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Conditions Surrounding Four Mexican Females' Quest for a Higher Education in a Southeastern United States Community

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Sharon L. Hixon entitled "Conditions Surrounding Four Mexican Females' Quest for a Higher Education in a Southeastern United States Community." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Patricia Davis-Wiley, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Amos Hatch, Ilona Leki, Barbara Thayer-Bacon

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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CONDITIONS SURROUNDING FOUR MEXICAN FEMALES' QUEST FOR
A HIGHER EDUCATION IN A SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES
COMMUNITY

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee

Sharon L. Hixon
May 2008

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There are many people to thank, for it would be impossible to complete such a study without the support and encouragement of many. I owe deep gratitude to my participants, my dissertation committee members, the library personnel at Dalton State College, many of my colleagues, and my family.

Of course, this study could not have taken place without the generous contributions of my participants. Each of them gave of her time; often this was time she did not have to give. They told me their stories with unflinching honesty, and this helped me to see what it was like to be a young woman of Mexican descent living in their southern town. When I became overburdened with responsibilities and felt as if the completion of the dissertation was an impossible dream, I remembered these young women and how they gave of themselves for my dream; I knew I must complete this study if for no other reason than to make sure their stories were told to others who could possibly make changes for similar young women in the future. All of them, through their stories, elucidated the struggles that are particular to undocumented immigrants as they attempt to follow their own dreams and traverse the path from childhood to adulthood.

While all four of these young women enlightened me, my interaction with each of them brought about its own special piece of enlightenment. Andrea helped me to see that special or extra assistance from Anglo teachers, while often well-intentioned, can be perceived as demeaning. This made me reflect on my

behaviors as I worked with other students of Mexican descent. Laura showed me that college, often seen as a more difficult endeavor than high school, can actually be relaxing after a high school career teeming with activities. Josefina made me take a closer look at the government policies that are often restricting for even the brightest and most promising of immigrant students. Finally, Susan showed me that there are students who are making sacrifices, sacrifices that I would not have even fathomed at her age, for the good of the family.

Next, I want to thank my committee members: Dr. Patricia Davis-Wiley, Dr. Amos Hatch, Dr. Ilona Leki, and Dr. Thayer-Bacon. Each of these individuals influenced my scholarship and teaching and contributed to the process of conducting research and completing this dissertation. I would like to thank Dr. Davis-Wiley for volunteering to serve as the chair of my committee. As such, she has provided unfailing support and encouragement; often, she knew just what to say to encourage me to continue the process when I was most in need of such encouragement. Without a doubt, Dr. Davis-Wiley and her purple pen have helped to fashion a more polished final product. In addition, I would like to thank her for reaffirming my desire to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) students and for developing my aspiration to teach ESL methods courses. I also need to thank her for understanding my need to forge my own path with regard to classes and my study. I feel fortunate that she afforded me such freedom in my choices. Finally, I need to thank her for the Herculean efforts she employed to gather the committee for the final defense.

While Dr. Hatch taught me *how* to become a qualitative researcher, Dr. Thayer-Bacon was the one who inspired me *to become* a qualitative researcher. Before taking Dr. Thayer-Bacon's class, I believed research was only real research if one had a control group and some quantifiable data. She showed me the power that could be found in the stories, and Dr. Hatch developed my ability to turn theory into practical application for research. Not only did Dr. Hatch give me the methodological background that I needed to become a skilled qualitative researcher, he believed in my abilities and provided me with lessons that required me to apply my newfound skills, and he offered encouraging words to support those burgeoning skills. My appreciation goes to Dr. Thayer-Bacon and Dr. Leki for requiring me to think about the socio-political aspects of teaching and about what it means to be an ESL teacher. Finally, I want to thank Dr. Leki for providing a model for me to emulate: I hope I, too, can be someone who can simultaneously be both an exemplary scholar and a stimulating teacher.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study collection followed 4 self-identified college-bound Mexican immigrants as they moved from their senior year of high school through their first semester of college. The purpose of this study was to learn about the young women's aspirations and expectations and how their aspirations and expectations were or were not in harmony with the actuality of their lives.

To meet this goal, the researcher interviewed the female participants three times. These interviews took place in high school and the first semester of college. The researcher began each interview with a predetermined list of questions, and added additional questions that were generated by the participant's responses. Next, the researcher reviewed the participants' transcripts and cumulative files and the transcripts of the interviews in order to conduct qualitative data analysis to find themes that were salient to the participants' lives. The researcher described the salient themes for each of the individual participants by telling their individual stories. After writing the participant's individual story, the researcher again met with the participant, so she could read the story and provide additional insights. Using the same data analysis process as with the individual cases, the researcher found themes that were germane across the case studies. The effectiveness of support from significant others, the value of helping people, the effects of racism, the development and maintenance of a Mexican identity, and the importance of marriage emerged as themes that were relevant across the four cases.

This study adds to the body of literature that details the aspirations that are held by Mexican students, and it adds to the corpus of research that attempts to provide reasons for why this particular population may encounter more or different types of obstacles than the typical high school senior or first-year college student. All 4 of the participants saw themselves as college-bound during their senior year of high school, and all had utilized various strategies (i.e. maintaining a high GPA, taking college entrance exams, attending college workshops targeted for the Hispanic population, and applying to several colleges) to make this goal a reality. While all 4 of the participants began college immediately following high school, financial difficulties stemming from current or previous undocumented status proved to be an obstacle that was quite difficult to circumvent.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the past several years, the Hispanic population in the United States has increased dramatically; this dramatic increase has been felt quite strongly in the Southern community from which I draw my participants. In fact, research shows that Hispanics make-up 12.5% of the total U.S. population, making them the largest minority in the country.¹ The numbers are even more staggering for Ridgeview (a pseudonym); 40.2% of the population of the city is Hispanic.²

Despite the increase in population, Hispanics remain some of the least successful students in high school and college. In fact, Simmons (2001) reports at least 30% of Hispanics do not obtain a high school diploma because they drop out prior to graduation. In addition, Hispanic students are 7.6 times less likely to enroll in a post-secondary institution than their Anglo peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 222). Once in college, the low retention rates for Hispanics can be seen again. Haro (as cited in Rendon & Nora, 1989, p.18) reports that the Hispanic dropout rate is 18.1% higher than is found for the majority population at college.

Problem

These statistics are not surprising for many educators and educational researchers, and a variety of researchers have conducted both quantitative and

¹ These figures were located in a U.S. Census Bureau, 2005, Anonymous Southern State Quick Facts: People Quick Facts Section. The exact citation is not given, nor will the reference appear in the reference list because the researcher protected the identity of the participants when she did not list the city in which they lived.

² These figures were disclosed in a U.S. Census Bureau, 2005, Anonymous Southern State: Anonymous Southern City Quick Facts: People Quick Facts Section. This citation will not appear in the reference list in order to maintain the participants' confidentiality.

qualitative studies to determine if it is possible to identify factors that may influence academic failure for a variety of students (Buening & Tollefson, 1987; Buriel, 1983; Calabrese & Barton, 1995; Davison Avilés, Guerrero, Howarth, & Thomas, G., 1999; Dietrich, 1998; Masten, Plata, Wenglar, & Thedford, 1999; Romo & Falbo, 1996). Some researchers have asserted that stringent or confusing program factors found within the school system may push some Hispanic students to drop out before they can successfully complete their education (Davison Avilés et al., 1999; Romo & Falbo, 1996). Still other researchers have investigated the effects that a teacher's style, expectations, preconceived notions, and/or perceptions may have on Hispanic students (Buriel, 1983; Masten et al., 1999), and some researchers have found that administrative assumptions about certain Hispanic students do factor into the level of encouragement that these students get for taking rigorous academic classes (Romo & Falbo, 1996). Failure to achieve in school could be linked to differences in cultural expectations between the White culture and the Mexican-American culture (Buening & Tollefson, 1987; Calabrese & Barton, 1995) or to problems associated with being "simultaneously immersed in two cultural systems" (Dietrich, 1998, p. 8).

A few researchers have attempted to investigate the topic from a positive stance and have attempted to identify factors that may be directly linked to academic success for Hispanic students (Attinasi, 1989; Weissman, Bulakowski, & Jumisko, 1998). However, these studies appear to define success from a purely Anglo perspective, and there are few studies that investigate the topic from the

Hispanic point of view. Furthermore, little research has been conducted that is longitudinal in nature and is focused on only female Hispanics. While Dietrich's (1998) study followed Chicanas in high school and Romo and Falbo's (1996) study followed Hispanics through high school, neither study followed students who believed themselves to be future college graduates from high school to college. While my study is not longitudinal in the strictest sense, it does follow young women of Mexican descent across two contexts (the last semester of high school and the first semester of college), and the participants are academically successful.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to follow self-identified college-bound high school seniors from their last semester of high school through their first semester of college. The purpose of this collection of qualitative case studies was to learn how the female Mexican-American participants' perceptions of their lives and their aspirations and expectations for their futures reconcile with the reality of the enabling and disabling forces in their lives.

Research Questions

I developed several research questions to address the purpose of this study.

1. What perceptions do the college-bound women of Mexican decent hold about their past and present lives?
2. What aspirations and expectations for their future lives do the participants have?

3. How do the participants' perceptions, expectations, and aspirations reconcile with each other?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in many ways. This study fills a void in the current research. As stated previously, little research has focused on a longitudinal examination of female Hispanic students and their aspirations, expectations, and perceptions. In addition, little research has been conducted to show how aspirations, expectations, perceptions, and circumstances intertwine to help or hinder a Mexican-American female's chances for success. Each participant's story is told in a way that the reader should have a clear picture of the young woman's aspirations, expectations, perceptions and circumstances and how they intertwine to help or hinder or her chances for success. More important, the reader has an understanding of how each Latina views success and how this perception intertwines with the above mentioned influences to develop the person she is today.

Second, these young women have all been influenced by our immigration laws. After reading their stories, readers cannot help but see why I suggest there is a great need for immigration reform. When I say immigration reform, I am talking about the government re-evaluating how it views undocumented students who have attended American schools for most or all of their lives. Many of the young women in this study are among the brightest and most academically successful students in their high school. They participated in numerous

community service organizations, in a variety of clubs, and in school governance. It would seem that these young women exude characteristics that would inspire colleges to covet them.

Instead, the lack of proper immigration documents and/or financial resources is severely handicapping their chances for meeting their next educational goal: attending the college of their choice. Instead, they have had to settle for the local college, attend part-time, drop out, or even move back to Mexico. Some people (such as the immigrants themselves, the researcher, and people who are aware of the oppressive nature of the dominant society) might feel that our government has refused to assist these motivated students that could acquire an education and offer a great deal to the American society. All of these young women entered the country without legal immigration documentation. Due to their immigration status, the respondents in this study were not able to receive some of the scholarships that were available, did not qualify for the state scholarships that are offered based on GPA, and were ineligible to receive federal funds. For example, all of these participants met the GPA qualifications for the state scholarship, and three of them had lived in the state and attended public schools in the state for most of their lives; however, they were ineligible for the state scholarship because they lacked the proper legal documentation to receive the funds. At the same time, citizens with less motivation and weaker academic skills were given state and federal money to attend college. One benefit they did

receive their first semester was out-of state tuition waivers. At the time of my third interviews, these waivers were under review. Susan eloquently stated,

I don't know what they're thinking, but if they want a better you know better people for their country, well, why do you take the waivers away? Why do you want to take the opportunity from people who want to do something with themselves (...)?

Assumptions

Since I conducted my qualitative research from a critical/feminist perspective, I have outlined some of the assumptions that guided my work. These assumptions intertwined, and they cannot simply be labeled in an ordinal fashion.

Some readers may be unfamiliar with qualitative research. For these readers, I have outlined a short characterization of qualitative research in order to provide the reader with the assumptions upon which much qualitative research is based. First and foremost, qualitative researchers assume that "objective reality can never be captured" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5). Creswell (1998) believes that qualitative researchers accept the idea that reality is seen differently by the different participants in the study, and I agree with him. With this view in mind, my first assumption is that no one view presented by a participant is any *truer* than any other view presented.

In addition, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) believe that each qualitative researcher holds a particular view of the people who will be studied. Since I am operating from a critical/feminist point of view, these beliefs will influence how I

view the participants in the study. As a result, I must identify the biases and beliefs that I hold, and I must analyze how these biases and beliefs are impacting the study I conduct. In addition, I must reveal my biases and beliefs in the text. By making such disclosures, I provide the reader with pertinent information that he/she will need in order to analyze how my background might affect all aspects of this study. Olesen (2000), writing about feminist researchers, argues that a feminist researcher does not need to concern herself with the elimination of these biases; instead, the researcher's background, experiences, and beliefs should be seen as "a set of resources" (p. 229). Furthermore, Stewart (as cited in Creswell, 1998) argues that qualitative researchers who operate from a feminist perspective must "consciously and systematically include their own roles or positions and assess how they impact their understandings of a woman's life" (p. 84). Hatch (2002) contends that qualitative researchers writing dissertations should not expect themselves to write in a detached manner; instead, he recommends that researchers "find their voices" (p. 221). All of this leads me to place myself in the study in a multitude of ways that will be revealed as the reader makes his/her way through this text. To paraphrase Hatch (2002), I have found my voice, and my voice will be strong and loud.

Because I am a critical/feminist researcher, I began my research with certain assumptions, and these assumptions influenced the type of research I conducted, the methods I used to gather and analyze data, the conclusions I asserted, and the manner I will chose to use to communicate the results to the

reader. Therefore, it is essential for the reader to understand the stance that provides the foundation for my critical-feminist view.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) suggest that one's epistemology addresses the questions one might have with regard to what is "truth" (p. 575). While Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) see perception of truth as an epistemological stance, Hatch (2002) suggests that one's ontological stance is formed when one can answer the question: "What is the nature of reality?" (Hatch, 2002, p. 11). "What can be known" (Hatch, 2002, p. 11) or not known, and what relationship exists between the "knower" (p. 11) and "what is to be known" (p. 11) form the foundation of an epistemological stance for Hatch (2002). Creswell's (1998) ideas about the foundation of an epistemological stance coincide with Hatch's (2002) notions. Creswell (1998) sees an epistemological stance as one that addresses the "relationship of the researcher to that being researched" (p. 74).

Following Hatch's (2002) and Creswell's (1998) definition of ontology, my ontological stance is firmly ensconced in a view that holds that there is no one true reality. Reality is not out there waiting for me or anyone else to find it. Hatch (2002) suggests that a researcher who operates from a critical/feminist paradigm would believe that "race, gender, and class" (p. 13) affect the realities or truth perceived by these individuals. I would take this one step further, and I suggest when I conduct research, I am going to learn the ways in which a

respondent's perceptions are impacted by race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and non-native speaker status.

Using Hatch's (2002) and Creswell's (1998) guidelines for defining an epistemological stance, I begin by assuming that knowledge can be declared subjective since there is not ultimate truth. In addition, knowledge cannot help but be political (Hatch, 2002). Because knowledge is subjective and political, the knowledge that I gained from this study was "mediated through the political positionings" (Hatch, 2002, p. 17) that I hold. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest that any given qualitative researcher, believing that objective truth is not possible, recognizes that he/she "speaks from a particular class, gender, racial cultural, and ethnic community perspective" (p. 18). For a critical/feminist researcher, such as myself, the values of the researcher will "frame [the] inquiry" (Hatch, 2002, p. 13). In other words, a different researcher could conduct the same basic study, and he/she could glean different knowledge because his/her political leanings, experiences, and values could vary greatly from mine. Finally, as a critical/feminist researcher, I believe that there needs to be less distance between me, the researcher, "and that [which is] being researched" (Creswell, 1998, p. 75).

Since I am operating from within both a critical and feminist perspective, I believe it is important for me to further outline what it means to me to be both a critical and a feminist researcher. In order to better articulate my critical and feminist framework, I conducted an in-depth perusal of the scholarship that addresses both of these paradigms. At the conclusion of this literature survey, I

am better able to articulate my stance, but I also am more aware that my framework does not neatly fit into any particular version of critical theory or feminist theory. In other words, I cannot say that I am a critical researcher basing my research ideas upon the critical framework suggested by any specific critical scholar. At the same time, I cannot say my feminist ideas are based upon a critical feminist framework or by a feminist standpoint framework. I find that there are parts of these different theories that I agree with and pieces that I do not agree with. Thus, I was afraid that I had placed myself in quite a quandary: how could I categorize my critical and feminist frameworks if I could not endorse all of the ideas ensconced within a single framework?

Thus, I came to the conclusion that I should “mine” (Hartsock, 1998a, p. 74) the different frameworks for the ideas that I endorse. Even though she found fault with at least five components of Marxist thought, Hartsock (1998a) used some parts of Marxist theory when she created her feminist standpoint framework. I believe this idea of extracting the relevant or useable parts of a theory neatly coincides with Aronowitz and Giroux’s (1991) suggestion that critical theory allows for “the presence of a plurality of philosophical discourses” (p. 19). At times, the critical and the feminist views overlap, but this is not always the case.

When I say I am a conducting research that will take a critical and a feminist view, I mean that I will be looking for instances where hegemonic practices in our institutions, family, and society are oppressing people. I agree

with Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), when they suggest that critical researchers understand that “Gramsci’s notion of hegemony is central to critical research” (p. 283). As a critical researcher, I believe that a great deal of the oppression that fosters “inequalities” (p. 283) is based upon a class system.

As a feminist researcher, I believe that we do live in a patriarchal and oppressive society, and I believe this means that society is arranged through conscious and unconscious decisions to benefit men. As a feminist researcher, I am also aware that people are not oppressed only because of their class or gender. In other words, I also need to consider sexual orientation, native speaker status, and other characteristics that may influence the experiences of individuals and their potential oppression. As a feminist researcher, I assume that “historically specific situations” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21) form the context for the oppression.

I have come to these ideas about the oppression perpetrated by a patriarchal society after studying many of Hartsock’s (1983, 1998a, & 1998b) writings. Hartsock (1983) suggests that women’s lives are not of the same structural make-up as the lives of men. In fact, she believes that this difference provides women with a privileged point of view from which to speak about and critique the patriarchal society in which they find themselves. Hartsock (1983) suggests that such an understanding and critique can provide an opportunity to understand how the “patriarchal institutions and ideologies” (p. 284) are working to create a society that is the opposite of a humane society.

For Hartsock, a feminist standpoint is based upon the desire to create an “epistemological tool for understanding and opposing all form of domination” (Hartsock, 1983, p. 283). In addition, Hartsock (1998b) believes that a feminist standpoint theory is her way to search for the truth. Truth, according to Hartsock (1998b), should be viewed more along the lines of “certitude” (p. 405). In other words, her standpoint theory is a theory that “has credible knowledge” (p. 405), and this knowledge should provide the where-with-all for action. For Hartsock (1998a), a standpoint theory is about more than an individual feminist viewpoint. Instead, a standpoint theory must be created by a collective and marginalized group.

As I stated before, I believe it is possible for me to agree with some of the assumptions of a theory and not others. This is the case with these ideas put forth by Hartsock (1983). Fraser (2002) would probably agree that the collective “woman” (p. 125) can be used for a feminist standpoint theory. Fraser suggests that the students in her study, while being from differing backgrounds, could be seen to share “common experiences of oppression” (p. 125). I, on the other hand, tend to agree with the critics who suggest the collective idea of “woman” (Fraser, 2002, p. 125) tends to “mak[e] invisible the experience of lesbians or women of color” (Hartsock, 1983, p. 290). Hartsock (1983) suggests that this intentional oversight on her part, while taken with some reservation, is permissible because she is attempting to show the commonalities among women that can be found in the sexual division of labor. I tend to agree with Olesen’s (2000) suggestion that

women of color develop their own ideas for standpoint theories because they see a decided lack of marginalized women in most research accounts, and they see a need to show how different women's experiences contributed to knowledge gained by women. For other standpoint feminists, "all knowledge claims are socially located" (Olesen, 2000, p. 222). For myself, I agree that women experience oppression from the patriarchal society, but I also believe that we cannot simply place all woman into one group and claim they share similar oppressive experiences.

Bloland (1995) suggests that some "standpoint theories that maintain as legitimate the modern scientific and academic standards are negated by postmodernist perspectives" (p. 545). In other words, postmodern ideas are in direct conflict with the essentialist nature of these theories. Essentialist ideas imply "that a definition entails a claim to be the only right one" (Verkuyten, 2005, p. 37). From an essentialist point of view, all women of Mexican descent living in America could be placed into a group, and theories about their lives could be developed without allowing for differences that may exist between young women who come from different economic backgrounds or from different sexual orientations. Essentialist notions appear to be at the foundation of standpoint theories.

If, as Olesen (2000) suggests, standpoint feminists believe that people who experience social situations from the lowest rungs of the hierarchy are the people who are best able to provide knowledge about their lives and the lives of others,

then this essentialist notion is no different from the White men who thought they could speak for all people if they just followed the correct scientific research practices. Hartsock (1998a) would not agree with this fault in her logic for two reasons. First, she does believe that people from the margins will have a “clearer and better” (p. 80) view of what actually takes place, and she suggests that this follows the Marxist thought that oppressed people can provide “better accounts of the world” (p. 80) than can the dominant group because they are more likely to be attempting to create just social experiences. Second, she insists that marginalized people will probably not develop the “totalizing discourse ” (Hartsock, 1990, p. 171) that Olesen (2000) fears because of the very nature of their marginalization. In other words, marginalized people are less likely to believe that they can represent everybody because they already know that their experiences do not transcend everyone else’s experiences.

From these critiques of a feminist standpoint theory, I have come to believe that women can provide a “clearer and better” (Hartsock, 1998a, p. 80) picture of their own lives, but I do not assume that their truth is any truer than the truth provided by a White male. In essence, the woman (be she rich or poor, young or old, White or a woman of color) can best describe her own reality. At the same time, a man (be he rich or poor, young or old, White or a man of color) can best describe his reality.

As a critical and as a feminist researcher, I will also critique the educational system because the educational system is one of the institutions where

the hegemonic practices of society are utilized to propagate the natural and neutral sense of oppression, and I will critique the educational system because educational systems are where we can begin to nurture resistance and change. I agree with Giroux ("The Hope," 1988) when he claims that Marx would suggest "that the basic function of the schools is to reproduce the dictates of the state in the economic order" ("The Hope," 1988, p. 95). Marx suggests this very idea when he states that public education is carried out in a way that changes the "aims of the individual into general aims" (Marx, 1975 p. 193) of the state. Marcuse (2005b) suggests that while transformation can begin from within the oppressive systems (p. 71), critiques are not enough. Critical research must be transformative; however, "it is not merely a question of changing the institutions but rather, and this is more important, of totally changing human beings in their attitudes, their instincts, their goals, and their values" (Marcuse, 2005a, p. 101). I assume that one way to transform society is to conduct research that enables individuals to acquire "insights" (Habermas, 1998, p. 25). Insight leads to the "freedom to decide upon an authentic life" (Habermas, 1998, p. 27).

In addition, as a critical and as a feminist researcher, I will be considering the dynamics of power. By this, I mean that I will try to learn about how power is used, how power is resisted, and how power can change hands. Marcuse (2005b) suggests that tolerance can "lead to an increase of repression and destruction" (Marcuse, 2005b, p. 68). In other words, if people tolerate repressive behavior this can lead to more repression. This leads me to believe that people who do not

work to overcome the power of their oppressors will participate in their own oppression. Following Thompson's (2003) thinking, I believe that "power is something that one group exercises over another" (p. 13), and I believe that the preponderance of power is held by middle and upper class White males.

How My Research is Critical Research

Strine (1991) suggests that there are two features of the early Frankfurt scholars that link all their ideas: "Their research was driven by questions that originated in their immediate life world and mattered to them personally" (Strine, 1991, p. 197). For me, this is a keystone that links my research to critical theory. I am driven to conduct my research with females of Mexican descent because of the questions that have developed in the context of my lived experience. In other words, the young women and their experiences matter to me because I have interacted with so many of them over the last few years in an educational setting. I am motivated to learn about their experiences because it appears that there are many intersecting factors that are serving to oppress them; however, they are certainly not without hope.

My research is also an example of critical research because it was designed to look at the educational experiences of these young women and to hold them in front of a critical lens. I thought I might learn about practices that were taking place in the school that affected these young women and their chances to meet with the success they desire. Furthermore, I believed I might learn more

about what these practices have to say about the hegemony that exist in society as a whole.

Pollock and Cox (1991) suggest that the origins of critical theory are rooted in the theorists' need to respond to the problems of the day. I see my critical theory and my research as a response to what is going on in the world today. As I look around, I see patriotism walking hand-in-hand with anti-immigrant sentiments. In addition, I see a failing economy walking hand-in-hand with conspicuous consumption. I also see failing schools walking hand-in-hand with a call for more accountability by using standardized tests. This leads me to see trained teachers with sound pedagogical practices walking hand-in hand with political decisions such as the English-Only and High-Stakes Testing movements. This paradoxical existence needs to be critiqued, and I believe these paradoxes were essential components of the research that took place with my respondents.

Finally, while I hesitated to call my respondents *successful* just because they had made it further in the educational system than many of their Mexican-American peers, I did want to understand how they have successfully reached this point. In addition, I wanted to learn if they had resisted the oppressive and hegemonic practices of society, the school system, and their families. If they had practiced resistance, I wanted to uncover the means by which they did this. In instances where they had participated in their own oppression, I wanted to understand how and why this had happened, and I wanted to learn if they even realized that this has happened.

How My Research is Feminist Research

While many feminist scholars do not outline specific methodology to use when one is conducting feminist work, there are some key suggestions and ideas that I think outline why this research project is a feminist research project. First, Hartsock (1998a) suggests that feminists begin their work by “examining and understanding the structures that define our lives” (p. 35). To the best of my ability as an outsider, I wanted to understand the structures that define the lives of the college-bound seniors I interviewed. I wanted to understand the structures in their school, home, and community lives. I also wanted to understand the structures of society that frame their experiences. I believed the best way that I could accomplish this understanding was by using semi-structured interviews that allowed my participants and me to have conversations. Through these conversations, I hoped to develop an understanding of the ways in which the respondent’s “public” (Hartsock, 1998a, p. 38) and “private” (Hartsock, 1998a, p. 38) lives intersected, interacted, and connected. I believe Hartsock’s (1998a) ideas about the connection between public and private lives are similar to Thompson’s (2003) desire to denounce socialization feminists because they look at categories in “additive terms” (Thompson, 2003, p. 23). Connecting Thompson’s (2003) concepts with Hartsock’s (1998a) ideas, I came to the conclusion that I needed to approach this research project with the idea that a respondent’s life at school could not simply be added to her life at home, her life at church, her life in the community, and her life at work in order to create 100%

of her life and the oppression she has experienced as a female, as a person of color, as a non-native speaker of the English language, as a child of immigrants, or as an immigrant herself. Instead, through these conversations, I hoped to develop a clearer image of the ways in which all these parts connect, overlap, and influence the “totality” (Hartsock, 1998a, p. 38) of her life.

Limitations of the Study

Misunderstanding of Case Study Research

Some readers may believe that one limitation of this study is connected to the limitations that are found by some researchers in the choice of the case study tradition. One of the possible problems that could occur with this research is the overuse of the term case study, and this overuse can cause confusion with regard to the definition and characteristics of the case study approach. Hatch (2002) suggests that case study has been used as a “catchall for identifying qualitative studies of various types” (p. 31). In order to combat this possible limitation, I have outlined the characteristics of this study that qualify it to be labeled as a case study in Chapter 3.

Number of Participants

A second limitation of this case study research is directly correlated to the number of respondents I chose to include. While Creswell (1998) recommends “no more than four cases” (p. 63) when conducting a study that utilizes multiple cases, readers may find this number troubling because they may feel that they cannot generalize with so few cases. By the very nature of qualitative case study,

I began with the idea that this would probably not be generalizable to a larger population; Glesne and Peshkin (1992) agree that qualitative research is not about “generalizability” (p. 7). Instead, with this meticulously developed qualitative research, I have provided “contextualization” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 7) and “an in-depth picture” (Creswell, 1998, p. 64) of these four participants. Creswell (1998) believes that some case studies have limited value if the researcher does not have enough data to supply the needed context for “an in-depth picture” (Creswell, 1998, p. 64). Again, I have attempted to forestall this limitation by detailing the methods that I chose to use in order to generate a large data set. This information can be found in Chapter 3.

In essence, I have provided thick descriptions of the perceptions and aspirations and the realities of the lives of only four women in a particular town, in a particular state, in a particular time period. Because of this, I cannot generalize their stories to what it might be like for other women of Mexican descent in other towns in this southern state, let alone what it might be like for others in another state.

Some would argue that having only four participants limits my ability to generalize for the young women in this particular town. Since all of the participants had or do have issues with their immigration documentation, their stories may be very dissimilar to young women of Mexican descent who have been documented since they were new immigrants. However, the rich descriptions have definitely provided the reader with insights into the lives,

perceptions and aspirations of these participants, and these are the stories that I set out to tell.

Brevity of the Investigation

A fourth limitation of this study is the brevity of the investigation. Because this study followed the participants from their last year of high school through their first year of college, there are many unanswered questions? Will the waiver program for out-of-state tuitions be dropped? If it is disbanded, how will this affect the academic futures of the respondents? How will Laura fare in Mexico? Will Susan drop out as she predicts? Will Andrea get to go to one of the schools of her choice? Will Josephina's struggles with accepting her situation plague her entire four years of college? Will they graduate? The best way to answer these questions and mitigate this limitation would be to continue to follow these young women as they progress over the next several years.

Differing Backgrounds

Fifth, the study is limited because the participants and the researcher were of such different backgrounds. I am a White, middle-class, educated, woman who is an assistant professor at a state college. The participants are all or have all been undocumented, young immigrant women from Mexico. Thus, it is possible that they could have filtered their responses to my questions. If they did indeed filter what they told me, they could have done this for several reasons. Perhaps, they wanted to dispel the negative stereotypes that are associated with the Mexican population living in the United States, and this caused them to give me a mostly

positive view of their home situations. At the same time, all of them knew I was a teacher at a college; this could have caused them to filter some of the information they provided about their school situations. Possibly, these young women did not want me to think they were complaining or unappreciative of their educational opportunities, so they provided a mostly positive view of their school experiences.

It has been suggested by colleagues, that I may have viewed the data from a positive bias myself. If this occurred, this would mean that the participants provided the examples of oppression and other negative examples, but I did not see them because I was looking at the data through a lens that was too positive, or I put a positive slant to the stories because I knew the participants would be reading them. While I was always aware that the participants were going to read their own stories, I made every attempt to analyze the data without this idea in mind. Frankly, when I had completed their stories, I often felt as if an individual's story were one of triumph over obstacles but hopelessness when it came to her future. Therefore, I feel as if the stories were not slanted with a positive bias until the concluding paragraphs when I showed how each participant's ability to overcome obstacles and define her idea of success led me to believe that her dreams could be achieved.

There is yet another possibility for the overly positive stories that were told. It is possible that both the participants and the researcher were trying to please each other. The participants may have told the positives of the school environment, for example, because that is what they thought I wanted to hear. At

the same time, I could have focused on the positive aspects of their lives because I knew they were going to read their own stories, and I wanted to please the participants. Both the participant and I may have operated from the idea that we did not want to hurt the other person. I may not have wanted the participants to feel as if they had made poor decisions, and they may not have wanted me to think they had been oppressed by others similar to me. In other words, they did not want me to feel as if they were putting me into the same category as the oppressors whom they had encountered throughout their lives.

Definitions

The following definitions are used in the study.

Anglo – According to The American Heritage College Dictionary, this word can be a shortened version of Anglo-American. It can be defined as “an English-speaking person, especially a white North American who is not of Hispanic or French descent” (The American Heritage College Dictionary, 1993, p. 52).

Aspirations – Goldenberg, Gallimore, & Reese (2001) view these as hoped for achievements.

ASPIRE (pseudonym) – This is a scholarship that pays some of the tuition and book fees for attending one of the public colleges in the anonymous state in which the participants reside. It is offered to students who graduate from high school in the anonymous southern state in which the participants of this study live. In order to qualify for this scholarship, the graduating high school student must have a minimum 3.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale. In addition, the student must be a legal resident

of the given state in order to qualify for the scholarship. Once in college, the student may continue to receive this scholarship if he/she maintains the required 3.0 GPA.³

Bilingual Programs – According to Lam (2001), these programs can have many forms. However, they involve “education using both languages [the native language and the second language] as media of instruction and/or having bilingualism as a goal of education” (p. 95).

CLD – Laing and Kamhi (2003) define this as “culturally and linguistically diverse” (p. 44).

ESOL – Carter and Nunan (2001) suggest this abbreviation (meaning English for Speakers of Other Languages) is used in the United States and worldwide.

ELL – This term usually means English Language Learner. Carrasquillo and Rodríguez (2002) suggest that this term may be more positive than LEP (defined below) because it focuses on the new skills the students are acquiring. For the purposes of this dissertation, I use this term when it has been used in the studies to which I am referring.

ESL – English as a Second Language – According to Lightbown and Spada (1999), immigrants learn English as a Second Language if they are “in a setting where English is the principal language” (p. 174).

³ The information for this definition was gathered through interviews with the participants, and it was verified by visiting the financial aid website for Ridge State College (a pseudonym). In order to maintain confidentiality, the requisite information will not appear in the reference list.

Expectations -- Goldenberg et al. (2001) view these as achievements that are “*realistically expected*” (p. 548).

Hegemony – There is some debate on the definitive definition for hegemony, and its beginnings have been attributed to Gramsci (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000) and to Lenin (Gramsci as cited in Adamson, 1980). Kincheloe & McLaren (2000) believe that hegemony is the “larger effort of the powerful to win the consent of their ‘subordinates’” (p. 279). Cammett (1967) refers to many of Gramsci’s writings to outline hegemony as the power that is “obtained by consent rather than force” (p. 204), and the “institutions of civil society” (p. 204) are used to garner this power. Mouffe (1979), too, studies many of Gramsci’s writings to offer the suggestion that hegemony is power that is achieved through an “ideological struggle” (p. 181), and this struggle produces a powerful class that is able create “a genuine ‘national popular will’” (p. 182-183). For the purposes of this dissertation, hegemony is viewed as the power that is achieved by one group over the other groups in society by the transmission of an ideology that appears to be for all the people, and this ideological stance is propagated through societal institutions such as the public schools. The result of a common ideology is that the oppressed people often believe that the policies and procedures that exist in the institutions are serving their best interests when, in fact, these procedures and policies help to maintain the status quo.

Hispanic – According to The American Heritage College Dictionary, this term can be used to refer to “a Spanish-speaking person” (p. 643). This dictionary

further clarifies the definition by explaining that “*Hispanic* encompasses all-Spanish-speaking peoples in both hemispheres and emphasizes the common denominator of language between communities that sometimes have little else in common” (The American Heritage College Dictionary, 1993, p. 643-644).

Immersion Programs – This can be defined as “an educational program in which a second language is taught via *content-based instruction*” (Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 175). Following this definition and Lightbown and Spada’s explanation, an English immersion program for native speakers of Spanish would begin with instruction in a subject area such as science. Students would be taught the science subject matter through the English language, but there would be little formal teaching of the English language.

Latina -- This term is defined as “a woman or girl of Spanish-speaking heritage, esp. in the United States” (The American Heritage College Dictionary, 1993, p. 767).

L2 – According to Lightbown and Spada (1999), this is a common abbreviation for second language. A second language is “any language other than the first language learned” (p. 178).

LEP – This term is usually used to refer to limited English proficient individuals. Carrasquillo and Rodríguez (2002), following Chamot and O’Malley (1994), suggest that this term carries “a negative connotation” (Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002, p. xi) Carrasquillo and Rodríguez (2002) follow Chamot and O’Malley’s (1994) lead when they argue that this term focuses on the skills that the individual

lacks. I have used LEP in this dissertation only to refer to subjects or participants in reported studies in the manner in which the authors used the term.

Tracking – Braddock and Dawkins (1993) explain this as sorting children into groups after compiling results from past academic achievements.

Undocumented Immigrant – Another term used for an undocumented immigrant is “unauthorized resident” (United States Department of Homeland Security (USDHS), Office of Immigration Statistics, 2007, p. 1). According to the USDHS (2007), this term encompasses “all foreign-born non-citizens who are not legal residents” (p. 1). Immigrants qualify as such if they “entered the United States without inspection or were admitted temporarily and stayed past the date they were required to leave” (United States Department of Homeland Security (USDHS), Office of Immigration Statistics, 2007, p. 1).

Organization of the Study

I have included the introduction, the problem and the research questions that guided the research, the purpose of the study, the limitations of the study, and the definition of the key terms in Chapter 1. In addition, I outlined the assumptions that guided my development of the research and the assumptions that played a part in the analysis and conclusions. In Chapter 2, I surveyed the literature that pertains to the study topics. For Chapter 3, I detailed the methodology that was used to gather and analyze data. In Chapter 4, I reported the results of my data-gathering. This chapter is comprised of five subchapters. In each of the four subchapters, I provided my description of each individual

participant's background and the salient themes that I found that applied to that particular participant. In the fifth subchapter, I detailed the themes that I found particularly salient across the participants' stories. In Chapter 5, I drew conclusions, identified the contributions offered by this study, detailed the implications that exist as a result of this study, and outlined recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I will begin with a description of the Hispanic population living in the United States; specifically, I will focus on Mexicans because the participants in my study are all of Mexican descent. When I present relevant research, I will focus on research that looks at Hispanics and Latinos because these terms also encompass people of Mexican descent, and there is not a large body of research available that focuses only on people of Mexican descent. Next, I will provide statistics that highlight the academic challenges that many Hispanic students face in the American school system. I will also present research that illustrates the expectations and aspirations that are held by these same students, and I will supply examples of research that have been conducted to show a possible connection between significant others' aspirations and expectations and those of the Hispanic students. Next, I will offer a possible explanation for the high dropout rates, and I will propose an argument that explains why some students are able to overcome these obstacles and achieve academically.

Hispanic and Mexican Culture and Identity

Sánchez (1993) suggests that Mexicans who immigrated to the United States during the early 1900s were studied by both “historians” and “Chicano social scientists” (p. 130), and these people promoted an image of the Mexican immigrant family that was no more accurate than earlier studies of Mexicans that were “psychoanalytically oriented” (p. 130). The latter studies “depicted the Mexican family as pathological”

(p. 130), and the former studies concluded that “*la familia*” (p. 130) was essential to the success of the Mexican immigrant because the family was “warm and nurturing” and provided “support and stability in times of stress” (p. 130). In these families, “*machismo* was not so much a maladaptive response which solidified male dominance, but rather represented an appropriate mechanism to ensure the continuation of Mexican family pride and respect” (p. 130).

Sánchez (1993) argues that this “unidimensional view of the Mexican family” (p. 131) leaves out the ways in which different immigrant experiences could shape the family. He explains that some immigrants came from villages throughout the country, but others came from cities. Some immigrants moved parts of their families at a time while others migrated as an intact family. Some immigrants lived in areas that were heavily populated with other Mexican immigrants, and some immigrants moved to areas of the country where they were surrounded with Anglos. Also, Sánchez reminds us that “conflict and consensus existed within each family” (p. 131); while the individuals might “compromise” (p. 131) for the good of the family, outsiders could never be sure what these compromises entailed.

In the early 1900s, Mexican families, according to Sánchez (1993), were seen as “hierarchical, rigidly patriarchal” (p. 131), ruled by strict parents, and gender-role bound. In addition, these families were seen as being influenced by “peasant values” (p. 131), the traditions of Catholicism, and the opinions of community members. Sánchez suggests that there is more recent research to

counteract some of these stereotypes. For example, gender roles had to change as the males often had to leave the family land to work for money by “working for the railroad or in mines” (p. 132), or they immigrated to the United States to work. This left the wives at home to care for the children, raise the crops, sew for cash, and sell some of the crops at the market. Reese (2002), too, suggests that migration patterns changed the family structure for Mexicans; because the men migrated to the United States to work, women shouldered responsibility for children who now had an absentee father, and they often worked outside of the home. Thus, when these families migrated to the United States, Sánchez (1993) argues, they had already “engaged in years of creative adaptation to adversity” (p. 132). Once in America, gender roles again changed for women if “their husbands were unable to find employment, were temporarily laid off, or when family expenses became burdensome” (p. 143). In these cases, the women adapted and found jobs in order to help the family survive the economic crisis.

Reese (2002), using an Ecocultural theory that looks at “everyday routines constructed and sustained by families” (p. 36), studied immigrant families from central America and Mexico who were living in the United States and Mexican families in Mexico. She learned that family routines were “a compromise between the structural and ecological constraints that families must live with, on one hand, and the cultural values, understandings, models, and beliefs that guide and give meaning to people’s lives, on the other hand” (p. 37). Reese suggests the immigrant families, in other words, made choices in support of their children

based upon norms of the culture in the United States, the home country, or neither. In the United States, for example, the immigrant families supervised their children more intently than the families in Mexico because they were concerned with their safety. At the same time, parents living in Mexico allowed their children more freedom to come and go as they pleased because they were not concerned about the safety issues.

The Chicano family today is still misunderstood or at the very least denoted in the stereotypical fashion of the past. Sánchez (1993) suggests some researchers view these families as we have viewed other immigrant families, namely “father dominated but mother centered” (p. 146); other researchers “place emphasis on the mother-centeredness of the Chicano family” (p. 146), and still other researchers pay particular attention to the dominance of the male in the family.

Sánchez (1993) recognizes that there are varying views on the positive and negative aspects of prioritizing the family. However, he suggests that despite these differing views, many would “agree that Mexicans are familistic in orientation” (p. 149). On the positive side, Sánchez believes the emphasis that the immigrants placed on their families could account for their ability to prosper or at least survive when they encountered a lack of employment, discrimination, and/or a society that was not welcoming. On the negative side, he argues that some might place blame on the family for Americans of Mexican descent not being very political, not being concerned about the greater good of society, not

fostering the development of independence in family members, and not searching for higher paying jobs because they are willing to take low-paid jobs in order to provide for the family.

Reese (2002) found that the immigrant families, most of them from Mexico, and the Mexican families shared a common cultural bond about their children's schooling. They broke with the traditional view of schooling (i.e., no need for more than an elementary education) with which they were raised. They saw "formal education as a means of social and job mobility" (p. 41). Thus, they tried to "assist with schoolwork to the extent that they could" (p. 41).

Academic Challenges

In America, we are regularly hearing about the increase in the Hispanic population and how this trend is predicted to continue. In fact, 12.6% of the population in the year 2000 was Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau: Census 2000 Projections, 2004, p. 1). In addition, projections show that the Hispanic population will constitute 24.4% of the population by the year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau: Census 2000 Projections, 2004, p. 1). Many of the Hispanics who reside in the United States are of school age. Statistics reveal that 35% of the Hispanic population is under the age of 18 (U.S. Census Bureau: Minority Links Tool, n.d., p.5). Logically, this means that many of our schools are beginning to see that Hispanics comprise an increasingly larger portion of their student body. While the numbers of Hispanic students are growing in the schools, the schools are reporting alarming rates of failure of one kind or other for these students (Horn,

2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2003) Therefore, there is currently an abundance of researchers who choose to investigate educational topics as they relate to the Hispanic population in our public schools.

Many feel that our school systems are underserving this population, and the evidence of our poor service is found in virtually every aspect of the educational system. Hispanic students are less successful on standardized tests than their Anglo counterparts (Horn, 2003). For example, the average 2001-2002 SAT-Verbal (Scholastic Assessment Test) score for Hispanic students (Latino, Mexican American, and Puerto Rican) is 448, the second lowest average among the groups disaggregated (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 154); African-American students have the lowest scores. Furthermore, Hispanics average 79 fewer points than their Anglo peers on the SAT-Verbal (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 154). While the scores for the SAT-Math are more promising, Hispanic students still average 76 fewer points than their Anglo counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 154). In addition, Hispanic students experience more non-promotions than their Anglo peers (Horn, 2003).

In 2001, Hispanics had the highest high school dropout rate (27%) of the three comparison groups (White, non-Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; and Hispanic) in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 132). Their dropout rate was almost 3.7 times higher than the rate for Anglo students (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 132). This phenomenon occurs in the southern state where the participants of this study reside as well. During the

1999-2000 school year, 10.9% of the 9th through 12th grade Hispanic students dropped out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 129).

Furthermore, Anglo students were 7.6 times more likely to enroll in college as their Hispanic peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 222). According to the U.S. Census Bureau: Census 2000 EEO Data Tool (n.d.), only 7% of the Hispanic population has earned a bachelor's degree. However, Hispanic women are slightly more successful achieving this degree than the men as 8% of Hispanic women and only 6% of Hispanic men have achieved this degree. On the other hand, Hispanic women are not as successful as their Anglo peers; 19% of Anglo females hold a bachelor's degree. In Mexico, in the year 2000, 6.3% of the female population had completed post-secondary education (The World Bank, Educational Attainment of the Female Population Age 25 and Older, Latin America and the Caribbean, 2002, p. 18). Some might see this statistic and argue that it shows that Hispanics still fare better in the United States than they would in their home countries, but one needs to remember that the Hispanic category contains members of groups from countries other than Mexico where the statistics are much more promising. For example, in Puerto Rico, 26.2% of the female population 25 years and older has completed a post-secondary education (The World Bank, Educational Attainment of the Female Population Age 25 and Older, Latin America and the Caribbean, 2002, para. 23), and in Costa Rica, 11.8 % of the female population has completed a post-secondary education (The World

Bank, Educational Attainment of the Female Population Age 25 and Older, Latin America and the Carribean, 2002, para. 8).

The fact that Hispanics are shown to meet with better academic success in their native countries than they do in the United States may support Ogbu's (2004) notion that "oppressed minorities" (p. 3) develop a "collective identity" (p. 3) because of the "status problems" (p. 4) they have experienced. They "respond to status problems" (Ogbu, 2004, p. 4) with an effort to foster their "collective identity" (p. 3). Sometime, this means that the oppressed group forms an "oppositional collective identity" (Ogbu, 2004, p. 17). In other words, this group will "label and avoid some attitudes and behaviors as "White"" (p. 18). Ogbu stresses the idea that there are, in his theory, at least five means by which minorities operate within this "oppositional collective identity" (p. 17), and only one response has its respondents "explicitly opposed to adopting White attitudes, behaviors and speech" (p. 28). These respondents rarely "reject good grades" (p. 28); instead, they "reject" (p. 28) "the attitudes and behaviors conducive to making good grades" (p. 28). This rejection could be a cause of the lower success rates for Hispanic students in the academic arena they encounter in the United States.

Perhaps this trend in our educational system has prompted the plethora of research that has been trying to determine why Hispanic students are less academically successful in the public schools than many of their Anglo and ethnic peers. Qualitative and quantitative researchers in a variety of studies have offered

possible reasons for the staggering evidence that Hispanics are one of the least successful minorities in the United States.

Aspirations and Expectations Affecting Hispanic Youth

I begin this foray into the literature with a review of aspirations, defined as *hoped for achievements* by Goldenberg et al. (2001), and expectations, or the *achievement that is “realistically expected”* (Goldenberg et al., 2001, p. 548). I look at expectations and aspirations of parents and teachers and the ways in which these two groups of significant others may influence the aspirations and expectations of the students. I also examine the aspirations and expectations of the students.

Parental Expectations and Aspirations

Laden (2001) reports that there is a myth that Hispanic parents have lower aspirations for their children than Anglo parents. In other words, she suggests that some people believe “that Hispanic parents neither encourage their children to go to college nor support their going if they choose to do so” (p. 81). Laden argues that this myth is dispelled by research. Hispanic parents are no less likely to expect their children to attain a high school and even a college education than their Anglo counterparts (So, 1986/1987). In fact, research documents numerous accounts of Hispanic parents who show high levels of aspirations and expectations for their children. Of the 612 Hispanic parents surveyed in the So (1986/1987) study, 57% wanted their children to complete 4 or more years of college (p. 50). This percentage is actually higher than the percentage for White

parents; 54% of the White parents surveyed wanted their children to complete 4 or more years of college (So, p. 50). In addition, the educational aspirations the parents held for their children exceeded the educational achievements of the parents' themselves; at least 61% of these students came from families where one or both parents had achieved a high school education or less (So, p. 49). The Mexican-American parents, surveyed each year as their children passed from one grade to the next in elementary school in the Goldenberg et al. (2001) study, did want their children to attempt a college education. Once again, these parents had aspirations and expectations for their children's education that exceeded their own educational attainment levels; the most educated parent in this study had 1 year of college, but the aggregate mean of education was only slightly over 7 years of formal schooling (p. 553). While there was some fluctuation in aspirations over the course of 7 years, these aspirations remained high from kindergarten (92.6% of parents wanting their children to attend college and/or finish a college education) to 6th grade (90.8% of the parents wanting their children to attend college or finish a college education) (p. 559). In addition, most of the parents of the "academically talented" (Duran & Weffer, 1992, p. 170) Mexican-American students in the Duran and Weffer study "wanted their children to finish high school and continue with college" (p. 179). Furthermore, high parental aspirations were prevalent enough that these aspirations were acknowledged by many Hispanic students. In the Coppock (1995) study, at least 95% of the 251 Mexican-American respondents stated that their parents desired at least a high

school diploma for their children (p. 17). When Cheng and Starks (2002) looked at the 17,001 respondents in the 1990 National Educational Longitudinal Study, they found that the minority (including Hispanic) students perceived that their parents had higher aspirations for them than the White students had perceived from their parents.

Research seems to suggest that it is improbable that lowered parental expectations, even if they did exist, could be directly connected to the lowered aspirations and expectations of Hispanic students. Somers, Cofer, and VanderPutten (2002) found neither parental education level nor parental influence was a strong influence on the child's eventual enrollment in college, and this effect was apparent across racial/ethnic categories. As Goldenberg et al. (2001) followed 81 Latino children from kindergarten through middle school, they found that parental expectations and aspirations, while correlated to school performance, were not necessarily in an obvious causal relationship. In other words, parental aspirations (what the parents would like for their children to achieve) and parental expectations (what the parents think their children can realistically achieve) may influence a student's performance, but it is also possible that student performance influences the parental aspirations and expectations.

Teacher Expectations and Aspirations

If low parental expectations and aspirations are not shown to create low student expectations and aspirations, perhaps teachers have low aspirations for Hispanic students, and this leads to lowered aspirations and expectations from the

students themselves. There is some support for the idea that teachers may have lowered expectations for Hispanic students, and there is also some support for the idea that the lowered teacher expectations begets lowered student expectations. For instance, Cheng and Stark's (2002) study shows that Hispanic students in the sample of 17,001 students from 1990 follow-up study of the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) perceived that their teachers had lower aspirations (the hoped-for achievements) for them than the perceptions that were identified by the Asian-American, African-American and White students. However, Cheng and Starks found that the minority (including Hispanic) students' perceived teacher aspirations were actually higher than the aspirations perceived by White students once they "[controlled] for students' school performance and family backgrounds" (p. 322).

How might students perceive low teacher expectations? It would seem that a student's placement within the tracking system could influence how a student views the expectations of the teachers in the school. In other words, if students are placed in low tracks, they will believe that their teachers have low expectations for them. Braddock and Dawkins (1993) suggest that tracking is the placing of children in homogenous or ability-grouped classes and/or program tracks, based upon some compilation of past academic achievement. They find that the tracking of students is linked to the aspirations of the students who are placed in the different tracks.

In their use of the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), Braddock and Dawkins (1993) found that minorities were more likely to be placed in the lower level tracks than are their White counterparts. This was a major concern to them since they found that the 8th grade students in the lower tracks had lower aspirations than the students who were in the higher tracks. In other words, they were less likely to aspire to the college preparatory track in high school. Since this study is longitudinal, Braddock and Dawkins were able to look for links between aspirations and tracking placement. They found that aspirations follow the tracking placement. In other words, the students who were in the lower classes in eighth-grade were less likely to be enrolled in the college-preparatory track in tenth grade. This allowed Braddock and Dawkins to conclude “that ability grouping in the middle grades serves to depress students’ educational aspirations” (p. 335).

While some could argue that perceptions of expectations are not as important as the actual expectations, perceptions of the teachers’ expectations have been shown to cause students to have lowered expectations of themselves. In the Davison Avilés, Guerrero, Howarth, and Thomas (1999) study, 72 Chicano/Latino students talked about the reasons they dropped out of school. Students who felt as if the teachers did not expect them to be able to succeed suggested they began to believe this to be true and later fulfilled these low teacher expectations.

