbol to maintain familial memory and history. Valerie, Elsie and Lissette also saw their care for younger siblings as an expression of their family commitment and the family's well being. It is unclear, however at what point or under what circumstances a familial commitment may adversely shape a student's goals, as may have been the case for Valerie.

The males in the study were also encouraged through stories about their ancestors to maintain their dignity and aspire for high goals in the US (in spite of their immigrant status). For Chico and Tomas, however, stories about other men (mainly grandfathers) served as important lessons on *what not to do*. Chico and Tomas' fathers shared stories of growing up without a father present or an abusive father. As a result the students' fathers vowed to stop the cycle of neglect and abuse. Interestingly, male ancestors (grandfathers) where not demonized rather placed in context of the economic, political and social times. Stories of other family members, grandmothers, uncles, aunts, godparents and cousins, served to remind them of previous family accomplishments and their rich history.

Political and local realities were dynamic issues that informed the students' interpretation of who was family and what lessons were learned. For instance, most of the students and their families were the first in their extended family to arrive in the state. The state's economy is primarily fueled by twenty-four hour, seven-day a week tourism. From a young age the students had to adapt to their parents' work schedule which was unpredictable. Parents and other adults in the family worked evenings, weekends, holidays, swing swifts, and often did not have consecutive days off. Consequently, extended family often included non-family members who cared for them (i.e., Lissette), shared a commitment to the same religion (i.e., Moroni and Tomas), lived in newly arrived immigrant communities. Finally, unlike the females who had the flexibility to visit extended family outside the US, the males did not know many of their family members who did not live in the US and instead they relied on parents' memories, stories, and occasional telephone calls.

As with aspirational capital, all the students were inspired to pursue high goals and improve their lives through education. Students felt that family, whether immediate, extended, or community-based, encouraged, motivated, and supported them in their educational pursuits.

Navigational Capital and Social Capital

Navigational capital refers to students' of color ability to maneuver through institutions permeated with inequalities. In response they develop social and psychological navigational skills to survive and achieve their goals (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Yosso, 2005). Students' navigation through postsecondary spaces and familiarization with campus resources are central to first year students and their success. Closely connected to individuals' facility to navigate stressful environments is their ability to develop and maintain social capital[27] or networks and community resources that provide information, support, and encouragement. A dominant theme across all cases was their participation in the Latino pre-college leadership program. The students highlighted the critical role their participation in the leadership program played in at least two ways; (1) familiarizing them with their particular campus and (2) connecting them to networks of Latino peers and Latino university representatives.

The students acquired and practiced navigational skills through social networks. Although they had a repertoire of survival skills in their toolbox prior to attending college they nonetheless traversed new territory and at times were unsure of

---

[27] Social capital has its roots in theoretical discussions of cultural capital and theories of reproduction (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). However, critical theorists, such as Yosso, have taken up the concept as a way to bring attention to the way the communities of color create and maintain capital in order to succeed despite institutional racism and barriers. See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for a discussion on social capital in educational research.

their abilities and sense of belonging. Indeed, their transition and adjustment to

college was a major hurdle and college was often described as a "cultural shock,"

"loner place," and a place where "people did not look like [them]." As a way to make

sense of these challenges the students connected communities that could support and

guide them. The students repeatedly returned to their participation in a Latino pre-

college leadership program and noted how it "helped," "guided," and "empowered"

them during their first year of college. Specifically, they turned to their Latino

leadership "familia." The leadership program divides students into "familias" of six to

ten individuals. There were peer and adult facilitators who served as peer counselors

during the program. Peers were typically previous participants and adult facilitators

were seasoned college students or recent college graduates. Facilitators are often

referred to as the parents of the group because of their experience with the program or

with college environments. Chico would comment, "I saw my daughter today"

referring to a Latina student whom had been in his leadership cohort. Or Lissette

might say, "I met with my [leadership] brothers and sisters" on campus. This

extended leadership "familia" became campus cultural translators and brokers

(Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Moje & Martinez, 2007) who demystified college and

provided a roadmap of the college landscape. For instance, Lissette shared, "Now we

are really good friends. You have people you can rely on if you need help." She

recalls how she connected to a college administrator presenter at the program.

> Like the reason I met [college administrator] was because of the conference.
> And the speech he gave was motivating and so it was about knowledge we
> didn't know about. I told him about my situation and he recommended me to
> an advisor who helped me pick out my classes. I'm thankful I met him.

Valerie also shared, "So with the program, I got to know a lot of the members and I feel like if I wouldn't have known anyone I would have been more uncomfortable to go [to college] and actually get involved and participate." Elsie also felt, "It built networks all over so I just know people that can help us." She goes on to say,

> I loved how the whole time, the whole week we were there they always said, "Don't stop until you get your Ph.D. Get your Ph.D." And that influenced me so much more, because it wasn't just to hang out for a week, it wasn't just [inaudible] for a week, it was really like, "Stay in school and do what you have to do to be successful and then come back and help out the rest."

Chico echoed Elsie's comments, "I think the main thing was being surrounded by so many people with potential or have gone to college or universities, that kind of motivated that, I wanted to be like them."

Research on the long-term outcomes of pre-college programs (e.g., Upward Bound) is mixed and even less research exist that examine the social and academic outcomes of *community-based* pre-college leadership programs such as the one the students participated (see Tierney & Hagedorm, 2002). Students in the study repeatedly mentioned they were motivated to aspire for high postsecondary goals. On campus the students connected to other Latino students, faculty, and administrators by joining ethnic groups on and off campus. The students identified specific individuals they could turn to if they had questions or concerns. Similarly, all felt they were familiar with campus spaces as a result of their participation in college-bound programs, such as the Latino leadership program. Four of the students (Lissette, Elsie, Moroni, and Tomas) spent time on campus and asked for help when needed. In Table 7, I highlight how each student practiced navigational and social capital. Lissette and Elsie spent considerable time at the library between classes and on the weekends;

Moroni and Tomas also spent time studying in open student areas on their particular campus. In addition, Lissette, Moroni, and Tomas asked for course help, usually from a peer tutor available through student services, when they were struggling. Because of their high levels of involvement with ethnic student groups on campus, I also expected Valerie and Chico to seek out help when needed and spend time on campus (other than ethnic group meeting spaces) but that was not the case.

Table 7: Navigational and Social Capital

Case	Identified Specific Individuals	Asked for Help when Needed	Familiar with Campus Spaces	Spent Time on Campus Spaces
Valerie	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Lissette	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Elsie	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Moroni	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Chico	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Tomas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

It is unclear to me why Chico and Valerie did not seek out help from campus or non-campus resources. Research on help-seeking behavior suggest that Chico and Valerie may have decided not to seek out help because of the potential threat to their self-esteem and the potential social costs or the prospect of long-term indebtedness (Gross & McMillen, 1983). Stanton-Salazar (2000), however, suggests that the social context and cultural processes must be taken into consideration to understand what motivates or inhibits Latino youth from seeking help available from resourceful individual and institutions. Specifically, he points to Latino cultural practices often

excluded in mainstream transactions and to the isolation and distrust youth often experience in mainstream institutions and with institutional agents. Stanton-Salazar (2000) further argues that decisions are informed by both distinctive individual attributes as well as larger contextual and cultural influences. In Chico and Valerie's case, their feelings of isolation and distrust of institutional agents provide evidence to Stanton-Salazar's proposition. Despite this fact, there were Latino faculty and administrators who Chico and Valerie knew and felt they could approach, but they did not approach them. It is unclear how they interpreted these relationships and under what circumstances they would seek them out for help. Admittedly, familiarity with campus spaces and knowing who to talk to are only two aspects that make up students' navigational and social capital. In-depth research in this area is needed to understand what other forms of cultural community wealth are important to student success.

Resistant Capital

Resistant capital refers to "those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" and "maintaining and passing on the multiple dimensions of community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). The students in the study all witnessed or experienced inequality because of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, class or immigrant status. Indeed, it was these markers that also brought them together and created a collective identity and a sense of struggle. Four themes emerged as important; (1) education was seen as a way to oppose negative representations of Latina/os, (2) in the classroom students challenged dominant knowledge, (3) ethnic student groups were used as vehicles to bring about social change on- and off-campus, and (4) sexism was resisted by both males and

201

females. There were gender differences in how sexism was resisted but there were no differences across cases with the other three themes.

