"We can change the paradigm": An Exploration of Latino Adolescent Identity Development and Educational Aspirations

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mami Graciela Mercado and to by papi Ernesto Mercado; and to my Abuelita Ester Acosta Hernandez who never sat in a classroom, never read a book, and never set foot on a college campus. But who made the choice to travel alone and pregnant with 4 girls on a bus from Romita, Guanajuato to Gardena, California in the summer of 1963 so that I could be here today in the halls of this institution. *A todas las Mujeres Acostas nacidas y que estan por nacir*, to every Acosta woman who has ever lived and has yet to be born I dedicate this work to you.

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And perhaps finally this dissertation is evidence that change can happen, the impossible can become the possible, and as the old adage goes *"lucha lucha, porque si se puede."*

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Blancos	–	Spanish colonial word for "White person born in Europe"
Castas	–	Spanish colonial word for "racially mixed people"
Chicano/a	–	a self-given definition for a person of Mexican American origin living in the United States.
Criolos	–	Spanish colonial word for "European born in the Americas"
Expectativas	–	Spanish for "expectations"
Gente de color	–	Spanish f colonial word for "people of color"
Hispanidad	–	Spanish created myth of White superiority
Indio	–	Spanish word used to describe a person of native phenotype
Latinidad	–	Expressions of what it means to be Latino
Limieza de sangre	–	Spanish for "cleansing of the blood"
Mejorando la raza	–	Spanish for "bettering the race"
Mestizo/a	–	Spanish word for "mixed": Spanish and Indian mixture
Mija	–	Spanish word for "daughter"
Mulattos	–	Spanish colonial word for "a mix of Spanish and Black"
Negros	–	Spanish for "black"
Pan-Latino	–	Term used to describe Latinos across countries in Latin American
Sistema de castas	–	Spanish for "caste system"
Zambos	–	Spanish colonial word for "a mix of Indian and Black"

ABSTRACT

This dissertation uses the concept of Intersectionality to explore the psychological meaning of race, gender, social class, and upward mobility in the lives of 17 working class Latino freshmen and sophomores attending a well-funded charter high school in New York City. Throughout I pay special attention to the context of education, a cultural site most Latinos feel represents the best hopes for upward mobility. Through discourses of race, gender, and social class I explore how these students manage to create meaning and find spaces to define their identity in a complicated race system of Black and White. It is about how they define their bicultural selves in relation to their parents, peers, communities, and society as a whole. Using a lens of Intersectionality I found three major themes emerge from the interviews and observations made during my time at the school: 1) The student's occupied an invisible space in society as neither White nor Black, immigrant nor citizen, thus giving them insight into the social construction of race in the United States. 2) Male and Female students were aware of the negative stereotypes society had about their gender and ethnicity and were actively fighting to oppose the preset idea of who they would become by constructing their identities as scholars rather than drop-outs. And finally 3) each student gained a sense of empowerment within the social structures of privilege and oppression they were experiencing in a segregated public school system by adopting the role of "delegate rather than charity case," using education as a vehicle to ultimately achieve their goals and better their families and communities.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

When I began my fieldwork I entered Excellence High School with the idea that I was going to be exploring the ways that Latino adolescents understood the race socialization messages they received from their parents, teachers, and society. This study evolved into an exploration of how the Latino youth of Excellence High School negotiated their identities as they shifted daily between what Michelle Fine refers to as,

> Segregated spaces or contexts in which individuals cross borders of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality to find a small corner in which to breath or to organize in peace (Fine, Weis, Centrie, & Roberts, 2000, p. 133).

The students in this research crossed borders both literal and metaphorical as they experienced their daily migration from worlds of poverty into worlds of privilege. Through this research I explore how Latino students in these shifting contexts managed to create meaning and found spaces to express their individual and group identities in a complicated race system of Black and White, and how they defined their bicultural and gendered selves in relation to their parents, peers, and society as a whole.

This dissertation presents a portrait of working class Latino freshmen and sophomores who attended a well-funded public charter high school in New York City. The contexts of the students' lives included a highly segregated American school

system with a strong emphasis on high stakes testing, predominately Latino neighborhoods experiencing gentrification, the buildup of anti-immigration sentiments, and an economy in crisis. My goal in presenting their experiences was to understand how these Latino youth came to define themselves relative to their transnational roots while also creating and maintaining a sense of hope for their future in the face of structural barriers which have historically prevented their communities from succeeding.

I came to study the identity formation of Latino adolescents indirectly. In the beginning of my graduate career my research was focused on the race socialization messages that Latino parents passed on to their children and how these messages affected their educational outcomes. My own mother and father both emigrated from Mexico in their teens with little to no money and less than a high school education, and my experience as a working class, child of immigrants played a pivotal role in my identity development and the way I viewed myself and my relationship to the United States. In my home, the subject of structural racism was never outwardly discussed, and most of the messages I received from my parents regarding this topic seemed to suggest that I could somehow overcome my racial standing in society by improving my social class; "If you work hard, *mija* [daughter], and get an education, you can do anything in this country." My father would repeat this throughout my youth, not so much as a fact but more as a dogmatic expression of his faith in the *American dream*. This message is often echoed in low-income schools like those that I attended where the hopes of entire communities are projected onto a few high achieving students. Both in my educational and familial contexts, I was indoctrinated with the idea that despite my meager

upbringing I could somehow overcome the low social status I had been born into through education. And it was this faith in the transformative power of education that propelled me to migrate to new spaces of privilege in the hopes of fulfilling my father's dreams. Education would be my way out of my minority status. Cherrie Moraga expressed it best in her essay *La Güera*:

> I knew nothing about "privilege" then. White was right. Period. I could pass. If I got educated enough, there would never be any telling (Moraga, 2000, p. 55).

Most of my life I had been considered by my community to be one of the lucky few who would go to college and do something better with myself. Consequently I developed my identity relative to my minority peers as an exception. And the idea that only a select few from my community would be allowed access to this world of privilege never struck me as structurally unfair. To echo Moraga's sentiments, if I could educate myself I could become someone different, someone better.

Because of these beliefs I did not have the tools to handle the types of insults I received upon entering a prestigious university. Other "more deserving" students informed me regularly that as a Latina female I was occupying the spot of a more qualified White student, and that I had only been let in to that school because of the "color of my skin," which by all accounts was no lighter or darker than the average student. These realities did not reflect the American dream of equality that had been espoused so often by my immigrant parents. I also struggled with the realization early in my academic career that I was "lucky," and that this exceptional status as "one of the select few" Latinos held many responsibilities. I was expected to be a spokesperson for all minorities since any opportunity I was given was always going to be at the cost of another Latino who had not received this chance.

In college I learned that my status as a minority in the world of privilege was never to be taken for granted and it was this exposure to spaces of privilege, which opened my eyes to the structural inequalities that existed in my life and in the lives of the students who I had grown up with. The world was not fair and the American dream was not real. All of this was complicated by the massive amount of guilt I felt that I had somehow escaped my true destiny through sheer "luck." Despite these struggles, college allowed me the space to explore and develop a critical consciousness while also giving me the tools to combat these injustices through my status as a privileged educated minority.

Reflecting on these experiences I began to conduct a literature review on the topics of race socialization and educational aspirations of Latinos, but I found research on these topics quite lacking. Within the fields of education and psychology research had been done on the ways that African American families warn their children about impending racism and the effects of these types of messages on academic outcomes and psychological well-being (Bowman & Howard, 1985; T. Brown, 2004; T. L. Brown & Krishnakumar, 2007; Hughes et al., 2006; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Lesane-Brown, Brown, Caldwell, & Sellers, 2005; Mutisya & Ross, 2005; Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006; O'Brien Caughy, Randolph, & O'Campo, 2002; Spencer, Brookins, & Allen, 1985; Stevenson, 1994; Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2002; Tatum, 1987; Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2010). But there was very little research exploring this phenomenon in Latino households. This is partially due to the fact that Latinos have a different historical relationship with the United States, but this history is often not reflected in the psychological literature. Most often Latinos are

represented in psychological and educational research as a large demographic block with quantitative statistics in place of personal experiences.

Questions about the nature of race socialization in Latino households and the value of education brought me to Excellence High School, a small charter school in New York City. It was here that I conducted my fieldwork and here that I became acquainted with regional expressions of *Latinidad*, what it means to be Latino. I had spent most of my life as a Mexican American female living in California, where issues of invisibility were not salient in this heavily Mexican populated region. I chose Excellence High School as my site due to its unique attributes: its recent opening, its small and all-minority student body, its strong parent involvement, and its strong social justice oriented curriculum which emphasized developing students' critical consciousness. In addition I intentionally chose a school in New York City due to the large Dominican and Puerto Rican communities, which have historically settled in that region. The national rhetoric around issues pertaining to the Latino community so often reflects a "Mexican " bias, and I felt it was important to explore a perspective that was outside of the center. It was at this school that I came to experience what life was like for the teens in this particular community. And it was here among a predominately Afro-Latino population of students that I came in touch with what it meant for me to be an educated, Mexican American, female outside of California. I found through my interviews and observations with the students that their perceptions of themselves as "lucky" and their access to privileged spaces mirrored my own experiences in college, though they were tackling these issues at a much earlier age. In addition, my own-shared personal history allowed me to probe deeper into their responses while also

being able to read the subtext between the lines. It was in these shared spaces and new encounters that meaning was made.

What I Mean When I Say *Latino*

Despite the myriad of perspectives that are represented in this study it is essential to define the community in which I worked in a way that is both respectful and inclusive of their varied experiences. Thus it becomes important to clarify that in this paper I use the term *Latino* as opposed to the term *Hispanic* for social, historical, and personal reasons. The U.S. Office of Management and Budget defines *Hispanics* or *Latinos* as a "person[s] of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" (OMB, 1997). Yet both have been widely rejected as terms of self-identification by most Latinos who report a preference for being identified by their country of origin (Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, & Velasco, Gabriel, 2012). In addition, it has been argued that terms like *Hispanic* and *Latino* deny the political, class, and cultural diversity that exists between and within groups who fall into this broad definition.

> The ethnic label *Hispanic* obscures rather than clarifies the varied social and political experiences in the U.S. society of millions of citizens, residents, refugees, and immigrants with ties to Caribbean and Central and South American countries (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011, p. 9).

Thus rather than shed light on ways to further understand these communities, such terms "strip people of their historical identity and reduces them to imputed common traits" (Darder, Torres, & Gutíerrez, 1997, p. 226). Finally for historical reasons I choose not to use *Hispanic* as it mutes the undercurrent of tension that often exists in Latin American countries between the historical realities of colonization under Spanish

rule and the at times complicated relationship that exists between these countries and their relationship to their Spanish heritage. But while I acknowledge that each group within Latin America has it own history and individual identity I also acknowledge that within the United States these communities have been grouped together, and this grouping creates an additional identity based in the experiences of being an "other" living in the United States. And therefore if I must choose a term I choose *Latino* because it acknowledges the identity that I as a Mexican American female share with other members of the Latino community within the United States, while also allowing these members to exist outside of the patriarchy of colonial terms like *Hispanic*. And this is what I mean when I say Latino: communities from countries existing in Latin America, colonized by the Spanish, who have immigrated to the United Space and occupy a space of otherness in the form of *Latino*.

Discussions of these communities are further complicated by the public discourse and mainstream characterization of Latino which often conflate being Latino with being an "immigrant other." An *immigrant* is simply defined as a person who takes up permanent residence in another country (Merriam-Webster, 2008). Yet for both real and imagined reasons Latinos in the United States have been constructed as a group of immigrant outsiders regardless of their citizenship or place of birth. A perfect example of this is the case of Puerto Ricans who have migrated to the United States mainland. They would not technically fall into the definition of immigrants as moving from Puerto Rico to the mainland is movement within the United States due to Puerto Rico's status as United States territory. Yet some have argued that once they enter the United States mainland they come to occupy the space of the immigrant other as depicted in the anti-

Puerto Rican sentiments that have historically been seen in places like New York City (Gonzalez, 2000; Grosfoguel, 2003).

In addition to being constructed as an immigrant group of outsiders Latinos have also been constructed as a racialized "other" who despite not sharing a common phenotype do not fit easily into the traditional American racial categories of White, Black, American Indian, or Asian as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In fact, Latinos technically can fit into all or none of these categories as they are historically a *mestizo* or mixed group of people who due to colonization and miscegenation share to varying degrees the physical characteristics of Native North and South Americans, Europeans, Asians, and Africans. As a Puerto Rican student Alley explained,

> Puerto Ricans are usually mixed mutts, a mix of Black, White, and I think Indian. And it's mainly like you got the Indian's, the Blacks, and the White's traits so that's what you're gonna come out to be. You're not gonna be all Black, you're not gonna be all Indian, you're not gonna be all White, you're gonna be a mix of those.

Marcial, a mixed phenotype Dominican student struggled to define himself within traditional American racial categories:

> My race is mixed with Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Everybody in the Dominican Republic is mixed but they would just say they're Latino here [in the United States].

He makes references to the fact that within strict definition of race most Latinos are technically mixed to some degree, yet the idea of race is not based on facts or rigid delineations. Rather ideas of race are reflective of the way that societies have constructed differences within and between peoples and populations. Thus as Marcial

notes, Latinos have somehow been constructed in the United States as a separate race existing outside of the bounds of Black, White, Asian, and Native American.

Thus it must be noted that when I am referring to *Blacks* or *Whites* specifically I am not including those Latino students with an African or White phenotype such as those from Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Mexico or Ecuador. In addition I intentionally use the term *Black* as opposed to *African American*, as the communities being observed in this research were populated by Blacks from the Caribbean, Guyana, and the United States. Therefore it was inappropriate to use the umbrella term of *African American,* as it did not accurately represent the Black community of which the students in this study spoke. Also within discussions of Blackness it is necessary to clarify that by *Blackness* I refer to communities who identify with a heritage related to Africa but including those who share heritage to Africa beyond just being American.

For the students who shared an African Phenotype but were in fact Latino the term *Afro-Latino* is much more appropriate as it describes,

> People of African descent in Mexico, Central, and South American, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and by extension those of African descent in the United States whose origins are in Latin American and the Caribbean (Román & Flores, 2010, p. 1).

Very recently this term has been developed as a way to signal the racial, cultural, and socioeconomic contradictions that exist within the "overly vague idea of Latino" (Román & Flores, 2010, p. 2). This term acknowledges the unique experience of being both Black and Latino and how that may differ from being a non-Black Latino or a non-Latino Black.

Despite concerns over the careless use of such broad terms as *Hispanic*, *Latino*, *immigrant*, and *race*, as a researcher I acknowledge that there are times when it is

appropriate to use such inclusive language for despite their differences there are in fact commonalities between these groups both historically and culturally. Hence *Latino* is being used in the broadest sense possible as a way to categorize a group but not as a means by which to explain people's experiences or behaviors. When referring to people from specific Latin American countries I will use the national label such as *Puerto Rican*, *Dominican, Mexican* or *Ecuadorian* and when referring to race I will use the term *Latino* or *Afro-Latino*.

Purpose and Research Questions

Discourses on race within the fields of Education and Psychology have historically focused on the Black American experience and have all but left out the experience of other groups, specifically Latinos. This is partially due to the fact that Latinos as a group do not easily fit into the existing binary model of race and are consequently discounted, made invisible. Arturo Madrid writes, "The accent would be heard in our pigmentation, our physiognomy, our names. We were, in short, the other" (Madrid, 2004, p. 24). This sense of otherness pervades the Latino experience in the United States as they are neither considered traditionally White nor can they be fully embraced by the Black American minority experience (Andersen & Hill Collins, 2004). As noted in the above exploration of terms like *Latino*, *Hispanic*, and *Afro-Latino*, Latinos are more often than not grouped together within a *pan-Latino* identity, which negates the reality of difference that exists not only historically but also racially in most countries within Latin America. This makes it difficult to study these communities within the existing rigid binary of race. By discussing race as static we deny the very essence of its social construction and the reality that race is much more complicated

than just what one looks like or where one comes from. Its construction is bound by intertwining factors of gender and, most importantly but less explored within psychological research, social class.

Due to the variety of differences that exist within and between Latinos, studying them as a group requires a broader lens than that which can be explained exclusively through race. The theoretical framework of Intersectionality posits that race, class, and gender are fundamental structures of society. The relationship between these three constructs is critical to understanding people's lives, institutional systems, contemporary social issues, and the possibility for social change (Andersen & Hill Collins, 2004; Cole, 2009). They are linked experiences with no one being more important than any other.

This study is an exploration into the lives of 17 Latino high school students as they reflected on how society viewed them, how they viewed themselves, and who they ultimately hoped to become. Using the lens and methodology of Intersectionality I attempt to analyze the heterogeneity of Latinos while also exploring contextual and social factors of poverty, social class, immigration, and gender and how they all play out within these titles of *Black*, *Latino, Afro-Latino,* and *immigrant*. My goal is to legitimize the experiences of Latinos adolescents as members of the broader American landscape by acknowledging, articulating, and theorizing their experiences within the American school system. Through this study I hope to contextualize the educational choices of Latino adolescents while also exploring alternative constructs and discourses of race that move beyond what has been traditionally used in the educational and

psychological literature on race and identity. The present study is guided by the following three research questions:

1. How do American born Latino adolescents negotiate their multiple identities as both transnational citizens of the United States and Latin America?
2. How do Latino adolescents envision and plan to create their futures in the face of adversity, societal expectations, and structural barriers?
3. What are the experiences and aspirations of low-income Latino adolescents attending a well-funded charter school and receiving access to spaces of privilege?

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Ethnic and Racial Identity Development During Adolescence

I chose a high school setting as adolescence is an important stage of self-exploration and experimentation leading to a commitment to various identities (Erikson, 1994). It is also specifically a time when individuals truly begin to examine their ethnic and racial identities (Phinney, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993). Before this, in childhood, ethnic identity is understood in a very simplistic way and is mainly informed by the opinions of one's parents (Bernal, Knight, Ocampo, Garza, & Cota, 1993). During adolescence individuals begin to identify with social groups, and information about those social groups begins to affect them. Social Identity Theory posits that during adolescence individuals begin to derive self-concept from knowledge of group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It is during this stage of development that youth come to understand more subtle aspects of race and ethnicity. For instance, they begin to notice the effects that race and ethnicity can have on socioeconomic differences between groups, friendship patterns, and finally an awareness of discrimination and prejudice. While adolescents are more able to recognize the social consequences of race and ethnicity they are also more able to discuss and reflect on their own experiences with prejudice and racism (Quintana, 1994, 1998). Quintana and Vera (1999) found that by the 6th grade Mexican American children had a sophisticated understanding of the

prejudice that they faced. So while Latino children are constantly hearing socialization messages about what it means to be Latino they are also using these messages to shape their identities and their relationships with groups around them.

In the past adolescence was described as a time of "storm and stress" when young people are discovering who they are and forging new identities in the face of pressure from their families, friends, and peers (Hall, 2005). More recent research has suggested that this may not necessarily be the case as the stress of adolescence can also be mediated by more contextual factors such as environments which allow teens to thrive (Lerner, 2007). For minority adolescents this time can be particularly tumultuous as minority youth are not only coping with the typical stress of adolescence but are also forming an understanding of what it means to carry a minority status in the United States or in the case of Latinos, what it means to be members of a minority ethnic group (Jones Thomas & Rodgers, 2009; Tatum, 1987). Research has shown that it is during this period when minority youth begin to show a drop in motivation and a decrease in their school engagement (Wong, Eccles, & Belansky, 1996). Historically researchers have argued that this awareness of one's minority status can lead minority adolescents to disengage from school. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) contend that for African American youth, attempts to participate in mainstream aspects of society, specifically education, could be construed as "acting White" or engaging in the majority culture's values. They argue that this desire to rebel against the mainstream and avoid behaviors that are deemed to express White mainstream values explains the disengagement of minority students in education (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986) the means by which a group was historically brought to the United States, whether it be willingly or by force, has a lasting effect on the relationship that group has with the United States. There are subordinate or caste like minorities, who were involuntarily brought to the United States such as African Americans; and then there are voluntary immigrant minority groups. In the case of African Americans, historically they developed a strong sense of collective identity and peoplehood formed in opposition to the social identity of White Americans. This oppositional identity was a reaction to the exclusion they historically experienced. But it is the formation of an oppositional identity which caused many African American students to actively disengage from school, as schools were seen as social structures that promoted White values or "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

In the past this theory of oppositional identities was used to explain the lack of academic success and engagement in minority students (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1990). But this is problematic in that it simplifies the experience of minority students placing them in contrast to an imagined White standard of "normal." In addition the idea of the caste like minority does not account for Latinos who despite immigrating willingly to the United States do hold a subordinate position in society similar to Blacks. In addition it also does not account for those Latinos whose families did not enter the United States voluntarily and were historically living in the Southwest during the time of U.S. settlement.

Cross (1995) later revisited the idea of oppositional identities but he chose rather to focus on the protective factors associated with oppositional identity formation. He argues that the formation of oppositional identities can be divided into those that are

alienated and those that were defensive. Unlike Ogbu's description of the alienated oppositional identity wherein students position themselves against society (Ogbu, 1990), the defensive oppositional identity allows minority students to construct psychological mechanisms that protected themselves from what is racist about American society while still allowing them to participate and engage as members of society (Cross, 1995).

In expanding the literature beyond the Black American minority experiences, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2002) observed the effects of negative group stereotypes on the children of immigrants, much like the population presented in this study. They noted that the children of immigrants experienced "negative social mirroring" wherein negative societal expectations of their group were constantly being reflected at them, distorting their idea of who they were. Through negative social mirroring children can either become resigned to the negative reflections they see resulting in low aspirations and self-defeating behavior such as gang involvement. Or they can resist those negative images, maintaining a sense of hope, allowing them to challenge the status quo and make the conscious decision to succeed in spite of the negative social mirrors they encounter (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2002).

Transnational Identities and Generational Differences Within Families

The term "transnational" has been used to describe, "People who migrate from a country of origin to a host one and maintain cultural, emotional, or physical connections to the residence of one's origin in the host country" (Heredia, 2009, p. 4). Discourses on transnationalism have also gone on to describe the transnational identities of children of

immigrants who are constantly engaging in multiple worlds as they shift both mentally and physically between real and imagined spaces of culture and identity (Heredia, 2009). Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco describe this experience as holding a,

> Dual frame of reference…a worldview [that] is organized around comparing experiences and opportunities in the two settings— the homeland and the adoptive community (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2002, p. 114).

But this dual frame of reference can also lead to generational differences between the children of immigrants (second generation) and their parents (first generation). Researchers have noted that first generation immigrants report feeling better off relative to their home country. This may be due to the fact that their home country remains their point of reference. This relationship to their country of origin acts as a buffer, which at times prevents the first generation from internalizing the negative stereotypes of the new country. Second generation children, in contrast, only learn about their parents' culture of origin in a vacuum within their homes. Thus their relationship to the country of origin is often romanticized or idealized. This can be aggravated by the fact that unlike their parents they see their marginality within the United States relative to the majority culture. In addition these children are often shuttled back and forth between home country and adopted country. This creates a sense of "social dislocation" in which these second generation children live in the margins of both countries as a member of neither society (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995, 2002, 2009).

But this transnational relationship with both home country and adopted country can have its benefits. Padilla argues that a healthy relationship between these two can lead to the development of a bicultural identity:

> The bicultural person is well adjusted, open to others, and a cultural broker between peoples of different backgrounds. The completely bicultural person is

> an individual who possesses two social persona and identities. The person is equally at ease with members of either culture and can easily switch from one cultural orientation to the other and does so with native-like facility (Padilla, 2006, p.471).

Thus a key element of the transnational orientation is the ability to adopt and live within two distinct cultures that manage to coexist within the bicultural individual (Schönpflug, 2008, p. 186). This orientation requires the social flexibility to travel between different spaces. Thus the typical crises of identity, which occurs during adolescence, may be especially difficult for the children of immigrants as they often struggle with their parents desires for them to maintain a strong cultural identity with their homeland while also being influenced by their own American culture (Padilla, 2006; Schönpflug, 2008). Thus it is essential to take into account issues of transnationalism and bicultural identity formation when studying the way that race, gender, and class identities are mirrored and expressed in the lives of Latino adolescents (Andersen & Hill Collins, 2004).

