



## The Qualitative Report

Volume 19 | Number 43

Article 1

10-27-2014

# Converting Capital: The Experiences of Latinas/os in Graduate Health Care Programs

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### Recommended APA Citation

Zell, M. C. (2014). Converting Capital: The Experiences of Latinas/os in Graduate Health Care Programs. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(43), 1-26. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss43/1>

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## Converting Capital: The Experiences of Latinas/os in Graduate Health Care Programs

### Abstract

This qualitative study combines critical race theory, cultural capital theory, and counter-storytelling to examine the experiences of Latina/o in graduate health care programs. Community cultural wealth provided the framework to investigate the mechanisms by which students converted their sociocultural assets into the kinds of social, cultural, and educational capital needed to succeed in a graduate program and pursue their career goals. A qualitative content analysis was employed to interpret participants' conversion experiences. The forms of community cultural wealth described by Yosso – aspirational, linguistic, familial, navigational, social, and resistant – intersected and interacted with one another. Aspirational and linguistic forms of capital were converted into occupational attainment; familial capital was converted into educational and occupational outcomes; navigational and social forms of capital were converted into educational outcomes, and resistant capital was converted into civic engagement. Recommendations for practice and future research are discussed.

### Keywords

Community Cultural Wealth, Cultural Capital, Content Analysis, Critical Race Theory, Counter-Storytelling

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## **Converting Capital: The Experiences of Latinas/os in Graduate Health Care Programs**

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The shortage of Latinos in all areas of health professions including medicine, nursing, psychology, social work, occupational therapy, and physical therapy has been an ongoing concern (Chapa & Acosta, 2010). Latinos represent 16% of the U.S. population, and will comprise 25% by 2050 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2008). Latinas/os are the fastest growing population in the United States, but little is understood about the unique health risks they face, as well as the patterns of disease prevalence and mortality among this ethnic group (Kanna, Fersobe, Soni, & Michelen, 2008). Research shows that Latinas/os face numerous barriers accessing health care, including language barriers and cultural differences (Rios-Ellis & Frates, 2005), poverty and discrimination, low quality health care, and lack of health insurance (Escarce & Kapur, 2006; Escarce, Morales, & Rumbaut, 2006). Building capacity in these fields among Latinas/os is important since studies have found that diverse health care personnel (including physicians, nurses, and occupational therapists) are more likely to work with minority and underserved communities, increasing their access to health care services and reducing health disparities (Carrasquillo, Orav, Brennan, & Burstin, 1999; Crane, 1997; Stinson & Thurston, 2002). The need for, and the advantages of, a diverse health care workforce have been extensively documented (Grumbach & Mendoza, 2008). Racial and ethnic diversity of the health care workforce has been associated with better care quality (Milem, Dey, & White, 2004; Chapa & Acosta, 2010). Also, some studies found racial concordance between doctor and patient (when both come from the same racial or ethnic background) leads to greater patient satisfaction and better health outcomes (Pérez-Stable, Nápoles-Springer, & Miramontes, 1997).

The barriers that prevent Latinas/os from pursuing careers in health care, most of which require a professional or advanced degree, have also been studied (Grumbach & Mendoza, 2008). Research has shown that the educational system presents formidable obstacles to increasing the percentage of Latinos in the health care workforce. Latino students corresponded

to only 16% of all college students in 2011 (Flannery, 2013). Of all of those awarded bachelor's degrees in 2011, only 8% were Latinos (Flannery, 2013), a percentage that remains unchanged since 2008 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009).

For those who manage to achieve a bachelor's degree, attainment of graduate education or a professional degree is even more improbable. Latinas/os represented only 6% of graduate students in 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010). An even smaller percentage is enrolled in graduate-level health care related programs. For instance, although professional-level nursing programs reported increases in the number of minority students, Latinos represent only 5.2% of all nursing students, compared with 73.9% who are White and 12.9% who are African Americans (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2010). According to a report by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (2012), of those who graduated from physical therapy programs, only 4.3% were Latinas/os in 2011. Latinas/os comprised only 5% of all master's level and doctoral level students enrolled in occupational therapy programs in the 2011-2012 academic years (The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc., 2012). Moreover, little is known about the few who succeed and earn a graduate or professional degree in health-allied fields.

Combining critical race theory and methodology, and cultural capital theory, this study examines the experiences of Latina/o graduate students. More specifically, this study focuses on students' conversion of their sociocultural assets into forms of capital needed to succeed in health care graduate programs and pursue their career goals. Understanding these students' experiences can increase our current knowledge of how to expand representation of Latinas/os in the health care related professions, thus reducing health disparities. The results presented here are part of a larger qualitative study focusing on the experiences of Latinas/os in higher education. The first study examined the experiences of Latina/o students who entered higher education through community colleges and transferred to a four-year institution (Zell, 2010).