The students saw a postsecondary education as a way to resist negative stereotypes and representations of Latinos or immigrants. They were aware of the "statistics" that placed them at risk from an early age and they sought to counter those stereotypes through educational excellence. In college they continued to oppose unjust conditions on and off campus. In the classroom students challenged the status quo by resisting dominant knowledge and asserting their culturally-based knowledge as relevant and valid. For instance, Moroni's father often encouraged him to dispute dominant knowledge and assert his own voice and views in educational settings via writing assignments. Lissette selected topics on cultural rituals her mother had expert knowledge and could help her. Chico challenged a professor when he discouraged him from selecting a Spanish artist for a class presentation.

Ethnic student groups were often a means of expression and action to improve conditions and counter negative perceptions of Latinos. In particular, the students acknowledged that participating in the Latino pre-college leadership program connected them to groups that gave them a collective voice and served as vehicles to bring about social change. On campus Valerie, Lissette, and Chico were vocal and active in demonstrating on campus to improve services and resources to retain students of color; off campus they participated in immigration demonstrations or letter-writing campaigns in support of immigration reform. While the students had an awareness of their ethnicity and culture the leadership program added another layer to

their understanding of the intersection of social, economic, and political histories with that of community, race, gender, and class.

Their oppositional behavior was also shaped by family history, home pedagogies and gender. For instance, the females learned through stories and narratives from their mothers and grandmothers how they responded to and resisted their condition, whether in their native country or in the US. For the female financial independence was viewed as a way to circumvent gender subordination and consequently higher education was perceived as a libratory act. In one example, Valerie described female pedagogies passed on from her grandmother, "She just says that I should stand on my own. I should be able to be educated. " Elsie similarly explained how her mother was a "fighter" and a woman with a "strong character." After her father left the family her mother managed to "keep things floating" and avoid foreclosure of their first home. Elsie's mother would tell her, "No matter what happens we're not going to lose this house. I fought for this house. I worked hard for this house. We're not going to lose it. It's my house. It's our house." While suffering was a common theme in their teachings to their daughters, they resisted representations of passive victims. They characterized their lives and that of other ancestral women as creative beings who had control over their sexuality, economic conditions, and future.

Moroni, Chico and Tomas resisted representations of "machismo." Moroni talked about his responsibility of "keeping the house clean." Chico self- identified as a "feminist" and attended "feminist conferences" on campus. Tomas spoke of his

father's openness to talk about relationships and emotions and resisted representations of male supremacy.

While they viewed marriage as an important right of passage, in particular Moroni and Tomas because of their faiths, they also saw marriage as an act of resistance against current immigration policy. They admitted that marriage to a US citizen could be "a business transaction" and ultimately the only way they could obtain legal residency and achieve their college and career goals.

Summary of Cross Case Analysis

My findings in this chapter demonstrate that the constructs identified in my conceptual model are indeed significant to the educational experiences of the students in my study. Further, my analysis brought to light additional themes that shape each construct. As expected early education engagement by the student and family involvement were central to their Pre-College Experiences. College-focused programs (in and out-of-school) also proved to be a significant theme in shaping students' higher education decisions and connecting them to institutional agents who could guide them through the web of college preparation. Included in this construct are also college-bound programs, such as the Latino pre-college leadership program the students participated. We have limited knowledge on how such programs shape students' college experience and postsecondary goals and decisions. Under Environmental Elements, family commitments, which include helping to care for siblings and contribute financially to family income, were central to the students' educational goals and decisions. The role of immigration and religion emerged as significant themes for the students in my study. These two themes have received little

attention in examining the role of Environmental Elements on the postsecondary decisions of Latino students. Concern over their ability to finance their college education was also a major factor. And although discussions about college affordability and aid availability are common in the public discourse, we know less about how Latino students, who are eligible for federal financial aid, make financing decisions. Under College-Related Experiences, students identified hostile college environments, transition and adjustment, and faculty and peer interactions as central to their first year of college. Current literature in these areas confirms the importance these factors take on as students of color navigate their college years.

Finally, the role of Cultural Resources and Knowledge was presented through a Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) lens in order to highlight the myriad of assets the students in my study brought to bear on their first year of college. These resources and knowledge were dynamic and informed all aspects of the students' educational trajectory, from early education to college. Aspirational, familial, linguistic, social, navigational, and resistant capital were discussed in detail and the ways in which the students interpreted these cultural resources.

I discussed qualitative differences across two student groups; those that intended to continue full-time their second year or temporary depart the system (Moroni) and those who intended to enroll part-time (Valerie and Chico). Most notably, Valerie and Chico did not seem to draw from their navigational and social capital when they needed it during their first year of college. The reasons are complex, as described in this chapter, but likely connected to their perception of a racially hostile campus and few interactions on campus.

In the following chapter, I offer conclusions on the model used for this study and on central themes discussed throughout the analysis. I also discuss limitations, policy implications and future research directions are also discussed.

CHAPTER 9.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this chapter I review my research questions, the model used for my study and describe its relevance to my findings. I then offer conclusions on the students' first year experience and postsecondary decisions as well as conclusions for each construct in my research model (i.e., pre-college, environmental, college related and cultural resources and knowledge). I follow with a review of limitations for this study and conclude with a discussion of policy, practice and research implications.

Research Questions and Model

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the Student Adjustment Model (Nora et al., 1996), background data on higher education for Latino students, and the role of cultural resources and knowledge in the education of Latino students. The model was designed to answer the following question:

> **How do pre-college experiences, environmental elements, and cultural resources and knowledge of a particular group of Latina/o students shape their first year of college and postsecondary decisions?**

The focus of the conceptual framework was to answer the following sub-questions which were derived from my central research question:

1) What pivotal pre-college experiences shape a particular group of Latina/o students' postsecondary goals and commitments? How do these students

interpret their experiences as it relates to their postsecondary goals and commitments?

2) What pivotal environmental elements shape a particular group of Latina/o students' postsecondary goals and commitments? How do these students interpret these experiences as it relates to their postsecondary goals and commitments?

3) How do a particular group of students' pre-college experiences and environmental elements inform their college-related experiences?

4) What pivotal college-related experiences and challenges do a particular group Latina/o students confront their first year of college? How do they balance or negotiate these experiences?

5) What cultural resources and knowledge does a particular group of students draw from as they navigate their first year of college? How do these resources mitigate their first year college challenges and barriers and shape their postsecondary decisions?

6) Are there gender differences in how males and females interpret their first year of college? What are these differences?

My initial model was instructive in guiding my inquiry and identifying major constructs under study. As expected, early exposure to college-bound curriculum and programs were central to moving the students through the educational pipeline, informing their educational goals and commitments and preparing them for college. The students completed college-bound high school curriculum and were academic high achievers. Another pivotal factor was their parents' early and continued

involvement in their children's education. Parental modes of involvement were often culturally based and were meaningful to the students' and their development of goals, commitments and postsecondary decisions.

My data also bear out previous research about the first year experience (i.e., campus perception, college financing) and identified new areas seldom considered (i.e., immigrant status, religion). First, the students' perceptions of campus climate shape their interpretation of their college experience and academic and social integration. My findings substantiate the important role of race-based student groups for students of color and their ability to integrate to campus life (Buriel, 1980; Guiffrida, 2003). Second, a student's concern about family finances and her or his ability to fund a college education weigh heavily on the student's postsecondary decision. Concern over family responsibilities, for the females, and immigrant status, for the males, were also relevant. Finally, religion was also an important theme in my study and accounted for at least one student departing the system and another open to leaving if she found a partner in her church. These environmental factors had a real and immediate effect on a student's first year college goals, commitments, and postsecondary decisions.

My conceptual model included cultural resources; specifically I considered student and family cultural assets and how these mitigate challenges students face their first year of college. Existing theories posit that Latino household knowledge and culture can aid students in academic and social adaptation and acculturation (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Yosso, 2005). My findings confirm that Latino

students in postsecondary settings draw from these assets as they traverse new college environments and learning and minimize hurdles confronted in college.

Although not explicit in my conceptual model, there were gender differences from preparing for college to their level of responsibility at home. Females were under more pressure to care for family members but were also more intentional about preparing for college early in their education. Indeed, studies on Latina postsecondary participation point to their high level of responsibility to care for other family members and longitudinal databases confirm that Latinas are entering and completing college at higher rates then their male counterparts. My research found both propositions to be true and shaped the females overall college experience.