Student Aspirations and Expectations

Two more research teams, Cheng and Starks (2002) and Kao and Tienda (1998), examined the data from NELS, and the results may provide additional support for the theory that Hispanic students have lower expectations and/or lower aspirations than White students. Cheng and Starks (2002) found that Hispanic students had “lower educational expectations than white students with comparable SES [socio-economic status] backgrounds, school performance, and significant others’ support” (p. 321). Kao and Tienda (1998) established that the educational aspirations of Hispanic females took a downward turn that was not experienced by White, Asian, and African-American students when the students made the transition from the junior high school level to the high school level. Of the Hispanic female students surveyed in the eighth grade, approximately 14% felt they would not complete high school or would complete high school but not progress to college (Kao & Tienda, 1998, p. 362). This percentage of students who did not expect to graduate from high school or continue to college showed an increase when the students were again surveyed in the tenth grade. At the same time, the survey results for the other minority youths and the White youths did not show this fluctuation.

However, these results may not provide support for the idea that Hispanics have different or lower aspirations than their counterparts. Kao and Tienda (1998) consistently refer to the aspirations of the students in the NELS, but when they provide support for the downward turn in aspirations, they show that the

“Hispanic girls reported that they *expected* [emphasis added] to finish high school or less” (Kao & Tienda, 1998, p. 364). If aspirations are thought to be what one hopes to achieve (Goldenberg et al., 2001) and expectations are what one can realistically expect to achieve (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Goldenberg et al., 2001), then Kao and Tienda (1998) were really showing that the Hispanic females experience a lessening of their expectations and not necessarily their aspirations. Perhaps, their aspirations are high, but by their sophomore year, they have become aware of circumstances in their lives that may interfere with their ability to actually attend college. While it may seem to some readers that this is purely a semantic complaint that is insignificant if lower expectations or lower aspirations produce lower success, this semantic difference is important. If Hispanic students have high aspirations but do not have high expectations, then educators and researchers may need to review this discrepancy and find the reasons why there is a gap between what one hopes to achieve and what one expects to achieve.

These results, taken by themselves, do appear to provide some support for the popular consensus that Hispanic youth do not have the same level of aspirations and expectations as the Anglo youth. However, one could argue that different aspirations and expectations cannot always be equated with inferior aspirations and expectations. In other words, the Hispanic student’s expectations and aspirations are no less motivating and no less valuable than the Anglo’s expectations, solely based upon the fact that they may be different from the Anglo student. The three studies (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Goldenberg, et al., 2001; Kao

& Tienda, 1998) all judge aspirations and expectations based upon the students' educational plans. Perhaps, these studies judged aspirations and expectations from an Anglo perspective and did not consider that Hispanic youth may have valuable and motivating aspirations and expectations that do not fit into an Anglo category. In other words, aspiring to enroll in a college-preparatory track, as was the measurement device in the Braddock and Dawkins (1993) study, appears to be a typical Anglo measure of a student's aspirations. A student does not have to aspire to earn a college degree, as measured in the Cheng and Starks (2002) and the Kao and Tienda (1998) study, in order to hold high aspirations.

When I refer to Anglo perspective here, I really mean middle or upper class Anglo perspective. For example, one needs to look at the scales that are used to determine the manner in which aspirations are measured. For instance, is a student who chooses a stereotypical female career (such as nursing and teaching) seen as having lower aspirations than a student who selects a more stereotypical male career (such as accounting or engineering)? If this is the case, then a Latina's career choices may make her appear to have lower aspirations than her Anglo counterparts.

There is some evidence to support the notion that women will aspire to have different careers than men. In fact, evidence suggests that gender is "one of the most powerful and robust determinants of academic major" (Simpson, 2001, p. 78). Essentially, Simpson (2001) found female respondents chose health degrees five times more often than male students, and they chose public service

majors four times more often than they chose technical degrees. Perhaps females saw more value in the service profession as was suggested by Eccles (1986), and they viewed these occupations as being as worthy as the stereotypical male occupations. In other words, the female students in the study conducted by Eccles (1986) were not choosing nursing or teaching in the elementary school over engineering or teaching in a secondary school because they felt that the stereotypical female occupations were embedded with different or lower expectancies or values. Instead, the young women indicated that occupations in both stereotypical male and stereotypical female areas required a similar amount of effort and/or ability to meet with success. In addition, Eccles (1986) suggests that the women in her study linked effort to be expended with the occupations that they felt were important. Since the women in her study did rate the occupation of motherhood as extremely important, Eccles suggests that these women would not want to engage in occupations that would interfere with successful mothering.

House (1999) suggests that students may be motivated to seek a college degree, certain types of degrees, employment, or certain types of employment for three main reasons. Using the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey, developed by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program in 1995, House suggests that these aspirations can be viewed from a three-prong framework. A student's aspirations may be fueled by the desire to be recognized by colleagues as an expert in his/her field. Second, one's aspirations may be driven by financial desires. In other words, a student may develop certain

aspirations because he/she wants to be a successful businessperson and/or wishes to have great financial success. Finally, one may develop aspirations because of a desire to help society. In other words, this individual chooses college and career goals because he/she would like to better society. This individual might be concerned about the environment, civil rights, and/or politics.

Based upon this three-prong framework, Hispanic youth who aspire to “become somebody” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995, p. 124) have aspirations that do not fit neatly into any of House’s (1999) categories. Once educational success is met, the students of Mexican heritage in the Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) believe they will be able to help their parents.

Becoming someone appears to have little to do with being recognized as an expert, as suggested in the first prong of House’s (1999) framework, or in helping society, as suggested by the third prong of the framework. Seeking financial success, the second prong, seems to be secondary to what the financial success can do – help their parents who have made sacrifices for them. Rosas and Hamrick (2002) label this aspiration “reciprocity” (p. 63) since the students in their study wanted to continue their education because they recognized the sacrifices that were made for them, and they wanted to achieve academic success because they believed their families operated under a framework of “mutual, shared obligations” (p. 63). In other words, they need to achieve, so they can repay their families by helping the next set of family members. Following House’s (1999) categories, the Hispanic youth in the Rosas and Hamrick (2002) study and in the Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-

Orozco (1995) study have aspirations and expectations that are different from the students who want to attend college in order to get rich or even to better society; thus, it may be difficult for people who follow House's (1999) ideas to neatly label the level or rate the level of aspirations these youths exhibit.

Even if we review aspirations from a more Anglo reference, the evidence should leave the reader unconvinced that Hispanics have aspirations that are markedly different from Anglo students. Laden (2001) suggests that people in our society believe that Hispanics do not desire a college education, and Laden believes this is just a myth. This popular myth is dispelled in several studies. In Coppock's (1995) study, only 5% of her high school respondents aspire to hold jobs in manual labor fields (p. 17). Coppock (1995) finds that 52% of her 251 Mexican-American respondents aspire to professional jobs, which would require a college education, and another 29% aspire to hold jobs in law enforcement or business, which may or may not require a college degree (p. 17). For the immigrant Mexican youth, the Mexican youth, and the Mexican-American youth, and the Anglo youth in the Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) study, there is the "conviction that school [was] the key to a good life and a good future" (p. 158).

Other Possible Factors Affecting Hispanic Youth

Maybe lower expectations and/or aspirations can influence academic success for Hispanics, and maybe they do not. However, reaching such a conclusion is not possible based upon the research outlined here. While

aspirations and expectations have been studied to help educators better understand Hispanic students, many researchers and theorists have attempted to link a variety of external factors to the Hispanics' lack of success in school. For example, Duran and Weffer (1992) look at family values, work status, previous academic experiences, and length of time in the United States or immigrant background to see if these external factors are related to a Hispanic student's success. In addition, many internal factors have been studied in order to determine if and how these factors influence a Hispanic student's chances for success. For example, there is a body of research that has examined the possible connections between a student's motivation and/or effort to complete school tasks and success (Duran & Weffer, 1992), a student's attendance rates and his/her academic success (Duran & Weffer, 1992), a student's level of test anxiety and his/her ethnicity (Willig, Harnisch, Hill, & Maehr, 1983), and a student's perception of his or her specific academic abilities and his/her actual performance (Bong, 1999).

These studies produce varied and often contradictory results, and often these results are different for various subgroups within the Hispanic population. For example, Duran and Weffer (1992) find that the longer students are in the United States, the greater the chance for absenteeism (or oppositional behavior) they display. This longitudinal study followed Mexican-American students who were in the highest quadrant of a high school that was 97% Hispanic. Results showed that there was a positive direct effect of .132 ($p < .05$ for all effects) with regard to absenteeism (p. 174); essentially, "absenteeism increased with length of

residence” (p. 175). Duran and Weffer (1992) also found that the scores for several subsets of the ACT were negatively impacted by employment while in high school. In fact, the direct impact ranges from $-.864$ ($p < .05$) on the mathematics subtest to -1.835 ($p < .05$) on the subtest that looked at the natural sciences (p. 176). Willig et al. (1983) found “test anxiety is related to important debilitating effects” (p. 393), and these negative effects were more of a factor for Hispanic students than for White or Black students. Willig et al. were able to draw the conclusion that test anxiety was more of a problem for Hispanic than for White or Black students after analyzing the data gathered from several questionnaires administered to “397 fourth to eighth graders” (p. 388) and correlating these results to the students’ performance on standardized tests. “The Hispanic children demonstrated higher test anxiety than other groups as well as a greater tendency to attribute failure to lack of ability but not to task difficulty” (Willig et al., 1983, p. 405).

A Possible Model to Explain Dropping Out

There has been a paucity of research to determine how these internal and external factors intersect to promote school success or failure. Finn (1989) outlines the “frustration-self-esteem model” (p. 119), a “common paradigm” (p. 119), that is used to explain why students have problems or experience failure in school. Researchers who believe in the frustration-self-esteem model believe that students may become frustrated or embarrassed due to poor performance in school. Frustration and embarrassment can lead to a poor self-image, and this can

lead to oppositional behavior. Oppositional behavior, according to Finn (1989), can lead to further academic problems. Thus, the cycle is repeated, and dropping out of school is the result.

Do Hispanics, especially females of Mexican descent, encounter situations, events, and circumstances that contribute to poor school performance, frustration, and a low-self-esteem? While there may not be a broad spectrum of research that directly connects specific happenings to the “frustration-self-esteem model” (p. 119) described by Finn (1989), there is a plethora of example situations, events, and circumstances that I believe can be connected to the model because they may contribute to poor school performance, frustration, and low self-esteem.

Frustrations from English Instruction

Academic problems and frustration with school-related tasks could stem from the English instruction that many of the Hispanic students receive. Evidence suggests that current English as a Second Language (ESL) practices could be debilitating for an ESL student’s self-esteem because the practices are not geared to the student’s best interests.

Texts

In many instances, students may use textbooks in ESL classes that predispose them to failure because they are not designed well. According to Valdes (2001), students may get fragmented instruction because many of the publishing companies publish the ESL books in a series where an individual

component (i.e., listening, reading, writing, or speaking) of the communicative process is the focus of the text. Thus, Valdes believes it is entirely possible that students will be enrolled in a school system that has chosen to purchase and utilize a text that only addresses one component (i.e., speaking) of the communicative process. Therefore, it is very likely that students may develop some skills in one area of English communication without having many opportunities to develop skills in the other necessary components of communication. If ESL students do receive fragmented instruction, then this could be problematic for their academic progress since research showed that success in high school courses that were reading-dependent was influenced by reading preparation prior to high school for Mexican-American students (Duran & Weffer, 1992). On the ACT subtests in English, Natural Sciences, and Social Studies, the resulting scores were positively impacted by the scores earned on the 9th grades standardized tests that were given in the fall of that year (Duran & Weffer, 1992, p. 174). In other words, higher standardized test scores in the beginning of the 9th grade year were correlated with the higher scores on the ACT subtests previously mentioned, when these tests were taken “in the fall of [the] students’ senior year” (p. 171). Since the first set of tests was given when students had not been in high school for many months, I assume that the scores here were impacted by the education received prior to high school attendance. Thus, this educational foundation in the middle school years seems to produce higher scores on the ACT in the later high school years.

A second problem with these texts, according to Valdes (2001), is that no ESL texts used in American public schools include any other language than English, and this is quite different for students learning a world language in American schools. In other words, students are using texts that do not provide glossaries, helpful hints about learning strategies that could be utilized to learn, or annotations that might explain concepts in their native languages in order to facilitate the learning process. If these books contained the aids that are often provided for the American students studying a world language, then the ESL student, Valdes (2001) believes, may not experience as many academic difficulties; thus, embarrassment and frustration could be lessened, and self-esteem might improve.

Content

Poorly designed textbooks may be the least of the frustrating encounters with ESL instruction; there is a good possibility that the instruction and content found in many typical ESL classes could be a conduit for embarrassment and frustration for ESL students because this instruction is often boring (Valdes, 1998, 2001), unrelated to real life tasks (Harklau, 2001), and defeating. Valdes (1998, 2001) suggests that many of the repetitive tasks (i.e., memorization of vocabulary and completing worksheets that focus on the basics of grammar) are a common part of ESL instruction in the public schools. For instance, Valdes (1998) finds that instruction offered to several Hispanic teenagers with what she “call[s] ‘zero’ English” (p. 4) appears to focus on forms and vocabulary. According to

Valdes (2001), this type of instruction, coupled with a typical text-driven curriculum, suggests that teachers may be more interested in making their way through the material than actually discovering what their students need to learn. This, in turn, perpetuates the idea that if students do not learn, they are somehow deficient.

Requiring ESL students in college to learn essay writing at the beginning of their college careers is an example of content that is unrelated to students' real life experiences; in other words, students are often struggling to learn something that they will typically not need to know for several years. Harklau (2001) questions the underlying reasons ESL teachers in college teach essay writing. She suggests that when students learn essay writing in high school ESL classes, there is some actual benefit. They will need to use this type of writing experience in their other classes. Thus, what is taught is directly correlated to what they will need in their regular classes. However, Harklau believes undergraduate college students rarely need such skills in their first 2 years of their education, so Harklau suggests these students may be better served if college ESL instructors provided instruction that matched the skills the students would need for credit courses.

Delivery Style

Even if a school system or college selects appropriate texts and teaches beneficial content, there is still the delivery style of the teacher and the context of the program that may prove problematic for the ESL students. Delivery style may greatly affect the participation of the class members. Delivery style of English

instruction can vary by programs (i.e., immersion, bilingual, ESL) and by the individual teacher. If students are in isolated classes or isolated programs, Olsen (2000) and Valdes (2001) suggest that they lose opportunities to socialize with native speakers of English; thus, they lose the opportunity to engage in conversations with people who already speak the language.

Possible frustrations from program type. The lack of opportunity to speak English in authentic situations can lead to several losses. First, Valdes (2001) suggests that students lose the opportunities they need to develop their English skills. In fact, she found that students in the sheltered and the ESL classes in her study were exposed to worksheets that required little comprehensible work with English skills. In addition, they were exposed to simplified English input from the instructors, and they also heard the stilted English of their ESL peers. In other words, the very programs that are meant to help the ESL students are actually depriving them of the specific skills that the programs are intended to provide.

Without well-developed English skills, students could believe themselves to be “different” or “inferior”(Mora, 2000, p. 210) once the ESL students are placed into the mainstream educational program. In addition, feelings of inferiority may be further exacerbated once the ESL students are mainstreamed into their base schools because their primary education will probably be delivered by “monolingual mainstream teachers who may lack adequate preparation” to teach the ESL students (Mora, 2000, p. 213). In other words, they may encounter teachers who use pedagogical techniques that are designed for native English-

speaking Anglo students, and these techniques may not match the needs of the ESL learners. For example, the Asian ESL students in Harklau's (1994a) study were enrolled in classes that are primarily teacher-driven, where the teachers speak quickly and either do not know how to adjust their output for the ESL students or are unwilling to adjust. Thus, the students are often silenced.

In an immersion program where the students and the instructors must speak English, Moses (2000) argues, the ESL student will not be able to maintain academic achievement in the subject areas because the students cannot possibly understand the content when it is delivered by an instructor speaking English to students who have limited or no knowledge of the English language. Mora (2000) adds that students in one-year immersion programs rarely develop sufficient English skills that will foster their ability to complete the work in the content area classes. Flores (2001) tells a story of her educational experience in a "sink or swim" (Flores & Murillo, 2001, p. 186) immersion class. Despite being a top student in Mexico, she was unable to keep up with her core academic subjects because of her limited English proficiency (LEP) status. This lack of academic achievement, according to Moses (2000), invariably leads the student to have a poor sense of her own worth, and dropping out of school becomes more likely. Moses appears to support the existence of a frustration-self-esteem model for academic failure.

Possible frustrations resulting from teacher delivery style. When an instructor makes choices about the manner in which he or she will pace his or her instruction or about the type of feedback he or she will provide on writing assignments, these choices have ramifications that can frustrate and embarrass students who are learning the English language. For example, Losey (1995) finds that the Mexican-American women in her study were silenced during the fast-paced total group interactions. Losey suggests that the silence is probably an interaction of their dual minority status, their “low self-esteem or negative self-perceptions” (Losey, 1995, p. 655), and the delivery style that facilitates interruptions of turn-taking and a fast-paced interaction sequence.

ESL students may also experience defeat when they read the feedback on their writing assignments. This may be more likely to happen if the ESL students’ instructors function from within an assimilationist stance. In other words, these instructors will expect the student’s work to “blend into the mainstream” (Severino, 1993 , p. 187). Urrieta and Quach (2000) view the use of Standard English as a benchmark as an illustration of the linguistic imposition that is placed upon the non-native speaker of English. According to Severino (1993), this benchmark would mean that ESL students would probably receive a great deal of negative feedback on their paper because they might use non-standard phrases, unsophisticated vocabulary, and different organizational patterns. In other words, the instructor would devalue the work because it did not read as if it were written by a competent native speaker.

ESL students may find that mechanical and organizational differences are not the only problem areas noted on their work; instructors may not appreciate the examples that are provided by the immigrant students because they do not match the life experiences of the educators. After conducting numerous case studies with a variety of students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, Nieto (1992) suggests minority, ELL students are often educated with a curriculum that makes immigration experiences invisible. In essence, these students are taught as if their “lived experiences” (Nieto, 1992, p. xxv) are irrelevant; thus, what they do learn is “an alien and imposed reality” (Nieto, 1992, p. xxv). Again, this feeling of invisibility could lead to frustration.

Frustrations Resulting from Learning English and Losing the Native Language

Even in the event that school system and instructors choose good texts, create a curriculum that matches students’ needs, and deliver content in a meaningful and helpful manner, there is still a larger problem at hand. There is evidence to suggest that learning English in America may result in traumatic experiences for many ESL students; learning English is often traumatic because it causes individuals to lose all or part of their competence with their native languages. When ESL students suffer this loss, the experience could lead to frustration, embarrassment, lower self-esteem, and oppositional behavior.

Olsen (2000) suggests that when immigrants learn to speak English, there is much more at work than simply learning the language. She believes that this accomplishment is equated with becoming an American for many immigrants, but

that in the process of acquiring the language, they often lose many more important aspects of themselves. They lose much of their first language if they do not continue to develop their language skills in their heritage language. Perhaps equally important, these students often learn that English is their only protection against being silenced in classrooms across the United States when teachers, administrators, peers, and community members are reluctant to recognize the value of languages other than English. In essence, immigrant students learn English in a subtractive, not an additive, manner. In other words, they learn that “the price of admission” (Olsen, 2000, p.198) to America and better opportunities is the loss of one’s first language since the old and the new languages are not going to be allowed to exist side-by-side in America.

Once students gain admission into mainstream society by abandoning their native tongues, they are confronted by a series of losses that could further damage their self-images. For example, Olsen (2000) and Moses (2000) agree that the forced preference for English over the native tongue leads the English-speaking students who have all but abandoned their native languages unable to make the connection with extended family members because they no longer speak the first language well-enough to communicate, and the extended family members do not speak English at all or well enough to engage in meaningful communication with them. This inability to communicate in the native tongue can lead to isolation from family members (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995) and to the loss of an important connection to the community (Moses, 2000).

The idea that one must abandon one's first language in order to be accepted into mainstream society could influence the students' feelings about their native languages. In fact, Moses (2000) suggests students often express the idea that they are ashamed of their heritage language. If this embarrassment occurs, Moses wonders if the students are equally embarrassed by their parents who still speak the heritage language. The embarrassment could carry over into the feelings about the family. For example, Walqui (2000) suggests that some immigrant students would rather not have their parents attend school functions because they are worried their parents' behavior and speech will not fit into the mainstream idea of appropriateness and will embarrass them. In such cases, further isolation from family members could occur, and isolation from potentially supportive people is not good for a student's self-esteem.

It appears a vicious cycle of loss has been set into motion, and it would seem that this cycle can not help but impair the construction of a positive identity for the individual. Non-native speakers of English feel they must learn English to succeed in American society. This leads them to abandon their native tongues. In turn, they lose their connection to the people who can support them and nourish their developing identities because they can no longer communicate with them or because they push them away, so they will not cause them embarrassment. Perhaps, this is the cycle that leads to the development of a transmutational identity, "the ever-changing, complex process of self-definition and the auto-naming of the self," filled with "self-rejection and self-hate or embarrassment"

(Urrieta & Quach, 2000, p. 32).

It appears that the loss of identity that Moses (2000) discusses is inevitable in such circumstances. The students' authentic identities, according to Moses (2000), are lost because students are forced to select identities that are not true to their cultural heritage if they wish "to attain success as defined by mainstream culture" (Moses, 2000, p. 335). Once these individuals have lost their true or authentic identities, Moses (2000) believes the students in turn lose a central element in their ability to be self-determining. In other words, students are placed in the untenable position of living in a social context which disables the students' ability to make "meaningful choices" for their lives and how they wish for those lives to proceed (Moses, 2000, p. 335). In essence, frustration caused by unauthentic identities leads individuals to an inability to make choices that are "meaningful" (Moses, 2000, p. 335) when they are confronted with the need to decide if they should persist in or abandon their academic endeavors.

Frustrations from High-Stakes Tests

One of the primary vehicles of frustration in schools today are the high stakes tests that are used to determine everything from promotion to the next reading or math level, promotion to the next grade level, graduation from high school, entrance to college to graduation from college. With an increased call for accountability and with the onset of widespread school reforms, high-stake testing is now a way of life for most educational systems. Thus, preparing for tests, worrying about the results, taking exams, and relearning material are all aspects of

high-stakes testing that most students in the U.S. school systems will face at some point in their lives. Often, they will face these high-stakes tests multiple times in their school careers. These repetitious and stressful high-stakes tests have a tremendous potential to provide embarrassment for all students, but minority students experience the highest levels of failure on these tests (Horn, 2003) and, therefore, are at high risk to feel defeated by such tests.

Tests for Grade Promotion or Retention

Standardized tests that are used to determine promotions to the next grade are the epitome of high stakes tests, and most minorities are being negatively impacted at a much higher rate than Anglo students. Horn (2003) found in North Carolina that students in various grades were not promoted to the next grade-level without passing a standardized test. While students were afforded opportunities to take a retest or get a waiver from the principal, minority students did not fare as well as their Anglo counterparts. Anglo and Asian students in the 5th grade were promoted to the 6th grade at a rate four times that of Hispanics and African-American students (p. 37).

In many instances, English-language learners are tested with standardized tests written in English (Mora, 2000). How valid is the decision to require the student to repeat a grade if this is the case? Mora (2000) questions the validity of using such standardized tests with LEP students. She argues that the reading comprehension tests are normed on native English speakers, so they are not appropriate measures of “literacy growth” for non-native speakers since the tests

are designed with “fully proficient native speakers” as the intended test takers (Mora, 2000, p. 213). In addition, she contends that the content area tests cannot possibly be accurate measures of content knowledge for non-native speakers of English since they are not proficient in the language that is used to ask the questions on the test. I have worked with students who are non-native speakers of English who miss questions on standardized reading tests because the tests make references to literary works that are assumed to be a part of most American students’ reading repertoire. Such tests must be frustrating for many ELL students; they may be frustrated by their inability to understand the test itself or their inability to communicate what they know because of their lack of English skills. In addition, they may be frustrated because they are being required to demonstrate mastery of one subject by making reference to content that is not part of their knowledge base.

Tests for Graduation

Many state school systems, including the southern state from which the participants hail, are using or are planning to use graduation exams. In fact, Vernon, Baytops, McMahan, Padden, and Walther-Thomas (2003) find that almost 50% of the states do use some type of high-stakes assessment in order for students to graduate from high school with a standard diploma (p. 8).

The participants in my study attend school in a state where high school students must pass graduation exams in the core areas (social studies, science,

English/language arts, writing, and math).⁴ These students do have the option to retake any tests that are failed, and study skills classes are offered to students who need to retake the tests. If they do not pass one or all of the tests, then they may graduate with a certificate, not a diploma.

According to the statistics for Ridgeview High School, which is the only high school within the Ridge City School System (a pseudonym) and the school from which I will draw my respondents, the disaggregated information demonstrates a disparity between the success rates of Anglo and Hispanic students. Less than 10% of the Anglo students fail one or more subject sections of the test⁵ while the Hispanic students are failing one or more sections at rates of 18% to 62%.⁶ Specifically, the Hispanic students earn their lowest pass rates in science with approximately 62% of the test takers failing the test.⁷ They have better success in English and math where they fail at the rates of 18% and 20%.⁸

Hispanics and ESL students' poor performance on high stakes graduation tests are alarming and are repeated in instance after instance. Horn's (2003) finds minority students (African-American, Hispanic, and LEP) are not passing the graduation tests at the same rate as are the majority students. For example, only 16% of the LEP students in Massachusetts have scored high enough on both

⁴ These data was retrieved from a website that was offered by the school council of the anonymous southern state in which the participants resided. Again, the complete citation is not given, nor will the reference appear in the reference list because the researcher protected the identity of the participants when she did not list the city in which they lived.

⁵ See number 4.

⁶ See number 4.

⁷ See number 4.

⁸ See number 4.

portions of the tests or retests to graduate (p. 35). While White students are passing both portions at a rate of 82%, Hispanic passing rates are at a low 41% (p. 35).

Once the students are enrolled in a public college within this southern state, they are again confronted with another high-stakes graduation test. In order to graduate with most of the two-year degrees or in order to take junior level classes in a four-year degree program, the students must pass a standardized test. This is a timed reading and writing test that is used statewide. ESL students must take the same test as the general student body; however, Ridge State College (RSC) and some other public colleges have chosen to allow extended time for these students. Like the high school graduation test, students may retake the test as many times as needed to pass; however, there are some stipulations in effect that may vary from college to college. At RSC, if a student does not pass one or both of the sections of the test, then he/she must enroll in a review class each time the test is attempted. Also, if the student earns more than 45 credit hours and does not pass the test, then the only class for which the student may enroll is the test review class.

The current pass rates for these graduation tests are not very promising for the Hispanic students in the public university system in the state in which these participants reside. For example, Hispanic students have some of the lowest passing rates of all the disaggregated groups; in the 2002 through 2003 school year, for example, only slightly more than 73 % of the students passed both

portions of the exam.⁹ In addition, they were almost 11 % less likely to pass both portions of the exam than their Anglo peers.¹⁰ The encouraging news is that Hispanics passing scores are showing a slight improvement from the previous school year; approximately 2 % more Hispanic students passed both portions in the 2002-2003 than passed in the 2001-2002 school year.¹¹

Test Biases

With all this talk about high-stakes standardized testing and its potentially detrimental effects, one might also want to consider the history of standardized testing and its uses. It should not be so surprising that LEP and other minority students usually underperform compared with White, middle and upper class students. After all, it appears that some of these tests were specifically designed to give the perception that minorities and ELL are inferior to White individuals. Flores and Murillo (2001) imply that intelligence testing gained popularity during the 1920s when there was a resurgence in anti-immigrant sentiment, and these tests were used to intentionally segregate and marginalize Mexican American students despite criticisms from experts. This is not the first time individuals have claimed that the covert purpose for the creation of a standardized test is to have justification for the classification of minorities as inferior. For example, Baker (1995) believes Ben Wood, the developer of the National Teacher's Exam (NTE),

⁹ The researcher gathered this data from reports released from the Office of Strategic Research & Analysis (OSRA). This office is part of the public university system for the anonymous southern state in which these students reside.

¹⁰ See number 9.

¹¹ See number 9.

intentionally marketed his test to the White administrators in the South by demonstrating how poorly the Black teachers scored on the test. This allowed the administrators to pay the Black teachers a lower salary than the White teachers.

Frustrations from Tracking

Tracking, the practice of placing students into classes or program tracks based upon some idea of their academic abilities (Braddock & Dawkins, 1993), is another example of an academic policy or procedure that could contribute to frustration and low self-esteem. According to Braddock and Dawkins (1993), academic abilities may be judged by standardized test scores, IQ scores, and achievement in previous classes, teacher judgments, or some compilation of these items. If this happens, say educators who support the usefulness of tracking, then student learning and student motivation will be at their optimal level because students will not be bored or frustrated by the learning tasks. In other words, proponents of tracking may believe students will benefit by homogenous grouping because “the instruction can be tailored to their particular educational need[s]” (Harklau, 1994b, p. 347).

Proponents of tracking may view it as a legitimate practice because our cultural notions in the United States focus on the individual (LeTendre, Hofer, & Shimizu, 2003). In other words, respondents in the LeTendre et al. (2003) study believed that equity in education is brought about by making sure that all individuals are getting their educational needs met. For many of the respondents in this study, ability grouping was one way that equity occurred because the faster

learners did not get held back by the slower learners, and the slower learners received the extra assistance they needed and did not become frustrated by work that is too difficult. If tracking works, as its proponents suggest it works, then it should help students avoid unnecessary frustration and lowered self-esteem.

Ability grouping and “streams” (LeTendre, et al., 2003, p. 50) are two forms of tracking; these methods can lead to embarrassment, frustration, lowered self-esteem, and the eventual oppositional behavior experienced by dropouts.

Grouping by Ability

Differentiation can take the form of ability grouping in the early elementary grades. For example, a child may find herself in the Redbirds reading group and the Blackbirds math group.

In the middle grades, ability grouping may take the form of ability-based classes. In other words, there could be five math classes in the 7th grade, and all of the students in one class are believed to be of the same basic ability level. Using the results from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 to access the patterns of tracking in the middle grades, Braddock and Dawkins (1993) find minority students (including African- American, Native-American, and Latino children) in the 8th grade are overrepresented in the lower track courses and underrepresented in the higher track courses. For example, Latino students are 2.07 times more likely to be in lower track English classes than their Anglo counterparts (p. 328). In addition, Latino students are 1.67 times more

likely to be taking the lower-level math courses than their Anglo counterparts (p. 328).

This practice in the middle grades “places constraints on the students’ high-school-to-college trajectory” (LeTendre et al., 2003, p. 58). In other words, math placement in the middle grades is shown to greatly restrict a student’s ability to enroll in college, and it also affects the student’s choice of a major in college (Braddock & Dawkins, 1993; Duran & Weffer, 1992; LeTendre et al., 2003; Noguera, 2001; Simpson, 2001). Noguera (2001) finds that tracking that begins with ninth grade math placement impacts the college choices of the students at Berkeley High School. If students fail to register for higher-level math courses in 9th grade, they will not have enough math credits for college admission. Noguera is especially concerned about these data because he found that more Latino and Black students are not registered for the needed math classes. Braddock and Dawkins (1993) follow the 8th grade students from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 to 10th grade when they were in the 1990 National Educational Longitudinal Study follow-up, and they find that “high school curricular program placement is strongly affected by middle grades ability-group placements” (Braddock & Dawkins, 1993, p. 333). Duran and Weffer (1992) found that “pre-high school achievement was strongly related to taking more advanced academic courses in math/science” (Duran & Weffer, 1992, p.173) in high school. Simpson (2001) found students from the High School and Beyond sample, regardless of race, who took more math and science classes in high

school, were more likely to choose technical majors such as engineering than they were to choose non-technical majors such as teaching.

I believe several separate esteem-destroying events could occur with this type of tracking. Because many people (such as the respondents in the LeTendre et al. (2003) study view the tracking placement in middle school as a choice influenced by “proactive” (LeTendre et al., 2003, p.66) parents, self-esteem issues arise. If students and/or parents are seen as the ultimate decision makers or the ultimate influences in the tracking process, then they are viewed as being responsible for any errors in judgment that are made in this process. Thus, if a student in the middle grades chooses a slower-paced math class in 7th grade and is unable to take upper level math classes in high school, then the student or his/her parents made a *dumb* decision that had huge ramifications. As a result, a student could doubt his/her own decision-making abilities or the decision-making abilities of his/her parents.

I would argue that there are documented incidents that illustrate the extreme difficulties that minority students and minority parents encounter when they are faced with important decisions about placement in particular ability-tracked classes. Even in schools where tracking has been removed, minority students and parents still have difficulties. Yonezawa, Wells, and Serna, (2002) found that access to information about choices differed across “the sociopolitical positions of [the] students” (p. 47) in many cases where detracking is taking place. In other words, White, middle-class or affluent parents often had more

access to information about alternative placements than did the minority or lower-class parents. In addition, Harklau (1994b) suggests that it would be rare for language minority students to be able to negotiate the current tracking system successfully because “most language minority students” (p. 359) will not be able to commandeer the “degree of sophistication about school practices and persistence [that] is necessary to overcome the inertia of the placement system” (p. 359). Without access to information, LeTendre et al. (2003) suggest students and their parents will find it virtually impossible to make an informed decision that would allow them to “foresee the impact that a seventh-grade math placement will have on course selection in the ninth through twelfth grades” (p. 64).

Grouping by Tracks

A third differentiation that may occur is a stream of courses that are offered to students, and I believe that this is the type of tracking that is at the center of the definition proposed by Braddock and Dawkins (1993). “*Streams*” (LeTendre, et al., 2003, p.50) are different programs of study that are offered in the same school; for example, a student in a high school can enter the college preparatory or vocational-technical preparatory track in the ninth grade.

Stream tracking is problematic for several reasons. According to Braddock and Dawkins’ (1993) use of the 1990 National Educational Longitudinal Study, Latino 10th grade students were 1.60 times more likely to be in the vocational track than their Anglo counterparts, and they were 23% less likely to be enrolled in the college preparatory or academic track than are their

Anglo counterparts (p. 333).

This overrepresentation of Latinos in the lower tracks is bothersome because there is some evidence to support the theory that different skills are taught in the different program tracks; thus, all students are not learning the same type of skills. For example, Braddock and Dawkins (1993) suggest high school students in vocational-technical preparatory (Vo-Tech) programs are taught skills that will help them move into jobs immediately upon graduation from high school. Harklau (1994a) found that students who are in the lower-track classes were more often exposed to “teacher-directed activities and individual seat work” (Harklau, 1994a, p. 250). Braddock and Dawkins (1993) found that students who were in the college preparatory program were taught the higher academic skills they would need in order to advance to higher education upon graduation from high school. Since Harklau’ (1994a) found higher-track classes with more “student-led activities” (p. 250) that may encourage more interactions, one might conclude that the content and the pedagogy may help to foster the higher academic skills needed to pursue an education after graduating from high school.

Is this a logical educational practice? Some might conclude that students who neither desire nor have the ability for a higher education are not overburdened with courses for which they lack any interest. In addition, educators may believe that tracking is a logical choice because they do not want students to perform poorly in classes that are too challenging. If educators support the frustration-self-esteem model, then they may very well believe they are saving

students from becoming frustrated and dropping out. However, what happens to the student who is placed in or chooses a vocational-technical preparatory track in the 9th grade but decides in the 11th or 12th grade that college really is an option and a desire? Will this student have the courses he/she needs to graduate and move onto college if a change in the program track is allowed? It should not be difficult for the reader to envision a twelfth grade student who thinks he or she will be able to change tracks now that he or she either has the means and/or the desire to attend college. I picture this student learning that he or she can change tracks, but he or she will not have completed enough of the college-bound courses in order to secure a diploma and/or attend college. A student in Walqui's (2000) study faced this dilemma after he had been encouraged by his social studies teacher to enroll in an institute of higher learning; however, he discovered he had actually been tracked into many low level classes (eight basic math classes and 18 English classes for example) that were not considered college-preparatory, and this tracking meant that he would not have the courses needed to attend college.

Perhaps, there will be a way for the student to actually make the transition to college-bound classes. Perhaps, this transition takes place in the senior year. Will this student even have the higher-level thinking skills that are needed to be successful in the college preparatory program and actual college classes? If, as Braddock and Dawkins (1993) and Harklau (1994a) suggest, different skills are taught to different tracks of students, then it is highly likely that the students who enter college-bound classes for the first time in 12th grade will not have the skills

they need to be successful; thus, the production of the frustration cycle is likely. If the student manages to change program tracks, succeeds in her high school classes, and gains admission to an institute of higher learning, will the student be able to immediately move into credit classes, or will the student need to make-up for deficiencies in her college-level abilities or deficiencies in the number of college placement classes taken by taking remedial English, reading, and/or math classes?

The participants in this study attended RSC, the local state college. According to the RSC 2004-2005 Catalog and Student Handbook, students may enroll in a “Limited Admission”¹² capacity if they did not take all the college preparatory classes that were designated as required courses in the local high school systems. However, they will need to take and pay for college-level courses that will compensate for these deficiencies. These courses do not count toward their degrees.

Frustrations from a Hostile School Environment

Students of Mexican descent may encounter a hostile school environment in the American school system. Finn (1989) suggests that proponents of the frustration-self-esteem model often attribute frustration, lowered self-esteem, and dropping out to “deficiencies in the school program” (p. 122), so Finn begins his cycle with “deficient school practices” (p. 122) and suggests these deficiencies

¹² The researcher gathered this data by reading page 33 of the handbook from the actual college where the participants enrolled. However, she has used a pseudonym to name the college catalog in order to protect the identity of the participants, so the name of the catalog will not appear in the reference list.

lead a student to perform poorly on academic tasks. Thus, the school environment is a major contributing component of a school program that must be examined for deficiencies that may adversely affect the student of Mexican descent and contribute to the frustration cycle that leads to unsuccessful academic progress.

A foray into the literature that describes the school environments of high school and college, appears to reveal some contradictory evidence about the state of these environments, how students feel about the environments, and how these perceptions of the school environment influences the success or lack of success of minority students. Some researchers suggest that minority students (i.e., Hispanics and women) found the high school and college environments as appealing as the majority students (Coppock, 1995; Drew & Work, 1998). Many Hispanic students (77%) perceived the high school environment as having helpful teachers (Coppock, 1995, p. 17), and women were as pleased with their college experiences and interactions as men (Drew & Work, 1998).

Other researchers document the many ways in which the environments may not be conducive to learning for minority students because these environments are viewed as inhospitable, unsafe, and/or filled with racism and prejudice (Coppock, 1995; Davison Avilés et al., 1999; Wayman, 2002). For example, more than half (52%) of the high school students in the Coppock (1995) study who live along the Texas-Mexico border in the colonias (poor subdivisions with inferior housing conditions) felt that their schools were not safe (p. 14; 18).

In addition, about 25% of the respondents believed that school was not a comfortable place for them (p. 18), and some of these students appeared to respond to that discomfort with self-defeating and/or oppositional behaviors. For example, 19% of these students cut class, and 12% of the students doubted their abilities (p. 18). Furthermore, 21% of these students wished they would not be required to go to school (p. 18). While someone could argue that these statistics are not that discouraging, it would seem that the educational system should always be concerned if there are students who feel unsafe or uncomfortable to the point that they wish they did not have to attend school. Lest the reader excuse these statistics based upon location or deprivation in the living conditions, the reader needs to examine the data on prejudice from the Wayman (2002) study that follows.

Any number of factors could cause a student to feel uncomfortable, but the unfamiliar organization of the school environment could lead to an uncomfortable feeling for the minority student. Some high schools in the United States are arranged in such a way that the high school experience has the potential to impede progress for students who are immigrants and/or non-native speakers of English. Walqui (2000) suggests students in American schools switch classes and classrooms many times per day; these students, according to Walqui, lose the camaraderie, the support, and the sense of belonging that can be found in many schools in other countries where students spend most of the day together as a cohort.

A decision that seems to have a bigger impact for ESL students is the decision to departmentalize the high schools. Walqui (2000) suggests that departmentalization is especially difficult for ESL students because teachers are operating under the assumption that they are specialists in one subject area. Thus, these teachers, suggests Walqui, are unable or unwilling to provide the reading and writing instruction that the ESL students need, and they are unwilling or unable to make the connections across the disciplinary fields that would aid in the understanding of the content for the ESL students. Departmentalization may raise another issue that must be examined from a critical standpoint. This is the issue of who exactly is teaching the classes. Walqui (2000) suggests that the less experienced (perhaps less skilled) teachers will probably be teaching the classes for which many ESL students are allowed to enroll because the more experienced (and perhaps more skilled teachers) choose the advanced classes by rights of their seniority. Obviously, sound pedagogical practices do not appear to be as important as rewarding the teachers' longevity.

The documentation of racism or prejudice or even the perception of racism or prejudice could contribute to an uncomfortable feeling. Racism and prejudice in American school seems to be especially pertinent for Hispanic and second-language students. The Anglo and Mexican-American students from the Wayman (2002) study who lived in “a city with 400,000 people, [...] a midsize town with 90,000 people, and [...] a small town with 30,000 people” (p. 28) did not share the deplorable living conditions of the students in the Coppock (1995) study who

lived in the *colonias*. However, more than 25% of these students felt that the Anglo students were favored by their teachers over the Mexican-American students (Wayman, 2002, p. 33-34). In addition, the students with a Mexican-American heritage indicated that teachers had a bias against Mexican-Americans more often than the non-Latino White students indicated a bias against Mexican-American students (p. 33). Wayman (2002) suggests that it does not matter if these perceptions are correct or not; because these students perceive bias, then there is a possibility that this perception is a potential “hindrance to academic achievement” (p. 34). While the dropouts in Wayman’s study are more likely than the enrolled students to perceive teachers as biased (p. 35), Wayman cautions that this does not mean there is a causal relationship between perceptions of bias and a student’s decision to drop out of school. Despite this caution, I do believe that researchers need to be concerned that there is an established link between perception of bias and dropouts, and Wayman did find that the perceptions were higher for Mexican-American students,

Following the frustration-self-esteem model, however, I suggest that these perceptions could lead to a lessening of self-esteem and a continuation of the frustration cycle, and there is some evidence to support my claim (Davison Avilés et al., 1999; Derwing, DeCorby, Ichikawa, and Jamieson 1999; Sparks, 1998; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). Davison Avilés et al. (1999) offer a causal link between a negative school climate and the frustration-self-esteem model. The 72 Chicano/Latino students in this study were dropouts who spoke

about dropping out, and they perceived their teachers and other students as being racist. For the Adult Basic Education dropouts in the Sparks (1998) study, marginalization of the students was a big deterrent to the continuation of the classes. In other words, the students expressed the idea that they felt excluded, invisible, and inferior. In addition, they felt as though their culture was not respected either because it was misunderstood, disregarded, or even denigrated in the school environment. The ESL students in the Derwing et al. (1999) study who had completed high school were more likely to suggest that their school climate was a more positive climate than the climate that was experienced by the dropouts. For example, the completers perceived more positive interactions with the native English speakers in their schools than did the non-completers.

Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (1995) found that second-generation Mexican-American youth may be more frustrated by hostile school environments than immigrant youth because there was the possibility that they had faced “racism, disparagement, and lack of equal opportunity” (p. 181), and they were comparing their current situations to the majority culture and were losing faith in their ability to achieve certain expectations. In essence, this could mean that they might have succumbed more quickly to the frustration-self-esteem cycle for dropping out than the immigrant youth who were comparing their current situations to their previous experiences in Mexico. Thus, immigrant youth in the Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco study suggest “that hard work would bring success” (p. 180).

While Wayman (2002) suggests that perceptions of a hostile school environment are as influential as an actual hostile school environment, it necessary to note that there are studies that demonstrate that the reality often matches the perceptions. Law and Lane (1987) found that preservice teachers lack knowledge of ethnic groups, and this resulted in negative attitudes about ethnic groups. In addition, they found that people of color are more likely to be viewed as unacceptable by preservice teachers.

After Norrid-Lacey and Spencer (2000) studied 70 Latino immigrant students at an urban high school, they speculated that a hostile school environment might be one way to explain that only 27% of the original students in the study graduated from high school 4 years after the study began (p. 51). They evaluated the school as hostile because of the overt racism exhibited by some of the teachers and the ridiculing of the immigrant students by the other students in the school. Here, we have outside observers who can describe the hostile environment perceived by students in other studies.

The questions that remain unanswered when I review this information on school climate deal with the ultimate power of a hostile school environment. Do students who experience too much hostility drop out, and do the ones who complete school experience less hostile environments? How much hostility is too much? Does the ability to deal with a certain level of hostility differ between the students who complete school and those who drop out? From the information gathered here, I believe that I can safely assume that hostile environments have a

negative impact on minority youth, and it seems that there is reason to suspect that this hostility plays some part in the decision to drop out; however, it is hard to determine how and why this is so.

Frustrations from an Unsympathetic Society

It seems to me that I would be remiss if I did not consider the environment outside the school doors as a possible contributor to the frustration-self-esteem model. If a hostile school environment can be detrimental to a student's chances for academic success, then an unsympathetic society could have the same chances of influencing the Latina. There are a multitude of instances that illustrate that American society as a whole may be insensitive or unsympathetic toward the Hispanic population

Immigrant Hispanics in the United States, like many other immigrants throughout the world, are viewed by many as unwanted people because they are seen as low-skilled, criminal, and/or abusers of the welfare system (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). In addition, immigrants are often seen as people who are unwilling and/or unable to assimilate into the dominant culture (Olsen, 2000; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Walqui, 2000). Many citizens view immigrants as people who are going to take jobs away from the *real* citizens of the United States (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995).

These negative images described by Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) and others live in the minds of the citizens of the United States and perpetrate the continuation of an uncaring and unjust society; fear of the Hispanic

immigrants may be at the root of many policy decisions that continue to foster an American society that can be quite hostile toward Hispanics. Demas, Cannella, and Rivas (2003) suggest that there is a current trend to disempower marginalized people who may have made gains over the years. They suggest that attacking education is one way that this disempowerment may occur. They also suggest that there is a host of conservative organizations that use the media to produce “sites of power, spirals of normalization and control at all levels” (Demas et al., 2003, p. 107). In other words, these conservative organizations or think tanks (i.e., Heritage Foundation, Bradley Foundation, Smith Richardson Foundation, Scaife Family Foundation, and Olin Foundation) have an almost limitless source of revenue that is at their disposal to use to foster conservative ideas. In fact, President Bush and other politicians use the ideas and suggestions from these groups to make political policy in a variety of arenas including foreign policy, welfare reform, and education (Demas, et al., 2003).

The English Only Movement

The English Only Movement is an example of the way in which politicians can affect education. I believe some hostility can be felt in the English Only Movement that is evident with the passing of Proposition 227 in California. Moses (2000) reminds us that this proposition forces schools to use one-year immersion programs to educate English language learners. As previously discussed, English-language learners can experience negative effects from “sink or swim” immersion programs (Flores & Murillo, 2001, p. 186) because, as Mora

(2000) suggests, they are not acquiring the grade-level content knowledge base they need as they “swim” (Flores & Murillo, 2001, p. 186) in the deep ocean of English-language learning. Although I have presented some possible negative effects of the English Only Movement, how am I able to suggest that such a movement can be seen as a hostile gesture from the American society?

Olsen (2000) suggests that American citizens are feeling threatened by the number of immigrants who come to this country and speak another language. Americans, she suggests, feel as though the country can only be unified if all people speak the same language; furthermore, that one language must be English. Walqui (2000) suggests that there is a prevailing sentiment (not supported by research) in America that today’s immigrants are less interested and less skilled in learning English than the immigrants of previous generations. In addition, Moses (2000) suggests that the English-Only, or anti-bilingual, movement is also about English-speaking Americans fearing that an erosion of the superiority of the English language will allow immigrants to feel as if they do not need to assimilate into the American culture. Once this happens, Americans, suggests Moses, will have to worry about the minorities casting disparaging remarks and complaints against the Americans and American culture. Instead, Moses suggests that current educational policy is directed toward “forced assimilation and injustice” (Moses, 2000, p, 339). Moses (2000) argues that voters are sending an “anti-people of color in general, and an anti-Latino and anti-immigrant in particular”

(p. 354) message with their passage of propositions that support the ideas of the English-Only Movement.

Fear alone cannot explain the complex factors that may influence policy decisions that create the hostile society in which the Hispanics live. Lack of knowledge from citizens can also influence decision-making. For example, Valdes (1998) agrees that an anti-immigrant sentiment may foster the English Only Movement, but she suggests that misconceptions upon the part of the American public can cause the same results. She reminds us that many monolingual Americans and many Americans who have learned to communicate with English as their second language believe that people can learn English with little difficulty. Valdes suggests that these Americans have many misconceptions about what actually happens in the language-learning process and what actually takes place in the schools. What actually takes place in the schools and the community has been discussed at length in this paper. Furthermore, she believes that these individuals do not really understand the entire framework of teaching and learning. Finally, she suggests that most second-language learners will never have a proficiency in their second language that appears native-like. Because these individuals do not sound like native speakers, she suggests that citizens who support the English Only movement assume that the immigrants are not learning English fast enough because they really do not want to learn. In essence, she argues that supporters of the English Only movement operate under assumptions that are not based on much knowledge about language-acquisition, the realities of

school life, or (in many cases) first-hand knowledge of learning a second language.

While Proposition 227 in California may seem like an unlikely event to influence the students of Mexican descent in the southern state where this study takes place, it is possible that the English-Only movement will only gain more momentum as more Spanish-speaking immigrants arrive on American soil, and this momentum can greatly affect the students in my study. Tinajero and Hurley (1996/1997) suggest that students who speak a minority language and LEP students will soon make-up the majority of the school population if current trends continue.

As Flores and Murillo (2001) suggest, language policies shift as politics shift. They suggest that bilingualism was valued before the beginning of WWI, and after the war began, citizens began to cling to an idea propagated by Theodore Roosevelt as early as 1917. This was the notion that to be unified required one language – English. Flores and Murillo believe English-Only policies became more prevalent once the depression set in and people became more concerned about the immigrants taking away much-needed work from the American citizens.

After 9/11, there seems to be a distrust of all immigrants in the United States. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) summarize the feeling Americans had after the bombing of the World Trade Center in 2001 as being one where they felt that “dark men speaking with thick accents seemed to symbolize

everything that had gone wrong with immigration policies” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995, p. 25). While Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco wrote their book pre 9/11, they could have just as easily made this same comment today. In addition, we are experiencing what appears to be a long-term down-turn in the economy, and once again, people may fear the loss of jobs to the immigrants. With this distrust of immigrants increasing and with the down-sizing of corporations and an ongoing weak economy, it is possible that the English-Only movement will continue to gain momentum and continue to provide a framework for a growing hostile attitude toward Hispanics and other immigrants.

In addition, what California does in its educational system is usually watched by other educational systems, and other systems may quickly follow. In fact, Flores and Murillo (2001) believe that California’s decisions act as a “prophetic barometer” (p. 200) of what will probably take place across the country. This has already happened with Arizona passing Proposition 203; Moses (2000) suggests this policy is a “more restrictive version of Proposition 227” (p. 347). For example, children are afforded a maximum of 1 year of immersion classes. With Unz, the millionaire supporter of these propositions, vowing to work for similar propositions in other states (McCloy as cited in Moses, 2000, p. 347), one has to wonder if it is only a matter of time before there is a government-sanctioned English-Only Movement in the participants’ area.

Moses (2000) suggests that the English-Only movement is about more than just a desire to unify the country. She suggests that “issues of race, ethnicity,

and racism” (p. 336) are central to the debate that is currently being waged about bilingual vs. English-Only education. This desire for a unified country implies that the residents will have a common cultural make-up, and Moses suggests that desiring a common cultural background of its residents makes the United States an oppressive residence for people of color because these “people of color change their identities in order to participate successfully in the dominant culture” (p. 339).

If the English-Only Movement and the other examples of an unsympathetic society are interpreted as racist tactics or ideas, then youth of Mexican descent may see these as forms of rejection from the American society. This feeling of rejection can be one more circumstance that contributes to the frustration-self-esteem model for poor academic success. It is very possible that the length of time a student of Mexican descent has been in the United States may affect the level of racism that is perceived or felt. For example, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) contend that second-generation American youth may have more problems than first-generation youth as a result of the racist attitudes in the United States. They theorize that new immigrants face the same racist attitudes, but they may be less affected than the second-generation youth. The second generation youth may be more affected because they will be exposed to the racist attitudes for their entire lives.

Overcoming Frustrations

If a student encounters frustrating academic tasks, a hostile school environment, and/or an unsympathetic society, how can she navigate the educational system and meet with success? Perhaps, some students of Mexican descent are able to succeed because they have a better or more effective support network than those who meet with less academic success. Parents, friends, teachers, and significant others may be people who contribute to their support network.