## **Literature Review**

Initially developed by scholars who challenged the nature and perpetuation of racism and White advantage in American law, critical race theory (CRT) has been used extensively in research that analyzes inequity in education and other settings. Based on CRT premises, Latino scholars moved away from the Black-White divide, developing a theoretical framework called LatCrit, or Latino critical race theory. LatCrit broadens the constructs of race and racism by calling attention to the experiences of Latinas/os, particularly the intersection of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin (Delgado & Stefancic, 1994; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Solórzano and Yosso's (2000) Latino critical theory (LatCrit) focuses on education, postulating that: (a) racism is endemic and omnipresent in American institutions, and education is not neutral, color-blind, or equitable (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Solórzano, 1997); (b) the experiential knowledge of students of color must be acknowledged and documented through their narratives and counter-stories (Bell, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 2002); (c) privilege, disadvantage, and inequity in education are best analyzed through a contextual/historic and multidisciplinary lens (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993); and (d) all forms of oppression relative to issues of immigration, language and culture, identity, bilingual and multicultural education, skin color, and cultural deficit theories must be challenged (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Villalpando, 2003). Studies by LatCrit scholars have exposed the fallacy of cultural deficit theory to explain Latinas/os educational achievements (Solórzano, 1997). LatCrit researchers have also examined the experiences of Latina/o students in higher education institutions (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). Of chief importance in these studies is the concept of transformational resistance, defined by the ability to critique

oppressive institutional mechanisms while remaining motivated to produce social change (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Latino scholars have reconceptualized Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital to examine Latina/o students' experiences in college (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012; Rios-Aguilar, Marquez Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Yosso, 2005). Bourdieu conceptualized capital as the resources, assets, skills, and knowledge that are valued because they reflect the standards and practices of dominant groups in society. Most theorists who used a capital perspective treated it as a dichotomous construct (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012); that is to say, either individuals have it or do not. Hence, the unique forms of cultural capital possessed by students of color are not recognized nor deemed worthy (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Yosso, 2005).

Challenging Bourdieu's traditional concept, Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) proposed combining *cultural capital* and Moll and Greenberg's *funds of knowledge* (1990) to examine how students convert capital into successful educational and career outcomes. The term *funds of knowledge* originally described the underestimated practical knowledge, wisdom, skills, and competences of poor and working-class Latino families living and working in the U.S. and Mexico borderland (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Mobilized by and shared through "social networks of exchange" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992, p. 133), these intelligences and intrinsic cultural resources were the basis for survival and prosperity of these families.

Using critical race theory, Yosso (2005) challenged deficit-based, traditional notions of cultural capital by incorporating *funds of knowledge* into what she defined as *community cultural wealth*. Yosso (2005) also expanded Bourdieu's concept by identifying six forms of cultural capital, or cultural wealth, comprised by the knowledge, skills, and abilities of historically marginalized communities. These include: aspirational, linguistic, familial, navigational, social, and resistant capital. Extending this body of work, the current study examines how Latina/o students convert community cultural wealth (their personal, familial, and cultural assets) into forms of capital needed to succeed in health-related graduate programs. To this end, an analytical framework that integrates Latino critical theory and community cultural wealth is used to examine this conversion.

## Methodology

As an interpretive methodology, Latino critical race theory challenges cultural deficit approaches, calling attention to acts of transformational resistance (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) by students of color (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). In the present study I follow this methodological tradition by affirming the voices, and the experiential knowledge, of Latina/o students, as well as their unique responses to educational and professional challenges (González, 1998; Yosso, 2006). I utilize a counter-storytelling method based on participants' narratives and personal stories (Delgado, 1989) to demonstrate how community cultural wealth is a source of educational strength and success (Delgado Bernal, 2002), and to legitimize untold stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-stories, as described by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), encompass family histories, *cuentos* (tales), *testimonios* (oral testimony) and personal narratives.

However, I endeavor to go beyond simply describing the types of capital possessed by this study's participants. I follow Rios-Aguilar's recommendation to use a capital perspective, exploring the process by which 12 underrepresented graduate students converted community cultural wealth into capital needed to succeed in higher education and achieve career outcomes. The study explored the following questions: What forms of community cultural wealth did participants possess that they drew from to succeed in a graduate program? How did they convert community cultural wealth into educational outcomes, occupational outcomes, and

civic engagement? What institutional structures or institutional agents supported or facilitated this conversion?

### **Data Collection Procedures**

A semi-structured interview guide was created to engender participants' insights, knowledges, and perceptions. However, a flexible approach was used to adapt the interview to individuals' contexts, exploring a given area more extensively when needed, or when the respondent desired to do so. This way, participants could express themselves in their own terms and shape the flow of the interview (Patton, 1987). This approach maximized the chances of capturing, in the respondents' own voices, the unique meanings they attributed to their experiences, helping to develop a deeper understanding of the conversion process. Questions were generated from the literature review and non-academic sources, including this author's own personal and professional experience navigating graduate programs, as well as this author's professional experiences with Latina/o students.