In sum, my model and research foreground the students' interpretation of their experiences (i.e., pre-college, college related, environmental) and their interpretation of their cultural resources which provided a rich and multifaceted perspective on how a particular group of Latino students arrive at their postsecondary decisions after their first year of college.

Conclusions on First Year Experience and Postsecondary Decisions

The students in my study attended either a public research university or a public two-year college. Regardless of institutional type, all the students intended to continue college at some point. Three of the six intended to continue full-time at the same institution, two modified their degree goals and attendance patterns and one departed the system temporarily. The various points of departure (whether it be from one institution to another or the system) and modification (degree goals or part- or full-time attendance) will likely influence the probability of a student completing a

four-year degree (Leon, 2003). These postsecondary decisions are made within the context of a student's first year experience.

Indeed, first year college experiences are critical to a student's persistence decisions. With each college semester of completion the probability of achieving a college degree increases significantly. Unquestionably, postsecondary decisions are a function of many factors and the degree of influence varies greatly on the individual material, structural and cultural circumstances. No single theory has been able to fully explain why students leave college and more importantly reverse the high college departure rates. Tinto (1989, 1993) has consistently pressed that student departure varies from institution to institution and programs need to be tailored to the specific needs of a particular institution and group of students. The problem is that institutions often exclusively rely on a set of limited persistence theories along with quantitative data that often provide a one-dimensional perspective on the student's decision to leave an institution. While quantitative data are critical to the puzzle, institutions need to employ qualitative methods of assessing student needs as it relates to college experiences and postsecondary decisions.

My study illustrates that while factors typically considered important in understanding students postsecondary decisions are relevant (e.g., college-bound curriculum, parental encouragement, clear college goals, finances, college transition and adjustment, interactions on campus) other factors played an equally important function in their first year of college. These included their assessment of the campus climate (in and outside the classroom), family, community, and religious commitments, the likelihood of (career related) employment (for the males), and

211

involvement in ethnic student groups. Furthermore, my study reveals the various ways in which cultural resources mitigate the first year experiences (i.e., challenges, barriers, creation and commitment to college goals).

<p style="text-align:center">Conclusions on Pre-College Experiences</p>

Clearly college bound curriculum and creating a college-going culture at home and school are essential ingredients to college access and success. My study demonstrates that Latino students who receive early guidance, encouragement, and support from their parents, teachers, and schools successfully move through the educational pipeline and develop high academic goals. The students in my study came from poor or working class backgrounds and attended under resourced schools early in their education. While their parents (who were all immigrants) were aware of school inequities their constant frame of reference was their home country and its limited access, resources and probability of social and economic mobility. Studies on Latino immigrant families have consistently found that recent immigrants are more optimistic about their educational, economic and political prospects than native-born Latinos (Suárez -Orozco & Páez, 2002; Portes & Rumbaut, 1997). Similarly, the parents in this study did not focus on what their children's schools lacked rather they emphasized what they could achieve and created a "culture of possibility" (Gándara, 1995).

My findings posit that early in their education Latino students also assess their local and larger social context as they develop academic goals and make educational decisions. These contexts are often filtered through their family's lived experiences and their local surroundings. For instance, the females in the study began to consider

ways to make themselves attractive college candidates as early as middle school and definitely in high school. There was awareness on the part of these females that white, middle-class social capital are needed to navigate in dominant achievement space (Gee, 2000) and they intentionally "hung out" with white or "whitewashed," high achieving students. Despite their awareness the females maintained a sense of cultural integrity to their specific ethnic group(s). Similar to Cammarota (2004), my data demonstrate that Latinas' strong sense of cultural integrity is an important factor that helps them achieve academically and may begin to explain why and how Latina students have surpassed their male counterparts at all levels in the educational pipeline (King, 2006).

<div align="center">Conclusions on the College-Related Experience</div>

My study confirms that the first year campus experiences, in- and outside the classroom, directly and deeply shape Latino students' sense of belonging, transition and adjustment, current and future academic goals and decisions. Certainly, a level of stress with coursework, college transition and adjustment is expected for all students but for Latino students who are the first to attend college these experience are intensified as they encounter unwelcoming and racially hostile environments. For instance, the students in my study reported incidents of microaggressions (Solórzano, 1998) in- and outside the classroom. These microaggressions were often connected to their ethnicity, gender, immigration status, or language use. Their perception of a hostile campus environment was closely connected to their level of interactions they had with peers and campus personnel. The exception was interactions with Latino student services personnel whom they had met the summer before their first year of

college. Previous studies confirm that the higher Latino students' perception of a racially hostile climate the less likely they are to develop a sense of belonging, meaningful interactions, and a seamless transition and adjustment to college (Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Two students (Chico and Valerie) described the highest levels of concern over these racial assaults and were also the students who modified their degree goals and enrollment intent for year two. Although an analysis of institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion were outside the scope of this research, institutions attended by the students had newly created vice president positions for campus equality, access and inclusion. At the time the students in this study attended these institutions there were no clear diversity and inclusion policies students could use as recourse.

My findings also suggest that student participation in ethnic groups mitigates some of the challenges and barriers Latinos face their first year of college. The students were critically aware of their college experience as a result of their participation in these ethnic student groups. In response, these students groups created a collective identity in which campus and broader economic, cultural, and social concerns were discussed, debated and acted upon. While the students in study strongly identified with a particular racial or ethnic group this was one of several identities that shaped their first year experience. For instance, Elsie (a new Mormon convert) and Moroni (a life long Mormon) strongly identified with their religious self, their church and its members on campus. The proximity to Utah and the subsequent large Mormon population in the city were factors that likely contributed to their strong religious identity. My findings suggest that students blend their multiple social

identities (Tajfel, 1981) and drew on these identities depending on the circumstances and their goals.

<center>Conclusions on Environmental Influences</center>

My study confirms that Latino students face many environmental factors that shape their first year of college. Key among them were their concern over college finances and their ability to help their family financially. All the students in my study were recipients of a multi-year, state merit scholarship that pays close to 75% of college tuition. The students were concerned about maintaining scholarship eligibility, but the males were also concerned that they would eventually be ineligible down the road because of their immigrant status. One student declined the scholarship all together for fear of reprisal down the road if immigration policies change in his favor. Two of the six students worked off campus their first semester, but by the second semester five of the six worked at least twenty hours a week to save for their tuition or to fulfill degree requirements. My findings support that the greater student concern over finances the more likely she will modify her goals and attendance decisions. Concern over finances was often connected to other key factors such as family responsibilities, religion commitment, and immigrant status.

My study also substantiates that Latino and Latina students interpret family commitment differently. For instance, for females in my study their strong sense of commitment to caring for siblings or helping out their parents financially often meant they had to balance college, work, and family obligations. For some, this juggling act was a source of inspiration and test of discipline but for others it created additional

<center>215</center>

stress that ultimately led them to reconsider their degree goals and attendance patterns (in favor of family obligations).

The males also had a strong sense of family commitment but there was not an expectation to care for younger siblings or work outside of the home because of their immigrant status. Despite this fact, all the males expressed an interest in working to help their families and all but one (Moroni) was working by their second semester of college.

For the male their immigrant status was also an important factor as they considered degree goals and attendance decisions. Their level of hopefulness often fluctuated depending on the national sentiment and the prospect of a legal pathway to residency. The more optimistic the student was about becoming a US resident the more committed he was to his degree goals and his decision to attend college full-time.

My research illustrate that for devout students, religious commitments are central to a student's first year experience and attendance decisions. One student in my study departed the postsecondary system temporarily in order to complete a two-year mission and in another case the student was willing to modify her degree goals and attendance in favor of marriage in fulfillment of her religious convictions. Both students were Mormon and active members in their respective wards. Their strong religious commitments mitigated some of the first year stress by providing them multiple social identities and spaces were these identities were honored. In the end the students' postsecondary decisions were not solely based on one specific factor rather it was the result of the dynamic interplay of local- (i.e., home, religion, work) and

macro (i.e., state scholarship conditions, federal and state immigration policy) experiences.