Forging a Sense of Resilience Through the Protective Forces of Context

Resilient students in the context of schooling refers to individuals who manage to succeed at high levels in the face of economic, cultural, and social barriers (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). And a resilient student can be further empowered through the formation of a critical consciousness, when an individual becomes aware of their position within an oppressive hierarchical system and feels a sense of responsibility to change that system (Massey, Cameron, Ouellette, & Fine, 1998, p. 339). Fine describes this as the ability to, "convert shame and embarrassment into outrage and activism" (Fine & Burns, 2003, p. 853). Refusing the identity that has been imposed on an

individual is at the core of oppositional identity formation. Yet this differs from the way oppositional identities were originally imagined by Ogbu and even Cross (Cross, 1995; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), Schultz (1999) refers to this as "Acts of Refusal," whereby students actively resist the path of failure that is laid out before them. It is seen in the cultural and psychological flexibility to define oneself in multiple ways (Schultz, 1999, p. 8).

Considerations When Studying Latino Populations

Latinos have characteristics like immigration, language, and cultural practices that may differentiate them from the mainstream population. Therefore when studying Latinos and their children, researchers must take into consideration certain key factors: history, the significance of phenotype, the role of social class, and generational or immigration status. Considering these factors will allow us to develop a clearer perspective of the mechanisms and motivations that are driving the ethnic and racial experiences of Latino communities in the United States.

Specifically, one aspect of race that has been overlooked in Latino populations, and perhaps minority populations in general, is the discussion of phenotype. In Latin America, the value placed on certain physical features is strongly tied to the history of colonization by the Spanish, who enacted a caste system throughout Latin America based on skin color (López, 2008). To complicate this even more, phenotype in Latino America must be discussed in relation to social class. One's social status in the Latin American context is seen as fluid, based on a combination of phenotype and socio-economic status (Alarcón, Szalacha, Erkut, Fields, & Coll, 2000; Howard, 2001;

Kinsbruner, 1996; Menchaca, 2002; Sagas, 2000). I will expand on this in the coming section.

History. Taking history into account is important for identifying the ways that African Americans and Latinos may differ in their notions of race and in their understanding of prejudice and discrimination. African Americans have a shared history of subordination by a White majority. They have been historically oppressed based on racial stratification and perhaps most importantly were involuntarily brought to the United States as slaves (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1990). In contrast, many Latino immigrants and their children may be more familiar with the Latin American form of social stratification founded on the Spanish caste system, which emphasizes indigenousness, skin color, and social class (Alarcón et al., 2000; Gomez, 2008; Howard, 2001; Hughes, 2003; Kinsbruner, 1996; López, 2008; Sagas, 2000).

History provides a lens through which to explore the meaning and significant of race within Latino communities. In her research, López (2008) makes the point that definitions of race differ for Latinos and are based on a history of colonized natives and enslaved Africans, mixing with Spaniards. Throughout Latin America the Spanish enacted the *sistema de castas*, or system of castes, where privilege was given based on White European racial heritage. At the top of the caste system were the *blancos*, Whites born in Europe. After this came the *criolos*, who were Europeans born in the colonies but who could be considered legally White. *Castas* were the racially mixed people: *mestizos* (Spanish and Indian), *mulattos* (Spanish and Black), and *zambos* (Indian and Black). After this came the *gente de color* or the people of color. And finally at the bottom were the *negros*, Black slaves imported for labor. This policy of privilege

promoted intermarrying as a way of improving one's status through trying to "whiten" one's lineage, and led to the creation of a distinctly mixed population of Latinos and Afro-Latinos. This history differs from the American system where miscegenation with African Americans was legally prohibited until 1967 (Gomez, 2008; López, 2008). Thus an exploration of history allows us to shed light on the meaning of the word race and how it is defined in different contexts.

Despite the fact that all of Latin America was colonized by the Spanish under the same racial caste system, in the following sections I will specifically highlight how race has been historically constructed in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico as these two make up the largest Latino ethnic groups in the region of New York where this study was conducted. Highlighting each of their histories helps to illuminate the complex racial geography of the community where this study was based. In addition, highlighting the different experiences of these two distinctly Afro-Latino nations acknowledges that despite the use of the umbrella term Latino each country in Latin America has its own unique relationship to race in addition to its own unique relationship to the United States.

A history of the Dominican Republic.

> Dominican nationalism has been colored by a pervasive racism, centered on a rejection of African ancestry and blackness. The exclusion of an African past and the manipulation of a European colonial legacy and indigenous heritage under-pine…analysis of Dominican society (Howard, 2001, pp. 1–2).

Dominicans are a genetic combination of three groups: the native Arawak Indians, the Spanish settlers, and African slaves. Yet despite the visible presence of African heritage, it is the Spanish and Native ancestry that are most touted resulting in a denial of Africanness. This denial has everything to do with the Dominican Republic's

long, bitter relationship with Haiti, their only land-sharing neighbor. But how these groups all came to coexist and mix is key to the way that race is defined and structured in the Dominican Republic (Howard, 2001; Sagas, 2000).

When the Spanish colonized the island of *Hispañola* the natives Arawaks were all but wiped out from disease, combat, and being forced into cruel labor conditions. Those who were left intermarried with Spanish settlers. A dearth of human capital led the Spanish to import slaves from Africa, brought for the sole purpose of working in the sugar cane fields. In an attempt to control this newly forming population of Africans, Indians and mestizos, the Spanish created the myth of White superiority known as *Hispanidad.* It was through this ideology of Spanish superiority that light skinned Spaniards were able to maintain dominance and oppress the population of the Dominican Republic and Latin America as a whole (Howard, 2001; Sagas, 2000).

The region now known as Haiti was occupied by the French and in 1804 the large African slave population revolted, successfully declaring independence from the French. This revolt spread into parts of the Dominican Republic where Haitians came to occupy much of the island and committed atrocities against the *mestizos* who lived in the countryside. Haiti's occupation of the Dominican Republic lasted for 22 years and the Dominican Republic had to eventually gain their independence from a nation populated by ex-slaves. The memory of this tumultuous period has continued to fuel present day anti-Haitian sentiment and, in turn, has led to a denial of African heritage. Blackness is associated with Haiti and dark skinned Dominicans often claim a *mulatto* identity rather than acknowledging any relationship to Black Haitians.

When general Trujillo took power over the Dominican Republic in 1931 he stressed that the Dominican Republic was a Hispanic, Catholic, and most importantly White nation. Haitians were massacred in accordance with his official policy of *anti-Haitianismo* (Howard, 2001; Sagas, 2000). Sagas (2000) writes "The Dominican may be a mulatto or black racially but he speaks Spanish, is baptized Roman Catholic, and 'thinks white'" (p. 29). It is their phenotypical Blackness and their strong anti-Haitian sentiment that are at the core of Dominican racial identity. It is the "tension between a racially complex reality and the logic of preferred indigenous and Hispanic heritage [that] frames any discussion of race in the Dominican Republic" (Howard, 2001, p. 44).

In addition to this complex relationship to race and skin color, the Dominican Republic has also had a tumultuous relationship with the United States. Presently it has one of the highest rates of legal immigration to the United States of any country in the Western Hemisphere. This is due mainly to an open door policy, which existed during the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic. During this time most of the people coming from the Dominican Republic were from urban sectors of the working class. Despite being encouraged to settle in the United States by the U.S. government they were not welcomed into American society, settling into predominately Puerto Rican neighborhoods. Grosfuguel (2003) argues that despite having a distinct Dominican identity they have come to hold the same metaphorical space of otherness in American society as Puerto Ricans. In addition, Howard (2001) argues that immigration to the United States leads Dominican immigrants to a new awareness of their Black roots via encounters with White Americans who assume they are African American. But rather than embrace their African roots this just reinforces their Dominican ethnicity as a

resistance to the prevailing racial order in the United States (Howard, 2001). Through an understanding of history, any analysis of Dominican racial identity must be placed in the context of their historical relationship with Blackness and European Whiteness and how all of this plays out through immigration to the United States.

A history of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico was a Spanish colony from 1493 until 1898 when sovereignty was passed on to the United States after the Spanish-American War. To discuss race and ethnic identity in Puerto Rico it is essential to place these concepts within the context of how Puerto Rican national identity has been shaped by their relationship to Spain and the United States (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006; Gonzalez, 2000; Grosfoguel, 2003; Malavet, 2004; Morris, 1995). Racially Puerto Ricans are a mixture of Taino Indians, European Spanish, and African slaves. Much like in the Dominican Republic, the Spanish imported African slaves for labor to replace the dwindling Taino population. Intermarrying and miscegenation with Africans and the remaining Native women led to the formation of new racial categories like *mestizo* (Spanish and Taino), *mulatto* (Spanish and Black), and *zambo* (Taino and Black), in addition to already existing categories of *indio* and *negro* (Gonzalez, 2000)

Despite this racial mixing many have argued that in Puerto Rico and throughout Latin American there is a clear preference for light skin and European features and a denial of Afro-Latino heritage (Gomez, 2008; Gonzalez, 2000; López, 2008; Menchaca, 2002). In 1530 the Spanish imposed a blood registry where residents of the island had to prove pure Spanish blood in order to receive the benefits of being full members of Spanish society. This blood registry remained in effect until 1870. More than 300 years of institutionalized preference for light skin gave birth to the idea of *mejorando la raza*

or bettering ones race by marrying up as a way of lightening ones lineage (Gonzalez, 2000; Rodriguez, 2000). Remnants of this system can be seen today in the way that many Puerto Ricans will describe respected ancestors in terms of their light skin, blue eyes, and straight hair (Rodriguez, 2000).

Much like in the Dominican Republic there is also a denial of African heritage in Puerto Rico and a glorification of Native ancestry. Gonzalez (2000) noted that by the end of the 18th century there were few Taino Indians left on the island leaving the reality of a population exclusively made up of White Europeans, Africans, and mixtures of those two groups. Despite this there is almost no acknowledgement of African heritage. Light skin preference does exist but it is so insidious in Puerto Rican society that one researcher found that most people when interviewed will report that they do not notice race (Gonzalez, 2000).

This White preference and lack of discussion of race have been complicated by Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States. As a result of the Spanish-American War proprietorship of Puerto Rico was passed on to the United States in 1898. The Jones Act of 1917 granted U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans allowing for mass migration of impoverished Puerto Ricans looking for job opportunities on the mainland (Gonzalez, 2000; Grosfoguel, 2003; Luis-Brown, 2008). In fact by 1973 40% of the Puerto Rican population was living in the United States and today that figure has risen to 53% (Gonzalez, 2000; Lopez & Velasco, 2011). The Johnson Act of 1921 decreased quotas for Southern and Eastern European migration as peoples from these countries were considered to have different, inferior cultures to those shared by Americans and Northern and Western Europeans. Yet during this time Puerto Ricans were encouraged

to come to the mainland to fill jobs once occupied by these Southern and Eastern Europeans groups (Luis-Brown, 2008; Sánchez Korrol, 1983). Despite being promised wealth and opportunity most Puerto Ricans experienced poverty, hardship, and were treated as second-class citizens (Gonzalez, 2000). In New York City they were forced to settle close to African American communities and, given their mixed phenotype, were often confused with African Americans. The majority of Puerto Ricans who came to the mainland were unskilled, rural labor with little to no education. In the 1960's they struggled for civil rights and equal pay, which caused them to be replaced by other newer immigrant groups who would work for less. Yet structural racism led to a lack of access to good schooling and housing making it nearly impossible to pull themselves out of poverty (Luis-Brown, 2008). To this day Puerto Ricans have the highest unemployment and poverty rates among Caribbean groups in the United States (Grosfoguel, 2003). Despite an active open door policy the United States historically expressed a disapproving attitude toward Puerto Rican immigrants. When Puerto Ricans of color entered the armed forces during World War I they were placed in African American units. The army went so far as to create a separate classification of "Puerto Rican White" as a way to differentiate them from "real" White citizens (Kinsbruner, 1996). Kinsbruner (1996) argues that these experiences and centuries of Spanish White supremacy promoted a quest for Whiteness among Puerto Ricans, discouraging them from acknowledging their African heritage, and promoting a lack of desire to associate with African Americans in the United States.

This complicated relationship between citizenship and otherness is why many experts in Puerto Rico have concluded that it is appropriate to use the term "immigrant"

when talking about Puerto Ricans on the mainland. For as Grosfoguel (2003) noted, despite having technical citizenship Puerto Ricans do not have access to the "imagined community" called "the nation." They have been socially constructed as "colored" in the Unitd States (Malavet, 2004). And this reality of constructed "color" is further complicated by the historically negative relationship that Puerto Ricans have had with their Afro-Latino heritage.

Phenotype and social class. A study done by the Pew Hispanic Center (Tafoya, 2004) found that 42% of the Hispanic population in the United States marked "some other race" in the 2000 census. Demographically those Hispanics who did identify as White were more likely to have a higher income, and those who were immigrants were more likely to have attained citizenship. The author suggested that for Latinos living in the United States race may be seen as a measure of their acceptance into broader American society, with Whiteness representing the ultimate acceptance (Tafoya, 2004). These results can be examined in the context of Latin American culture where race is defined in different ways and is fluid. Historically, different groups in Latin America enjoyed different access to power and property. A person's racial categorization could be defined in terms of language, dress, religion, social organization, and culture. Therefore one could move up in one's status by accessing these markers of class. But as one author notes,

> Social mobility thus created an optical illusion…in Latin America [the illusion of equality and no racial divides]…mestizo (as opposed to *indio*) is an achieved status as well as an ascribed status (Graham, Helg, & Knight, 1990, p. 73).

Thus despite the fact that biological determined racism does not really exist in Latin American the sociological problem of racism is still very present (Graham et al., 1990).

During the time of Spanish rule in Latin America, Spanish soldiers were encouraged to marry Indian women as a means of preventing an uprising. Indian, and later *mestiza* women with lighter skin and less Indian features, were valued by the Spanish as potential marriage partners (Menchaca, 2002). Similarly under Spanish rule Whiteness could be purchased through a *limpieza de sangre*, a cleansing of the blood, in which a mixed person could purchase their Whiteness as a means of achieving higher social status. Even in contemporary Latin America higher socioeconomic status can "Whiten" a dark skinned person while low socioeconomic status can "darken" a light skinned person (López, 2008). Alarcón et al. (2000) writes in her historical analysis of Puerto Rico:

> In Puerto Rico, one's color is a cultural designation that has racial implications. On the mainland [United States], race is an ancestry-based designation that has color implications (p. 209).

The author points out that racism in Latin America does not equate to a belief in certain people's genetic inferiority but rather in a belief in the social inferiority of certain groups (Alarcón et al., 2000). According to this complex system, the poorer you are the more indigenous you are considered. Yet the more indigenous you look the more likely you are to be denied opportunities and relegated to the lower social classes (Howard, 2001; Kinsbruner, 1996; Sagas, 2000). Escaping poverty via immigration to the United States or access to education can allow someone to escape the stigma of being racially indigenous (Hughes, 2003).

Parent generational and immigration status. Another important factor to consider when exploring Latino adolescent identity is the generational difference that may exist in immigrant households. While some 11% of Latino children share a foreign

born status with their parents, 52% are second generation, U.S. born children who are growing up in a completely different context from their foreign born parents (Fry & Passel, 2009). Also an understanding of racial stratification as it exists in the U.S. is something that is learned over time through encounters with mainstream American culture. Recent immigrants may be less aware that they are being discriminated against based on their race or ethnicity and may attribute hardships they experience to other factors related to their immigrant status (Hughes et al., 2006). Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2002) note that children of immigrants do not always share the same frame of reference as their parents. In the case of Latino immigrant parents, their negative experiences in the United States can always be placed in the context of struggles they may have encountered in their home country. Their children do not have such a comparison and see their life for what it is, unjust and sometimes full of prejudice. They see the many ways that they are deprived of access, and they are unable to share this with their parents in the way that African American parents and children have a common shared experience (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2002). In addition, Latino households are often multigenerational and may include not just foreign-born parents but also foreign-born grandparents (González, Umaña-Taylor, & Bámaca, 2006). The generational status of children, parents, and extended relatives may play a major role in the varying experiences and beliefs about discrimination that a single household can have.

A review of the literature in education, psychology, and history highlights the need to take into account the various cultural factors that embody the Latino-American experience. By contextualizing the cultural factors of history, social class, and

immigration researchers can get a better picture of the context of the lives of Latino adolescents as they discuss their experiences of gender, race and social class within the United States.

CHAPTER III

Methods

I conducted two rounds of semi-structured qualitative interviews with 17 Latino students attending Excellence High School during the fall of 2010. I chose to use a qualitative lens as it allowed me the opportunity to truly do an in-depth exploration of the students' daily lives both inside and outside of the school walls. Seidman (1997) argues that using qualitative methods to explore individual experiences can be especially useful in the context of educational research as, "Social and educational issues are abstractions based on the concrete experiences of people" (Seidman, 1997, p. 1). He (1997) added that the ultimate goal of qualitative interviews is to understand the experiences of others and the meaning they make of those experiences. I wanted to explore how the Latino students at Excellence High School experienced their reality and the world around them and how they used this reality to define themselves. My hope was to move beyond demographics as they can merely tell us trends but do not paint a full picture of Latino students' lives.

I negotiated permission to use the school as my research site from the Principal, Ms. Rao. Though a convenience sample such as this limits the generalizability of this study, it facilitated the process of data collection given the sensitive and personal nature of the topics I investigated, the challenges of recruiting participants, and the realities of my limited financial resources. Building a relationship with the principal proved

invaluable to successful data collection and interpretive analysis into my inquiries as it allowed me to more easily establish new relationships with other teachers and staff members of the school. If need be I could further explore a student's experience or family life by asking one of the teachers. In addition, Spanish teachers Mr. Jones and Ms. Vasquez provided extensive assistance in recruiting and encouraging student participants for this study. Likewise forming relationships with the school staff made for easier follow-up, interpretive validity checks, and assisted in overcoming barriers that may have resulted from my identity as a Mexican American, West Coast born and raised, female doctoral student.

Research Site

The student body. 89% of the students enrolled in the school came from the Jefferson Park area, a predominately Dominican and Puerto Rican ethnic enclave 30 minutes from the school. The first wave of students attending Excellence High's feeder junior high were admitted through recruitment, which was done at local after-school programs and community centers in the Jefferson Park area. This accounted for the large population of students from that neighborhood. Subsequent waves of students were admitted through a random lottery. The remaining 11% of students commuted from other parts of the city. In addition family members who already had children enrolled in the school were able to bring in brothers, sisters, and cousins as part of a family recruitment policy.

At the time of my observation the school was in its first year of functioning as a high school, and the student body was made up of 84 students with the school serving

grades 9 and 10. They planned to increase their enrollment over the next four years with the ultimate goal of having a fully enrolled school of 800 students serving grades 9 through 12. The general student body was 63% boys, 37% girls, with 66% receiving free or reduced lunch. Racially the students were 45% Black non-Latino and 55% Latino. The primary language spoken in homes was 58% English, 42% Spanish. Dominican and Puerto Rican students made up the largest portion of Latinos with a remaining handful of Latino students identifying as Ecuadorian and Mexican.

Due to small class sizes the school was limited in its offering of foreign language classes with only Spanish being offered in a sequence for non-native speakers and a sequence for native speakers. The latter was referred to as "Spanish for heritage speakers." Consequently due to the demographics of the school, students were tracked such that non-Spanish speakers, predominately Black (non-Latino) students, took one Spanish sequence, while Spanish speakers, predominately Latino students, took the heritage speakers series. This led to inadvertent segregation of the student body whereby the Black students took almost every class together while the Latino students took almost every class together. This created a strong sense of both racial/ethnic identity and distinction for both of these groups. The tension that existed between these two groups is discussed in later chapters. It was unusual circumstances like these and others related to the recent founding of the school, which made it a special site to observe as these 84 students, shared a unique experience that differed from those of students in well-established charter school and more traditional educational contexts.

The curriculum. Excellence High School's curriculum was based on four major building blocks: college preparation; high standards for academic and personal

character; a highly structured learning environment; and a committed faculty who embody leadership.

First, students were "coached" throughout their time in school and encouraged to explore academic and extracurricular interests which would further their pursuit of higher education. This coaching includes assistance with standardized testing, college application requirements, and pursuing financial aid opportunities. In addition students were encouraged and given the opportunity to find summer internships. The emphasis on "College Preparation" was echoed throughout the building itself. College flags festoon the walls: Pomona College, Stanford, Columbia, CCNY, Mount Holyoke, Ithaca, Princeton, Yale, Cornell, and Dartmouth. The hope was that by merely exposing the students to these names and flags they would become options for the futures that they could and would create for themselves.

School walls were decorated like any other typical American high school with pictures of field trips and athletics, but in addition to these there were also walls dedicated to honoring students' academic accomplishment and encouraging them to succeed: high PSAT scorers, school newspaper staff, tips for studying, etc. But nowhere was "college preparation" more evident than in the library. It was designed around the model of an actual college library with a reading room filled with shelves of crisp, brand new books framing the entire open space, long wooden reading tables, and five private study rooms where students could meet for group projects. Each of these study rooms was equipped with a SMART Board where students were encouraged to work together to solve homework problems.

Bulletin boards were strategically placed throughout the hallways of the school reminding students that "the mission of Excellence High School is to prepare each scholar to enter, succeed, and graduate from a four year college" with the word "**college**" being bolded and emphasized. The idea of the students as "scholars" was an important distinction at Excellence High School, and was crucial to understanding how the students viewed themselves and their accomplishments. The ultimate goal was for freshman year of college to be a natural extension of graduating from high school, an unspoken privilege typically attached to students in private and public school in well-funded school districts.

The second building block of the school was an emphasis on high standards for both academic and personal character. To facilitate this students came together weekly for school assemblies, which focused on social justice issues which included but were not limited to: gender inequity around the world, Native American invisibility in United States history, poverty around the world. During these assemblies individual students were honored for their academic excellence and granted a prestigious spot on the honor roll wall. Three of the six honored students participated in my interviews. Students were also honored for good citizenship, which was clearly defined as holding the qualities of "bravery, responsibility, integrity, discovery, greatness, and excellence." Students who held all of these qualities were celebrated during these assemblies and their photos lined the hallway.

The third building block involved creating a highly structured and safe learning environment. The main way in which this was enacted was through the implementation of longer school days. Students' days officially began at 7:50 a.m. and consisted of

eight 45-minute class periods with classes officially ending at 2:54 p.m. After this students attended mandatory study hall, which ran until 5 p.m. During this time students had the option of completing their work on their own or they could choose to meet with individual teachers during what were termed "office hours."

The school itself was a closed campus with guards protecting the entrance of the building. The staff believed that through creating a sense of safety and structure they could create a "calm, composed, and disciplined environment to maximize student productivity." Students wore mandatory uniforms and the young boys were required to wear ties as part of an attempt to teach the children "professionalism," a word that was emphasized by teachers and school staff. It was a word that could be heard throughout the hallways as students were often praised for carrying themselves with decorum and "professionalism."

The fourth building block was a strong, committed faculty of leaders. At the time of my observation, the school staff was made up of 10 teachers and two principals, with additional auxiliary support in the form of an administrative assistant. The school followed a two principal model where one served as the director of operations and the other as director of curriculum and instruction. The racial make up of the faculty was primarily White along with two African American females, one Southeast Asian female, one Latina woman from Canada, and one African American male.

Ms. Rao, the director of operations and co-founder, served as my main source of information on the school's history and academics. My other main informants were the Spanish language teachers Mr. Jones and Ms. Vasquez. Mr. Jones was a friendly, tall White male who openly discussed with students his own experiences with prejudice as a

homosexual male. Much of the social justice oriented curriculum was developed and presented by him as he felt it was his responsibility to empower the students with knowledge. Part of this empowerment involved not only having students observe injustices in the world around them but also thinking of things that they could do to fix these injustices. The one Latina faculty member was Ms. Vasquez who was also a Spanish teacher but had grown up as a Latina living in Canada and expressed having a different relationship to her minority identity from the students in her classes. My main interactions with faculty during my observations were with these three staff members.

Data Collection Procedures

At the start I gained access to the general student population through the principal of the school, Ms. Rao, who acted as my initial gatekeeper. After being given access to the campus, I was also allowed to attend parent teacher conferences where I gained access from parents via consent forms. Finally I formed relationships with informal gatekeepers Mr. Jones and Ms. Vasquez, both Spanish teachers at the school. Together they gave me access to all of the Latino students in the school by allowing me to observe their classrooms and also attend field trips with small groups of students. Initial contact with the students occurred at a beginning of the year assembly where I introduced myself by informing the students that I would be conducting interviews and that I would more generally be present in the building during school hours. Following this introduction I was invited by Mr. Jones to attend a field trip with several Latino students. I used a convenience sample based on the students I met during this fieldtrip and used snowballing to connect with friends of these of students.