The researcher and the participants discussed a wide range of issues relative to participants' academic and professional experiences, including their experiences as undergraduate students and the time and reason for pursuing graduate education in a health-allied field. More specifically, the researcher and participants discussed strategies used to manage a graduate program in a health care area and the personal, familial, and professional factors that motivated them to persist; the kinds of knowledges, wisdoms, skills, and values (familial, social, and cultural) respondents believed influenced their educational and career choices; the impact of their educational and career choices on their family; meaningful moments, events, or family stories about the value of education and career; how respondents explained their academic success and what were their daily habits and practices as graduate students; the habits and practices of others (family members, peers) that facilitated their academic success; what, if any, psychological, familial, social, and cultural costs were incurred in their academic trajectory; financial issues and family demands that affected them as graduate students; what contributed to their socialization in the program and in a health care profession; the role the community college (for those who attended junior colleges) and undergraduate programs played in their academic and professional development; what institutional agents support their goals or took actions on their behalf; others who provided institutional and/or instrumental support and resources; the extent and depth of their interactions with faculty and other institutional agents; the quality of their relationship with their peers; and the institutional mechanisms and structures that supported or hindered their success. Each interview lasted one and half to two hours, depending on the pace and communication style of participants. Interviews were carried out in Spanish and English, as either the interviewee or the researcher switched back and forth between the two languages. After interview #9 was concluded, data continued to be collected for theoretical saturation purposes.

### **Sample**

The public university where this study was conducted is located in the southland region of the Chicago metropolitan area, where Latinos comprising 18% of the population (Alejo, 2008). Traditionally a hub for the steel mill industry, the area has undergone extensive de-industrialization in the last three decades. Although the institution serves a broad range of communities as well as culturally and economic diverse populations, Latina/os students are not well represented in the student body, comprising less than 5% of all students.

Prior to commencing the study, this author obtained approval of the research protocol by the university's Institutional Review Board. Twelve participants were recruited through a

non-probability snowballing sampling method. Participants learned about the study either through word of mouth, or through college advisors or counselors contacted by this author. Students who were interested were instructed to contact this author. Upon contact, potential participants were informed about the research objectives as well as data collection procedures, and were ensured of complete confidentiality. All participants gave written informed consent to participate in the study. None of the participants had prior relationships with this author.

The sample comprised two students enrolled in the university's physical therapy program (one of them a doctoral student), one student enrolled in the health administration program, three others enrolled in the occupational therapy program, and six students enrolled in the masters of communication disorders. Eight of the respondents entered higher education through a community college, while four of them attended their entire undergraduate education in a four-year institution. One of them had completed a bachelor's degree in another country. All 12 respondents were bilingual, and so was this researcher, who conducted the interviews. Seventy-five percent were either second generation Latina/o American of Mexican descent or biethnic of Mexican and Puerto Rican heritage. Three respondents were first generation individuals born in Cuba, Chile, and Ecuador. Half of the participants in the sample were married, and two lived with at least one parent at the time of the interview. Four participants also had young children and one had adult children. The age of participants ranged from 22 to 43. Except for two participants, all others were the first in their family to complete an undergraduate degree. All were the first in their families to attend a graduate program. Although this research attempted to reach all participants for follow up interviews, only two respondents were available.

### **Data Analysis**

Data collection and data analysis were conducted concurrently. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and imported into Hyper Research™, a qualitative software program for coding and analysis. Qualitative content analysis (Weber, 1990) was employed to interpret respondents' conversion experiences. Qualitative content analysis starts with established research findings, and it is used to validate existing knowledge of a particular phenomenon, or to expand a theoretical framework (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). In the current study, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework was used as the background against which forms of cultural wealth possessed by participants were identified and capital conversion processes were elucidated.

As typical of content analysis (Hsieg & Shannon, 2005), Yosso's six forms of cultural capital (2005) were used to generate an initial list of coding categories and the operational definition of each category. Immersed in the data and using these predetermined categories, the researcher extracted meaning units from the transcripts (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009), and identified and grouped themes. Meaning units were extracted based on individual themes that were expressed in a word, statement, or paragraph. This step was necessary because the researcher could not simply assume that participants possessed any of the particular type of community cultural wealth delineated by Yosso (2005). Meaning units that could not be coded into one of the predetermined categories were later reexamined to determine if they were either a subcategory or a new category. As similar codes or concepts were grouped, this initial coding led to 145 categories.

The researcher constantly compared and checked out Yosso's (2005) forms of capital against the actual data in the study. Categories were then re-arranged and reduced, based on their commonalities, according to major themes, and according to each type of community cultural wealth found in the data. Simultaneously, during this process, several categories and themes emerged that related to the conversion process. Here too, the analytical unity consisted

of words, sentences, or paragraphs that expressed a meaningful idea related to the conversion of community cultural wealth. Causal conditions that affected the conversion process, specific strategies employed by participants, and intervening conditions that influenced these strategies were identified and compared. This analysis also included comparing and contrasting categories and themes until saturation was achieved and no new codes emerged. The database was reduced to core themes that specified the conversion process of each form of community cultural wealth. All participants engaged in some form of capital conversion. The researcher attempted to meet with participants for a second interview for the purpose of verifying and confirming findings, gathering feedback about the theoretical constructs, and seeking out impressions that might disconfirm the analysis. Although only two participants were available, both felt positive about the researcher's analysis and thought that it was a valid account of their experiences. Also, both described additional conversion strategies, which complemented the analysis.