Support from Parents

If people believe “that Hispanic parents neither encourage their children to go to college nor support their going if they choose to do so” (Laden, 2001, p. 81), then they are implying that Hispanic parents are somehow lacking the ability and/or the desire to provide support for their children’s success; however, this is a gross misrepresentation of Hispanic parents and their capabilities and desires. This impression may occur because the parents are judged as either good or bad parents, based upon their level of perceived concern for their children’s education. Teachers and others can use a parent model by which to judge all other parental behaviors. In other words, individuals carry a vision of a model parent and how that model parent behaves. If the parent under review does not exhibit similar behaviors to the model parent, then this parent is somehow lacking good parenting skills. Gebhard (2002) finds that some teachers express the idea, as if it is commonsense, that caring parents are concerned about their children’s

education, and they express this concern by coming to school for parent conferences and similar activities. If parents do not volunteer at the school or participate in other school activities, then they are seen or judged as uncaring and uninterested in their children's education. Gebhard reminds us that middle-class hegemony is embedded in this idea because it is the middle-class parent who typically has the time to volunteer and who has developed this caring parent behavior through socialization.

Valdes (1996) reminds us that parental involvement programs that propagate the notions expressed by Gebhard's subjects are enmeshed in "seemingly innocuous statements" (p. 33) that suggest that good parenting includes activities such as reading to children before they go to bed, discussing news heard on the radio and television, and listening to children discuss the events of their days. These statements are "seemingly innocuous" because they honor mainstream middle-class values without taking into account that "non-standard" (p. 33) families have very different lives and thus may behave differently for reasons that are important and logical to these families. For example, some of the parents may not be able to read, so reading to their children is not an option. Many parents may not be involved in the schools in the ways in which the parental involvement programs will outline good parenting, but many of the parents in the Valdes study will attend events that are ceremonial in nature. Valdes does not suggest that Mexican-American families are unique in their parenting, living, or socializing styles; she just reminds us that parental

involvement programs are sociopolitical in nature and begin with the idea that the children are not succeeding in school because there is something deficient within the Mexican-American familial culture. Perhaps, the Hispanic parents do not attend some or all of the school functions because their children do not want them to attend, as Walqui (2000) suggests.

In addition, middle-class values are embedded in this model in other ways. Nieto (1992) argues that parent involvement has cultural underpinnings. She suggests that in many cultures around the world, parents believe that the school is responsible for the education once the child is in school. Thus, parental involvement, as seen through a White, middle-class lens, is an alien concept for parents who believe the school and its educators are the responsible parties (as is the case in a Mexican family).

Parents can be concerned and care about their children's education, and they can demonstrate that care in other ways besides coming to the school. Parents and children can have discussions in the home, and these discussions can be a way for the parent to show his or her care and concern for the child's education. In fact, Brusoski, Golin, Gladis, and Beers (1992) found that students ranked activities like discussing college plans with their parents in their junior and senior years as one of the most encouraging activities that their parents undertook.

Also, parents who have had positive educational experiences in American schools can support their children's educational needs if they are able to help them navigate the educational system. Romo and Falbo's (1996) study illustrates

how important parental educational experiences can be; James and Richard, two participants with disparate school experiences, demonstrated how parental experiences impacted the lives of their children. Romo and Falbo suggest that Richard's parents possessed previous educational experiences that afforded them the ability to negotiate with administrators; James, on the other hand, came from a family headed by parents who lacked the same level of education as Richard's parents. Thus, James did not have parents who were capable of influencing the administration, and these negotiations were one possible reason why Richard was able to graduate from college while James was not able to graduate. This example illustrates the ways the parents' own educational experiences influence their abilities to assist their children in the American school system.

Support from Teachers

Can teachers (be they Anglo or not) provide support for the student of Mexican descent in order for him/her to meet with success? There is evidence to suggest teachers can be a member of the support network, despite some research that suggests that teachers have racist views about the inferiority of one group or many groups of minority students. Nieto (1992) indicates that most teachers genuinely care about all of their students and their academic progress. In fact, she believes that most teachers usually begin their careers believing that all children can learn, but some will develop more negative feelings over time as they continuously encounter students from minority groups who are not succeeding. This, she suggests, is when these teachers begin to seek out explanations for the

disparity in achievement, and this is when they start attributing the disparity to the children, their parents, and their culture.

Often, teachers are held liable for the education or mis-education of their students. Individuals, be they parents, community members, educational administrators, or educational researchers, may find it easy and reasonable to blame the teachers since they are the trained professionals who spend such a large part of their days with the students. After all, teaching the children is what the teachers are getting paid to do. However, as Nieto (1992) suggests, these teachers and their pedagogical techniques are often influenced overtly and covertly through a variety of policies and systems over which they have no control, and society tends to blame the teachers because that relieves them of any responsibility. In addition, Nieto reminds us that people, other than teachers, also hold low expectations of minority, poor, and LEP students. In essence, teacher expectations may simply be a reflection of the same expectations held by society in general.

Support from Significant Others

Is it possible for students to receive significant support from people other than their teachers and parents? Undoubtedly, friends and family members can provide support for the Latina's education. Rosas and Hamrick (2002) found that the women of Mexican decent in their study considered relatives and others as part of their family support system. Rosas and Hamrick (2002) suggest these young college students saw their families as "groups of accessible individuals

who provided care, support, and encouragement” (p. 62). This support can come in a variety of forms. For example, the immigrant youth from Mexico in the Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) study relied on their siblings to help them with their homework, and the Latinas in the Rosas and Hamrick (2002) study relied on their siblings to provide advice about college majors. Kao and Tienda (1998) found that some Hispanic students believed that their friends encouraged them and pushed them to do better. Family members in the Rosas and Hamrick (2002) study provided support for decision making by serving as role models and by “voicing early, clear, and consistent expectations” (p. 63) that the young Latina would graduate from high school and attend college. Of course, this support from the extended family is probably going to be more difficult to achieve if the second language learner has lost her ability to communicate in her native tongue and suffers from the isolation described by Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995).

There is evidence that suggests that students are more successful in school if they perceive and/or have support from significant people in their lives. For the minority and Anglo students in Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, and Gallagher's (2003) study, the more support they perceived they had from family and others around them, the more positive the results that were achieved. For example, “ninth-grade urban high school students who perceived higher levels of support from family and others within their environment maintained more positive attitudes about the value of school” (p. 151) than the students who

perceived lower levels of support. In essence, these students stated they were more inclined to complete their work and be attentive in class than did the students who did not perceive such high levels of support. In addition, students were more likely to believe that they could plan and achieve a successful and rewarding career when they perceived higher levels of support from significant others. Desiring leadership positions and believing in the importance of work was also linked with perceptions of higher levels of support. Romo and Falbo (1996) found that some of the pregnant Latinas in their study were able to successfully complete high school with strong familial support. Norma, a Latina used to represent others in this ethnographic study, believed that she was able to overcome many obstacles placed in her path because her family provided financial help, encouragement, and babysitting services.

Conclusion

While the research reviewed here shows that Hispanic youth are not as academically successful as their White counterparts, the research also shows that it is very difficult to draw a conclusion as to why this might be the case. Yes, Hispanic youth are less successful on many standardized tests (Horn, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2003) and are more likely to drop out of high school than their White counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). However, the reason for these difficulties is not clear. Perhaps, these results are caused by the aspirations that are held by the Hispanic youth. Some research demonstrates that Hispanic youth have different expectations or aspirations than their White

counterparts (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Kao & Tienda, 1998). Perhaps, the expectations of parents or significant others affect academic performance of Hispanic youth. Research shows that students are aware of their parents' aspirations (Coppock, 1995) and their teachers' aspirations and expectations (Cheng & Stark, 2002). Perhaps the students' aspirations are lower or different than their White peers, and these lowered aspirations cause lower success. Cheng and Starks (2002) and Kao and Tienda (1998) do find that Hispanic youth have lower or different aspirations than their peers.

Since there is no clear causal link between aspirations, expectations, and success, one needs to consider alternative theories that might explain why Hispanic youth are traditionally less successful than their peers. Finn's (1989) explanation of the *frustration-self-esteem model* appears to provide a plausible theory to explain a causal link for the lack of success. Perhaps, poor academic performance does indeed beget lowered self-esteem; this lowered self-esteem, in turn, could beget oppositional behavior. A variety of research was reviewed here to suggest that there are numerous examples that support the idea that students could become frustrated by the instruction they receive (Harklau, 2001; Losey, 1995; Mora, 2000; Nieto, 1992; Severino, 1993; Urietta & Quach, 2000; Valdes, 2001); the losses they experience as they learn English (Moses, 2000; Olsen, 2000; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Urietta & Quach, 2000); the pressure they encounter from high-stakes tests (Horn, 2003; Laing & Kamhi, 2003; Mora, 2000; Vernon, et al., 2003); and the disappointments they face as a

result of tracking (Braddock & Dawkins, 1993; Duran & Weffer, 1992; Harklau, 1994a, 1994b; LeTendre et al., 2003; Noguera, 2001; Simpson, 2001).

In addition, students may become frustrated because they may be educated in a hostile school environment, and/or they may live within an unsympathetic society. Several researchers offer support for the idea that the American schools provide a hostile environment for Latino students (Coppock, 1995; Davison Avilés et al., 1999; Derwing, et al., 1999; Norrid-Lacey & Spencer, 2000; Sparks, 1998; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Walqui, 2000; Wayman, 2002). There is also some support for the notion that the American society may be unsympathetic to Latinos and other minorities (Demas, et al., 2003; Flores & Murillo, 2001; Moses, 2000; Olsen, 2000; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Valdes, 1998).

If students have support from parents, teachers, and significant others, they may find themselves better equipped to overcome frustrations that are felt in the school environment or in society. In fact, Romo and Falbo (1996) found parental support to be a key ingredient that helped one of the students in their study to overcome obstacles that were placed in his way. In addition, research has shown that Latino students do get support from significant others (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995), and this support may help them to meet with more success (Kenny et al., 2003).

In Chapter 2, I presented the literature that focused on the aspirations, expectations and perceptions held by Hispanic students. In addition, I provided a

summary of the research that offered possible explanations for the academic problems that Hispanic students face. Finally, I furnished examples of the research that illuminated the types of support that Hispanic students may receive to help them overcome some of the frustrations they encounter in society and in the school systems. In Chapter 3, I will outline and explain the methodology I used to conduct the research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

There are a variety of purposes for this section of my dissertation. The first purpose is to identify my research questions. Then, I will identify and define the tradition that I have chosen and provide my justifications for this choice. Next, I will explain the methods that were used to select participants and sites, and I will explain the methods that were used to gather and analyze the data. Finally, I will provide details that will explain how the results were presented.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my longitudinal, qualitative study was to learn how the participants' aspirations and expectations for their future and their perceptions of their daily lives reconciled with the realities of their lives as they moved from their senior year of high school to their lives beyond high school. If a student hopes for an achievement, then this can be seen as an aspiration (Goldenberg, et al., 2001). If a participant realistically expects an achievement, this is seen as an expectation (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Goldenberg, et al., 2001). In other words, a person can dream of becoming a nuclear physicist; however, the person realizes that she does not have the financial resources to go to college for the required number of years, and she struggles with mathematics. Thus, her expectation might be a degree in laboratory science because it is a more likely achievement based on the context of her life.

Research Questions

I chose three research questions to guide my study.

1. What perceptions do the college-bound women of Mexican decent hold about their past and present lives?
2. What aspirations and expectations for their future lives do the participants have?
3. How do the participants' perceptions, expectations, and aspirations reconcile with each other?

Tradition

Characteristics and Definition of Case Study

Introduction

Case study is a tradition that was ideally suited to this research project. Even though Creswell (1998) argues that case study research has “a long, distinguished history” (p. 62), there seems to be a variety of interpretations of the case study tradition in the literature, and case study research has often been viewed as the “weak sibling” (Yin, 1989, p. 10) of such research traditions. Case study research does not need to be seen as a “weak sibling” (Yin, 1989, p. 10) because this researcher who understands, outlines, and applies the characteristics of the case study tradition to her research can utilize a methodology that will ensure the “rigor” (Yin, 1989, p. 21) of the study.

Characteristics

Several prominent qualitative researchers have contributed to my definition of case study as an “empirical inquiry” (Yin, 1981a, p. 98) tradition. For me, case study research has several characteristics. First and foremost, a case study required me to “intellectual[ly] construct” (Goode & Hatt, 1952, p. 332) a “bounded system” (Smith as cited in Stake, 1988a, p. 255) in order to “[view] any social unit as a whole” (Goode & Hatt, 1952, p. 331). In other words, a case had some kind of constructed boundaries that surround the person, place, process, or phenomenon under investigation, and the case study tradition required me to study the bounded unit. One person, one classroom, one school, one city, one event, or even one process can be a case (Creswell, 1998). I agree with Goode and Hatt (1952) and Stake (1988a) when they suggest that my readers and I need to be cognizant of the fact that the study of a bounded system does not imply that we will ever begin to understand the “whole story” (Stake, 1988a, p. 258) of the participants’ lives. However, the use of the bounded system required in case study research, according to Stake (1988a), allowed me to look at the elements of the young women’s lives as they related to my research question while still focusing on the “unity or wholeness” (p. 258) of their lives. Also, Merriam (1988) agrees that qualitative case study required me, the researcher, to look at many variables at one time because I was using a qualitative case study in order to “uncover the interaction of significant factors” (Merriam, 1988, p. 10). She

suggests, however, that as the researcher, I may not have known what many of these variables were before the study began.

Second, a case study approach required me to use “multiple sources” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61) to gather data because a “variety” (Yin, 1981a, p. 104) of sources contained data that were applicable to my research question. Therefore, I was more likely to have data that provided a comprehensive picture of the case. Since the data were gathered in the context of “real-life” (Yin, 1981b, p. 59) or “natural” (Stake, 1988a, p. 256) situations; the data are contextual and “rich” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Case studies should use inductive thinking (Merriam, 1988). Merriam suggests that this means I brought assumptions into my research, but I had to continually reexamine these preconceptions as I gathered and analyzed data, which led to the “[d]iscovery of new relationships, concepts, and understanding” (Merriam, 1988, p. 13). In other words, a qualitative case study is not conducted if the researcher desires to test and verify hypotheses (Merriam, 1988). The final characteristic of a case study has to do with the final product. While there are many accepted ways to produce a final product, Merriam (1988) suggests that all qualitative case studies will contain “words and pictures rather than numbers” (p. 7) to report the findings.

My Definition

These characteristics led me to a definition for case study as it applies to this research project. This project is a case study because it is an empirical and investigation of an individual (a boundary constructed by me) that required me to

use a variety of data-gathering techniques to study the interaction of multiple dimensions of the participant's life in genuine situations in order to produce a product that will help the readers picture the student in as much of her complexity as we (the participant and I) can portray through the words she spoke, the inductive analysis I used, and the words I wrote.

Multiple Cases

Within the broad tradition of case study research, I must also delineate the type of case study I conducted. I began this research with the idea that I would be conducting a “*collective case study*” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). In other words, I conducted four individual case studies for this one research project. While not all researchers refer to this approach as a “*collective case study*” (Stake, 2000, p. 437), several support Stake's (2000) assertion that the case study tradition can be used with multiple cases (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 1981a, 1981b, 1989). In fact, Yin (1981b) compares the use of a collection of cases in qualitative research to the “cross-experiment” (p. 63) approach used in experimental science. Both of the collections require the researcher to make logical connections and comparisons within and across cases or experiments.

Specific Type of Case Study

I viewed each individual case and the larger collective case study from an “explanatory” (Yin, 1981b, p. 59) or an “interpretive” (Merriam, 1988, p. 27) position. In other words, I have provided the readers with a clear retelling of the events (Yin, 1981b). At times, I “pose[d] competing explanations for the same set

of events” (Yin, 1989, p. 16), and I drew conclusions that seem to be “most congruent with the facts” (Yin, 1981b, p. 61). For example, I provided concrete details that allow the readers to understand the perceptions and aspirations of a participant. Sometimes, I suggested rival explanations for the perceptions, aspirations, and realities of the students in the study. Finally, I drew conclusions that are directly connected to the data.

Rational for Use of the Case Study

The choice of the case study tradition makes sense on several fronts. “When ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are” (Yin, 1989, p. 13) used to begin the research investigation, then Merriam (1988) and Yin (1989) suggest that the case study tradition is well-suited for finding these types of answers. Since my research investigated how the young women’s “perceptions, expectations, and aspirations reconcile with each other” (Hixon, 2007, p. 98), I am beginning with the type of question Yin (1989) and Merriam (1988) favor for case study investigation.

Yin (1989) also suggests that case study affords the researcher the ability to view “real-life events” (p. 14) in a “holistic and meaningful” way (p.14). In essence, this means that using a case study approach afforded me the opportunity to see how “operational links” (p. 18), or the pieces of each student’s life fit together, instead of just trying to show causal relationships between discrete bits of information as I might have done if I were using a quantitative or qualitative survey. Because I started with the assumption that each young woman was living

a life that was, in essence, “a complex, dynamic system” (Stake, 1988a, p. 256), Stake (1988a) suggests that the case study tradition afforded me the opportunity to tell the story of this complexity. However, I did not assume that the story I presented to the reader was the *whole* story. As Stake suggests, the story that was told was dependent on a multitude of decisions I made. For example, setting and resetting boundaries for the cases could have influenced the final story that I told (Stake, 1988a).

Perhaps the most significant justification for my choice of the case study tradition has to do with the way in which I view the world. I do not believe that there is a reality waiting out there for me to discover; instead, I believe that each of us has a different view of reality at different times in our lives. Merriam (1988) suggests case study research is definitely compatible with this philosophical base.

While I selected the case study tradition, this does not mean that my research project was an in-depth study of one college-bound Mexican female’s life. Creswell (1998) and Yin (1989) concur that the use of multiple cases can be subsumed within the tradition of case study. I will be conducting a “*collective case study*” (Stake, 2000, p 437) to investigate my research questions. One reason I chose a collective case study over a single case study was because I believed there would be a better chance for readers to apply the results from my study to other situations after I generated generalizations or themes across multiple cases. If Schofield’s (1990) belief that similar results from multiple heterogeneous sites

may be more useful to readers who wish to use the data to understand other sites is accurate, then, readers may find a collective case study that focuses upon four Mexican females to be more useful than a case study that focuses on only one Mexican female.

Methods Chosen for Data Collection

While researchers using case study inquiry have used interviews and observations (Creswell, 1998; Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993; Stake, 1988a; Yin, 1981a, 1989) reports and audio-visual materials (Creswell, 1998), documents (Creswell, 1998; Goode & Hatt, 1952; Yin, 1981a, 1989), archival records and physical artifacts (Yin, 1989), testing (Merriam, 1988), and publications like newsletters that give information about an organization (Yin, 1981a), Merriam (1988), Stake (1988a), and Yin (1981b, 1989) suggest that the case study tradition did not require me to use any specific set of these data collection means. Since I made every attempt to use a wide variety of sources to collect the data about as many of the aspects of each participant's life as I could, then I found that "there [will be] a greater opportunity to grasp the pattern of the individual's life" (Goode & Hatt, 1952, p. 333).

Interviews

I chose interviews as my primary data gathering method. I believe the use of interviews is a logical choice because I was interested in the participants' perceptions and expectations. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest that using interviews is essential for researchers who want to learn about the participants'

“opinions, perceptions, and attitudes” (p. 65). Perceptions and expectations are not “observable” (Merriam, 1988, p. 72), and the students cannot “replicate” (Merriam, 1988, p. 72) the events from the past that have shaped who they are today; thus, Merriam suggests interviewing is a logical choice.

The fact that interviews have been used successfully in some similar studies is another reason that I believe using interviews is a wise choice. De Groot (2002) found that using interviews to learn about the students’ perceptions of their “experiences in learning” (p. 42) was a good match for her study since she wanted to gain insight into the perceptions the students had of themselves as learners and in the experiences they had encountered with learning. She believes she was able to gather “rich data” (p. 50) that “allowed the students to tell their own stories in their own ways” (p. 50).

I used semi-structured interviews with the students because “less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (Merriam, 1988, p. 73), and this belief was compatible with my feminist ideas. In other words, my semi-structured interviews were loosely constructed around several topics, and I let the students’ responses guide additional questions as suggested by Dilley (2000) and Merriam (1988). Vincent and Warren (2001) would agree with this decision because they suggest that using semi-structured interviews provides space for the respondents to “introduce issues that they feel are important” (p. 52). Also, I was afforded the opportunity to learn more about

each participant's "emerging worldview" (Merriam, 1988, p. 74) because I asked follow-up questions after the participant responded.

Another key point about all of the interviews is that I looked at them as conversations. In other words, I wanted to have a real dialogue instead of a question and answer session, with me asking all the questions. Finch (1984) finds nothing wrong with this conversational approach; in fact, she heartedly recommends it. For Finch, a feminist researcher must "invest some of her own identity" (p. 81) if she wants to lessen the chances for a hierarchal relationship. Limerick, Burgess-Limerick, and Grace (1996) would probably suggest that using a conversational style is another way to shift the "balance of power" (p. 453). Using a conversational approach meant that I could come to the interviews from the stand-point that we were co-constructors of the information to be gleaned from the process. In other words, both the students and I had information to share and questions to ask, and this information helped us construct a version of reality for each student.

Dilley (2000) suggests that interviewers need to be reflective and aware of the "multiple voices" (p.134) they will hear while they interview. This is an appropriate suggestion for someone who began her research within a feminist framework. This suggestion is similar to the ideas expressed by Thompson (2003). She suggests, too many times, researchers view respondents' marginalization in "additive terms" (p. 23). This means that we add on each layer that may contribute to marginalization without making room for the idea that the

layers may intersect. In other words, the participants may have shared information with me using their Hispanic voice, their female voice, or their non-native English-speaking voice. At the same time, I may have been listening and interpreting through my female voice, my White voice, or my researcher voice. While Dilley's (2000) ideas are similar to Thompson's (2003), they are not identical. Dilley (2000) reminds us that we have the listener voice, the timekeeper voice, and the respondent voice. No matter which way I approached it, there were many voices interacting and intersecting during the interviews.

Documents

I conducted some analysis of documents that were found in the students' cumulative files. I needed to review each student's cumulative school record and transcript because these records included information about test scores, track placement, grades from elementary and middle school, report card comments, attendance records, and high school GPA. Before I could look at these confidential records, each participant gave me written permission (Appendix A or Appendix B). In Susan's case, her parents gave me written permission (Appendix C) before I could gain access to the files because she was under the age of 18 when this study began.

My use of document analysis proved to be an invaluable element of this case study, and Yin (1989) suggests that this holds true for all case studies. Hodder (2000) upholds the value of document analysis when he suggests that document analysis can provide "historical insight" (p. 704), and it could provide

information that may have been different from the information gained in the primary data-gathering mode (interviewing in my case). Merriam (1988) suggests that a strength of document analysis for case study research is that any written source can provide valuable data if the source can be obtained “in a reasonably practical yet systematic manner” (p. 105) at the same time it helps me to answer my research questions.

Hatch (2002) suggests document analysis provides “context” (p. 120) for the findings. Hatch recommends that triangulation be used to improve document analysis, and I believe triangulation was successful because I used the data from the documents to “corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (Yin, 1989, p. 86). Yin is not alone in the belief that documents can be used to corroborate the data from other sources (e.g., Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Contradictions that resulted from differing forms of data analysis do not necessarily imply that data that I gathered from one source invalidated the data I gathered from a different source. For example, data gathered from an interview question may have been concretely contradicted by data gathered from school documents; however, this does not mean that the school documents are valid, and the interview data are invalid. Several researchers subscribing to feminist or activist stances (Gitlin & Russell, 1994) suggest that such contradictions are to be expected because knowledge is contextual. In other words, I should not have been surprised when the participants contradicted themselves when they participated in the interviews. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) indicate that this is to

be expected and may be the result of the participants' confusion, growth, or mixed feelings. When contradictions or confirmations arose, I used these data to ask further questions in the subsequent interviews. I also used this information as discussion points when I met with the participants after I had written their stories. This collaborative process fostered the idea that both the students and I were "participants" and "united" (Gitlin & Russell, 1994, p. 185) in the same research process.

Procedures for Data Collection

Site Selection

While Schofield (1990) suggests that site selection should be based upon "typicality" (p. 211) if I wanted to improve my chances for generalizations, I did not choose Ridgeview High School because I believed it was necessarily a typical high school. However, my selection of Ridgeview High School (RHS) was a logical choice for various reasons.

First, this is the school in the area that has an ever-changing and growing Hispanic population. In the 2005 through 2006 school year, Hispanic students were the majority population of the school. They made up 56% of the student body.¹³ The Hispanic population had risen 6% since the 2003-2004 school year.¹⁴ In addition, I chose RHS as my research site because many of the students

¹³ In keeping with the maintenance of my participants' anonymity, the reference citation will not appear in the reference list. The information was gathered from The Governor's Office on Student Achievement (2005-2006) for the anonymous southern state mentioned previously.

¹⁴ See number 12.

who eventually enroll at Ridge State College (a pseudonym) are graduates of RHS. This means that the research data were relevant to the high school, the college, and the community. Fine (1994) suggests that activist feminist research should seriously consider the “local meanings” (p. 23). Therefore, it was logical for a feminist researcher to conduct a study that could be of value to a particular community because the four participants connected the high school and college to the community.

There are no other high schools within the Ridge City School System, but there are other high schools in the local county school systems. I think RHS is a logical choice because I had undertaken steps that made gaining access easier. For example, I had worked with one of the school counselors before, and she was able to help me gain access to the principal, the teachers, and the participants. In addition, she was hired at this school because she has the ability to speak Spanish, so she worked closely with many of the Hispanic students and their parents. This counselor had already helped me gain access when I conducted a previous study, so she was familiar with and supportive of my research. Since I had been at this site before, I was familiar with some of the school’s procedures, so this made the research move more smoothly than it may have progressed had I selected a brand new site.

Gaining Access

My first step in gaining access was to contact the personnel at the Ridge City Schools’ central office. In order to get permission from the school board’s

central office, they needed to see a brief proposal of my planned study, my letter of informed consent, and a copy of the IRB request. Once I submitted these documents for their perusal, they reviewed them and contacted me. The officials at the school board contacted Paul Jones (a pseudonym), the principal at RHS. I worked with Kathy Summer (a pseudonym), the school counselor with whom I worked before.

Background of the Ridge City Schools

Ridge City Schools have several types of programs for non-native speakers of English. According to the information found on the Ridge City Public Schools (2005) web page,¹⁵ there are three programs provided for students who are non-native speakers of English. ESOL classes are offered to students who have gained some mastery of conversational English. Older students will usually divide their days between regular academic classes and the ESOL classroom, and younger students will usually experience immersion in the regular classes and receive assistance from ESOL teachers for a portion of the day. ESL students at the high school may receive content instruction in sheltered classes.

The Ridge City Schools (2005) web page¹⁶ identifies Language Academy classes as one means of instruction for newcomers. Newcomers can enroll in Language Academy classes for one year. Here, the students are taught by bilingual teachers. Students in Language Academy classes must be on grade-level

¹⁵ Again, the actual reference for this citation will not be found in the reference list because such an inclusion would reveal the name of the school that the participants attended.

¹⁶ See number 15.

in terms of their academic and Spanish abilities when they are tested in Spanish in order to participate in this program.

A few years ago, Ridge City Schools opened a newcomer program housed within its International Inclusion Center (IIC), and this opening was covered in the local newspaper.¹⁷ According to the report, if immigrant students are in fourth grade through high school and if they do not score at grade level on the Spanish Assessment of Basic Education, they are given the choice to attend classes at the Inclusion Center or at their local schools. If they attend classes at the IIC, then they will be immersed in English; in other words, the regular core subjects will be taught in English with a little bit of Spanish used as needed for explanatory purposes. Bob Smith (a pseudonym), the IIC director, believes that this type of immersion instruction works at the inclusion center better than in the local schools because the students are getting more direct attention since the class sizes are small at the IIC. Smith notes that the students are usually ready to progress to their local schools within a year. Matt Jones (a pseudonym) was cited in this article.¹⁸ He is the ESL instructor from Ridge State College (RSC), and he believes this type of immersion program works the best for teaching any foreign language.

¹⁷ This article was printed in the local newspaper in 2003 for the city in which the participants resided. In order to maintain the participants' anonymity, neither the reporter's name nor the name of the newspaper will be listed in the reference list or the text of the article.

¹⁸ See number 17.

Background of Ridge State College

At RSC, non-native speakers of English who do not score high enough on the entrance test are required to take 1 of 3 ESL classes. If a student is placed in the lowest level of ESL, then he/she must take and pass each of the three levels before he/she can enroll in most of the credit courses offered at the College. Each of these classes is a four-credit class, and the final level of ESL requires a student to pass a timed writing test and a timed reading test. Students are required to pass the COMPASS exam in reading and writing, a test used for exiting the developmental classes that are attended by the native speakers of English; they are also required to write a response to the same essay topics that are used for the native English-speaking students in the developmental essay writing classes.

Participant Selection

Self-Identified College-Bound Mexican Female Students

My four participants were the selected for this study for several reasons. If the young women were still in school in the twelfth grade, they were already more academically successful than their peers who dropped out earlier. While I did not want to label them as successful just because they had outlasted many of their peers, I did want to learn about the circumstances that may have influenced their abilities to persist to this point. In addition, there is a body of quantitative studies that have addressed high school students, their perceptions, their expectations, their aspirations, or other possible contributing factors that influence them to persist in a certain school subject or school program or influence them to

drop out (Braddock & Dawkins, 1993; Cheng & Starks 2002; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Somers, et al., 2002; Wayman, 2002). There is an additional body of quantitative work that addresses these same issues for college students (House, 1999; House & Keely, 1996; Perna, 2000; Somers et al., 2002; St. John, 1991). However, there seems to be a dearth of information when it comes to considering how all or many of the factors interact to form the lived experiences of the students. In addition, there is little connection made between the high school studies and the college studies. In other words, the students are rarely followed from high school through the years they should be in college after high school graduation. While some of the limited qualitative studies are longitudinal, I found no existing work that specifically followed self-identified college-bound seniors from high school to college to learn how their perceptions and aspirations reconciled with their lived experiences. There are two ethnographic studies by Dietrich (1998) and by Romo and Falbo (1996) that come close. However, the Romo and Falbo (1996) study followed Latino students in general, not necessarily females and not necessarily college-bound students. The Dietrich (1998) study did follow the Latina high school students, but they were not self-identified college-bound students. Thus, my research project filled a void in the research because I followed self-identified college-bound females from their senior year in high school until the following year.

Four Participants

I chose to include four participants in my collective case study for several reasons. Schofield (1990) suggests that there is a “trade-off” (p. 213) that I had to consider when I was choosing to include many sites or few sites in my case study. While more sites, or in my case more participants, may have increased generalizability, with fewer sites, I was better able to offer an in-depth portrayal of each participant’s experience. I believe that four individual case studies collected together was a compromise that could offer some balance between generalizability and an in-depth picture. Merriam (1988) suggests that a larger number of participants is not necessarily the key to a successful case study; instead, she argues that the quality of the contribution of each participant is more important. I believe the quality of the contribution of four participants was superior since I followed the guidelines I had established before I began my current research study.

Making Connections

Ms. Summer selected the participants for my study based on the criteria I outlined for her. After she asked these four young women if they would be interested in participating, she gave them the consent and assent forms as appropriate. If a student, age 18 years or older, agreed to participate in the study, the student signed the informed consent document (Appendix D). If a student indicated she would like to participate in this study and she was under the age of eighteen, she took the informed consent form (Appendix E) to her parents or

guardians and had it signed and returned. Since it was very possible that the parents could have been non-native speakers of English or they may have spoken little or no English, the informed consent form was also translated into Spanish. Susan, the only participant under the age of 18, signed the assent document (Appendix F) after her parents signed the consent document. After the participants had returned the forms to her, Ms. Summer contacted me to come for the first interviews.

The Interviews

Selecting Interview Sites

The settings for the first two interviews were different from the interviews that followed. For the first two interviews, I met with the students at the high school. The interviews with the students were conducted in a conference room with comfortable chairs and a table for the placement of the recorder. I believe this arrangement met the guidelines that suggest that interviews should be conducted in places that are as comfortable and as confidential as possible (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

When it came time to conduct the third round of interviews, I needed a comfortable place that was convenient for the participants. Since all of the respondents attended college at RSC, I offered to use the study rooms in the library to meet with the participants. In each of these rooms, we found comfortable chairs to sit in and a table for the tape recorder. As an additional

benefit, the room was soundproof, so people in other parts of the library were not aware of the content of our conversations.

Conducting the Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were recorded using a small tape recorder, and I used pen and paper for any notes or spur-of-the-moment questions I had. The topics and sub-topics for the first interviews were sometimes different from the subsequent interviews. Since my interviews were intended to be semi-structured, I went to each interview with a list of specific questions to ask; however, I did not necessarily ask the exact same question in the same order with each interviewee. In essence, I conducted some analysis of the results of my interview as I interviewed because I developed new questions as the participants responded to the questions I asked. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest that looking at interviews in this fashion meant that I realized that interviewing was about more than just gathering the data. I estimated that each interview would last about 1 hour. However, different participants and their stories needed differing amounts of time. I made sure that our schedules allowed for some flexibility. For example, when a participant had to end an interview before I was finished covering all the topics, we made arrangements to continue the interview later that day. When a participant missed an appointment, we rescheduled.

Appendix G contains the protocol for the initial interview. The initial questions were intended to begin the interview in a relaxed manner with easy to answer questions, and I labeled them as *Rapport Building*. While Finch (1984)

suggested that rapport building may not have been necessary because “women are almost always enthusiastic about talking to a woman researcher” (p. 72), I did not want to arrogantly assume that young women would automatically feel a rapport with a middle-class, middle-aged, White, college professor simply because we shared the same gender. Therefore, I began with these questions, and I continually strived to be empathetic, as suggested by Merriam (1988), in order to make sure that my participants and I had an atmosphere of trust. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) propose that trust and rapport are inseparable, and I used “verbal and nonverbal” (p. 79) cues to ensure that the participants knew how interested I was in what they had to say. Since I have an honest enthusiasm for this project, I trusted that these cues would not be absent from our interactions. Besides building rapport, these initial questions provided invaluable information about how assimilated each respondent was into American culture, and the level of assimilation was often a focus of one or more of the themes uncovered during data analysis.

Following Merriam et al. (2001), I see myself as one of the “feminist scholars [who is] concerned with participants having an equal relationship with the researcher [and] with the research experience being empowering” (p. 413), and Vincent and Warren (2001) suggest that one way to “develop egalitarian and nonexploitative relationships with [my] key respondents” (p. 51) is to have “a research design that allows for repeat interviews” (p. 51). These are just a few ideas that helped me to decide to interview each participant another time after I

had completed some preliminary data analysis of the first set of interviews. This interview relationship continued to grow as I analyzed more data and returned for additional interviews.

Since the follow-up interviews once again involved semi-structured interviews, the interview protocol was a flexible one (Appendix H). I used follow-up questions to the previous interview and questions about the motivating and discouraging events that had happened since we last had a conversation. I read the transcripts of the other interviews, beginning data analysis, and I developed central ideas to guide my next set of interviews. Sometimes, I used my follow-up questions to address items I noted from the previous interview of a particular participant. At other times, I would learn something from one participant that inspired me to generate questions for all of the participants. This method afforded me the opportunity to discuss some of my impressions with the interviewees, and this allowed both the participant and me an opportunity to interact with the data analysis. These interviews were recorded and transcribed like the first set of interviews.

The third and final interviews took place during the participants' first year of college. I asked follow-up questions to the previous interviews, but I also included questions about the respondents' first semester in college and plans for the next semester (Appendix I).

Data Analysis

Background

Before data analysis could begin, I had the tapes transcribed by a professional secretary who understood the need for confidentiality. She signed a confidentiality form (Appendix J). Before I began formal analysis, I listened to the recordings and compared them with the transcripts in order to do several things. First, I wanted to be able to fill-in any information that the transcriber may not have been able to decipher from our conversations. Next, I wanted to listen to the recordings instead of just reading the transcripts because this, along with any field notes, reminded me of the context in which the information was delivered.

I did not use any computer software to aid in my analysis process. Since I was a novice researcher, I believed it was important to experience all the trial and error that is an inherent part of the research process. Software would seem to be better suited for a researcher who already has a fundamental grasp of the analysis process; in that case, the researcher could use the software as a tool and would have the background to make judgments about the usefulness of a given software program. Instead of using software for the analysis phase, I looked at the transcripts several different times; I have described this approach in detail below.

Preliminary Analysis of First Interviews

For my first analysis, I wanted to look at all the participants' transcripts to find any themes. I used these themes to generate areas of focus for my follow-up

interviews. In addition, I reviewed each participant's individual transcript to generate possible areas of focus to address with that individual participant in the follow-up interview. As stated before, I used information I gleaned from one interview to follow-up with another respondent. In this way, I was attempting to learn if the other respondents had had similar experiences. I was hopeful that this method of generating questions would improve the quality of my study because I asked questions that were "anchored in the cultural reality" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 66) of the participants' lives. I paid particular attention to any ideas that the participants put forth that suggested oppression based upon the participant's social status, ethnic background, gender, and/or non-native English speaker status. In addition, I reviewed the transcripts to see if the students gave any indication of the reasons they were or were not able to overcome these oppressive factors. Oppressive factors and the circumstances that led to the participant's ability to circumvent them or be stifled by them were ideas that I wanted to re-visit with my participants during the follow-up interviews.

When I conducted my third round of interviews, I wanted my participants to comment upon some of the initial analysis that I had generated. I waited until I had concluded the interview before I formally outlined my perceptions and analysis with the participants because I did not want my impressions to influence any of their responses to the questions I asked. Then, I asked for their feedback. In other words, I asked them to help me make sense of the data that they had provided. I chose to include the participants' input as more than a "courtesy"

(Yin, 1981a, p. 106). First, the participants were able to inform me if I had “misconstrued” (Yin, 1981a, p. 106) any of the factual details they had provided. In addition, the participants were afforded opportunities to let me know if I seemed to be *on track* with my impressions, and this enabled the participants to have opportunities to let me know if I did not see some details or concepts in the ways in which they intended me to see them.

Besides increasing the credibility of my findings (Stake, 1988b; Yin, 1981a), this method was used in order to help us co-construct the analysis, and it provided balance to the case study research. First, the participants found a balance between my perceptions and interpretations of the data and their perceptions and interpretations (Yin, 1981a). More important, co-construction of the case study analysis fostered a better balance of power in the researcher-participant relationship. I believe this method also increased my chances for having the “power-sensitive conversations” (King as cited in Haraway, 1988, p. 590) Haraway believes are equivalent to “rational knowledge” (Haraway, 1988, p. 590) and thus necessary since I am operating from a feminist stance. In other words, the discussion that each participant and I had was a means by which I demonstrated that I was cognizant of the fact that I was telling her story. I was not the all-knowing expert who was going to interpret her life for her.

Of course, my participants may not have agreed with my analysis, but Yin (1981b) suggests this can be a typical result when a researcher gives the participants a case study analysis or even a survey analysis to review. Yin

(1981b) suggests that a way to alleviate this problem is to have the participants review the cross-case analysis (the analysis that results in the identification of themes across the four individual cases) instead of the within-case analysis (the analysis that results in the identification of themes from within one individual participant's case). However, I chose to have each of my participants review only the within-case analysis of her own story because at least one of my participants was concerned that the other participants might be able to determine her identity if they read the whole study. Since all of my participants knew each other and encountered each other on our tour of the college, it may have been possible for Andrea, for example, to figure out the parts of the *Story of Four* that pertained to Josefina or vice versa. I decided it was important for me to go beyond the stipulations I had created in the original IRB form to further honor the need for these young women to maintain their anonymity. I believe an idea that fits more closely to my feminist and critical stance is to include multiple interpretations (mine and the participants') and the possible reasons for our different perceptions.

Interview Analysis

There are several reasons why I began data analysis as soon as the first transcript was returned to me. First, I needed to conduct the preliminary analysis in order to generate questions for the follow-up interview. As Merriam (1988) suggests, I needed to begin formal analysis "with the first interview," (p. 119) because this enabled me to determine where I needed to go next. In other words, this analysis of the interviews could have led me to documents that I needed to

gather or toward questions I needed to ask my participants. Since I used a repeating cycle of data gathering, analysis, and data gathering, I was able to readdress my research question continually (Merriam, 1988). This method is one that is similar to the method Yin (1981a), following Hersen and Barlow, calls a “two-wave replication design” (Yin, 1981a, p. 102). Yin (1981a) suggests that this method of gathering data that allows for a follow-up interview afforded me the opportunity to “fill information gaps” (p. 102) that may have existed because I may have had questions for one participant based upon the data from the interview or the documents of another participant.

This cyclical approach toward data analysis is supported by researchers. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest qualitative research, by its very nature, is “evolutionary” (p. 6). Merriam (1988) suggests that a systematic cycle that allows an ongoing look at one’s research question helps to increase the validity and the reliability of a qualitative case study. Another method I used to increase validity and reliability is through the systematic data analysis methodology that I chose and have specified in this document. Yin (1981a) suggests that a systematic approach must be outlined in advance if I wanted to overcome the weakness of poor within-case design that is often a problem with the case study tradition. With this thorough and fastidious analysis, I am able to advance generalizations (themes) in such a way that readers are able to see how I arrived at the “naturalistic generalizations” (Stake, 1978, p. 6) that Stake supports.

I read the entire transcript to get a sense of the whole interview in its entirety. Hatch (2002) suggests this to be a good place to begin in order to ensure that the analysis will not “be off the mark” (p. 163). Then, I applied a frame of analysis as one question and answer sequence. For example, my first frame of analysis began with my prompt, “Tell me about any hobbies you have.” My frame of analysis ended with, Josefina’s response:

Um well, let’s see. I like to play soccer and I actually I’m into crafts and stuff and what else? I actually do like to do a lot of sports and stuff but my dad really doesn’t like sports because he says that they are a waste of time and that women really shouldn’t be doing sports like that.

Next, I developed basic typologies that enabled me to create a few semantic relationships to begin my data analysis. This technique is a combination of the inductive analysis and typological analysis described by Hatch (2002). Merriam (1988) suggests that the development of typologies was essential since I was conducting an “interpretive” (p. 27) case study. As I read the data for the first interview for the first respondent, I began to fill-in domain sheets. A sample domain sheet is located in Appendix K. A domain sheet requires the researcher to look for “relationships that can be expressed semantically” (Hatch, 2002, p. 165).

Hatch (2002), following Spradley's (1979, 1980) outlines, suggests that there are seven common semantic relationships. These semantic relationships or domains can be expressed as "*strict inclusion*" (e.g., family support is a kind of motivation); "*spatial*" (e.g., cafeteria is a place students are allowed to go); "*cause and effect*" (e.g., having fun in school is a result of learning English); "*rationale*" (e.g., getting married is a reason for poor performance); "*locations of action*" (e.g. study hall is a place for getting help); "*function*" (e.g., graduation tests are used to measure ability and/or knowledge); "*means-end*" (e.g., taking easy classes is a way to do well in college); "*sequence*" (e.g., filling-out an application is a step toward going to college); and "*attribution*" (e.g., loving is a characteristic of her parents) (Hatch, 2002, p. 165). Using the frame of analysis described above, I created my first domain sheet for Josefina. I listed soccer, making crafts, and sports as types of hobbies. This semantic relationship or domain would fall into "*strict inclusion*" (Hatch, 2002, p. 165). In addition, I created a second domain sheet for the same frame of analysis; on this sheet, I listed traditional and industrious as characteristics of Dad. This domain is an example of "*attribution*" (Hatch, 2002, p. 165).

The above method of looking for semantic relationships was used for the analysis of each respondent's first transcripts. As I read the subsequent transcript for a respondent, I added details to the domain sheets established earlier, and I made new domain sheets. For example, Josefina later talked about shopping with friends, and I added this to the domain sheet (created previously) for types of

hobbies. In addition, in the second-frame of analysis, Josefina describes her dad as having an “old fashion way of thinking,” and I added old-fashioned to the domain sheet for the characteristics of Dad. In order to keep the transcripts organized, I added details from the third transcript in different colors. Colors were also used to easily identify one respondent’s domain sheets from another; each respondent’s domain sheets were printed on different color paper.

I coded the domain sheets next. I marked items that appeared to be important, and I made notations to show links between what appears on the domain sheets and what appears in the literature. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest, I believed I would find some contradictions in the data that I gathered, and I noted any contradictions. Fraser (2002) suggests that feminist theory must allow for contradictions, and she suggests a researcher should not feel the need to “explain away” (p. 127) the contradictory data. Instead, she advises the researcher to begin reflection “at these points of contradictions” (p. 127), and this may be transformative. Here, I used follow-up questions or document analysis in order to better understand the contradictory data.

Next, I looked for connections within domains to make sure they make logical sense. At this time, it was necessary for me to combine or rearrange domain sheets because this process of looking for connections generated new or combined domains. In addition, some domain sheets needed to be discarded because they did not appear to be relevant to the research question. Yin (1981b) likens this process of discarding research data to the process a detective must

undergo as he/she gathers facts to explain a crime. Sometimes, one gathers facts that are “unrelated to the crime” (Yin, 1981b, p. 61) or the research question, but one is not aware of this until one is attempting to explain the crime or answer the research question.

Then, I arranged my domain sheets in categories. For example, I had many domain sheets that spoke of elementary, middle, and high school perceptions and experiences. I organized all of these under the heading of Perceptions of Academic Life (K-12). Within this category, I created subcategories for Elementary, Middle, and High School. In all, I created eight main categories and organized each participant’s domain sheets under these umbrella terms. The categories included Perceptions of Family, Perceptions of Academic Life (K-12), Perceptions of Peers, Perceptions of Success, Perceptions of Self, Miscellaneous Perceptions, Goals, and College Life.

After I had constructed the typologies, created and recreated the domain sheets, and completed the coding described previously, I could have used these typologies, according to Merriam (1988), to simply offer the readers some insights into the relationships that may exist between the variables in the young women’s lives, or I could have used the typologies to generate theories. I believe my technique fell somewhere between the ends of this continuum. I looked for themes from within and across the domain sheets in order to construct some possible generalizations or themes after the logical connections had been established. At that time, it was imperative that I locate and identify the data I

had used to make my generalizations in order to ensure that I had left an explicit trail for my readers to follow. If readers can follow this data trail and my explicitly outlined analysis methodology, then the readers should be able to see what I saw (Goode & Hatt, 1952).

After I made the generalizations and located and specified the supporting data, I generated a master outline of the data for each participant. The series of steps was conducted with each interview and each set of interviews. Furthermore, I looked for patterns and themes that existed for each student from interview one to interview three. I also reviewed the data to see if some patterns or themes existed for a particular participant in the earlier interviews but were missing from the later interviews. In addition, I reviewed the data to see if patterns that appeared in the later interviews were absent from the previous interviews.

Finally, I looked for patterns and themes that are shared and not shared among the participants. Sometimes, I unearthed the themes because they related to some of my philosophical ideas. As stated previously, I was looking for any signs of oppression, and this required me to take a close look at the idea of racism and sexism. In addition, I looked for signs of oppression that could have been a result of any obstacles placed into the path of these young women. After looking at the participants' responses both to questions about unfair treatment and other comments made, I had to ponder to what extent racism impacted their lives. On another occasion, I uncovered a theme because a colleague asked me about the participants' thoughts on marriage. As I answered his question, I realized that, for

the most part, 3 out of 4 of the participants shared a common and well-defined belief system on this topic. Thus, another theme was born, and I addressed the importance of marriage in my cross-case analysis. I provide these examples to illustrate the complexity of my thought process as I was discovering the themes.

Document Analysis

Merriam (1988) suggests that there is little difference between using interviews and using documents for gathering data, so I believed the combination of inductive and typological analysis described for the interviews could be used for the documents (each respondent's school record and transcript). I added the information gathered from the records and transcripts to existing domain sheets, or I created new domain sheets. These domain sheets were housed under the umbrella terms already established with the interview analysis. As I analyzed the documents I obtained, I did generate still more questions that I needed to address in my future interviews. For example, I had questions about the Inclusion Center after looking at Laura's cumulative file, and I had additional questions about classes taken and participation in programs listed in several of the cumulative files. I did not attempt to quantify anything through document analysis because Merriam (1988) suggests that a qualitative case study does not require the researcher to quantify.

I used a color-coded system to organize the document analysis domain sheets. For example, I used red sheets for the interview analysis for one participant, and a different color for the next participant. For the interviews that I

did in their high school years, I used black ink to write on the domain sheets. I then used red ink for the college interviews, and green ink for the document analysis. In this manner, I was able to synthesize the information for one participant while maintaining my knowledge of the original source of the information.

Reporting the Gathered Data

Since I wanted to find a way to show the circumstances of the participants' lives that have affected their quest for a higher education, I chose to report this data first through individual stories. I began each participant's story with a description of her life. Following Schofield's (1990) suggestions, I provided a good deal of background information about the students, their families, their schools, and their communities in order to increase the chances that the readers would be able to use this information to determine if the lessons learned from my study will be "useful in understanding" (p. 207) other situations or individuals that they may encounter or wish to understand. Within this synopsis, each participant's voice should be heard through quotes. If the participant chose to read her story and comment upon my analysis, this increased her voice in the story. Next, I explained the themes that related to the individual's perceptions, aspirations, expectations, and life.

Finally, I connected all of this information to research. I made these connections to research in several ways. First, as noted previously, I made notations of links to the research that I had already read on my domain sheets. I

added more notations of relevant research on my master outline. After I had written each respondent's story, I looked through my literature review for research that supported, contradicted, or illuminated my analyses. If I found nothing supportive, contradictory, or illuminative in the standing literature review, I conducted a more extensive review of additional literature. This provided a dual effect. I added more research to my initial literature review, and I was able to make connections between my participants and other youths.

I believe this methodology makes the stories of the young women's lives "vivid" (Stake, 1988a, p. 260) enough to ensure that the readers receive the "vicarious cognitive experience[s]" (Stake, 1988a, p. 260) that they need in order for them to be able to relate the participants' experiences to their own "existing experience[s]" (Stake, 1988a, p. 260) and their own knowledge. Stake and Trumbull (1982) suggest that readers who are able consider this new, rich data and any generalizations that I have advanced in light of their own experiences, their own knowledge, and their own convictions will be able to draw "naturalistic generalizations" (Stake, 1978, p. 6). While Stake (1978) believes that readers will not be able to make predictions based upon generalizations, he suggests the readers will be able to use generalizations to form expectations; since I used this naturalistic approach to generalizations, this may be the best way to accommodate both scholarly and "lay audiences" (Stake, 1978, p. 6) who may read the report. I believe it is important to consider both scholarly and "lay audiences" (Stake, 1978, p. 6) since my original use of this information is for publication as a

dissertation, and my future plans for this research include the desire to provide information to public school teachers and college-based scholars alike.

When I wrote the fifth section of the chapter on results, I looked for themes that crossed the cases. This allowed me to provide the reader with a synthesis of the circumstances that these young women did and did not share in their quest for higher education. I used quotes that were relevant to support the synthesis of the data. According to Yin (1981b), either of these methods (telling the individual's stories or describing the themes across cases) would have been appropriate since I used within-case and across-case analysis. I chose to use both because I felt that neither method alone would completely convey all there was to share about these participants. I was constantly compelled to find more and better ways to reveal their triumphs, disappointments, frustrations, and successes.

Discussion of the Data Analysis

In this final section, I summarized the participants' lives and the themes salient to their individual lives. In addition, I made connections between past research and my study. Therefore, I demonstrated how my research added to the body of research that already exists by showing how the themes agree with and how they differ from previous research study results. From there, I drew conclusions or generalized about the specific group of participants that were involved with this study; the nature of this study did not allow for wide or sweeping generalizations since this extremely focused qualitative approach was

used. However, I do hope that the rigor of the study fosters generalizations that may “speak to situations beyond” (Schofield, 1990, p. 206) my direct study.

Summary

This collection of qualitative case studies was designed to use interviews and documents to learn how the participants’ perceptions and expectations reconciled with the realities of their lives as they progressed from their final year of high school to the world beyond high school. I approached the gathering and analysis of data with the idea that the students and I were participating in the research process together; thus, the final product was a collaborative effort.

In chapter 3, I presented the research questions that guided my research study. Then, I described the methods I used to gather, analyze, and report the data. In Chapter 4, I will present each participant’s story and the cross-case analysis.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Life is a Series of Paradoxes: Andrea's Story

Self

Andrea had a very unique childhood experience. She was born in Mexico. Her father and mother divorced when Andrea was very young. As a result, Andrea flew to Florida to live with her nanny. Andrea describes this household as “diverse” Her nanny was Cuban, and her husband was Chinese. Thus, English was the language that was used to communicate with her, and she was not “exposed to Spanish.” Five years later, her father “got enough money” to bring the whole family to the southern city where they are now living. Thus, Andrea began living with her father, brother, and sister after a 5-year hiatus. After leaving Mexico, Andrea never saw her mother again until the summer between her last year of high school and her first year of college.