Interview Protocol

My initial plan was to use Seidman's (1997) *Three Interview Model*: interview one focused on life history; interview two focused on details of experience; and interview three focused on reflecting on meaning. But scheduling constraints led me to combine the second and third interview with each student. Seidman noted that, "There are no absolutes in the world of interviews" (Seidman, 1997, p. 15), and therefore it is uncertain what effect if any this truncation had on the outcome of the interviews.

Student interviews were scheduled during their lunch period or during after-school study hall and lasted between 25 and 35 minutes. At the beginning of the interview details of the study were explained to each student and they were informed of their confidentiality rights and their right to withdraw, after which they were asked to sign a required student assent form. A short demographic questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the interview to determine if students met the criteria for Latino identification. They were initially asked, "What is your racial background?" Students who answered any variation of Latino/Hispanic or who claimed heritage from a Spanish speaking country located in Latin America were included in the analyzed data.

The interviews primarily consisted of a series of predetermined questions to gauge each informant's personal history. The topics included the following:

- experiences with race and prejudice;
- transnational experiences with migration to and from Latin America;
- exploration of Latino and American identities;
- educational experiences within and outside of the Excellence Charter network;
- future goals and aspirations.

These topics provided the overall framework for the semi-structured interviews and were organized to establish a sequence of events that culminated in their high school experience to date at Excellence High School. However, the semi-structured format allowed me to ask follow-up questions to probe deeper for specific information deemed relevant to my research questions.

After completing the first interview, information from each respondent was organized thematically to prepare for a follow-up interview. For example, areas such as immigration and education were not covered in-depth during the initial interview, even though it became apparent that these were key features in the personal development of the participants. Therefore, details regarding family histories and educational aspirations that needed more exploration constituted the themes for the next interview. The follow up interviews took place on the school property and again were scheduled during the students' lunch and free periods. If questions still remained after the second interview I contacted the student to clarify an inquiry or to provide additional information for a particular question. Each student was given the opportunity to choose a suitable pseudonym to protect his or her confidentiality. As repayment for their participation students were allowed to participate in a "pizza party" at the end of the term, an idea suggested and approved by Ms. Rao.

When building my participant pool the major criteria was that they categorize themselves as Latino, or more specifically that being Latino was central to their identity. The goal was not to generalize to a broader population but rather to present the experiences of each informant such that those reading it will be able to connect to their perspectives, learn from them, and deepen their understanding of the issues reflected in

this research. Seidman argues that the goal of interviews is not to create generalizable study but rather to create "a compelling evocation of an individual's experience" (Seidman, 1997, p. 44). In doing so we open possibilities for readers to connect to the individuals whose stories are being shared. Thus the goal in this study was not to create predictions of people's behaviors but rather to understand the complexity of the students' lives and to contextualize their actions.

Demographics of Sample

Participants were recruited from a small sample of urban Latino, students attending Excellence High School, a public charter high school located in New York City. Participants were selected to participate in the interviews, based on their willingness, scheduling availability, and demographic indicators, to ensure a sample that roughly represented the characteristics of the larger Latino student body of the school. Eight of the students were 14-years-old beginning their freshman year and nine were fifteen years old beginning their sophomore year. Nine of the students identified themselves as Dominican, five as Puerto Rican, two as Ecuadorian, and one as Mexican. The gender breakdown of the participants was 6 female and 11 males, which roughly reflected the school's gender demographics (37% girls, 63% boys). All of the students were born in the United States and held legal citizenship.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N=17)

Pseudonym	Grade	Age	Gender	U.S.A. Born	Identification
Maya	Freshman	14	Female	Yes	Dominican
Malcolm	Freshman	14	Male	Yes	Puerto Rican
Princess	Freshman	14	Female	Yes	Dominican
Alley	Freshman	14	Female	Yes	Puerto Rican
Diego	Sophomore	15	Male	Yes	Ecuadorian
Michael	Freshman	14	Male	Yes	Puerto Rican
Alejandro	Sophomore	15	Male	Yes	Ecuadorian
Hailee	Sophomore	15	Female	Yes	Puerto Rican
Pablo	Freshman	14	Male	Yes	Dominican
Justin	Sophomore	15	Male	Yes	Dominican
Beatrice	Sophomore	15	Female	Yes	Dominican
Marcial	Sophomore	15	Male	Yes	Dominican
Manny	Sophomore	15	Male	Yes	Dominican
Sky	Sophomore	15	Female	Yes	Puerto Rican
Boots	Freshman	14	Male	Yes	Dominican
Santiago	Freshman	14	Male	Yes	Mexican
Jason	Sophomore	15	Male	Yes	Dominican

Qualitative Analytic Strategy

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by a hired assistant and crosschecked for accuracy by myself. Once transcribed, I went back to the interviews and corrected for tone and emphasis. To clean the data I followed the steps laid out by Seidman (1997), first deleting certain characteristics of oral speech such as “um’s” and “mm’s” that did not do the informants justice in the written version while making sure to keep their voices and the meaning behind their words intact. I also suppressed some of my own contributions such as “uh huh’s” and “yeah’s” or words whose removal did not distort what was being said. I finally went through the transcripts and dropped out conversational spacers and false starters (Weiss, 1995).

I then reduced the data first inductively then deductively. In the first phase I read the transcripts with an open mind to see what emerged as important and marked everything that was of interest while acknowledging that in this process I was making judgments about what was and what was not important. I then returned to the new marked up version of the interviews to find what was most compelling while attempting to craft a narrative of the student's lived experiences (Massey et al., 1998; Seidman, 1997; Weiss, 1995).

I then organized the interview excerpts into thematic categories for coding. Early coding included the following topics: identity, definitions of race, immigration, family pressure, relationships with other racial groups, phenotype, positive role models, group risk factors, safety, school, social class, value of hard work, feeling lucky. All of this was done by hand. Once this phase was complete I went back and entered all of these codes into NVIVO computer software. It was from there that I returned and sifted through the most compelling narratives that ran through the data ending up with three major thematic stories: invisibility in racial discourse, gendered stereotypes and acts of refusal, and discussions of social class and privilege through the lens of private and public schools.

Validity

Validity has been defined as "The correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (Maxwell, 2004, p. 87). Member checks, such as reviewing transcripts and analytic interpretations, were utilized to address researcher bias and reactivity in this study. Writing reflective memos

(Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) assisted me in identifying potential bias and to guard against transference of my own experiences as a Mexican, college educated, female, doctoral student, raised on the West Coast. In addition, I shared data, crosschecked codes, and generated alternative interpretations of interview data with colleagues and researchers trained in qualitative analytic strategies.

CHAPTER IV

The Social Geography of Excellence High School: Bridging Spaces Through Daily Experiences of Migration

In much of her work Michelle Fine espouses the importance of contextualizing spaces of learning as she notes that education does not merely happen in the classroom but also takes place "at dinner time, in front of the television set, on the street corners, in religious institutions, and in coffee shops" (Fine et al., 2000, p. 131). It is for this reason that it is important to discuss the multitude of contexts through which the students in this study maneuvered and migrated in their daily lives. Migration for many of these students happened as they shifted not only between literal spaces but also between figurative spaces of oppression and privilege. In addition all of the students included in this study had a deep relationships with their parents' country of origin and all but four spent their summers abroad with relatives. This reflected the students' strong transnational identities and experiences not only between countries but also within their own daily realities: spaces of poverty and privilege, danger and safety, inequity and access. Because the students were constantly shifting between real and imagined locations the social geography and landscape through which the students travelled daily can be divided into three major sites or places of migration: Jefferson Park and its surrounding community, Kingstown and the streets housing Excellence High School, and finally Excellence High School itself.

Jefferson Park: Home and Surrounding Neighborhoods

Of the students interviewed in this study 14 came from the ethnic enclave of Jefferson Park, approximately three and a half miles from Excellence High School, and a 30-minutes ride via the bus. The main reason for this high representation was that Excellence High School's affiliated junior high was located in this neighborhood. Jefferson Park has historically been a major hub of the Dominican and Puerto Rican communities but also calls itself home to the largest Hasidic Jewish community in New York City. Historically Jefferson Park was heavily populated by working class Puerto Ricans who settled there during the 1940's. It was not until the 50's and 60's that Jewish families began moving into the neighborhood (Markey, n.d.).

At the time when this research was conducted Jefferson Park was divided into what was colloquially known as the Southside, mainly populated by the Jewish Hasidim and Puerto Ricans, and the Northside, which was predominately Dominican. The crime statistics of the Northside were far worse than those of the Southside mainly due to the less financially stable Dominican immigrant population (Harris, 2010; Huffington Post, 2009; Leland, 2011). These three groups came together on Grand Ave where one could see signs in Spanish, English, and Hebrew. Due to these demographics the major reference group for "Whiteness" for some of the students were members of the Jewish community. When asked about the prevalence of different races in his neighborhood Marcial, a Dominican student noted:

> My parents talk about Jews. They talk about how they're taking over America right now. How Jews take over like the big businesses right now. That's what they say. And it's true. Basically the section over there in Jefferson Park…Jews…Jews. Because the Jews own that area. They don't even communicate with us. They just have us as workers and that's it.

In this statement Marcial alluded to the tension, which existed below the surface of casual interactions, which happened daily on Grand Ave.

Another factor that added to the existing tension was the onset of gentrification, which had been increasing slowly since the early 90's. Both the working class Latino and Hasidim communities were being affected in different ways by the rise of what have been described as, "artists, trend setters, White people, and yuppies" (Markey, n.d.). Latinos were experiencing the financial backlash of gentrification as they were being pushed out by landlords in an attempt to create lofts and larger apartments for the growing yuppie community. The Hasidim felt equally enraged by the changing demographics of the neighborhood but the reasons for their anger stemmed from their conservative values which clashed with the more liberal dress and lifestyle of the yuppie youth (Huffington Post, 2009; Leland, 2011; Markey, n.d.).

Despite the students not knowing academic terms like "gentrification," the effects of this social phenomenon were salient in the their lives as two students specifically expressed concern over the changes they saw happening in their community. Maya, a Dominican female explained:

> The White people are taking over. Like, they're coming over now to the South Side. Like they used to live in their, *whatever [waves her hand in a dismissive manner]* areas, and now they're making houses and new apartments here.

Maya appeared to be echoing sentiments she had heard at the dinner table with her family. White people were taking over her community and she sensed this in the changing visual landscape of her neighborhood where high-rises were being erected. Similarly Hailee, a Puerto Rican student whose family had lived in Jefferson Park for two generations explained,

> The Southside was more about, mostly Dominicans and Puerto Ricans and now it's splitting in two, with the Whites taking over. Like there's a lot of condominiums being built and I feel like, the Southside's not gonna be the Southside anymore *[makes a sad face]*.

When asked how the Latino and White communities associate with one another Hailee continued:

> They [Whites] don't even look at us! Every time we walk by, I don't know. It's not…I don't feel like we're hiding, it's just that we feel like the White people are taking over so it's like they're gonna be on top and we're gonna be on the bottom. So it's like why should we interact with them?

For these students the changing demographics reflected a fear that they would lose their sense of community as Hailee explained that her neighbors no longer spoke to one another. She alluded to the idea that for her Jefferson Park was the one place where she was not "at the bottom" and now with the gentrification in the midst her safe space had been breached by outsiders. Marcial, a Dominican boy, echoed these same sentiments.

> I'm bored of this city. I stayed in Jefferson Park my whole life and I've seen it change. It got boring. Like before there was so much more life outside. Like there were, not to be racial or anything, but there were more Hispanics on the Southside, where I live. And it was more alive. And then all the White people started moving in, and then it just got all boring and quiet. And then, they started taking away all the jobs from us. It's like I don't even talk to my neighbors anymore.

From these selected quotes it is evident that these particular students felt that gentrification did not mean higher rent or loss of homes but rather a loss of community, a building of borders demarcating "us" from "them," creating yet another border to be crossed in their daily lives.

School Neighborhood

Excellence High School was located in the neighborhood of Kingstown, a largely Caribbean Black and Guyanese community marred by poverty and crime. It was situated 3 miles from Jefferson Park and most students rode the bus 30-minutes to school, as trains to and from this area were infrequent.

Yet similar to what the students saw in Jefferson Park, Kingstown was also experiencing gentrification, as residents of the neighboring wealthy communities had slowly begun to bleed into the area. The visual of the changing demographics was evident in many of the students' daily commutes. Diego, an Ecuadorian student described the changes he saw during his bus ride from Jefferson Park,

> As I leave the school and I walk around and go to the store or something, and then when I'm on the bus there's like different people around me. And then you can see the gradual change of the different type of people while you're on the bus.

This gradual change that he brought up was indeed noticeable. Riding the subway to the school was nearly impossible as trains going into this part of the city were few and far between, with older trains being dispatched less frequently. This made the bus system a more practical option for students coming in from Jefferson Park. During these daily commutes you could see a range of people riding the bus as it passed through impoverished neighborhoods but also through what were considered the more affluent parts of the city. Buses were crowded with any number of people including young White twenty-something's wearing the newest trends, reading obscure novellas through their sunglasses, oblivious to those around them. In stark contrast were the Caribbean and Latina nannies lugging strollers occupied by pale, blue eyed, pristinely dressed children. The nannies' worn tennis shoes were a sight to see when juxtaposed with the

wheels of a brand new $1,000 stroller. As the bus penetrated deeper into the heart of Kingstown the nannies and young White people gradually disappeared; replaced by young Trinidadian, Guyanese, and African American mothers taking young children to school.

Demographic changes in the neighborhoods were also evident just from looking out the window of the bus. I shared in the commute with the students and noted how we would pass by newly renovated brownstones into areas with architecturally similar buildings that were dilapidated in comparison. Deterioration was rampant, and our official entrance into the Kingstown neighborhood was always marked by a tree with a handwritten sign stapled to it that read, "bed bug infested." This one can assume was a warning to the local residents to steer clear of this particular part of the sidewalk. During my 5 month stay in this city, and even during my subsequent return visits months later in the spring and summer that sign was still stapled to that tree. I wondered if that tree would have remained infested and untouched just a mile up in the wealthy area where I was fortunate enough to live.

Walking the three blocks to the school from the bus stop, students were greeted by barred up businesses: an old soul food restaurant, a night club with letters missing from the dilapidated sign, a furniture store that never seemed to be open and two bodegas with barred up windows and handwritten signs advertising their acceptance of WIC and EBT. Exiting these bodegas were middle-aged Latino and African American men purchasing beer at 9 a.m. and haggling for the prices of stronger forms of liquor. Abandoned office chairs were strategically placed outside of the empty buildings and on occasion African American men in their 20's would sit signaling to people across the

streets in windows and on stoops. My personal experience growing up in places like this made me immediately aware that these men were in fact "holding down the street," or dealing drugs. These drug deals happened in broad daylight. The principal, Ms. Rao confirmed that this street was in fact a hot bed of drug trafficking in the city.

Directly across from the school was a red, dilapidated building, which during a tour of the school Ms. Rao informed me served as the neighborhood brothel. Windows were draped over and no one really came in or out during the times when I observed the school. Not three blocks up was another public high school. It had all of its windows boarded up and scaffolding covered the entire façade of the building in an attempt to hide graffiti filled walls. It looked eerily more like a prison than a building housing young people. During a one-on-one interview Ms. Rao expressed concern as she pointed to an overlooking park from her office. She relayed how earlier in the fall a young girl from the other school had been raped in this park in broad daylight. Most of the students commuting in from Jefferson Park and other communities walked through this park daily, and Ms. Rao expressed repeated concern over the students' safety. This concern was echoed by Santiago, a commuter student who explained,

> I'm used to wearing the Mexican flag on me. And my mom doesn't feel really comfortable with me wearing it outside, and especially in this neighborhood. She's scared that I might get…well I'm not really sure, but my mom doesn't really like the neighborhood. She's always worried, like she wants me to call her every single time when I arrive and when I'm leaving.

Santiago seemed to be alluding to an underlying notion that this neighborhood, while not being safe, was especially unsafe for Latino students, as it was a predominately Black neighborhood.

When I first began my observations at Excellence High in the early fall the

school had hired guards from a private security company to patrol the surrounding area before and after school. Upon my return in the winter there was a heavy police presence on the route taken by most of the children to get to the bus stop. Ms. Rao informed me that police presence became a necessity when an Excellence student was attacked and badly beaten on his way to the bus stop. When I returned after the holidays the drug dealers were no longer visibly present. At a local precinct meeting I attended in the spring I was informed that the community had experienced eight shootings in the month of April alone, and a week prior there were four separate shooting incidents in one day. All of these crimes had been committed by youth ranging from 12 to 16 years old. All of this is not an attempt to garner sympathy for the students whose lives are presented in this research but rather to paint an accurate picture of what they saw on a daily basis in their outside world in contrast to their school world.

Excellence High School: A Million Dollar Building

Excellence High School was founded in August of 2009 just a month before I began my observations. The building, which housed the school, was in such stark contrast to the outside neighborhood of Kingstown that the difference becomes glaringly obvious as you crossed the threshold onto school property. Construction of the school began four years earlier from the ground up on an abandoned plot of land, which had been empty for decades. Being part of a well established charter network allowed for relatively easy fundraising from large non-profit organizations. In fact, the entire building was backed by a large, charitable organization sparing no expense, with the building costing well over a million dollars. The students seemed to be quite aware of

the role that charitable organizations played in the founding of their school and even noted this in several interviews.

The school had a closed campus and as students entered the building they were greeted by a rotation of three friendly African-American guards and a giant painted wall, which urged each student in bold capitol letters to "BE EXCELLENT, CHANGE YOUR WORLD!" This was less of an inspirational quote and more of a call to arms, as students were often encouraged to live out this motto and make a difference in their communities.

Past the entryway was a long, brightly painted hallway framed with inspirational quotes, which defined for the students exactly what it meant to "be excellent."

- "The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled – Plutarch";
- "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world – Mandela";
- "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit – Aristotle";
- "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world indeed it is the only thing that ever has - Margaret Mead";
- "Remember that our nation's first great leaders were also our first great scholars - JFK";
- "No act of kindness, no matter how small is ever wasted – Aesop";
- "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself - Eleanor Roosevelt."

Being able to recognize the names of such great minds is part of the cultural capital given to children of the upper class elite, but these are not names commonly spoken in working class homes of children born to uneducated immigrant parents. And the administrators of the school believed that there was a wealth of knowledge being created in just being able to recognize and read these inspirational quotes daily.

From this hallway students entered a brightly colored stairwell that led to their lockers and classrooms. These stairs were cleaned daily and polished by janitorial staff

as Ms. Rao noted the importance of showing the students that they were indeed valuable and deserving of a clean space. The hallways were also lined with pictures of students who had made the honor role or who had shown exceptional character. In this way pictures of students were given equal importance on the walls to other great minds like Aristotle, Plutarch, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King Jr.

Every time I entered the doors I wondered what it must have felt like for the students to go from the stark realities of Kingstown into a state of the art, million-dollar building. Every day the students walked past these inspirational quotes written on un-scuffed walls, and used top of the line educational technology that had been purchased solely for their benefit. It was a reminder of their own excellence and perhaps more importantly a reminder that in this building they were central, important, valuable and worthy of investment. How often are low socioeconomic status youth made to feel unimportant by their tarnished surroundings? They recognize this in the food they are fed in their cafeterias and in the old desks and undersupplied classrooms in which they are taught. These are subtle messages that urban, low-income children pick up that let them know they are less valuable than other children. A Puerto Rican student, Hailee, noted in her interview,

> I don't know. I just feel like White people get better things than, you know, Latinos or Black people get. I don't know. It's just something I've always seen.

Another Puerto Rican student, Malcolm who had attended public school earlier in his life informed me:

> Like, if you sit at our library there's brand new books that people ordered and stuff. But when I was ten in that [other public] school there were a lot of used books and stuff. When I went to public school, the materials weren't brand new.

> It looked like somebody, they just like, not just picked them up off the street, but like they were from other people who donated stuff.

Unlike most children from low-income neighborhood the youth at Excellence High School were being told through various ways that they were important and worthy of nice things. And while college readiness was the overt goal of the school between the lines I saw that there was so much more behind this mission as the school attempted to give the children ultimately a sense of worth. This school embodied the definition of a "community space" as explained in Michelle Fine's research.

> We believe in the educative power of community spaces to be homes, to offer places to breath and places where despair can be transformed into outrage, calm, and/or collective action…a space may bridge into possibilities not seen, imagined, or enacted (Fine et al., 2000, p. 148).

Fine also describes what she calls "free spaces" as, "those spaces in which hope is nourished in spite of impoverished material circumstance" (Fine et al., 2000, p. 131). The school campus acted as a sort of free community space where the students could breath while escaping the daily concerns for safety and survival that were expressed by students like Santiago. This was a space where students crossed real and imagined borders, where exploration was allowed, where stereotypes were contextualized, and where assumed identities could be broken down to invent new more true ones (Fine et al., 2000).

My Own Personal Biases

In my encounters with the students and the local community I felt both estrangement and identification as I came to terms with my own "cultural baggage" and my own limited ideas of what it meant to be "Latina" which had mainly been influenced

by a West Coast, Mexican American bias. I came to understand that I too had to overcome strong preconceived notions of what these students would be like. The strong Afro-Latino demographics of the school were such a change for me coming from Mexican-centric Southern California. But this estrangement allowed me to feel the sense of invisibly and displacement that many of the student expressed in their interviews.

Finally I also had to come to terms with my own personal demons of being a minority student who had been given access to worlds of privilege. My access to privilege was given to me at age 18 but it led to a profound realization that the world was not in fact fair. In so many ways I related to the students whose voices are represented in this dissertation, as we seemed to share an understanding of what it meant to be a visitor in a land where you did not necessarily belong. In his personal account of attending Harvard University the Chicano author Ruben Navarrette Jr. described this complex struggle as he wrote of his own parallel experience as a minority student in the highly privileged educational context:

> Those talented few…who have squeaked through a barely opened door into an ancient world of privilege are undeniably fortunate. And it is the idea of being a fortunate one, a chosen one, that has defined every aspect of my experience. That simple idea has nurtured my ambition, reassured me of my ability, and at times of distress sustained me in the belief that I would somehow endure and survive. Yet, as an unforgivable side-effect, the concept has also subjected me to horrible loneliness, alienated me from the once-familiar intimacies of my hometown and family, and gradually consumed me with guilt over the precarious nature of academic success in the American educational system (Navarrette, 1994, p. xi–xii)

CHAPTER V

Invisibility Within Racial Discourse

> "The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world--a world which yields him no self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (DuBois, 1903, p. 3)

In his personal memoir, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois reflected on his experience of invisibility as a Black man living in the United States during the turn of the century. He characterized his experience as lacking a sense of agency due to his inability to act within a racialized social hierarchy, which sought to oppress him. Yet it was this outsider perspective and this sense of invisibility, he argued, that allowed him to view race in the United States as a social construct. It was through his feeling of invisibility that he developed what he termed a *double consciousness*, "a second-sight into the American world" (DuBois, 1903, p. 3). The Latino students at Excellence High School occupied a similar invisible space in society as neither White nor Black, immigrant nor citizen, which granted them the ability to explore their own double consciousness and engage in higher levels of racial discourse. In addition, strong transnational ties left the students constantly shifting both mentally and physically between contexts, causing them to reflect on the ever-changing meaning of the word "race" in their own lives and in the world around them.

In this chapter I focus on answering my first research question: "How do American born Latino adolescents negotiate their multiple identities as both transnational citizens of the United States and Latin America?" While exploring this question I found that the Latino students at Excellence High School attempted to both differentiate themselves from their Black classmates, while also forging coalitions with these students around mutual experiences of oppression. Similarly their experiences as transnational citizens allowed them to redefine "race" by attempting to situate themselves within this discourse, which so often excluded them. They were creating new definitions that were inclusive of their experiences as children of immigrants through their status as invisible members of society. Yet the way that these students interacted around issues of Blackness, Whiteness, and Latino identity was directly affected by their individual identities as Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Ecuadorian, and Mexican. These ethnic labels affected where they positioned themselves within discussions or race, while also influencing their lived experiences as racialized minorities in the United States.