### **Researchers' Positionality**

Arzubiaga, Artilles, King, and Harris-Muri (2008) define research as a situated cultural practice involving personal, social, and ideological dimensions. Hence, decisions about theoretical frameworks, data collection, analysis, and interpretation methods, and theory building processes are grounded in the researcher's assumptions, values, and cultural biography. As a Latina scholar and critical race theorist, my epistemology has been shaped by the intersection of personal, cultural, academic, and professional experiences. My own history as an immigrant, who came to the U.S. with limited English proficiency, has sensitized me to "listen and hear the messages in counter-stories" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 116). I found that I was often targeted by nativist discourse, and encountered difficulties navigating higher education environments that operated from Eurocentric types of knowledge that did not value other ways of knowing and that ignored or discounted my cultural assets. These experiences also facilitated my alignment with those who develop unique responses to various forms of oppression.

Hence, in my research, I attempt to move beyond unidimensional categories of oppression (i.e., racism). Unidimensional views can obscure more subtle systemic, cultural, and institutional barriers. The students of color who are the subjects of this study, are located at the margin (hooks, 1984). The majority of society does not fully recognize, nor rarely honors, their suffering and their achievements. So my aim is to document the journey the subjects in this study have made and bring to light the stories that matter to them, not the stories the majority tells about them—to challenge the dominant representation of Latina/o students. I view my scholarship as a means of advancing social justice within the academy and as a form of resistance to being silenced.

My proximity to the lived experience of the participants undeniably affected the research decisions made along the way: the questions asked, my observations of their reactions, and my discovery and interpretation of the themes in the data. Because of this, I made conscious effort to not romanticize their experiences, but hopefully to legitimize their experiential knowledge.

### **Limitations**

Trustworthiness of data collection and data analysis is an important area to consider in content analysis. In this study, results need to be interpreted in light of the impact of bias on the sample selection. Since respondents belonged to a small group of graduate students, variation in the sample may be limited. However limited by size, and the number of Latino/a students enrolled in health care related graduate programs is very low, the sample is comprised



by participants who best have knowledge of the research area. Also, a small sample may also compromise a thorough understanding of the phenomenon. However precautions to ensure data saturation were established during the data collection process, as explained in the data collection section of this paper. Since this researcher took care of collecting and analyzing data simultaneously, saturation of categories was more adequately ensured (Sandelowski, 2001). Possible bias may also have occurred in the data analysis, based on this author's own frame of reference, beliefs and interpretations. In addition, participants may have favored some aspects of their experiences in their responses.

The findings reported in this paper are not representative of other groups. While results cannot be generalized, this was not the purpose of this study. Rather this study aimed at providing a more detailed understanding of the capital conversion processes carried on by respondents. Despite these limitations, participants' thick descriptions and information-rich counter-stories provided knowledge and insight into these processes. Credibility, a means to establish trustworthiness of data in qualitative research, was addressed through follow-up phone interviews with two participants. This member checking supported the findings.

### **Findings**

The findings are presented through the lens of counter-storytelling. Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth provided the framework to investigate the mechanisms by which students mobilize and transform their assets into the kinds of social, cultural, and educational capital needed to succeed in a graduate program and pursue their career goals. Findings demonstrate a strong presence of community cultural wealth among respondents. This section describes how respondents converted community cultural wealth into academic success, occupational attainment, and civic engagement.

#### **Converting Aspirational Capital and Linguistic Capital into Occupational Attainment**

Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework defines aspirational capital as hopes and dreams and the ability to set one's sight on possibilities, despite adverse circumstances. Extant research has demonstrated this ubiquitous form of capital amongst Latino students and their families—the participants in this study were no different (Ceja, 2004; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Respondents spoke of their hopes for themselves, their children, and their aspiration to contribute to the betterment of their communities. All respondents possessed great amounts of this capital even when their goals appeared out of reach and numerous personal, social, and institutional barriers stood in their way. For example, the majority of the respondents found that a straight trajectory toward college and subsequent graduate school was not possible. One student fell into a deep depression not long after dropping out of high school and getting married. Despite this depression and several "dead end jobs," she continuously set her sight on one day going back to school. She comments:

I always wanted to go back to be a doctor. But in high school, maybe because my parents didn't have money...I dropped out and got married at 17. I was still thinking about being a doctor when I went back to school at 22, and I was just taking a class at a time. I had to work...it took me 4 years to finish my associate degree.

Another respondent, the oldest sibling in the family, had to delay attending college twice. As a young adult, he needed to help pay for his younger brother's college tuition, since the family could not pay for both. Years later, after getting married, this respondent once again had

to postpone college. He and his wife decided that she should get a degree first, since they felt that their young children would need their mother more later on. Another participant, a soldier who had hoped to take classes while enlisted, could not attend school because he was deployed to foreign countries several times. Although his plans were deferred, he continued to hold high aspirations. After completing his time, he “got out and joined the National Guard” where he received the benefit of free college tuition.