Conclusions on Cultural Resources and Knowledge

There is no denying it: *Students need someone to provide them with specific college knowledge throughout their education and during college.* Much has been written about the cultural advantage white, middle class, students have in educational settings. In response, scholars have begun to identity the ways in which specific ethnic communities also (re)create and transmit culturally-based resources that positively shape students educational models and can be valuable in teaching and learning settings. Yosso's (2005) community wealth capital framework provides a critical perspective on how historically marginalized groups create and transmit meaningful information, knowledge, and assets to their children to resist and succeed in hostile environments. My findings bear out that Latino families and communities intentionally and purposefully encourage, teach and advice their children on ways to succeed in educational spaces (despite their lack of specific college knowledge). Knowledge of their native language, customs, rituals, strong commitments to ethnic communities, critical awareness of social, economic and political inequalities and intergenerational relationships were key in shaping this particular group of Latino students' first year experience and subsequent decisions.

The degree to which students in my study identified and drew from their cultural resources varied depending on their needs, context and spaces. For some, these resources mitigated challenges and helped them navigate their first year by connecting them to similarly positioned college students, faculty and college

personnel. Specifically, ethnic student groups often served as sites where college knowledge, resources and peer advice were circulated within a context where their ethnic identities, cultural knowledge, and college concerns were acknowledged and validated.   For others, for complex reasons, they distanced themselves from (Latino and non-Latino) peers, faculty, campus personnel and family who could have facilitated their transition, adjustment, and continued enrollment. My research begins to look at the role of cultural resources and knowledge in Latino college experiences but clearly additional research is warranted on the varied student meanings and enactments of these cultural resources in different postsecondary settings.

Of the various forms of Latino cultural resources identified in the study, the most noteworthy are social and navigational capital. The students had a repertoire of survival skills that helped them move through the pipeline, however in their first year of college social and navigational capital became more critical as they confronted uncharted educational territory, racially hostile environments, and new expectations and norms on what it means to be a good student. Students who sought out help, whether from peers, family, faculty, or campus personnel, successfully completed all their first year college courses, maintained strong and clear degree goals, and intended to enroll full-time in year two. There was one exception: Moroni. In this case the student decided to temporarily depart the system all together to fulfill a Mormon mission. It became apparent as he prepared for his mission that he was "welcomed" into new circles of men within his church. In these sites a white, middle class value system prevailed. There was no question that the student was wholeheartedly committed to the ideals of his church and his mission, yet there was

evidence that he recognized the social benefits and capital of participating in and networking with an elite group of Mormon men. Clearly, the student's decision to leave college was based on multiple and complex reasons, but it raises new questions related to the ways that religious students arrive at decisions to leave or stay in college and the role of social capital.

Limitations

Three limitations mentioned earlier merit repeating. Additional limitations emerged during the course of my study that will also be discussed. First, this study looked at the experiences of traditional aged Latino college students (under 24). The experiences and responsibilities of older Latino students are likely to be different; similarly their involvement (on and off campus), social networks, concerns over finances and perception of campus climate may be significantly different than traditional aged students as they consider their postsecondary goals and decisions.

Second, this study involved six cases and although multiple data sources were used to ensure triangulation additional cases can provide greater depth and nuance of Latino first year college experiences and postsecondary decisions.

Third, by its nature qualitative research is interpretive and "data is filtered through a personal lens that is situated in a specific sociopolitical and historical moment" (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). I bring my bias as a researcher. This analysis is my interpretation of what I heard, observed, and witnessed. It represents but one interpretative slice for a group of individuals whose lives are multifaceted.

Three additional limitations emerged during the study. The study was confined to Latino student experiences at two public postsecondary institutions.

Institutional type matters in terms of mission, resources, student population, and student success. Students in the study attended a public research university or a public two-year college. Latino college students are more likely than any other group to live at home and attend local colleges, however there is a minority of Latinos who leave home and their home state to attend college. Future research can include students who attend out-of-state colleges across institutional types. Such an analysis may reveal a complex comparison across first year experience and type of institution.

The students in the study were either first- or second-generation Latinos in the US. Researchers have found that generation matters in terms of educational goals, outcomes, perceptions and adaptation. Newer immigrants are likely to be more optimistic about the prospects of life and education in the US, whereas third (and beyond) generation of Latinos (low to working class in particular) may be less likely to buy into beliefs about meritocracy (Portes & Rumbaut, 1997). The stories of such students can provide additional insights about generational status and postsecondary goals and decisions.

Finally, with the exception of one, all the cases were individuals of Mexican origin. Mexican origin individuals account for the largest Latino group in the US and when compared to other Latino groups, have one of the lowest college going and completion rates. Unquestionably, Mexican origin students merit research at all levels, from a multitude of perspectives. With that said, researchers need to have a better understanding of material, historical, political and cultural differences between the various Latino groups on US campuses today. Furthermore, multiracial identity

among Latino students was not addressed in this study or in the model, but is relevant as Latino intermarriages continue to grow (Daniel, 2004).

<div align="center">Policy and Practice Implications</div>

My study raised several policy issues that significantly affect first-time, Latino undergraduate students. From an institutional perspective, college leaders can help Latino students achieve their academic goals and persist by acknowledging and incorporating families into the college process through culturally relevant initiatives.

Institutions usually offer parent programs and literature but few are tailored to the specific needs of Latino families. Around the country institutions, mainly two-year colleges (e.g., Palm Beach Community College, University of New Mexico-Valencia, Dallas County Community College District) have begun to tailor culturally relevant programs for Latino families. These often include family nights and orientations that provide information on the college process (e.g., tuition, financial aid, transfer process, counseling) and encourage families to be a part of the students' educational endeavors. In particular, knowledge about the federal financial aid process is critical since research has consistently found that Latino students and families are unclear of how it works and many forgo funding opportunities (Venegas, 2007). Alternatively, these family-oriented programs can be taken to the "kitchen table" of students homes as many Texas colleges and universities have begun to do. In essence, these family-oriented programs can help students and families build social and navigational capital needed for college success at two- and four- year institutions. Furthermore, early and continuous evaluations of family programs along with

tracking of student success are essential to understand the outcomes of such initiatives.

Second, my study highlights that a student's decision is influenced directly and indirectly by his campus experiences. Institutions need to create welcoming environments for seamless transition and adjustment to college life. As a first step, an institution can develop a written campus policy against hostile environments, define specific unacceptable behaviors, and provide recourse for corrective action (e.g., see University of Michigan Office of Institutional Equity). As a second step, an institution can engage in a self-assessment to grain a critical perspective of the campus climate for students. Such an assessment can yield information on specific student concerns, perceptions and priorities as well as help develop short and long-term plans as it relates to creating a welcoming climate for all students. Continued and on-going institutional campus climate efforts that engage and value students, faculty, and college personnel are necessary in order to create welcoming campus environments for all students.

Third, my research brings to bear that institutions need to recognize and address the role of external state and federal policies (.e., immigration, state funded scholarships) on institutional practices and programming. College leaders should participate in external policy discussions and formulation in order to better understand the challenges and barriers faced by students, families, and communities. Flores, Horn and Crisp (2006) identify specific external policies (including immigration) that postsecondary leaders need to "vigilantly acknowledge and address head-on" if colleges are to "maximize access and success for Latinos and ultimately

all students" (p. 77). To be sure, policies dealing with immigration have profound and disproportionate affect on Latinos students mainly because of in-state tuition policies and federal financial aid eligibility.

Research Implications

My study also raised additional research questions related to Latino undergraduate students. Key among them was the lack of data available on undocumented students. We know very little about this group of students and their movement along the pipeline. Better data collection at the institutional, state and federal level is needed in order to inform educational policy and practices at all levels. Questions raised during this study include: How do undocumented Latino college students differ from documented or native-born Latinos in terms of their college experiences and postsecondary decisions? How does time of entry (e.g., child, adolescent, teenager) into the US shape their postsecondary goals and experiences? What are the gender differences among undocumented college students?

Second, additional research is warranted on how cultural resources mitigate college barriers and challenges for Latino students. Researchers have begun to describe how students interpret these resources. Our attention now needs to focus on how cultural resources operate in educational settings, in and outside the classroom. In this study, I used a community cultural wealth perspective (Yosso, 2005) to differentiate the various ways that students bring to bear their family- and ethnic-based knowledge on their college goals and decisions. Future research needs to focus on the multiple sites (e.g., pre-college programs, classrooms, ethnic groups) in which

students acquire and practice community cultural wealth essential for college success. In doing so, researchers, practitioners and communities can have a better understanding of how to facilitate college student success.