According to federal policy in the United States Hispanics are not considered a separate race and can technically be of any race. This legal categorization was reflected in the 2010 Census, which asked respondents first to mark whether they were "Spanish/Hispanic/Latino," and then in a separate question to specify their race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Yet the reality is that at present "Hispanic" has become a racialized term used to identify a group, which is neither considered "White" nor "Black" but which does occupy a space of "otherness." This inability for Latinos to place themselves within this racial binary was reflected in a study done by the Pew

Hispanic Center (Tafoya, 2004), which found that 42% of the Hispanic population in the United States marked "some other race" in the 2000 census. This number is of significance since 90% of the U.S. population placed themselves within the existing categories of White, Black, Asian, American Indian or Pacific Islander. Thus Hispanics as a group found it difficult to place themselves within the confines of existing racial categories (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). One explanation for this may be that these categories do not exist in an objective vacuum but rather are charged terms grounded in histories and loaded with underlying meaning. Whiteness goes beyond mere skin color but rather reflects a social placement within a hierarchy of power both in and outside of the United States. And the foil to Whiteness has long been the idea of Blackness.

In a conversation with African American professor Cornel West, Latino writer José Jorge Klor de Alba (1996) attempted to get at the heart of the socially constructed binary of Blackness and Whiteness in the United States. He argued that race discourse is "Black" in nature explaining,

> Blacks are the central metaphor for otherness and oppression in the United States. Therefore if we as researchers want to discuss the social standing of Latinos…it is imperative to reframe the conversation…Don't Latinos have their own situation that also needs to be described if not in the same terms, then at least in terms that are supplementary?...I am trying to argue against the utility of the concept of race. I say we need a different kind of language…because we're in the United States and Blacks are Americans…they're Anglos of a different color…Why? Because the critical distinction here for Latinos is not race, it's culture (Klor de Alba & West, 1996).

While his argument is provocative it does begin to disentangle some of the realities of the, at times, strained relationship that exists between African Americans and Latinos in the United States. It also alludes to the difficulty that Latinos may have in expressing

their experience of otherness within the discourse of "race" as the very term is loaded with historical meaning.

Between Group Differences in Experiences of *Latinidad*

The Pew Hispanic Center found that as a group Latinos themselves believed there were more differences between Latino groups than similarities. The Pew Hispanic Center also found that 64% of young Latinos reported feeling that Latinos had less of a shared culture with each other (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Therefore are Latinos in fact more of a heterogeneous group than would be expected? In looking at these students' responses with this question in mind, there were many differences in how they viewed themselves relative to the broader American landscape, relative to other Latinos, and relative to their Black peer groups.

Dominicans. The Dominican students were the largest group in the sample, which also reflected their general status as the largest Latino group in the school. Demographically all of the Dominican students were second generation and came from two parent homes. All but one student, Princess, came from low income families where parents did not have anything beyond a high school or high school equivalent education. Their parents' occupations included but were not limited to cook, daycare provider, corner market manager, and building manager. While the Dominican students varied in their skin tone all but one student, Princess, shared the common characteristic of holding an Afro-Latino mixed phenotype. All noted that Spanish was their primary language at home. This led to every Dominican student including Princess being placed in the Spanish for heritage speakers' sequence, which affected his or her class

schedules. Consequently these students had very little interaction with Black classmates during school. In addition, the Spanish teachers Mr. Jones and Ms. Vasquez designed the Spanish for heritage speakers' classes as spaces for Latino students to explore not only their language but also their culture through projects, which affirmed these students' histories and identities.

These Dominican students tended to come from families who had emigrated from *el campo,* the rural farmlands of the Dominican Republic. All of them talked about returning to the Dominican Republic regularly for extended family visits. Most spent summers with their grandparents and cousins in *el campo*. Several Dominican students also expressed strong ties to the land of their parents. One student, Boots explained:

> I know that I'm American because I was born here, but I consider myself Dominican because that's where my blood is from. And I don't have American blood or anything, I just have my Dominican blood and I grew up with my parents.

Boots and other students acknowledged that their Dominican identities stemmed not only from their experiences on the island, but also from the cultural practices of their home life. This ability to easily visit the Dominican Republic was a result of the ease of access to air travel and a lack of immigration related problems in the families of these students.

Of the Dominican students Princess was an outlier in that she not only came from a relatively middle class, educated family, but she also had predominately European features compared to other students in the school. When discussing his future aspirations one Dominican student, Manny, referenced Princess's family:

> I just want to really work as a cop cause I know one of the students, Princess, her father's a cop, and he earns a lot of money. She has a big house. I've been to

> her house. They have really nice things, and I really like it, and I know they earn a lot of money per year, and they get a lot of benefits. So I really want to be a cop.

Her relative wealth was a well-known fact among her classmates. In addition, Princess had striking blue eyes and had the lightest skin of any student in the entire school in addition to being the only student to have naturally blonde hair. Her distinctly European features often clashed, perhaps intentionally, with her strong Spanish accent when she spoke English. This accent may have been her way of asserting her identity to those around her. She admitted that the way she looked affected much of her interactions with other minorities both inside and outside of the school:

> When people say that I don't look Dominican that offends me cause that's where I come from. And that's one of the things that really bothers me. But my family looks the way I look. Like they have the light skin and the blue eyes and blond hair. That's why I came out that way. When I was younger a lot of my friends used to say, "Oh you're White" cause I have White skin. Because since I was Dominican and I had light skin maybe they thought that I didn't fit into those stereotypical ways that they classified a Dominican or that they would classify somebody that looked the way I look. And that still bothers me because you can't judge a person by the way they look. There's always gonna be difference.

Princess struggled with her desire be recognized as Dominican but also with her inability to be fully accepted by "White" Americans. And it was this highly visible yet invisible space of not being White enough, Black enough, or Dominican enough that shaped her entire identity and experience as a Dominican student at Excellence High School.

Puerto Ricans. The Puerto Rican students were the second largest group in the sample. Michael was an outlier in the group in that he came from a two-parent home and his parents had both emigrated from Puerto Rico making him the only second-

generation Puerto Rican student in the sample. He spoke Spanish in his home and phenotypically looked lighter than the other Puerto Rican students. The remaining Puerto Rican students all varied in their appearance with a shared Afro-Latino phenotype, much like the Dominican students. All but Michael were third generation New York City Puerto Ricans. These students came from single parent households where their mothers had dropped out of high school to have them. Hailee was the only student being raised by a single father. Of those students whose mothers had dropped out of school, each one had returned in their adulthood to receive their GED and was attending community college during the time of the interviews. Of this group only Malcolm and Sky were placed in the Spanish for Heritage Speakers sequence. The remainder were tracked into classes with the Black students in the school. This may have affected not only the way they viewed themselves in contrast to the Black students but also the way they viewed themselves relative to the other Latinos in the school. Due to financial constraints, only Michael and Malcolm had ever actually been to Puerto Rico, but they all considered themselves first and foremost Puerto Ricans. Alley, a female student explained her strong transnational identity:

> I'm *from* Puerto Rico! I've never actually been there, but my mother has been there and she told me a whole bunch of stories. But I have more pride for Puerto Rico than America. Yeah I'm an American citizen because I live here, because I have the passport and I know the history and stuff, but I grew up Puerto Rican because I learned their culture. When I'm sick I use home made medicines that are Puerto Rican and like the food I eat is from Puerto Rico and all the candies that my grandma brings are from Puerto Rico, and the little deserts are Puerto Rican.

The historically uneasy relationship between Puerto Rican and the United States was often reflected in the comments the students made about their relationship to the United States. Alley explained,

> All the Puerto Ricans that I know have a lot of strong pride for their country and it's not like we're hating America, but it's like, we take it into consideration that Puerto Rico is where it all happens. That's where it starts, that's where we get our name, *Puerto Ricans*, that's where all our food, that's where all our styles, that's where all our daily life things come from.

To students like Alley, Puerto Rico was more than a place but was an identity they lived in their daily lives and in the choices their parents made in raising them.

"Latino other." I intentionally chose the term "Latino Other" as it touched on the outsider status of the remaining Latino students: two Ecuadorian boys and one Mexican boy. All were second generation Latinos and fluent in Spanish. Therefore they were tracked into the Spanish for Heritage Speakers sequence. This led them to have limited encounters with African American students in the school, and they spent most of their days with Dominicans and Puerto Rican students in their classes.

Of the two Ecuadorian boys, Diego's family was much better off financially. His mother had received a degree from a university in Ecuador, but struggled to have her degree accredited in the United States. Diego was light skinned with light green eyes and light hair. The other Ecuadorian student, Alejandro's parents had no formal education in Ecuador and worked as shoe shiners. Of all of the students included in this work his family appeared to be struggling the most financially. Phenotypically he would be described as *indio,* dark skinned with Indian features. Alejandro's family was forced to leave New York City for financial reasons and moved to a neighboring state into a Mexican and Ecuadorian enclave. Consequently his daily commute to school lasted

two-hours in either direction. He reported that at times he would stay with an aunt in the city if he had to remain at school late. In his interviews Alejandro expressed feelings of invisibility relative to his more largely represented Latino classmates. He explained that he was often confused for being Mexican and expressed frustration at not having his Ecuadorian identity recognized:

> Well the people I talk to…get me [mock me] maybe by calling me "Mexican" and all that. I don't treat that as an insult but I don't know why everybody that's Latin is Mexican. Except like Dominicans and Puerto Ricans…people think they're Dominican so they don't think about, like, Ecuadorians or people from Guatemala, or Nicaragua. They just think of them as Mexicans because they look sort of like them and they have the color skin like them.

He explained that at times it was not just outsiders who did not acknowledge his true identity but also other Latinos who often lumped him into the category of "Mexican." Yet he seemed to understand that this assumption came from a place of ignorance. It was his position as an invisible outsider, much like DuBois (1903), which gave him the perspective to discuss the deeper meaning behind these types of encounters.

Due to more expensive travel and greater distances, these two were able to visit Ecuador less frequently than the Dominican students. Diego had not been since he was seven. Alejandro, though born in the United States, had lived in Ecuador with his grandmother for the first seven years of his life, but had not returned since then. Despite the distance, they both expressed a strong relationship to their Ecuadorian heritage. Diego explained:

> Because I feel…I don't know why. But it's just like in the environment I grew up in, in my house, or like the different shows I watch on TV, or like if I watch soccer, it's just like something in me that just says, "I love this!" [being Ecuadorian]. So even when I hang out with my friends I'm mostly the only Ecuadorian. It's like I don't fit in exactly. But when I'm at my house or meeting

> another Ecuadorian even if I don't know that person very well, we have similar experiences from what our family tells us and stuff like that.

In this statement Diego alluded to some of the alienation he felt from his other Latino classmates, and the pride that he felt upon being able to share what he considered his true identity as an Ecuadorian. Alejandro also expressed a strong relationship to the birthplace of his parents. When asked if he felt more American or Ecuadorian he responded,

> Yeah like 50 percent…Well, I feel more Ecuadorian than American for some reason. I don't know why, but I was born here but all my ancestors and my parents were born in Ecuador.

Despite both being Ecuadorian these two boys had very little in common. This was reflected not only in their parental level of education but also their aspirations as Diego expressed a desire to become a surgeon while Alejandro did not know what he wants to be. This variance in their aspirations may have been reflective of their different social classes.

Santiago was the only Mexican student in the sample. He too had *indio* features and his parents were working class. Despite being of a larger national majority, Santiago alluded to anti-Mexican sentiments that he felt living in New York and he often feared for his safety, having heard about Mexican hate crimes on the local news. His status as the lone Mexican in this sample was echoed in the demographics of the school, as Mexican students were nearly non-existent. Santiago's experiences as a "Latino Other" mirrored many of the experiences of the Ecuadorian students, Alejandro and Diego: feelings of invisibility relative to Latinos and other minorities and an inability to easily travel regularly to Mexico.

Individual Student Perspectives on Blackness, Whiteness, and Latino Identity

For the reasons discussed above each student's experience and interpretation of the social construction of Blackness, Whiteness, and Latino Identity was completely bound by their specific identities as Dominican, Puerto Rican, and "Latino other." Therefore it became essential to differentiate these groups to explore the way that their invisibility and otherness was experiences in different or similar ways.

Dominican student perspectives.

Blackness. For Dominican students their relationship to Blackness was directly tied to their own Afro-Latino identities and bound by historically rooted anti-Black sentiments in the Dominican Republic (Candelario, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2003; Howard, 2001; Sagas, 2000). There appeared to be a strong desire for these students to assert their Dominican identities in relation to their Black classmates as a way to let others know that they were indeed different. And yet there was also the sense that the Black community was pushing back, constantly reminding them that they were not in fact "real" Blacks and could not share in the Black American Minority experience.

When asked if he had ever felt discriminated against Marcial, shared a personal encounter with the Black community:

> People don't really mention it [skin color]. The only time was when I went to this camp, where it was mostly African Americans, and they were like, "Shut up you light skinned." And I was like, "Alright, thank you!" And then I was like, "whatever" *[makes face of not caring]*.

Despite being phenotypically lighter skinned, Marcial still shared many physical characteristics with the Black community. And yet in this encounter he described a hostile environment where being light skinned *and* Dominican equated to not being welcome at a Black summer camp. It was as though the Black students in his story were

asserting that, as a Latino, Marcial could not understand what it was like to be a "real" minority. It was examples of hegemonically charged encounters such as these, which embodied the Dominican students' experiences of occupying an invisible space as neither White nor Black.

Princess, who was light skinned, explained that despite what could be a shared experience of oppression, the Black community often excluded Latinos from the larger narrative of racism. When asked about misrepresentations of minorities in the media she noted,

> Like the same way Latinos might say stuff about Black people, Black people might say the same stuff about Latinos. Just out in the street…like they might say, "Oh, they've got more advantages because they're Latinos but they're bad people," and all that stuff. At school some people say, "Oh they [Latinos] got better grades because they're not Black." Or like last year I went on the class trip and two of my friends got pulled out of the group because they did something and they said, "Oh they did that because I'm Black. If it was somebody else, like if it was a Puerto Rican or a Dominican they wouldn't have gotten in trouble." Like *sometimes* I think it's true. *Sometimes* I think that teachers have those people that they just don't like but it depends...like it always varies."

This experience that Princess shared exemplified the types of negative interactions the Dominican students had with their Black classmates. It was as though their Black classmates wanted to assert not only their cultural difference from the Afro-Latinos but also their experiential differences of discrimination. Yet Princess felt that her status as a Latina did not shield her from discrimination. She went on to describe the way that she personally was treated by the Black community with regard to her light skin and blonde hair:

> Well Black people usually… sometimes I feel like…like let's say they were with a teacher for example! They would probably feel like I would be a favorite

> because of the way I look. But usually I have a lot of friends who are Black and they treat us the same way *[nods as if to affirm her own experience]*.

This inability to connect and form coalitions with the Black community was very real for students like Princess. Yet it was her position as an outsider and an "other" which allowed her to articulate the hegemony she experienced from her Black fellow classmates. And the sense of injustice that she felt appeared in her silent but affirming nod.

Despite this sense of exclusion Princess still attempted to engage in discussion of race and racism in the larger American landscape. This idea that society had not really changed came up repeatedly in her interviews:

> Well I have an aunt who me and my cousins say is racist sometimes because…I remember one time we were passing down by this neighborhood, and there were a whole bunch of Black people crossing the street and she goes, "Oh, lock the doors." And I told her that's really wrong because you can't classify all Black people the same way because everybody's different. She probably said it because of the things that she hears about on the news. You would never see on the news, "Oh a White guy robbed a store." It's always a Black guy. They want to keep that stereotype going that Black people are the bad ones and that they're always the ones who cause all the trouble.

From her vantage point as an invisible outsider Princess was able to engage in a critical discussion of racism in the media as she explained that stereotyping of African Americans was systemic and not always accurate. She was also able to critically assess what she saw an unfair treatment of the Black community by her own family. And it was this ability to apply a critical eye to the injustices in the world around her, which allowed her to see her own minority status as constructed and not reflective of her own potential.

Whiteness. The Dominican students who were interviewed also seemed to have a difficult time placing themselves within racial discourses of Whiteness as Whiteness was often conflated with being American. This was complicated by the messages about Whiteness that they were receiving from their immigrant parents. For their parents Whiteness was a signifier of access to privileged spaces of power. Beatrice explained,

> My parents talk about how, you know, we're at the bottom; Whites are at the top you know? Like they just have that old fashion idea of White people being at the top, they're the ones with the money, and we're at the bottom. And then that's why they tell us: "That's why you need to study so you could be up there," or whatever.

Despite these messages Beatrice seemed to understand that her parents had a different understanding of social structures, and their idea of Whiteness was bound by their cultural upbringing. Justin shared a similar message he had received from his parents:

> My parents talk about props to White people. They know how to save money. They know how to buy stuff. They've got big apartments…stuff like that. Like, they know how to speak their language, and English is very important in America, so they get very far.

Here Justin alluded to the idea that "White" was often used in his home as a substitute for "American." And therefore Whiteness was something that his parents believed could be earned through a mastery of American culture. This fluidity of racial terminology was most likely reflective of historically bound Dominican ideas of "race" (Candelario, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2003; Howard, 2001; Sagas, 2000). Also Justin noted that it was not, therefore, that Whites were inherently better or smarter than him, but rather that they had been taught "the rules" of society. Therefore if he could learn these unspoken rules he too could be in the same position as those in power. Justin's perspective as an

outsider allowed him to not only critique the system but also critique his parents' understanding of this system.

This understanding of the systemic barriers they faced did not always lead to a sense of hopelessness. On the contrary, students like Beatrice expressed a belief that things could change:

> I think right now Latinos as a whole are at the bottom, with the exception of a few people that were actually successful. But I think that probably over time that'll be changing because of the educational system that probably, hopefully will be progressing.

Thus education became that key to understanding the system that Justin and Beatrice spoke of.

The value of Whiteness expressed by their parents and the generational differences reflected in these values was often exacerbated by the transnational experiences that many of these students had in their travel between the Dominican Republic and the United States. When in the Dominican Republic, students explained that they were often considered American, but while in America they were considered Dominican. It was this space of invisibility, which allowed them to contrast both countries. When asked about the construction of race in the Dominican Republic Marcial explained that in the Dominican Republic people differentiated themselves by skin color, with Whiteness being at the top:

> People that are lighter skinned succeed more because, it's like all over the place in the Dominican Republic. Not just that, but people in the Dominican Republic mostly look at American tourists like, "wow, they're what I can't be."

This relationship between light skin, Whiteness, and being American was so intertwined it was impossible to separate. When asked if he thought that skin color also mattered in

the United States he replied, “It still does. People still discriminate on skin color and where you come from.” Marcial noted that despite being in a different country with different ideas of race, the reality of light skin preference still existed in the United States. But it was his experiences of traveling between countries that gave him this perspective on Whiteness.

“Latino/Hispanic.” While it was evident that these students saw themselves as neither White nor Black, their identities were complicated by the societal imposition of a pan-Latino identity. Juan explained his concerns with the term “Latino”,

> I think “Latino” is too vague cause I feel like I have to say specifically what I’m feeling. “Latino” could mean a lot of races, you know. Like Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, they’re all different in a certain way, they all speak differently in some way.

He seemed to believe that the umbrella term “Latino” did not recognize the myriad of differences that existed between Latino groups. And he alluded to the fact that although these groups were often lumped together due to their common Spanish language, in reality they did not even necessarily share a common dialect of Spanish. These differences that existed between Latino groups was referenced by Manny. When asked which group he felt Dominicans did not get along with he responded,

> Puerto Ricans. I don’t know it’s like from what I see…To me I’ve seen some Puerto Ricans that talk a lot of [bad] stuff and like…they talk bad about specific people and stuff like that so that might trigger us [Dominicans] or something like that.

In addition to linguistic difference another student, Marcial, felt that the term Latino also incorrectly assumed a singular racial background:

> Race [in America] means either you come from areas such as Europe, the Americas, Africa, or Asia. But I’m mixed with Africa, Europe, and the Americas. In the Dominican Republic everybody’s mixed but here [in the

> United States] they would just say they're Latino. Cause they don't think about it. They just say Latino like it's a race but it's not.

Marcial felt that the racially imposed categories of the United States did not reflect his reality as a person of mixed heritage. What he saw as the racialization of the term "Latino" did not make logical sense.

Similarly Princess expressed the struggle she had with placing herself within America's conceptualization of "race":

> Usually like I see race as Black, White, or *[paused to think]*…usually it's just Black and White. I don't see it as like Latino or Latina. But I say I'm Dominican because I remember one time I asked my mom, and she said that there's no difference between race and background ethnicity. But then I was talking to my friend's mom, and she said that we wouldn't be classified as Dominican…that we would be classified as White. But, I don't know, I still see my race as being Dominican.

She continued to explain, "You're either Black, White, or where you come from." It was clear that for Princess it was difficult to place herself within the Black and White racial dichotomy in the United States. And yet she also was receiving messages that Whiteness and Blackness were not actual reflections of skin color but were rather reflections of social standings in society. Rather than work within these terms she chose instead to forge a new identity for herself outside of the imposed category of "Latina" or "Hispanic," by claiming herself as "Dominican."

Issues of what terms like "Latino" and "Hispanic" meant went far beyond Black and White and were also reflective of a national dialogue which equated being Latino with being Mexican. Therefore the term "Latino" could at times feel alienating to the Dominican students. The invisibility that Dominicans felt with regard to the larger

Mexican community was embodied by an encounter that Justin described. When asked if he had ever experienced discrimination he responded,

> Yes, Not, like, here [at school] but when I play online with my Play Station 3. Like, some people assume I'm Mexican when I talk on the head seat. But like, how do I sound Mexican? What does a Mexican sound like *[asks sarcastically]*?"

Being told that he sounded like a Mexican meant something more than just that he had an accent. It was a reflection of the lack of visibility Justin and other Dominican students felt around broader national discussions of Latinos issues. In this situation being called a Mexican was a denial of his Dominican identity. Another student, Boots, hinted at the way that issues affecting mainly the Mexican community were what dominated the discourse around Latino discrimination:

> Yes because there is always discrimination, like in Arizona, the whole state of Arizona is discriminating against Mexicans, or immigrants that come in, and here I see it in the news that African Americans jump [attack] Mexican's because they're immigrants.

Boots felt that rhetoric around immigration politics in America was exclusively Mexican in nature. This was also evident in the way that other students stereotype the Mexican community. Jason shared his thoughts:

> I don't want to say it, but I know that Mexicans, they come here, they cross the border illegally, or legally, but they don't know anything about America.

As the students were struggling with feelings of invisibility in Black and White racial discourse they were also dealing with externally imposed ideas of what it meant to be Latino. And these ideas of "Latino" often conflicted with their own feelings about larger nationally represented groups like Mexicans. This relationship between illegality and Latinos bled into some of the way that some students felt they were being denied their

citizenship in the United States. When asked he if he felt that others saw him as an American Marcial responded,

> White people always want to say, "Oh, you Hispanics are stealing our jobs." Yet, I was born here, so how am I gonna steal your job!

This feeling of exclusion from his born right of citizenship was something he breezed over casually but is got at what appeared to be his struggle with feeling like a true member of the society that he was born into.

Despite feeling excluded from the larger Latino community some students still felt the weight of what being Latinos meant in the United States. Justin was one of the top performing students in the school and had been selected during the previous year to attend a prestigious summer enrichment program in the East Coast. But when asked about the high drop out rates of Latinos he explained:

> I think also like the stereotypes set for them, Ms. Vasquez [Spanish teacher] says the *expectativas,* basically, expectations. Like the society we're in, there's a lot of different expectations for different ethnic groups. And it leads those people to actually think that they're that way when in actuality they're not. For Latinos the expectations are mostly that either they're lazy, or they're actually like looking for a job because they think they won't succeed in school. They just quit school, and look for a job, or things like that.

At 15 he had picked up on the fact that society had lowered expectations of him but it was his perspective as an outsider, which allowed him to reflect critically on the problems within and outside of his community.

Puerto Rican student perspectives.

Blackness. While the Puerto Rican students shared a similar Afro-Latino phenotype with the Dominicans, their encounters with Black Americans inside and outside of Excellence High School were inextricably bound by the tense relationship

that has historically existed between Puerto Ricans and African Americans in New York due to: Puerto Rican mixed phenotype; acceptance into "White" spaces for light skinned Puerto Ricans; denial of Blackness by dark skinned Puerto Ricans, scarce resources within and between minority communalities; cultural and linguistic differences (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006; Gonzalez, 2000; Grosfoguel, 2003). This was exacerbated by the fact that most of the Puerto Ricans, unlike their Dominican classmates, took classes exclusively with Black students in the school. Alley broadly described the types of encounters she experienced with her Black classmates,

> Like, it's just a matter of our cultures that probably makes us different. Yeah but it's not big though. It's things that you could deal with. It's not things like them [Black students] saying, "You're Puerto Rican I don't like you." It's not like that. It's like cultural ways, like the things that we eat, they'll [Black students] say; "What is that, ew!" Stuff like that.