Andrea has two personality traits that were noticeable in all of our interviews. First, she demonstrates a high level of care and compassion for others and her surroundings. Andrea has spent a good deal of her time offering her skills, knowledge, and abilities to others. She gave advice to her brother and sister. She provided support for an older student who was in her history class, and she is trying to help her dad learn more English. She participated in a multitude of volunteer activities that included translating for parent-teacher conferences, sending “[...] care packages to the soldiers,” gathering care packages for “under privileged kids,” and helping with the blood drive. In addition, she cares about

her friends' happiness. In fact, she says, "I [...] really care about them and want to make sure they are happy before I'm happy." She displays a great deal of compassion and empathy for those that she is helping. For example, she found it "heartbreaking to tell the mom or the single mom that her child wasn't going onto the next grade" when she translated for parent-teacher conferences. When she discussed her interactions with the older student who was in her history class, she documented her compassion when she said, "I mean I enjoyed helping of course, but it was kind of weird cause I didn't want her grades to be bad because of the things I told her." Even though this woman assured Andrea that Andrea's help could not possibly put her in a worse position than she was already in, Andrea still fretted that it was possible that this woman might not be successful because Andrea "didn't help her well enough" or because she gave her inferior notes from the class lectures.

One of Andrea's most prominent characteristics that I observed was her sunny personality. Her face was bathed in smiles as she shared many of her memories, thoughts, and feelings in all three of our interviews. As I listened to the tapes, I felt as if I could hear her smile or recall her smile just by the tone of her voice. In addition, she often gave quick-witted responses to my questions or comments. Sometimes, I could not help but laugh out loud because her sharp wit was amusing, and our shared laughter made these interviews all the more enjoyable. For example, I asked her how others would be able to determine that she was successful. She replied, "I will tell them." Another time, she was

describing the steps she would take to recover the funds owed to her by her previous employer. She predicted, “I will have to sneak up on her one day [and say], ‘give me my money.’”

Family

Andrea’s father, too, has an interesting childhood story. He is undereducated; he only attended school through part of second grade. At that time, he had to drop out because “he had a job that required him to travel.” Andrea believes “he worked with his brother in construction,” or “he was an errand boy.” Today, Andrea’s father “does a lot.” He works 12 hour shifts at one of the major manufacturing companies in the city 6 days per week.

Andrea spoke a good deal about her brother and her sister. Andre’s sister is older than her by a few years. She seems to have taken on some of the “life maintenance tasks” (p. 59) that Rosas and Hamrick (2002) suggest “keep the household running” (p. 64). For example, this sister seems to be the one who is responsible for the preparation of meals. Andrea’s brother has a job in one of the manufacturing plants, and he has applied to the local college and has been accepted. However, he was not attending college at the time of our final interview.

Andrea never really spoke of her mother until the day we met to discuss her story. Her mother has been diagnosed with several mental disorders, but Andrea believes she is still a very “independent” woman. Although Andrea spent a few weeks visiting her mother in Mexico, she really does not stay connected to

her through phone calls or mail. Most of the phone calls to Mexico are to talk about practical things. In other words, Andrea's family will call her mother to make sure that she knows that they have sent money for her medications.

Academics – Kindergarten Through Grade 12

For the most part, Andrea's early academic experiences seem to be positive ones. Early on, Andrea was identified as a gifted student. She remembers taking "a lot of tests to see your intelligence level," and she says, "I did pretty good on those." Andrea's father decided against gifted classes. Andrea's summarizes this decision. "My dad didn't want me to [go to gifted classes] because he wanted me to be social more than secluded to a group." Sometimes, the teachers needed to "push" her because she "would be smart" if she was willing to make the effort. In second grade, Andrea's teacher thought it would be good for her to skip to the third grade. Again, Andrea's father considered the suggestion and rejected it. Andrea states, "He said that he didn't want me to be placed somewhere where people thought 'oh she's so smart,' so he told my teacher that he preferred that I stay with my age group, so I did."

Perhaps Andrea's father reacted to Andrea's chances to further her academic progress with caution because of a Mexican custom that affected Mendez (2005) as he grew-up in the United States. Mendez describes how the immigrant Mexicans reacted if any "person of Mexican descent showed signs of trying to 'move up' by" (p. 40) advancing themselves through more education. Mendez explains, "That person was held up to ridicule for trying to be better than

la gente [our people]" (p. 40). Perhaps, Andrea's father did not want to have Andrea treated with ridicule because she was getting *too big for her britches*.

Although Andrea's early academic experiences were positive, she identifies her middle school years as a "transition period." In other words, these were the years when she "never really did anything bad," but she "wasn't really as focused" as she would become in a few years. At this time in her academic career, Andrea feels she gave into "peer pressure" and focused her attention on "trying to fit in." Andrea states, "I was more like worried about does this person like me; does he want me to hang around with them." At this time in her life, she believed it was important to "be cool and more popular." In addition, she was not "worried about" going to college; thus, she did not link her middle school performance with any future ambitions.

High school was a new beginning for Andrea, and the transformation took place by the end of her freshmen year of high school. Andrea describes this transformation when she says, "All the other friends that I hung out with, they dropped out. And the friends that I have now are like college-based friends." In other words, she suggests, "I kinda changed my whole personality."

This transformation led to a focused young woman who was reasonably successful in most of her academic endeavors. She maintained a high B average on a 4.0 scale for her entire high school career (Andrea, cumulative file, 2006). In addition, she passed all of her graduation exams on the first attempt. More important, she passed the language arts, math, and social studies exams with

superior scores (Andrea, cumulative file, 2006). This transformation makes Andrea very different from the Hispanic females in the Kao and Tienda (1998) study. These females tended to have lower aspirations as they moved from middle school to high school.

Andrea saw her daily life in high school as being “stressful.” However, she viewed this stress as “good stress.” In other words, she had many obligations because of the amount of extra curricular activities she had undertaken, but she did not view these obligations as chores. These obligations just left her with little “leisure time.” She had a wide range of interests that filled her after school hours. Andrea participated in several academic clubs (French and mock trials), a few community service clubs, drama club, and a few clubs that addressed skills that would help her be a future business leader.

Goals

Andrea is certainly a goal-driven person at this point in her life. She is easily able to articulate her goals. She believes that the desire to go to college was always present for her, but the time span between her 10th and 11th grade years is when she realized that she needed to take advantage of the “opportunity” and go to college. The opportunity seems to be directly correlated to the fact that at this time in her life, she became a resident of the United States, and she would not have to pay out-of-state tuition. She acknowledges, “So for a while, I was going to have to pay out-of-state tuition to go to college, so that kind of discouraged me a little bit.” The anticipated availability of financial resources could have

changed both her expectations and aspirations; thus, this could explain why Andrea identifies an increase in her desire to attend college as she entered high school. Kao and Tienda (1998) found that “the lack of financial support for college” (p. 378) was one of “the biggest obstacles facing their [Hispanics’] desire to attend college” (p. 378). Once Andrea realized she should have access to the state ASPIRE scholarship and in-state tuition, she saw college as a more realistic possibility.

Andrea had a clear idea of her area of focus in college and where she needed to go in order to declare art or interior design as her major. If she majors in art, she will be studying studio art, so she can create her own pieces and sell them. If she majors in interior design, her goal would be to own her own business in order to “pick out colors and fabrics [...] [and] design the areas and how things are placed.” She suggests that she would prefer to be an interior designer of homes rather than of “hotels or places like that.” Again, Andrea’s responses are very different from the Hispanic females in the Kao and Tienda study (1998). Kao and Tienda found that the Hispanic students were not as “precise about their educational and occupational aspirations” (p. 378).

Academics – College Life

Expectations

Andrea had a definite set of expectations about college life in general and about the type of college life she could experience at the different colleges that

were on her list of places to attend. Also, some of her expectations had a negative feel to them, and some of her expectations were much more positive.

When she was in high school, she figured college would “be a little nerve-racking.” She felt this way for several reasons. First, she thought she would get lost. Next, she was afraid she might be “forced to make interactions with people.” For instance, she might “have to talk to a complete stranger.” Another somewhat negative expectation for Andrea was her belief that it would be difficult for her to truly know how she was performing in college. She felt this “up in the air” impression would be a result of thinking that college was “really hard and you are not going to do good.” At the same time, she could actually be performing well. She concluded that college would be so difficult that she would need to study many hours in order to be successful.

Not only did Andrea have worries about college, she had worries about herself in college. For instance, she had the idea that she might be easily distracted in college. She acknowledged that this would probably be more of a problem if she went away to a public university or college. Here, “football games” and “partying” could take precedent over studying. In fact, she predicted she might “spend more time socializing than actually studying.”

After she made all of her more negative predictions, she still started college with the idea that she was going to have fun. However, once she was in college, she soon realized that “people make it out to be a lot funner than it is.” Before she started college, she had the impression from others that “all you do is

hang out with your friends.” Once she entered college, she was faced with the reality that “your friends have classes, too.” In addition, she believes that she only spends time on campus if she has classes or she is working in her on campus position.

Pleasant Surprises

Perhaps one of the most pleasant surprises she encountered in college is the rapport she has been able to establish with her professors. Before she entered college, she assumed that college professors would be aloof and “not willing [...] to make interactions” with the students. In fact, she predicted that these professors might greet students who came to their offices with a comment like, “I’m doing work. You can’t come in here.” Instead, she found some of her professors to be “down to earth.” In other words, she can “go to their offices and talk to them.” This unpretentious attitude seems to be exemplified by her math teacher. Not only will he help her if she needs help, Andrea feels she can just go to his office to talk with him even if she does not need help.

Problems

Andrea has encountered several problems before and after she entered college; however, because Andrea seems to be very savvy when it comes to seeking advice, she has been able to overcome these problems with few or no negative side effects.

Andrea’s first obstacle to success in college was the denial of the ASPIRE (a pseudonym) grant. This state government uses proceeds from the revenue

generated by the lottery to offer all students who graduate from a state high school with a GPA of 3.0 or higher a grant to pay for most of the tuition fees they will face at the local state college. Andrea received a letter from RSC stating that her application for the ASPIRE scholarship was denied. At the time of our first interview, she felt this was a simple misunderstanding. All she needed to do was submit her final transcript, and she would receive her approval and scholarship money. This was not the case. She later learned that there was a clause that stated that she had “to be a resident for a full year prior to graduating” in order to qualify for the scholarship. Since Andrea did not receive her legal documentation until September of her senior year of high school, she had not been a resident for one whole year by the time she began college in mid August. In other words, she missed the deadline by a few weeks. Andrea, however, did not let this daunt her. She spoke with several people (a family friend, a person she worked with, and me) and learned about loans. She took out loans for her first year of college. She has been promised by the administration at RSC that she will qualify for the ASPIRE scholarship at the beginning of her sophomore year.

Her next problem occurred when she registered for classes for her second semester. Andrea diligently cross-referenced the courses that were offered at RSC with the courses that she would need when she transferred to the university of her choosing. However, she inadvertently gave the advisor the wrong registration code for the history class. She ended up in a second American history class where as she needed a world history class. She sought advice from the

secretary in the division where she worked, and since this woman thoroughly knows the advising rules, she was able to quickly change Andrea's schedule and offer her sound advice about approaching the professors. Once again, Andrea seems to instinctively seek help from the most knowledgeable people she can find to provide assistance.

Themes

While I was analyzing the data from Andrea's transcripts and files, several themes became apparent. Many of these themes concerning Andrea's personality flared to life in the first two interviews, and when I discussed some of them with Andrea during our third interview, she readily agreed with my assessment and contributed more data to support my ideas. What stands out the most for me is that Andrea does not have an all or nothing type of personality. She seems to embrace several contradictory personality traits.

Obsessive-Compulsive or Nonchalant

Obsessive-compulsive. Andrea believes friends would describe her as "obsessive-compulsive" or as a "perfectionist" because things must be "done a certain way, or it's not acceptable." She agrees that she does behave this way at times. For instance, she describes her room as "really neat" and "organized." This level of perfectionism is also noticeable when Andrea discusses working in groups with her peers. Andrea prefers to work with people who compliment her abilities, skills, and desires. She explains, "with Rita [a pseudonym], we have a lot of the same kind of ideas, and we are creative at the same level, and so we just

make each other better.” While she readily admits that she might want things to be just so, she has little tolerance for and is frustrated by the know-it-all people in groups who are unwilling to listen to others.

Andrea’s obsessive personality may also be seen when it comes to her school work. She believes her dad would describe her as “school-obsessed.” She explains why he would view her as such, “He hardly sees me, and when he comes into my room, I have a book out [...]. I’m studying.” Andrea describes a time when she “blacked out” on a math test.

I remember one time, I took a math test, and there’s this one problem on that test. I don’t know what happened. I was blacked out. I didn’t know what I was doing. How do I not remember how to do this, and I turned in my test, and I said, ‘You know I’m coming to your office and finding out about this question because I have no idea what’s going on here.’ So, I went [...] the next day early in the morning.

Of course, Andrea did arrive at the math professor’s office door the next morning before he had even had a chance to look over the tests. She was very relieved when he explained what she had done correctly for partial credit and what she should have done. She summarizes her feelings by saying, “It was before a weekend, and if I don’t figure this out, I am just going to go crazy this weekend.”

Andrea is extremely organized and plans in advance, and she has demonstrated this time and time again. First, she used a planner in high school to keep track of “assignments, homework, and [...]" her after school obligations. In

addition, she arrived early for her tour of the college. When she arrived, she had already completed her financial aid paperwork, signed-up for orientation, and pulled jobs from the announcement board for student workers. Her organizational skills are obvious when one learns what she had to do to participate in several of her clubs. For Junior Achievement (JA), she served as Vice President of Marketing. This position required her to work with others to develop and market a product. When she was working with Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), she and her partner developed business cards and brochures by using desktop publishing. This project took several months and various steps to complete. Thus, organizational skills are a given. Once again, Andrea had to be organized in order to meet with success when she competed in Mock Trials. Her team was given a real criminal case. She had to learn the rules, practice, and compete against another team. Again, it sounds like organization was a key to her success.

I also look at this involvement as a sign of her ability to be organized and plan ahead because of her motivation for doing so. As I have already mentioned, she knows that she wants to own her own business one day. Joining clubs like FBLA and JA has provided her with an opportunity to learn skills that she may be able to apply as a future businesswoman. In addition, these experiences can help her decide if she truly wants to own her own business. Finally, she stated, "I [...] just really wanted something to write down on my college application." To me,

this shows that she recognized the importance of extra curricular activities when she might try to get into a college or university with competitive admissions.

When Andrea discusses her goals and how she plans to meet these goals, her fastidious nature is once again evident. Andrea “always wanted to go” to college, and when she was in high school, she determined what she wanted to do in college. By the time we met for our first interview, she had already taken the PSAT and the SAT. In addition, she had considered four colleges. She decided to apply to three colleges because they were from “different kinds of spectrums,” and it was possible that she “would have a different experience in each one of them.” Andrea could readily identify the pros and cons of each of the institutions; she had considered factors such as transportation issues, financial obligations, course offerings, campus climate, housing needs, and application fees. This was not a decision she made lightly.

Nonchalant. On the other hand, she appears almost nonchalant about various situations or events. While she keeps a very tidy bedroom, she also states, “Once I start working on something and go back in there [...] an hour later, and it’s a mess.” Another example of offhand attitude is apparent when Andrea speaks about graduation day. She had to have a specific type of dress to wear under her graduation gown, and she purchased this dress and had her hair and nails done all on the day she graduated.

At another point in our first interview, I asked her to discuss “any bad experiences” she had while in high school. She identified earning a poor grade in

one of her biology classes that made her unhappy. She explained in detail how this happened. She had failed to submit many homework assignments for a grade because she “didn’t have [...] a computer at home,” and she felt as if she “didn’t have time to come here [the high school] and do them in the morning.” At the same time, she appears to have spent hours at the school preparing for many of her extra-curricular activities. While she seems to have accepted responsibility for the poor grade, she seems to be unconcerned that she devoted an inordinate amount of time to extra-curricular activities at a time when she needed to devote that time to an academic endeavor.

Perhaps this nonchalance was most pronounced when Andrea talked about her plans for the money she was making at the job she held while in high school. During our second interview, I asked her what her plans were for her earnings. She replied, “I am saving it up right now. I then don’t know. Whatever.” When I asked her what plans she had for her savings, she surprised me by saying, “I have no idea. I don’t know. It will be [...] an IPOD or something.” I had assumed that she might plan to use some of the money for college since she had already received the letter that her ASPIRE scholarship had been denied. She had hope that she would not need the money for college tuition or books, but she did acknowledge that it might be needed to pay for food while she was in college. It was as if she believed everything would be taken care of with regard to the scholarship, and it was as if she did not need to plan ahead for possible complications.

Confident or Cautious

Confident. Andrea seems to be extremely self-assured in various situations. I can identify several instances where Andrea appears to be very confident and reflective when it comes to identifying her abilities and strengths. When Andrea spoke of her early childhood educational experiences, she was very matter-of-fact when detailing her experiences with intelligence testing, her teachers wanting to place her in gifted classes, and one teacher wanting her to skip ahead a grade level. She seemed to just accept this as a given part of her nature. In addition, she said, “Now I am going back to learning Spanish and hitting spots where I am rusty.” In a very matter-of-fact way, she let me know that she was competent at reading, listening, and translating Spanish. She viewed her weak area as writing in Spanish in the sense that “a real Spanish scholar” may find errors, but she could write well enough to communicate her ideas to the reader. Also, Andrea talked about translating for parent-teacher conferences as if this skill of hers was not something for which she should be commended. In fact, after her club advisor asked her to translate at the school, she says, “I didn’t have anything better to do, so I just went.” She “helped the teacher and parent kind of interact.” Once again, she seems to accept her Spanish abilities as a natural part of herself.

It seems to me that Andrea appears most self-assured when she speaks of the jobs she has and how she has handled situations at these jobs. She seems more self-possessed than many of her peers. As stated previously, Andrea

arrived for the tour of the college with campus job announcements in hand. She went to the job fair and interviewed with the secretary of the division where she was working at the time her third interview took place. Andrea once again seems to see her strengths as natural when she says, “She [the secretary] called me, and she was like, ‘we really liked you. Come work for us.’” When Andrea told me about the steps she took to recover the \$400 owed to her by her previous boss, she once again demonstrated a necessary boldness that should serve her well in the future. She called the woman repeatedly, stopped at the store, and spoke with a police detective. She stated this in such a matter-of fact manner that it is obvious that she just expects herself to handle the situations that may arise. In other words, she seems to have moved into adulthood with ease.

Cautious. On the other hand, Andrea also seems to have a cautious nature at times. She explained why she did not like using the on-line application process when applying to colleges “because you have to pay on-line, and it’s kind of like they have your information.” In addition, Andrea is very selective when she uses an online site to check to see what ratings certain professors have received from students who have taken their classes. Andrea realizes that a student could have “had one bad experience.” As a result, this student could go to the site and just write that the teacher was horrible. Andrea typically does not “trust” such ratings unless the student provides more details and specific examples.

I believe Andrea demonstrated her cautious nature most when she was hesitant to apply for a loan for college until she had consulted several people.

First, her family friend e-mailed her and told her to get a loan. Andrea and I also discussed this as a possibility. Andrea was concerned when she said, “I’m hoping that I’m going to make enough money that I don’t need to worry about owing these people this loan.” It was not until Andrea talked with a colleague at the United Way who assured her that she had loans for her college education and was not “bombarded with them” that Andrea felt “at ease.” This allowed her to feel comfortable enough to take the financial risk and apply for a loan.

I find the contradictory nature of the themes that surround Andrea’s personality to be present in the general themes that relate to her life.

Supportive Significant Others or Unsupportive Significant Others

For the most part, Andrea seems to view the significant people (family, teachers, school counselors, and friends) in her life as supportive of her and her goals. The types and amount of support she has received over the years is a reoccurring theme in her interviews. The Kenny et al. (2003) study suggests that this perceived and described support may have helped to foster Andrea’s work ethic and aspirations. Kenny et al. (2003) suggests that “perceptions of support” (p. 151) can lead to young people who “feel engaged in both their educational and vocational lives” (p. 151).

Supportive family. Without a doubt, her family demonstrates their support in a multitude of ways, and they have demonstrated this support over time. Both her sister and her brother attempted to help Andrea as she entered high school. In Andrea’s view, they provided both good and bad advice. For example, they

suggested computer concepts as a class, but Andrea believes “they didn’t make good choices” for her. While some of their class suggestions were not good for Andrea, they did tell her “not to slack off.” They seemed to be worried that she “might think it was really easy” and not submit all her work, so they told her “make sure that you turn in all of your stuff.”

Andrea’s father, too, has provided a great deal of support for her. From her cumulative files, I learned that her father attended parent-teacher conferences; this is no small feat considering Andrea describes his work schedule “like 12 hours like 6 days.” Furthermore, she believes “he does a lot.” Andrea sees him as supportive of her long-term goals because he would not let her get a job for most of the time she was in high school. He told her, “You need to concentrate.” Thus, this allowed Andrea to “spend a lot more time with [her] studies.” Moreover, Andrea’s father seems very willing to make big sacrifices in order to provide her with the opportunities she desires. For instance, her father is not thrilled with the idea of her desire to transfer to a school that is approximately 6 hours from home. Andrea explained that this is the school that has the classes and the major that appealed to her. Her father asked, “Do you want us to move down there?” Not only has he offered to relocate, he seems to have reconciled with the idea that she will go away to college without the family. Andrea explained, “He has already told my family in Mexico. He’s like, ‘this girl she’s gonna leave, and she’s going to be 6 hours away.’” Obviously, this is a father who will let his

young daughter reach out for her goals even if he instinctively wants to keep her close to protect her. To me, this is the most selfless kind of support.

In the Brusoski et al. (1992) study, 75 college students rank ordered the “specific behaviors of parents that encouraged them to go to college” (p. 226). Attendance of her graduation or “events in which you participated” (p. 228) is the only supportive activity that Andrea mentions that is even on the list of 19 items that were ranked in this study. Talking about college attendance, discussing the importance of college attendance, helping with the financial aspects of college, and linking grades to college attendance were all items that the students needed to consider. Had Andrea completed such a questionnaire, it may have looked like her father was not supportive and/or encouraging. However, what I think this says is such surveys already have a white, middle class bias built into the testing device. In other words, the makers of the questionnaire thought they already knew what parental behavior looks like when a parent is encouraging a child to attend college. In our conversations, Andrea had the opportunity to show how her father supported her. How could anyone argue that a man who is willing to move his family in order for his daughter to attend college and achieve her dreams is not extremely supportive of her goals?

After Andrea read the first version of her study, she wanted to make sure that I added details about the ways in which her mother supported her. While she and her mother had not really had any contact since she left Mexico, her mother did offer her encouragement for going away to the college of her choice once

Andrea was able to help her understand why this was needed. Andrea thinks her mother might have had trouble understanding this concept since her mother has metal health issues and since her mother was not familiar with the idea that in the United States children finish high school and move away to attend college in order to “expand.”

Supportive school personnel. When Andrea described her many experiences throughout her school years, it is obvious to both Andrea and to me that many of her teachers and counselors provided a great deal of support and encouragement. She believes that her elementary teachers demonstrated that they “cared” by viewing all the students as “gifted,” by writing a student’s name on the board “if you did something really good,” and by helping her when she earned “a bad grade.” In addition, one of Andrea’s teachers “said good show, great!” when she submitted a drawing. The teacher even “framed it and entered it into a contest.” Andrea described this memory when I requested she identify “a really good memory that stands out from elementary school.” She says this experience “made me feel really good.” She summarizes her feelings, “I was like yes. [It] made me feel happy.” When she encountered this teacher a few months before our interview, the teacher said, “I still love it – I still have it.” Andrea still receives pleasure from such comments.

Her high school teachers also demonstrated support and/or encouragement in various ways. First, one of her teachers noticed her potential in class because she was “talkative” and completed her assignments. She says, “[this] made me

stand out a little bit.” Once the teacher noticed her potential, she suggested that Andrea try mock trials. Another teacher suggested she join one of the community service organizations where she later translated for parents. Once again, it appears as if the teacher recognized her potential and directed her toward an activity that could provide her with additional experiences that could further her skills and her future endeavors. Finally, her 9th grade homeroom teacher provided support and encouragement by giving her a monthly “little lesson about life and school.” This teacher also helped her learn what she needed to do in order to earn a dual seal diploma, and she tracked what Andrea did in order to insure that she had the correct number of credits in order to earn this dual seal.

Once Andrea arrived on her college campus, supportive school personnel continued to be a theme. Andrea considers the faculty that she works for on her on-campus job to be “understanding,” “nice,” and “the best people.” They support her efforts to be academically successful in college by allowing her to study then complete her duties after she takes her tests. In addition, they allowed her time off to meet with me for our final interview. In general, she finds her college instructors “open to help,” “really nice,” and “down to earth.” This was an unexpected turn of events.

Unsupportive school personnel. The contradictory nature of this theme is most evident when Andrea discusses the school personnel (teachers and counselors) who have affected her life and the lives of her friends. As started previously, she did describe many instances where the school personnel were

supportive and encouraging; however, there are also several very specific instances when they were less than helpful, negligent, or insensitive. First, Andrea has a very reasoned theory to explain why her middle school friends might have dropped out of school. She explains,

A lot of them really didn't have the drive in the first place and seeing that, teachers [...] got kind of fed up with trying to help them. I think that kinda just [...] didn't make them want to try as much. [...] Like, I would see teachers making the effort to help them, but they just wouldn't take it. [...] They wouldn't listen. [...] Then, when I would tell them '[...] you know they are trying to help you,' they're like, 'well, I'll go next week,' but by that time the teacher was so frustrated they didn't want to help anymore. So, then they got real discouraged, and after that things [were] building up at home I guess and [they] just quit.

In this theory, she realistically attributes some of the responsibility to the students themselves; however, the eloquent description can not help but demonstrate how these teachers failed their students.

When I asked Andrea if she had “experienced any unfair treatment in school,” she answered, “It’s sometimes that you feel like teachers are giving you an extra push or extra care cause they think that you are not as smart as other people.” She felt that this attitude from a few teachers had both a positive and a negative impact on her. She explains, “It was positive because it made me want

to work harder and show them that I could do it on my own. But it was also kind of negative because I felt like they were looking down on me.”

Andrea is not alone in her feeling that she was singled-out as somehow inferior. This perception that teachers may see Hispanic students as inferior is evidenced in the focus group discussions held with Chicano/Latino youth who had dropped out of high school in the Davison Avilés et al. (1999) study. The Chicano/Latino students in this study told of instances where they encountered teachers with “negative attitudes about them as students” (p. 469), and this attitude was obvious when teachers reacted with either shocked “facial expressions” (p. 469) or “verbal” (p. 469) comments if a “Chicano/ Latino student answered a question correctly” (p. 469). This perception that teachers may view one as inferior is even more closely connected to the students from the Derwing et al. (1999) study. Derwing et al. found that although the ESL students interviewed in their study “appreciated any extra consideration and assistance given by the teachers, they disliked being singled out” (p. 540). In essence, Andrea, and the ESL students in the Derwing et al. study, are conflicted by this dichotomy.

Andrea also had very conflicted feelings about her school counselors. At the end of our last interview that took place in her freshmen year of college, I discussed with Andrea the fact that I had noticed how many people she had identified as having helped her or encouraged her to be academically successful and to continue onto college. During this discussion, I mentioned school counselors as people from whom she had received such encouragement; she

immediately broke-in with, “Now, I don’t like them.” She clarified this statement.

I think they do care if you go to college, but I don’t think they cared enough to look into everything to make sure you’re taken care of once you got into it. I mean I don’t think they were as helpful. [...] They were excited for me to go, but once it wasn’t I was already out of high school and I couldn’t go back and be like ‘oh you need to talk to them and say you thought you told me this,’ but they couldn’t do anything. Once you got out of high school, you’re on your own. No more counselors.

In other words, during our interviews while she was in high school, she thought she was on track to have her scholarship; at this time, the advice she had received seemed to be good advice. Later, when she learned that she did not get the scholarship because of the timing of her legal documentation, then she had to re-evaluate the advice she had received. Thus, she had an entirely new perception of the advice and a new perception of the counselors who gave her the advice. She believes that the counselors discouraged her from filling out the forms for additional scholarships because she was on-track to receive the ASPIRE scholarship, and they really did not think it was necessary to try for any other avenues of income because “you are living at home with your parents, and you are going to have a job.” While she readily admits that she “should have looked

into it,” she also feels that the counselors did not have a thorough understanding of the rules that applied to her situation; thus, they were unable to elucidate the options that may have saved her the last-minute stress of getting loans to finance her first year of her college education.

Lack of information was a reoccurring issue when Andrea discussed the advice she received from her college advisors. While she states, “they were really helpful” when they helped her register for her first semester of classes, she also believes they failed to provide her with options. One of her friends had a schedule with six classes, and Andrea did not realize that “you can take as many classes as you want.” She feels as if she “could have taken another class last semester” without being “overloaded” because one of her classes “finished half way through October.” However, she lost this opportunity because she did not learn that she could take more than five classes until she spoke with her friend.

Supportive friends. Without a doubt, Andrea has received a great deal of help from the family friend who was the principal of a school. As I have outlined previously, Andrea received advice from her about different ways to pay for college. In addition, this woman made some phone calls to see if she could gain information about the reason Andrea was denied the scholarship. Finally, she offered to help Andrea pay for college.

Andrea seems to share at least one commonality with the college students in the Rosas and Hamrick (2002) study. They found that the women of Mexican heritage in their study “extended their families to include *comadres* and

compadres (mostly *comadres*, or women) in a way that emulated the cultural institution of *compadrazgo*” (p. 67), and I believe this may be what Andrea did also. According to Rosas and Hamrick (2002), this cultural phenomenon encourages friends “to provide support and accompaniment for important life occasions” (p. 67), and they further suggest that attending college falls into this category. Many of the young women in this study, like Andrea, did not have parents or other family members who had their own college-attending experiences; thus, the family members, while still an important support network, could not provide the specific information needed that would help the women deal with the intricacies involved in college attendance. Therefore, they began to rely on their friends for such specific support. In the Rosas and Hamrick (2002) study, the *comadres* were found in the peer group, but it seems that Andrea has selected a family friend to serve the same purpose.

Andrea also surrounded herself with the type of friends that could support her in her quest for a high school diploma and a higher education. She describes her middle school friends as lacking “drive,” and the friends she had in high school as “college based friends.” Andrea stopped “hanging out” with her middle school friends by the “end of ninth grade,” and she seems to have consciously decided to surround herself with people who shared her goals. She summarizes their relationship,

I think we see that we want to be successful. [...] We see that if we just quit, there is a dead end when we quit. And we see the fact that we know [we] want to be better for our parents.

American or Mexican

American. After I had completed the first two interviews with Andrea, I had noted that she seemed to be exceptionally Americanized. First, she selected a pseudonym (Andrea Miller) that sounds very much like a White, American name. Next, when she discussed her musical tastes, she viewed herself as having “really diverse” tastes. She listed “pop and rock” as two types of music to which she listens, but Ani DiFranco, a folk artist, is her “favorite.” She never mentions any type of Latino music. Then I noticed that her favorite food comes from Burger King; however, she does like Mexican food that her sister cooks as long as it is only “a little bit spicy.” She concludes that her “taste buds are not [...] for spicy foods at all” because she immigrated to the United States when she was so young. In addition, Andrea’s father gave her the option to have or not to have the quinceañera (or sweet 15 party), and Andrea chose to forgo this celebration. Finally, I noted that while she can speak English and Spanish, English seems to be her primary language. During our first interview, she said she was “learning Spanish.”

At the end of the third interview, I discussed the idea that I saw her as a thoroughly Americanized individual. Andrea agreed whole-heartedly when she said, “I am, and [it was] emphasized by going to Mexico.” When she went to

Mexico, “It was so weird. It was culture shock. I think I experienced what most Americans experience when they go over there.” She concluded that several events took place that provoked these feelings of culture shock. For instance, she had a difficult time riding the bus because she could not count her money quickly enough as she boarded the bus, and this made the others on the bus become frustrated with her ineptness. In addition, the taxi service was operated very differently than what she was used to in the United States. People on the streets would ask for money. Also, if she went into a store and ran her hand over an item to feel its texture, she did not know that the business people would expect her to buy this item. “All of these little things” were disquieting because she was not prepared for them. She feels as if the culture shock she experienced in Mexico is greater than the culture shock she might encounter if she traveled to France. She has come to this conclusion because she is much more familiar with French culture than Mexican culture since she has learned about French culture through her classes. Her dismay is poignant when she says, “I didn’t ever take a class that said in Mexico,” you need to behave in a certain way, but the people there “just expect you to know things about Mexico.” She determined that these individuals expected her to be more familiar with the culture because she was Mexican. She certainly noticed how people reacted toward her when she spoke in Spanish that she describes as “horrible” and “Americanized.” The people she encountered asked her, “What part of America are you from, and where were you born over there?”

Perhaps this high level of acculturation is somehow linked to Andrea's academic success and her college aspirations. The Mexican-American high school students in the Ramos and Sanchez (1995) study who aspired to a 2-year or 4-year degree were more acculturated than the students who had no college aspirations.

Mexican. Despite this strong connection to the American culture and despite her recent acquisition of residency, Andrea does not view herself as an American. She captures her identity clearly when she says, "I was born in Mexico, so I say Mexican." Her desire to have others view her as Mexican is palatable when she talks about her motivation to develop more or better Spanish-speaking skills. When she was in Mexico, she felt as if people gave her nasty looks because she was speaking in English. She felt as if she "really could not communicate in any other way." Her brother suggested that the people may have seen her as "disrespectful" since she could not communicate well in Spanish. Andrea was very concerned that the people in Mexico would perceive her as someone who "thinks she's better." She also does not want the Mexican people to say or think "she's from America."

Conclusion

I started this research project with three research questions to guide my research. After conducting three interviews, looking at Andrea's transcripts and cumulative file, writing her story, and meeting with Andrea one final time to

discuss her story, I believe I accumulated more than enough data to address these questions through her story. I have summarized the points below.

Perceptions of Past and Present Life

In these pages of Andrea's story, I detailed her perceptions of her past and present life. For the most part, she describes her life in positive terms, and she seems to accept any unusual or potentially negative experiences as experiences that are just part of life. For instance, she seems to hold no ill feelings toward her mother, even though her mother has had little to no interaction with her for the greatest portion of her life. In addition, she accepts, in a matter-of-fact manner, that her father sent her to the United States to live with strangers for 5 years, and she was separated from her family. She describes her educational experiences in an equally positive fashion, occasionally glossing over or down-playing any negative experiences. In fact, her most negative comments are directed toward teachers who expected less of her because of her ethnic background and school counselors who were not informed enough to help her with the financial backing she needed to attend college. Despite these two negative instances, Andrea perceived most of her high school experiences in a positive light. She belonged to an almost endless list of clubs that were "fun," enjoyable, and "interesting." They were also informative, in the sense that they helped her to "see what [she] wanted to do." While all this activity made her high school years seem hectic, and she sometimes let homework responsibilities slide in favor of taking care of her club obligations, she again speaks of this in mostly positive terms.

Once in college, her positive outlook continued. She saw her on campus job as one where she was “learning,” “getting so much experience,” and having “fun.” Her college professors were more approachable than she had anticipated. The 18-month delay before she could go to the residential college of her choice was not something she seemed to agonize over. Once she dealt with her initial disappointment and frustration with the rules of the ASPIRE scholarship, she moved on to attending classes and making arrangements to go to the college of her choice. Again, she handled this obstacle with aplomb, and moved on.

While she perceives her life in mostly positive terms, she seems to perceive herself in a more balanced manner. She is a self-described “nerd” because she enjoys “taking notes” in class. She perceives herself to be “an average advanced student” because she was in many advanced classes, but she believes that she “did just enough,” and the work “didn’t come naturally.” In other words, she would perform well, but she had to “study” in order to do so. On the other hand, Andrea is somewhat hard on herself when she talks of her failures. She believes “economics is a failure” because she took the Advanced Placement exam and did not earn a high enough grade for the high school credits to count in college. This feeling of “failure” is present even though the test was meant to be taken by people who had two semesters of economics, and she had had only one semester of the course. Andrea also believes others would see her as a “perfectionist” and “obsessive-compulsive” because she wants something “done [in] a certain way, or it’s not acceptable.” While she thinks teachers would see

her as “sweet,” “smart,” and hardworking, she also believes they would think she was “not focused enough” because she “goofs around a lot” or makes jokes.

Aspirations and Expectations of the Future

As discussed in her story, Andrea wants to become an interior designer. She expects to do this by taking some courses at the local state college until she can make arrangements to attend the residential college of her choice. Here, the school offers the courses she will need in order to pursue this degree. She believes the “atmosphere” of the college is one that she would enjoy and “feel comfortable in” because “it’s friendly.” She expects that she will need to be wary of the distractions that she may encounter while she is there. These distractions would probably come from “extra curricular things to do like football games” and “socializing.” Andrea hypothesizes that all it will take is “one bad grade.” Then, she says, “I have to study – lock myself up in the library and get away from people.” Andrea sees an internship in an interior design company as a stepping-stone to being hired by the company when she graduates. Finally, Andrea sees world travel in her future. She would love to go to Africa, and she wants to participate in a study abroad experience in France. What is the allure of France? First, she knows a great deal about French culture, and she believes that this means she would not experience the level of “culture shock” that she experienced when she went to Mexico. Second, she believes that the French “value” interior design.

Reconciliation of Aspirations, Expectations, and Perceptions

It appears, that for the most part, Andrea's perceptions, aspirations and expectations have reconciled in a somewhat balanced fashion. She aspired to and expected to go to a residential college. She has every intention of doing so, but she did have the 18-month delay because of her initial immigrant status. She expected that all her hard work and high GPA would lead to the ASPIRE scholarship and the wherewithal to attend said residential college. This did not happen immediately, but she worked around it and made steady progress toward her goal by taking her basic classes at the local state college. She expected that college might be difficult, and she feared that she would be unaware of how well or how poorly she was performing. In both instances, she found this was not necessarily the case. The 4 hours of studying per class that she anticipated needing turned into only two hours of studying per class. The college professors were willing to help, which was an unexpected bonus. Finally, she found many ways to assess her performance in a realistic and timely manner. She approaches the professors and asks them "to look up" her current averages, and she has been averaging her own grades. In addition, she finds that if she needs to know a particular grade for her "sanity," she will just approach the professor immediately and ask him/he how she did.

Conclusion

What is in store for Andrea's future? Obviously, no one can know for sure. However, I am confident that Andrea will do everything in her power to

make as many of her dreams come true as possible. She equates success with “doing what you like to do and making a good living” and believes that success is “not being trapped by some job that you don’t even want to have.” Andrea is already on the path to do what she wants for a career. She has developed plans, considered various options, circumvented any number of obstacles, continued to set new goals, maintained a sunny attitude throughout the process, and learned how to find the humor in troubling situations. These skills and traits should serve her well as she progresses from stage to stage in her life.

Life is Frustrating and Empowering When one is Caught Between Two Worlds:

Josefina’s Story

Self

Josefina has several characteristics that seem to be the linchpins of her personality. I believe these characteristics are obvious to me because Josefina seems to be the type of person who has a very good sense of herself, a high level awareness of where she has been, and an exact idea of where she would like to go. As such, she is able to specify what it takes to truly know oneself. She proposes that one will need to “look around at the stuff you are doing. You look at the things you’ve done and the things that you’ve become.” Josefina must make these types of reflective inquiries on a regular basis because she is very capable of articulating her personality traits and connecting these traits with multiple examples. In addition, she effectively communicated the idea that she will not fully know herself until she has achieved her goals.

Helpfulness

One of her most prominent traits seems to be her high level of helpfulness that was demonstrated time and time again throughout her life. In middle school, she “always wanted to help the teacher to do this and that.” In her high school years, she participated in numerous volunteer activities. She volunteered at a nursing home, with Girl Scouts, and at parent-teacher conferences, to name a few. She estimated that there were some weekends where she spent between “5 to 8 hours” doing volunteer work. Not only did she complete this level of volunteer activity, she also recruited others to help, too. In fact, she recruited some friends and her brother and sisters to help at one time or another. In addition to her volunteer activities, she mentioned a variety of chores that she completed around her house, and she helped her younger sisters with their homework. When her older sister was enrolled in the local state college, she had difficulty with her math class, and Josefina, still in high school, helped her with her math homework, too. Her desire to help others has not stopped with her enrollment in college. She participated in a volunteer activity to pick-up trash out of a local river, and she had all of her siblings join her. She was almost able to convince her mother to join them, but her mother needed to stay at home and complete household tasks.

Hard-Worker

Josefina is a go-getter. She has high expectations of herself, and she is very willing and able to do whatever work that needs to be done in order to live-up to these expectations. For instance, she wants to be a teacher, and she has

already participated in various unpaid activities that will give her experience working with children. She worked on crafts with the children in the neighborhood. While in her first year of college, she volunteered at a United Way day camp. She had worked with a group of children who were in first grade (the grade she wants to teach), and she even developed the activities she would do with them. She expects high grades, and she had established routines to ensure her success.

She continues this tradition of high expectations and hard work when it comes to the academic arena. She typically spent “3 to 4” hours per night working on homework. She also allotted one personal hour per night for watching Spanish soap operas on television. Even though she had all A’s in her senior year of high school and was exempt from finals, she still took several of her final exams. She explained why she made this decision for her English class. “I decided to take it because it didn’t seem like a hard final, and I was hoping to raise my grade up.” Her desire for knowledge does not end with school work. Josefina is “trying not to lose” her ability to read Spanish; thus, she has made a concerted effort to develop and practice these skills by reading books written in Spanish. Sometimes she must ask her mother for help with the definitions of some of the words, but she does not let these unknown words keep her from goal of maintaining and developing her Spanish language abilities.

Family

I learned a great deal about Josefina's family throughout our three interviews because she talked about her family quite a bit. Josephina's family immigrated to the United States when she was 2 years old. Josefina's dad is undereducated; he only finished the first grade in Mexico. He began herding sheep and cows at the age of 6. He works in one of the factories for the major manufacturing industry in Ridgeville. Josefina's mother is also undereducated; she completed the sixth grade. At that time, she "moved away from her parents and got a job as [...] a maid for a rich family in Mexico." She married Josefina's father "at a young age." She is a housewife. Neither of her parents spoke English when Josefina started school.

Josefina has an older sister, a younger brother, and two younger sisters. Josefina's older sister was born in Mexico. She had finished kindergarten when they immigrated to the United States, and she did not know English when they arrived. Josefina feels this is the reason her sister had to retake kindergarten once she was in the United States. When this sister was in the seventh grade, the teacher recognized that she had the ability to recoup the year she had lost. Thus, the teacher consulted with Josefina's parents, and her sister was allowed to complete both seventh and eighth grade work during seventh grade. Her sister graduated from the same high school as Josefina, and then she attended the local state college where Josefina would eventually attend. Her brother is one year younger than Josefina. He also attended the same high school as Josefina at the

time of our first and second interviews. Her brother stated his desire to go to college during his senior year of high school. This “surprised” Josefina’s parents since he had not previously expressed such desires. He wants to pursue a certificate in auto mechanics. Both of Josefina’s younger sisters were born in the United States; thus, they have citizenship. Josefina says neither one of them can speak Spanish. The 12 year old sister viewed school as “not cool” for quite some time. She was quite upset when she read Josefina’s story that I had written. Josefina feels that this may have had a positive result because she now takes school more seriously and is discussing college as a possibility for herself. Josefina sees her 10 year old sister as similar to herself. She excels in school and wants to attend college in order “to be a pediatrician or a lawyer.” Josefina concludes that this sister may have made the decision to attend college at an early age because she saw Josefina’s older sister start college, and she sees Josefina undertaking the work to have a college education. In addition, Josefina’s father portrays college as the natural progression after one completes high school when he speaks to this sister.

Josefina’s paternal grandmother rounds out the immediate family. She does not live with Josefina, but she lives close by. Josefina describes her as “old but [...] not that old” and in poor health. Josefina links this poor health to the idea that her grandmother “worked so much to have a middle-class life.”

Academics – Kindergarten Through Grade 12

Josefina began her academic career with “Early Headstart” at the age of 3. At that time, she “did not know any English.” She was in a class that was almost exclusively native speakers of English; there was only one other boy who spoke Spanish. She “started picking up English really fast.” She says, “I really did not talk to anybody; I just kept to myself.” While this was her *modus operandi* at school, she does remember coming home after a few weeks of school and speaking English to her father. She also remembers that in this beginning phase of English acquisition she mixed English and Spanish when she spoke.

Josefina’s love of school and education was obvious as she spoke about her early elementary years. When I asked her what she remembered about elementary school, she replied, “I really did like going to school. I like being around all the little kids and like learning.” She learned to read in kindergarten, and she feels as if she “always wanted to sit down and [...] get a book and read.” This love of learning was obvious to others; one of her teachers commented, “She’s a great student that wants to learn” (cumulative file, 2006).

In middle school, she was enrolled in several advanced classes. She finds it “ironic” that she has been in advanced language arts since third grade, and this is a class that she finds distasteful. In middle school, she challenged the teachers’ recommendation for continuing with advanced English, but the teachers insisted that she would become “bored” in general reading classes; they felt that she could “do better than that class.” In middle school, she was academically successful; she

had an average in the 90s throughout 7th and 8th grade (cumulative file, 2006), and she scored in the average to above average range on her standardized tests (cumulative file, 2006).

When Josefina entered high school, she was once again academically successful. She maintained a 4.0 GPA throughout all 4 years of high school. She earned these grades in both general and advanced classes. She did not have to “study all that much” to earn these grades. She describes her learning style as one where she listened to what was going on in class, and this was usually enough for her. In addition, she participated in various clubs and other extra-curricular activities. At Josefina’s high school, the students are given some freedom in choosing classes. “The minimum that you can take is six [classes], and mostly everyone has seven.” However, Josefina chose to take eight classes.

Goals

When we met in Josefina’s senior year, she was able to articulate her goals and the steps she had taken or needed to take in order to meet these goals. She knew that she wanted to go to a college, and she believed that there were “good schools” that could offer her the education and the experiences that she wanted. In fact, she named two private schools within the state where she wanted to attend college. However, she was realistic and knew that her family did not have the resources to send her to a “real college” where she could “get the whole college experience.” Thus, she changed her plans to a more realistic goal of attending the local state college and living at home. While she was obviously disturbed by this

necessary circumventing of obstacles, she had taken the necessary steps to meet the overall goal of attending college. She applied for admission to the state college in February of her senior year, and she had declared Early Childhood Education as her major. This put her clearly on track to meet her next goal of becoming a first grade teacher. In addition, she had applied for several scholarships in an attempt to alleviate the financial burden of attending college.

Academics – College Life

Expectations

When I asked Josefina what she thought college would be like, she often had a difficult time articulating her ideas; however, I was able to learn a great deal about her expectations as she worked them into her answers to other questions that I asked. She vacillated when she discussed the possible difficulty of the work in college. Once she said,

When I moved from the middle school to the high school, [...] I thought the work was going to be a lot harder and that I wasn't going to be able to do it, and that's what I think about the college work.

At another time, she said, "I really don't see it [the work] as being harder [than in high school]."

While she may have had conflicted or ambivalent feelings about the difficulty of college in general, she did have definite ideas about certain aspects of college life. Josefina seemed to be most worried about her English classes. Here,

she knew that she must meet the requirement of writing an essay in one hour with a limited number of Type I errors (i.e. subject-verb disagreement, sentence fragments, run-on sentences). Josefina describes her high school English teacher's tirades on the subject.

Oh my gosh. My English teacher has gone on and on about it. Like, when were reading a book or if you can't understand this, then she's like 'you had better have Plan B for when you get to college because this book is easy compared to what you're going to get in college. And, if you can't write an essay in an hour, you're not going to be able to write their essays in college.'

Josefina was particularly troubled by these comments and the comments of others because she felt as if she was "really bad at English." This made her "scared."

Pleasant Surprises

I would describe Josefina's English class as one of her pleasant surprises. While she "was really nervous" that she might "get topics" that were too difficult for her and this would cause her "to freak out," she found this not to be the case. In fact, she finished her first essay before the end of the hour; thus, she was able "to look over it." Josefina describes the experience of earning a 99% on this first English essay as "the most positive thing" that happened within her first semester of college. She "worked really hard on it," and she was "really excited" with the results. In the end, she earned an A in this class.

Problems

One of the problems Josefina encountered was balancing her school and family obligations. One day she had to go and get her sister at her place of employment. This made her late for her biology class; she believes this tardiness was a contributing factor to a “bad” grade on the biology test given that day. After earning a 79% on this test, she evaluated her performance, and she decided that she needed to make sure her sister was aware of her priorities, and she also needed to change her study habits. She recognized that the tardiness may have contributed to her poor performance, but “procrastinating to read the chapters” was also a contributing factor. Therefore, Josefina no longer waited until the last minute to read the chapters.

While a low grade was an obstacle that Josefina readily and quickly identified, analyzed, and counteracted, a much bigger obstacle almost forestalled her college plans all together. Josefina took all the steps necessary to acquire the financial resources to attend college. Josefina knew that a 4.0 GPA would not earn her the right to attend college on the ASPIRE scholarship because of her undocumented status, and she followed logical steps to overcome this obstacle. She attended a Latino conference aimed at future college students. Here, she acquired a list of scholarships for which she could apply. She applied for several of these scholarships, and at first, it seemed as if undocumented students could receive them. Later, one of her high school counselors told her that her undocumented status might exclude her from the pool of possible recipients. She

also applied for some scholarships given by her school. She did not receive any of these scholarships, but she was able to go to the local state college because Ms. Smith, the person in the registrar's office who is responsible for minority student affairs at the college, contacted her because it did not appear that she was planning to go to college. This woman "looked around and she got a scholarship" from the college to offer Josefina since finances were holding her back.

Themes

To me, it seems as if there is one major theme that surrounds Josefina. Josefina is caught between two cultures, and this can be both frustrating and empowering. Josefina identifies herself as Mexican because she "was born in Mexico." She does not view herself as "special or different or unique" (S. Hixon, 2006). Instead, she sees herself as "a Mexican, just not living in Mexico and just living somewhere else." As such, this dichotomy between the two cultures (Mexican and American) is obvious time, and time again. Josefina took a diversity class in college that "brought her to tears." In this class, she had to write a paper to describe who she was. She explained why this paper troubled her so greatly.

I really do not know who I am. I was born in Mexico, but I really don't know Mexican history. I'm just confused with who I am. I was brought here when I was two years old. I'm a Southern girl – not really.

Dichotomy within the Family

This dichotomous relationship is perhaps most evident when Josefina describes the various interactions among her family members. Josefina sees her dad as “old-fashion.” Despite her interest in playing soccer, he would not allow her to play because he “really doesn’t like sports because he says they are a waste of time and that women really shouldn’t be doing sports.” Instead, he believes women “should be [...] doing chores and [...] tending to the men.” At the same time, Josefina’s dad believes that there is a “difference between girls’ work and guys’ work.” For instance, even though she volunteered to help, she was not allowed to help her father with fixing the roof because she might fall off, and she needed to stay at home and do “laundry and clean something up.” Instead, her reluctant brother was drafted for the job.

Josefina’s mother seems to be less traditional in some ways. In fact, Josefina describes several instances where her mother has encouraged Josefina and her sister to become more independent.

My mom got married at a young age as well, and she’s always told us since we were real little, ‘Don’t get married right away.’ She’s always like, ‘Do everything you want to do career wise and like everything else first. You know you don’t have to depend on a guy to [...] support you and stuff like that. You can do that yourself.’

Josefina believes that while both parents encourage her to go to college, her mother is more encouraging. Josefina’s mother seems to link education with

independence, and this is evident when Josefina said,

My mom's like, 'you need to do this on your own, so you can be more independent and whenever you do get married and later in life you're not going to have to be depending on your husband to provide for you.' So, she's like, 'you're education is really important.'

Both of her parents agree that she should not move out of the house until she is married. She believes it would be very difficult to persuade her parents to let her move out before she gets married because "they have very, very, old, old, old beliefs." Josefina believes this idea that a daughter cannot move out of the family home until she is married is a "pretty traditional belief in the Hispanic culture" (S. Hixon, 2007). She also believes that Hispanic parents may feel this way because they are worried that their daughters would "start doing bad things" if they were not living under their parents' roofs. She identifies "go[ing] out all the time," "never being at home" and "hang[ing] out with the wrong people" as the bad things her parents may worry about. At the same time, they have different standards for her brother. He is a year younger than her, and by his senior year in high school, Josefina's "dad [was] already asking him, 'when are you going to move out?'"

Without a doubt, Josefina's grandmother is firmly entrenched in the Mexican culture, and this causes Josefina a great deal of frustration. She "still

doesn't see the point" of a college education for Josefina. Why might this be the case? Josefina described the situation, "I guess she's more old fashion than my dad. The only responsibility of a woman is to get married and have kids and raise your kids." Josefina does not agree with this philosophy.