Delays and obstacles did not weaken these students’ aspirations. Earning a college degree was only a means to an end for them, since their ultimate goal was a career in health care. This larger aspiration continued to shape their decisions, including the decision to go into a graduate program. For all respondents, nevertheless, a graduate program was beyond what they could afford. All participants noted onerous financial barriers that stood in the way of earning a graduate degree. However, nurtured by their dream, this challenge prompted students to take a realistic look at their academic prospects and professional goals. For example, the respondent who aspired to be a doctor realized that speech therapy was a viable career, one that could be achieved more rapidly and affordably, but still consistent with her vision for herself. Likewise, other participants had to revise their more immediate goal in order to accomplish their larger objective of finding occupation in the health care field. One participant, who had the additional burden of a low GPA, explained:

...because my GPA didn’t meet requirements I didn’t apply [for grad school] right away. I took 2 courses just to kind of help with my grad application. Also, I had to get twice as many letters of recommendation.

The same strategy of goal revision and readjustment was also employed when participants faced financial challenges combined with problems in intimate relationships. For example, one of the participants who was working on a masters in speech pathology reported her involvement in domestic violence throughout her associate and undergraduate programs. “My husband was very jealous and controlling, he didn’t want me to study or to become a speech therapist. He would hide my books, slash my tires, or take away the car keys [to prevent me from getting to school]...” This student remained in this situation while working and saving money for years. She set specific yearly milestones for herself related to her safety and her academic and financial situation, by planning an escape strategy for months and by taking fewer classes per semester. Coupled with her enduring commitment, these practical goals led her to finish her undergraduate studies while maintaining her faith in the future. When she met with this researcher she was one year short of finishing her master’s program.

Aspirational capital nurtured some respondents who had completed all or almost all of their undergraduate work in a different field, but decided that their passion was, after all, in a health care profession. This was the case with one-fourth of the sample. These individuals had bachelor’s degrees that, although not completely unrelated to health care, did not focus solely upon it. Sometimes a shift was made within the field itself. For example, Helena was almost finished with her nursing program when she decided to go into health administration. By capitalizing on her knowledge of nursing, she made a successful transition into a bachelors program in health administration and, subsequently, into a master’s program. Another respondent had a bachelor’s degree in psychology. She decided to become a speech therapist because this profession fit more fully with her “life purpose.” One participant, an occupational therapist in his country-of-origin, described how hope and confidence sustained him through disappointment. This happened when he discovered he could not practice his profession without a degree from an accredited American school. At the time of the interview, and while simultaneously learning English and raising a family, he was investing enormous amounts of time and financial resources getting through a graduate program. Despite this setback, this

student kept a clear aspiration to become competent in this new context. He decided to “review what I learned in the past,” and “revise old understandings because some scientific knowledge has been updated.”

Respondents also reported establishing a method to “survive” their daily routine, while maintaining good academic performance. The following comments are illustrative:

...five o'clock in the morning...between five and six I read or catch up on any reading... and we eat...then the bus picks up the boys at 7. I get here by 9...uhm, then class is from 9 till noon... But, usually I stay later, so that I can work on any homework assignments or group projects or anything like that. I go to bed...oh, sometimes midnight, sometimes one, sometimes 2:30 because I [usually] have to finish up some papers...I also record my lectures so that [I can hear them later on].

I wake up around 6...have breakfast. Then I make my own food [for lunch]. I get my little son ready [and] drop him off at my mother-in-law's house. Sometimes I finish school, around 1, and sometimes around 4:30...so when I get out early, I pick my son up, and when I get home I do some homework [while the baby sleeps]. My wife gets home after 6 and she takes over the baby...I start dinner. It is our only time together, we don't have full days together, because I work Saturdays and Sundays. But we understand that his is just a period in our lives...I put my son to bed by 9:30...then I study.

An aspect of aspirational capital brought up consistently by respondents in this study was how they became inspired to go into a health care profession. Narratives demonstrated that their aspirations did not develop in a vacuum, but emerged within what Ray (2006) called aspiration windows that influenced their dreams and mobilized future-oriented behaviors. Aspiration windows reflect the individuals' environmental opportunities and help them envision possibilities for themselves and their future. In this study, connection with a health care professional, sometimes occurring at a young age, constituted an aspirational window. This connection planted a seed and awoke what participants referred to as a “calling.” One respondent did not consider going to college until, at the age of sixteen, she witnessed a speech therapist teaching a family member how to swallow food. These encounters made a lasting impression, motivating respondents toward a career path, stimulating their curiosity about a health care profession, and nurturing their potential. The comments below provide three examples:

I grew up with a speech impediment... because [my parents] went through that whole experience of not being able to find someone affordable, and also the language barrier because it was mostly English-speaking professionals.

...I used to babysit my cousin...she was born with cerebral palsy, and the speech therapist was coming and it was interesting [I thought] that is great, neat.

But also I play soccer a lot so I injured my knee one time, and I had to go to physical therapy and I had to talk to the PT and he explained to me how the program worked and what kinds of things you can do and the field you can work in and all that kind of stuff. That's when I started building up my knowledge about all that kind of stuff. Then from there I started going to school for kinesiology and then now physical therapy.

How did participants convert their aspirational capital into career attainment? They did so by developing clear and pragmatic goals and timeframes, revising and readjusting their goals, exceeding their graduate application requirements, executing a daily routine and maintaining self-discipline, sustaining hope and confidence, visualizing themselves as a health professional, and focusing on the outcomes.