This small micro-aggression about her cultural foods was casually mentioned, and while she seemed to want to brush off these types of comments as being insignificant it was apparent that they had indeed left a mark on her.

Hailee expressed similar feelings about being the recipient of Black discrimination even outside of the school:

> There was this situation where I was at McDonalds, and there were a lot of Black people there, and they were saying how all Latin people are supposed to be loud and they're rude and all that stuff. So that got me mad and I came out with an attitude and I was like, "You shouldn't say that cause not all Latin people are like that!" I mean of course we're loud, kind of, but that's just who we are. That got me mad! And we started arguing and they were like, "Oh that's why you all don't belong here." So I was like, "What are you talking about! What do you mean we don't belong here!" Puerto Rico is part of the U.S. So I said, "Dude, you're so slow."

This interaction exemplified the Puerto Rican experience of exclusion and invisibility within the United States. And yet in this case it was a group of Black Americans who were questioning whether or not Hailee was a "real" American. Much like the Dominican students, the Puerto Rican students were experiencing hegemonic oppression at the hands of another minority group.

The Puerto Rican students also struggled with the reality that as Latinos they did not easily fit into the categories of White or Black. But when asked where she felt Latinos should be placed within the American concept of race Hailee noted:

> Oh so we're in between. Well I think we're *like* Blacks, cause people still treat us different than a White person. Like if I was to go into a store all the security guards would look at me mostly while I'm in the store, but then if a White person went in they wouldn't look at them as much. So like, they look at me as "Black." That's the way stereotypes are nowadays. Definitely.

In this quote Hailee discusses "Blackness" not as a skin color but as a status within American society. And yet this feeling of being socially "Black" was often in conflict with the lack of acceptance the Puerto Rican students felt from the Black community. This led to some of the Puerto Rican students having a difficult time discussing discrimination as definitions of "discrimination" were typically grounded in the Black experience. When asked if she had ever personally encountered racism Sky struggled as she shared her story:

> I have…maybe. Sometimes like if I'm…like I remember this one case when I was with my cousin at this baseball tournament in Pennsylvania. And I remember we were kicked out of a pool because supposedly it was a certain time [when the pool was supposed to be closed]…but then White kids went into the pool and they were swimming and nobody told them anything. So then I just like felt like *[pauses]*…

Her stammering reflected her difficulty in finding the words to describe her experience. And this inability to articulate herself around topics of racism and discrimination echoed José Jorge Klor de Alba's (1996) critique that these terms are so intertwined with Blackness that it is impossible to disentangle them to include Latino experiences. As he states, "Don't Latinos have their own situation that also needs to be described if not in the same terms, then at least in terms that are supplementary?" (Klor de Alba & West, 1996). Sky reported that she and her cousins did not speak of the event after it had occurred. But when pressed to discuss her feelings about the experience she noted,

> The rest of the country is like that, in my opinion. Because, like, I'm in a civil rights group with a few other 10th and 9th graders, and I remember when we were discussing in one meeting that…like basically recent things that had happened and stuff that had to do with the South. Like racism against either Black people or Spanish people…but it still happens within the U.S. now…so I'm not the only one ever.

Sky seemed to find some comfort in recognizing that she was not the only person who had ever experienced these types of racially charged encounters and her ability to include herself in broader discussions of civil rights gave her a sense of belonging. Yet in this socially constructed space of Blackness Sky did not have the words to discuss her experience of discrimination, and she struggled to convey the way it made her feel.

> It was just like…between us [my cousins]. It's like, It was just like, oh wow, just whatever. We'll go back to the pool tomorrow. And plus it was getting late anyways. Like we just were making excuses for, like, it's just trying to, I guess, not really think about it that much, but, just knowing that it…like that we felt that way. I don't know.

Whiteness. The Puerto Rican students who were interviewed also seemed to have a difficult time placing themselves within racial discourses of Whiteness, which was complicated by their in-between status as American citizens and Puerto Ricans.

Malcolm, a male student often turned to history to try to contextualize the inequities that he saw between Whites and other oppressed communities.

> I think Whites have more money, so, I guess it's just that I don't think they went through what we've [Puerto Ricans] gone through, like, they haven't lived in the standards that we've lived in. Like how we don't have enough money to live in a stable home…like how Blacks were slaves. I think that's one of the reasons. They have more money, and, well, I've never been to a private school, but I would guess that if you went to a private school you would barely see any minorities.

On a very basic level Malcolm was discussing historical access to privilege and the reification of spaces of privilege that can be seen in the top performing private schools in our country. For Malcolm Whiteness equated to access. He continued,

> Well, they say that White people *have* more opportunities. But I think they *get* more opportunities than Hispanics and other ethnic groups because of how other White people feel about them. Like, how back then, they were always racist and stuff, but, now it's seemed to calm down, but it's still not equal. It's getting there, but it's not all the way.

Malcolm had concluded that White privilege had been structurally embedded into our society and was repeated generationally. Simply, according to him, White people got more opportunities because White people preferred other White people. It was through the invisible space he occupied as a Puerto Rican male that he was able to engage with a critical analysis of structural racism in the United States.

Hailee shared similar feelings about what she saw as White privilege:

> You know, we [Puerto Ricans] struggle to survive and all that stuff and most of the White people I see have mad [a lot of] money. I'm like, "What's up with you all?" I don't know, I just feel like White people get better things than, Latinos or Black people. It's just something I've always seen. Like they live in condominiums, while we live in apartments. They have big boats, while we have busted [old] looking cars. Like when I went to New Orleans we were by the water and saw a group of White people that were on this big boat, and I was

like; *[gasps]* "Oh my God!" And then we saw another group of people, they looked Latin, but I wasn't sure, and they had like a busted rowboat. I was like, "Oh my God are you serious?" And then like in the city you see all the condominiums and mostly I only see White people there. I wish that was me.

While she had not fully processed the reasons for White privilege Hailee did seem to understand on a very real level that there were "haves and have nots." And within this social hierarchy Whites were most definitely the "haves" while Puerto Ricans were the "have nots." Whiteness for her did not mean skin color but rather an overall access to a world of opportunities.

"Latino/Hispanic." The Puerto Rican students also struggled with the all-inclusive terms "Latino" and "Hispanic," which were further complicated by the reality of Puerto Rico being a part of the United States rather than its own country like other Latino nations. Thus their relationship to America was bound by a historical context of exclusion and dominance. Students like Sky expressed confusion at not knowing what to call herself racially given this precarious in between status. When asked what the word "race" meant to her she responded,

> Like, where your family's from, you're background. So, being that my mom is from Puerto Rico that makes me from there. But sometimes they call Spanish people "brown," but being that I'm not close to even dark I would just say Hispanic. I guess.

These titles like "American," "Spanish," and "brown" did not reflect the way she felt about herself as a Puerto Rican female. And yet she felt forced to choose "Hispanic" not because it was what she felt she was but because out of the available options it was the least undesirable.

While these blanket terms of Hispanic and Latino did not necessarily reflect the Puerto Rican students' identities they also carried with them their own problems and

assumptions. Malcolm was a high achieving, active student who was a founding member of the drama and glee clubs, an editor for the school newspaper. Yet he acknowledged and struggled with the reality that despite his many accolades and successes this was not what people see when they looked at him.

> When I was born the media and people everywhere were already saying and it was already assumed that Latinos have high drop-out rates and their education isn't that smart and I was actually talking about it this weekend, with my cousins…they were saying, like, people think of us like we're only sanitary workers and only people who are janitors and stuff. So, I mean, I kind of got that. Like, I understand why people would say that, but, I also don't. Like if we actually took the time to study and do whatever we needed to do we could change that 18% [Latino dropout rate] and be as close as Asians and Whites.

Malcolm felt that when people looked at him they did not see a future scholar but rather they saw a future janitor and a statistic reflected in the broader stereotypes of lowered expectations for Latinos. Similarly Alley had aspirations of becoming a doctor. She did not know any doctors personally but based her aspirations on the lives of the doctors she saw on primetime television shows.

> I think, well, honestly, I feel like there's a lot of stereotypes that Latinos don't make it as far. But I feel like, no one in my family has ever just dropped out and then that's it. Like if they dropped out then they eventually went back in. So I was raised and I was brought up to success. I wasn't raised and brought up to dropping out of school, not doing what you can. And I feel like education is a big part of everything because…everyday of our week, Monday through Friday...five days in the seven days in the week, we are in school. That's a big part of our life. Almost six to seven hours every day, we are there every day in school getting an education, in the best school. So I think it's really important to society...like communities and stuff.

Her assertion that she was brought up to success not failure was core to how she believed she would succeed in life, despite the social barriers and negative expectations

working against her. But this idea of success was also central to her identity as a Puerto Rican and a Latina.

Also within dialogues of pan-Latinidad the Puerto Rican students expressed feelings of invisibility as they too felt that "Latino" within the national discourse meant Mexican. When asked to discuss issues of discrimination against Latinos Malcolm immediately began to describe issues of discrimination affecting the Mexican community.

> I think Mexicans are mostly discriminated because like the Arizona immigration law. I don't know what's the problem with not having immigrants here. I mean, and I'm actually doing my research paper on how deportation affects illegal immigrants economically and socially. I feel like it's wrong, cause in some of the articles that I read they said that they're "illegal aliens," which I find that's kind of rude because I mean they're still people, they're no different than you and me, they're just darker. It's really, they seems like they're not from earth but everybody was born here.

Malcolm appeared to be talking about Latinos and Mexicans in a way that suggested that these were not issues that directly affected him. And in reality as a Puerto Rican they did not because issues of immigration are not central to the Puerto Rican experiences. Yet these are the topics most often discussed in relation to Latinos. Therefore it made sense that many of the Puerto Rican students would feel absent from these discussions. Similar to how discussions of racism were structured around Blackness, discussions of Latino Identity were structured around Mexican issues.

"Latino Other" student perspectives.

Blackness. Unlike the other groups in this sample the Ecuadorian and Mexican students did not discuss Blackness or the Black community in their interviews. This may have been due to the fact that in their courses they were mainly tracked with Dominican and Puerto Rican students. In addition, these students came from Latino

ethnic enclaves where they had few encounter with the Black community. Yet the type of strained relationship that the Dominicans and Puerto Ricans described in relation to Black Americans was mirrored in the relationships that the "Latino Others" had with Dominicans and Puerto Ricans.

Whiteness. These Latino students appeared to have a different, less defined relationship to Whiteness. While they appeared to have a theoretical idea of how White privilege worked in the United States they had very few real encounters from which to draw such conclusions. Alejandro, an Ecuadorian student, noted that although he had never met any White people outside of his teachers he did see White people during his daily two hour commute to and from school.

> When I see White people I don't really know how they interpret me like; "oh look at him with a uniform and all nicely professional." Or if I look like a Latin person trying to be White or something, I don't know. Isn't it like a stereotype, like if you're Latino or African-American you dress up differently like with just regular clothes? And if you're White; you dress up all nice, suited or whatever doctors wear?

Alejandro's idea of Whiteness appeared to be centered not only around being American but also around social class signifiers of wealth such as suits and formal articles of clothing. And this relationship between how one dressed and how one was racially perceived was so intertwined in his mind that he felt that by dressing differently he could be seen as a person who was dressing "White."

"Latino/Hispanic." Like the Dominican and Puerto Rican students the Ecuadorian students expressed both a public and private definition of their own Latino racial identities. Diego, a Sophomore of Ecuadorian descent, explained,

> To me it's like there's different ways to think about race. Because most of the people, when they think of race its Black or White. But to me it's more than

> that. It's, yes, your color, but also what you do about it to make it better. Because there's a lot of stereotypes about different people. So you take what you have and then see how far you can get with it.

Diego attempted to define himself outside of the typical racial constructs most likely due to the fact that these constructs were not inclusive of him as an Ecuadorian. According to him the term "race" on the surface referred to the binary of Blackness and Whiteness. But there were also deeper levels that he observed whereby race was also an imposed identity. He continued,

> Because I feel that race is only, or mostly native to like the United States, because from all the history of the United States that basically was, what was always there. So when people see us, or like the "Latino nation," they would put us into the "White" category. But I think that there should be like another category for us. But I don't think these categories are good at all anyway.

Diego felt that while he would be categorized according to the American system as White, "Whiteness" was not an accurate description for his experience as an Ecuadorian American high school student living in a predominately Dominican and Puerto Rican neighborhood. Whiteness was a space of privilege, and he felt that Latinos required another category since this did not accurately describe their lower social standing. And yet the idea of being categorized felt forced to him, and meant very little to how he constructed his own identity. He saw these categories as merely ways to differentiate and separate people.

In addition to not knowing where to place themselves, the two Ecuadorian students also struggled with the idea of citizenship and their own realities of feeling like outsiders. When asked if he felt that he was treated as an American by other Americans Alejandro responded,

> No. I think they treat me as a Latino person that just knows English cause they were here for a time, or something.

In addition to not being recognized as an Ecuadorian specifically, Alejandro felt that his American citizenship was yet another identity that he was being denied. To him being Latino in the United States equated to foreign otherness. He felt that despite his citizenship he could never truly be accepted as anything more than just a Latino person who knew the language.

Unlike the other Latino groups who felt that they were not represented in the media, the Ecuadorian students had seen images of Ecuadorians, though these images tended to be negative. Diego described things he had seen:

> What I saw on the news is that I think in New Jersey five different Ecuadorians were killed. Yeah. So that really impacted me. Like that made me feel like, "Why?" They said that they were hate crimes.

Diego explained to me that he felt that these hate crimes had been committed because the aggressors were trying to assault men they thought were undocumented Mexicans. In reality these Ecuadorians were being mistaken for Mexicans due to similar physical appearances. In this way issues pertaining to the larger Mexican community affected him indirectly, by making him feel that any anti-Mexican sentiments could be projected onto him.

Inversely, Santiago, the one Mexican student gave his perspective on these Ecuadorian men who had been killed. When asked if these crimes were fueled by anti Latino sentiments or specifically anti Mexican sentiments he explained,

> Like when I hear the news they basically hit people that look Mexican, like Ecuadorians, cause they look Mexicans, and they [Ecuadorians] mostly get the beatings, but sometimes Mexicans get them too. I'm not sure why. I basically think cause sometimes they get all the jobs. Yeah. My mom, especially my

> mom, she, she's always worried, she, like she wants me to call her every single time when I arrive and I'm leaving.

Santiago alludes to the mainstream idea of Mexicans taking American jobs, which appears to be the rhetoric that he has been exposed to. And while both the Mexican and Ecuadorian students differed in their identities they shared many similar experiences in the way that they were treated within the United States due to their similar phenotypes. So while the Ecuadorians and Mexican students did not feel invisible in the larger racial dialogue of Latino issues, these representations for the most part were negative in nature and expressed the way that they often felt they were denied their American citizenship.

Limitations in Current Definitions of Race

Race is defined as "A global social fact, a socio-cultural category that structures social hierarchies of power and prestige, determines access to resources, and organizes individual and collective identities and action" (Itzigsohn, Giorguli, & Vazquez, 2005, p. 51). In essence it acts a way for people to view themselves relative to others by defining themselves as members of groups both real and imagined. And while racial categories can often be chosen they can also be imposed, as in the case of the youth in this study. Within the United States the discourse on race is binary, with White and Black being presented as opposing forces. Yet for groups who do not easily fit into this binary there is a sense of marginality and invisibility. The students in this study were informed by their transnational experiences and saw their race as malleable and contextualized. And yet in not having a strong sense of where they could place themselves within the rhetoric of American racial discourse they often lacked the

language to describe and cope with racially charged encounters as they appeared to be internally struggling with defining their experience within narrow definitions of "race."

Other researchers have noted that categories of race in the United States are quite limited and while Latinos may choose to publicly work within these terms of "White, Black, and Hispanic," privately they see themselves as none of these (Rodriguez & Cordero-Guzman, 1992). Rather they see these categories not as representative of a real identification but rather as representations of the way that society is structured around groups in power and groups not in power. This understanding of power was reflected not only in the students' discussions but also in their lived experiences as they seemed to differentiate who they were with what location they held in society. While some students categorized themselves as "White" and others as "Latino" or "Hispanic," they all self identified primarily by their country of origin. This experience of being forced to choose an identity that is not representative of ones true self is unique to the Latino experience. This is due in large part to their considerable numbers; the way that labels have been imposed on them historically; and the way that their individual histories and presence in this country have been hidden and denied.

As Judy Cohen (1993) noted in her ethnography of urban high school students, "Not only are students authorities on their own experiences, but they also bring critical insight to the complexities of race/ethnicity" (Cohen, 1993, p. 306). For the Latino students at Excellence High School it was their unique placement as outsiders, which afforded them the perspective to recognize and at times critique the social construction of race in the United States. Despite the societal injustices that they experienced the

students still expressed hope for an egalitarian future. When asked what he or she would tell their children about race and prejudice every single student's response was nearly identical. Hailee exclaimed,

> Yes, yes! I think there's always a higher power in every city or state or whatever, and I think that's unfair cause everybody should be treated equally. Like, they should have the same advantages as other people. They should be able to get the same jobs, the same welfare, whatever, nobody should be on top of anybody else."

Hailee felt strongly thing that the unjust forces that separated society could and should be erased. Jason expressed a similar message that he had received from his mother:

> She tells me that different people, like Whites or any people just think they're superior, better than others, and they might come down on you. Just ignore them. Just keep on moving forward.

Yet despite this desire to ignore and move forward it was difficult for some students to not internalize the negative messages they had received about their inferior standing in society. When asked about his daily two-hour commute from his home to the school Alejandro shared his reflections:

> Something that interests me is how certain trains come all the way down here to these neighborhoods. They are like the old trains, not the new ones. But the train that goes to the World Trade Center is one of the brand new ones. And I wonder how come there's never no trains that run all the way down here that are the new and fancy ones? I think it's because of the community and society. That's what I think. The people riding these trains are African-Americans and Latinos. That's what I've been noticing. I don't think it's fair, but I think it's *[pause]* not like the best, but it's a better way cause I think many Latinos and African Americans don't really care how clean their trains are. But Whites would care. So I wonder how come we don't get those trains, but then I think that we'll just, like, leave stuff everywhere. Like on our trains there's spilled juice and things on the floor…the ground's sticky…trash everywhere and all that. And I think we just don't take care for our stuff, and if we had new trains they'd become like the old trains. So I think in order for them not to ruin the new trains they just made them pass through the good, clean stops.

Invisibility and Forging an Identity Within the Hyphen

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife--this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost…He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without losing the opportunity of self-development (DuBois, 1903, p. 4).

Fine and Burns describe life in the margins of society as the existence of struggling to survive within the American system while also trying to change it (Fine & Burns, 2003). The Latino youth whose experiences have been included in this chapter were living in the margins of both mainstream and minority culture. But it was within these margins that they began to develop,

> "Hyphenated selves…living in bodies infused with global and local conflict, as they strive to make meaning, speak back, incorporate and resist the contradictory messages that swirl through them" (Fine & Sirin, 2007, p. 17).

It was through their experiences of marginalization and hyphenation that they forged an existence within the hyphen, "a dynamic social psychological space where political arrangements and individual subjectivities meet" (Fine & Sirin, 2007, p. 21). Scholars of Afro-Latinidad have built on DuBois' idea of double consciousness by describing what it means to hold a *triple consciousness,* the ever feeling of three-ness: the Latino, the Negro, and the American. And regardless of whether or not the students self identified as Black or Afro-Latino their experiences of living within the hyphen could be explained through the lens of triple consciousness. But the contradictions, pain, and outrage that go along with this triple consciousness do not lead to inevitable pathology of failure, but rather can lead to an embracing and celebration of all the varied dimensions of one's self (Román & Flores, 2010). Thus it was through expressions of

feeling nationally rootless that the Latino students at Excellence High School were able to develop the perspective to critique the very society, which excluded them. .

Gloria Anzaldúa described her experience as a *Chicana* living in the borderlands, an imagined and real space of marginality:

> The new *mestiza,* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode-nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 101).

Though Anzaldúa's ideas are grounded in her perspective as a *Chicana*, experiences of marginality are not limited to one gender or ethnic group. Metaphorical and real borders are crossed daily by a multitude of people; and just as she illustrates the *mestiza's* ability to cope with contradictions, so too did these students appear to be defining themselves in the face of contradictions and thriving in the space that exists within the hyphen.

CHAPTER VI

Forging Hopeful Futures Amidst Gendered Expectations

In this chapter I focus on the ways that Latino adolescents envision and plan to create their futures in the face of adversity, societal expectations, and structural barriers. But when exploring the way that identities are expressed it is impossible to disentangle the effects of socially mirrored expectations both with regard to gender and race and social class (Andersen & Hill Collins, 2004). Therefore when discussing the experiences that these students had around stereotypes it was necessary to discuss the way that these stereotypes were often grounded in gendered expectations of what Latino and Latina teenagers should act like. Yet as children of immigrants they were not merely struggling with the Latino ideas of appropriate male and female behavior. They were also working within the confines of stereotypes held by mainstream Americans. Examples of this could be gleaned not only from their interpretations of interaction with the outside world but also from their interactions with Black classmates. These assumptions were exacerbated by the realities of many of their lived lives, which too often reflected the very same stereotypes they were combating. And yet every single student had a strong desire to prove these stereotypes wrong through their actions and daily choices to commit to their educations (Bettie, 2003; Schultz, 1999).

Along with broadly defined ideas of gender within and outside of the United States these students were also combating external societally imposed essentialized

notions of what it meant for them be young Latino men and women. These stereotypes often differed not only from how they viewed themselves as individuals, but also how they were positioned as delinquents in contrast to American "normative" teenage behavior. While some have noted that essentialism is a heuristic bias that allows humans to make sense of the differences in the world (Gelman & Taylor, 2000), Mahalingam argues that essentialism can be used as "an ideological tool that justifies power relations" (Mahalingam & Leu, 2005, p. 840). Thus through gendered discussions of stereotypically negative representations of Latinos and reflections on their own aspirations, the young boys and girls in this study appeared to be negotiating among who they were, who they wanted to become, and essentialized notions of who it was assumed they would become. Yet the students in this research were actively refusing the futures others had assumed for them by establishing their identities as counter to the prevailing notion of Latinos as teen mothers, dropouts, and delinquents. This resistance was manifested in the way each student shifted between giving into the difficult circumstances of their lives and in reaffirming constantly their determination to do things differently from their sisters, brothers, neighbors, and even parents. Yet the goal of this study is not to view these students as static entities destined to fulfill a stereotype that is reflected in a report depicting the problems facing Latino youth. Rather it is an attempt to share the experiences of individuals whose daily lives and choices were bound by contextual factors such as their gender, their status as American minorities, their working class background, and their transnational identities as both Latinos and Americans.

Externally Imposed Expectations From the American Mainstream

Latina girls as pregnant dropouts. Research has shown that 52% of Latina teens have been pregnant at least once before the age of 20. This is twice the national average rate of teen pregnancy (NCPTUP, 2012). The girls interviewed in this study expressed concern not that they themselves would get pregnant but rather that the people around them assumed they would get pregnant. This fear was in many cases made more real by the examples they saw in their homes of mothers and sisters who were forced to drop out of school due to unplanned pregnancies. Teen pregnancy was not merely a statistic but was a reality for many of these females. And yet the idea of teen pregnancy was so heavily bound to their fears of dropping out that it was nearly impossible to disentangle the cause and effect relationship that they attributed to pregnancy and dropping out. It also appeared that the teenage girls in this study were carrying the weight of this statistic, as pregnancy was framed as an exclusively female issue.

Hailee, a Puerto Rican female, described an incident in her classes when she felt that she had been essentialized not by the White community but by her Black classmates.

> Yeah, there was a situation here at school last year… we were talking about stereotypes and two of my friends, African American girls, said that Latin people always get pregnant at a young age. And they were looking at all the Latin girls that were in the class, which was me and a friend. They were saying how we were gonna get pregnant, or whatever. And I was like, "How can you say that? What are you talking about!" And then I was like, "At least we have real hair!"…I didn't like the way she came at me, and I didn't mean to but it just came out! It got me mad cause, like, I'm not ALL. I'm not everybody else! I'm me! *[Taps her index finger to her chest]*. Don't try to tell me what I'm gonna do! Yeah it's kind of true but don't put it to me.