Furthermore, her grandmother believes educational advancement is for Americans – not for Josefina and her sisters. In fact, she could not see the advantage of Josefina and her older sister even finishing high school. Josefina says that her grandmother "thinks they are ready to work," and Josefina has tried to explain to her that getting a college degree "will pay off when you work later on. You will start working later on, but you'll get paid more than if you keep the same entry-level job that [...] you get if you don't finish school." Her grandmother's attitude has provided an unintended result: Josefina has even more motivation to successfully complete college. Josefina says, "I just want to prove her wrong." She wants to show her grandmother that she "can do you know what other people can do."

Why does Josefina's grandmother have such strong convictions about Josefina's future? Josefina speculates,

I guess because she thinks we're living in the small town that I'm from in Mexico where once you hit 18 or 17, you are already married. And even though we're here in the United States, she just kind of sees us as really not from here.

Furthermore, Josefina feels as if this value system encourages her grandmother to feel as if she and her older sister should not “have the same opportunities” as American citizens. She tells Josefina, ““We were not wasting our time on education.”” Instead, her grandmother was “working”, “getting married”, and “having kids” when she was young.

Not only is Josefina caught between the two worlds, her grandmother and father also seem to have an interesting tension between their American lives and their Mexican identities. This was most noticeable when Josefina spoke of the ways in which she believed the significant others in her life viewed success. While I have detailed the numerous instances where her dad and grandmother may be perceived as traditional, when it come to their purported views of success, here they seem to have taken on elements of the American persona. Josefina believes her “dad views success with money.” In other words, “If you have a lot of money, you are successful.” She feels as if her grandmother takes this one step further. “She just wants money. If you have a lot of fancy cars and jewelry and you can show it and flaunt it, then you are successful.” Josefina and her mother, on the other hand, link success with “helping out other people.”

This discord between the Mexican heritage and life in America is also exemplified in the narrative Josefina shares about her younger sisters and their lack of Spanish-speaking skills; this lack of skill on their part motivates Josefina to expand own abilities. Her sisters, “don’t speak a word of Spanish.” “They

can't carry on a conversation in Spanish.” Josefina explains the ramifications of such a break from their heritage.

If I start talking to one of them in Spanish, they will respond to me in English, and I don't want to be like them because like whenever we go out and we see our other family (like our cousins) that are not from here that don't know English, and we are talking in English amongst ourselves with a bunch of my brother and sisters. Oh, they think that we are all that because we know English. They don't want to come talk to us.

Josefina believes this lack of Spanish-speaking skills causes a Hispanic to be “looked down upon by Hispanics.” Furthermore, the sisters do not talk to their grandmother who does not speak English, and when they are around her they only speak English. This causes the grandmother to feel as if “they are talking about her, or they are disrespecting her in some way.”

Moses (2000) would not be surprised by the resulting disconnection that exists between Josefina's sisters and grandmother. Moses might suggest that this was an inevitable breach that was produced because “assimilation into English came at a high price” (p. 338). It is possible that Josefina's sisters have become “ashamed of their heritage language” (p. 338); as a result there is a “rift” (p. 338) between her Spanish-speaking grandmother and her English-speaking sisters.

Dichotomy in Academics

The tension between her life in America and her Mexican identity is also felt when Josefina talks about her educational experiences. However, I believe this tension can be felt most profoundly with a comment I found in Josefina's cumulative file. "Her family is extremely helpful in their limited way. She's a great student that wants to learn" (cumulative file, 2006). Here is a student who learned to read "at the end kindergarten," and she did this by taking a "little bag of books" home to read to her mother. When she first started this process, *reading* involved creating stories from the pictures that were in the book. Her mother would respond with encouraging comments. In addition, her father helped her with her math homework because he is "good at math." Josefina would ask her mother for help with unknown concepts; she says she used Spanish for these conversations. In later years, her mother provided assistance with English homework. Josefina said her mother "would help [her] narrow down the topic," "help [her] stay on topic," and "give [her] suggestions on what [she] could write about." To me, it seems as if the writer of the "limited way" (cumulative file, 2006) comment made a judgment that her parents were unable to help her in any substantial way either because they were immigrants or because they had limited English abilities. Limited English abilities should not be equated with a limited ability to help. It sounds like her undereducated parents provided a great deal of assistance over the years.

Her identity was also an issue when she was placed in advanced classes in middle school. While she acknowledges the many benefits of having taken these harder classes in middle school, she also is quite adamant that at the time, she did not see this placement in a positive light. In fact, she said, “I hated it. I was like, ‘why are you punishing me? Why can’t I be with all of the other kids?’” These other kids she was referring to her were her friends, but she seemed to be most disturbed by the idea that she would be in a class with “all white people.” Her disconnection is felt when she says, “I was the only Hispanic in there, and I was like, ‘Okay, who am I going to talk to? There’s nobody to talk to.’” She was also worried that her classmates would view her as “stupid.” She continued in advanced classes at the beginning of her high school career, but she made the decision to drop to general classes, and she does not link this decision to her view of advanced classes as punishment in middle school. Instead, she made the decision once she learned that the family’s immigration to the United States was an undocumented one. In middle school, she had the idea that the natural progression for her would be middle school, high school, and college. Once she learned she was undocumented, she felt that the desire or dream to go to college of her choice was no longer a realistic possibility. In fact, she determined that working was her only option. Thus, taking advanced classes did not seem to be a reasonable demand at this point. She summarizes, “I didn’t see the point to studying hard and doing the work.” She explains further, “I stopped doing all the advanced classes because I didn’t see the need for them because I couldn’t get

into the colleges that I really wanted to get into.” In essence, her American dream was derailed by her undocumented status.

While Josefina did believe she had little chance of furthering her education in the environment of her choosing, there was a very powerful second reason for abandoning the advanced classes. Once she was in regular classes, she did not want to go back to advanced classes because she was unwilling “to be alone anymore.” Josefina shares these feelings with other students. Yonezawa, Wells, and Serna (2002) found that the Latino and African-American students in their study “often felt isolated” (p. 55) if they moved to advance classes when given the chance. They suggest this feeling of isolation was because they “relied on racially segregated peer groups for social support” (p. 55). Yonezawa, Wells, and Serna explain the larger picture: these students “might desire high-status courses” (p. 55). However, they also desire “the respect, admiration, and companionship of other students like them” (Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002, p. 55). Thus, these students are in a quandary.

While hindsight made Josefina wish that she had not made this decision, at the time, the decision was logical based on the information she had at hand. While Dietrich (1998) was talking about Chicanas who had developed some oppositional characteristics, she made a point that is applicable to Josefina’s situation. Dietrich suggests that youth such as Josefina are “simultaneously immersed in two cultural systems” (p. 8), and this causes them to select the values from the different cultures that fit the particular circumstances and contexts. In

other words, a decision that may appear illogical to others at the time or even to the decision maker at a later date is logical based upon the given context.

I was quite troubled when I realized that it did not seem as if anyone discussed Josefina's decision to drop to a lower level of academics because she did not see college in her future. Here, we have a student who scored in the nineties in all of her middle school classes (cumulative files, 2006), earned a 4.0 GPA while taking advanced classes in high school (cumulative files, 2006), missed only 2 days of school in 3 years (cumulative files, 2006), and passed all her graduation exams with plus scores (exceeding the requirements to pass) (cumulative files, 2006), yet, she only mentions one teacher who continued to encourage her to pursue advanced classes. At the time, she was not very fond of the geography teacher who attempted to encourage her to take an advanced placement class because his methods left her feeling "dumb." She explains, "He said that I was a disappointment, and I was wasting my brain." Now, she wishes she would have taken his advice. Instead of taking his advice, she was able to get switched to the general class by having her parents come to school. It seems as if a school counselor could have provided her with some suggestions and or incentives for continuing her advanced training.

Josefina has learned a great deal as a result of these troubles, and she is attempting to help her father guide her younger sisters (especially the sister who is most like her) to take a prudent view of their educational opportunities. For example, the sister who is about to go to middle school has been in advanced

classes for years, and she wants to drop to regular classes “with all of the other kids.” Josefina responds, “What is wrong with you? Stay in those classes.” She explains to her sister that she have an opportunity to get “many scholarships” if she maintains a good GPA in advanced classes. She also reminds her, “You can go away.” Obviously, she does not want her sister (an American citizen) to squander the opportunities that Josefina so desperately wishes she had.

Dichotomy in Society

Josefina’s choice of her favorite childhood book exemplifies her perceptions of the United States and what it is like for her to be an undocumented Mexican living in the United States. When we were discussing how much she loved to read, I asked her about any favorite books she could remember from her childhood. She identified Maurice Sendak’s, *Where the Wild Things Are* as her favorite childhood book. Josefina explains why this is her favorite book.

It was and still is one of my favorite books [...] because he gets to go [...] [to] his own imaginary place where everything is the way he wants it to be. And, I guess it let me [...] like imagine my own perfect place where I would want to be. A place that doesn’t have like very strict – well, they don’t care where you come from or something like that. [...] Then, I can do all the things that I wanted to do. It always [...] goes back to my [...] education of what I want to do.

She seems to find the United States to be so strict because she is undocumented; as a result, she cannot pursue her goals as she wishes to pursue them. In essence, the United States government has managed to stifle her dreams and deny her opportunities that others have simply because she came from another country in an undocumented fashion. What, then, is her reward for all the hard work and community service she completed while moving through her academic career?

This tension between the opportunities documented citizens have over the lack of opportunities for undocumented people provides a great deal of frustration for Josefina. The frustration is obvious in the tone of her voice, the words she uses to explain, and the underlying tears as she discusses this topic. Josefina illustrates the frustration eloquently when she says, “I have all the desire and like everything else to go to college, but I just can’t because of my status.” Josefina is not just frustrated that she is denied the opportunity; it seems to be more of an insult that “there’s like other people who have the ability to go to any school, and they can apply for any scholarship cause they are born here.” However, “they’re not doing anything.” These people “don’t work for it,” and Josefina must continue to “keep on looking for [...] hope.”

Josefina has a strong sense of how others in the community may view Hispanics. Hispanics, she suggests, are viewed as “lazy,” “living off of welfare,” “getting pregnant,” and “getting married as a teen.” The number of teen pregnancies experienced in the Hispanic community seems to be an important topic for Josefina. In fact, she thought I would ask, “Why is there more in [...]

Hispanic cultures right [...] now?" She was very willing to speculate why there might be more pregnancies in the Hispanic community than in the general population. She suggested, "They are not paying attention to what they are doing, and then others are not really interested in school and getting an education. They only like see themselves getting married and starting a family." She explained that getting pregnant might help the young women move toward their goal of getting married because the common Hispanic attitude is that "if the guy gets the girl pregnant, then he has to take her." Josefina believes that many of these young partnerships will not prevail because the "guy might just lose interest." Josefina also identified teen pregnancy as one of the "stupid" things that a high school student could do that would lead him/her to drop out of high school.

She wants to "help influence" Hispanic teens who might be considering college because she does not "want people to [...] classify all Hispanics like that." Josefina elaborates,

I think it's important for us to actually do something you know. Get an education. Get into the jobs, and you know show people that no, we're not living off of welfare, and we can do what they do. You know. We can get an education. We can be doctors. We can be lawyers. We can be teachers. We can be whatever any person wants to be.

In essence, Josefina is like Karina in the Rosas and Hamrick (2002) study.

Karina said she wants to help "others realize that their dreams can come

true” (p. 63). Josefina’s comments above reflect this same aspiration, and she also has a strong desire for others to recognize the accomplishment of these dreams.

Conclusion

After analyzing the data from three interviews and Josefina’s cumulative file and transcripts, I believe I have told Josefina’s story in manner that helps the reader to see her as she sees herself and as I see her. I believe her story was further enhanced because I met with her and discussed her story with her. I will illuminate how these ideas fit within my research questions.

Perceptions of Past and Present Lives

As I said at the beginning of her story, Josefina is quite self-reflective, and this self-reflection on her part reinforces my belief that I have presented Josefina’s story in a manner that helps the reader to see who she is, where she has come from, and where she is in the present.

Her past and present life seems to be dominated by the dichotomy that splits her Mexican background and her American life. She describes herself as someone who is living in a household that is controlled, in large part, by an “old fashion” father who on one hand supports her bid for independence by encouraging her to go to college and who on the other hand seems to hold her back by imposing his ideas of what it means to be a woman. There are things that she can and cannot do because she is female. She cannot do outside chores that are too dangerous; those chores are for her brother. She could not play soccer

because “sports are a waste of time,” and because “women really shouldn’t be doing sports.” At the same time, the messages she receives from her two female role models in her life are at odds. Her paternal grandmother believes that Josefina is just “wasting [her] time on an education,” and instead, she should be focusing on “working,” “getting married,” and “having kids.” Meanwhile, Josefina’s mother focuses her life around her husband and children, but she repeatedly encourages Josefina to focus on getting a degree and becoming “independent.” It as if she does not want Josefina to experience the same life that she has had.

In terms of her schooling, she is once again caught in the split between the positive experiences that she had and the negative impact felt because of her ethnic background. She describes her interactions with the teachers, students, and other school personnel in positive terms. However, in her reflections of these instances, she also recognizes that she felt alienated when she was placed in the advanced classes. While she acknowledges that her teachers must have recognized her academic abilities, they seemed unaware of the struggles she faced as being one of the only students from a Mexican background in these classes. She was worried that others would question her right to be there, and she felt awkward because there would be no other people from her ethnic background with whom she could bond. Dropping out of such classes seemed to her, at the time, to be a solution to this agony.

Aspirations and Expectations of the Future

Although Josefina had no difficulty expressing her aspirations, she did have a difficult time conveying her expectations of college life at times. Josefina knew she wanted to teach first grade. In fact, her first grade teacher was her inspirations for such a career. She does aspire to have a family, but she believes this should not happen until after she has an established career and independence. In addition to her career and family aspirations, she is very committed to helping Hispanics. She feels that she must be helping others to be truly successful.

At times, Josefina expected college to be difficult, and at other times she did not fear the level of difficulty she might experience. At one point, she felt that college would be a “big party.” However, she had definite ideas about certain classes. She did assume that English 1101 would be difficult because high school teachers had told her classmates and her about timed essays and Type I errors. Josefina did not see English as one of her strong suits. She also thought she would need to be more responsible. She worried that she would give into the temptation to “miss class” since she “would be allowed to miss class.”

Reconciliation of Aspirations, Expectations, and Perceptions

At one point during her senior year of high school, Josefina did not even expect to go to college even though she had the desire or aspiration to do so. These lowered expectations were not based on her academic abilities or self-confidence. After all, she had achieved a 4.0 GPA. Once she realized that she could not qualify for the ASPIRE scholarship and she was turned down by the

scholarships that were for Hispanics, she did not see any possibility for college attendance. One of her teachers stepped in and brought her to RSC to meet with the person in admissions who handles minority student issues. An appropriate scholarship was *discovered*, and she was on her way to college. Her dreams were once again damped when the waiver program for out-of-state tuition was dropped by the state. However, she worked through this hurdle by saving money from her job to pay one third of the tuition, by having her father pay one third of the tuition, and by having the scholarship pay the other one third.

Once in college, her expectations of college life were not met. College was not a “big party.” In fact, “people are always sitting down, always [...] studying.” Her negative expectations did not bare fruit either. She was quite successful in English 1101. While she was afraid she might get topics on which she could not write, the topics she was given “were alright.” She unexpectedly finished before the hour was over, and she even “got a chance to look over it [the essay].” She earned a 99% on the first essay and an A in the class. In this instance, her fears seemed to be groundless. She seems to have a much more pessimistic view of her abilities than is actually true. In fact, her college entrance scores were so high that she has already been exempted from having to take the writing portion of the college graduation exam. Her diminished perceptions of her abilities in this area coupled with the teachers’ exaggerated diatribes on the topic seemed to have given her a false sense of what English 1101 would mean for her chances for success.

Conclusion

Josefina's future looks very promising. She is an articulate, driven, young woman who is self-reflective and hardworking. She says, "Success means accomplishing everything I want to accomplish. Getting to the point of my life where I am satisfied with what I am doing and how it's benefiting like other people and myself." Here, Josefina's desire to accomplish something that benefits others is similar to female college students of Mexican decent in the Rosas and Hamrick (2002) study who were concerned with "reciprocity" (p. 63) with the members of their communities. They believe that "reciprocity in the sense of benefiting others and becoming an active contributor was a broad responsibility to the respondents' communities" (p. 63).

Her ability to be self-reflective extends to her idea of success, and she is a hard taskmaster when it comes to this self-reflection. At the time of our second interview, shortly before she graduated from high school, she rated herself "a 7" "on a scale of 1 to 10" for success. On the positive side, she had "high grades," was "involved in school," and "had made a name." However, this was not enough to rate herself higher on the scale of success. She explained, "I think there were other things I could have done." "I could have taken more advanced classes and found a way to convince my dad to let me play soccer."

When I interviewed Josefina for the third time, a few weeks into the second semester of college, she stated that she was "successful right now." She felt successful because she was "working," "going to school full time," and

“doing good in school.” In addition, she knew that she had identified her goals and was working toward achieving these goals. All of these elements had combined to help her logically view herself as successful.

As I see it, Josefina knows she wants to help people, and this seems to be a cornerstone to her image of success. In this regard, she is similar to the youth of Mexican heritage in the Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) study who told stories that demonstrated they had a yearning “to help others” (p. 123).

She has already made great inroads in this goal. One way she can help people is by becoming a teacher. As stated previously, she has participated in numerous activities to develop her skills in this area. In addition, she is able to identify and overcome obstacles that she encounters. She has found a job to help defray the cost of college textbooks. Most important, she is making the best of a difficult situation. She has an idea of the perfect college experience, and she knows she is not going to be able to have this experience because of the lack of finances and the government policies that stifle the educational dreams of undocumented immigrants. While it is painfully obvious that it is hard for her to give up these dreams, she is not wallowing in self-pity. Instead, she is doing the next best thing to attending the dream school of her choice: she is getting the education she needs in order to do what she wants to do in her future. I cannot help but think she will be a resounding success as a teacher, as a humanitarian, and as a role model or mentor for future generations of Mexican immigrants.

College is Like a “Vacation” with a Few Flat Tires, Wrong Turns,
and Other Mishaps: Laura’s Story

Family

When I first met Laura in the spring of 2006, she was a 19 year-old high school senior who was a few weeks away from achieving one of her goals: graduating from high school. Laura wanted to participate in the study because she thought it would help me, and at the same time, she felt she would not be doing anything wrong. By the end of this study, she articulated that her participation in this study was important because it was necessary for “people to know what it is like to be an immigrant student.”

Laura is a recent immigrant from Mexico; in fact, she moved to the United States with her mother 3 years before she participated in the study. They came to live with her father who had been in the United States for eight years. Her father, who had worked as a veterinarian in Mexico, worked in a veterinarian clinic in the United States. Her mother, who had been an elementary school principal and a kindergarten teacher in Mexico, was a stay-at-home mom and housewife at the time this study took place. She was unable to work outside of the home because she did not possess the proper documents.

Academics – Kindergarten Through Grade 12

At this point in her life, Laura had been very successful academically. Throughout her three high school years in the United States, she had achieved a cumulative GPA of 3.91. After her first semester in the United States, she had

earned a 4.0 GPA each semester. The only reason she did not have a 4.0 the first semester was because she had scored a 79 and an 87 percent in her two ESOL classes that semester. While it is commendable that she passed all the graduations tests, the fact that she passed 3 of the 5 graduation tests with scores that fell into the *plus range* made this feat truly remarkable.

I cannot mention her academic success without also shedding some attention on the other activities and qualities that should have made her transition to college seamless. She was a member of several clubs sponsored by her high school. In all of these clubs, she participated in activities that helped with charitable work or community service activities. What makes her academic success especially noteworthy is that when she arrived in the United States 3 years ago, she had virtually no English skills. In fact, she stated that the only word she knew in English when she arrived was, “hi.”

This academic success seems to have been a foundation of her life since her earliest years in school in both Mexico and the United States. Most of Laura’s elementary school memories are positive ones. While she only has “random memories” of these years, she does recall them fondly as being “enjoyable.” Her perceptions of these early years are ones of playing with friends, eating lunch, and doing her work. Her enjoyment was further enhanced by her early academic success. She views her elementary years as ones in which she “didn’t have any trouble with it (classes),” nor did she have a “hard time.”

When Laura entered middle school, her parents decided to send her to a private school with her cousin. Laura believes there were several factors that led to this decision. She views the public schools in Mexico as having less organization, inferior teachers, and crowded classes. In other words, the overall education in a typical private school is “better” than the education in the public school system.

Despite these perceived advantages, her first experiences in private school were not as positive as her elementary school experiences, but later she started to meet with a higher level of academic success. When she first went to middle school, she says, “I didn’t have a good time there,” and the “classes were hard for me.” She really does not recall why she struggled, but she knows that she left elementary school prepared for middle school. However, she suggests that “they [the school] didn’t have preparation of the teachers.” Her parents and her cousin’s parents sent them to a second private middle school. Here, her “grades started getting better, and [she] could feel more comfortable.” Once again, she was meeting with academic success, and Laura views her experiences in this second school as much more positive. She sees the teachers from this school as “better prepared,” and “the students and the classes were better.”

She continued to attend the private school for her first 2 years of high school. Laura believes the transition to high school was a fairly easy one since the teachers and the principal were the same people she interacted with in the middle school. After 2 years of high school, Laura and her mother moved to the

United States. At this point, Laura began what can only be described as a frenzied academic career.

Upon arrival in the Southern town where she would live with both of her parents after 8 years of separation from her father, she was screened by the personnel at the immersion center for newcomers. She took the Spanish Assessment of Basic Skills, and she scored 8.7 on math calculations and 12.1 on math applications. She had a similar divide on the reading portion of the test where she scored 9.6 on vocabulary and 12.9 on reading comprehension (Laura, cumulative file, 2006).

Once she arrived at RHS, she was placed in ESL classes for one year. She attended the ESL class for the entire day. Not only did the English-speaking teacher in this class provide English instruction, she also taught the content areas to students who “were working slower than other people.” Laura liked the fact that the teacher “worked more slowly” because this made it “easier for [her].” Her fellow classmates also made the process easier because they had better English skills than Laura, and they translated the teacher’s directions and comments when Laura did not understand.

Laura exited ESL after 1 year and “moved onto regular classes” where she found the work to be more difficult. Laura suggests that the classes were challenging at first due to the teachers’ lack of understanding of her English abilities. In other words, the teachers were unaware that Laura had come to the United States within the last year with very limited English knowledge and had

just learned English. This feeling that Laura had that her teachers were unaware of her abilities parallels Harklau's (1994a) findings; she found that many of the mainstream teachers in the high school she observed "did not even know who the English learners in their classes were" (p. 264). Laura attributes her academic success in this environment to her drive to "study more than a regular person" in order to "get the same grades as [her] other classmates." What does it mean to "study more than a regular person?" For Laura, it means studying approximately three to four hours per day seven days per week.

While Laura did invest a great deal of time and effort in studying and completing her homework in order to maintain her exemplary GPA, this did not prohibit her from enjoying some of the other activities that were offered by her school. In fact, I would say that Laura was relatively active. She attended prom and other school-sponsored dances. She joined several clubs where the focus was on community service.

Goals

At the time of our second interview, Laura freely expressed her dreams and desires. She developed a desire to go to college at approximately 7 to 8 years of age, and she feels that this desire began as a result of having parents and a brother who went to college. Going to college was not a nebulous idea; she knew that after she graduated from high school, she wanted to attend college in order to become a nurse. She has known since she was young that she wanted to work in the medical field, and she attributes this fascination with the medical field to two

possible factors: her father is a veterinarian, and her brother is studying to become a dentist. At one time, she had considered studying to be a doctor, but she changed her mind for what seems to be very practical reasons. She suggests that it will take too long to become a doctor (perhaps 15-20 years), and she needs “to get a job to support [her] family.”

During different interviews, she vacillated between wanting to work in a hospital in Mexico City and in Ridgeview (pseudonym). This uncertainty of her future living environment is based upon the fact that she does not know if she will have to return to Mexico with her mother in the summer of 2007. While she was in high school, she saw herself living in Ridgeview, and during the summer of 2006, there was already talk that she and her mother would be returning to Mexico. If she does return to Mexico, she has once again formulated a new set of goals based upon practicality. She suggests the nursing program in Mexico is “really expensive,” and her brother “has all the instruments and tools” needed for dentistry school. Her brother and friends are studying to become dentists, and her brother could help her. Perhaps most important, “[one] can get a better income” if one is a dentist.

What I find most interesting about her change in goals is that her aspirations and expectations seem to be higher when she is living in Mexico or contemplating returning to Mexico. In the United States, she aspires and expects to work as a nurse, but when she was a young girl, she had visions of being a doctor. Now, that the possibility of returning to Mexico is looming ahead, she once again

returns her desire to a dream of becoming more than a nurse. Even when she says she wants to study to be a nurse, she talks of her desire to “keep studying” once she has “settled down” in her field.

Academics – College Life

Expectations

Laura had several well-defined expectations of college life before she entered college. For example, several times she stated that she thought college would be hard, and she believed that using the English language and taking English classes would be the most difficult aspects of attending college. She “was ready to study a lot” once she arrived on the college campus. One of the reasons she felt this way is because she anticipated daily life in college would be similar to daily life in high school. Finally, she felt that “nobody will talk to you” because they would not “care about anything but [the] work.” In essence, the “focus” for all students, including her, would be the school work.

Pleasant Surprises

Many aspects of the reality of college life were pleasant surprises for Laura when she actually went to college. The very first item on my question list when I met Laura again in the beginning of her first semester of her freshman year was to ask her to tell me about what college life was like for her. Her response was, “It’s been like a vacation.” She found that college was not really harder than high school; it was just different. “In high school, it was a lot of work and homework and projects.” In addition, high school involved “reading and

exercises.” College, on the other hand, involves “reading, studying,” and “taking tests.” She finds that she has “more free time” and “more time at home.” The fact that she “can sleep more” also adds to the “vacation” feeling.

One of the reasons she seemed to have “more free time” was because she “didn’t have to make any homework” or “study that much.” Laura suggests that lowering the number of academic classes (six per semester of her senior year of high school to four in the first semester of college) could be a reason college is not “stressful.” In essence, she is “relaxed” because she comes to school, takes her classes, and goes back home. She also attributes some of the ease of transitioning to college to the classes and the teachers she had in high school. She feels as if the content of what she learned in her various classes did “prepare” her for what she is taking in college. In addition, she had “the pressure of having two social studies classes in high school at the same time,” and she was taking other classes. She repeated this pattern when she took two English classes at the same time.

Mishaps

Has her “vacation” been trouble free? No, in fact, she has had to deal with a few metaphorical flat tires, wrong directions, and other mishaps. Her biggest flat tire seems to be her inability to successfully pass English 1101 during her first semester. She was unable to meet with success despite the fact that she worked on her time management skills in order to facilitate her ability to complete the essay in the time allotted, and she went to the writing lab where she could work

with professional tutors or English professors. Perhaps, part of her difficulty stems from the fact that she “just barely got the points to be in 1101.” In other words, her COMPASS score was barely above the minimum requirement for entrance into English 1101.

Also, she feels English is more difficult than some of her other subjects because in the other classes, she is expected to “give information from [her] head and know the facts and know the stuff.” In English class, however, she has to “think” and write in order to meet with success. Laura suggests she may have benefited from taking a learning support English class, but, with the advice of an advisor in the advising center, she decided that “it would help me a lot if I take the class [English 1101]” again. When I spoke with Laura after I had completed writing her story, she suggested she also might have benefited from an ESL version of English 1101. In such a class, she felt that she would receive more practice and more time to complete her essays.

In her English 1101 classes, the students (native speakers of English and ESL students) must select a topic from a list of four topics and write a 500-word essay within 50 minutes. These essays are not holistically graded. According to the English 1101 syllabus (RSC, Division of Humanities, English 1101 Syllabus),¹⁹ students cannot pass the essays if they make three or more Type I errors. Type I errors include run-on sentences, subject-verb disagreements, fragments, and comma splices (RSC, Division of Humanities, Error Types and

¹⁹ The actual citation for this syllabus will not appear in the reference list in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

Grading Standards).²⁰ It is not surprising that Laura found it difficult to organize her thoughts, develop and write an appropriate answer, and make grammatical and other corrections within the fifty minute time slot since English is not her first language.

Is this type of writing a reasonable task for an ESL student who has been speaking and writing English for 3 years? According to research, timed essay writing for ESL students is probably an unreasonable expectation. Leki (1992), after analyzing the data from the study conducted by Raimes (1985), suggests that “L2 [second language] writers need considerably more time than native speakers need” (p. 82). Raimes (1985) suggests that second language writers need more time to write and more time to access the necessary vocabulary (p. 248). They need this vocabulary in order “to generate, develop, and present ideas” (Raimes, 1985, p. 248) and in order to “make their own background knowledge accessible to them in their L2 [second language]” (p. 250). In addition, Polio, Fleck, and Leder (1998) found “extra time, whether used to focus on sentence-level changes or content, results in more linguistically accurate essays” (p. 55) for ESL students.

If lack of financial resources and loss of the proper travel documents are mishaps that can spoil an enjoyable vacation, they certainly can impede one’s steady progress in college. Laura’s stint in college began with a promising financial start. She received two scholarships that paid her entire tuition. This year, she was able to “have a thing that waives out-of-state tuition” because she

²⁰ In order to protect the identity of the participants, the actual citation for this document will not appear in the reference list.

was “one of the first people like immigrant (...) that doesn’t have any documents” to request the waiver. It is very probable that these waivers will be cancelled in the upcoming semesters. Without the proper documents, Laura will have to pay out-of-state tuition which is a substantially higher fee than in-state tuition. Since Laura has a visa and a passport but no green card, this is a probable possibility. In addition, she cannot apply for financial aid. The threat of losing her financial resources is a definite impediment for Laura’s college and career aspirations. This problem coincides with the data gleaned from the Kao and Tienda (1998) study; they, too, found that “financial support” (p. 378) was one of the biggest roadblocks for the Hispanic youth in their study who aspired to have a college education.

Themes

As I analyzed the data presented in Laura’s case study, I found myself returning to several ideas or themes that appear to be central to her story. Many of these themes are centered upon features of her personality.

Optimism

Laura has an optimistic outlook on life. She seems to be able to view even the most worrisome or troublesome occurrences with positive perceptions. For example, when she moved to the United States from Mexico, she was placed in the tenth grade despite the fact that she would have been in her junior year in Mexico and despite the fact that the grades she was transferring in were all in the ninety percent range. Her optimism is evident when she says, “I lost 1 year

only.” When she talks about moving back to Mexico without completing her degree in the United States, she is once again able to see the positive attributes of taking classes here that may or may not transfer for credit to Mexico. She feels she will be able to “do it faster” if she has to retake any classes in Mexico.

Perhaps this optimism is partially responsible for her persistence in school, or perhaps her optimism is partially a result of her persistence in school. Kao and Tienda (1998) find that Hispanic students “who persist in school remain relatively optimistic about their educational outlook” (p. 371), and Laura does this despite the fact that she was held back 1 year when she came to the United States. Kao and Tienda (1998) found “that having ever repeated a grade, either early or later in the educational career, greatly dampens college aspirations” (p. 370).

A Thirst for Knowledge

A second personality trait that Laura exhibits is her thirst for knowledge, and this thirst seems to have developed over time. Laura’s interest in learning was somewhat evident at a young age. In kindergarten, Laura “enjoyed elementary school, and [she] didn’t have a hard time.” She says, “I did all of my homework all the time, so I didn’t have any trouble.” In her second middle school, she continued to meet with academic success despite her self-reported lack of focus on school.

Once she immigrated to the United States, her love of learning became much more developed, and she took advantage of different learning opportunities. While she was placed in ESOL classes her first year to facilitate the development

of her English skills, this was not enough for Laura. She was motivated to do more to learn on her own. She used electronic dictionaries, “watch[ed] the English channel,” [tried] to read books,” “[listened] to music,” and went “to the movies.” She is not satisfied to translate the movie from English to Spanish in her head. Instead, she works hard to overcome any misunderstandings of the English language, by “thinking about it and contemplating.” Now, she feels as if she “[goes] with the flow,” and watching movies in English or listening to music with English words is “like listening to Spanish.”

She likes the idea of interacting with White Americans because this affords her the “great opportunity” to “exchange cultures and everything.” In addition, she has more opportunities to improve her English skills. She sees these interactions as valuable educational experiences, and she cannot understand why more of her Mexican or Mexican-American peers do not see them in the same light.

This desire to learn from others was also obvious when Laura spoke of traveling abroad with friends. She wanted to make sure that I knew that her desire to travel was not because she was a “spoiled brat.” Instead, she saw traveling abroad as an opportunity to “grow” through “new experiences.” In addition, she believed that such travel would add to her knowledge base.

Laura’s highly developed love for learning should continue for the rest of her life. In her senior year, she suggested that she would not be satisfied to stop learning once she had achieved her goals of earning a nursing degree. In fact, she

already has a plan to “look for other opportunities” and to “keep studying” once she has completed college and moved into her career. This could lead her to “study another career.” When I asked her what she thought she would be doing in 10 years, she included studying in her future plans. In addition, she has a desire to learn French.

When I suggested she has a love for learning, she agreed and said, “If I can learn something, I will go for it.” Furthermore, she states, “If I have the money and the motivation,” this is what she will need to keep on studying. While she does see money as being a key element in her ability to continue her studies, she does view motivation as “the most important thing. Even if you don’t have the money, you can do it. Whatever you want.” I believe that Laura would agree with the “Spanish speaking students” (p. 377) in the Kao and Tienda (1998) study who “argued that success requires *ganas* (desire or determination)” (p. 377).

Goal-Oriented

Through-out our discussions, I was able to see how goal-oriented Laura was. This trait was obvious to both Laura and I in our very first interview. I observed that we had moved quite briskly through my initial questions, and she figured this was because she “[had] her goals already on the table.” In fact, she stated, “I know what I want to do.” Furthermore, she suggested, “I know what I want and know how to get it.” Without a doubt, I agree with Laura’s summation of this trait: she is able to articulate a goal, identify the steps she will need to take to meet this goal, develop steps for circumventing any obstacles, follow through

with the plan, and meet with success. All of this is evident when one remembers what she did in order to quickly learn English when she immigrated to the United States.

Academic success. Laura views herself as “one of the top students” in her high school. One of her goals seems to be to maintain this status. She articulated the steps she followed in both high school and college in order to meet with academic success. As stated before, she is very capable of delineating the steps she needs to follow to meet her goals. Since she felt like the non-ESL classes in high school were difficult for her at first, she knew that she would need “to study more than a regular person” in order to “get the same grades as [her] other classmates.” While Laura’s study time was not filled with a great deal of reading, she did use her 3-4 hours of study time each night completing exercises and looking over notes or the chapters for her math classes. For her literature and history classes, she did do more reading.

In college, it appears as if her study methods have transformed over time. For her first semester, she did develop a plan of attack that varied from her high school method. She usually prepared the night before the test by reading for about 6 to 8 hours. While she feels she was somewhat successful (all A’s and B’s except for English 1101), she does recognize that “[she] can make a higher grade.” She acknowledges that she should probably have begun to study “five days before the test.”

With the beginning of the second semester, she has learned some valuable lessons. “If it’s in my notes, and the teacher talks about it, and I see that in the textbook, I had better study that.” Also, she lists reading as one of the primary methods she uses to study. She has decided to read after the class meets. She explains her decision. “Read after class cause I get a better understanding of the thing when I read it after we go over it in class.” When she is reading, she actively highlights the text. She describes her method by saying, “the things that I remember the teacher talked about and what I have in my notes” are the things that get highlighted. She explains the procedure she follows for clearing-up confusing points. “If I don’t understand something, I just write an e-mail and send it to my teacher.”

Her drive to be a student at the top of her class seems to foster a competitive streak. She definitely demonstrates a competitive drive with others. As stated previously, she wants to perform as well as her English-speaking classmates. In addition, she detailed how competitive she was with one of her friends from Mexico. She said, “I would like to learn French because my friend that came from Mexico – he spent a year in Canada. He learned French, and I want to do the same thing.” When they attended school together in Mexico, she perceives that “he was the top student,” and this was a title she coveted for herself. She also competes against herself in order to improve her skills. Doing the job well is not enough; she must continue to improve. She beautifully summarizes this drive when she says, “For some people, do the work good or

well, but I feel like I can do better. That's how I try to improve myself. I don't give up very easily, so I improve, improve, improve till I get it."

Going to college. Laura's goal-orientation is once again apparent when one looks at what she did in order to go to college. First, she took the SAT once she learned that she needed it if she wanted to go to college. In her senior year when I interviewed her, she had already applied and been accepted to the local state college. She felt like money issues could play a part in her ability or lack of ability to attend college. As this was a possible obstacle, she had already applied for scholarships by completing the applications, writing essays, ordering transcripts, and appearing for interviews. She had several back-up plans if she was unable to receive the scholarships. She could get a part-time job, but she says "if that doesn't work then I work and get the money and then go to school." In other words, she would work until she had saved enough money to pay for her college education. Following these beginning steps for college admission, she registered for classes in a timely manner. In fact, she registered for her classes before she took the tour of the college in early July. Once again, she had a definite plan for this part of the process. When she went to registration, she had pre-selected most of her classes and went with a preliminary schedule in hand. Later, when she was contemplating returning to Mexico, she researched a few of the schools she might attend, filled-out the application before our meeting in February 2007, and planned to return to Mexico prior to July 8, 2007 in order to take the entrance exam at that time if she wanted to start in Fall 2007.

Long-term goals. Her ability to articulate and plan for her goals does not stop with her educational and career desires. She also wants to be living by herself, and in order to make this happen, she suggests that she will need to be employed, and she will need to “get the papers and the green card” if she hopes to do this in the United States. In ten years, she also visualizes a future where she is married and having children, but this cannot happen unless she has first finished college. She also has a definite idea “that 30 is a good age to have a baby.”

Helping others. Laura’s goals go beyond what she needs to do for herself. Her desire to be a nurse is partially motivated by her desire to help others -- especially Hispanics. She would like to “help the Hispanic people that won’t get the attention because of the language.” In addition, Laura’s idea of what constitutes success is partially formed by the importance she places on helping others. For instance, she partially equates success with making “a stable living.” Laura believes a stable living means “having enough money for your basic needs, for your kids, for your parents, so that you can help them.” Rosas and Hamrick (2002) refer to this desire of their respondents to help their parents as “reciprocity” (p. 63). In other words, Laura’s aspirations are found “within a dynamic of mutual, shared obligations with family and others” (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002, p. 63).

Disciplined

Self. Having discipline is a trait that Laura finds necessary in herself and others, but she is also honest with herself and realizes that she has not always

been as disciplined as she is now. She credits her mom for helping her to “get on task,” and she acknowledges that she “wasn’t focused in school that much” when she was in Mexico. Despite this reported lack of focus, she “still made some good grades.” Time and time again, she describes herself as disciplined and uses this trait to explain her achievements once she arrived in the United States. She told me about going to clubs when she was in Mexico, and she does not do this in the United States “because [she’s] mentally dedicated to study.” In addition, when her friends or her boyfriend call her to go out, she replies, “I have to do my homework first then go out.” She attributes her ability to “[be] one of the best students” to the discipline that she maintains.

One byproduct of her self-discipline is her willingness to do things that she finds unpleasant if they are needed. For instance, she found the SAT to “[be] the hardest test that [she had] ever taken,” and this frustrated her greatly. However, she took the test two times because she thought she needed “it to go to college, so [she would] do it.” In addition, she found homework to be the only negative aspect of high school because it was too time consuming, but she would complete “it every time” because she knew she needed to do it. Next, Laura expressed her dislike for learning the English language. Laura’s dislike for learning English was evident when she told about her first experiences with language learning in the third grade. She felt as if “the other kids enjoyed learning and singing and talking and saying words and everything.” She, on the other hand, found the lessons “hard,” and she “had a negative attitude.” Despite

this lack of affection for the learning of the English language, she embraced the learning process when she moved to the United States and went to great lengths to help herself learn quickly. Furthermore, she is taking English 1101 for the second time even though she feels as if it is unfair; she should not have to take it because once she returns to Mexico, she will not “need to know how to write in English.” Finally, Laura, like many college students, is dreading taking a speech class, and, like with English 1101, she feels this requirement is unfair to her. She feels she is a good speaker in Spanish, but she does feel as if she will not perform as well in a speech class that requires her to speak in English. However, her plan is to take it in the summer after “[she has] practiced more.”

Peers. Laura seems to have little patience for her peers who do not hold self-discipline as a valuable personality trait. She was obviously frustrated when she talked about her peers who have the money and the documents to go to college, but “they just don’t take advantage of it.” Laura exclaimed, “That makes me mad sometimes.” She also gets mad at students who “don’t want to go to college because they are lazy.” This frustrates her “because (...) they have everything on the table,” and all they need is the motivation to come to college. Laura, on the other hand, “[has] motivation,” needs the “documents, the money” and is “struggling with this and that.” In other words, they have everything she “[wishes she] could have, and they don’t do it.”

On a slightly smaller scale, she is also frustrated by students who do not have the self-discipline to raise their hands in class; instead, they just shout out

answers to questions. Because of this, she did not have the opportunity to answer even though the “word was in [her] mouth.” I suggest that Laura has just described an instance where she was silenced in class. While Losey (1995) attributes the silencing of the Mexican-American women to fast-paced group instruction, Orenstein (1995) attributes silencing to overtly “territorial” (p. 9) boys who yell out answers that overcome the middle school girls’ responses. This silencing appears to still be present in the schools 10 years later and many years of education later. In this case, it appears that Laura’s silence was a result of both her gender and non-native speaker status. She needed a little bit more time to process and prepare her answer, and the teacher allowed an aggressive male to break with class protocol (discipline) and eliminate her chances for participation.

Laura tends to prefer to interact with peers who hold self-discipline in high esteem. For example, during our senior year interviews, she spoke fondly and with admiration of her boyfriend of two years. She felt as if he was focused on goals like she was, and he had a desire to go to the same college she was planning to attend. Furthermore, she believed “[they were] trying to support each other.” When we met again in her freshman year of college, I inadvertently failed to ask her follow-up questions about this young man. She said, “I was thinking you were going to ask about him. I was prepared.” Obviously, she felt as if it was important for me to know about their break-up that occurred 7 months prior to our interview; in essence, Laura did not see him as part of her “plans” because he had decided he was not going to go to college. Laura ended this relationship

for several reasons, but she summarized her decision by saying, “He didn’t have the motivation that I have, and I need someone that motivates me.” She explains her feelings by saying, “I don’t need a boyfriend to be in college, but if I’m going to be with somebody/someone, it better be someone that has the same motivation that I have.”

When I interviewed Laura at the end of her senior year, she expressed feelings of sadness because she was leaving high school behind. However, when we met in February of her freshmen year of college, she immediately told me, “I don’t miss high school at all. These feelings seem to be directly linked to the “more mature people” that she encountered at college. Here students “know what they want to do, and they are really focused on what they want to reach. They don’t worry about high school stuff” like who is wearing what. Again, self-discipline that leads to a focused person is very important to Laura. When Laura and I spoke after I had written her story, she added that she wanted to travel abroad with like-minded friends. She felt that it was important to select friends who could offer her something. In other words, she preferred friends who could add something to her life.

Teachers. For Laura, teachers must be disciplined, and they need to impart the value of discipline to their students. When she discusses the differences between the two middle schools she attended, she favors the second school where the teachers were more disciplined in the sense that they “were better prepared.” Her favorite middle school teachers were the ones that “knew how to manage the

class,” and “they would try to talk to the students and get their attention.” When asked about her favorite high school teachers, Laura places many names on this list. She recalls, “They gave me discipline.” In addition, she states, “They taught me that I can do things.” She learned that she could do these things even though she had limited English skills. Since the teachers motivated her to be more disciplined, she is more responsible about doing things as they need to be done. Laura now has a strong sense of motivation and a sense of self-discipline, and Laura states these teachers “taught me how to be successful.” In college, Laura continues to view teacher preparation as an important element in good teaching.

While many of the salient themes revolve around characteristics of Laura’s personality, not all themes are tied to her personality traits.

Time

The use of time or the lack of time seems to be a salient theme in Laura’s life. For example, one of her favorite things about her elementary school experiences relates to the amount of time that she had. She asserts, “My favorite thing about it [elementary school] was that I have enough time to do other things at home.” While she did not discuss her lack of time in high school directly when I first interviewed her, I had the sense that she did long for more free time when she indicated that free time was an attractive characteristic of elementary school. In addition, the amount of activities and classes in which she was involved coupled with her study time lead me to believe that the pace of high school was somewhat frenzied. In our last interview when she said, college was “like a

vacation” because “I have more time at home, and I can sleep more,” I was not altogether surprised.

Having time for different experiences was discussed again when Laura talked about the results of breaking up with the boyfriend she had had for two years. She felt that her parents liked this boyfriend, but her dad was happy that they broke up because this would afford her the opportunity to “experience other things” and “have more time to hang out with [...] friends.”

Support

Laura has received and continues to receive support and encouragement from a variety of people and programs.

Support from family. Without a doubt, Laura receives a great deal of support and encouragement from her parents and other family members for goal achievement. While Laura did not have a goal of learning the English language when she was in the third grade, she acknowledges her parents encouraged her to take English classes because “they knew I had the potential to learn stuff, and they wanted me to get ahead.” At this time, her parents did not know she would eventually move to the United States; Laura believes they just recognized her abilities and wanted her to have different experiences that might facilitate her ability to meet her full potential.

She suggests that both parents encouraged her to go to college. First, this encouragement began through modeling. From a young age, she knew both of her parents had enjoyed college, and her brother was attending college. Next, her

parents overtly encouraged her to go to college because “the only thing that they are going to leave [her]” is her education; according to Laura, this is her legacy because her parents are “not rich.” Like students in the Coppock (1995) study, Laura recognizes the educational aspirations her parents hold for her; she emphasizes the value her parents place on going to college when she expresses that they link success with college attendance. She says, “They want me to go to college, so I can have my own things.”

While modeling the enjoyment of a college education is one way in which Laura’s parents supported Laura’s goals, their own college educations may have been contributing factors to her academic success and high aspirations in other ways. Brusoski et al. (1992) found that college students who had come from families with at least one parent having a college education were more likely to perceive their parents as undertaking “encouraging activities” (p. 227). Romo and Falbo (1996) suggest that parents of Hispanic students who have an educational background come equipped with knowledge to which undereducated parents do not have access. In other words, her parents have a better chance of knowing exactly what it is that Laura may need to do in order to meet her goal of going to college because they have been through the process of higher education themselves. Granted, they undertook this process in Mexico; however, they do at least have a rudimentary understanding of the process, and they are probably able to help her navigate the educational system. In addition, Laura’s mother was probably able to provide more assistance with Laura’s earlier educational

experiences because she was a teacher and a principal of the school where Laura attended kindergarten.

Her parents support her goals in simple ways, too. For example, her father drove her to the college for the tour in the summer, and he brings her to college and returns to take her home on the days she has classes. Laura's mother has helped her with her homework from the time she first entered school through her high school years. In addition, her mother took over Laura's chores during the week of finals in high school because she wanted Laura to be able to focus her time on what she needed to do. Her parents and her grandmother from Mexico all went to her high school graduation. Valdes (1996) suggests that attending ceremonial events in a child's life is one way in which parents offer support and encouragement for their child, and the college students in the Brusoski et al. (1992) study ranked "attended events in which you participated at school" (p. 228) as one of the top three "encouraging activities" (p. 228) demonstrated by their parents.

Laura suggests that her parents provide support by encouraging her to take advantage of the opportunities that come her way. Laura's mother suggests that it is acceptable for her to work 12 hours per day, but she does not want Laura to have to do this. Laura explains her mother's reasoning. Laura states that her mother has said, "I'm old. I lived my life. I have traveled." In other words, she "has done what she has to do." Now, Laura says, "It is my time to do what I want to do."

Rosas and Hamrick (2002) found that 86% of their female respondents of Mexican decent believed that having support from siblings already in college was advantageous (p. 63). These siblings “provided examples of successful college-going behaviors” (Rosas and Hamrick, 2002, p. 63). Laura’s brother, too, was able to provide such examples because he was enrolled in a dentistry program, has had to take some time off because of finances, and has returned to college. In addition, Laura views her brother as someone she can count on for support. She declares, “He supports me a lot, and he takes care of me.” One way her brother will demonstrate these characteristics is by having Laura live with him when she returns to Mexico to complete her college education in July.

Support from teachers. Supportive teachers seem to be a theme in Laura’s adolescence. For example, she suggests that one of the reasons she joined one of the clubs in high school was because the teacher in charge of that particular club “invited” her to join. Her former ESL teacher told her about a free summer program that was offered by the college to help students increase their skills, and Laura attended this program and had “an opportunity to learn [...] English.” Laura’s teachers in high school had very supportive or encouraging attitudes toward her. Laura credits them with increasing her self-esteem. She contends, “They realize that I could do better and do it better than other students even though they could speak English.” Laura feels these teachers also conveyed their pride in her accomplishments and her attitude. In addition, Laura is aware of how highly they value a college education for their students because she believes

that her high school teachers, like her parents, equate success with completion of college for their former students.

Conclusion

Analysis of three interviews, high school transcripts, and high school cumulative records gave me a wealth of information in order for me to tell Laura's story. Meeting with her to discuss her story provided me with even more information. Together, these experiences have allowed me to answer my research questions as I hoped they would do.

Perceptions of Past and Present Lives

Laura's overriding perception seems to be that no matter what has happened to her or no matter what adjustments she has had to make, she has a good life and can find some positives in every situation. She had mostly positive educational experiences beginning in kindergarten and throughout most of her years in Mexico. Her most negative educational experiences were in the one private school, but this situation was quickly rectified when her parents moved her to a new private school. Once she arrived in the United States, she had to repeat a year because of her lack of English skills, but she does not regret this. Most of the courses she took in the United States will not count when she gets to Mexico, but this is fine because when she retakes the subjects in Mexico, the classes will be so much easier. In addition, her experiences with the English language in the United States will allow her to take an exemption test for the English requirement in the Mexican college. Moving to the United States gave

her an opportunity to simultaneously live with her father and mother, an experience that she had not had for many years. Living in the United States has been a good experience in her eyes because she has been able to interact with people from other cultures. By going back to Mexico, without her mother and father, she will have better educational opportunities, and she will be able to live with her brother, an experience she has been without for many years. As I have said, she is able to perceive every situation, no matter how traumatic, as an experience from which she can gain some positive meaning.

She sees herself as someone who can “incorporate discipline in [her] life.” For Laura, discipline is perceived to be an important trait in herself and others, and she demonstrates a low tolerance for those who are not disciplined. She is “proud” of herself because she sees herself as someone who has met with a great deal of success even though she has had to overcome the barrier of newly learned English skills. Laura also views herself as a “one of the best students in the classroom.” This, she believes, impresses her teachers and makes them “proud.”

Aspirations and Expectations of the Future

Laura articulated several goals for her future, and all of them related to learning in some form or fashion. She wanted to learn in college, and she expected that there was a good possibility that she would qualify for enough scholarships that her tuition costs and perhaps the cost of her books would be covered. Her career aspirations have changed over time. She aspires to have a job in the medical field, be this as a career in nursing or dentistry. She also wants

to learn throughout her life. After she has achieved her first career goal, she plans to continue studying. She is not sure what these studies will entail, but she does know that she wants to continue on past her initial degree. She also would like to learn to speak French. She expected that she would complete her studies before she married, and babies were not expected until the age of 30.

Laura definitely expected college to “be hard” -- especially “the English classes.” She, like Susan, had decided that “nobody will talk to you.” She had cast a scenario where all the students were intent on going to class and working. Thus, that is all they would “care about,” and they would not have time to interact with each other or her. Finally, she was “ready to study a lot.”

Reconciliation of Aspirations, Expectations, and Perceptions

The reconciliation of aspirations, expectations, and perceptions has been a challenge at best. Laura aspired toward a college degree and expected to earn one. She is on her way to meet this goal; however, the realities of her situation have caused many changes in the original plans. In the beginning, her scholarships did cover the cost of tuition and books just like she expected them to. She even had about \$500 per semester left over to apply to living and travel expenses. Then, the out-of-state tuition waiver program was cancelled, and the cost of tuition alone tripled. She cannot complete her degree in nursing in the United States because the cost is prohibitive. Thus, her new goal is to major in dentistry in Mexico.

College, itself, was a delightful surprise. In fact, it was seen as a “vacation” compared to her high school years. Classes were perceived to be easy, requiring little study time or homework. In her first semester, she earned all As and Bs, except for the failing grade in English 1101. She anticipated that this class would be difficult for her, and in this case, her expectations were proven to be true.