For the respondents in this study, aspirational capital was combined with linguistic capital to take advantage of respondents' personal attributes. Linguistic capital involves the intellectual, social, and communicative skills resulting from experiences with more than one language or language styles. This aspect of cultural wealth encompasses proficiency in a language other than English, but also skills such as metalinguistic awareness, cross-cultural understanding, social maturity (Orellana, 2003), dexterity in language- and task-switching (Prior & MacWhinney, 2010), and linguistic and non-linguistic cognitive control (Garbin, Sanjuan, Forn, Bustamante, Rodriguez-Pujadas, Belloch, & Avila, 2010). All respondents possessed linguistic capital, as they were bilingual and bicultural. In their counter-stories, they reflected on the academic benefits of being bilingual, including improved verbal, reading, and math scores. Mario, who was a student in the occupational therapy graduate program and a high school math teacher and biology tutor explained that, "being bilingual helped me to learn the 'language of math'... and the 'language of biology.'"

How did participants convert linguistic capital into occupational attainment? They did so by transforming personal attributes—being bilingual and bicultural—into valuable resources in the job market. Participants realized that being bilingual and bicultural were assets that, combined with their career goals, could potentially fulfill an unmet demand for health professionals in the Latino community. The following comment illustrates this vision:

When I was working in (community) I noticed there were not enough speech therapists...much less bilingual. So it was something I always wanted to be able [to do] and offer to people who were disadvantaged or [had] the language barrier.

### **Converting Familial Capital into Educational and Occupational Attainment**

A significant form of cultural capital for the participants, familial capital is comprised of the cultural, social, and historical knowledge and wisdom nurtured within the family and the community. Building on the work of Auerbach (2002), Elenes, Gonzales, Delgado Bernal, and Villenes (2001), and Lopez (2003), Yosso (2005) proposes that family "lessons" of survival, caring, guiding, coping and providing "informs our emotional, educational, and occupational consciousness" (p. 79). Respondents' narratives revealed the familial lessons, values, and stories that sustained them, and how this form of capital was converted into educational and career outcomes. For example, one participant explained how his father encouraged him to become a health care professional. As an adolescent, this respondent worked as a janitor alongside his father, also a custodian. Together they used to clean doctors' offices in the evenings. He said:

One day [while cleaning the doctor's office]...my dad sat me in the doctor's chair and said, "You can do this!" Yeah, my dad... said, "You can do this!"...you know, you don't have to work with your hands and your back like [this]. So, I didn't know college, but I knew that that seed was planted where I wanted to go be in the health care field and help people.

Familial capital entails cooperative effort among family members (Sue & Sue, 2008). The counter-stories in this study provided many examples of this cooperation. Although one respondent's father had completed some years of community college, none of the other respondents' parents had gone beyond high school. However, respondents saw their parents as role models for persistence, fortitude, sacrifice, and moral fiber. Parents' caring, nurturing, and providing (Yosso, 2005) was manifested in concrete actions. These included babysitting for the respondents' children, giving financial support, creating a quiet space and time to study in the home, cooking meals and taking care of the respondent when she/he was ill, expressing encouraging and comforting words, and voicing pride about the respondent's accomplishments. Here is an illustrative comment:

...they [family members] helped a lot...My mom helped with the kids when I needed to get to the library or if I had class. Even my brother-in-law watched them while I'd go to class...even though they were going to eat chocolate for dinner, or be soaked wet through their clothes [when I got home]. Without my family I couldn't have done it.

Parents sometimes helped by putting themselves on the line financially to help their son or daughter pay for the graduate program expenses. Other times they prevented the respondents from doing something they would regret later, such as quitting school when the graduate program appeared too hard. One student, who was completing the required full time portion of her program, had to work part time. Since her salary did not cover the full tuition, her parents began helping. "I pay for my books and they pay for tuition and car expenses," she reported. "I am also still under their health insurance." Another participant in this study commented on her mother's support and on how they worked together to maintain the household:

...she is helping me out a lot. Now that she is working, she also like helps me with the bills and stuff. And she's always telling me like if you need time to study...or go ahead, don't cook, don't do this...She'll give me my space...

Another prominent form of familial capital in this study was parental hopes and the firm belief in the student's competence to achieve her or his vision. This belief was demonstrated by encouragement and emotional support, as evidenced by the following comments:

...school was always first in my life...ever since I was like ten...probably because of my parents, the way they stressed that. You know you parents influence your life. They want me to be a good student. And I always had it built in my mind...

...She worked [but] she would always tell me, "what do you need Anna?" on the weekends she would tell me, "do you need me to take the kids?" what do you need me to do?" Sometimes I just want to talk, and she would say ok, just come on over...she was more supportive emotionally, anytime I had to talk about anything...

Parental aspirations and expectations, particularly those of mothers, have been shown to affect college students and academic success positively (Ceja, 2004; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). In looking for examples of familial capital beyond the contribution of mothers, this study found that fathers and male partners played a crucial role in influencing respondents' success. One respondent described how her father persuaded her not to drop out of her graduate

program. “I think a lot of that was my dad,” she said, “ who was always like...you’re going to make sacrifices now but in the end your kids are going to benefit more than if you didn’t finish.” The following comments also illustrate this point:

...but, after the boys grew up a little more, my father helped me, he was like, ‘Ahh, don’t worry about it if you want to go back [to school].’ So, then I started coming back slowly, went in part-time to got my bachelor’s degree.