Third, we know little about religious Latino students on college campuses. In particular, are there differences between religious and non-religious Latino students in terms of their degree goals, campus experiences, and postsecondary decisions? Are there specific resources circulated and practiced among strongly identified religious students? Do certain faiths offer Latino students the perception of greater social and economic mobility?

Fourth, my study raised questions related to the role of community-based, pre-college programs which promote critical awareness of the role of race and ethnicity in US society. Very little data or evaluations exist on such programs yet these programs often promote a college-going culture and critical social capital for successful college navigation and success (see Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). For the students in this study, their participation in a Latino pre-college program created a sense of collective identity, helped them access spaces and resources on campus, connected them to similar students, and raised their critical consciousness of the historical and present state of Latinos in higher education. We know little about the outcomes of ethnic-focused pre-college programs and the degree to which these programs may facilitate campus integration and college success.

Finally, by using race-based perspectives and models (e.g., community wealth capital) that position historically marginalized groups as knowers and engaged participants in their education, future research can provide critical perspectives on the

college experiences of Latino students and their interpretation of the material, social, and political challenges they face. By having a better understanding of the life experiences and everyday circumstances of Latino students, postsecondary leaders, policy makers, and researchers can help create institutions, policies, and campus cultures in which all students can thrive and achieve their postsecondary goals.

Appendix A.

Consent Form Cover Letter

Dear Student/Parent,

My name is Magdalena Martinez, and I am a graduate student at the University of Michigan. I am currently working on my dissertation about how students become successful and the role that family play in the process. Many studies examine why students are not successful and do not go on to college. My project is different because I am focusing on what helps students be successful in school and college. These perspectives are often excluded when looking at students who live in urban cities. This is why I have chosen to conduct my study at [name of college]. I hope that my findings will help educators and policy makers understand what type of structures, programs help students succeed in school and the role that family plays.

My study will be based on qualitative research, which means I will be interviewing the students at [name of college] for a period of about eight months. Some of the interviews will be with individual students, and some of the interviews will be with groups of students. Your participation in the study will be voluntary; that is you can choose to participate as much or as little as you would like without any negative consequences.

I will not identify the college or individuals by your real name. The conversations with you will be held in strict confidence. My research practices are subject to the rules of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Michigan which is a committee that reviews research to ensure that the research does not harm participants; and requires that all information collected remain confidential except as may be required by federal, state, or local law. Given the nature of my study, it is unlikely that any data I collect will be required by any federal, state or local agencies.

If you are willing to participate, please sign the attached consent form and return it to me. If you have additional questions and you would like to talk to me, please feel free to contact me at 734.276-1142.

I look forward to the opportunity to working with you. I believe this study can help administrators and policy makers better understand what experiences and structures enable students to become successful in school and beyond. I appreciate your consideration.

Respectfully,

Magdalena Martinez

Appendix B.

CONSENT FORM FOR
PARTICIPATION IN STUDY
Magdalena Martinez
Center for the Study of Higher & Postsecondary Education
University of Michigan

I understand that the purpose of this study is to examine how college students negotiate and balance their college experiences. I understand this study is being conducted by Magdalena Martinez as part of her dissertation work at the University of Michigan.

I have been assured that participation in the study is voluntary. I am free to discuss only what I feel comfortable sharing without concern of any negative consequences. Furthermore, I am free to withdraw from participation at any time without affect.

Magdalena will be collecting data for approximately eight months. My participation in the study will be limited to interviews (some individually and some in groups). The interviews (individual or group) will vary but will generally last approximately 60 minutes. No possible discomfort or risk will occur as part of my participation in the individualized interviews. Group interviews or focus groups will primarily cover questions related to college perceptions, expectations and aspirations. Minimal risk will be involved in this process, however an individual may reveal personal information in which case there may be a risk of others knowing personal information about me.

I understand that my identity will be kept anonymous and the statements made will be kept confidential, except in the unlikely circumstances in which information relevant to this study is required by federal, state or local law or students share personal information in the group interviews. Information collected from this study will be kept in the Magdalena's sole possession.

Should I have any further questions, I can contact Magdalena at 734.276-1142 or by email at mmzz@umich.edu.

My signature indicates that I understand and agree with everything that has been stated above and I, _____, agree to participate in interviews.
　　　　Print Name

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Further, ❏ I will   or ❏ will not   permit the interviews to be audio-recorded for the purposes of this study. I understand that the information recorded will also be kept in Magdalena's sole possession to be kept confidential and anonymous. I understand that if I decide not to permit this interview to be recorded, I will still be able to participate in the study without any negative consequence.

_____   _____
Print Name   Date

_____
Signature

227

Appendix C.

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The protocol serves as a guideline for interviews. During the course of this research conversations will emerge based on participant observations and conversations about what I observe and what is shared with me. I cannot anticipate those questions a priori, but the themes in this protocol are central to the student and will be themes that I will explore during interviews and observations.

Introduction to be read out loud: Hi and thanks again for agreeing to participate in today's interview. As you know I am a researcher from the University of Michigan and I am conducting research on Latina and Latino educational experiences. This is a voluntary process, so feel free to answer only the questions you want to. You can participate freely whenever you want. If at any point you feel uncomfortable you do not have to answer a question and if you like you can withdrawal from the discussion without any negative consequences. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview #:_____
Alias: _____
Gender: _____ Age: _____ DOB: _____

1. What's been going on since the Leadership Program?

2. How would you describe yourself? Probes:
   - What you do like best about yourself? Least about yourself?
   - How do you think people would describe you?
   - How would you describe yourself when you were younger?
   - How would you describe yourself now?
   - Have you changed much over the years? How?

2. Tell me about why education is important to you? Probes:
   - Parents often tell us stories about their lives that may have important meanings for our lives. What stories do you recall from your parents?
   - What are your goals for the future (i.e., personal, educational, employment)? Do you see yourself accomplishing them? What do you need to do in order to accomplish your future goals? What might keep you from accomplishing your goals?
   - Who have you talked to about these goals? Who are the people who most support you in accomplishing your goals? What do they do or say to support you?
   - In what ways to do you think your high school prepared you for what you want to do in the future?

- In what ways do you think your high school prepared you to attend college?

- (grand tour question first) Do you think there are people that have an advantage when it comes to going to college, if yes who are they? Why do they have an advantage?
- Do you think there are groups of people who have less opportunity to achieve academically? Who are they and why?
- Do you think there are any negatives associated with doing well in school or college? What are they?
- What people do you think have the best chance of getting ahead and why?
- What would you say is the best way to get ahead in life? Why?
- Does the college you attend have anything to do with your ability to get ahead? Why or why not?
- In what ways did attending the Latino Youth Leadership Conference influence your educational goals?

3. Do you feel support and encouragement from family is important to achieve your educational goals? Probes:
- Can you share with me how you feel your parents and other family members have supported and encouraged you throughout your education?
- Can you talk to me about what groups of people you feel are your support network in college? Outside of college?
- How do these people support you?
- What types of things do they say to you to make you feel like they are supporting you?
- Have they always supported you in your goals?
- How have they influenced you to reach your goals? In what ways?
- Can you name someone you look up to? Who and why do you look up to him/her?
- What do you most admire about this person?
- How is this person similar/different than you?
- What type of things do you learn from this individual?
- How long has this person been an influence you in your life?
- Can you explain why this person is important to you? In what areas of your life is s/he influential?
- Have any of these individuals influenced your thoughts about education and educational attainment?
- How did this person influence your thoughts on education? In what way did s/he tell you or communicate to you that they believe that education is important?

4. Looking back on your life were there any people who felt that you were really smart or truly talented at something? If yes, who? Probes:

- What kinds of things did they say or do that made you believe they felt this way about you?
- Were they people who felt that you would be successful in school? People who encouraged you to graduate from high school? People who encouraged you to go to college?
- Were there people who might not have felt that you were able to achieve your goals?
- What are the reasons you think they did not feel you were capable?

5. As you reflect on your educational experiences, what stands out most in your mind? Probes:
- Is your relationship with family and friends the same? If not, how has it changed?
- How do you think college has been different than high school (i.e., spaces, people, expectations)?
- What was the hardest thing to adjust to in college? How did you overcome it?
- Thinking back, what was your first semester of college like?

6. What does it mean to you to be a successful student? Do you consider yourself a successful student?

Appendix D.