Conclusion

What might the future hold for Laura? I believe Laura’s future will be successful no matter what criteria one uses to judge, but most important, she will be a success based on her own criteria. Laura believes that she should be considered as a “big success” after she graduated from high school “because of the challenge” she faced. She had the English language as a barrier, and she was able to overcome this obstacle and have a high level of academic success or proficiency. In other words, she is a success because she faced and overcame her obstacles. Laura has demonstrated in many ways that she has the skills necessary to identify her goals and the obstacles that may impede her progress, and she is able to formulate a plan or several plans to circumvent these problems. Finally, she has the commitment necessary to follow-through with the plan. She did this when she decided to learn English, when she wanted to go the college in the United States, and when she adapted her educational goals to return to Mexico.

Clearly, she should continue to be “a big success” as she faces more obstacles or challenges.

Life is a Balance between Dreams and Responsibilities: Susan’s Story

Self

Susan was 17 at the time I met her. She immigrated to the United States when she was in fourth grade. At that time, she did not speak English. Learning to speak English was very important to Susan, and she articulated very specific reasons why this was the case.

Susan felt that “it was tough” for her because she needed to “communicate with other people.” She felt she needed to “learn as fast” as possible. Susan explained why it was so important for her to be able to speak English. “I couldn’t understand. I didn’t know what they were talking about, and it made me feel like I didn’t fit there.” For Susan, this was “one of the worst things” about elementary school. Furthermore, Susan believes she had an obligation to learn the English language. She explains, “I was here now, so I had to learn the language.” Olsen’s (2000) research suggests that Susan’s sentiment is felt by many immigrants. According to Olsen, “the goal of becoming fluent English speakers is embraced by most newcomers who recognize that learning English is a fundamental requirement for acceptance and participation in an English dominant world” (p. 197).

However important it was for Susan to communicate to others, Susan had a much stronger motivation to speak English. “[...] I wanted to make something

of myself, and I wanted to ah, be somebody.” Susan explains what is involved in being somebody.

[...] If people see you and if you don't speak English, people see you as like nothing. Like some people look at you like you don't exist. I don't want people to think that I couldn't learn or I was incapable of doing the things they did.

Susan, like the students of Mexican heritage in the Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) study, places great value on the need to “become somebody” (p. 124). For Susan, becoming somebody is about more than learning English. She links becoming somebody with many aspects of her life. If she becomes “somebody,” she will “be known,” and she will have a job that will make her future family (husband and children) “proud.” They will be proud because they will not see her “struggle to get money for them,” nor will they have to watch her “work really hard to get money.” Susan concludes, “I want them to see that even though I am a woman, I can work by myself, and I can do something.” House (1999) would probably see Susan's need to “be known” as a “desire for recognition” (House, p. 250), and he would probably see her yearning to have enough money as a “financial goal” (p. 250) for college attendance and graduation.

Susan describes herself as someone who has changed quite a bit since she first began high school. Susan believes she was very shy at the beginning of high

school; as a result, she “would walk away and ignore” slights against her. “If you are like that nobody notices you,” so now Susan believes in paybacks if someone treats her unfairly; otherwise, she believes people will “just try to step on you.”

While she may be “loud” to make sure others do not take advantage of her, Susan is still a very private or reserved person. She says, “I don’t open myself [up] that much.” Perhaps, she is so reserved because she seems to be fairly cynical about people. In fact, she explains why she does not “have good friends.” “I’ve learned that through the years you can’t trust nobody except yourself and sometimes your family.”

Family

Susan lives with her mother and father. Her father works in “road construction.” Susan describes her father as someone who “never went to school” because “he worked all his life.” Susan feels that he had to work so much because “his parents did not love him, so they sent him to his aunts and he had to work for his aunts.” When Susan was growing up, her father was working in the United States most of the time, and he traveled “back and forth” between the United States and Mexico. She and her brother lived in Mexico with their mother.

At that time, Susan’s mother owned a grocery store about 3 miles from Mexico City. “The store was at the very bottom,” and Susan’s “house was at the top.” When we had our first two interviews at the high school, Susan’s mother was working at one of the major manufacturing plants that is in the area. By our third interview, Susan’s mother had purchased a building and opened a store that

sells jewelry, dresses, party favors, and other items for weddings and *quinceaneras*. While her mother owned and operated this business, she continued to work in the manufacturing plant.

Susan's brother, sister-in-law, and niece round out her immediate family. Susan's brother is a few years older than Susan. He lives in a place that her mother owns. Both her brother and sister-in-law attend the local college full-time and are studying to become nursing assistants.

Academics – Kindergarten Through Grade 12

Susan spent most of her elementary school years in Mexico. She distinctly remembers her first day of kindergarten because she cried. She “was scared” since her mother “left” her in a room with a strange woman. Other than this scary day, she seems to have been left with mostly positive impressions of her years in Mexican schools. She cannot recall many specific details, but she does remember she worked, and it was “fun.” In addition, she implies that she had a good education while she was in Mexico. In fact, she describes her classes in Mexico as being more detailed than her classes when she arrived in the United States. Susan elaborates, “When I was in the third grade, they taught you the history of Mexico – deep, deep history of Mexico - not just the beginning of it.” In addition, Susan was confident of her math abilities and of her ability to read and write Spanish when she immigrated to the United States. She summarized this confidence when she said, “Even though I only finished third grade, I thought I could do it [reading and writing] pretty good.”

When she came to the United States, she was placed in a class with children who spoke both English and Spanish, but the teacher spoke English. She also went to an ESOL class. Her first school year in the United States was “tough.” Susan explained why this was the case.

It was hard because it was hard to understand the teacher when she was talking, and I didn’t know what I was doing. Like for a[n] English class or language arts class, [...] we had to read books, and we had to [...] summarize the book and write it down. Well, I couldn’t do that because I didn’t know English, and I still had to do it.

Susan remembers going to the ESOL class through fifth grade. When she was in her ESOL classes with the English-speaking teacher, she used the other students as translators because “some of the other students knew a little bit of English.” She felt as if she “could communicate more” by the end of fifth grade. However, she still felt as if she was stronger in her reading and writing skills than her speaking skills.

Susan has all “good” memories of middle school. She began her middle school career in one middle school and changed to another because her family moved. She preferred the middle school she attended with friends from her elementary days because she is “more comfortable with people” she knows than with new people. While in middle school, she had varying academic success with her classes. For example, she averaged from 78% to 88% in pre-algebra and from 48% to 81% in science (Susan, cumulative file, 2006). However, her teachers had

only positive comments to make. Teachers saw Susan as an “excellent student” (Susan, cumulative file, 2006) who “makes a great effort to achieve” (Susan, cumulative file, 2006). They also described her as someone who was “a pleasure to have in class” (Susan, cumulative file, 2006).

When Susan entered high school, she chose the dual-seal diploma route. This means that she would need to take certain college preparatory classes as well as technical classes. For the most part, Susan met with a great deal of academic success while in high school. She achieved her highest averages (90 to 100) in various computer classes, and she maintained averages in the 80s in most of her other classes (Susan, cumulative file, 2006). She passed all but one of her graduation exams on the first attempt (Susan, cumulative file, 2006).

Susan struggled with math in high school. She failed Algebra I; as a consequence, she re-took this class during summer school, and this was helpful because she was “not behind in anything.” She made the decision to repeat the class in the summer because her brother and her counselor let her know that she would fall behind otherwise. At the time of our first interview, she was again struggling with math in her Algebra III class. She attributed her struggles to a teacher who “writes problems on the board and sometimes [...] skips like certain steps.” In addition, he did not assign much homework. Susan and her classmates were confused, and Susan was performing poorly on her tests. Since her overall average was based primarily on her tests grades, her average was low. In order to meet with more success, Susan was “asking for extra credit” and getting it.

In addition, Susan's homeroom teacher had offered to help her. Susan's homeroom teacher showed her "step-by-step" what needed to be done, and she also explained "why" things needed to be done in a certain way. Susan saw her test grades improve after she had sought tutoring from this teacher. Susan's description of her methods on testing day explains how this worked. "When I am taking the test, I remember what she told me – [...] why you change this number and where you are suppose[d] to put it."

While Susan did not fail any science classes, she did have a little difficulty passing the graduation exam for science. She missed passing by 11 points (Susan, cumulative file, 2006) on her first attempt. As a result, she was "put in a special class" to help her with the exam. Here, she received a "practice book." Susan reviewed the book, and she would "write the stuff" that was confusing to her. She studied this information. On her second attempt, she passed with a score 5 points over the needed score (Susan, cumulative file, 2006).

Goals

When I first met Susan during her senior year of high school, she easily stated that she had a goal to go to college. She remembered that this goal came to fruition in her sophomore year of high school. This seems to be the time she saw how her parents were "struggling," and she knew she "didn't want to struggle like that." She also knew at this time that she wanted to major in criminal justice. Eventually, she saw herself seeking a degree in forensic science. At that time, she

shared her desire to work in a lab and in the field like the characters on the *CSI* television show.

Susan had taken several steps to meet her goal. As stated before, she had attended summer school to make-up for the failing grade in the math class. In addition, she had enrolled in the dual seal program, so she would have the required coursework to attend college. Susan took her PSAT exams, passed her graduation exams, and had visited the local state college with her brother and sister-in-law. Also, she had raised her GPA above the 3.0 level that would qualify her for the ASPIRE scholarship.

Susan was not satisfied planning just her immediate college future. She had researched different colleges she could attend for a degree in forensic science since the local state college only offered a two year criminal justice degree.

Academics – College Life

Expectations

Susan had mostly positive expectations of college. At the end of her senior year in high school, she believed college would be “interesting” because she would be “walking from building to building, driving there, [...] [and] meeting people.” She anticipated that there would be “more teaching and more things [...] to learn.” Despite what high school teachers had told her, she stated, “I don’t think that it’s going to be hard.” It seems that watching her family members who had attended college gave her the confidence to see herself meeting

with success in college even though some teachers made college seem quite challenging. She summarizes her feelings.

[...] Teachers here they tell us it's so difficult. It's like the hardest thing to go through, but when I see my brother, it is not as hard.

It's not as hard. I don't think it's hard. I've seen my brother, my sister-in-law, and my cousin too, and they're calm. They're not like, 'Oh, my God! I have to turn this in, or I have to do this'. [...]

They can take it step-by-step.

In this instance, Susan's brother was a person who "provided examples of successful college-going behaviors" (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002, p. 63). In addition, his calm demeanor seemed to provide "evidence that going to college was a realistic option" (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002, p. 63). The brothers and sisters of the college students in the Rosas and Hamrick study provided similar "role modeling" (p. 63) behaviors for their sisters of Mexican heritage who were attending college.

Susan had obviously paid attention when her teachers spoke of college expectations because she could enumerate many examples of the ways in which high school teachers made college sound like "the worst thing that you are going to have go through." They gave the impression that she would need to "be studying 24/7." The high school teachers also left her with the idea that there would be "300 people in that room." They would ask the high school students, "Do you think that those teachers are going to be paying attention to every single one of you?" Teachers also left the students with the impression that they were

going to have to do everything on their own. Susan stated that the teachers suggested, “We’re not going to have any help, and if we have trouble, we’re going to have to deal with it and work as hard as we can and burn our brains out.” Once again Susan reiterated that she did not believe this to be so because she watched her brother while he was in college. During our final interview in her first year of college, Susan did say she was “afraid” that college would be hard because of all the scary things the teachers had told her.

Pleasant Surprises

While Susan did not have many worries about college, she did have a few concerns, and these seemed to be alleviated quite quickly. At times, she seemed to give some credence to the teachers’ intimidating comments about college. However, she readily admitted that “It’s [college] a lot easier than they [teachers] say it is.” Susan told of some of her other concerns.

I was scared because I was thinking that nobody was going to talk to me, or I was not going to understand anything that the teacher was saying. [...] I was going to feel really bad. But, after a while, it got better.

Susan said that none of these concerns came to pass. In fact, she met people quite quickly in her classes.

Problems

Susan encountered one major academic struggle – learning support math. Because of her placement scores, Susan placed in the highest level of

developmental math. This class is designed to help prepare the students for their first algebra class in college. At the end of the semester, she did not pass. She believes this class was “the same” as her “high school math” class because it had to be same. In other words, it was a college preparatory course, so it would be similar to high school math. The instructor in this class even presented the material in a fashion similar to her high school teacher. Both of these teachers “put the problem on the board. Work it out, and that’s all.”

Susan did try to develop her skills and work around her difficulties in math. For instance, she “tried to study,” but this was difficult since she had to balance a job and her homework. She did, however, have a process that she followed when she could study. She explains,

I would write the problem that we had done, and I would work it.

[...] If I got it right, well that means that I knew it, but if I didn’t, I would try it again and again until I got it.

Susan did have a theory to explain why she might have failed the math class. She and her brother took the class together, and this stimulated two possible negative consequences. First, they decided to share a book in order to save money since the book cost “around 60 almost 70 dollars.” The decision to share the book had several repercussions. Susan detailed these problems.

I would get home about 11:00, and he would be asleep by the time

I got home. I would not be able to do my homework, or if I would

take it to work, he would not be able to work on it during the day because I had it. [...] When I got home at 11:00, he would be asleep. He wouldn't have time to do his homework.

In addition to the problems she encountered with the text, she realized that it probably was not a good idea for her to take a class with her brother because this caused them "to compete." She summarized this problem, "I guess the harder you try, the less you get it because I tried harder, and I thought I did good and when the results came back they were not good." The second semester, she and her brother took different teachers for the math class, and they were meeting with more success."

Themes

There are several themes that emerged as I analyzed the data that I gathered. Some of these themes are not only relevant for Susan; they also seem to be relevant for other family members.

Hard Work and Dreams

Hard work is important to Susan and her family, but it seems like hard work is often not enough to help them realize their dreams. Perhaps these dreams will be delayed temporarily, changed to meet current situations, or delayed indefinitely.

Susan's mom and her dreams. Susan believes her mother had a dream at one time to become a teacher. She has encountered many obstacles over the years that have kept her from realizing this dream. For

instance, Susan's mother only went to school through the sixth grade. Her mother's father "passed away" when Susan's mother was a young girl. Susan's mother was one of six children, and "she [Susan's grandmother] had to raise them all by herself and didn't have enough money, so she [Susan's mother] had to quit school." She could not afford the books for school in addition to the money that was needed for "their clothes, their shoes, and plus the food." Her chances to pursue her dreams did not improve when she arrived in the United States, and this has impacted Susan greatly.

When she got here, she didn't have a chance to go to school because the fact that she was illegal and the fact that she didn't have money and the fact that she didn't know the language and the fact that she had to raise two kids and a house. She didn't have a chance to [...] keep up her dream, and I do. I want to make my dream come true.

While this may have been one unfulfilled dream for Susan's mother, she has obviously altered these dreams. While working in one of the local manufacturing plants, Susan's mother had been saving "money just in case she wanted to buy something else." When she saw a certain building, "she said, 'we'll make a store to sell clothes or something.'"

Everyone in the family is invested in making this business a success.

Susan, her dad, her brother, her sister-in-law, and her mother all work in the business. No one in the family works solely in the store. Susan's mom has continued to work in the factory, and her dad has continued to work construction. Susan's brother and sister-in-law balance raising a child and attending school with working in the family store. Finally, Susan balances more than a full-time job at the factory where she works 6 days per week and part-time college attendance with her obligations at the store. Everyone in the family does what needs to be done in order for the business to meet with success. In other words, they may undertake any duty from helping the customers to cleaning the store.

Susan and her brother seem to have different motivations for working in the store. Susan is not enamored with the idea of working in the store, so she basically works there because her mother expects it. Susan explains,

Since I was born, I've been in the store since all my childhood was at the store. Now, that I'm grown, it is just like [I am thinking], 'not again.' I hate the fact of being in one single place and have to be there at a place like my mom says. You know. I have to be here. I have to be there, and you always have to be doing something.

Susan's brother, on the other hand, is motivated to work in the store "because he wants the business to be better and for them [his parents] to stop working at the factory and the construction. And you know just be working at the business."

Despite all of this hard work and dedication, Susan's mother has been

discouraged with the results. She was so discouraged that she wanted to quit.

Susan detailed how she and her brother offered her mother encouragement to help her through this.

At first, she wasn't very positive about it. She would say, 'let's just close it and sell the building.' My brother and me kept telling her, 'You know what you applied for it. You wanted it at the beginning. Why are you going to give up? You know it not like you opened the business and you're going to get a 100 people a day. You know you just opened it.'

Susan and her dreams. Susan, like her mother, has experienced financial struggles and responsibilities to her family that are hindering her pursuit of her dream to become a forensic scientist. When we talked during her senior year of high school, she already knew that a lack of financial resources was going to impact the decisions she could make about attending college. She, however, did not realize that her undocumented status would disqualify her for the funds offered by the ASPIRE scholarship. At that time, the college did offer in-state tuition for undocumented students, but the financial burden still left Susan in a quandary. Susan was leaning heavily toward the idea of delaying her college education for 1 year while she worked. She had a strong desire "to help her [mother] really bad." She summarized her motivation, "I don't want her to think that I'm just one more bill or something like that."

Susan had considered going to college part-time while she worked, but she was adamant that this combination of school and work would not be good for her. This was not a decision she made lightly. In fact, she was able to clearly enumerate the reasons this was not an option for her.

I know how I am and I know that if I have two things like they're really important to me, I'm not going to pay as much attention cause I'm going to pay half attention to one and half attention to the other one, and I don't want do that. Because I don't want to fail my classes because of when I'm working or because I have to do overtime or because I have to do this or that. So, I don't want my job to interfere with my studies or my studies to interfere with my job.

While Susan seemed to be adamantly opposed to the idea of part-time college attendance, her mind was not completely settled at the time of our second interview. In fact, she had systematically explored the dilemma and had identified that she was still very "confused" about her ultimate decision. On one hand, the teachers and others were encouraging an immediate step toward college. On the other hand, she had this strong need to support her mother. She felt as if she would need "to think really hard and really fast because" the school year was about to end, and it was time for her to make a decision. She had even made a pro and con list, but this did not help her to alleviate the confusion; instead this

seemed to only intensify her predicament. She found the sides to be “equal.” She explained her results, “They are the same, and I am just like this is better but then this helps me more and I am just in the middle.”

When I met with her for her third interview, she was enrolled in college part-time and working more than a full-time time job. How did she end up making a decision that was contrary to her first instincts? First, her parents held a family meeting and decreed that she would go to college. This move by her parents could be seen as an activity that encouraged Susan to attend college. Brusoski et al. (1992) found that the students ranked “talked to you about attending college during senior year of high school” (p. 228) as the number 1 activity that “encouraged them to attend college” (p. 229). Then, Susan spoke to some friends who basically told her the same things her parents had told her. This led her to decide that she would go. As stated previously, her work obligations may have been a major contributing factor to her inability to meet with success in her math class since these obligations did interfere with her ability to study.

I believe these examples illustrate the manner in which obligations to the family seem to take precedent over obligations to one’s own future and dreams for both Susan and her mother. When Susan and I met to discuss my version of her story, we talked about this theme. While I was describing this theme to her, this connection “clicked.” She had not seen that she and her mother made the same type of sacrifices for the good of the family. Susan states that she “doesn’t want it to end up the same.” Lugones and Spelman (1983) suggest that a feminist

“theory or account can be helpful if it enables one to see how parts of one’s life fit together, for example, to see connections among parts of one’s life one hasn’t seen before” (p. 578). I can only hope that this recognition of this connection will benefit Susan in some manner.

Helpfulness

When analyzing the dream theme, it was obvious that Susan and her mother valued helping family members to such an extent that they often deferred their dreams. Helpfulness within the family does not stop with Susan and her mother. In fact, in Susan’s family, many of the members place helping each other high on their priority lists. Often, this assistance is desired and valued by the other family members. Sometimes the *helper* provides assistance whether or not the other family member desires it, and sometimes the family member may not even know he/she is receiving assistance.

Susan’s brother. Susan credits her brother for giving her a great deal of support over the years. This support has ranged from advice to financial assistance. For instance, when Susan was analyzing her choices for part-time college attendance or working for a year, her brother encouraged her to go at least part-time. He and his wife suggested Susan enroll in “English classes and math classes.” They believed that these classes would keep Susan from falling “behind.” Susan describes some of her brother’s more forceful advice, “He told me not to be stupid and to go to college because he didn’t want to see me working in a factory for the rest of my life.” Susan uses this example to illustrate how

much encouragement her brother offered her. It seems that Susan's brother is similar to the "family members" (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002, p. 63) of the young women in the Rosas and Hamrick (2002) study once again. While the parents in that study were "voicing early, clear and consistent expectations that the respondents would go to college"(p. 63), Susan's brother has assumed this role of expressing the expectation that she will go to college, and he is supporting this expectation with sound reasoning.

Advice is not all that Susan's brother is willing to provide. He provides financial assistance for both Susan and her parents. For the second semester of college, the waivers that allowed undocumented immigrants to attend college as in-state students were revoked. This made the financial burden even greater for Susan. When Susan was able to save only \$1000 from her paychecks, her brother was willing to lend her the other \$1000 she would need to pay for her part-time college attendance. In addition, he provides financial assistance to their parents "when he can." Susan explains how this works, "When they need the money, he takes the money that he has and gives it to my mom."

Susan's sister-in-law. Susan's sister-in-law provides a great deal of advice and help in Susan's family; some of this advice would definitely fall in the category of unsolicited advice that Susan may or may not want. While Susan describes the relationship with her sister-in-law as one where they are polite, Susan feels as if she does not know her sister-in-law well. She explains how this happened, "We [Susan and her sister-in-law] have come to the conclusion that we

are so much alike that we hate each other that much.” Despite this lack of closeness and love, Susan provided examples of numerous instances when her sister-in-law has helped her family and helped her. After encouraging Susan to attend college part-time, Susan’s sister-in-law went with her to her first advising appointment. Susan was unable to tell me much about this experience “because she [the sister-in-law] mostly did everything.” In addition, the sister-in-law seems to have appointed herself as the supervisor of the family members who are attending college. She tells Susan and her brother what classes to take, reminds them it is time to register, encourages them to complete their work, and prompts them to try to perform better when they fall short. In other words, “She’s always the one on top of us.” Despite the animosity that Susan described, she perceives this monitoring and take-charge attitude in a positive light.

During the meeting when we discussed her story, Susan said the relationship with her sister-in-law had improved. She added that her sister-in-law worked hard to bring Susan, her sibling, and her parents closer. Susan felt they had lost some of their closeness due to all of the hours each of them was working. Susan’s sister-in-law seems to be motivated to encourage family closeness because she “wants a loving family,” and she “wants to see them happy and wants them to be together.” Susan believes that her sister-in-law craves such a family because her own family is not like this.

Susan. As mentioned previously, Susan had a strong desire to assist her parents by getting a job and funneling the income back into the family reserves.

This is exactly what Susan did when she graduated. Susan's description of the decisions she made with regard to this money illustrates how important it is for her to help her mother even if her mother does not want the help.

I was giving them every check that I got, but after awhile, there were problems between me and my mom and I just stopped. [...] Now, she won't accept the money that I give her. I have to give my brother the check without her knowing and him cashing it and putting it into the account.

Conclusion

Through three interviews, I learned much about Susan's perceptions, expectations, and aspirations. After analyzing the data from these interviews as well as analyzing the data from her high school records, I believe Susan's personality, background, and experiences are clearly elucidated in this story. Of course, the story I have written is based upon my analysis of the story she told. However, I believe the story that I have told here does answer the research questions that I had.

Perceptions of Past and Present Lives

The first perception of Susan's life that resonates as an important one is the way in which she perceives the English language. For Susan, learning English is important, and this importance is based on so much more than her need to communicate with others. She links the ability to speak English with "becoming somebody." She also believes that she was obligated to learn English because she

lived in the United States. This obligation began when she first moved to the United States, and it continues today.

Working in her mother's store has had a tremendous impact on both Susan's past and present life. When she was a child living in Mexico, she was unhappy being in the store day in and day out. Her mother's new venture seems to bring back the memories of being trapped "in one single place." She views the store as a place that she has to be because her mother tells her she has to be there, and she feels as if she must always "be doing something."

Aspirations and Expectations of the Future

Susan has many aspirations, only one of which is to earn a college degree. She sees this degree as a means by which she can become independent, so her future children will be "proud" of her because they will not see her "struggle" or "work really hard." This aspiration seems closely linked to her desire to "become somebody." This appears to mean that if Susan achieves the status of "somebody," she will have shown those around her that she can communicate well in English, can earn a degree, and can work in a field that will not force her to "struggle." She also believes that it is important to show those around her that a woman can accomplish these things and "become somebody."

Since RSC only offers two-year degrees in forensic science, Susan had already explored her options by the time I first met her in May of her senior year. She knew that there was a school in New York City she could attend after she completed her first two years at RSC. She expected New York City to "be more

interesting.” She hypothesized that she would need to “be fast” because people are “in a hurry.” She thought it would be “interesting” to have “new things” to learn. She had obviously given this anticipated move some thought. She recognized that it was “going to be really, really hard” to move that far away from her family, but she also acknowledged that such a move would make her more independent because they would not be close by to tell her she “can do it.” In other words, it would be more difficult for her to lean on them and for them to tell her “everything is going to be fine.”

Another important aspiration that she had was to help her mother and the rest of the family with finances. This was such an important goal that she had considered delaying the start of her college career for a year. She was certain that a delay was better for her than for her to work and try to go to school part-time. Susan viewed the split loyalties that would result from such an experience as being detrimental to both her school success and her job. In essence, she said, “I don’t want my job to interfere with my studies or my studies to interfere with my job.”

In 10 years, Susan hoped that she would be living in the “biggest city.” She also predicted that she would have finished her degree “early” because she would have worked hard to do so. She also saw herself having a family.

Reconciliation of Aspirations, Expectations, and Perceptions

Susan’s aspirations, expectations and perceptions are in a tumultuous amalgamation. As she predicted, her drive to help her mother and her aspiration

to go to college was a difficult division of her loyalties. Since she took a full-time job to help her mother with the finances, she did struggle to keep-up with her school responsibilities. At the same time, the out-of-state tuition waiver program was halted by the state government, and the fees to send both Susan and her brother to college were too exorbitant for the family. Susan decided to switch her major to a certificate in computers because this would take less time to earn than a four-year degree, and she could use her knowledge in the family business. By the time we met to discuss her story, she had dropped out of college. She was still working the full-time job at the factory, and she was still working in her mother's store. She did tell me that her plan was to return to college the next semester to earn an insurance certificate in order to go into business with her sister-in-law.

Susan's dreams of attending school to earn a forensic science degree seem to be but a distant memory. She has not given-up these dreams completely, but she recognizes that even if the family can find the money for her to attend college for four years, she still has the problem with her documentation when she graduates. How can she possibly get a job working for a police department or some other governmental agency when she is undocumented?

Conclusion

Without a doubt, Susan has big obstacles ahead of her. The work schedule that circumstances has dictated is brutal and has the potential to reek havoc upon her ability to study and concentrate in order to successfully complete her courses. Her overriding need to provide some type of major financial assistance to her

parents presents yet another potential encumbrance that can and has had a negative impact on her academic success. Finally, the rules that disqualify her from receiving the ASPIRE scholarship or in-state-tuition simply compound these issues exponentially. Despite all of this, Susan has persevered, found ways to circumvent the obstacles she encountered, and has assessed and changed her goals as needed.

Susan has a very detailed sense of what success means for her. For Susan, success is categorically linked to “making something of yourself.” For Susan, this means “setting a goal and accomplishing it.” She elaborates, “Not setting it and be like, ‘I can do it later’. Actually doing it really good and be able to be proud of it.” In other words, “hard work would bring success” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995, p. 180). Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco propose that the immigrant students in their study linked hard work with success because they were able to compare their lives in the United States with their lives in Mexico. Perhaps, this is what Susan is doing, too.

During our interviews, Susan discussed the many ways she was already successful. At the time of our last high school interview, she saw herself as “pretty good” when it came to success because she had developed an “excellent portfolio,” was “graduating” from high school, and had “good grades.” In addition, she had “accomplished” the things she had attempted to accomplish. When we met again during her first year of college, she added her ability to persist as another example of what made her successful. Susan believes

individuals have to show others how they are successful, and she believes others will know she is successful because she “won’t give up, no matter what.” Here, Susan is very similar to the “Spanish-speaking students” (Kao & Tienda, 1998, p. 377) found in the Kao and Tienda study. They, too, believe “that success requires *ganans* (desire or determination)” (p. 377).

This dogged persistence seems to be one of her qualities that will help her meet with the success she desires. Susan has persisted in the face of all the obstacles I have identified previously, and it is obvious that this persistence has not come without sacrifice. In fact, during our final interview, Susan told of changing her major from a degree in law enforcement to a certificate in computer operations. She is not abandoning her ultimate dream; instead she says, “I had to change my classes and my career, too,” but she believes that the knowledge she gains in the computer classes will assist her with her work in forensic science. During our last meeting to review her story, she spoke of a new educational goal. Now, she plans to take classes in insurance because she is going work with her sister-in-law. She hopes to eventually return to her original goal of criminal justice.

The Story of Four

As I analyzed data for each individual participant, I began to notice some themes that stretched across most or all of the participants. These themes included support from others that may not always be effective, the importance of helping others, a lack of overt racism experienced by the participants, the

necessity of developing and maintaining cultural connections, and marriage and children as possibilities but not an immediate priority.

Support from Others: Is it Effective?

All four of the participants listed numerous instances when school personnel, family friends, family members, and significant others offered supportive advice and other assistance. Often, this support helped these young women to move toward their goals or helped them deal with significant events in their lives. At other times, the support was ineffective because the supporter may not have had all the information needed to give effective advice, or the supporter may not have know what was needed to actually help the participant.

Effective Family Support

There are many instances where these young women received effective support from their family members. In fact, I would suggest that the support offered and used helps to “combat the deficit representations of Latina/o family educational values and aspirations for their children” (Knight, Dixon, Norton, & Bentley, 2006, p. 46). In other words, the support offered by the participant’s family members dispels the notion that their families’ ways of valuing education operate to negatively impact their children’s educational aspirations and abilities. In fact, the opposite is true; these families encouraged, advised, and offered help in a multitude of ways to not only make a higher education a dream but to make it a reality.

Support from family members has manifested itself in a variety of forms. Support materialized when parents and other family members demonstrated that they recognized educational effort and achievement. This is the case when Susan's "whole family," including an uncle and her godmother, attended her high school graduation; they demonstrated that they valued the diploma she had earned and recognized the effort it took to earn one.

Support also took the form of advice or other help from siblings. For instance, Susan's brother and sister-in-law provided advice and planning assistance for both Susan's high school years and attendance in college. Andrea, too, had siblings to encourage her by giving her sound advice about completing her work and staying on task. In addition, Susan's brother provided financial assistance in order for Susan to remain in school for a semester after the out-of-state tuition waiver program was revoked.

Even though Laura's brother attends college in Mexico and she does not spend a great deal of time with him, he still serves as a model for what a successful college student might do. In addition, he has provided a clear picture of the planning process one needs to undertake when one is attempting to achieve a goal. For example, her brother believes he would prefer to work in a clinic-type setting where there are "many [...] dentists in the same building." In essence, her brother did not stop his planning process with graduation or the achievement of earning the degree; instead, he has already considered the type of practice that will work best for him, and he knows he wants to work with his girlfriend. Not

only does he demonstrate the planning process, he exhibits the ability to circumvent or adapt to stumbling blocks. When there was not enough money for him to continue his education, he “stopped going to college.” “Then he went back.” From this example, Laura is able to see that dropping out could be a temporary situation, and she could always return to school when finances will allow.

Parental support sometimes took the form of advice, and sometimes it took other forms. Andrea’s father attended parent conferences, and so did Josefina’s parents. From Josefina’s early report cards in her cumulative file, I was able to learn that when Josefina’s parents attended some of her parent-teacher conferences, they reported that they were reading to her each week. In addition, the teacher noted that her “sister is making flashcards to help her” (Josefina, cumulative file, 2006) with letter recognition. Susan’s parents obviously support her intention of earning a college degree. They demonstrated this support by being concerned when she was going to wait 1 year after graduating from high school to begin college. Susan believes they were both concerned about this option because they were afraid that she would never continue her education. Their concern led them to call a family meeting to discuss her options. Josefina’s father obviously supports her desire to attend college. He will drive her to school and pick her up on the days when she is not working. In fact, he is very anxious that she gets to school in a timely manner. He doesn’t want her to be late, so he leaves the house a half an hour earlier than necessary. In addition, he

attended her advising session for her first semester of college. Andrea's father's offer to relocate the family so Andrea can live with the family and attend the college of her dreams is perhaps the most dramatic offer of support received from a family member.

While all the young women had support from their family members, Laura has probably benefited the most from the support she received from her family. Since her parents are college-educated, the fact that their support is effective makes logical sense. In other words, they possess important knowledge that enables them to have somewhat of an insider view of the educational process. First, her parents supported her future educational objectives by telling her about their educational experiences. In fact, Laura identifies her parents' positive college experiences as motivation for attending college. In addition, she attributes her interest in the medical field to her father's career as a veterinarian and her brother's desire to become a dentist. Her parents discussed education as her inheritance. In other words, their financial situation was such that they would be unable to leave her money for her future. Instead, they encouraged her to get an education because this could be an avenue to provide for her future. These discussions provided another facet to their supportiveness.

Effective Support from Others

In addition to family members, the participants have found effective assistance from various school personnel. Andrea had elementary teachers who encouraged her artistic side by framing her artwork and fostered her

intelligence by attempting to place her in gifted classes or moving her ahead a grade. Susan, too, had support from her elementary school teachers. When Susan first arrived in the United States, the “students and teachers” she encountered “were friendly.” Their friendliness encouraged her to view herself as “good.” In addition, she says, “I could count on them when I needed help.”

Susan and Andrea both spoke of the support and encouragement they received from their middle school teachers. In their middle school years, there were several memorable teachers. For Andrea this was the teacher who did not give tests until she was “sure” that the students understood the content. For Susan, this was the social studies teacher who “would try her hardest to get everybody to pass her class,” and the math teacher who “explained it really good until you understood it.” It sounds like Susan remembers these teachers fondly because they truly supported her educational needs. In fact, this appears to be one of the last times Susan had the classroom math teacher offer her so much support.

The participants discussed teachers and other school personnel who had helped them in high school. As stated before, Susan received assistance in high school math from her homeroom teacher who taught science. Andrea had a teacher who once again recognized her intelligence and wanted to make sure she developed to her full potential; thus, she recommended that Andrea move from regular to advanced placement to IB (International Baccalaureate) English classes. In addition, her high school counselors provided advice and information about attending college. As discussed previously, Laura’s high school teachers were

able to show her “how to be successful.” Once she learned “how to be successful,” Laura feels she was able to do what she needed to do when she needed to do it.

Besides family and school personnel, support was offered from various others. Susan relied on her friends to provide support in the form of advice and as a morale booster. She describes her high school friends as “awesome” because she can count on them to lift her sadness and to consider her dilemmas. For instance, when she was torn between taking a year off to help her mom and going right to college, her friends said, “You need to go to college. You need to keep studying. But if you want to help your mom, well then do it.” Andrea was most savvy when it came to seeking advice from knowledgeable others. As detailed previously, she went to her family friend, to older associates at her volunteer job, and to me, seeking a solution to her financial dilemma her first semester of college. Not only does she seek advice, she also analyzes this advice and uses it to make an informed decision. When all three of us suggested and encouraged the use of loans for her first year of college, she used this advice, applied for a loan, and moved one step closer to her goal of a college degree.

Ineffective Support from Family

The participants received some poor advice from their parents; however, this poor or ineffective encouragement does not seem to have had very detrimental consequences, and this poor advice or ineffective support appears to stem mostly from inexperience with the processes of American higher education.

Andrea's situation seems to illustrate this best. Andrea's father was worried about her safety if she moved to college on her own; he said, "You need to just stay here, and you need to find something that you like at this college [RSC]." Andrea explained to her father that "this is what they do here." In other words, Andrea sees going away to college as a typical American tradition or custom, and her father has difficulty understanding that RSC has limited offerings in terms of four-year programs. Thus, if Andrea tried to continue her education at that college, she would have to drastically change her dreams. I do not believe her father is trying to stunt her dreams; he seems to be offering her what he considers a logical compromise to the dilemma of her dreams versus his concerns for her safety. He probably does not understand how few choices for majors and future careers Andrea would have if she stayed at RSC for all 4 years.

Ineffective Support from Others

The support the participants received from concerned school personnel, while seemingly well-intentioned, was occasionally misguided; thus, the participants suffered varying levels of setbacks. Again, Andrea's experiences seem to exemplify this misguided support. For instance, there was the huge miscommunication about the ASPIRE grant. One minute she qualified, and the next minute she had to wait a year to qualify. It seems the school personnel at both the high school and the college had trouble with the rules as they applied to a newly documented immigrant. While Laura does have financial challenges deterring her ability to maintain full-time college attendance, I cannot find any

instances where she links these problems with any bad advice or lack of encouragement from others. I believe she is unaware that her college or high school counselors could have assisted her with additional scholarships or other financial means of attending college.

Conclusion

All of these young women were fortunate to have significant others in their lives who offered them support in various forms and amounts. Often, the significant others were family members. Susan's brother and sister-in-law and Laura's brother seemed to have "served as key sources of support and evidence that going to college was a realistic option" (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002, p. 63). After all, Susan's sibling was able to take each day as he encountered it, and this convinced her that college might not be as terrifying as some of the teachers tended to make it seem. Laura's brother served a similar purpose when he showed Laura that he could dropout of college until his financial situation was more stable, and then he could return to college. This seems to have shown Laura that she can change her methods (i.e., getting a different degree or going to college in a different country) for reaching her overarching goal of obtaining a college degree.

Unfortunately, there were several instances when the support of or the advice to the participants was less than adequate, off track, or completely incorrect. When this type of support came from family members, it seems it was often because family members were inexperienced in the way college works in

general or in the ways college works specifically in the United States. Rosas and Hamrick (2002), too, found a link between the “family members’ own knowledge or personal experiences with college” (p. 65) and their level of understanding of what college entailed or what their daughters needed. Ines, in the Rosas and Hamrick study (2002) experienced a similar situation to Andrea. Andrea’s dad wanted to move the whole family to the college town, and Ines’s mother wanted Ines to come home when she was upset about dropping a class. Both parents were just trying to be supportive, but neither young woman received the support she wanted or needed at the moment. Josefina has had an experience very similar to Rita in the Rosas and Hamrick (2002) study. Josefina’s father thinks that she has too much free time, should not need to study so much for a math class, and can take multiple classes, one right after another. Rita (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002) explains, “Sometimes, I don’t think she [the mother] realizes how hard it is” (p. 65).

On one hand, when the ineffective support came from school personnel, it seems that this could be attributed to the idea that school personnel are not fully versed in all the rules that apply to undocumented students. On the other hand, some of the obstacles these women face could be attributed to school administrators who have not fully confronted these issues and thus have not engaged in any meaningful discussions to alleviate the barriers.

Helping Others: Is it a Priority for All?

As I wrote each individual's story, I often discussed how they helped others. Therefore, it was easy to see that helping others appears to be a priority in some form or fashion for each of these young women. They demonstrate their helpfulness in a multitude of ways, and they seem to be motivated to be helpful for multiple reasons.

Careers

For the most part, all four young women have selected careers that serve others. Josefina wants to be an elementary teacher. Laura has chosen nursing or dentistry as possible future careers. Susan hopes to be a forensic scientist. Andrea had considered producing and selling her artwork as a studio artist, but she later changed her mind to interior design.

Helping Families

As discussed previously, all of these young women are motivated to help their family members in any number of ways. Josefina helps her parents by doing chores around the house, and she has helped her younger siblings and her older sister with homework. Susan helps her parents in the family store and works many hours at her full-time job. Then, she secretly has money placed in their bank account to help them financially. Laura works with her mother at the dry cleaners. In addition, Laura thinks of their future financial security, and this is the reason she wants to become independent and live on her own. She feels that this will "take the pressure [...] off." Andrea helps her dad learn English when they

have discussions, and she has given her older brother and sister advice. In fact, she says, she is “the one telling them the process [of going to college] right now” “because they haven’t been to college.”

Volunteer Activities

While not all of the participants were engaged in volunteer activities, three of them did participate, and two of these young women participated at a very active level. Andrea, for example, participated in multiple clubs while in high school, and she “sent [...] care packages to soldiers,” made more care packages for poverty-stricken children, rang the bells for the Salvation Army, “read to kids,” provided breakfast for “the maintenance staff” at the high school, translated for Spanish-speaking parents at the elementary school, and worked at “cleaning up places.” Josefina, too, participated in a plethora of clubs while in high school. She served as a translator for “parent-teacher conferences,” “helped with Girl Scouts”, volunteered to work in a nursing home, “joined the United Way Youth Community” group, and solicited her siblings to volunteer with her at the “multi-cultural festival.” In addition, she first served as the secretary and subsequently as the president of the Student Council. Laura joined some of the same clubs that Andrea and Josefina had joined, and she undertook “activities for charities.”

Motivations for helping others in society. The motivations for participating in these activities were multi-faceted. Andrea originally joined some of her clubs because her advisor asked her to join, and she concluded, “I don’t have anything better to do.” In addition, Andrea volunteered to become a

participant in my research study, because she thought she would “help.”

Josefina’s seems to have the largest variety of reasons for helping others in society, and she has articulated these reasons with a great deal of clarity. In the beginning, she joined the clubs and helped people because she “saw people [...] helping and like actually enjoying it.” Since these people were “having fun,” she concluded that she would “try it.” Once she tried it, she found it “fun,” too. As stated before, Josefina now links success with helping others. She feels she will be successful if she is “satisfied” that what she is doing is “benefiting [...] other people.” Finally, she is motivated to become a first grade teacher because she wants to help “other Hispanic kids who don’t know [...] English.” This desire to help members of her community was again obvious when she spoke of her desire to “help other Hispanics get an education” by helping in a mentoring program. As previously discussed, she feels this is important in order to dispel the negative Hispanic stereotypes that are prevalent.

Conclusion

While helping others in society was discussed by only 3 of the 4 participants, helping people, including family members, was discussed by all. Some of these young women seemed to have helped their families just because it was seen as the natural course of events. There seemed to be the sense that this is what one does: one helps family members. In other instances, some of the young women seem to share the idea of “reciprocity” (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002, p. 63) with the respondents in the Rosas and Hamrick study. In other words, they “were

well aware of sacrifices their families had made in order to provide educational opportunities for them, and they articulated their place within a dynamic of shared, mutual obligations with family and others” (p. 63). While Josefina does not articulate her situation in the same manner as Justice in the Rosas and Hamrick study, I believe they share the desire to help the next generation of their families. Justice (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002) seems to be motivated to help her younger brother and sister because her aunt has helped her; she says, “My aunt helped me out the best she could and [now] it’s my turn to help out my brother and sister the best I can” (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002, p. 63). Josefina, on the other hand, offers her younger sisters advice about going to college and taking advanced courses because she does not want them to squander the opportunities they have as American citizens.

All four chose helping professions; however, Josefina, Laura, and Susan’s career choices may seem to some as the true *helping* professions. Josefina and Susan share some similarities with Anita and Maria in the Bullington and Arbona (2001) study. Josefina wants to become a teacher in order to help other Spanish-speaking children in school, and Anita has identified a career in law enforcement as a possibility. Anita feels this career is as a means by which she can “help with the drug problem in her Hispanic neighborhood” (Bullington & Arbona, 2001, p. 146).

Without a doubt, Josefina articulated the strongest need to help others, and she feels a particular kinship with helping or giving back to her community.

When Karina suggests that it is important to “be a role model to make sure people realize it is possible” (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002, p. 63), she shares the idea of “reciprocity” (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002, p. 63) to one’s ethnic community with Josefina. “We can be whatever any person wants to be,” Josefina explains as she details why it is important for her to mentor other Hispanics and to help eliminate the stereotypical ways other view people of Hispanic heritage. In this instance, she shares “the desire to prove the stereotypes wrong” (Bullington & Arbona, 2001, p. 150) with Anita and Miguel in the Bullington and Arbona (2001) study.

For Miguel and Anita (from the Bullington and Arbona (2001) study and for Josefina (from my study) education is the key for dispelling some of these stereotypes. To reframe this, volunteering to help other Hispanics become educated is a means by which these youth are demonstrating “(re)positioning against texts such as pejorative stereotypes of Latinas within” (Knight et al., 2006, p. 41) the Anglo-dominated society. Miguel and Anita seemed to see their own educational pursuits as a means by which negative stereotypes might be dismissed. In other words, they are motivated to succeed because their success will prove that an education is achievable for Mexican-Americans. Josefina, on the other hand, appears to view her educational goals as a conduit for helping other Hispanics become educated. In other words, her success alone will not set aside a plethora of negative stereotypes. Instead, she must become part of an educational cycle, and when this cycle takes place, there will be many other

educated individuals of Mexican heritage who can be the means by which society can begin to change.

While I have begun the conclusion of this section on helpfulness by drawing positive connections between this research and other research, I cannot help but ponder this phenomenon through a critical/feminist lens. In other words, could there be some underlying societal expectation at play that leads these young women to devote themselves to others – sometimes to the neglect of their own needs and desires? Although Thompson (2003) links “social scripts assigned to women” (p. 11) with marriage, I believe having a helpful personality is yet another example of such a script or role that is traditionally assigned to women – often to their detriment. Thompson suggests that difference theory will “revalorize ‘women’s work’ – above all, the work of caring” (p. 13), but it fails to address how this “work plays in upholding class hierarchies, nationalism, racism, heterosexism, and patriarchy” (p. 13).

In some cases, these forces that concern Thompson’s (2003) could be the forces that are affecting the young women in this study. For example, the school system willingly uses the volunteer services of several of the participants to translate for parent-teacher conferences. In doing so, it seems like it should be a win-win situation. The participants can feel good about helping others and have a resume-boosting skill, and the Spanish-speaking parents can learn about their children’s academic progress and can learn what they might do to help them. From a different perspective, however, this activity could also be seen as a lose-

lose situation. The young women are voluntarily being used to provide a service for which people are often paid good money, and the school systems, through their use of the unpaid teenagers, have found a way to serve a large portion of their community without having to procure the permanent services of Spanish-speaking individuals. Perhaps, if the school systems hired more bilingual individuals, especially if these individuals were of Mexican descent, the children and parents would not only have the ability to communicate better with the school system, the children would also have the benefit of successful role models. In essence, the school systems are meeting their own needs by relying on the caring and unpaid work of a group of people who are often at the bottom of the economic hierarchy.

Racism: Did It or Does It Exist in the Lives of These Young Women?

Without any hesitation, I can conclude that for the most part these young women believe they experienced little to no overt racism from their teachers and other school personnel, from their peers, nor from other individuals in society. At the same time, a few of the experiences these Mexican women described show that there were possible racist practices that did impact their lives at some level, but they seem unaware or unwilling to label them as unfair or possible racist practices. On the other hand, I can also conclude that the racism or unfair practices that they did recognize and detail are a direct result of governmental policies that target undocumented immigrants, and these policies have provided a great deal of conflict and trauma for each of these young women.

The Positive School Environment

When I asked my respondents about unfair treatment, most of the time, they had few or no examples to provide. Their school environments do not sound at all like they are overtly hostile environments. For instance, none of these young women spoke of children laughing at them as they learned English, nor did they speak of instances where they thought teachers were exceptionally rude or uncaring because of their Mexican heritage. In fact, the opposite seemed to be the norm. These young women spoke of students who were helpful, and teachers who were nurturing.

These young women described many positive interactions in their schools with teachers and students, and this leads me to believe that they were not exposed to overtly hostile school environments. One way in which teachers fostered a positive school environment was through their interactions with students. For example, Josefina's kindergarten teacher inspired her to become a teacher because she "played" with the students and worked with them individually. Josefina talked about teachers treating all the students the same during our first interview, and she clarified what she meant by this in our second interview. "I don't see any teacher giving [...] any student preference based on other race or on how smart they are or anything like that." In addition, "they try to help everyone." When Susan first entered school in the United States she was able to feel like she "was good" and that she "fit there" because the "students and teachers" reacted to her in such a "friendly" way. Laura had only positive

interchanges to discuss. For example, she believes that her teachers were “impressed” because she had such a good “attitude,” and she made them “proud” because she was “one of the best students in the classroom,” even though she was still in the process of acquiring English skills. Andrea believes she was “really lucky to have teachers that really cared.”

Not only did their teachers interact with them in positive interchanges, the teachers also demonstrated that they had a good understanding of their individual abilities. It appears that most of the participants had teachers who recognized, acknowledged, and encouraged their talents. Laura attributes some of her success to high school teachers because they were responsible for teaching her “how to be successful.” Andrea had several of her teachers who recognized her abilities and wanted to place her in “gifted classes” or wanted her to move ahead a grade level. Josefina had a similar experience to Andrea. The teachers encouraged her to attempt harder tasks by placing her in advanced English classes; these teachers thought she was capable of doing the work, and they did not want her to be “bored” in the easier classes.

Even when Josefina described her least favorite middle school teacher who made her feel “dumb,” she did not paint a picture of a teacher who was mean or hostile to her because of her heritage. Instead, she concluded that this teacher did not call on her and make her feel “dumb” out of spite; this teacher was calling on her because Josefina was reticent in class, and she understood that Josefina

“knew the answers.” She hoped Josefina would “be able to share them with the class.”

The Negative School Environment

Several of these young women made mention of particular instances or events that hinted at possible racist attitudes, but they were often able to perceive these events or instances in a positive light or show how they had produced a positive result. In addition, there were a few instances or events that happened, and it seems as if the respondents didn't even realize or perceive them as having racist overtones.

Perceived unfairness. Andrea was the only participant who discussed perceived unfair treatment in schools. As mentioned previously, she sometimes felt as if teachers gave her “an extra push” or even showed her more “care” than to others because they viewed her as “not as smart as other people.” This made her feel as if “they were looking down on” her, but it also made her “work harder” because she wanted to demonstrate her abilities. She also discussed the teachers who sometimes doubted her ability to utilize the English language at any level and those who doubted her intelligence. Andrea was quick to point out that these teachers did not directly state that she was “dumb.” Instead, their actions, concern, and encouragement left this impression. In addition, Andrea almost excuses their actions when she says “they didn't really know me. They just met me on the spot.”

Overlooked unfairness. There are two particular instances of unfair treatment that stand out for me, but they were discussed by the participants in a manner that suggests that they did not recognize them as unfair, or they just accepted that this was the way things worked.

The first instance that became apparent to me was the way that dances were handled at their high school. As stated previously, this is a school where more than half of the student body is of Hispanic heritage, yet the school dances are separated into traditional dances such as homecoming and prom where Anglo music is featured and international dances where more Latino music is played. In fact, Laura says that “they play only English music” at the prom or the sweetheart dance. Laura explains at the “international dance, they play Salsa, Merengue, and Hip Hop.” While the type of music that is played at a high school dance may seem insignificant to some, I found it astounding that Latino music could only be heard at the international dance when students of Hispanic heritage were the majority of the student body population. It was also shocking to me that Hip Hop was featured at the international dance; I had thought that Hip Hop had moved into what would be considered mainstream music for American teenagers. Laura did not seem to be troubled by any of this; in fact, these revelations came about within the first few minutes of our first interview while I was asking basic questions about the things she liked to do. Perhaps, she was unconcerned because she had only been in the United States a few years, and she concluded this was just how things were done in the United States.

I found one more instance of treatment that might be deemed unfair or tied to racist ideas, and this was the treatment that Josefina experienced when she decided to move from advanced to general classes. As discussed previously, Josefina was a student who had met with a high level of academic success throughout her academic career, and I am troubled by the notion that only one teacher seemed to be concerned when she dropped from advanced to general classes. Perhaps the lack of concern from the other teachers was based on the perception that general classes are good enough for students of Hispanic heritage.

An Unsympathetic Society

These young women discussed a few instances of perceived racism in the school environment, and I uncovered a few instances of unnoticed racism in the schools. However, all four young women spoke of ways that the society and the American government treated them unfairly, denied them opportunities offered to others unconditionally, and disregarded their hopes and dreams. Sometimes, they spoke of these instances with direct questions about unfair practices or frustrating moments. At other times, they revealed their concerns when we were discussing seemingly innocuous subjects like favorite childhood books.

Andrea spoke of instances where people in “stores” and a “couple of fast food places” who were American, but they spoke to her in Spanish. She explains how she feels when this happens.

I appreciate the effort, but it frustrates me. They kind of say that your skin is darker, and you have to know Spanish – you don’t

know English. So I answer them to do English, and they're like 'oh, sorry about that.' So, it's kind of both situations that frustrate me cause I don't know. I've worked hard to learn and things like that. It frustrates me for people to say things like that because your skin is darker, you don't know English and stuff.

An Unsympathetic Government

All four of these young women were negatively impacted by the rules and regulations that the government has established to *protect* our society against mass immigration and from immigrants. All of the participants recognized and were quite vocal about how these rules and regulations impacted them and how important it was for others to know about the complications they faced.