In this interaction Hailee recognized that to the outside world the relationship between getting pregnant was directly correlated with her identity as Puerto Rican female. But her heated reaction to the accusation that she too would get pregnant at a young age took on personal meaning as she later explained that her parents had both dropped out of high school at age 16 in order to have her. The statistic of high teen pregnancy rates among Latinas was more than just a number in Hailee's life, because she herself was a part of this statistic. Yet she struggled to assert herself within this widely held belief that she too would end up pregnant and without a high school diploma like her own mother. This situation that she described was also fueled with undercurrents of the racial tension that appeared to exist between the Black and Latino students in the school as these were not only stereotype held by the external world but were expectations from her own peers, classmates, and fellow minorities. Hailee used the commonly held stereotype of Black women having weaves to insult her Black classmates in an attempt to assert herself and place herself, a Puerto Rican female, above Blacks, the dominant reference group in her life. Researches have noted that this can be a strategy for minority females to affirm their own self worth in the face of essentialization (Bettie, 2003; Espiritu, 2001; Mahalingam & Leu, 2005).

Like Hailee, Sky was also the living result of a teen pregnancy and had spent much of her existence in government-funded housing projects with her single mother and autistic brother. Her personal experience as the child of a teen mother gave her special insight into the outcome of these decisions beyond what she read or heard about on the news.

> I know my mom dropped out of high school with me. And then my aunt dropped out of high school because she also had a baby. My cousin too…other reasons

> are I guess feeling like it's too much and somebody can't handle this and they just give up. But that could be for anybody. And also I guess peer pressure outside of school, so like gang violence. Or just getting it into your mind that stereotypes are true. So like when people see you as not being able to achieve something, you just feel like "Oh, so I'm not going to be able to it, so why even try?"

In her reflection she explained that stereotypes were not just words but powerful forces that could prevent people from achieving their full potential. But in discussing and recognizing the realities of these stereotypes Sky no longer had to fall victim to the power that they held in her life. She fought society's expectations that she too might get pregnant in her daily choices to avoid the mistakes made by her mother, aunt, and cousin.

For nearly every female whose perspective is presented in this research the issue of dropping out of school was directly tied to their fears of getting pregnant. This relationship was not unfounded since research has shown that of all Latinas who drop out of high school between their sophomore and senior years 26% of those were due to pregnancy. And of these teen moms, 54% did not actually go on to complete high school. This is a staggering number compared to the 34% of teen moms overall in the general population (NCPTUP, 2012). Thus their fears appeared to be grounded in reality. When presented with these statistics Hailee reacted with shock, disappointment, but also empathy.

> Well it's mostly in high school so I guess it's mostly due to the fact that they can't go to college and raise a kid. Like some of them can, but not all of them. So then maybe that's the problem, and maybe we just let life take us in negative directions than what it's supposed to be, like we want to hang out instead of going to school when it's not all about hanging out, you could do that later. So I guess that's why Latinos drop out. I'm shocked by that number. Oh my God!

Despite the feelings of disappointment these young women like Hailee felt at hearing the problematic statistics plaguing their community they also felt empowered by this knowledge. Through informing the students they no longer had to be part of a statistic but rather could reframe their identities as young women beating the odds. But the unspoken reality within these ideas of teen pregnancy was the fear that they would not only end up pregnant but also would end up repeating the lives of their working class mothers. Thus avoiding teen pregnancy was an active choice to try to escape their lives as working class Latinas.

Interestingly when the girls spoke of teen pregnancy they never once discussed the effect that it had on the young men in their community. It was as though the women were expected to take full responsibility for pregnancy related issues. And while dropping out of high school was a problem afflicting both Latino males and females, the reasons for dropping out were clearly dividing by gender lines such that girls dropped out because they got pregnant and boys dropped out because they were lazy and irresponsible. Julie Bettie (2003) found similar narratives in her exploration of Mexican American females living in the Central Valley of California. She noted that female sexuality within Latino communities is often seen as "slutty" while male sexuality is seen as "normative." But the underlying assumption is that "normative" male behavior equates to young men being unreliable (Bettie, 2003).

Yet despite the indications from the students that pregnancy was an exclusively female problem two male students had witnessed second hand the effects that teen pregnancy had on their friends and peers. When asked to describe what he saw as the root of the high rate of teen pregnancies among Latinas, Alejandro explained:

> Yeah. So they just have sexual relationships. I know a lot of girls that are pregnant after 15, 16 years old. Then they have the little kids and they'll be walking with them. They don't go to school no more, and they were great students. But they just dropped out cause some guy pressured them, and then they just had to dropout.

The idea of a young girl being coerced and acted upon may have reflected some of Alejandro's gendered beliefs about young women as lacking a sense of agency in their lives. Regardless it appeared that men had sex with girls while girls suffered the consequences of these interactions.

Boots, a Dominican male student was the only other male who alluded to pregnancy and its effects. His sister had become pregnant and was forced to leave college, and the subsequent birth of his niece became a major motivator in his life.

> I really want to go to college, cause I have a little niece, and I want her to really be inspired by me, like to look up to me. So my sister went to college. But when she had my niece she was in her 3rd year. But I want my niece to look up to somebody, because I'm her only uncle. Like it's just me and my sister and that's it. I just want her to know that I'm always gonna be there and not wander off like some other uncles. They go do some bad stuff and they mess up their lives, and they can't see their nieces or daughters or sons. I just want to be an uncle that's positive, always positive, and always teach her what to do so that she doesn't grow up to do bad things.

Boots' explanation for his feelings of responsibility toward his niece may have provided a clue to the absence of Latinos males in these discussions of teen pregnancy. He alluded to the idea that teenage Latino boys were making serious mistakes which hindered their futures and prevented them from fulfilling their obligations not only as uncles but also perhaps as fathers. These two male students seemed to affirm the widely held belief that young Latino men were not to be relied upon (Bettie, 2003).

Aside from these two instances, the Latino male students in this study made no reference to the stereotype of teen pregnancy within the Latino community. On the

contrary, the silence on their part with regard to this issue appeared to reflect gendered views of dropping out. In addition there was only one reference made to a classmate who had become pregnant the previous year and dropped out of Excellence Junior High. The reality of not only their mothers but also this fellow classmate may have made this issue particularly salient for the young women in this group. Princess was the only female who did not discuss pregnancy in either of her interviews. In this case the omission of this topic was relevant as it may have been reflective of her relatively better off social status and her experience as a light skinned Dominican female. Thus teen pregnancy was not just a Latina issue but rather was a poor Afro-Latina issue.

Latino boys as delinquents. In contrast to the female centric stereotype of pregnancy, the male students described coping with assumptions that because they were Latinos males they were perceived as being delinquent. While the students did not always feel comfortable discussing racism in their interviews I found evidence of aversive forms of racism that they seemed to encounter in their day-to-day life. When asked if he had ever been discriminated against Diego, an Ecuadorian student responded,

> There's nothing like too specific. But it's just like these little things, like when I walk into a store sometimes they just eye the camera, the screens and stuff like that. But it's not just one specific race or storeowner…actually I think it's more cause of my age instead of my race.

While Diego clearly felt the weight of the owner's eyes on him he was hesitant to attribute this to racism but rather chose to see this as an instant where being a young person made him look suspicious. And this choice avoid the racial undertones of these interactions may have been a way for him to cope with societal expectations that he, a Latino male, would be a delinquent.

Another stereotype that emerged from several interviews was the assumption that Latino boys put off studying in order to "mess around" or "have fun"; and it was these behaviors, which led to boys dropping out of school. These socially imposed assumptions of what typical Latino teenage male behavior looked like mirrored the female students' experiences around issues of pregnancy. And similar to their female classmates, the male students saw instances of brothers and cousins who had dropped out of school to participate in delinquent behavior.

Alejandro, an Ecuadorian Sophomore, saw his personal desire to succeed juxtaposed with direct examples of failure in his own family. His older brother was well on his way to being a high school dropout, having been held back twice in a public high school. When asked about the low expectations that society held for Latinos Alejandro explained that sometimes it was the choices that people like his brother made which led to their negative outcomes:

> I think it's just cause of the things they decide to do, their decisions don't lead them to no good. Cause they think; oh girls and all that, and maybe they're parents never got a great education. Some parents just don't have the time to be home and all that to remind them that, "Education is great, and you have to try hard." But they can't actually tell them that if they never actually did it. Also, I think many Latino's parents have kids at a young age and then they're kids just think, "I'm gonna have a girl and just want to have a sexual relationship," and then that causes a baby, or something, and then that makes them dropout of school.

Alejandro, despite his difficult life circumstances, still maintained a sense of autonomy expressed through what he believed to be daily choices that he was making to further his prospects. He went on to describe interactions with his older brother:

> Knowing my brother he does horrible at school, he doesn't care about his grades. He just wants to hang out with girls, drink, smoke, and just have a teenage life. That's what he believes, that it's a "teenage life." My mom tells me when he's 18, and he gets out the house, he's really not gonna know how to be

> in the real world. And I think education is really important for me cause, like when I get home he'll say; "Oh come play Xbox with me," or "Let's go to the park and play soccer, leave your homework." And I'll say no, because I want to do it cause I really do care about my grades. And I really want to pass.

Rather than fall prey to the pressures and distractions he saw his in his brother's life, Alejandro reframed his education as a choice that he was making to change his life. This emphasis on choices was what helped Alejandro to commit to his daily two-hour commute to attend a school where he might actually be able to attain a better future. Yet even with this hope, he still acknowledged that sometimes people cannot escape the world around them and just like his brother, he too could very well end up in the same situation. For Alejandro and other students there was an ever-present sense of fear that a single mistake made at any moment could change trajectory of their hopeful futures. Their only real option was to make good choices daily to renew their commitment to their dreams. Alejandro discussed the idea of a "teenage life" in terms of what he considered normative behavior. Yet what he considered normal was bound by cultural ideas of delinquent Latino male youth.

In these discussions of dropping out not one female in the sample mentioned "having fun" as a reason why females might have to leave school. Rather for the females in the sample dropping out was framed less as a choice and more as a necessity in the face of unfortunate circumstances like getting pregnant. And this issue of dropping out reflected externally imposed gendered ideas of what Latino youth are expected to be and do. While Latinas girls dropped out because of pregnancy, Latino boys dropped out because of their poor choices. These views were heavily bound by the realities of their working class backgrounds, but rather than focus on the effects that poverty had on the lives of these students their problems were being framed as

pathological to the Latino community as a whole. In addition mainstream view of Latina females gave little agency to these young women by assuming that they were being acted on by men, whereas Latino males were actively making poor choices. Yet it would be impossible to evaluate these gendered ideas of dropping out as being either American or Latino in nature since their understanding of gendered norms were influenced by the variety of environments through which they shifted daily.

Internally Imposed Expectations From Within the Latino Home

Expectations of Latina girls. The girls in this study repeatedly brought up concerns centered around their personal safety, and the subtext of these messages appeared to be grounded in beliefs about Latina femininity and the need to protect young women from unknown danger. In their homes they were being told to protect their beauty and their bodies. An example of this was expressed by Alley, a Puerto Rican student, whose physical attractiveness seemed to be central to her identity as a Latina. Her looks also drove many of the messages that her mother gave her around issues of protecting herself.

> My mom has told me that I need to watch out mainly because I'm Puerto Rican and I'm not ugly. She told me "Alley you're not ugly, you have to watch out because some people might get jealous and I don't want anything to happen to you." And then I was like; "so I'm Puerto Rican. What does that have to do with anything?" She's like; "Because you're not ugly." And the fact that I'm Puerto Rican or Hispanic is just like…it makes it a little bit…like it adds on, kind of.

Alley herself did not appear to fully understand the relationship that her mother was constructing between her level of attractiveness and her Puerto Rican ethnicity, but she seemed to understand that something about her being Puerto Rican "adds on" in the way that she was able to relate with the outside world. Protecting herself from unknown

harm became central to the way she was expected to comport herself in public. Alley went on to explain how these types of messages may have played a role in her desire to cover her body.

> I feel like, like I'm not racist, cause I love Black people. But sometimes I feel like they'll exclude me not because of my skin color, but because of my culture, like I'm very preserved [conservative]. Like I wouldn't go to the beach in a bikini, I'd probably go in a tankini to cover my body, while their culture would probably be in a bikini or something more exposed.

When tied together with the messages she was receiving from her mother about personal safety it was apparent that these ideas carried into not only how she acted but also how she viewed herself relative to others, namely Black females. This incident can be read in multiple ways. On the one hand Alley's desire to differentiate herself from Blackness through her clothing choices could be the way that she differentiated herself from the ideas of social class that are embodied in Blackness. In this case a bikini was not just a cultural symbol but is a class symbol of sexuality. The reality is that for a well off White teenage female to wear a bikini means something different from a working class Puerto Rican female. And in the case of Alley a bikini was a symbol of her sexuality, which she was intentionally "preserving." Sexuality for Latinas equated to pregnancy. So in this instant it was not just an attempt for her to differentiate herself from Black females but also to differentiate herself from the idea of the hyper sexualized pregnant Latina. Another way to read this is that Alley was attempting to essentialize herself as a conservative Latina female as a way to combat the negative stereotype of teen pregnancy. Mahalingam and Leu (2005) found that both Indian female engineers and Filipina mail order brides contrasted their values and behaviors with those of White women by framing white woman as being sexually promiscuous

and lacking family orientation. By creating a narrative of the inferior White woman these women were able to create idealized gendered immigrant identities as a defense against the denigration and subordination they experienced as immigrant women of color. In this case, Alley played up her femininity in an effort to resist the racial denigration held in the assumptions of her sexuality as a Puerto Rican female. So while Whites and Blacks alike were essentializing these females, as in the case of Hailee's and her Black classmates, they were also essentializing themselves as they combatted but also accepted these messages.

In a later interview with Alley it was revealed that all of these concerns of personal safety were tied to her mother's fear that she like other Latinas would get pregnant and ruin her future. Alley explained this in relation to her mother's choice to send her to Excellence High School:

> My mother wouldn't have let me go to a public school. She said she would either put me in a private school or another charter school. Like the public high schools here are ***really*** bad. There are a lot of kids doing drugs and that's where most girls get pregnant. It's not good, like, that's where all the main…*[shakes her head in disgust]* that's where bad things happen.

The definition of "bad things" was grounded in gendered differences and risk factors associated with Latina femininity. But also the influence of social class was evident in the way her mother framed the type of protection Alley would receive at a private versus a public school.

These concerns around issues of personal safety were not just limited to what the students encountered in the city. They were also expressed in relation to their experiences traveling abroad in Latin America. Beatrice, a Dominican student, explained that although she appreciated the summers she spent with her extended family

in the Dominican Republic she preferred her life in the United States noting the various ways that her life would and could be different were she living in the Dominican Republic.

> I feel like here [in the U.S.] a girl would feel, one, a lot safer, two, those expectations that people have for them would be easier to accomplish here than it would over there. And like even all my guy cousins say they would love to live there, because it's just the atmosphere of being able to do whatever you want. Not that girls can't, but you don't see it as much as you see it with guys over there. Which is because of like the stereotypes of women and stuff.

While the stereotypes of women in the Dominican Republic were not explicitly named, she alluded to the idea of expectations being different for males and females. But keeping oneself out of danger appeared to serve a duel function of not only protecting one's femininity but also increasing ones potential for success. Safe spaces like Excellence High School were those were females like herself could thrive without concerns for issues of personal safety. Beatrice continued:

> In the Dominican Republic it's like violence. Like it's kind of crazy. I don't think you can really depend on the police and things like that because it's not strict rules like here in the United States where certain things just cannot be done, you know, so I think there's more control here.

Issues of personal safety were salient and important for Beatrice and this bled into her experiences both inside and outside of the United States. And yet this ability to compare her life in the United States with her life abroad was reflective of the transnational perspective of many of the students who were interviewed.

Latino based expectations of femininity were not only reflected in the female students' interviews but were also evident in the way that the boys talked about gender relations in their home life. Malcolm, a Puerto Rican student, felt that gender discrimination was much more problematic than other forms of discrimination.

> I mean, women have always been discriminated against as only being good for the kitchen and whatever, so I think, like, I know that that's false...I know that that's wrong because women have so much more potential than men actually do and that supposedly they mature faster and, I kind of think that's true, and, I mean they're not any different from us. They just have different... organs and stuff.

In this and other instances Malcolm chose to ground his observations in the historically based facts he had learned in school. And yet he was able to connect these historical anecdotes with things that he saw in his daily life as the son of a single mother. And despite what he saw and read Malcolm chose to rebel against these ideas forging a new perspective as a different kind of Puerto Rican male.

Similarly Justin, a Dominican male student, expressed the generational differences he saw in his home around treatment toward women:

> Well my dad said that I should always try to look for a girl who can cook *[laughs]*. Or could actually, like, tend the house. But we're in a different generation so I think differently than him. Like it doesn't really necessarily have to be like that, but he thinks old fashioned.

The observations that Justin made were grounded in generational differences that he noticed in his house. To be old fashioned and of the land was to be like his father holding antiquated views of femininity and the role of women. Like Malcolm, he felt that these views did not correctly represent his perspective and his experience as a second generation Dominican American male.

Beatrice Later explained the idea that expectations were different for Dominican men and women.

> Generally, the [Dominican] girls are more successful than the guys that I know. I don't know if it's like about expectancies, or things like that. But I think that… like, I don't even know how to put it. But to me girls are more able to sit down and focus to learn something. Just like they can stay and cook, just like they can stay and do laundry, wash dishes, whatever, like the typical thing of a girl, you

> know. And then guys just like, you would hear more regular stereotypes of guys, that they're lazy and that they don't do anything, play sports, things like that.

Beatrice's assumptions about stereotypical male and female behavior were rooted in her own experiences as a Dominican female. And yet she was able to think about the skills necessary to complete these traditionally female tasks such as dish washing and doing laundry and reframe these menial skills as strengths, which could help her to succeed in school. Rather than allow those expectations of gender norms to hinder her from success she instead chose to empower herself. But as she continued it became evident that these were not only stereotypes but actual realities that were reflected in her own family.

> Of my family, most of the girls are a lot more successful than the guys. Which happens in my house, I'm more successful than my older brother. He did horrible in high school. And then he's supposed to be in college right now. But he took off this whole time, and he's working now.

The stories they retold were not merely statistical representations of the problems facing Latino youth, but were often regrets reflected in the experiences of their mothers. When explaining the value her mother placed on her education Maya shared,

> My mom says that education is the best thing. She wants me and my other sisters to do better than she did, like have a good college education and then afterwards you can get married and stuff like that. Have your head straight into your education. Make sure you've got good grades because good colleges don't want people that don't get good grades. So yeah, I think she thinks that college is so important because right now, she's a really smart person, and so, if she were to have gone to college she could actually have a better lifestyle, and she said she could have had all of that.

Throughout every interview this was the only time that marriage was alluded to by any of the female participants. And yet her mother chose to discuss marriage not as a way to achieve ones goals but rather as something that might prevent her daughter from being

independent. It was messages like these that allowed the women in this study to assert themselves even within traditional views of femininity.

Expectations of Latino boys. In contrast to the messages the young women were receiving, Latino boys were expected to be young, rambunctious, and focused on "just having fun." This was not only reflected in their fears of failing in school but also in the examples that they saw around them. Alejandro described his own concerns that his youngest brother would end up making poor choices, much like his older brother, for he believe that it was only through education that his family would be able to overcome their personal hardships.

> I feel like my parents can't be there a lot for me cause they don't know English. They didn't have a great education. And for me, like I'm in this school, I've learned a lot more than my [older] brother has. Cause he failed this year and had to repeat a year of school. So I'm already more advanced than him and I'm only a sophomore, and he's a senior about to graduate, but he's still failing his classes for some reason. So I feel like I'm gonna try to tell my little brother that education is one of the most important things in order to be successful. Cause my mom tells me, "All the hard work you put in now is gonna pay off when you get bigger." And then she'll tell me that my older brother can have his fun now but then later on he's gonna have to face the real world, and is gonna have a hard time. Yeah so that's why now I'm gonna tell my little brother exactly what my mom told me; put education first and then all the fun, the girls, the money, parties will come, you won't have to work that much in order to survive in the world.

Unlike the young women in this work, Alejandro alluded to the idea that young Latino men were expected be out on the streets enjoying themselves. And his desires to educate himself were an attempt to put off his fun for a future time in his life. These types of discussions about having fun were not present in the message the girls were receiving both inside and outside of their homes. And yet education seemed to be the common vehicle for these students to achieve their goals regardless of their gender.

Manny, a Dominican student, shared a similar experience with his own brother:

> My father cares a lot about education. My mother she cares but not as much as my father. She's not, like, that into it cause my brother dropped out, like, around 10th grade. My father really wants me to get 90's and above. My mother she cares, but she knows if I'm passing like it's not really a big deal. *Ella me conseja* [she advises me]. I don't know, she like talks to me about it, like to stay in school. My brother dropped out when he was in 8th grade, and my mother, she got mad at him but he didn't even want to go school, and he started cutting school. So she didn't want him to get in trouble by the cops or something like that, so she just took him out of school.

Despite not admitting it, Manny was failing in his classes and although he claimed that his mother was not concerned with his education this was not completely accurate as she communicated regularly with his teachers regarding her concern for his grades. But in his eyes his mother had been disappointed by the outcome of her oldest son. When asked if he had a lot of responsibilities in home aside from doing his homework he explained:

> No, because like I don't have as many responsibilities as other kids. They do chores. I don't do chores. Because there's my cousin, she's a girl. Cause my mom…my mom puts her to it. Yeah. My mom said don't do the dishes if I don't feel like it.

This gendered breakdown of chores in his home reflected the gendered tasks that Beatrice talked about in her interview. Yet despite these gendered ideas of masculinity some of the boys like Malcolm and Justin appeared to be fighting against prescribed ideas of the roles they were expected to play as young Latino teenagers.

Homosexuality, not allowed in the Latino household. Only two students discussed homosexuality in their interviews but they each felt strongly about the anti homosexual sentiments that they saw in their homes and in their communities. Although neither student was homosexual themselves, they felt that the way that homosexuals were treated was problematic and unjust. Malcolm shared his feelings,

> It makes me feel angry, cause everybody's supposed to be treated the same way and it's not only with, race, but with gender and sexuality because the recent suicides from being bullied because you're a homosexual…I feel strongly about that because they were created equal. Like if you didn't even know that they were a homosexual, you would treat them like a normal person, but as soon as you find out, you're gonna treat them differently? That doesn't make any sense at all. One of my teachers, Mr. Jones, he spoke to us about this at school. He made his own "It gets better" video when he was coming out to us. And, yea, it was nice.

Malcolm went on to describe the way that his own father viewed homosexuality.

> Well, my dad, he said that he's fine with homosexuals and everything but he doesn't understand the reason for them to act like that…like if you're a guy and you're gay, he doesn't see the reason to act like a girl. He says he'll understand if you're homosexual, but you don't need to act like a girl. To me it doesn't matter, but...

His father's issues with homosexuality were grounded in ideas of what was considered appropriate and inappropriate Puerto Rican male behavior. Yet Malcolm was hearing mixed messages from within his Puerto Rican household and American mainstream culture, in the form of "It gets better" videos. This generational and cultural conflict was reflective of the various contexts these students shifted between daily. But Malcolm still felt a sense of empowerment to speak his mind and express his belief in the American ideal of "everybody's treated equal."

Another female Dominican student, Maya discussed her personal experiences with discrimination against homosexuals.

> My dad discriminates but not against Blacks. He discriminates against homosexuals. For some reason he doesn't like them. Like, I have a cousin that's a lesbian. And he says, "Oh they should they all should be killed." He says he's playing around but that's not really playing around. So he doesn't really like them. He says, they should get sent to a priest or something. And her parents believe that too. Her parents actually tried to take her to a priest to "take out the demons," they said. So she ran away one time. But that was because her dad told her, "If you want to be a boy then I'll shave your head." They tried to force her to shave her head. But she ran away that day.

Just as Malcolm's dad felt that homosexual men displayed inappropriate male behavior, Maya's family too felt that homosexual females were not adhering to the norm of what was expected of a Dominican female. Ideas of what was appropriate for men and women were culture bound for these students. And yet they appeared to be visibly concerned with this type of external pressure to adhere to strict gender norms. When asked where she learned that discriminating against gays was wrong Maya responded,

> I get my opinions from…it's not really from anything it's just like…oh a feeling that I get…it's just I feel like they're still people. Just like Blacks, just like Whites they're still people. They might be different in a way…but my dad thinks that they're not born that way. They're made that way. Like if their friends are that way than they get that influence. But I don't think that, and it's just that they're born that way.