My father helped me like taking care of [the children]; picking them up, putting them on the bus for school for me. Just so I can make it to school on time and get back and not have to worry about rushing because the bus is coming.

In addition to fathers, male partners were described as very supportive, sympathetic, and kind. Women were the majority of the sample, and a fourth of them were also mothers. According to these women’s counter-stories, their partners had to put their own plans on hold and “become Mr. Mom,” as one participant put it. Another respondent said:

Everything seemed really, really hard, once I moved into the master’s program...I was like, Oh my God, what did I do to myself? I would get home and I be like don’t talk to me, don’t look at me, leave me alone...My husband would be like, ‘ok guys, let’s go outside...come on!’ You know, dinner would come up and if he [couldn’t] make dinner he would be like ‘Let’s order a pizza.’ Sometimes I would be inside studying and he would do a little cook-out for the kids and just bring me food.

Nonmaterial resources comprising familial capital comprised the values transmitted within families. These assets included belief systems, lifestyles, and habits of parents or family members, whether they were dead or alive. “... I survived because I was determined like my [deceased] dad to just get through.” This student emulated her father’s determination, according to her, by accelerating and finishing the coursework part of the graduate program faster.

Other studies have confirmed family resources’ facilitative role in the academic achievement of low SES families or ethnic groups (Gofen, 2007). The value of accomplishment was highlighted by a student who declared that he was “raised to succeed,” by combining discipline and vision. Another participant, whose parents fled Cuba in the 1960s but continued to help the relatives left behind, explained the influence her parents’ frugal, austere, and altruistic conduct had on her worldview. She said:

...for a long time had like I couldn't go to the store and buy a pair of shoes... I don't deserve this. Somebody in Cuba doesn't have you know...My parents they got me to eat my food saying: ‘Your grandparents [back in Cuba] don't have food.’ And hearing my dad say, ‘all that is needed for evil to triumph is good men to do nothing’...that has really influenced my life. And seeing their sacrifice.

Yosso (2005) explains that, as a cultural wealth, familial capital extends well beyond the concept of kinship and extended family. It includes a responsibility for the welfare of the community, and a focus on the collective, not individual well-being (Yosso, 2005). The following comments describe how respondents’ familial capital strengthened their ties to their community and fostered a desire to “give back”:

...working with lower income [families], helping and educating...making phone calls, getting transportation, or just talking to them about different issues. Maybe because the need is there, maybe because you can see your own family in them, I don't know.

...so he had a real sense of duty, to family and being very frugal with your money and using it and using all your resources to... better other people, that would be something I would say I learned from both my parents!

That is really because I do know that if you can help a child in speech pathology. That you make a difference in all of their schooling.

Participants' counter-stories demonstrated that they kept an unwavering commitment to core *values* of accomplishment, achievement, and altruism, crucial components of their familial capital. Values influence attitudes and generate behaviors, providing direction for appropriate courses of action or outcomes. How was familial capital converted into educational and career outcomes? They did so by making the completion of a graduate program into a whole family endeavor. Also, by creating congruence between core values and their behaviors, participants transformed familial capital into motivation to develop capabilities, secure knowledge, and acquire the skills they needed to achieve the career attainment envisioned for themselves. The confidence of parents, partners, and other family members inspired respondents to see what they could do, moving them toward greater possibilities for themselves. Backed by these familial assets, students maintained a personal vision, discipline, and perseverance. As the majority of the sample stated, respondents "would not have made it without their families.

### **Converting Navigational and Social Capital into Educational Outcomes**

All participants demonstrated navigational capital, defined as skills and competences for navigating institutional settings on behalf of oneself or others (Yosso, 2005). This form of cultural wealth is developed and accumulated through transactions and negotiations with institutions that are not receptive to the needs of people of color (Yosso, 2005). Respondents' narratives showed a range of navigational strategies, from maneuvering through discriminatory environments in education systems, negotiating bureaucratic constraints, to advocating for themselves or their families within school settings. In this study, navigational capital interacted with social capital. Social capital is defined as the ability to create or to tap into family relationships and community networks that provide help and support in specific social situations (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Combined, these assets, skills, and strategies of participants' navigational and social capital were converted in educational outcomes. Conversion strategies included generating new networks of peers, developing purposeful connections with faculty, and sharing knowledge of critical institutional resources.

Peer networks were sources of resilience and support for respondents as they traversed higher education institutions. In several cases, friends were crucial sources of information and continuous support, even influencing the decision to seek a graduate program at a particular institution, as exemplified by the comments below:

... we took all our classes together, we help each other out, we called each other with homework questions, so we both helped each other, so that was a motivation to me.

Actually, the reason I found [this program] and chose [this university] was through some friends of mine from my undergrad program. Two of them had signed up for the MOT [masters of occupational therapy] program here. I kept in touch with them...