Laura was the only participant to use the word discrimination; she still felt as if she had not be discriminated against "directly," but the indirect discrimination prevented her from "doing some things." For instance, since she did not have proper documentation, she was unable to get her driver's license or rent an apartment. In addition, she says, "There are some schools that I couldn't apply to because I don't have a green card."

Most of their descriptions of discriminatory governmental practices revolved around financing their college educations. Laura received a rejection letter from one organization saying that "they couldn't give any scholarship to any student who doesn't have any papers or documents." This made her "feel really bad." Josefina, too, spoke of the scholarships for which she was unable to apply.

First, there was the state government-supported ASPIRE scholarship that she qualified for based upon her grades, but her undocumented status did not allow application. Next, she wanted to apply for the scholarship through the Hispanic Scholarship fund, but she was told that the lawyers said there “might be a conflict” because she was undocumented. In essence, she cannot “do all the things” that she dreams of doing simply because she lacks some legal papers. In other words, she “won’t get the whole college experience” because she must attend the local state college for all four years, and she does not get to go away to a “real college.” Josefina’s examples document how restricting these rules and regulations are. Is there any wonder she sees the United States as place where people “care where you come from?”

Susan, who seems to be the participant who is most negatively affected by the governmental regulations, unabashedly has the harshest opinion on this theme. Once the school removed the in-state tuition fees for the undocumented students, Susan and her brother had to contemplate discontinuing their college educations because it would cost “over \$5000 dollars” for them to both go to school. I believe Susan’s summarizes the predicament that these participants face with vocal eloquence.

I don’t know what they’re thinking, but if they want [...] better people for their country, well, why do you take the waivers away? Why do you want to take the opportunity from people who want to do something with themselves?

Susan's comments lead to the obvious question. Does the government of the United States *really* want better-educated people? While I did not ask this question any more eloquently than did Susan, I do think I can offer a theory with regard to why the government appears to be so unsympathetic to the plight of Susan and others like her. If "the basic function of the schools is to reproduce the dictates of the state in the economic order" (Giroux, "The Hope," 1988, p. 95), then the removal of these waivers makes perfect sense. The government has a vested interest in maintaining a working underclass in order that said underclass will continue to work the low-paying and manual labor jobs that are the very backbone of our economy. By removing these waivers, the very institutions supposedly rendered with the responsibility to provide opportunities for the advancement of the *American Dream* have quashed the dreams of these young women and others like them and forced another generation of immigrants to accept that their fate in America is a predetermined one of low-skilled, low-pay industriousness.

Conclusion

Although these participants expressed the idea that little overt racism and discrimination existed in their school lives, Andrea did acknowledge that there were times that she felt inferior. As discussed before, she was somewhat conflicted about her teachers' perceptions. This perception that teachers may view one as inferior is closely connected to the students from the Derwing et al. (1999) study. Derwing et al. found that although the ESL students interviewed in

their study “appreciated any extra consideration and assistance given by the teachers, they disliked being singled out” (p. 540). In essence, Andrea and the ESL students in this study are conflicted by this dichotomy.

In essence, Andrea was “Othered” (Rishoi, 2003, p. 136) by the teachers. Rishoi suggests that “the less an immigrant looks like she is of European descent, the more Othered she tends to feel in American society” (p. 136). Added to the fact that Andrea does not look “like she is of European descent” (p. 136) is the fact that she is female, and Rishoi suggests that there is a “widespread cultural Othering of females generally” (Rishoi, p. 136). In essence, she is “Othered” (p. 136) or made to feel less than others because she is both female and an immigrant of color. Following Thompson’s (2003) suggestions that one cannot simply look at a life in “additive terms” (p. 23), I suggest that Andrea’s mostly undocumented status, her femaleness, her financial difficulties (or socio-economic status), and her acquisition of the English language as a second language are all interacting and intersecting at the moment she felt “Othered” (Rishoi, 2003, p. 136) by the teachers who gave her the additional attention.

While these participants felt and/or experienced little discrimination in their school environments, they are very aware of and concerned about the level of hostility they encounter because of governmental regulations. Fraser (2002) supports the idea that feminist theory must allow for such contradictions. In fact, she found that the participants in her study often offered examples of “positive personal experiences” (p. 126), but there were “myriad examples of how social

power permeates their lives in a negative fashion” (p. 126). In essence, Fraser suggests that we should not feel the need to “explain away” the contradictory nature of the participants’ experiences (Fraser, 2002, p. 127).

I do not think I can offer any stronger of a conclusion than what was offered by Susan. If a country truly wants its citizens (be they documented or undocumented) to have a productive life and improve society for all those who live here, why, indeed, does it deny the people who are obviously capable and motivated to achieve the opportunity to do so? I have offered one logical answer to this question.

Mexican Identity: How is it Defined and Maintained?

I wanted to learn how these young women perceived their Mexican-American identity. In other words, what was special about being Mexican-American? One of the most important things I learned was that I was presumptuous when I labeled these respondents as Mexican-American. While a few of the respondents attempted to answer my question directly, they also made it clear that they, themselves, did not fall under the label of Mexican-American. They did, however, all agree on what made someone Mexican-American. In future interviews, I apologized for selecting the term Mexican-American as a label to describe their heritage, and I asked them to tell me how they would describe their heritage if someone asked them about it. Unequivocally, they all told me that they were not Mexican-American.

Mexican-American versus Mexican versus Hispanic

For all of these young women, the Mexican-American identity was associated with someone who had parents from Mexico, but the individual was born in the United States. In fact, Josefina perceived a different identity for herself, an individual born in Mexico but living in the United States, as opposed to her younger sisters, individuals who had parents from Mexico but were born in the United States. Josefina, Andrea, and Susan (first generation immigrants) all identified themselves as Mexicans. Selecting “labels that refer solely to national origin” (Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005, p. 802) was a “more likely” (Fuligni et al., 2005, p. 803) occurrence when the respondents were first generation individuals in the Fuligni et al. study. In addition, the first generation students of Mexican heritage in the Fuligni et al. study “were more likely to select a national label” (p. 804) as “the most important label” (p. 804). Laura identifies herself as Hispanic. In fact, when I asked her about her heritage, she replied, “Hispanic – definitely; I’m proud of it.” She sees this as “a warm culture.”

Maintaining Identity and Connection to Family Culture

Most of these young women were making conscious decisions to undertake activities that would help them maintain their cultural roots and stay connected to their family’s cultural experiences. Sometimes, their parents encouraged or suggested these endeavors, but most often, the young women took it upon themselves to do so. Developing and maintaining skills with reading, writing, and speaking the Spanish language appeared to be of importance for all.

Andrea. Andrea made her first trip home to Mexico the summer after she graduated high school. Although she had already served as a translator for Spanish-speaking people in the United States, this trip made her realize that she was not as fluent as a native Spanish-speaker. In fact, she was sometimes mistaken for an American while in Mexico. Her “Americanized Spanish” skills and her lack of knowledge of the Mexican culture prompted her to feel “out of place” in Mexico. While she had already identified learning more Spanish as a goal in our first interview, she returned to the United States from Mexico with an even greater desire to improve her Spanish. She explained how her dad would say things in Spanish “during dinner” in previous months, and she “did not really care to know what they were about.” Now, she asks questions because she is motivated to learn and maintain her connection to her heritage.

Josefina. Josefina is attempting to maintain her reading skills in Spanish. She is motivated to do so for a variety of reasons. She explained, “I’m trying to read books in Spanish because I’m trying not to lose my Spanish.” One of the books she described was a book of historical fiction that was about a woman who “led Cortez to the Aztecs.” As she reads, she translates the book into English. Sometimes, she will ask her mother, “What would it be in English?” After her mother translates for her, she “can work on that and [...] can picture it [the story].”

Josefina seems to be most concerned about keeping her Spanish skills at a high level because she does not want to find herself in the same position as her

younger sisters. As discussed previously, “They don’t speak a word of English.” This proves to be a handicap when Josefina’s family visits extended family members who do not speak English. These family members are left with the impression that Josefina’s family thinks they “are all that” because they are speaking English and not Spanish. Since her sisters do not speak Spanish, they can not speak to their paternal grandmother who lives in the United States. Thus, the grandmother views them as “disrespectful.” Josefina also believes “you are looked down upon by Hispanics if you are Hispanic if you don’t talk in Spanish or if you don’t read Spanish or write Spanish.”

I believe Josefina also maintains her connection to her heritage or culture by having the desire to help others from her community. As discussed several times, she has a deep-seeded need to assist other Hispanics. She wants them to become educated in order to show society what Hispanics are capable of accomplishing. Once this happens, she is hopeful that others in society will be able to see Hispanics as something other than “lazy” people “living off welfare” and producing babies and marrying at young ages.

Bernal (2006), acknowledges that her participants reported that the “commitment to families and communities can be a heavy emotional burden.” (p. 124). However, she sees such a commitment as just one facet of the “mestiza consciousness” (p. 125) that helps young women such as Josefina to “draw from their sense of self” (p. 125) in order “to continue on their educational journey” (p. 125). In other words, Josefina’s “mestiza consciousness” (p. 125) includes

uncertainty she may feel because she “straddles cultures, races, languages, nations, sexualities, and spiritualities” (p. 117). However, this uncertainty does not have to pose a threat to her quest for a higher education. Instead, Bernal suggests that such a consciousness provides yet another reservoir from which Josefina can draw “strength” (p. 123) to complete her “educational journey” (p. 125).

Susan and Laura. Susan and Laura both participate in activities that will help them maintain or develop their Spanish skills, but they did not put as much emphasis on the need to stay connected as did Andrea and Josefina. Susan continues to practice reading and writing in Spanish. She says, “My mom makes me. She’s like, ‘You can forget your heritage.’ So yeah, every time I can, I read and write.” What I find most interesting about Susan’s dedication to maintaining at least part of her heritage is that she does so by doing something she dislikes. She says, “I just don’t like reading. I’m not a big fan of reading.” She finds reading, in Spanish or English, to be uninteresting. In fact, she says, “It just bores me.”

Laura, on the other hand, did not directly mention any need to stay connected, she just discussed some of the activities that she does, and I can see how they might help her make the connection. For example, she talked about reading when I first asked her about any hobbies she enjoyed. Reading was the first hobby she mentioned. She does read some books written in English, but she reads a variety of books written in Spanish. She also seems to maintain her

connection to her culture through dance and music. She mentioned Salsa and Merengue as the types of dancing that she enjoyed. In addition, she listens to a variety of American music, but she also enjoys music sung in Spanish by a troubadour.

Conclusion

Identity terminology. Since all four of these participants are first generation individuals from Mexican heritage, it probably should not have come as a surprise to me that, for the most part, they would most closely link themselves with their Mexican roots. When I began my study, I did not know what immigration or background status my participants might have. I attempted to select a term that would both honor their heritage and be the most applicable to any of the individuals that might volunteer to participate. I began with the “panethnic” (Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005, p. 799) label of Latino, and switched to Mexican-American because I knew I would request that the school counselor solicit volunteers from the group of female students whom she knew came from Mexican heritage.

When these young women replied to my questions about their Mexican-American identities, they were somewhat similar to 3 of the 4 youths in the Bullington and Arbona (2001) study. The youths in this study at first identified themselves as “Hispanic” (p. 147) and later “used the terms Mexican and Mexican-American when referring to themselves, their families, or their culture” (Bullington & Arbona, 2001, p. 147). At first, some of the young women in my

study attempted to fulfill my request and link themselves to a Mexican-American identity; later, they were very articulate when they identified themselves as Mexican or as Hispanic (in Laura's case).

I believe that the youth in my study made this transition because they were attempting to answer my initial questions as I had worded them, and then I reworked the questions about ethnicity and heritage, and this afforded them the freedom to express how they truly viewed themselves. They were very sure of their ethnic identities from the beginning; it was an outside influence (the interviewer) who imposed a label upon them.

For Bullington and Arbona's (2001) youth, it seems possible that they chose the Hispanic identifier because this is the term that is often the choice on forms and is in use in the media. Since Bullington and Arbona believed their youth took "pride in Mexican culture" (p. 147), it seems possible that outside influences (like the media and the government) caused them to select an ethnic identifier different than how they truly saw themselves. It is also possible that the youth in Bullington and Arbona's study chose the Hispanic term in order to "distance themselves from" (p. 148) "the negative stereotypes of Mexican-Americans" (p. 148). In both cases, it seems the youth are aware of who they are, where they came from, and what their culture means to them.

Acknowledged motivations. While maintaining a connection to their Mexican heritage appears to be a different level of priority for Laura, Andrea, Susan, and Josefina, each did undertake activities to at least develop and maintain

their connection to their first language. Those young women who directly addressed their motivations, discussed the encouragement from parents, the realization that others would see you as an American, the respect it showed to the people who shared your heritage, and the need to be able to communicate with relatives who do not speak English. Josefina and Andrea seemed most intent on developing and maintaining their connection, and this appears to be a direct result of their personal experiences. Andrea was confronted with the loss of her Mexican self by the Mexican people she met this summer, and Josefina sees the lack of connection to a Mexican identity in her younger sisters. Both of these young women seemed to be troubled when they imagine what these losses could mean for their futures.

Theoretical motivations. There is another position from which one can view the development and maintenance of a Mexican identity. Bernal (2006) followed students of Mexican descent who identified themselves as “Mexican, Mexican/American, and/or Chicano” (p.117). She suggests that “their use of Spanish in both academic and social settings can be seen as forms of resistance because that behavior challenges the historical and current anti-immigrant and English-only sentiments” (p. 121). Perhaps what is so important about this type of resistance is that it is productive or “positive” (Bernal, 2006, p. 115) resistance. In other words, the participants in my study resisted the oppressive dictates of “a white supremacist society” (Ochoa as cited in Bernal, 2006, p. 116) to assimilate by “claiming an identity, maintaining one’s language, and affirming one’s own

culture” (Ochoa as cited in Bernal, 2006, p. 116). In doing so through the development of their Spanish language skills, they are moving closer to developing or maintaining their bilingual abilities. Besides aiding in the maintenance of a Mexican identity, they are also developing a skill that could procure jobs for them in the future. They are not resisting by becoming pregnant, dropping out of school, or undertaking some other “self-defeating” (Bernal, 2006, p. 115) pattern of behavior.

Marriage and Children: Are They a Priority?

In various ways, 3 of the 4 respondents did speak of marriage and family. For instance, these topics were brought up by the respondents when they were talking about their motivations for going to college, what they envisioned for their futures 10 years from now, and what success meant to them and others. I would say that all three of these young women do see marriage and children as possible components of their future lives. The emphasis here is that that they all see marriage and family as a *future* component. Most of them articulate the idea that they need to graduate from college, begin working in their careers, and become settled in some form or fashion. Then, they can contemplate marriage and children. While marriage and children seem to be a priority for most of them, they have a strong sense of the order in which these events need to take place. In fact, several of the respondents commented upon the current state of teenage pregnancies in the Hispanic community, and it was obvious that they did not want to duplicate this trend.

Marriage as a Future Goal

For Laura, Susan, and Josefina, marriage was discussed as a matter-of-fact course of events that would occur sometime in the future. More important, there is a definite pattern or progression that they envision. While some of Laura's peers believed "getting married is a success," Laura, Susan, and Josefina seemed to need to have some level of academic or career success before they could get married. Laura feels as if she needs to get a college degree before she gets married. Laura "would like to get married 8 to 10 years from now." This was a good plan in her mind because she wanted to "finish college first," and "30 is a good age to have a baby."

Susan spoke of her future family with regard to becoming "somebody."

When I grow-up and I have a family, I want my family to be proud of me, and I don't want them to be seeing me work really hard to get money or to struggle to get money for them.

It appears as if Susan sees having a family as a natural progression, but she must first "be somebody" before this can happen. She also values spending time with children. When she spoke of her co-workers at the manufacturing plant, she told of how "tough" it was because they "have to work so many hours, and most of them have families and kids and they don't get to see their kids or their families as much as they would want to." Susan's compassion for others was obvious with this statement, but it is also possible that she had given this much thought because she does not want this same life for her future children.

Josefina saw marriage as part of her “future but like later, later on.” She had not selected a particular age at which she wanted to get married, but she did have specific criteria that she wanted to meet before she married. For example, her education needed to be complete and she need to be self-supporting and “independent.” Marriage, she said could take place after, “[I] actually know who I am and know what I have accomplished and like just know myself and am happy with who I am and my career.”

From these examples, it became obvious that these young women had set standards or criteria that they must meet before they could move onto the next natural phase of their lives. Marriage and family was envisioned as part of the future, but Laura needed to earn her degree first. Susan had to “be somebody” that earned enough money, so her children would not see her “struggle” and so she could spend enough time with her children. Josefina needed to be “independent,” and she needed to “know” herself before she could marry and have children.

Possible Reasons Why Marriage is a Future Goal

These participants seem to have had various life experiences that have shaped their motivations to delay marriage until certain benchmarks are met. For example, Susan’s experiences with the workers at the factory have led her to see that working such long hours at a factory job means that one must sacrifice time with one’s children. Her experiences with her own family’s financial difficulties

have shown her that she does not want her children to experience the same financial hardships that she experienced as a child and is still experiencing today.

Josefina's mother and paternal grandmother seem to have exerted contradictory influences upon her, but while their messages are in conflict, the results are the same. Josefina's mother seems to have expressed the idea that there should be a natural order to events like college attendance, learning about oneself, and marriage and family. Josefina explains her mother's point of view.

My mom got married at a young age as well, and she's always told us since we were real little like, 'Don't get married right away.' She's always like, 'Do everything you want to do career wise and like everything else first. You know you don't have to depend on a guy to [...] support you and stuff like that you can do that yourself.'

As I discussed previously, Josefina's grandmother has definite ideas about the proper behavior for young girls of Mexican heritage; Josefina once again discussed marriage in the context of her grandmother's expectations. Her grandmother remembers that in her time, women "married" and had children. They "were not wasting [...] time on an education." When Josefina discussed her grandmother's ideas that education was not for Josefina and her sisters because they were Mexicans, Josefina wanted to "prove her wrong" by showing her grandmother that she "can do you know what other people [Americans] can do."

Josefina again appears to want to defy her grandmother's expectations of what a "good" (Knight, et al., 2006, p. 39) Mexican girl should do when it comes to marriage and babies. In other words, she is not "conforming to norms that construct her as 'good'" (Knight, et al., 2006, p. 39). Instead of finding any job that pays decent money, finding a husband, and having and caring for babies, she has decided to *waste time* and earn a college degree.

While Bernal (2006) speaks of quiet resistance to the assimilation stance of the American society, I suggest in this case, Josefina is practicing productive and "positive" (Bernal, 2006, p. 115) resistance to the oppressive dictates of her own patriarchal culture that are being fostered by her grandmother. She wants oh so much more for herself than a life of caring for a husband and a child. She wants "independence," and she wants to truly know who she is before she needs to worry about or care for others.

Teen Pregnancies

The topic of teen pregnancies was brought up in discussion by both Josefina and Susan. Josefina began by telling me that she thought I would ask about "teen pregnancies" and their prevalence in the "Hispanics cultures." Josefina feels that "teen pregnancies" beget teen marriages in the Hispanic community; Josefina believes that such marriages are "not going to last." Josefina discussed marriage and teen pregnancies in several other contexts. When we discussed dropouts, she felt as if some students "did something stupid" like getting pregnant before they dropped out. Susan, too, sees teen pregnancies as

one reason students might dropout of high school. In other words, these individuals could not “work hard enough” because of the children they have. Josefina fears that others in the community see Hispanic teens as people who become pregnant and get married.

Clearly, Josefina and Susan are exhibiting the need to “distance themselves from” (Bullington & Arbona, 2001, p. 148) “the negative stereotypes of Mexican-Americans” (Bullington & Arbona, 2001, p. 148) that they (or at the very least Josefina) recognize as being constructed upon the Hispanic population. The question becomes why this distancing was an important distinction for both of these young women. Perhaps, they sought to show where they fit “within the good girl/bad girl ideologies/texts” (Knight et al., 2006, p. 48) of their own communities. Knight et al. (2006) suggest that there is a current ideology “that require[s] Latinas to live as heterosexual youth not engaged in sex or ‘sexual’ activities” (p. 51).

If this is the case, I can see why it was important for Susan and Josefina to demonstrate that they were living life differently from the young women who become pregnant. Josefina and Susan made sure that they were seen as “good” (Knight, 2006, p. 48) because they were both separating themselves from their peers who fall into the “bad” (Knight et al., 2006, p. 48) category and because they are making sure that I recognize that they fall into the category of young women who are “college bound” (Knight, 2006, p. 52). Knight et al. suggest that

the distinction is “dichotomous” (p. 52); sexually active Latina youth cannot be seen as “college bound” (p. 52).

Conclusion

While Andrea did not discuss marriage and family, the other three respondents did find this topic very relevant to their lives and to the lives of others within their families and communities. Sometimes, as in the case of Josefina and Susan, current and future family members and their expectations featured prominently in the discussion. At other times, the discussions of marriage and family were a result of the discussions of the perceptions of people within and outside of the Hispanic community. This was especially true for Laura and Josefina. No matter how the discussion came to light, all three young women had a definite sense of the progression that needed to happen before they undertook the steps to acquire a husband and family. For all of these women, education and some sense of accomplishment and/or independence was a must before marriage and childbirth could take place. In this instance, these three participants are very similar to Maria and Anita (two teenage, Mexican-American participants) in the Bullington and Arbona (2001) study. They, too, “spoke of delaying marriage until at least their mid-twenties in order to have time to complete school and establish themselves in a career before adding family responsibilities” (Bullington & Arbona, 2001, p. 146).

Thompson (2003) suggests “that girls still have trouble imagining themselves outside the social scripts assigned to women. Insofar as they think of

themselves primarily in relation to men – as the future Mrs. Somebody – girls and young women may fail to realize the potential liberatory effects of academic achievement” (p. 11). For the participants in this study, the opposite appears to be true. While some of these young women did speak of marriage and family as a future possibility, they all did see it taking place after they had achieved academic success (a college diploma) and after they had become independent young women who had careers. To me, it did not seem that the participants felt the need to be a “future Mrs. Somebody” (Thompson, 2003, p. 11). Instead, marriage and family was seen as an enrichment of an already independent and successful life.

It is hard to say what might have led the participants to value the possibilities inherent in earning a degree. For Josefina, she had a mother who spoke of waiting for marriage until after she had established a career; she had a grandmother who continually preached the traditional values of marriage and family, and she wanted to defy her grandmother’s expectations. Laura had a mother who had established her own successful career with some limited power before moving to the United States. Susan observed her mother working hard at her factory job, and she saw that her mother was financially savvy. She was savvy enough to save money to start her own business and to purchase houses. She also noticed that her mother was able to successfully run her own business in Mexico while her father lived in the United States. Andrea was the participant who never really discussed marriage and family, and perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that she grew-up without a mother. Whatever the possible

causes may be, the result is a group of four young women who are able to see beyond the typical “social scripts assigned to women” (Thompson, 2003, p. 11) because they are “challenging the beliefs and ideologies that inhibit the ways in which they chose to enact their gendered roles” (Holling, 2006, p. 90). These are women who yearn for so much more than a wedding ring and a man to whom they can attach their identity.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The Participants

I began my study by asking my informant at the high school to select four young women who saw themselves as future college students; the only other characteristic that I requested they share was that their ethnic heritage be that of someone who was of Mexican descent. My informant selected four young women, and I was fortunate enough to have the first four selected to volunteer for the study.

After writing the stories of these four young women, I noted that they shared some similarities. Possibly, these similarities are attributed to the fact that they were roughly the same age (17 years old to 19 years old) when the study began, were from a similar background (undocumented Mexican immigrants), were all living in Ridgeview, were participating in many of the same activities on and off their high school campus, and all chose the same state college to fulfill their quest for a higher education. In addition, three out of four of the participants had spent the greater portion of their lives in the city of Ridgeview. Furthermore, they all knew each other, and several of them interacted on a regular basis. Despite similarities, their individual stories illuminated each participant's unique background, personality, aspirations, path to academic success, obstacles to overcome to meet her goals, and the realities of college life. Each of these young women had a story to tell that was unique, interesting, and poignant.

The Snapshot of the Participants (Table I) provides a graphic representation of these distinct differences.

Unique Backgrounds

While all four young women immigrated to the United States from Mexico, they did so at various ages. Andrea immigrated to the United States when she was just 3 years old to live with a nanny for 5 years. Andrea's early immigration coupled with her first five years in the United States speaking English could be the reason she appears to be and feels so Americanized. Josefina and Susan shared a similarity in that they both immigrated during their elementary school years. Laura was the last to immigrate during her 11th grade year, but she did share a similarity with Susan's immigration path in that they both stayed with their mothers in Mexico for some years while their fathers worked in the United States. Perhaps Laura's more recent arrival has led her to both recognize the discriminatory practices inherent in our society and speak of the United States with fondness. Without a doubt, she has the most memories of and attachment to Mexico.

Distinctive Personalities

I was enthralled as I interviewed each of these participants. Each time we met, a little more of their personalities were revealed. Andrea's good humor was obvious from the first interview, and I believe this is one personality trait that would stand-out above the rest. She was always smiling a natural and comfortable smile; it seemed that she just enjoyed life. As we continued to meet,

Table 1: Snapshot of the Participants, Part 1

Name	Family Background	Characteristics	Aspirations	Factors in Academic Success
Andrea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ lives with father and siblings ■ raised by a nanny in US for five years ■ in US since age 3 ■ father works -- factory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ nonchalant ■ obsessive ■ competitive ■ humorous ■ cautious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ attend dorm college ■ earn degree ■ interior design ■ studio art ■ world travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ advanced classes ■ competitive ■ “kept-up” with note-taking ■ focused in high school ■ participation in clubs ■ organized ■ finds people to help ■ set goals in middle school ■ selective of partners/classes ■ note-taking ■ changed procrastinating ways -- read ■ came to school early-left late ■ participates more ■ look-up unknown words ■ explained school needs ■ participation in clubs
Josefina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ lives with both parents, several sisters and a brother ■ lived in US since 1st grade ■ father works -- factory ■ stay-at-home mother 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ caring ■ selfless ■ resigned ■ shy ■ leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ attend dorm college ■ earn degree ■ teacher ■ help her community ■ join mentoring club 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ educated parents ■ willing to complete hard tasks ■ life-long learner ■ put “goals on the table” ■ competitive ■ worked on time issue for essays and went to Writing Lab
Laura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ lives with both parents ■ immigrated to US in 11th grade ■ lived in Mexico with mother and brother/father in US ■ professionals careers for parents (in Mexico) ■ father works -- veterinarian clinic ■ mother works -- dry cleaners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ optimistic ■ high-achiever ■ disciplined ■ open-minded ■ self-confident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ attend college ■ learn more languages ■ nurse ■ dentist ■ go back to Mexico ■ world travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ listens to brother’s advice ■ does what she has to do ■ recognizes mistakes or problem areas and addresses them ■ fast learner
Susan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ lives with both parents and sibling nearby ■ lived in US since 4th grade ■ lived with mother and brother in Mexico ■ father in US - construction ■ mother works in factory/owns store 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ realistic ■ self-sacrificing ■ private/reserved ■ cynical ■ assertive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ attend college/degree ■ forensic scientist ■ earn certificate in computers or insurance ■ attend college in NY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ listens to brother’s advice ■ does what she has to do ■ recognizes mistakes or problem areas and addresses them ■ fast learner

Table 1: Snapshot of the Participants, Part 2

Name	Expectations of College	Obstacles	Overcoming Obstacles	College Life
Andrea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ will have to interact with strangers ■ will get lost ■ might have misconceptions of how well she is doing ■ can “hang-out” with friends at a dorm school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ no Aspire scholarship ■ being distracted by outside influences ■ registered for incorrect classes ■ expensive books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ two part-time jobs at college and auto parts store ■ loans for first year ■ attended local college instead of dorm school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ found professors surprisingly approachable ■ saving hard biology for summer session ■ did not join lots of clubs – easier pace
Josefina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ too busy for clubs ■ unsure of difficulty ■ have to be responsible ■ “have to have a plan B” ■ “big party” ■ “scary” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ no ASPIRE scholarship ■ family responsibilities ■ poor grade on one science test 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ attend local state college -- not “real college” ■ get part-time job at Mexican grocery store ■ meet with college personnel for special scholarship ■ changed study habits ■ met with instructor ■ private scholarships ■ work at dry cleaners ■ take class again 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ not a party ■ 99% first essay ■ not in new clubs – but some old ones ■ college algebra and pre-calculus – easy – only needs to do work in class ■ “a vacation” ■ history easy – review ■ anatomy easy – review ■ college algebra – easy ■ performed better on first essay in second English class ■ not in clubs ■ changed major 3 times ■ shared textbook ■ in same math class as brother ■ balancing work/school
Laura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ students focused ■ English classes/ English – difficult ■ lots of studying ■ hard ■ Students will not talk to her. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ no ASPIRE scholarship ■ failed ENG 1101 – not enough time ■ not as skilled in English as she would like 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ work a full-time job in factory ■ take class/take again ■ get help from others ■ work in mother’s store ■ give mother paycheck 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ “a vacation” ■ history easy – review ■ anatomy easy – review ■ college algebra – easy ■ performed better on first essay in second English class ■ not in clubs ■ changed major 3 times ■ shared textbook ■ in same math class as brother ■ balancing work/school
Susan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ meet new people ■ not difficult ■ “burn-out brains” ■ Students will not talk to her. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ no ASPIRE scholarship ■ passing graduation science test and math classes ■ competitive ■ help mother or go to college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ work a full-time job in factory ■ take class/take again ■ get help from others ■ work in mother’s store ■ give mother paycheck 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ not in clubs ■ changed major 3 times ■ shared textbook ■ in same math class as brother ■ balancing work/school

her humorous nature was obvious as she made jokes about getting her money from the boss who owed her and telling people how successful she was.

For Josefina, I cannot settle on one personality trait that stands above the rest. When I first met her, she seemed particularly shy, and she describes herself as such. As time went on, I would describe what looked like shyness to be more disheartened than shy. In other words, her soft-spoken words and downcast eyes appeared to be more a result of the resignation that she felt as she continually recognized that despite her hard work and best efforts, she had too many obstacles placed in her path to be able to go to college where she wanted to go. Her selfless desire to give back to her community was always apparent and was discussed several times.

Laura, like Andrea, was often smiling and full of life. What struck me as most significant about Laura was her often discussed open-minded approach to life. She saw her immigration to the United States as a way to interact with Anglos and learn about different cultures. She could not understand and was frustrated by other Mexicans or Hispanics who wanted to insulate themselves from the Anglos and who lost the opportunity to interact with people from another culture. Perhaps this trait was most pronounced in Laura because she was a recent immigrant, and she was still in the enthralled stage of the immigration process.

While Laura may have been worldly in terms of her educational background and ideas, Susan was definitely the most worldly in term of life

experiences. Her personality traits that stood-out seemed to have been developed by the *School of Hard Knocks*. In other words, she was cynical and expected people to try and take advantage of her. However, she had learned that she must assert herself. She felt as if most people could not be trusted.

Varying Aspirations

In this area, the young women shared major similarities, and this makes logical sense. I intentionally selected women who saw themselves as future college students, so I expected them to share the desire to earn a college degree. Josefina, Susan, and Laura all chose helping professions: teaching, forensic science, and nursing. Josefina and Laura's choices are stereotypical female occupations while Andrea's choice (interior design) could be seen as available for both sexes. Susan's choice (forensic science) maybe seen as more masculine field, but it is certainly portrayed on the popular television series, *CSI*, as a field open to women.

Their choices of careers seem to be linked directly to their life experiences and/or their personalities. For instance, Josefina has fond memories of first grade, and she has a selfless desire to help others in her community become more educated. In this respect, her desire to become a teacher is connected to her life experiences and her personality. Laura grew-up in a family where her mother was a principal, her father was a veterinarian, and her brother is studying to be a dentist. She attributes her desires to her father's and brother's career choices. In addition, becoming a nurse or a dentist probably seems like a realistic possibility

since achieving a degree and high status has already be successfully accomplished by several members of her family. Andrea's choice of interior design is directly linked to her life experiences in the sense that she know she has artistic talent, has taken additional art classes, and has had her talent encouraged. Susan's original career choice seems to be directly linked to her life experiences, and these life experiences have helped her to develop cynical, cautious, and suspicious traits, all traits that anyone in the area of law enforcement should probably embrace in order to be effective.

All of these young women varied on their commitment to their particular career paths, and the reasons for this variance were different. Interestingly, Josefina was the most firm on her decision to become a teacher; this desire never changed across the three interviews. In fact, she had already taken steps to gain experience with children. Not only had she translated at the elementary schools, she had also volunteered at a camp where she had to develop activities and work with children.

Andrea, Laura, and Susan, at first glance, appear to have less commitment to their career paths than does Josefina. Andrea was a bit undecided in our first interview; she was attempting to make a choice between studio art and interior design. Practicality won out; financial stability in studio art was impossible to gauge, so interior design made more sense for her. Coming from a background where she did not have extra money to make frivolous choices, Andrea made the choice that had a greater likelihood of more financial stability.

Laura and Susan made choices based on practicality, too, but their changes in careers were more drastic and more vacillating. This fluctuation or apparent lack of commitment to a career path was not based upon a lack of drive or lack of commitment to the field. Instead, it was based upon financial situations and family obligations. Although Susan aspired to be a forensic scientist, both realism and practicality overshadowed her original desire. There was no money or no resources available for a four-year degree, so she could choose a certificate in computers, and this would help with the family business. Later, she changed to earning a certificate in insurance, and this would afford her the opportunity to work in the business with her sister-in-law. Even if she found the resources for earning a four-year degree, the local government could not hire her because she was undocumented. For Laura, nursing was a good choice while she had plans to live in the United States because it would not take as long or take as much money as it would to become a doctor or a dentist. Once she realized that she had more educational opportunities if she returned to Mexico, then her career path changed. She continued to desire a career in the medical field, but dentistry was her new choice. She can live with her brother, get assistance from him, use his already purchased tools, and work in the practice he hopes to establish when she graduates.

It is important to note that to an outsider it could appear that Susan and Laura, and to a lesser degree Andrea, have unclear or irresolute aspirations. Without a study like this one, where the participants are given ample opportunity

to discuss their hopes, their dreams, the obstacles they are encountering, and their reasoning process, outsiders can draw false assumptions about the strength of the aspirations that are held by young immigrant students of Mexican descent. While a “collective case study” (Stake, 2000, p. 437) does not allow the researcher to generalize to the greater population, I suggest that results such as these should, at the very least, caution teachers, counselors, other school personnel, and researchers to delve deeper before they cavalierly dismiss a student with apparent unfocused aspirations as being less serious about her college plans than a student who has held the same aspiration for a period of time.

Diverse Paths for Academic Achievement

Academic success means different things to different people, and because of this, I have been hesitant to label my participants as successful from the very beginning of this research. However, many people, including the participant themselves, would judge these young women as having met the requirements for the label of academically successful. Each had a GPA that was higher than 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. All had passed their graduation tests; most had passed on the first attempt, and several of the participants had passed the tests with scores in the exceptional range. Did all of them succeed at this level because they followed the same path? Did they hold the same personality traits, experiences, or backgrounds that might cause one to become academically successful? The answer to these questions is decidedly no.

It is probable that Laura's academic success was entrenched at an early age because her mother was a school teacher, a teacher able to help her with her work, and both of her parents held college degrees. In addition, her parents found a private school environment for her in Mexico that was both challenging and supportive. Added to her earlier experiences and background, or maybe because of her earlier experiences and background, Laura is someone who has an immense thirst for knowledge and learning. As such, she is very willing to do the difficult tasks and go beyond what the teachers require in order to reach an educational goal. This was evidenced when she took it upon herself to listen to American music, movies, and television in order to improve her English skills. She had teachers in the United States who believed in her abilities and showed her what she needed to do in order to be successful. Finally, Laura links her academic success to her ability to place her "goals on the table."

Josefina undertook many activities that could have helped to foster her academic success. First, she set goals of a college education when she was in middle school, so she had early motivation to try to succeed. Next, she was very cautious when she chooses classes and partners in classes. She made sure she had a balance in her day, and she made sure that she chose someone to work with who could add to the working relationship. Josefina enrolled in advanced classes for a time, and here she learned skills, concepts, and ways of thinking that she might not have had in the average classes. Through experiences in college, she has learned that she must read the chapters in the text in order to be successful in

classes, and she has learned that she can do this in different orders in different classes.

Andrea attributes her success to several factors. She knows she was not really attentive to school tasks in middle school because she was more focused on fitting in. In high school, she determined that she would need college-bound friends, and she became more focused. In addition, Andrea participated in several clubs that encouraged the development of even more skills that she could utilize to meet with more academic success. Through her participation, she acquired or honed her organization, persuasion, and cooperation skills.

While Susan seems to have had several academic hurdles to overcome, she did meet with a high level of success, and I think the biggest reason for this is because she learns from her mistakes. She was competitive with her brother when they shared a book and took a class together, so she learned to take classes independently from him. Then, they both met with more success. She seeks advice and seeks help to improve. Her brother and sister-in-law offered advice about retaking the failed math class in high school, and she listened to them. She recognizes the importance in doing so. She could not learn the math from her high school math teacher, so she found another teacher to help.

What leads to academic success for one participant does not necessarily work for another participant. For instance, Andrea and Laura have an acknowledged competitive nature. This nature helped Andrea meet with success in mock trials and in the competition for the business portfolio. Laura's

competitive nature means that she strives to be at least as good as the other students in the class, but most of the time she wants to be the best or one of the best. Susan, on the other hand, found that competition made learning more difficult.

Similar Expectations of College

Since these young women attended the same high school, I do not find it surprising that their expectations of college were quite similar in many ways. For the most part, the negative or frightening expectations seemed to have been formed because high school teachers made college, as Susan put it, “seem like the worst thing that could happen to you.” On the other hand, some of them had expectations of an easy life. Josefina knew from her high school teachers that the work could be very difficult, and she would need to plan for this eventuality. At the same time, she thought it would be “a big party.” Susan had heard all the stories about *burning-out* her brain, but she had faith that she could be successful in college because she observed her brother and sister-in-law going to college in a “calm” fashion. Laura seemed to have the most specific sense of what college would be like for her. She expected English classes to be difficult, and she expected her English skills to prove problematic in general. Perhaps, Laura’s background gave her more specific insight. Again, she comes from a family with college experience. On the other hand, she could have expected this because she was insightful when it came to understanding her own academic abilities. She knew she was a recent learner of the language, and she felt as if this was a

struggle for her. In this regard, she was similar to Susan who struggled with math; Susan expected math to be difficult. Perhaps Laura and Andrea did not have such specific expectations of struggle because they were unaccustomed to struggling.

Obstacles and Overcoming Them

General Hurdles

There are a few obstacles that the individual participants did not share. For example, Laura had the extra burden of being a fairly new user of the English language, and this caused her to struggle with and fail English 1101. Laura worked on managing her time better for the timed writing tests, tried to write about things that would cause her to be “emotional,” and visited the Writing Lab for assistance. Susan had struggles with passing the science test and math class in high school, and she again encountered problems when she took a review math class in college. Susan overcame these obstacles by taking a special class to help with the science exam, retaking the high school math class during the summer, and retaking the college class without her brother. Andrea made a mistake and registered for some classes she did not need, so she had the administrative assistance in the division where she worked help her register for the correct classes. All of these obstacles seem to pale in significance when they are juxtaposed with the obstacles they faced because of their immigration status.

Immigration Status

As I stated before, I intentionally had my contact at the high school select four individuals who shared a common heritage. While I expected all of these young women to be of Mexican descent and several colleagues worried about the impact on my study if I were interviewing undocumented students, I did not approach this project believing that all of my participants would be undocumented individuals. However, all four of these women were or had been undocumented immigrants.

Perhaps, I should have expected that all or part of the respondents who volunteered for this study would be undocumented immigrants based on the numbers alone. As of 2006, there was an estimated 11.6 million undocumented immigrants in the United States (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2007, p. 4). Of that number, there was an estimated 6.6 million undocumented immigrants from Mexico (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2007, p. 4). The Southern state from which these participants hailed saw the largest percentage growth of undocumented immigrants from any state in the years between 2000 and 2006 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2007, p. 4). In fact, this state ranks in the top ten for the number of undocumented immigrants (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2007, p. 4).

While the numbers of undocumented immigrants from Mexico in the United States and from the Southern state where this study would take place are high, I do not believe these numbers should have led anyone to assume that the participants would necessarily be undocumented. In the first place, I assumed that undocumented immigrants would be cautious about participating in such a study, or at least they would have been cautious about revealing their undocumented status. Obviously, I held a flawed assumption here. It is possible these young women, one needing parental permission, joined the study believing they would not need to discuss their immigration status. However, I think this is highly unlikely since several of them discussed how important they thought it was for other people to know what life was like for them. In addition, Laura confronted this issue directly during our follow-up discussion after I had written my version of her story. She believed she should not be “afraid” to tell people about her undocumented status. She needed to do this in order for others to know “what it’s like to be an immigrant student” in her situation. Since their immigrant status was directly connected to the pathos of their stories, their life stories could not be told without the revelation of their status

Possible impact on life stories. I believe this undocumented status first led all of these women to share a similar socioeconomic background. One or both of their parents usually worked in an unskilled job. Susan’s father worked in construction. Laura’s mother worked at the drycleaners cleaning clothing. Susan’s mother, Andrea’s father, and Josefina’s father all worked in one of the

factories for the local manufacturing companies. Laura's father was working in a veterinarian clinic. While one could hypothesize that lack of education led to these unskilled or semi-skilled positions, I suggest that lack of education alone may not be responsible for their lower socioeconomic status. One needs only to remember that Laura's parents were college-educated and worked as a veterinarian and teacher before they immigrated.

Without a doubt, this lack of documentation has proven to be the biggest obstacle that they face as they attempt to achieve their goals. The repercussions from their undocumented status coupled with a lower socioeconomic background are far reaching. Susan, Josefina, and Laura all earned the required GPA to qualify for the ASPIRE scholarship (a state funded college scholarship for high school graduates who maintained a 3.0 GPA). In fact, Laura with her 3.91GPA (Laura, cumulative file, 2006) and Josefina with her 4.0 GPA (Josefina, cumulative file, 2006) exceeded the expectations by far. However, their undocumented status made them ineligible. Andrea, too, surpassed the required 3.0 GPA when she earned 3.44 (Andrea, cumulative file, 2006), and her undocumented status only delayed her eligibility a year since she was able to acquire the proper documentation prior to her high school graduation.

In addition, their undocumented status made it difficult for them to apply for and/or receive other scholarships. This was so discouraging for Josefina that it appeared to outside parties that she was not intending to go to college after graduating from high school even though she had a stellar academic record of

high achievement, service to her high school through the student government, service to her community through volunteer activities, and participation in a variety of clubs. When Ms. Jones, the Director of Admissions, *found* a special scholarship for her at RSC, Josefina's dreams of attending college were partially fulfilled. While she definitely speaks of her appreciation of this educational opportunity, she also believes that she is missing the "whole college experience" she could have at another university. Laura, on the other hand, was able to find a few special scholarship opportunities, and these scholarships did not seem to be attached to American citizenship. Since there are obviously some monies available in the form of scholarships for academically exceptional undocumented students, high school counselors and college recruitment officers need to have early access to this information, and they need to do their best to match these exceptional students with these special funds early in the students' senior year of high school. Hopefully, this will keep students like Josefina from seeing their situation as hopeless until the very last minute.

While special monies did become available for Laura and Josefina and Andrea did finally qualify for the ASPIRE scholarship, Susan, an academically successful but not exceptional student, was left with very few options. There was not an ASPIRE scholarship and no special last minute scholarship for her; she was left with no choice but to pursue her dreams in the manner in which she was adamantly opposed. She knew her attention would be divided if she had to go to school part-time and work part-time or full-time to help her family and pay for her

education. She was proven correct; according to her analysis, her ability to pass the developmental math class was directly and negatively impacted by the number of hours she worked at her full-time job and in her family's store.

Possible impact on participation in study. Even though the immigration statistics for undocumented individuals mentioned previously illustrate the sheer numbers of undocumented people, this still leaves me to ponder how all four of my participants were or had come from an undocumented background. It is entirely possible that their undocumented status was an impetus for high academic achievement. The young women in this study spoke of the need to achieve for parents who had made sacrifices for them and the need to achieve for the parents who had been denied educational opportunities of their own. Participants of Mexican descent from other studies have shown similar motivations for achievement (Bullington & Arbona, 2001). Since my informant chose individuals who saw themselves as future high school graduates who would attend college, their level of academic success set them up as likely candidates for the study.

Possible impact on personality traits. When I began to examine the impact of their immigration status on their lives, I also began to closely examine their personality traits, and sometimes one or two of them would share a trait with another, but rarely did all four of them share a particular trait. I could not help but notice that these three young women shared at least one distinctive personality trait. They all shared a virtual plethora of examples and instances that showed that they were competitive. Is this trait typical of college-bound youth, or is it

possible that this personality trait was developed as a result of their immigration status?

Susan sees herself as competitive with her brother and herself. She and her brother were in competition in their college math class. Susan linked her success level at the end of her high school career to the “excellent portfolio” she had developed. This portfolio, compiled by all seniors in the college-preparatory track, contained an award for a poem that she had written, and it contained “everything that” Susan had accomplished. Thus, her success was linked not only to her personal best but also to accomplishing something that others had not - namely having earned a certificate and possible publication for one of her poems. Susan does acknowledge her competitive nature, and she sees herself as someone who has “to do it no matter what,” and she says, “I try to do my best.”

Josefina’s competitive nature may be a bit more understated in the overall sense, but this does not mean that competitiveness is any less of a factor in her personality than it is for the other three participants. For the most part, Josefina’s participation in the clubs in school was more about helping others than it was about competing against others. There is one exception, however; she ran for office in the student council several times. She served as a representative, the secretary, and the president. While competition may not have been the motivation for undertaking these offices, running for these offices at least shows that she is able to participate in competitive activities. More importantly, Josefina is competitive on behalf of her Mexican peers. She has the desire to help them

become educated in order for them to change their image within the Anglo society. Thus, I interpret this as competition with the Anglos for respect and acknowledgment of worth. In both instances, competition for student council offices and competition for respect from an Anglo society is not about personal best or personal success, as much as it is about doing for society. This seems to be the cornerstone of Josefina's personality.

I first noticed Andrea's competitive nature when she talked about her participation in mock trials and FBLA. In both of these clubs, she participated in activities that required her to compete against people from other schools. While Andrea did not enjoy "all the stress that builds up" while preparing and participating in mock trials, she did find the competitions "interesting" and "really fun." In addition, she says, "I always try to do things a little better than someone else." She also has a need to outperform her last best effort, and she feels that she is motivated to do this in order to build her "confidence." Finally, she wants to be at the "top of [her] class."

Laura spoke of her need to compete in several different arenas. First, she perceives that she and her friend from Mexico are in a friendly competition that seems to motivate both of them. "He was the top student" in high school, and she was a year behind him. She "wanted to be the top student." "He spent a year in Canada [and] learned French," and now Laura would "like to learn French." He came to visit and was "kind of jealous that" Laura had such good English skills, and she had "translate" for him.

She also identifies herself as “one of the best students in the classroom” in the United States, and she believes this is because she is “disciplined” and because she wants to “be one of the first ones to get a job done and do well.” Because she has often found herself at the top of her class, she knows she “is not used to failing,” and she is “used to getting high grades.” When asked if she sees herself as competitive, she laughed and replied “very competitive.” For her, it is not enough to “do the work good or well.” Instead, Laura wants to continue to “improve.”

College Life

While they entered college with some trepidation, most of the participants have found college to be easy, and their reasons for these feeling are somewhat similar. Laura thinks college feels like a “vacation” because she has so much more time than she had in the past. Andrea, too, noted that she did not join clubs, and this made the pace of college more relaxed than in high school. This relaxed feeling is despite the fact that she was working two part-time jobs. Andrea also found the professors much more approachable than she anticipated. Josefina and Laura found several of their classes to be easy because they were basically a review of material that they covered in high school. In addition, Josefina performed very well in English 1101, and she was worried that English 1101 might be difficult. All three of these young women entered college with a high level of academic success already accumulated. Their chances for academic success in college were high, so it is not too surprising that they found some of

their classes to be easy. Susan's level of success was slightly lower as she faced a few more academic challenges in high school, and she continued to face them in college.

Research Questions

Perceptions of Past and Present Life

Positive Perceptions

All four participants have described lives that they perceive from a highly positive stance. They have described family situations that are supportive, encouraging, and connected. Parents and siblings were most often the family members who provided support and encouragement. The participants and/or I were able to identify behaviors that offered them support and/or encouragement. This support from family members came in a variety of forms: attending parent-teacher conferences, assisting with homework at various points in the participant's school career, listening to the participants read, advising participants about which classes to take in high school, attending high school graduation ceremonies, sharing their own positive experiences about getting a college education, providing loans for college attendance, offering to relocate the family in order for the participants to meet their desire of a college education, transporting participants to classes and other school functions, modeling "successful college-going behaviors" (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002, p. 59), and modeling "how not to succeed at college" (Rosas & Hamrick, 2002, p. 59) .

School experiences have been filled, for the most part, with friendly

students and helpful teachers. Elementary, middle and high school teachers provided support by encouraging success for all students; using positive reinforcement for successful endeavors; suggesting gifted or advanced classes; offering to allow a high achiever to skip a grade; furnishing individual help with problem areas in academics, even if it was not their particular subject area; finding other faculty who could help participants with problem academic areas; demonstrating that they were truly concerned about the participants. They also offered encouragement and/or support by showing that they enjoyed their chosen profession, managing the classroom well, talking to students, asking questions, suggesting clubs that the participants might enjoy, teaching in a manner representative of the next level in order to make the transition easier, stimulating thinking about subjects in a manner that was diametrically opposed to a participant's previous views, and ensuring participants knew what it took to be successful in school. College instructors were supportive and encouraging by making their classes interesting through anecdotes and jokes, advocating that participants seek assistance by coming to their offices, explaining problems with content even if the instructor thought the question was not a good question, giving partial credit, and interacting with students.

High school counselors/advisors and other personnel provided support by informing participants about college, advising participants to take the PSAT and/or the SAT, providing opportunities for participants to attend a conference directed toward Latino high school students, and suggesting scholarships.

College personnel were encouraging and supportive when they offered information about loans, contacted a participant to see why she had not registered for classes when she was such an exemplary student, found a scholarship that could cover the cost and was not dependent on citizenship, directed the participants to the appropriate personnel on campus who could solve problems with financial aid and other problems, and adjusted schedules.

Negative Perceptions

Although I have written at length about the positives that were perceived in their home and school environments, these young women did view society and the government through a more critical lens. While these young women may not have perceived the separation of their culture at the high school dances as possibly being based upon a racist attitude, the participants did perceive racism in American society. Andrea, for instance, identified people in stores and restaurants who might speak to her in Spanish, and she was upset that they would just assume that she could not speak English before they even heard her speak. Laura felt that she was denied opportunities (i.e., getting a driver's license or applying to certain colleges) that she should rightly receive because she was undocumented. In fact, most of them recognized that they were being denied opportunities that are typically bestowed upon documented citizens. They also recognized that many of their documented peers who were eligible for the local ASPIRE scholarship and/or other scholarships from the federal government had little or no interest in attending college. In addition, many of these same peers did

not have the work ethic that seemed to be embodied in all of the participants. They were frustrated by this lack of symmetry between their effort and academic performance and the rewards that were proffered by the government and society as a whole. Despite these practices, they somehow had the wherewithal to persist in their college educations through at least their first year of college. With the possible exception of Susan, they all expect to persist through their second year of college. Were the support and positive school experiences they had enough to help them overcome this major hurdle, or are their other factors that may contribute to their ability to jump the hurdle of an unsympathetic society and its unfriendly practices?

Analysis of Perceptions

As a researcher, I cannot help but analyze these perceptions from a myriad of angles. First, I will offer the most obvious conclusion. Perhaps, the positive experiences they have had are the major contributing factors that have led them to where they are today. In other words, maybe they were able to achieve so high academically because they did indeed experience so many wonderful educational opportunities and they did indeed have so much support and encouragement from family and significant others. In other words, the caring and concerned teachers, coupled with strong familial support, contributed to their ability to meet with academic success and thus encouraged them to see themselves as future college graduates. This support and encouragement often validated their worth, improved their self-esteem, and afforded them the

opportunity to work toward their goals. Research supports the conclusion that supportive others beget academic achievement. Hassinger and Plourde (2005) found that the high-achieving Hispanic youth in their study all had “a supportive relationship” (p. 324) with “at least one person” (p. 324). Reis, Colbert, and Hébert (2005) found that the high achieving students in their study had “support networks” (p. 116), and they suggest that “this network was absolutely essential to the academic success of most of the achieving participants” (p. 116).