PARENT AND FAMILY MEMBERS
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The protocol serves as a guideline for interviews/conversations. During the course of this research conversations will emerge based on participant observations and conversations about what I observe and what is shared with me. I cannot anticipate those questions a priori, but the themes in this protocol are central to the student and will be themes that I will explore during interviews and conversations.

Introduction to be read out loud: Hi and thanks again for agreeing to participate in today's interview. As you know I am a researcher from the University of Michigan and I am conducting research on Latina and Latino educational experiences. This is a voluntary process, so feel free to answer only the questions you want to. You can participate freely whenever you want. If at any point you feel uncomfortable you do not have to answer a question and if you like you can withdrawal from the discussion without any negative consequences. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview #:_____ Student Alias: _____
Alias: _____
Gender: _____ DOB: _____

---

1. Everyone has a story. Tell me about your life, in about 20 minutes or so if you can. Begin wherever you like and include whatever you wish. Probes:

- What were the most important turning points in you life?
- Tell me about the happiest moments in your life.
- What about the saddest points?
- Who have been the most important in your life?
- Who are you closest to now?
- What does you life look like from where you are now?
- If you could live your life over, what would you do differently?
- How do you explain what's happened to you over your life

2. How would you describe yourself? Probes:
- What you do like best about yourself? Least about yourself?
- How do you think people would describe you?
- How would you describe yourself when you were younger?
- How would you describe yourself now?
- Have you changed much over the years? How?

3. Tell me about why education is important to you? Probes:
- What would you say are your priorities in life? In order words, what are the most important things in your life?
- What are your goals for the future (i.e., personal, educational, employment)? Do you see yourself accomplishing them? What do you need to do in order to accomplish your future goals? What might keep you from accomplishing your goals?
- Do you think your high school prepared your children well for what they want to do in the future? Why or why not?
- Do you think race has anything to do with access to education? Why or why not?
- Do you think gender has anything to do with access to education? Why or why not?
- Do you think there are people that have an advantage when it comes to going to college, if yes who are they? Why do they have an advantage?
- Do you think there are groups of people who have less opportunity to achieve academically? Who are they and why?
- What people do you think have the best chance of getting ahead and why?
- What would you say is the best way to get ahead in life? Why?
- Does the college your children attend have anything to do with their ability to get ahead? Why or why not?

4. Can you tell me about your schooling? Here or in your country of origin? Probes:
- Do you feel support and encouragement from family is important for children to achieve their educational goals?
- Can you share with me how you feel you supported and encouraged your children throughout their education?
- What types of things do you say to them to make them feel like you are supporting them?
- Have you always supported them in their goals?
- Who has supported you in your goals?
- Can you name someone you look up to? Who and why do you look up to him/her?
- What do you most admire about this person?
- How is this person similar/different than you?
- What type of things do you learn from this individual?
- How long has this person been an influence you in your life?
- Can you explain why this person is important to you? In what areas of your life is s/he influential?

5. Looking back for first couple of years of your child's college, what stands out most in your mind? Probes:
- Is you relationship with him/her the same? If not, how has it changed?
- What was the hardest thing to adjust to when your child started college?

- Do you consider him/her a successful student? What does it mean to you to have your child be a successful student?

REFERENCES

Alarcón, N. (1990). The theoretical subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism. In G. Anzaldúa (Ed.), *Making face, Making soul/ Haciendo caras: Creative and critical perspectives by women of color* (pp. 356-69). San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press.

Anzaldúa, G. (1990). *Making face, Making soul/ Haciendo caras: Creative and critical perspectives by women of color.* San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press.

Arbona C. & Nora, A. (2007). The influence of academic and environmental factors on Hispanic college degree attainment. *The Review of Higher Education. 30*(3), 247-269.

Astin, A. W. (1972). *College dropouts: A national profile*. Washington, DC: Office of Research American Council on Education.

Astin, A. W. (1982). *Minorities in American higher education* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.

Attinasi, L. (1989). Getting in: Mexican Americans' perceptions of university attendance and the implication for freshman year persistence. *Journal of Higher Education, 60*(3), 247-255.

Attinasi, L. C., & Nora, A. (1996). Diverse students and complex issues: A case for multiple methods in college student research. In C. S. V. Turner (Ed.), *Racial and ethnic diversity in higher education* (pp. 545-554). Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster Custom Pub.

Barajas, H. L., & Pierce, J. L. (2001). The significance of race and gender in school success among Latinas and Latinos in college. *Gender & Society, 15*(6), 859-878.

Bean, J. P. (1980). The synthesis of a causal model of student attrition. *Research in Higher Education, 12*, 155-187.

Bean, J. P. (1983). The application of a model of turnover in work organizations to the student attrition process. *Review of Higher Education, 6*(2), 129-148.

Bean, J. P., & Creswell, J. W. (1980). Student attrition among women at a liberal arts college. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 21*(4), 320-326.

Behar, R. (1993). Translated woman: Crossing the border with Esperanza's story. Boston: Beacon Press.

Behar, R. (1996). *The vulnerable observer: Anthropology that breaks your heart*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Bensimon, E. M., & Riley, M. J. (1984). *Student predisposition to transfer: A report of preliminary findings*: Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Community Colleges.

Bentler, P., & Speckart, G. (1979). Models of attitudes-behavior relations. *Psychological Review, 86*, 452-464.

Berger, J. B. (2002). Optimizing capital, social reproduction, and undergraduate persistence: A sociological perspective. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the Student Departure Puzzle* (pp. 95-124). Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Bers, T. H., & Smith, K. E. (1991). Persistence of community college students: The influence of student intent and academic and social integration. *Research in Higher Education, 32*(5), 539-556.

Bowles, S. & Gintis, H. (1976) *Schooling in capitalistic America: educational reform and the contradictions of economic life.* New York: Basic Books.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J.G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook for theory and research for the sociology of education* (241 – 258). Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J. (1977) *Reproduction in education, society and culture* London: Sage.

Braxton, J. M. (2000). *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (1st ed.). Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Braxton, J. M., Bray, N. J., & Berger, J. B. (2000). Faculty teaching skills and their influence on the college student departure process. *Journal of College Student Development, 41*(2), 215-227.

Braxton, J. M., Milem, J. F., & Sullivan, A. S. (2000). The influence of active learning on the college student departure process. *The Journal of Higher Education, 71*(5), 569-590.

Braxton, J., Sullivan, S. A., & Johnson. (1997). Appraising Tinto's Theory of College Student Departure. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (Vol. XII, pp. 107-164). New York: Agathon Press.

Braxton, J. M., Vesper, N., & Hossler, D. (1995). Expectations for college and student persistence. *Research in Higher Education, 36*(5), 595-612.

Buriel, R. (1980). *Identity with traditional Mexican America culture and sociocultural adjustment.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association, Honolulu, HI.

Cabrera, A., & Nora, A. (1994). College students' perceptions of prejudice and discrimination and their feelings of alienation: A construct validation approach. *Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies, 16*(3-4), 387-409.

Cabrera, A. F., Castaneda, M. B., Nora, A., & Hengstler, D. (1992). The convergence between two theories of college persistence. *Journal of Higher Education, 63*(143-164).

Cammarota, J. (2004). The gendered and racialized pathways of Latina and Latino youth: Different struggles, different resistances in the urban context. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 35*(1), 53-74.

Carnevale, A. (2003). Seize the moment. In D. Leon (Ed.), *Latinos in Higher Education*. Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd.

Choy, S. (2002). *Access & persistence: Findings from 10 years of longitudinal research on students*. Washington, DC: American Council of Education Center for Policy Analysis.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (2007). *Mission and service opportunities*. Retrieved on July 15, 2007 from http://www.lds.org/csm/fulltime/0,18443,,00.html

Clements, E. (2000). Creating a campus climate in which diversity is truly valued. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 28*(4), 63-72.

Cope, R., & Hannah, W. (1975). *Revolving college doors: The causes and consequences of dropping out, stopping out, and transferring*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Daniel, R. (2004). Multiracial identity and the Chicana/o Latina/o experience. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Hilton San Francisco & Renaissance Parc 55 Hotel, San Francisco, CA,* Retrieved July 19, 2008 from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p108534_index.ht

Delgado Bernal, D. (2001). Learning and living pedagogies of the home: The mestiza consciousness of Chicana students. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 14*(5), 623-639.