Although the messages these students received were at times complicated by the generational differences that existed in their homes, they were still able to incorporate the information they received in their school to combat the injustices that they saw. And even though these two students were not openly homosexual they still felt I was important to express their concern for other communities who were also living under prescribed notions of what was and was not appropriate gendered behavior.

Forging New Futures, New Identities, and New Dreams

The male and female Latino students who were included in this study struggled to create identities that existed outside of both literal and metaphorical borders of expectation. But through exploring their fears and hopes it became evident that they saw education as the main route to achieving their goals. Yet even their goals were bound by their gendered experiences of *Latinidad*.

The male students felt that education would help them to accumulate the wealth necessary to live an easier life in the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Ecuador. But within this hope was the assumption that the life of a Latino man was full of hard labor. These boys wanted to become doctors and lawyers and architects not only for the prestige but also for the life it could afford them, a life without physical or manual labor. For the male students education was a way for them to make enough money to be able to relax and live a simple life abroad in their country of origin. Santiago laid out his hopes for his future,

> Cause my plans are to go back to Mexico cause I don't really like it over here, cause I basically feel like I'm in a jail, cause I'm always in the house, I don't got freedom. Like today I don't know why but I was going to school, there was a whole bunch of cops on the block. I feel like it's dangerous over here. I think it's the city itself. Cause there's lots of violence. But my parents tell me to go to college over here, then when I finish try to go to Mexico and live over there. It's peaceful over there.

Santiago understood his life relative to what it could have been were he born in Mexico. For him the life of a Mexican American boy in the United States was violent and lacked a sense peace. Yet his transnational experiences in Mexico gave him a comparison for what his life could be. Diego echoed similar sentiments about how he would like to use his education.

> I would really like to go live in Ecuador cause that seems like a very calm place where I can do a lot of stuff or help a lot of people. So I want to live over there.

Despite the realities of poverty in both Mexico and Ecuador these two students had received idealized messages from their parents about the life that they could afford in their homelands backed by the powerful force of education. The idealized life that several of these boys described could really only be achieved with the backing of American dollars. Thus they were always struggling in a love hate relationship with the

United States. Another student, Marcial, spoke candidly about the negative feelings he felt toward the United States and his strong desire to return to the Dominican Republic. Yet he openly admitted that without his American citizenship and American money he would not be able to freely return to the Dominican Republic and live the life of leisure that he sought.

The girls on the other hand saw education as a way to create more choices in their lives. Their awareness of their lack of choices was bound by not only the gendered expectations of what a Latina woman should be in the United States but also by Latino notions of femininity. For these young women education offered them freedom not from manual labor, like their male classmates, but freedom to develop themselves as individual. And it was this desire to escape their future as a wife or mother, which motivated them to make their schooling a priority.

When describing how she would achieve her goal of attending Cornell University Hailee explained,

> Well first I'm gonna find a teacher that went there so that they could tell me what they did so that I could figure out my own steps of how to get to Cornell. And then also I need to not always pay attention to my friends cause they distract me easily. And I just have to think about how at the end of the day it's only me by myself. My friends won't be there with me if I fail. So it's like I'm the only person I could count on really. So I have to do this for me not for anybody else.

As Hailee laid out the steps she would have to take to achieve her goals she was constantly reminding herself that this goal was not for her parents or her friends but for herself. Alley also described the myriad of ways that education would allow her to pursue her own personal wants.

> Like one of my aunts finished college and she lives in an apartment right now and her apartment is filled with ***expensive*** things. Like she goes on shopping

> sprees a lot and she still stays on a budget, because when her and my uncle got divorced, she had to lower her costs and stuff, but she can get more things when she wants them rather than having to put it off to pay for bills and stuff.

For her aunt it was only through divorcing her husband and becoming independent that she was able to take control of her own life, and this model of an independent women represented the life that Alley wanted for herself. Alley expressed her desperation at her inability to have all of the things she wanted,

> I think it's [education] pretty important, especially because I want to grow up and get ***everything I want***. I go to the mall and I go to all the expensive stores and my mother hates it, right. But that's kind of my motivation though to stay in school. I like the idea of getting what I want, when I want it, and then not having to worry about my money going anywhere. I like the idea of being able to support myself, being independent. So I feel like if I do slack off in school…because sometimes I do get lazy cause I'm only a teenage girl…but I know that I can't play [trick] myself. I have big dreams. I want what I want and I know I want what I want. So in order for me to do those things and accomplish those goals, I have to start off slow, and I have to get into school, go to college.

Her desire for "everything" was tied not only by her experiences as a Puerto Rican daughter of a single mother, but also by her social class. And it was her inability to have the things and the life she desperately wanted which drove her to make choices in her life to achieve her goals. And yet the knowledge that she knew exactly what she wanted allowed her to stay focused and pursue her goals.

Sky shared many demographic similarities to Alley and discussed the value of education in her own life.

> Like, I would have my career. I would make my own money. I wouldn't have to depend on anybody but myself. I could help out my family if I needed too...and yeah I think it would just make my life somewhat easier, so I wouldn't have to struggle, the way my mom has struggled trying to raise me and my brother without a job. I would know that I can depend on myself if I have to pay for something and I would be able to, *[pauses struggling to describe]* just, be stable on my own.

Like Alley, education for Sky equated to freedom. But it was not just the freedom to do what she wants but also the freedom to help and better her families living situation. She witnessed her mothers struggles to find a job without a high school diploma and it was this negative example of suffering that drove her to avoid the same mistakes made by the women in her life. It is important to note that Alley's aunt was the only positive example of a female role model that emerged across all of the interviews. And the image of an independent woman providing for herself was in direct contrast to the repeated images of struggling single mothers with dashed dreams.

While these young women already added value to their families in less noted ways through chores and cooking, the freedom of education would allow them to provide an income, making them equal to their fathers and brothers. And this desire to not only provide for themselves but also assist their families was always at the forefront of their educational aspirations. Alley summarized her feelings,

> College helps you not only get money but ***give*** to people. It all starts with an education and then from education, it leads to success that will make you be something in life. And when you're that something in life you can make a difference in someone else's life.

Male and Female Students as Living Exceptions to the Rule

Studies focusing on Latino males and females are so often only framed around discussions of traditional gender roles such as *mariasinimo* and *machismo*. Kay Deux (2001) noted that individual identities are not separate from but rather braided together with gender, race and ethnicity, class, geography, and the historical context in which ones lives. Therefore to view these students only through the lens of culture is

reductionist and denies their lived experiences which are bound by culture, gender, and social class.

As working class Latino males and females these three identities were related to the way that the students constructed themselves with relation to their families, communities and peers. Julie Bettie (2003) noted that the subjects of her research who were successful in school were often seen as "passing" or performing upper class values, and these values were at time in contrast to their lived working class realities. For the Latino students presented in this study the daily choice to attend school could be seen as a form of upper class performance, as the students formed their identities as exceptions. But the source of their similarities as exceptional students was not in their Pan-Latino identity or in their identities as males or females. Rather their similarities emerged in their common structural experience of being essentialized and in their daily acts of resistance to such rigid definitions of who they were.

CHAPTER VII

Public vs. Private School:
Discussions on Social Class and the Value of Education

In this chapter I examine the ways the Latino students at Excellence High School viewed their identities in context relative to the larger social forces and structures of privilege and poverty that permeated their daily lives. Through discussions of the readily available concepts of "public schools" and "private schools" the students were able to engage in discourses around the complexity of the intersecting relationship between race, social class, and the reification of an unfair system through access to privileged spaces of education. In their world "private school" equated to Whiteness as Whiteness was inextricably linked in their minds with wealth. The underlying assumption was that Whiteness meant a general acceptance into the broader American idea of "citizenship" thus Whiteness became a marker to delineating those who were considered American and those who were considered un-American (Bettie, 2003). In contrast "public school" equated to "Blackness" or spaces of poverty where students like themselves were relegated by society. But the way that students were able to rationalize this space they held in society was by understanding their place as non-Americans. It was in this physical and metaphorical space of "otherness" as low-income Latino students attending a "White" charter school that the students were able to reflect on the systemic injustices affecting their communities. Through masked discussions of

social class disparity told through the narratives of inferior public schooling, a college education was seen as the great equalizer granting them not only access to worlds of privilege but also making them equal to the types of people attending "White" or private schools. College equated to an earned status of Whiteness, which in essence meant true American citizenship.

Within these personal reflections on educational inequity the students sustained a complicated relationship to the fact that despite being low income "public school students" their attendance at Excellence High School equated to a "private school" education. In this case "private school" was defined by the access to information necessary for getting into college: standardized test prep, college visits, assistance with summer enrichment program applications, etc. But as outsiders looking into the very worlds that were excluded them they were able to describe the plethora of differences that existed between the wealthy and the poor.

Yet even with this unique perspective as interlopers the students did not view themselves as charity cases but rather as delegates who were being given access to opportunities that would benefit not only themselves but also their families and communities as a whole. And while students did express a sense of luck at being given the privilege of attending such a well-funded school they also felt a sense of responsibility to not squander this chance. By viewing themselves as delegates rather than charity cases each student was able to gain a sense of empowerment rather than disenfranchisement.

The American Dream and Upward Mobility.

The American Dream has been defined as, "The belief that hard work and educational advancement are rewarded with upward mobility" (Bullock & Limbert, 2003). This belief despite not always being accurate still pervades the immigrant and low income mentality as education is still associated with upward mobility and the opportunity for prosperity (Fine & Burns, 2003). These ideas were directly reflected in the way that the students envisioned their futures with the help of education. In addition there are also generational differences in perspectives on upward mobility. The three major goals of the first generation immigrants are to earn money, learn a new language and to educate their children (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). In a study looking at low income women Bullock and Limbert (2003) found that these women, though poor, still maintained a sense of hope that they could become upwardly mobile. And the main means by which they hoped to attain a middle class status was through education. Thus the reality remains that most people assume that the public narrative equating education to upward mobility is still readily available in the American psyche (Bullock & Limbert, 2003). The way that "marrying up" was the only way to escape ones social class in Latin America, educating oneself becomes the main focus of the low income minority individual.

Ostrove and Cole (2003) argued that psychological discussions of social class must go beyond mere categorizations of people but rather must explore the consequences of social class identification and the ways that these social class identities allow people to see themselves relative to other groups in similar or different classes. Much like racial and gender identity are central to a person's experience, so too is class

identity as it shapes not only the way a person sees the world but also the very world to which a person is given access. And unlike the permanence of race and gender in the United States social class is somewhat malleable. Yet experiences of upward mobility may lead to realizations of the system barriers that are embedded into American society and reified through things like public education and housing. Ostrove and Cole write, "It is often movement from one class position to another that exposes the discriminatory nature of the class system, and the ways in which feelings of inferiority or superiority based on class may be internalized" (Ostrove & Cole, 2003, p. 686). Through movement from spaces of denial to spaces of privilege the students whose perspectives are presented in this research were coping with the realities of exposure to the very real separation between classes that exists in the United States.

Public vs. Private School

Throughout the interviews student were discussing their lives as charter school students relative to the lives of their public school peers, centering these experiences around the idea "public vs. private school." School was the main lens through which they viewed their lives; therefore issues of social class inequities were structured around the idea of what private schools gave students and what public school did not give students.

Alejandro shared his personal experience within his own family of public and private schools as he describes his brothers' very different experiences attending a public school. When asked to compare his teachers at Excellence with his brothers' teachers he explained,

> They care about me here [at Excellence High School]. At my brother's school, I don't really think they care about his education. Cause there are teachers that I know over there who'll just go chill with the students and curse at them, just cause it's like that at public high schools. They don't really care about students' grades. And mostly all of the students fail.

Alejandro's ideas were not just based in stereotypes but were based in his lived experiences both as a student in a public school in his early youth and as a brother of a public school student. He was very clearly able to paint a vivid picture of what a classroom in a public school looked like, and this image was in stark contrast to the experiences he had in his everyday life at Excellence High School

The difference between these two types of schools was not only evident in descriptions of teacher involvement but also in discussions of the types of information that students were learning. Malcolm described the difference between he and his public school peers,

> Well most public schools don't focus. Like right now we're, above what regular public schools would be learning. So right now I'm learning geometry, but I think that other [public] schools would still be learning integrated algebra. So, I'm already one grade above them and most of our teachers from Excellence told us that right now we are a grade above regular high schools so, I kind of understood that we were learning harder material than what other public schools were learning.

Not only was treatment different in public schools but also the access to information was different.

Students' narratives around the poverty of public schools were often directly related to their own personal experiences as many of them had attended public school prior to entering the Excellence charter system in the fifth grade. Hailee described her time at a public school,

> Yeah cause other public schools, they don't help the students like charter schools do. At my other public school I use to do whatever I wanted, like if I

> wanted to I could skip class, because the teachers didn't care. Cause they still got paid at the end of the day. But when it came to educational stuff, if I didn't know something every time I went to my teacher she would say, "Oh you should've been paying attention." And then that's it. I didn't like that cause I use to always have failing grades. But then now my grades are really high.

For Hailee, she was able to reflect on the differences she noticed not just in the material and teacher assistance she received but also in the improvement in her grades, which she felt was directly related to leaving her former public school. Thus it was evident that for many of these students public schools were not just mythical ideas of spaces where students were left behind. They were real, breathing spaces, etched in their memories in comparison to the education they were newly receiving at Excellence High School. And each student seemed to have a complex understanding that the lack of success in their communities was not based on group differences but rather was structural nature, started in schools where public school students were being given an inferior education.

In addition to these detailed descriptions of public schools it became evident that private school was not just a class based term but was tangled with issues of race as "private school" became a code word for "schools where White students go." Inversely "public school" was code for "schools were Black and Latino students go." For these students Whiteness and racial hierarchy in the United States were being discussed in terms of what kind of schools people were allowed to attend. When asked about the different kinds of schools that different people attend Diego noted:

> I don't know about New York as a whole, but like if you go to where there's a huge population of mostly Latinos there are probably not gonna be as good of schools as if you go to an area where there's only mainly Whites or Asians there.

This differentiation between spaces for Latinos and spaces for Whites and Asians often became confused by their own status as Excellence students. Maya explained her mother's choice to send her to a charter school.

> It was, my family, and the whole priority they wanted to make. Because I was in public school and there were a lot of fights there, like guys would bring guns sometimes or knives and my mom didn't like it cause I got suspended once for being in a fight. So, my mom said that she wanted to bring me into like this "White" school or whatever and at first I was like "Okay" but then I came here and it wasn't actually a White school.

When asked what she meant by "White school" she explained,

> I think she thought the kind of school White people got to go too or something.

Maya alludes to the idea of racially segregated spaces of privilege but these spaces are not literally full of White people. Whiteness is not used as a racial term but rather as a signifier of social class. For Maya's mother White schools were those where students had better amenities, better outcomes, and better safety. Therefore attending Excellence High School was the equivalent of entering the privileged space of "Whiteness." While these students' perceptions were not necessarily accurate in their depictions of whiteness as equating to wealth, they were in fact a reflection on their own lived realities where Whiteness and poverty did not cross paths. Julie Bettie (2003) noted that for her working class Mexican American subjects the idea of poor whites did not exist. She also notes that race and social class may be the most readily available categories for young people to reference in the structures of their daily lives without a clear understanding of how class is intertwined by race (Bettie, 2003). So while the students seemed to understand that Whiteness equated to wealth they did not seem to yet understand the ways that Whiteness also equated to accepted into American culture. But by attending this "White" school they were acting out social class and Whiteness.

Perspectives as Interlopers

The unique position that students held as minorities being given to access to a "White" space was at times complicated by the unequal treatment they saw their communities receive. Justin noted,

> When I see other public schools for my race specifically, for Dominicans, I see a lot of Dominicans around my area where they go to big, huge [public] schools. It's not like really a good system, like compared to this one. I see a lot of them acting the same way, they're not educated at all, they speak very slang, they dress like sagging [baggy clothing], very unprofessionally basically, and their attitude and their appearance, it just looks completely different from what mine would be, or my brothers, or any other kind of Dominican from this [Excellence] school.

Much like their experiences of invisibility in Black and White racial discourse, these students were also struggling with their reality as poor student being given access to a great school. They existed in an in between space where they could see both the world they were escaping and the world they were not supposed to see.

Yet this comparison between what their peers were receiving and what they were receiving at their "White" school felt unjust. Hailee expressed her outrage at the lack of opportunity that her fellow peers were receiving outside of Excellence High School:

> I don't think it's fair. I think everybody should be in a charter or private school. Like even though it is strict, but it's a good strict that once we go to college we'll be ready for the outside world. But I think they should close down all public schools and just make them into charter school, cause it'll be better.

This assertion that all students should have access to "private school" equivalent education was Hailee's way of equalizing students across race and social class. Malcolm expressed his concern for his community,

> I don't think its fair, I think everybody should get an equal educational but they don't. Because if you can't afford certain things it's gonna be really hard for you

> to get a good education, so basically it's your financial issues. But for this school you had to be in a lottery to get in. So that's based on luck and chance I guess. So if you don't have very good luck, you probably won't get in. But in private schools you pay to have an education so people that don't have enough money, their child is gonna suffer and not have a good education.

In school and history courses students like Malcolm were receiving messages about American ideals of equality and the Civil Rights Movement, but the equality that was being preached to them was not evident in their lived experiences. And yet as Malcolm is easily able to discuss, wealth equated to a better education and it was by mere luck that he himself was attending Excellence High School. This feeling of luck carried over into the way that these students negotiated their status as exceptions, students of color attending a privileged school.

Delegates Not Charity Cases

The Latino students interviewed in this study felt that they were being given access to a world of privilege; spaces where students like themselves did not normally exist. But rather than feeling that they were somehow better than their public school peers they instead framed their opportunities in terms of luck. This sense of luck carried with it though an intense feeling of responsibility as the students saw themselves not as charity cases but rather as delegates for their families and communities. Education was not just a tool for their personal advancement but for the advancement of their families and larger communities (London, 1989). But this role as a delegate for one's community can feel alienating at times. London describes the way that opportunities such as those offered to the students in this study do offer many gains but also the losses must be acknowledged and delegate students often feel isolated and a sense of social

dislocation from both their communities and their educational settings The role of the delegate can be difficult as students are given the responsibility of carrying the weight of their family's unmet aspirations

> Being a "good delegate," therefore, requires going out into the world to promote the interests, wishes, or needs of another rather than one's own, unless, of course, they coincide. Thus, while a delegate is sent out, he or she is also held on to by a "long leash of loyalty" (London, 1989, p. 168).

This pressure to fulfill their parents unmet needs was expressed by several students as they explained their parents' desires for them to be educated. Princess described the pressure she felt from her father to become a doctor.

> Well they [my parents] don't really tell me what to do. But my dad really wants, wants me to become a doctor, but that's gonna be challenging for me cause I don't like blood and needles and all that stuff so. He's hoping that I'll still go for it. He says that I should pick something that brings money. And he says that in my first years of being a doctor it's gonna bring a lot a lot of money. He says that one of the main things should be that you like it, but that shouldn't be the basis of choosing a job because if you like something that doesn't mean that it's gonna be good. Money should be the most important thing. I want to become a doctor but like, I want to. *[Pauses to think]* I would like to become a Spanish teacher, or like a doctor for children like a pediatrician.

In the case of Princess and other students her own personal desires to become a teacher were going to have to be put on hold as she felt pressured to achieve the goal set out by her father of becoming a doctor. It is also evident in this quote that the need for a steady income at times overpowered the students desires to pursue their personal dreams, as dreams were often in opposition to their strong need for financial survival and stability. Princess continued to explain that education would not only benefit her but also her extended family.

> Without an education it's really hard to get like a really good job that pays off so that everybody in the family could be successful.

As a delegate for her family it was important for Princess to first and foremost make decisions that would benefit her entire family. And at times the luck she felt could be a burden as it forced her to set aside her own goals for the purpose of fulfilling her parents unmet dreams. Princess was not the only student who felt pressure from their parents to succeed academically. Diego explained

> My mom wants me to be better than her. Like I know that sounds bad, but like, to accomplish more than what she did. So she says that's what her mom expected of her, and that's what's been going down through our family. My mom always tells me to do better than her. So she finished college, but she wants me to go to masters, or even doctors degree. Yeah even thought my mom did graduate from college, she still doesn't have the job she would want. So she doesn't want me to go through that. She wants me to be like at the top of something, and not have to worry about financial stuff or stuff like that.

Their parents' fears were founded in the struggles they experienced as immigrants in the United States. And education provided the stability for their children that they themselves could not always offer. Like Diego, Alejandro also saw himself as an extension of a long line of relatives who were constantly trying to better themselves.

> Well my mom told me that when she was young my grandma never learned how to read or write. So then my mom, when she went to school she had to learn how to read and write, and then she had to teach my grandma. Then my dad too, he told me about his schools and how there's teachers that they didn't actually cared about him, never cared of what they did, they just came, waited for Friday, and then just took their paycheck and went home. Never learned nothing. And then he tells me, I have a privilege to go to a school where teachers actually do care. Brand new school building, like everything you could ask for, it's something that he wished he could have had when he was young so he could have a better future and a profession. They tell me to look at their life now.

At times it appeared that the students' parents saw themselves as cautionary tales of what not to do. And the students felt the pressure not to repeat the mistakes made by their parents.

School also equated to working less as Justin explained that his father did not receive a paycheck that was substantial enough to reflect the amount of work he put in.

> My dad he always used to tell me that it's a lot of hard work, if you don't get educated. So he just tells me periodically, and like from a young age since the first grade, to work very hard to get an education because it'll make my life a lot easier in the future. And I think mainly it's because my dad, I see him every day but at night, he come home at like 9, maybe 10 pm from work. And then like when you see what he receives as a check, it's pretty low. And I'm like; that's kinda unfair because he works basically the whole day, and yet he receives such a low payment. And that's all because he doesn't have the education.

Unlike Princess's father who stressed the value of making money over choosing a satisfying career Justin felt the opposite.

> I think to my dad and to me, education isn't necessarily just the money, it's also having an easier life and spending more time with your family and being more happy overall.

The students told stories of parents with dashed dreams who due to various circumstances were not able to fulfill their potential. And yet it was through sending their students to Excellence High School that opportunities and the doors to another social class were being opened. Boots explained that his mother stressed education because, "I don't want you to grow up and not be the person who you want to be." The freedom that education would provide the students was evident in their reflections of the lives they wanted to live and how they differed from the lives in which they presently lived.

CHAPTER VIII

Discussion and Limitations

What We as Researchers Can Learn From the Latino Students at Excellence High

The students presented in this dissertation contradict the common portrayal of Latinos as pregnant teens, dropouts, and gang members. And as such the goal of this study is not to view these students as static entities destined to fulfill a stereotype that is reflected in a report depicting the problems facing Latino youth. Rather it is an attempt to share the experiences of individuals whose daily lives and choices are bound by contextual factors such as their gender, their status as working class American minorities, and their transnational identities as both Latinos and Americans. And through sharing these experiences it is my hope that I can help to influence not only the methods we as Psychologists use to research Latino communities but also to challenge the assumptions about Latino communities and minority communities as a whole. What I found in this research was that despite what they lacked in their lives these students were still active agents still in their own lives. But it is important to note the value of educational contexts, which allowed the students to express their agency. In addition Latinos are not all the same, and it is through exploration of these differences that we can come to find not just what Latino teenagers have in common with each other but what Latinos have in common with other teenagers regardless of race, gender, or social class.

Students are agents in their own lives. Each expressed a strong sense of pride in their Latino identities in addition to a strong desire to be engaged and successful academically as a means of conveying that pride. Fine and Sirin (2007) discuss the ways that social structures and ideologies can "penetrate intimately" in the lives of youth. And though students do not always have the academic language to describe and name what they see they still are aware of the forces which, "shift and shape their lives" (Fine & Sirin, 2007, p. 31). Yet even with their hopes and aspirations, it was evident that these students were fully aware of the low expectations society had for them expressed through vignettes of racially charged and gendered encounters with family, friends, and classmates. In addition they were cognizant of the structural barriers they would have to regularly encounter in their quest to become educated. Yet in the face of these obstacles these students proved to be resilient, constructing their identities as scholarly males and females in opposition to the expectations that society had for who they would become: dropouts and teen mothers.