In addition, the young women in my study provided no examples of hostile school environments, so the school culture in itself could be seen as supportive or at least as neutral and non-threatening. Hassinger and Plourde (2005) found that the Hispanics in their study “knew that school was a safe place physically and emotionally” (p. 325), and they had the “opportunity for meaningful participation at school” (p. 325). Hassinger and Plourde suggest that such participation can be experienced in the classroom, but it can also be experienced through extracurricular activities. I suggest that this was also true for Susan, Josefina, Andrea, and Laura. They have provided a virtual plethora of examples of this “meaningful participation” (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005, p. 325) when they described their positive school experiences and all of the clubs in which most of them were involved. Reis et al. (2005) also found that the youth in their study who were high achieving participated in “numerous activities” (p. 116), and this meant that they “were productively busy every day for several hours after school, which gave them little time to fall prey to some of the urban

problems that troubled their less productive peers” (p. 116). Perhaps, this support and a positive school culture play pivotal roles in the participants’ ability to persist in school when friends and other peers are dropping out, getting pregnant, or acting in oppositional ways. It is possible that I would not be telling their stories if they had not had such positive educational experiences and a great deal of support from all of these people.

Perhaps a strong sense of self has fostered their academic achievements and resilience. While I had a definite sense that Josefina was in the middle of two cultures, I never had the sense that Josefina or the other participants were not sure of who they were. They all know who they are and how they connect to their Mexican identity. Reis et al. (2005) found that the resilient youth in their study who were high achieving also had “an understanding about who they were” (p. 116). Reis et al. suggest that this understanding is part of “a strong belief in self” (p.116), and they saw this belief as one of the “protective factors” (p. 116) that these youth had developed that enabled them to build resilience and persist despite the negative influences in the reality of their lives. Perhaps, this secure knowledge of their background and their strong link to their Mexican or Hispanic heritage provide the participants in this study with yet another foundation for persistence and the achievement of personal goals.

On the other hand, maybe they all share an enduring optimistic attitude that allows them to put on the *rose colored glasses* and ignore or transform the negative experiences in their home and school lives. For example, Josefina, while

highly frustrated with her grandmother's opinions on gender roles and what Mexicans could and could not do, spoke of these oppressive views as motivation to prove to her grandmother that she should have the same opportunities regardless of ethnicity or gender.

Andrea discussed the positive and negative impact that some teachers had on her when they gave her "an extra push or extra care." While she acknowledges that she felt that this compelled her "to work harder" in order to prove her worth, she also felt as if they were "looking down on" her. Andrea linked these feelings with unfair treatment based upon her ethnic heritage, and this is one of the only examples given by any of the participants that even hints that these young women might have been viewed as different because they were of Mexican descent. Andrea was able to turn the teacher's "Othering" (Rishoi, 2003, p. 136) of her into a positive in the sense that it made her more motivated to demonstrate that she could do the work.

I have written several examples of the ways in which Laura took a positive stance after she encountered setbacks. She was able to rationalize spending an extra year in the same grade in high school and having to retake college courses when she returns to Mexico. Although Susan described a contentious relationship with her sister-in-law, she was still able to see the benefits of having a domineering relative direct her college-going experiences. In all, these young women demonstrated an uncanny ability to ignore the negativity around them or to transform this negativity into a positive that fostered their growth and helped

them move along the path to their goals. These first two angles beg the question: did the positive experiences and optimistic attitude promote the academic achievement, or did academic achievement promote the optimistic attitude?

I think it behooves me to look at these positively-described perceptions from at least one more angle. There is a chance that the researcher-participant relationship could have colored the results of this study. Although I attempted to remove as much of the power dynamic from this process as I could, the participants were very aware that they were talking about their lives to a White, middle class, middle-aged woman who probably did not share many of their life experiences. On one hand, this realization might have encouraged them to make sure I *truly understood* what life was like for them. This is a distinct possibility since several of the participants made it a point to let me know how important it was for people to know what life was like for them. On the other hand, they may have filtered out some of the more negative experiences for various reasons. They knew I was a teacher at a college, and maybe they did not want to disappoint me by telling me negative things about other teachers and/or school. In addition, it is a possibility that they realized I knew the school counselor who selected them and asked them if they wanted to participate in this study. Aware of the negative stereotypes that are often associated with Mexicans, they might have wanted to portray their families in the most positive light in order to decrease the chances that the harsh stereotypes would continue.

Through my use of a conversational approach, rapport-building, and semi-

structured interviews, I believe that I provided a safe and comfortable research environment that fostered an exchange between the participants and the researcher that would be one of openness. In other words, I think the environment was such that the participants should have not felt the need to consciously couch their responses to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. At the same time, I acknowledge that my different age, educational level, social class, and ethnicity could have fostered an unconscious need for the couching of responses from the participants.

While I have shown how I think the differences that existed between the researcher and the participants could have promoted a slanted view, I also believe that our commonality of gender could have influenced the results, too. Gilligan (1982) suggests that an “ethic of care” (p. 73) is part of women’s development of morality; thus, people who develop their moral barometer predicated on care often show “concern about hurting others” Gilligan, 1982, p. 65). What I am suggesting is that the participants answered their questions in a way that they would not hurt me, their parents, their teachers, and/or their siblings with their stories. Laura demonstrated that she was cognizant of the hurt that could be caused when she informed me that she would not share her story with her parents; she did not want them to question or regret the decisions they had made with regard to her life. I, too, have already mentioned that I was wary of having the participants read their stories because of the possibility that they would perceive their stories as being stories of hopelessness.

Aspirations and Expectations of the Future

College Aspirations

All four young women did have aspirations for a college education; that is why they were selected for the study. Their colleges of choice did vary somewhat. Susan wanted to start at RSC and move onto a college in New York to finish her degree since she could only take the first 2 years at RSC. Andrea had contemplated several residential colleges and RSC. Josefina had the aspiration of attending a “real” institution of higher learning, but her expectation was that she would go to RSC. Laura vacillated between an education at RSC or at a college in Mexico. Josefina firmly wanted to become an elementary teacher, and Andrea was fairly certain she wanted to major in an art field (studio art or interior design). Laura aspired to be a nurse or a dentist, and Susan originally wanted to earn a degree in forensic science.

Negative expectations of college. Some of the participants predicted college would be hard, and their preconceptions seemed to be mostly based on the stories that they heard from their high school teachers as some of them had little other knowledge to apply since they had few family members and/or friends that had made the leap to a higher education. In fact, the teachers made the experience of college seem almost insurmountable at times with their focused attention on the amount of studying that must be done and the stringent requirements of the English 1101 essays. At other times, the participants assumed that they would be able to spend a great deal of time visiting with friends and indulging in other

social activities. Andrea worried that she would have a false sense of her academic progress, and she believed the teachers would hold themselves as superior to students and would not be approachable. Laura feared that her newly-acquired English skills would make college difficult. Josefina was concerned that the independence promoted in college would encourage her to make poor decisions. For example, she worried she would not attend classes since attendance was not mandatory. Susan was apprehensive about the interactions she might have with students and teachers. She was nervous that teachers would not afford her the attention she might need, and she was worried that students would ignore her. Laura shared this fear of being ignored by other students with Susan.

Positive expectations of college. At the same time, the participants predicted college would be a place of exciting opportunities. Susan and Josefina were intrigued with the idea of meeting new people. Josefina expected a “big party.” Susan thought there was a good chance that it would not be as unbearable as teachers made it seem because she had observed her college-going brother and sister-in-law. They exhibited a “calm” demeanor in the process; therefore, college could not possibly be as unpleasant as the teachers made it seem.

General Aspirations and Expectations

In general terms, these young women had given some thought to what their future lives might look like. As discussed at length, Susan, Josefina, and Laura did see marriage and family as a foregone conclusion, but this was not

going to take place until after they had achieved some academic success in the form of a degree, achieved some independence, and/or some financial security. In Josefina's case, she wanted to have a good sense of who she was before she took on the responsibilities of a husband and family.

They had other aspirations, too. Susan wanted to go to school in New York, and she eventually wanted to live in a "big city." Andrea wanted to travel to France. Josefina had the desire to help others in her community become educated. Laura wanted to keep learning new things.

Reconciliation of Aspirations, Expectations, and Perceptions

How, then, do the aspirations, expectations and perceptions reconcile?

The young women have described mostly supportive school and home experiences, a strong sense of self, and an uncanny ability to ignore and/or transform negative actions or experiences. They have also described future lives that are predicated on the earning of a college degree.

With regard to their expectations of college, the participants have mostly had an easy reconciliation between their perceptions and aspirations. While they seemed to have more fears than positive expectations, they have found college to be easier than anticipated in many respects. Laura sees it as a "vacation" because she does not have to spend as much time studying as she did in high school, and she does not have the same hectic lifestyle she had in high school since she is not involved in all the clubs. Andrea, too, forewent the clubs, and her life is less

hectic. Susan and Laura learned that students would not ignore them, and Andrea learned that the teachers were “down-to-earth.”

This is not to say that they have not also faced some academic challenges while in college. Laura failed her English 1101 class because as a new speaker and writer of the English language it takes her a bit longer to process, and she is required to write essays in the same hour that is given to native speakers of the English language. However, Laura did have the expectation that this would be difficult for her. Thus, she visited the Writing Lab for more assistance. Josefina earned a score of 79% on one of her biology tests because she waited to study, and she had to do something for her sister. She learned to study in a more timely fashion, and she spoke with her sister about the responsibilities she had as a college student. Susan failed her learning support math class because she shared a book with her brother and because she competed with him. She learned that she needed to take the class by herself, so she would not be competitive.

The most challenging reconciliation is the reconciliation of their aspirations with the restrictions placed upon them as undocumented students. While many of their educational aspirations were originally based upon what they enjoyed or what they liked, as time went on, they often re-formed their aspirations in terms of what they could hope or expect to do, given their circumstances. In other words, their aspirations did not change as much as their expectations changed. Once financial hurdles were recognized and problematized, then educational goals had to be adjusted and adapted for the given situation. Andrea

had to spend 1.5 years at RSC before she could plan to transfer to her residential college because she did not qualify for the ASPIRE scholarship until then.

Josefina is resigned to the idea of not only starting but finishing her college career at RSC. There is no hope, at least in her mind, that a “real college” is a possibility since the waiver program has been revoked. She has had to find a job to help pay for college costs, and her parents are sacrificing in order to give her \$1,000 per semester for her education. The out-of-state fees mean that Laura will return to Mexico, without her parents, to live with her brother and continue her education. Susan’s aspirations seem to have been the most shaped by the removal of the out-of-state tuition waivers. She has changed her major two times, and she continues to work two jobs to help her family and to pay for school.

If their aspirations and expectations for their future lives are predicated on an earning a degree, then I cannot help but wonder what this means if they are unable to earn such degrees or if the earning of the degrees are delayed. It is hard to predict the future, and predicting the future is not a goal of this study.

However, I do have questions about how their aspirations and expectations might be affected if circumstances dictate that the degree is delayed or extinguished.

Susan, for example, has already changed her degree aspirations to the expectation of earning a certificate in insurance, so she can continue helping the family. In this case, her dreams of forensic science career have been delayed indefinitely.

Does this mean that she will change her aspirations for a family? I ask this because she did not want her future children to see her “struggle” to provide for

them. Josefina links success with helping others, and she wants to have a sense of who she is before she marries. If she is unable to work in the field of teaching, assuming that she earns the degree, because she is undocumented, what affect will this inability have on her overall sense of self and on her ideas of success? These are questions that cannot be answered, but I think it is important to note that there are many more amalgamations of perceptions, aspirations, and expectations that will take place in the coming months and years.

Implications

The implications from this study are predicated on the idea that these young women are indeed products of the intersections of many facets of their being. They are women; most of the participants have spent the greater portion of their lives in the United States as undocumented immigrants; they are non-native speakers of English; they are Mexican; they are women of color; and they come from families where the parents are working in manual labor occupations. Thus, their life experiences, their perceptions, their aspirations, and their expectations are all colored by the intersection of these facets. In other words, it is difficult to separate where the influence of one facet ends and the influence of another facet begins.

From this study, I have concluded that outsiders attempting to analyze the decisions made by these young women and the decisions made by their parents may never be able to fully understand how these decisions were made. Were the decisions made because they were “simultaneously immersed in two cultural

systems” (Dietrich, 1998, p. 8)? In other words, it is possible that these young women routinely made decisions about classes to take, college attendance, employment, and so forth because they were Mexican females living in the United States. Thus, they made decisions based upon “cultural pragmatism – picking and choosing cultural values, stretching existing norms to fit the circumstances” (Dietrich, 1998, p. 9). Dietrich suggests that operating in such a fashion is common for most people, and she uses her book to show how the decision of her Chicana participants made sense in the context of their lives; I believe my study does the same. The difference is that her study focused on Chicana females who were often making decisions that led to behaviors that might be seen by some as “oppositional” (Dietrich, 1998, p. 8). In other words, some of these young women indulged in “unprotected sexual intercourse, early pregnancy, [and] gang-affiliation” (Dietrich, 1998, p. 156). Ogbu (2004) suggests that the “resistance or opposition” (p. 18) is “just one of the copying responses” (p. 18) that minorities employ when faced with the “culture and language of the dominant group” (p. 6).

In my study, the young women were not partaking in oppositional behavior, but their behavior could still be seen by outsiders as illogical or “self-defeating” (Bernal, 2006, p. 115). If these young women were truly motivated to attend college, some might suggest, then it was illogical and “self-defeating” (Bernal, 2006, p. 115) for them to drop advanced classes, fail to fill-out college applications, take on the responsibility of a full-time job while attending college,

share textbooks, change majors three times in the first year of college, attend the local college where there were no classes offered in the major of choice, move to Mexico, or drop out of college. However, many of these decisions not only made sense in terms of the context of their lives, they also made sense when one looks at the different cultural values that are at work. These students needed to honor the value of helping one's family while they simultaneously honored the value of helping oneself succeed or work toward a dream or aspiration.

In this same vein, Sánchez (1993) reminds us that “specific family decisions could mask the range of compromises made by the individuals involved in the resolution” (p. 131). In this study, my participants unmasked the compromises they made as they traversed the path to a higher education. I have explicated their decision in detail throughout this document. What I have not been able to do is pinpoint the influence that led to these decisions. As I have stated before, many factors or facets are at work that can lead the compromises that Sánchez discusses. He focused on the compromises that are made because one is part of an immigrant family of Mexican decent. However, these decisions were influenced by more than the mismatch between American and Mexican culture values, and they were influenced by more than the need to assist the family.

These participants were also women; therefore, their decisions were influenced by their femaleness. As I have indicated previously, it is very likely that they were impacted by gender when they were self-sacrificing and put their

families before themselves. In other words, this desire to help the family has cultural overtones, but I cannot help but wonder if male participants of Mexican descent would have had the same level of self-sacrifice. Their gender may have also influenced their choice of careers. Resistance to gender role expectations most definitely influenced their stance on marriage. While some of the participants were resisting marriage expectations placed on them by society (in general), others were resisting expectations imposed upon them by their own ethnic community. Thus, resistance was fostered by their minority status as non-native speakers of the English language, their gender, and their ethnic heritage.

In addition, these participants shared a similar socio-economic status, and finances, or more specifically a lack of finances, affected their decision-making. Thus, economics played a role when they made decisions to seek employment, attend a specific college, assist their families, and choose careers. Economics, in turn, was an issue because of their undocumented status. Do they lack finances because their families are undocumented, so their parents are forced to work low-paying jobs often in factories or other manual labor fields? Are finances an issue because they are undocumented and cannot qualify for federal or state financial aid? It is difficult to determine where one influence begins and the other influence ends. I began this study with the belief that I could not simply add the oppression a participant might feel as a woman to the oppression she might feel as a non-native speaker of English to the oppression she might feel as a woman of color. This study further enriched this belief. In essence, this study demonstrates

the complexity of the decision making process and the interconnectedness of the many facets of their beings for these young undocumented immigrants as they attempt to seek a higher education.

Contributions from this Study

Previously, I have identified one contribution that this study has added to the field of research that looks at the aspirations of Mexican students living in the United States. Through my research, I have shown the extenuating circumstances that did exist for my participants as they developed their educational aspirations, negotiated the sometimes confusing world of scholarships and financial aid, and began their college careers. As discussed, these young women often adjusted their aspirations according to the circumstances of their lives at the time and the predicted possibilities of obstacles in the future. This study shows how school personnel need to probe deeper when they notice obviously hardworking, bright, and dedicated students that do not appear to aspire toward a higher education. One can only speculate what might have happened to Josefina if observant high school personnel had not approached her to inquire why a student with a 4.0 GPA, involvement in any number of clubs, and service to her community did not appear to have any plans to attend college.

Without interviews such as the ones utilized in this study, teachers, school counselors, and college administrative personnel may not be able to understand the “conflict and consensus” (Sánchez, 1993, p. 131) that took place in Susan’s family and in Laura’s family in order to develop a “compromise” (Sánchez, 1993,

p. 131) that worked for the families. As stated before, the apparent vacillation between careers could appear to an outsider to be based upon a lack of focus or a lack of commitment to the college endeavor.

This study also discounts some of the concerns that are expressed by feminists and reinforces some of their other concerns. For example, Thompson (2003) suggests that young women still focus on the idea of becoming the “future Mrs. Somebody” (Thompson, 2003, p. 11). However, the results found in this study seem to discount this worry. Andrea never even mentioned marriage as part of her future, and Susan, Laura, and Josefina suggested that it was a distant possibility (often approximately 10 years in the future). They were more concerned with earning a degree and acquiring some level of independence. Never did I get the sense that they would feel incomplete if marriage did not happen, and their future identities were tied to other endeavors. For instance, Josefina’s identity seemed to be more tied to her ability to help others (especially her community). Susan’s identity was tied to becoming the type of person who did not “struggle” to live each day. In essence, these young women have demonstrated that they are “challenging the beliefs and ideologies that inhibit the ways in which they chose to enact their gendered roles” (Holling, 2006, p. 90).

Not only are they able to challenge the gender roles that have been established and passed on, they also demonstrate the ability to resist oppressive forces that have ascribed certain roles for them based on their ethnicity combined with their gender. Josefina’s grandmother knows what Mexicans, especially

Mexican females, should be doing, and this does not include getting an education. Josefina does more than quietly resist this oppressive act. Her resistance, while still respectful of her grandmother, is quite blatant. She enrolls in college, and she attempts to explain to her grandmother why she should get an education even if she is a woman and a Mexican. Her vocalization on this issue is similar to Andrea's written statement in Holling's (2006). Andrea, one of Holling's students who was exploring issues that related to Chicanas through readings and self-reflections in writing, says, "Remaining silent on issues I feel passionate towards has only nurtured my oppression as a wom[a]n" (Holling, 2006, p. 90). Josefina has not remained silent; thus, she is not promoting her own oppression. Instead, she is actively and deliberately resisting the oppression.

To me and, I believe, to my participants the biggest contribution this study makes to the field of research that looks at the aspirations and expectations of Mexican female youth is it illustrates the struggle these young women face as they attempt to realize their aspirations. My participants felt as if it was very important that others knew what it was truly like for them as they traversed the sometimes smooth, sometimes rocky, and sometimes downright tumultuous path toward earning a college degree. I have told their stories, and I believe that they hope that these stories bring a real face for others to associate with the undocumented students' desires and hardships. My writing of their stories has illuminated the sometimes rocky journey Andrea has had as she has gone from a high-performing high school student with numerous service endeavors to a

college student working two jobs to meet the financial needs of her education. Laura's story demonstrates that the hard work and perseverance of a new immigrant that helped her to learn to use English well enough to enter college 3 years after her arrival in the United States was not enough alone to help her to stay in college once the waivers were removed. Josefina's story illustrates that it is not enough to earn a 4.0 GPA in high school while volunteering your time in numerous service organizations when you are Mexican and undocumented. Susan's tumultuous story exemplifies the complicated processes that an undocumented Mexican student must undergo in order to even have the hopes of achieving a college education. Thus, their stories make the undocumented students' experiences real for the readers.

Recommendations

Continuing the Current Research

First, this study is limited in the sense that the research did not last over a long enough period of time. Basically, its brevity disqualifies it from being considered a longitudinal study; therefore, my first recommendation concerns these particular participants. In other words, what will happen to these young women in their sophomore, junior, and senior years of college? Will they persist and graduate in a timely manner? Will Susan have to drop out of college because of finances? Will Andrea get to experience a residential college? If so, what will these experiences be like, and how will it compare and contrast to her expectations? Will Laura return to Mexico? If so, will she become a dentist?

Will Josefina become a teacher? Is there any chance that some other scholarship could be *found* for her, so she could go to the school of her dreams?

Finally, what will happen to any of these undocumented women when they do earn their degrees? In other words, will Josefina and Susan, assuming that they do not have the proper documents upon graduation, be able to get jobs within the local school systems or police departments? For me, these are but a few of the most important questions that will remain unanswered if this study is not continued. Thus, I suggest that I continue to follow these women at least until they graduate from college, or I should at least follow them for the 4 years it usually takes to receive an undergraduate degree.

Helping Future Immigrant Students

Visits to College

While I acknowledge that my qualitative study is not meant to provide generalizations to the greater population, I still feel as if this study has added insights into what my participants, and perhaps other first-generation college students like them, need in terms of exposure to college. These young women had so little background knowledge from which to draw their predictions of college life, they could have certainly benefited from college visits. By this, I am not talking about taking a tour of the college campus as they did with me.

Although I am sure a tour experience like this makes them more comfortable and sure they can find their way around and find the people they need to assist them with certain experiences, I do not think it necessarily provides them with an

accurate picture of college life. I believe my participants needed to visit the college campus and attend some classes. They needed to see what daily life in college was really like. Here, they could have seen how teachers treated students, and they could have seen how students interacted with each other and with the teachers. Maybe a student panel (that includes students of Mexican descent) could visit the high schools or could be on the college campus to give them insights from an insider point of view. All of these activities could have balanced the horrifying stories that the teachers told.

Financial Aid Information

As I reviewed the transcripts of the interviews, I realized that all four young women could have benefited from assistance. In other words, necessary support was missing, and had any of these young women received this support, they may have benefited from some more positive outcomes. For instance, the financial problems that they had to address because of their immigrant status should have been addressed at their local high school and the college. Both of these institutions keep records of their changing population demographics, and I firmly believe the administrators know which students are undocumented. A missing social security number would be the first indicator of such status. Thus, they know that these individuals will not qualify for ASPIRE and most other scholarship options. High school counselors who encourage bright and hardworking young women, like Susan, to go to college need to also be fountains of information with regard to financial options. It behooves college

administrators who worry about recruitment and retention to locate additional sources of financial support for undocumented students and to assist these students in accessing this support.

Why should high achievement be a goal of undocumented students if they are not going to reap the same benefits from such hard work as the documented students? Federal financial aid programs will affect other undocumented students in other towns and other states. What can we do for other high-achieving undocumented students if they aspire to have a higher education and the funds are not available through family resources or through traditional state and federal programs? I would suggest that other research be conducted to see how undocumented status, aspirations, expectations, and persistence in high school and college interrelate.

More important, I vociferously advocate that researchers, educators, and other concerned community members need to work together to find a way to provide hope to high school students who find themselves in similar situations. Federal financial aid programs and community colleges were supposed to pave the way for an education for all who wanted it. Bogue and Aper (2000) reiterate this idea when they suggest that “the establishment in most states of comprehensive community college systems” (p. 121) was the initial step toward making higher education a real possibility for “those who have the ability and the desire” (p. 121). They also suggest that the “state and federal government have made an even more significant investment in financial aid for students interested

in attending college” (p. 121), and this investment increases access to a higher education.

I can see from this study, these programs mentioned by Bogue and Aper (2000), while helpful to many, may leave out undocumented students who aspire to achieve a higher education. If the federal government is not going to provide opportunities to produce “better people for their country” (as Susan suggested), then the researchers who encounter these individuals while conducting their research and the school personnel who work with these individuals will need to band together with concerned community members who wish to initiate a change.

Conducting Research

I further suggest that Anglo, middle class women, such as myself, need only venture into this type of research if they are doing so “out of friendship” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 581). In other words, Anglo women who wish to understand the Latinas’ experiences do not need to do so because they self-righteously believe that it is time to make-up for past wrongs; if they operate under this assumption, then they are not interacting with “Hispanas” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. p. 574) “out of friendship” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 581). This self-serving behavior is seen by Lugones and Spelman as being as unacceptable as beginning the work because one needs research to publish. In essence, they contend feminist theory should help a woman determine the links between the different aspects of her life, should help a woman “locate” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 578) herself in the world in which she lives instead of

locating herself in the world in which the theorist lives, and should help a woman determine how she is and is not responsible for her own “location” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 581). I contend that research based upon a feminist framework should be based upon these same ideals.

Continuing with recommendations to future researchers, I also suggest that researchers who come from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds from the participants they interview need to be especially cautious about their own filtering of the data they gather. Such researchers need to be cognizant of the bias, be it overly negative or overly positive, that they may bring to the research process. In order to balance any possible biases of their own, I suggest that the researchers who have told stories that seem to lean heavily to one side or another need to reassess their interview questions to see if they can ask follow-up questions that may provide much needed data. These data can augment the data that have been gathered and analyzed previously.

In addition, if a one-sided vision appears in the stories or the data analysis, the researcher needs to ask herself why this might have been the case. If the researcher had already included the participants in the reading and discussion of the stories, she needs to address the one-sided nature of the stories or the data analysis with the participants themselves. Perhaps such a discussion, especially if it was conducted in a focus group with the participants, would encourage the participants “to see connections among parts” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 578) of their lives that they did not observe in the past. In addition, such a

conversation may further encourage these young women to “sort out just what is and is not due to themselves and their own activities as opposed to those who have power over them” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 578). In the end, a “genuine and reciprocal dialogue” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 577) between the “insiders” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 577) and the “outsider” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 577) may help both the participants and the researcher “give a better account” (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 577) in the stories that are told. In the end, a focus group discussion such as I outlined here adheres to the feminist philosophical suggestions offered by Lugones and Spelman (1983).

Conclusion

This qualitative collection of case studies followed 4 college-bound Mexican females as they moved from their last year of high school to their first year of college. By conducting analysis of the transcripts of 3 semi-structured interviews, high school cumulative files, and high school transcripts, I was able to describe the participants, their lives, and themes that were relevant to their individual lives and across the lives of the 4 participants. Each young woman’s experience was unique; however, they all shared similarities in terms of their undocumented status, their geographic location, their ages, their high school of attendance, and their choice of college.

The participants have experienced a high level of academic achievement. This achievement may be a result of certain personality traits (i.e. competitiveness, organization, and hardworking). Supportive parents,

encouraging educational experiences, and positive school environment may also be a contributing factor. Developing and maintaining a Mexican identity could be seen as another factor that contributed to their academic achievement. Having the ability to resist oppressive practices may be another factor in their successful academic achievement to date.

These young women were able to resist some of the oppressive practices that were enacted against them. Sometimes these oppressive practices came from the society in general as in the case of society conditioning women to link their identities and worth with marriage. The participants resisted this dictate and chose to link their future identities with education and independence. At times, the oppressive practices came from their own family members as was the case for Josefina. Again, Josefina was able to resist the role her grandmother prescribed for her, and she did this in a vocal fashion.

There is, however, one oppressive act from the government that is difficult for the participants to resist. The government will not allow them to qualify for federal financial aid, and the state level government has removed the waivers for out-of-state tuition. This deliberate act of domination perpetuated by the government is forestalling their educational dreams. While some of them attended the informational meetings about the waivers on campus, their options for resistance in this case seem limited. The participants seem to be resisting in the only manner left to them; they are speaking-out through me by telling their stories and by offering me the opportunity to share their stories with others.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Informed Consent for Review Of Student's Cumulative File For Participants 18 Years of Age and Older

Aspirations and Expectations for Self-Identified College-Bound Seniors

INTRODUCTION:

The researcher would like to review your cumulative file and transcript. It is likely that your cumulative file will contain details about your grades and placements in elementary and middle school. Your transcript will likely contain your grade point average, your graduation test results, your attendance records, grades, and scores on tests (such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test).

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The researcher will take several steps to maintain your confidentiality.

1. The researcher will not photocopy any documents from the cumulative file or transcripts.
2. The researcher may make notes about your Grade Point Average, track placement, previous academic work, attendance, and so forth.
3. The researcher will file these notes under your pretend name.
4. The researcher will keep these notes in a locked cabinet at her home, and no other person will have access to these files.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Sharon L. Hixon at (706) 272-2583. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact Research Compliance Services of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

CONSENT:

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree that I wish to participate in this study, and Ms. Hixon may review the files mentioned above.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Informed Assent for of Review Student's Cumulative File For Participants 17 Years of Age and Younger

Aspirations and Expectations for Self-Identified College-Bound Seniors

INTRODUCTION:

The researcher would like to review your cumulative file and transcript. It is likely that your cumulative file will contain details about your grades and placements in elementary and middle school. Your transcript will likely contain your grade point average, your graduation test results, your attendance records, grades, and scores on tests (such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test).

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The researcher will take several steps to maintain your confidentiality.

1. The researcher will not photocopy any documents from the cumulative file or transcripts.
2. The researcher may make notes about your Grade Point Average, track placement, previous academic work, attendance, and so forth.
3. The researcher will file these notes under your pretend name.
4. The researcher will keep these notes in a locked cabinet at her home, and no other person will have access to these files.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Sharon L. Hixon at (706) 272-2583. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact Research Compliance Services of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

ASSENT:

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree that I wish to participate in this study, and Ms. Hixon may review the files mentioned above.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Parental Permission to Review Student's Cumulative File Aspirations and Expectations for Self-Identified College-Bound Seniors

INTRODUCTION:

The researcher would like to review your daughter's cumulative file and transcript. It is likely that your daughter's cumulative file will contain details about your daughter's grades and placements in elementary and middle school. Her transcript will likely contain her grade point average, her graduation test results, her attendance records, grades, and scores on tests (such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test).

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The researcher will take several steps to maintain your daughter's confidentiality.

1. The researcher will not photocopy any documents from the cumulative file or transcripts.
2. The researcher may make notes about your daughter's Grade Point Average, track placement, previous academic work, attendance, and so forth.
3. The researcher will file these notes under your daughter's pretend name.
4. The researcher will keep these notes in a locked cabinet at her home, and no other person will have access to these files.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Sharon L. Hixon at (706) 272-2583. If you have any questions about your daughter's rights as a participant, please contact Research Compliance Services of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

CONSENT (PERMISSION):

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree that my daughter may participate in this study, and Ms. Hixon may review the files mentioned above.

Parent's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Informed Consent Statement For Students 18 Years of Age and Older Aspirations and Expectations for Self-Identified College-Bound Seniors

INTRODUCTION:

You have been invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sharon L. Hixon, a Dalton State College professor and a graduate student at the University of Tennessee. You have been invited to participate in this study because you see yourself as someone who will go to college. The purpose of this study is to learn about your expectations (what you think you will be able to do) and your aspirations (what you would like to be able to do) and the expectations and aspirations of other Latinas. An additional purpose of this study is to learn how your aspirations and expectations relate to your everyday life.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE PARTICIPANT'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY:

The researcher will begin by meeting with you during the school day sometime during April 2006 or May 2006. The researcher will ask you to select another name you wish to use for the purpose of the study. This is the name that the researcher will use during the study in order to protect your identity.

Next, the researcher will interview you. Sometimes, she will ask predetermined questions, and other times she will ask you questions that may develop from the conversation. These conversations will be recorded. Recorded conversations will be transcribed by a transcriber who has agreed in writing to keep all the information she hears in strict confidentiality. These tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet and analyzed by the researcher.

After the researcher has interviewed you and the three other Latina participants, she will interview you and the other Latinas one more time before the end of the school year.

In addition, the interviewer will access your academic school file to review information about academic performance and placement. There is a separate form for you to sign to indicate that you give permission for this part of the study, too.

During November 2006, the researcher will again interview you to learn about your expectations and aspirations after high school. Before the researcher submits the study, she will meet with you and the other Latinas to discuss the information learned through the study.

Each interview is expected to last approximately one hour. This means that you will invest approximately 3 hours of your time over the course of 10 months (April or May 2006 through January or February 2007).

_____ Participant's Initials

RISKS:

There are very few risks associated with this study. The researcher will maintain confidentiality of your daughter's identity by having her use a pretend name. A pretend name for the school, the college, and the town will be used when this information is published or presented at a conference.

BENEFITS:

You could benefit from participating in this study because you may learn about yourself while you talk with the interviewer.

Your input, along with the input from the other Latinas, could help future teachers better serve the Latina students in the community.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Again, the first step towards securing confidentiality is the use of a pretend name. When this study is written and presented, the pretend names will be the only names used to discuss the results. In addition, the school that you attend will be given a pretend name when results are printed in articles or presented at conferences.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Sharon L. Hixon at (706) 272-2583. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact Research Compliance Services of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This study is not connected to your academic progress. In other words, your participation will not affect your grades in any manner. You may withdraw at any time. If you withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed.

CONSENT:

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree that I would like to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E

Parental Consent or Permission Form

Aspirations and Expectations for Self-Identified College-Bound Seniors

INTRODUCTION:

Your daughter _____ has been invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sharon L. Hixon, a Dalton State College professor and a graduate student at the University of Tennessee. The purpose of this study is to learn about your daughter's expectations (what she thinks she will be able to do) and the aspirations (what she would like to do). An additional purpose of this study is to learn about the aspirations and expectations of other Latinas and how the aspirations and expectations of the Latina participants relate to their everyday lives. **After you give your permission for your daughter to participate, your daughter will sign the attached assent form and indicate that she wishes to participate in the study.**

INFORMATION ABOUT THE PARTICIPANT'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY:

The researcher will begin by meeting with your daughter. She will ask your daughter to select another name she wishes to use for the purpose of the study. This is the name that the researcher will use during the study in order to protect your child's identity.

Next, the researcher will interview your daughter **during the school day sometime during April 2006 or May 2006**. Sometimes, **the researcher** will ask predetermined questions, and other times she will ask your daughter questions that may develop from the conversation. These conversations will be recorded. Recorded conversations will be transcribed by a transcriber who has agreed in writing to keep all the information she hears in strict confidentiality. These tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet and analyzed by the researcher.

After the researcher has interviewed your daughter and the three other Latina participants, she will interview your daughter and the other Latinas one more time before the end of the school year.

In addition, the interviewer will access your daughter's academic school file to review information about academic performance and placement. There is a separate form for you to sign to indicate that you give permission for this part of the study, too.

During **November** 2006, the researcher will again interview your daughter to learn about her expectations and aspirations after high school. Before the researcher submits the study, she will meet with your daughter and the other Latinas to discuss the information learned through the study.

_____ Parent's Initials

_____ Parent's Initials

Each interview is expected to last approximately one hour. This means that your daughter will invest approximately 3 hours of her time over the course of 10 months (**April or May 2006 through January or February 2007**).

RISKS:

There are very few risks associated with this study. The researcher **will** maintain confidentiality of your daughter's identity by having her use a pretend name. **A pretend name for the school, the college, and the town will be used when this information is published or presented at a conference.**

BENEFITS:

Your daughter could benefit from participating in this study because she may learn about herself while she talks with the interviewer.

Your daughter's input, along with the input from the other Latinas, could help future teachers better serve the Latina students in the community.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Again, the first step towards securing confidentiality is the use of a pretend name for your daughter. When this study is written and presented, the pretend names will be the only names used to discuss the results. In addition, the school that your child attends will be given a pretend name when results are printed in articles or presented at conferences.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Sharon L. Hixon at (706) 272-2583. If you have any questions about your daughter's rights as a participant, please contact Research Compliance Services of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION:

Your daughter's participation in this study is voluntary. **This study is not connected to your daughter's academic progress. In other words, her participation will not affect her grades in any manner.** She may withdraw at any time. If your daughter withdraws from the study, her data will be destroyed.

CONSENT (PERMISSION):

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree that my daughter may participate in this study.

Parent's Signature: _____ Date: _____
Parent's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F

Informed Assent Statement **For Students 17 Years of Age and Younger** Aspirations and Expectations for Self-Identified College-Bound Seniors

INTRODUCTION:

You have been invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sharon L. Hixon, a Dalton State College professor and a graduate student at the University of Tennessee. You have been invited to participate in this study because you see yourself as someone who will go to college. The purpose of this study is to learn about your expectations (what you think you will be able to do) and your aspirations (what you would like to be able to do) and the expectations and aspirations of other Latinas. An additional purpose of this study is to learn how your aspirations and expectations relate to your everyday life.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE PARTICIPANT'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY:

The researcher will begin by meeting with you **during the school day sometime during April 2006 or May 2006**. **The researcher** will ask you to select another name you wish to use for the purpose of the study. This is the name that the researcher will use during the study in order to protect your identity.

Next, the researcher will interview you. Sometimes, she will ask predetermined questions, and other times she will ask you questions that may develop from the conversation. These conversations will be recorded. Recorded conversations will be transcribed by a transcriber who has agreed in writing to keep all the information she hears in strict confidentiality. These tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet and analyzed by the researcher.

After the researcher has interviewed you and the three other Latina participants, she will interview you and the other Latinas one more time before the end of the school year.

In addition, the interviewer will access your academic school file to review information about academic performance and placement. There is a separate form for you to sign to indicate that you give permission for this part of the study, too.

During **November** 2006, the researcher will again interview you to learn about your expectations and aspirations after high school. Before the researcher submits the study, she will meet with you and the other Latinas to discuss the information learned through the study.

Each interview is expected to last approximately one hour. This means that you will invest approximately 3 hours of your time over the course of **10 months (April or May 2006 through January or February 2007)**.

_____ Participant's Initials

RISKS:

There are very few risks associated with this study. The researcher **will** maintain confidentiality of your daughter's identity by having her use a pretend name. **A pretend name for the school, the college, and the town will be used when this information is published or presented at a conference.**

BENEFITS:

You could benefit from participating in this study because you may learn about yourself while you talk with the interviewer.

Your input, along with the input from the other Latinas, could help future teachers better serve the Latina students in the community.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Again, the first step towards securing confidentiality is the use of a pretend name. When this study is written and presented, the pretend names will be the only names used to discuss the results. In addition, the school that you attend will be given a pretend name when results are printed in articles or presented at conferences.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Sharon L. Hixon at (706) 272-2583. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact Research Compliance Services of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. **This study is not connected to your academic progress. In other words, your participation will not affect your grades in any manner.** You may withdraw at any time. If you withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed.

ASSENT:

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree that I would like to participate in this study. **I realize I may not my assent to participate until my parents' have given written consent in order for my participation in this study to be accepted.**

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G

Interview Protocol 1

I. Rapport Building

A. Pseudonym Chosen By Respondent

1. I will explain what a pseudonym is and why it will be used.
2. What would you like your pseudonym to be?

B. Background Information – Things Respondent Enjoys

1. Tell me about any hobbies you have.
2. What are some of your favorite musical artists or songs?
3. What are your favorite foods?

II. Educational Experiences

- A. Tell me about your elementary school experiences.
- B. Tell me about your middle school experiences.
- C. Tell me about your high school experiences.
- D. Do you feel as if you have experienced any unfair treatment? Explain.

III. Circumstances Surrounding Aspirations of Obtaining Higher Education

- A. When did you become interested in continuing your education by going to college?
- B. What motivates your desire to go to college?
- C. Have you encountered any stumbling blocks or obstacles that might prevent you from attending college?
 - 1. If so, how have you been able to overcome these obstacles or stumbling blocks?

IV. Future Educational Goals

- A. What are your future educational goals?
- B. What might motivate you to accomplish them?
- C. What might discourage you from accomplishing these goals?

V. Being Mexican-American

- A. What makes it special?

VI. Success

- A. What does success mean to you?
- B. How do you think your parents view success?
- C. In your opinion, what does success mean to your teachers?
- D. How do your peers view success?

Appendix H

Interview Protocol 2

I. Follow-up to Previous Interview

- A. Questions Relating to Participant's Previous Responses
- B. Questions Relating to Other Participants' Responses
- C. Questions Relating to Documents
- D. Questions Relating to Themes

II. Graduation

- A. What are your feelings about graduation?
- B. What does it mean to be a high school graduate?
- C. What does it mean if one is unable to graduate?
- D. What are some of the results of graduating?

III. Plans for the Immediate Future

- A. What are your plans for the summer?
- B. What are your plans for your near future?
 - 1. What steps have you already taken to meet your goals?
 - 2. What steps do you still need to complete?

IV. Encouraging/Discouraging

- A. What has encouraged you to meet your goals?
- B. Who has influenced you to meet these goals? How have these people influenced you?

V. Long-Term Goals

A. Where do you see yourself in ten years?

B. What are your plans for accomplishing this idea?

VI. Success

A. Last time we met, we talked about success. How successful would you say you are at this time? Explain.

Appendix I

Interview Protocol for Participants during 1st Year of College

I. First Few Weeks of College

- A. What were your perceptions of college after the first few weeks?
- B. How did you feel about being in college?
- C. What experiences did you have that seemed fair or unfair?
- D. Did you have any pleasant surprises? Explain.
- E. Did you encounter any unpleasant surprises? Explain.
- F. How has the college experience impacted your aspirations?

II. Correlation Between High School and College

- A. What preparation did you have in high school that made the transition to college easier?
- B. What was missing in your high school preparation that would have made the transition to college easier?

III. Particular Aspects of College Life

- A. Tell me about your classes.
 - 1. What do you like and dislike about them?
 - 2. Why did you select these particular classes?
- B. Tell me about the registration experience.
- C. Are you involved in any student activities?
 - 1. If yes, in which activities are you involved and why?

D. Tell me about the financial side of going to college.

1. How have finances impacted your college decisions?

E. Tell me about any new friends you have made in college.

1. How are these friends similar and different from your friends in high school?

2. Do you still interact with your high school friends? Explain.

a. Tell me about what these friends are doing now.

IV. First Semester of College

A. What positive experiences have you had since the beginning of the semester?

B. What negative experiences have you had since the beginning of the semester?

C. If you could go back to the beginning of the semester, is there anything you would change? Explain.

D. What stumbling blocks or obstacles have you encountered this semester?

1. How have you circumvented these stumbling blocks?

V. Next Semester

A. What classes are you taking next semester?

B. What things will you do differently from this past semester?

C. What are your anticipated stumbling blocks and your plans for circumventing these obstacles?

VI. Goals

- A. Tell me about your short term goals.
- B. Tell me about your long term goals.

VII. Success

- A. How will you know you are successful?
- B. How will others know you are successful?

VIII. Follow-Up Questions for All

- A. What preparation did you have in elementary school that made the transition to middle school easier?
- B. What was missing in your elementary preparation that would have made the transition to middle school easier?
- C. What preparation did you have in middle school that made the transition to high school easier?
- D. What was missing in your middle school preparation that would have made the transition to high school easier?
- E. Was there something that you heard about college life before you came to college that came true for you? Explain.
- F. Was there something that you heard about college life before you came to college that did not come true for you? Explain.
- G. Please describe the study methods you used in high school. How did these methods work for you? How did you develop these methods?
- H. Please describe the study methods you used in college. How did these methods work for you? How did you develop these methods?

- I. Describe your first day in each class, and tell me how you felt.
- J. How much of your college work has taken place in groups? How much has been independent work? How does this compare/contrast with high school?
- K. Describe a typical day in your life as a college student.
- L. What would your friends say about you? What would your parents say about you? What would your high school teachers say about you? What would your college instructors say about you?
- M. What was your high school graduation like? Who came to see you graduate? How were you feeling on that day? Why? Did you celebrate in any way?

IX. Follow-Up to Previous Interviews -- Susan

- A. You talked about getting out of ESOL class at the end of fifth grade? How did you do this? Do you remember how you felt about being in an ESOL class and getting out of this class? If so, describe these feelings for me.
- B. During our first interview, you said you were struggling in your high school math class. What did you have to do to pass this class? Have you taken any college math classes yet? If so, how did this class compare/contrast to your high school experiences in math?

- C. In our first interview you said you were motivated to go to college because you did not want to struggle like your parents struggled. What is this struggle like for them? What may cause these struggles? Do your parents support you desire to go to college?
- D. Previously, you said the whole idea of crime scene investigation and lab work made you happy. What did you mean by this?
- E. You said you thought it would be interesting to go to school and live in NY? What do you mean by interesting?
- F. In our first interview, I asked you how your parents might view success. You said you did not know what they might say. Do you have any more ideas on this?
- G. As a child did you have a favorite book? If so, what was it, and why did you like it?
- H. In the last two interviews, you talked about how difficult it would be for you to go to college and work because you would not be able to give either one of them 100% of your attention. How many hours did you have for classes last semester, and how many hours did you work? Was it as difficult for you to spread your attention between the two areas as you thought it would be? Why or why not?

- I. In your previous interview you described your USA teacher in high school as one of your favorite teachers, and you said he knew how to teach. What did you mean by this?
- J. Last time we talked, you said the immigration laws in this state were discouraging you and getting you behind on thinking about college. Can you explain what you meant by this?
- K. In a previous interview, you mentioned that your family encouraged you to go to college. Who encouraged you? How did they encourage you?
- L. How do you think your brother views success? How do you think your sister-in-law views success?
- M. You talked about that there were not enough cars to go to college. What did you mean by this?
- N. Have you had any experiences where you felt as if you were not treated fairly? Explain.
- O. You talked about going to summer school to make-up your math class. What made you decide to do this?
- P. What steps did you follow to get a job? What do you do at your job? How do you like it?
- Q. How has math been in college?
- R. You said you had good memories of middle school. Can you describe them?
- S. You said school in Mexico was fun. Can you explain this?

- T. How did school in Mexico compare/contrast to school in the United States?
- U. If someone said they were Mexican-American, what would this mean to you?
- V. Are you helping your parents as planned? What are you doing?
- W. You talked often about being somebody. Can you explain what this means to you?
- X. You talked about having a good portfolio. What did you mean by this?
- Y. I know you said in your e-mail you were working for your mom. What are you doing for her?
- X. Follow-Up to Previous Interviews -- Andrea
 - A. Where are you from in Mexico?
 - B. Did you go to Mexico this summer like you planned? Tell me about this trip.
 - C. Tell me more about high school. What was a typical day like while you were in high school?
 - D. Have you applied for any scholarships for next year?
 - E. Are you still planning to transfer? Why or why not? What steps have you taken to meet this goal?

- F. Last time we met, you said you qualified for ASPIRE, but you needed to follow-up and make sure you received it. How did all of this work out? Did ASPIRE pay for everything?
- G. How does your level of responsibility for college assignments compare to your level of responsibility in high school?
- H. You were very active in extra-curricular activities while in high school, have you continued any of these activities? Are you involved in any activities at RSC?
- I. How much effort have you needed to expend for your college classes?
- J. Last time we talked, you were waiting on your results from you AP Economics and AP Psychology exams. What were your results?
- K. You mentioned that you thought your brother would start college in the spring. Is he enrolled?
- L. You talked about wanting to study abroad. Have you taken any steps to meet this goal?
- M. You mentioned that you thought you were going to visit all three colleges of interest to you this summer. Did you do this? Tell me about this experience.
- N. In one of our previous interviews, you talked about your middle school English teachers being one of your least favorite middle school teachers. Why was this the case?
- O. You thought college might be nerve racking. Has this come true? Why or

why not?

P. You talked about wanting to check your grades or progress while you were in college. Have you been able to do this? Why or why not?

Q. You predicted it would rain on graduation. Did this come true?

R. I know you are working on campus. Tell me about this job. How is it impacting your daily life and studies? How did you go about getting this job?

S. When we met in the summer for the tour, you were having a lot of trouble getting paid for your job. How did all of that finally work out?

T. In our first interview, you talked about the fact that you learned English, and now you are going back and learning Spanish. What motivates you to do this? How are you doing this?

XI. Follow-Up to Previous Interviews -- Laura

A. Last time we met, we discussed the possibility of you taking honors classes. Are you still considering this? Why or why not?

B. When we met in May, you were waiting to hear about scholarships, and you had been invited to the scholarship night at the high school. What scholarships did you receive? Did this cover the cost of tuition, books, and extras?

- C. You were talking about getting a job. Did you? Why or why not?
If so, how did you go about finding and getting this job? How is it impacting your school life?
- D. You talked about liking your high school classes, friends, and teachers. Tell me more about this.
- E. You said some ways you helped yourself to learn English was to read books, and magazines, watch TV, and listen to music. Tell me how this helped with the development of your English skills. What made you use this method?
- F. You were involved in a few clubs in high school. Have you become involved in college? Why or why not?
- G. In our previous interview, you thought your friend from Mexico would come to visit, did he? Tell me about his visit.
- H. Did your grandmother and brother come for a visit? Tell me about these visits.
- I. You predicted that people would not talk to you when you came to college. Has that prediction come true?
- J. You named a long list of favorite teachers in high school, and said that they taught you to be successful. What did you mean by this?
- K. Can you write the name (in Spanish) of the books you used to learn to read?
- L. When we were talking about people what it meant when people were unable to graduate, I was not able to hear what you said. You said, “if they were born here, it made me mad because.....” Do you have any idea what you might have

said, or can you tell me why these high school dropouts make you mad?

XII. Follow-Up to Previous Interviews -- Josefina

- A. In one of our previous interviews, you mentioned that you “always wanted to sit down and ...get a book and read.” When you were in elementary school, why did you like to read so much? Do you still enjoy reading?
- B. Tell me more about the advanced classes that you took in middle school.
 - 1. What subjects were advanced?
 - 2. What were these classes like?
 - 3. How did you get enrolled in advanced classes?
- C. Do you still have the packet of information you received from the conference for Latino students? If so, may I see it?
- D. In one of our previous meetings you said you thought there was a difference between the way in which Anglos and Hispanics viewed success, but you could not explain the difference. Can you try to explain this difference now?
- E. You talked about wanting to attend culinary school. What motivates you to want to do this?
- F. In one of our previous meetings, you mentioned that you regretted changing from advanced classes to general classes. Why did you have regrets?
- G. Previously, you said you sometimes rushed through unimportant homework assignments without much thought. Have you found yourself doing this in college? Why or why not?
- H. You said you asked (in Spanish) for help from your mom with homework.

What kind of help does mom provide? Has this changed over the years? Does your dad help, too? Does your older sister provide any type of help?

- I. You talked about the possibility of joining the Hispanic mentoring program. Are you still interested in this program? Why or why not?
- J. When we talked about the mentoring program, you discussed that you were motivated to join such a program because you thought it was important to help other Hispanics get an education. You had trouble finding words to describe why you thought this was important. Do you think you could explain this to me today?
- K. Last time we met, you thought you were not really sure what the first day of college would be like. Describe your first day in each class, and tell me how you felt.
- L. You told me you took 8 classes per day in your senior year. Why did you do this when only 6 classes were required?
- M. When we talked in May, you said you were scared about college because the responsibility would be on you. You used a relaxed attendance policy as an example. How had this impacted you?
- N. At times during our interviews, you suggested college work might be harder than high school work, and at other times you thought it might not be any harder. For you, which has been the case so far?
- O. Last time we talked, you said you went to friends and teachers if you needed help. What kind of help did you get when you were in high school? Do you

seek such help in college? Why or why not?

- P. You mentioned that you thought your grandmother felt as if schooling was for American students. Why do you think she feels this way? Is this your dad's mother?
- Q. We discussed some of your favorite and least favorite teachers in the past. Did you have a least favorite high school teacher? Describe why he/she was your least favorite.

Appendix J

Transcriber's Pledge of Confidentiality

As a transcribing typist of Sharon L. Hixon's research project entitled, *Conditions Surrounding Four Mexican Females' Quest for a Higher Education in a Southeastern United States Community*,²¹ I understand that I will be listening to tapes of confidential interviews. The information on these tapes will be revealed by research participants who participated in this project on good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information on these tapes with anyone except Sharon L. Hixon, the primary researcher of this project. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards, and I pledge not to do so.

Signature of Transcribing Typist

Date

Printed Name of Transcribing Typist

²¹ The title on this form has been changed to represent the final title of the dissertation. The original title identified the state in which the participants resided. Thus, the title change reflects the need to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

Appendix K
Sample Domain Sheet

Playing Softball

Dancing

Reading

Listening to Music

Are Types of

Hobbies

VITA

Sharon L. Hixon has been a graduate student in the Ph.D. program at The University of Tennessee since Fall 2000. She will graduate in May 2008 with a Ph. D. in Education with a concentration in Literacy, Language Education, and English as a Second Language Education. Sharon L. Hixon taught first and second grade in Baltimore City Public Schools and fourth grade at The Banner School, a private school located in Frederick, Maryland. Since August 1998, she has been teaching at Dalton State College located in Dalton, Georgia. Here, she taught developmental reading and credit reading courses for 9 years. In August 2007, she joined the Division of Education at Dalton State College where she currently works with teacher candidates and holds the rank of Assistant Professor.