Delago Bernal, D. (2002). Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Theory, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(2), 105-126.

Denzin, N.K. (1989). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Emerson, R.M., Fretz, R.I. & Shaw, L.L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Erisman, W. & Looney, S. (2007). *Opening the door to the American Dream: Increasing higher education access and success for immigrants.* Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Espinoza-Herold, M. (2007). Stepping beyond *Sí Se Puede*: *Dichos* as a cultural resource in mother–daughter interaction in a Latino family. A*nthropology & Education Quarterly, 38*(3), 260–277.

Ethier, K.A. & Deaux, K. (1994). Negotiating social identity when contexts change: Maintaining identification and responding to threat. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*(2), 243-251.

Falicov, C. J. (2002). Ambiguous Loss: Risk and Resilience in Latino Immigrant Families. In M. M. Suárez-Orozco & M. Páez (Eds.), *Latinos: Remaking America* (pp. 274-88). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fernández, L. (2002). Telling stories about school: Using critical race and Latino critical theories to document Latina/Latino education and resistance. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 45-65.

Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1975). *Belief, attitude, intention, and behavior: An introduction to theory and research*. Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Flores, L. A. (2000). Reclaiming the "Other": Toward a Chicana feminist critical perspective. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 24*, 687-705.

Flores, S.M., Horn, C.L., Crisp, G. (2006). Community colleges, public policy, and Latino students opportunity. In C. L. Horn, S.M. Flores, G. Orfield (Eds), *Latino educational opportunity: New directions for community colleges, No. 133* (p. 71-80). San Francisco: Jossey Bass

Foley, D. (1990). *Learning capitalist culture: Deep in the heart of Tejas.* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Freire, P. (1970).*Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Herder and Herder.

Fry, R. (2002). *Latinos in higher education: Many enroll, too few graduate.* Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

Fry, R. (2004). *Latino youth finishing college: The role of selective pathways*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

Gándara, P. (1982). Passing through the eye of the needle: High-achieving Chicanas. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 4*(2), 167-179.

Gándara, P. (1995). *Over the ivy walls: The educational mobility of low-income Chicanos*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

García, A. (2004). *Narratives of Mexican American women: Emergent identities of the second generation*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Gee, J. (2000). Teenagers in New Times: A New Literacy Studies Perspective. *Journal of Adolescence and Adult Literacy, 43*(5) 412 – 420.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretations of culture*. New York: Basic Books.

Giroux, H. (1992*). Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education*. New York and London: Routledge.

Gonzalez, K. P. (2000). Toward a theory of minority student participation in predominantly white colleges and universities. *Journal of College Student Retention, 2*(1), 69-91.

Gonzalez, K. P. (2002). Campus culture and the experiences of Chicano students in a predominantly White university. *Urban Education, 37*(2), 193-218.

Gonzalez, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (2005). *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Gross, A.E. & McMullen, P.A. (1983) Models of the help-seeking process. In B.M. Depaulo, A. Nadler, & J.D. Fisher (Eds.), *New directions in helping*: Vol. 2. Helpseeking (pp. 47-70). New York: Academic Press.

Guiffrida, D.A. (2003). African American student organizations as agents of social integration. *Journal of College Student Development, 44* (3), 304-319.

Gutierrez, R.A. (2004). Hispanics and Latinos. In W. Deverell(Ed.), *A companion to the American west* (pp.390-411). Blackwell Publishing.

Haro, R. P., Rodriguez, G. J., & Gonzales, J. L. (1994). *Latino persistence in higher education: A 1994 survey of university of California and California state University Chicano/Latino students*. San Francisco, CA: Latino Issues Forum.

Heller, D. (1997). Student price response in higher education: An update to Leslie and Brinkman. *Journal of Higher Education*, *68*(6), 624-659.

Hernández, G.E. (1999) What is a Corrido? Thematic Representation and Narrative Discourse. *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture.* Retrieved June 15, 2007 from http://www.chicano.ucla.edu/center/events/whatisacorrido.html

Holland, D.C. & Eisenhart, M.A. (1990). *Educated in romance: Women, achievement, and college culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hurtado, A. (2003). *Voicing Chicana feminisms: Young women speak out on identity and sexuality*. New York University Press.

Hurtado, S. (1994). The institutional climate for talented Latino students. *Research in Higher Education, 35*, 21-41.

Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education, 70*, 324-345.

Hurtado, S., Carter, D. F., & Spuler, A. (1996). Latino student transition to college: Assessing difficulties and factors in successful college adjustment. *Research in Higher Education, 37*(2), 135-157.

Hurtado, S., Milem, J. F., Clayton-Pedersen, A., & Allen, W. R. (1998). Enhancing campus climates for racial/ethnic diversity: Educational policy and practice. *Review of Higher Education, 21*(3), 279-302.

Karabel, J. (1972). Community college and social stratification. *Harvard Educational Review, 42*(521-562).

King, J. E. (2006). *Gender equity in higher education: 2006*. Washington, DC: American Council of Education, Center for Policy Analysis.

LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (1999). *Designing and conducting ethnographic research.* Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.

Leistyna, P., Woodrum, A., & Sherblom, S. A. (1996). *Breaking free: The transformative power of critical pedagogy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review.

Leon, D. (2003). *Latinos in higher education*. Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd.

Llagas, C., & Snyer, T. (2003). *Status and trends in the education of Hispanics* (NCES 2003-008). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Lopez, G. & Parker, L. (Eds) (2003). *Interrogating racism in qualitative research methodology.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

López, G. & Vázquez, V. (2006). Parental involvement in Latina/Latino-impacted schools in the Midwest: Recognizing the role and function of home-based knowledge and practices. *Journal of School Public Relations, 27*, 365-396.

MacLeod, J. (1995). *Ain't no makin' it: Aspirations and attainment in a low-income neighborhood*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Martinez, R. O., & Aguirre, A. J. (2003). Resource shares and educational attainment: The U.S. Latino population in the twenty-first century. In D. Leon (Ed.), *Latinos in Higher Education*. Oxford: Elsevier Science Ltd.

Massey, D. S., Charles, C. Z., Lundy, G. F., & Fischer, M. J. (2003). *The source of the river: The social origins of freshman at America's selective colleges and universities*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Matute-Bianchi, M. E. (1986). Ethnic identities and patterns of school success and failure among Mexican-descent and Japanese American students in a California high school: An ethnographic analysis. *American Journal of Education, 95*(1), 233-255.

Merriam, S.B. (2001). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Metzner, B. S., & Bean, J. P. (1987). The estimation of a conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate. *Research in Higher Education, 27*(1), 15-38.

Moje, E., & Martinez, M. (2007). The role of peers, families, and ethnic identity enactments in educational persistence and achievement of Latina/o youth. In A. Fuligni (Ed.), *Educational persistence and achievement of Latina/o youth*. New York: Russell Sage.

Moreno, J.F. (1999). *The elusive quest for equality: 150 years of Chicano/Chicana education*. Cambridge, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Morrow, R.A., & Torres, C.A. (1995) *Social theory and education: A critique of theories of social and cultural reproduction.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Mower, L. (2007, April 27). All immigrants in same bind. *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. Retrieved July 15, 2007, from http://www.lvrj.com/news/7219671.html

Muñoz, C. (1986). Identifying areas of stress for Chicano undergraduates. In M. A. Olivas (Ed.), *Latino college students* (pp. 131-156). New York: Teachers College Press.

Nevada Department of Education (2007). *Publications: Quick facts and stats.* Retrieved July 15, 2007 from http://nde.doe.nv.gov/Publications.htm

Nora, A., Cabrera, A., Hagedorn, L. S., & Pascarella, E. (1996). Differential impacts of academic and social experiences on college-related behavioral outcomes across different ethnic and gender groups at four-year institutions. *Research in Higher Education, 37*(4), 427-451.

Nora, A., & Lang, D. (2001). *Pre college psychosocial factors related to persistence.* Paper presented at the 41st Annual Meeting of the Association for Institutional Research, Long Beach, CA.

Ogbu, J. (1987). Variability in minority school performance: A problem in search of an explanation. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 18*(4), 312-333.

Olesen, V. L. (2000). Feminisms and qualitative research at and into the Millennium. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook on qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Olivas, M. A. (1986). *Latino college students.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Olmedo, I. M. (2003). Accommodation and resistance: Latinas struggle for their children's education. *Anthropology & Education, 34*(4), 373-395.