It was through engaging in discussions of race, class, and gender with the Latino students of Excellence High School that I came to understand the value of education in their lives. In educational psychology literature, education is often used as a measure of outcome achievement, but rarely does research in this field explore the meaning of education for individuals living in poverty. At his confirmation hearing United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated:

> Education is also the civil rights issue of our generation--the only sure path out of poverty and the only way to achieve a more equal and just society. In a world where economic success is tied more closely than ever to educational opportunity, we are condemning millions of children to be less than they could be by consigning them to schools that should be so much more. That is a blight

> on our country and a brick on our progress (*Confirmation of Arne Duncan*, 2009).

This reality of unequal education was reflected in the lives of the students I interviewed, and this study became an investigation into how these Latino students at Excellence High School saw education as a means of not only bettering themselves and their families but also as a source of access to spaces of privilege. Messages about the value of education were passed onto them daily in direct and indirect ways through the negative examples of those around them who had dropped out of school and through the struggles of their uneducated parents many of who had not been given access to the privilege of education due to their poor, immigrant status. And it was through discussions of the value of education that I came to see the way that these youth's lives were bound by the social structures of race, gender, and social class. Individual stories such as those shared in this dissertation also demonstrate the value of qualitative research as it allows individuals to express their agency by sharing their lives and experiences in their own terms.

Educational contexts matter. Resilience in the context of schooling refers to students who manage to succeed at high levels in the face of economic, cultural, and social barriers (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). This present study suggest that the main reason these students were able to display a sense of resilience was in part due to the critical consciousness that they developed during their time at Excellence High School. The formation of a critical consciousness occurs when an individual becomes aware of their position within an oppressive hierarchical system and feels a sense of responsibility to change that system (Massey et al., 1998, p. 339). In her work on the

social psychology of spaces Michelle Fine (2000) notes the value of finding spaces to connect with others:

> We recognize simply that to bridge, to be connected, to stretch with others, in the company of others…is educating, is far better than to die buried by the alienation of alienation, the oppression of oppression, the hollow silence of silencing. That is, we believe in the educative power of community spaces to be homes, to offer places to breath and places where despair can be transformed into outrage, calm, and/or collective action (Fine et al., 2000, p. 148).

Through a curriculum that emphasized social justice and through encounters with social justice oriented teachers like Mr. Jones, the Latino students presented in this research were able to verbalize the injustices they witnessed in their daily lives while also expressing a sense of agency and responsibility to make a difference. Fine describes this as the ability to, "convert shame and embarrassment into outrage and activism" (Fine & Burns, 2003, p. 853). But activism need not be measured in grand gestures or uprisings but rather in the students' daily refusal to adhere to the statistics of failure they not only read about but also witnessed in their homes.

Rather than passively being acted on these students actively pushed against the expectations of society and even their families. And it was through engagement with Excellence High School that the students dreamt of futures beyond the scope of their lived realities. Through a curriculum that emphasized social justice and through encounters with social justice oriented teachers like Mr. Jones, the Latino students presented in this research were able to verbalize the injustices they witnessed in their daily lives while also expressing a sense of agency and responsibility to make a difference. Schools like Excellence High School are examples of the types of spaces of learning that we as educators should strive to create as they are space that respect and value their students.

Heterogeneity of Latinos. Socially imposed identities like "Latino" and "Hispanic" said less about what these individual students had in common and more about the overall way that they were viewed and treated as a group. And their shared experiences as marginalized "others" transcended their national identities as Puerto Rican, Dominican, Ecuadorian, and Mexican. Despite being lumped together under the umbrella term "Latino," the young girls and boys in this study had a multitude of varied perspectives that were shaped by their intertwining identities as: Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Ecuadorians, Mexicans, males and females, middle class and working class. And while the between group differences were at times large enough to be noticeable, as in the case of the Ecuadorian and Dominicans students interactions around Blackness. There were also within group differences, which clearly emerged, evidenced by examples like Princess whose experience as a Dominican female differed drastically from her fellow Dominicans and was influenced not only by her parents' relative wealth and education but by her physical appearance of light skin blonde hair, and blue eyes.

Through exploring differences we find what is common to all. And yet through exploring their individual differences their shared commonalities as people, not just as Latinos, emerged, as with Maya who felt an equal amount of rage with regard to discrimination against homosexuals as her classmate Malcolm. While students like Maya and Malcolm appeared to have very little in common on the surface - one was a second generation Dominican female from a two parent home while the other was a third generation Puerto Rican male raised by a single mother - their shared desire to live in a more just world bonded them on the issue of homosexuality. But it was through exploring their individual differences that commonalities emerged. Each student shared

the same dreams and desire to become educated as a means of achieving their goals. And while the details of their aspirations differed in content, the desire to better themselves remained constant across groups.

Implications For Furthering Exploration of Under Researched Communities

While the fields of Psychology and Education were historically at the forefront of expanding the literature on race and identity we as researchers have reached a point where the ways that we study minority communities is problematic. Cole (2009) and others have argued that psychology suffers from the belief that understanding of groups must come through comparison. But these comparison are what she terms "insidious" or offensively discriminating in nature in that they often come from a place of assuming some general norm. And rather than explore what differences mean or do not mean these comparisons seek to reaffirm the status quo of inequality within that exists within our society by highlighting the ways that "outsiders" depart from the norms of the dominant group (Cole, 2009). For this reasons the fields of Education and Psychology should expand research on identity using a lens of Intersectionality where all identities can be explored simultaneously. Such a lens removes focus from what has traditionally been the White middle class center and allows us as researchers and educators to focus on groups who have been traditionally neglected. And as Cole notes, these categories of race, social class, and gender "do not simply describe groups that may be different or similar; they encapsulate historical and continuing relations of political, material, and social inequality and stigma" (Cole, 2009, p. 45).

Trueba (2002) argues that Latino children specifically are often studied from a deficit perspective while never focusing on the adaptive strategies that are necessary to succeed in this country. And while oppression can lead to failure it can also produce resiliency and the psychological flexibility necessary to assume different identities in order to survive. He writes,

> The mastery of different languages, the ability to cross racial and ethnic boundaries, and a general resiliency associated with the ability to endure hardships and overcome obstacles will clearly be recognized as a new cultural capital that will be crucial for success in a modern diversified society, not a handicap (Trueba, 2002, pp. 7–8).

Immigrants and perhaps more importantly their children have developed many adaptive strategies and must possess unique skills of flexibility in their identities in order to thrive. The experiences shared by the students of Excellence High School showed elements of psychological flexibility as seen in their daily acts of resistance and in their refusal to accept the lives they were born into.

But to define success and resilience only in terms of academic achievement ignores the complexities of students' daily choices. Given the at time arduous circumstances of their lives, college was an abstract idea, and getting a job at the local market seemed a more realistic solution to their immediate financial problems. Trueba writes,

> The epitome of arrogance is not only that these psychologists demand all children be tested with the same English instruments, but that the outcomes of their tests measure 'intelligence' and predict future achievement (Trueba, 2002, pp. 20–21).

Often when discussing students of color we essentialize their lives by representing them through numerical data, which is more often than not framed in terms of deficits relative to an imagined standard of "Whiteness." But by only looking at statistics we make the

mistake of taking their choices out of context. And contextualizing choices is instrumental to understanding outcomes like pregnancy and dropping out. Princess attempted to explain the increasing drop out rates of her Latino peers, asserting:

> I think I speak for many when I say that, especially in the Dominican culture, I know that there are a lot of kids who just don't care about school, and they just want to work and get money. And they think that education isn't important and it's not necessary to go through your life with it. College can be a big sacrifice. Some families depend on that one person, and if that one person is going to college it might be too much to handle, like taking care of the family. And on top of that having to deal with schoolwork, going to school, and all that stuff.

The choices that these students made on a daily basis were intertwined in a complex reality where they often had to choose between their long-term goals and their daily needs of survival. It was not as simple as willing oneself to success when there were other competing factors involved. By depicting their complex decisions as a single number that represents their outcomes we miss the myriad of ways that students construct and negotiate their futures.

Another student, Beatrice, felt that her choices were not the same as other people her age. When asked if she felt that education was valued in the Latino community Beatrice responded,

> No. I think that, not only for Latino's but for Black people too…education is more valuable to us, but certain people don't seem to take as much advantage in it as others. Because I feel like even on TV, you would see that White people say things like; "Oh school, I don't know, whatever." You know? But then, they all go! They look at school more as something they *have* to do. And most of them already have money so it's kinda like they know if they don't necessarily do good in school, they still have money to survive off of. But we [Latinos and Blacks] know if something were to go wrong in our education, it's not like we could live off of our parents cause they need to support themselves, and we need to support them as well so. I think it's also the unity between families that increases value of education for us.

Each student lived in a complex world where the choice to be a dreamer and scholar was not independent or without its sacrifices.

Rather than add to the mounting literature on failure rates and risk factors affecting Latino adolescents I choose instead to paint a hopeful picture of strength and resilience in a group of young people who were still willing to dream in the face of hardship. Each student believed that through their success they could somehow make a difference or as Sky explains,

> Because Latinos and African Americans are considered minorities in society, I don't think that we're viewed very highly, so like, when one of us makes an achievement, it's like an achievement for all of us. We can change the paradigm and people would think more highly of us and we could show them what we're capable of and just give them a whole different view.

Identities Are Intersecting and Braided

So often Psychological and Education research seeks to quantify people's identities by theorizing aspects of the self as separate and unbound. This study finds that there is value in exploring people's multiple identities rather than try to parse out these identities as "gendered" or "racial." Bettie (2003) notes that race, class, and gender are not individual properties of a person but rather are axes of the social world that are constantly shifting and fluid. But they are routinely embraced as real by social actors thus a student's assertion that they are a Dominican may be merely a property of their self but is real in the consequences that it may present in their daily lives (Bettie, 2003).

Cole (2009) also notes that these identities like poor, wealthy, Black or Latino are structural categories and are not primary characteristics of an individual. But by focusing our research on these identities we lose site of the ultimate goal of psychology,

which is to understand the human experience. Intersectionality seeks to find commonalities across differences, but I argue that there is also value in seeking out the difference in what is assumed to be common as in the case of Latinos who are so often assumed to share common experiences of being Latino. But as shown with these students, the source of their similarities was not in the presupposed Latino identity but rather in how all of these groups (Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Ecuadorians, Mexican, male, female) commonly experience racial, gender, and class discrimination in the United States.

The students depicted in this chapter were actively constructing their own visions of who they wanted to become and battling a complex system of obstacles. So often children of color are told that they are destined for failure. They see this in the mounting news stories about gang violence and teen pregnancy. And while many of these "risk factors" are realities for these students, as in the case of Hailee whose parents dropped out of high school to have her or Alejandro whose brother was a gang member, they are not the whole picture of who these students will become. Student like Justin, Beatrice, Malcolm, Alley, Princess, Marcial, Maya, and Sky, like so many others, refused to give into the mounting pressures of society. To the contrary, the Latino students at Excellence High School were determined not to fit into the common stereotypes that society held about their gender, class, and ethnicity, even as they lived lives shaped by these very views and assumptions. They chose instead to change the paradigm as they shaped their future identities as scholars.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Parent Permission Request Letter (English)

Dear Excellence High School Parent:

I am writing to invite your high school student to participate in a research project on the experiences of Latino adolescents. The study explores how race, class, parenting, and student identity impact the development of identity during mid-adolescence. There is a lot of new research indicating that high school is a challenging time psychologically and academically for students and parents. Very little of this research, though, includes the experiences of Latino students. Therefore, I would like to interview Latino students participating in the Spanish for Heritage speakers course at Uncommon Charter High School. I am a Latina doctoral student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Michigan. I am particularly interested in describing the range of experiences and attitudes of Latino youth so that schools can better serve Latino children.

The study consists of three 30-minute audio-recorded interviews with your high school aged child. By agreeing to allow your child to participate in this study you are also agreeing to allow your child to be recorded. The whole thing takes about an hour and a half and can take place in school during your child's free elective period. Students who participate will be given 10 points for each interview (30 points total) that can be used at a later date in their school end of semester auctions. The consent form that is enclosed explains more about the study and about the rights of participants. If you allow your child to participate, you may fill out the consent form and return it in the envelope provided.

The risks associated with this study are minimal, no more than you would experience in everyday life. However, each participant will be encouraged to think about and reflect on their own experience as Latinos, which may prove to be beneficial.

Please understand that the information you share with us is confidential and will only be used for research purposes. Information gathered from the project will be written up in scholarly journals and will be presented at research conferences. Your child will not be identified by name in any publications or reports based on this project and audiotapes of the interviews will not be played in public without your consent. All audiotapes will be destroyed after a period of 5 years. Although teachers may know who is participating in the study because of our recruitment at the school, we will only share overall results with teachers. Your child's identity will always remain confidential. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may choose not to answer any question and may discontinue the interview at any time without penalty or loss of compensation. If you have questions or concerns about any of the topics discussed during the interview, contact Cristina Mercado at (650) 759-3121. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, 540 E Liberty St., Ste 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933 [or toll free, (866) 936-0933], irbhsbs@umich.edu

I thank you in advance for your help with this project.

Sincerely,

Cristina Mercado
(650) 759-3121
mercado@umich.edu

Race, Discrimination, Education, and the Experiences of Latino High Schoolers
Parent Consent Form

By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in this project based on your understanding of the information contained in this form. Please read this form carefully and sign below. I am looking forward to working with your child and thank you for your time.

Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one copy for your records and return the other to the interviewer.

I give permission for *my child* _____ to participate in this project and to be audiotaped.

_____ _____
Signature Date

_____
(Please **PRINT** your name here)

Appendix B

Parent Permission Request Letter (Spanish)

Querido Padre de la Preparatoria "Excellence":

Le escribo para invitar a su hijo/hija estudiante de preparatoria a participar en un proyecto de investigación, enfocado en la experiencia de adolescentes Latinos. Este proyecto explora las formas de las cuales la raza, la clase social, la educación de los padres, y la identidad del alumno, afectan el desarrollo de la identidad personal en el periodo de la adolescencia media. Actualmente, existen muchos estudios que demuestran que el periodo de la preparatoria es un momento difícil y retador, tanto psicológica como académicamente, para estudiantes y también para padres de familia. Sin embargo, poca de la investigación está enfocada en estudiantes Latinos. Por lo tanto, quisiera entrevistar a estudiantes Latinos participantes en el curso de Español para descendientes Hispanos. Soy Latina, estudiante de doctorado en el departamento de Psicología en la universidad de Michigan. Me interesa, en específico, trazar el espectro de experiencias y actitudes de jóvenes Latinos, para que en el futuro las escuelas puedan acudir de mejor manera a las necesidades de niños Latinos.

El estudio consiste de tres entrevistas con su hijo/hija estudiante de preparatoria, grabadas en audio, con una duración de treinta minutos cada una. Al aceptar que su hijo/hija participe en esta investigación, también estará aceptando que su hijo/a sea grabado/a auditivamente. El proceso tomará aproximadamente una hora y media en su totalidad, y puede ser llevado a cabo en la escuela, durante el periodo libre de su hijo/hija. Los/las estudiantes que participen serán acreditados/as con puntos que se usarán más tarde, en la subasta al final del semestre escolar. La forma de consentimiento adjunta explica con más detalle tanto el estudio como los derechos del participante. Si acepta que su hijo/hija participe, podrá llenar la forma de consentimiento y regresarla en el sobre proporcionado.

No tiene ningún riesgo participar en este estudio. Sin embargo, cada participante será alentado a reflexionar sobre su propia experiencia como Latino, lo cual podría resultar benéfico.

Permanezca asegurado que la información que comparta con nosotros será estrictamente confidencial, y solo se usará para los propósitos de la investigación. La información recabada se presentará en revistas académicas y en conferencias, sin embargo su hijo/hija no será identificado/a por su nombre en ninguna publicación o reporte basado en este proyecto. Al igual, las grabaciones del proyecto no se transmitirán en público sin su consentimiento. Todas las grabaciones serán borradas después de un periodo de cinco años. Los maestros de escuela podrán enterarse de que alumnos participan debido a nuestro reclutamiento en la escuela, pero solo se les mostrarán los resultados generales. La identidad de su hijo/hija permanecerá siempre confidencial. La participación de su hijo/hija es voluntaria. Su hijo/hija puede elegir no contestar cualquier pregunta y puede suspender la entrevista en cualquier momento sin penalización ni perdida de compensación. Si tiene cualquier duda acerca de los temas que serán discutidos en le entrevista, por favor contacte a Cristina Mercado al (650) 759-3121. Si tiene preguntas de sus derechos como participante, también podrá contactar al Consejo Institucional de Revisión para las Ciencias del Comportamiento, por correo con la dirección 540 East Liberty Street, Suite 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2210, o por teléfono al (734) 936-0933, o por correo electrónico con la dirección irbhsbs@umich.edu.

Le agradezco de antemano por su ayuda en este proyecto.
Muy atentamente,

Cristina Mercado
(650) 759-3121
mercado@umich.edu

Race, Discrimination, Education, and the Experiences of Latino High Schoolers
Parent Consent Form Spanish

Al firmar este formulario, usted acepta participar en este proyecto, y entiende la información presentada en este documento. Por favor lea esta forma con cuidado y firme abajo. Le agradezco su tiempo, y la oportunidad de trabajar con su hijo/a.

Por favor firme ambas copias de este formulario. Conserve una con sus archivos, y entregue la otra al entrevistador.

Yo doy permiso a *mi hijo/hija* _____ a participar en este proyecto y a ser grabado/a en audio.

_____ _____
Firma Fecha

_____
(Por favor escriba su nombre aquí en **letra de molde**)

Appendix C

Adolescent Assent Form

Race, Discrimination, Education, and the Experiences of Latino High Schoolers

The consent form explains your rights as a participant.

The risks associated with this study are minimal, no more than you would experience in everyday life. However, you will be encouraged to think about and reflect on your own experience as a Latino, which may prove to be beneficial.

The study consists of three 30-minute audio-recorded interviews. By agreeing to participate in this study you are also agreeing to be recorded. Interviews can take place during your free elective period or during your lunch period. Students who participate will be invited to a pizza party during their lunch period.

Please understand that the information you share with me is confidential and will only be used for research purposes. You will not be identified by name in any publications or reports based on this project. I am the only person that will listen to these audio recordings, and they will be destroyed after a period of 5 years. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question and may discontinue the interview at any time without penalty or loss of compensation. If you have questions or concerns about any of the topics discussed during the interview, contact Cristina Mercado at (650) 759-3121 or by email at mercado@umich.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, 540 E Liberty St., Ste 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933 [or toll free, (866) 936-0933], irbhsbs@umich.edu

By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in this project based on your understanding of the information contained in this form. Please read this form carefully and sign below. Thank you for your time.

Please sign <u>both copies</u> of this form. Keep one copy for your records and return the other to the interviewer.

π I (do / do not) agree to participate in this project and to be audio taped.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____

(Please **PRINT** your name here)

School:_____ Home Room Teacher:

_____

Email Address (if you have one): _____

Appendix D

Adolescent Background Questionnaire

To get a better picture about students' lives, we would like to know more about your family.

1. What is your parents' highest level of education

2. Mother _____

3 Father _____

4. What is your racial background? _____

5. What is the racial background of your mother _____

6. What is the racial background of your father _____

7. Parents' Marital Status: _____

8. How many adults _____ and children _____ are present in your home?

9. What language do you primarily speak with your parents?

_____

10. What language do you usually speak with your siblings?

_____

11. What language do you usually speak with your friends?

_____

12. How far do you *hope* to go in school?

1) high school graduate
2) some college or technical school
3) college degree
4) graduate school (masters, PhD, MD)

13. How far do your *expect* to go in school?

5) high school graduate
6) some college or technical school
7) college degree
8) graduate school (masters, PhD, MD)

14. What kinds of grades do you get?

9) Mostly As
10) As and Bs
11) Mostly Bs
12) Bs and Cs
13) Mostly Cs
14) Cs and Ds
15) MostlyDs

Appendix E

Interview Protocol 1, 2, and 3

[Interview 1: Topic – Race Socialization. The goal of the first interview will be to build a rapport with each participant and to get them thinking about the types of messages they may have received about race.]

WARM UP QUESTIONS:
1. *So tell me where you're from? Where your parents are from?*
2. *Tell me a little bit about your new school?*

Interviewer: *This is going to be unlike any other interview you have done. I'd like it to be more of a conversation than an interview, so feel free to ask me any questions or ask me about my own experiences.*

RACE /COLORISM QUESTIONS:
Interviewer: *Now I'm going to ask your opinion on some topics related to race, colorism and being Latino. There are no wrong or right answers since they are your opinions and feelings.* (Pause)
3. *What kinds of messages do your parents give you about what it means to be Latino* (can substitute with their country of origin)?
   - *How often did they talk about what it means to be Latino?*
   - *Give me an example of something they told you?*
4. *What does the word "race" mean to you?*
5. *What kind of message did your parents give you growing up about skin color?*
6. *Growing up what kinds of things did your parents tell you about race? Discrimination?*
   - *How did you feel about the things that your parents told you regarding race and/or discrimination?*
   - *In what way do you think this is similar or different from the way that African American parents talk to their children about race or discrimination?*
7. *What were some of the things that your parents told you about White people? Black people? Other Latinos? Other groups?*
   - *How did you feel about some of those things that your parents told you about these other groups?*
8. *Have you ever experienced discrimination?*
   - *How do your own experiences with discrimination compare with the messages that your parents gave you?*

EMPOWERING QUESTION:
9. *If or when you have children someday what kinds of messages will you give them about some of the things that we've talked about today* (what it means to be Latino, race, discrimination, colorism)?

DEMOGRAPHICS:
10. *Tell me about the places that you've lived in your life.*
11. *Like I said, this was unlike any other interview you have done. What did you think?*

[Interview 2: Topic – Experiences with discrimination. The goal of the second interview will be to build explore the types of experiences the participants have had around issues of discrimination.]

WARM UP QUESTIONS:

1. *How are things going in your Spanish class?*
2. *Tell me one interesting thing that you learned this/last week?*

Interviewer: *As I told you in our last interview this is going to be more like a conversation than an interview so feel free to ask me any questions or ask me about my own experiences.*

EXPERIENCES WITH DISCRIMINATION QUESTIONS

Interviewer: *Now I'm going to ask you about some of the things that you brought up in our last conversation regarding your experiences with discrimination. There are no wrong or right answers since they are your opinions and feelings.* (Pause)

1. *What does the word "discrimination" mean to you? Why do you think certain people get discriminated against?*
2. (remind them of an example of discrimination they had discussed in the previous interview) *Why do you think you were discriminated against in that situation?*
   - *Give me an example of something they told you?*
   - *How did that make you feel?*
3. *Who did you discuss this incident with?*
   - *What did they say?*
   - *If you chose not to discuss it with anyone why?*
4. *Is there a time that you can think of when you may have discriminated against someone else? Why did you discriminate against this person?*
   - *A time when your parents have discriminated against someone else? Why?*

EMPOWERING QUESTION:

1. *If or when you have children someday what kinds of messages will you give them about some of the things that we've talked about today* (discrimination)?

[Interview 3: Topic – Education. The goal of the third interview will be to build explore the types of experiences the participants have had around issues of education.]

WARM UP QUESTION:

1. *So tell me a little bit about your parents' education?*
2. *How about the rest of your family (siblings, cousins, uncles).*

Interviewer: *As I told you in our last interview this is going to be more like a conversation than an interview so feel free to ask me any questions or ask me about my own experiences.*

EDUCATION QUESTIONS

Interviewer: *Now I'd like us to talk a little bit about education in the Latino community. Again there are no wrong or right answers since they are your opinions and feelings.*
(Pause)

1. *What kind of messages have you heard about education from your parents?*
   - *How about from other sources like school, friends, other family members?*
2. *What do you think about education?*
   - *Is it important to you? Why or why not?*
3. *Do you think that being educated is an important part of Latino culture?*
   - *Why or why not?*
   - *Do you think it's an important part of other cultures?*
4. *According to the Department of Education Latinos have the highest high school drop out rate of any other group. 4% of Asians drop out of high school, 5% of Whites, 10% of Blacks, 15% of Native Americans. Meanwhile 18% of Latinos drop out of high school. Why do you think so many Latinos choose to drop out of high school?*
   - *Do you know anyone who has dropped out of high school? Tell me about them.*
5. *Tell me about someone you know who has attended college.*
   - *How do you think they got there?*

EMPOWERING QUESTION:

1. *Tell me about your dream school (college). How do you plan on making that dream a reality*

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