Orfield, G. (1996). *Dismantling desegregation: The quiet reversal of Brown v. Board of Education.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Orfield, G. (1999). Educational policy and Chicano students. In J. F. Moreno (Ed.), *The elusive quest for equality: 150 years of Chicano/Chicana education.* Cambridge, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Orellana, M. F. (2003). *In other words: Learning from bilingual kids' translating experiences.* Evanston, IL: School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University.

Pantages, T., & Creedon, C. F. (1978). Studies of college attrition: 1950-1975. *Review of Educational Research, 48*(1), 49-101.

Parker, L., Deyhle, D. & Villenas, S. (Eds) (1999) *Race is … race isn't: Critical race theory and qualitative studies in education.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Pascarella, E.T. & Terenzini, P.T. (1983). Prediction voluntary freshman year persistence/withdrawal behavior in a residential university: A path analytic validation of Tinto's model. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 35,* 215-226.

Pascarella, E. T., & Chapman, D. W. (1983). Validation of a theoretical model of college withdrawal: Interaction effects in a multi-institutional sample. *Research in Higher Education, 19*(1), 25-48.

Pascarella, E., Duby, P., & Iverson, B. (1983). Student faculty relationships and freshman year intellectual and personal growth in a nonresidential setting. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 24*(2), 395-340.

Pascarella, E. T., Smart, J. C., & Ethington, C. A. (1986). Long-term persistence of two-year college students. *Research in Higher Education, 24*(1), 47-71.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1979). Interaction effects in Spady's and Tinto's conceptual model of college dropout. *Sociology of Education, 52*, 197-210.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Passel, J.S. (2003). *Further demographic information relating to the DREAM Act.* Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center. Retrieved June 25, 2007 from http://www.nilc.org/immlawpolicy/DREAM/DREAM_Demographics.pdf

Passel, J.S. (2005). *Background briefing prepared for task force on immigration and America's future.* Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center. Retrieved June 30, 2007 from http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=61

Passel, J.S. (2006). *The size and characteristics of the unauthorized migrant population in the U.S. estimates based on the March 2005 Current Population Survey.* Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center. Retrieved June 25, 2007 from http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/46.pdf

Perez Carreon, G., Drake, C., & Barton, C. (2005). The importance of presence: Immigrant parents' school engagement experiences. *American Educational Researchers, 42*(3), 465-498.

Portes, A. & Rumbaut, R.G. (1997) *Immigrant America: A Portrait.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Price, J. (1977). *The study of turnover*. Ames: Iowa State University Press.

Renato, R. (1993). *Culture and Truth: The remaking of social analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Rendón, L., Jalomo, R. E., Nora, A. (2002). Theoretical considerations in the study of minority student retention in higher education. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 127-156). Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Rendón, L., Justiz, M. J., & Resta, P. (1988). *Transfer education in southwest border community colleges*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina.

Rendón, L., & Valadez, J. (1993). Qualitative indicators of Hispanic student transfer. *Community College Review, 20*(4), 27-37.

Rhoads, R. A. (1998). *Freedom's web: Student activism in an age of cultural diversity*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Rhoads, R. A. (1999). The politics of culture and identity: Contrasting images of multiculturalism and monoculturalism. In K. M. Shaw & J. Valadez & R. A. Rhoads (Eds.), *Community colleges as cultural texts* (pp. 103-124). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

San Miguel, G., Jr. (1987*). Let all of them take heed: Mexican Americans and the campaign for educational equality in Texas, 1910–1981.* College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

Sandoval, C. (1991). U.S. Third World Feminism: The theory and method of oppositional consciousness in the Postmodern world. *Genders*, *10,* 1-24.

Schensul, S.L., Schensul, J.J. & LeCompte, M.D. (1999). *Essential ethnographic methods: Observations, interviews, and questionnaires.* Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press.

Solórzano, A. (2005). At the gates of the kingdom: Latino immigrants in Utah, 1900-2003. In E.M. Gozdziak and S.F. Martin (Eds), *Beyond the Gateway: Immigrants in a Changing America* (pp. 177-212). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Solórzano, D. G. (1998). Critical race theory, race and gender microaggressions, and the experience of Chicana and Chicano scholars. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11*, 121-136.

Solórzano, D. & Delgado Bernal, D. (2001). Critical race theory, transformational resistance and social justice: Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context. *Urban Education, 36,* 308–342.

Solórzano, D. & Villalpando, O. (1998). Critical race theory, marginality, and the experience of minority students in higher education. In C. Torres & T. Mitchell (Eds) *Emerging issues in the sociology of education: Comparative perspectives.* New York: SUNY.

Solórzano, D. G., Villalpando, O., & Oseguera, L. (2005). Educational inequities and Latina/o undergraduate students in the US: A critical race analysis of their educational progress. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 4*(3), 272-294.

Spady, W. G. (1970). Dropouts from higher education: An interdisciplinary review and synthesis. *Interchange, 1*(1), 64-85.

Spencer, M. (2007 May, 2). In-state conflict on tuition amid tension on illegal immigration, support for change in college status. *Northwest Connecticut/Sports Final Edition,* pp. A1.

St. John, E. P., Cabrera, A. F., Nora, A., & Asker, E. H. (2002). Economic influences on persistence reconsidered: How can finance research inform the reconceptualization of persistence models? In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the Student Departure Puzzle*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Stahl, J. (2007, April 30). The politics of the Dream Act. *The Minnesota Daily*. Retrieved July 15, 2007 from, http://www.mndaily.com/2007/04/30/politics-dream-act

Stake, R.E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oak, CA: Sage.

Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (1997). A social capital framework for understanding the socialization of racial minority children and youth. *Harvard Educational Review, 67*, 1-39.

Stanton-Salazar, R.D. (2000). The development of coping strategies among urban Latino youth: A focus on help-seeking orientation and network-related behavior. In M. Montero-Sieburth & F.A. Villarruel (Eds.), *Marking invisible Latino adolescents visible: A critical approach to Latino diversity* (pp. 203-238). New York: Falmer Press.

Stanton-Salazar, R. D., & Dornbusch, S. M. (1995). Social capital and the social reproduction of inequality: The formation of informational networks among Mexican-origin high school students. *Sociology of Education, 68*, 116-135.

Steele, C. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist, 52*(6), 613-629.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Suárez-Orozco, M. M., & Páez, M. (2002). *Latinos: Remaking America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Summerskill, J. (1967). Dropouts from college. In N. Sanford (Ed.), *The American College: A psychological and social interpretation of higher learning*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tierney, W. G. (1996). An anthropological analysis of student participation in college. In C. S. V. Turner (Ed.), *Racial and ethnic diversity in higher education* (pp. 624-634). Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster.

Tierney, W. G. (2000). Power, identity, and the dilemma of college student departure. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Rethinking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 213-235). Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Tierney, W. G., & Hagedorn, L. S. (2002). *Increasing access to college: Extending possibilities for all students.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.

Valdés, G. (1996). *Con respeto: Bridging the distances between culturally diverse families and schools: An ethnographic portrait.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Vasquez, M.J. (1982). Confronting barriers to the participation of Mexican American women in higher education. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 4*(2), 147-165.

Vélez-Ibáñez, C. & Greenberg, J. (1992) Formation and transformation of funds of knowledge among U.S.-Mexican households. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 23*(4), 313–335.

Venegas, K. M. (2007). Low-income urban Latinas' student aid decisions: The effect of family ties. (ASHE/Lumina Policy Briefs and Critical Essays No. 1). Ames: Iowa State University, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

Villenas, S. (2001). Latina mothers and small-town racisms: Creating narratives of dignity and moral education in North Carolina. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 32*(1), 3-28.

Villenas, S. & Moreno, M. (2001) To valerse por si misma between race, capitalism, and patriarchy: Latina mother-daughter pedagogies in North Carolina. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 14*(5), 671–688.

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labor: How working class kids get working class jobs.* New York: Columbus University Press.

Wolf, E.R. (1958). The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican national symbol, *The Journal of American Folklore*, 279(71), 34-39.

Yin, R. (1984). *Case study research: Design and methods.* Newbury Bark, CA: Sage.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), 69-91.

Yosso, T. J. (2006). *Critical race counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano educational pipeline.* New York: Routeledge.