Perhaps even more importantly, respondents had honed in practical skills for cooperative learning during their undergraduate studies. They formed study groups, shared and compared notes, recorded lectures and shared them with those who missed the lectures, and provided encouragement and moral support to each other. They brought these skills into their graduate program to form new peer systems, manage academic work, and therefore convert these forms of capital into educational outcomes.

Developing purposeful connections with faculty also resulted in important educational outcomes. Respondents pursuing graduate degrees in communication disorders, comprising half of the sample, were receiving a federal grant that provided funding for training bilingual, minority, and ability-challenged speech-language pathologists. These students were selected from the university's undergraduate programs through a competitive process. This process included recommendation by faculty attesting that the applicant could accomplish graduate work. Hence having or establishing an ongoing relationship with faculty was fundamental to getting into the graduate program.

Connections with faculty facilitated respondents' understanding of the application procedures. Some respondents, who failed to apply on time or were rejected in their first attempt, were encouraged by faculty to try again. In some cases faculty worked with these applicants preparing them to re-apply, recommending additional courses or letters of reference that would substantiate the candidates' abilities, or simply advising the student to "stick" to the process.

Once they were awarded the funding, these students became part of a cohort, and were required to work closely with faculty. Although, as participants indicated, working closely with faculty "added extra pressure to succeed," it brought numerous academic and professional benefits. These respondents felt that they were fortunate to have these connections. They understood that a critical element of their survival in a graduate program was accessing information, including information of how to finance it through grants. They also appreciated receiving the focused attention granted through participation in the cohort. As members of the "grant cohort," they were lined up with faculty mentors, guided to opportunities in the field of communication disorders, and connected with tutors who helped them improve their writing and overcome other academic challenges. Additionally, as a student put it, they could "stick together during the whole program." "You can go to the professor's office," one student commented, "and their door is always open, you can ask them anything." Another student described receiving what is known as intrusive advising, a proactive approach to reach students who might not seek help on their own (Earl, 1988). Although intrusive advising is more characteristic of undergraduate programs, these graduate students recognized the value of it. "[The professor] pushed us by email, mail, and phone calls," said one participant. "She knew what was going on before we did."

Respondents who were not part of this cohort found other ways to establish purposeful relationships with instructors in and out of the classroom. These connections were perceived as important for these participants' academic, personal, and professional goals. For example, a participant who was struggling with a course for weeks mustered the courage to approach the professor. Once she explained her difficulties with the course, she and the professor developed a plan of study that entailed regular meetings outside the classroom to cover content that was unclear. Others found faculty whose life trajectory they identified with. For example, the



director of the Writing Center became a strong ally and supporter for one of the respondents who had delayed her entry into the graduate program.

I met [the director of the Writing Center] through the Latino Center for Excellence and she told me that she uhm went back later on in life and got her degree and uhm that really...surprised me...Because I [had] that mentality...the typical student goes to high school and then they go to college and then they get their master's...

Responses also indicated that establishing significant connections with faculty was part of the process of mastering the culture of a graduate program and learning how to be a graduate student. Students' narratives show that faculty played a fundamental role in this processes. This is consistent with findings demonstrating that successful students use instructors as institutional agents that assist them in accessing vital resources (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Tinto, 1975).

Drawing on the social and navigational capitals accumulated via peer networks and meaningful connections with faculty, several participants in this study sought to disseminate this knowledge of institutional resources. This way of giving back has been identified by Yosso (2005) and others (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001) as a way for communities of color to preserve the value of these social networks. In turn, these networks continue to make possible the accumulation of more navigational and social capital. For instance, one student recalled her efforts to finance her graduate studies in occupational therapy. After accumulating considerable navigational and social wealth, including information systems (who does what in the institution) and critical institutional resources (i.e., grants and scholarships), she sought to disseminate this essential knowledge to other students in the program:

I [decided] to look for the scholarships...I really ran all over this university. I went to the Latino Center, I went online, uhm, they told me about the tuition waiver, and then I found out about the SDS scholarship...through another student. But the information was not right there...I had to really search and dig deep. After that, I was talking to another one of my partners in class, he's Hispanic, and he said: 'they never mentioned anything about scholarships or anything,' and I told him, you didn't apply for any scholarships? ...You know, I had already applied...I knew the deadlines and everything....[he didn't know where to go]...So, I came down here with him and... you know, if I ...had not told him...he wouldn't have known...

How did participants convert navigational and social capital into educational outcomes? They did so by transforming their prior experiences of discrimination into valuable insights and confidence, establishing new networks of peers and faculty, disseminating institutional knowledge, and taking advantage of educational funding for bilingual students going into health professions.

### **Converting Resistant Capital into Civic Engagement**

Yosso (2005) defines resistant capital as skills and oppositional actions used to challenge inequality and injustice. Responses showed that participants had accumulated a significant amount of resistant capital throughout their undergraduate years (and indeed throughout their school history) and that this capital was a crucial part of achieving a baccalaureate education. Participants reported having used this cultural wealth to fight marginalization and stereotypical assumptions about their lack of academic ability or motivation to complete college. Several

indicated that they had used resistance skills to defy isolation in high school or in college. Others who dropped out of school or community college at some point in their academic trajectory, resisted the notion that they were drop outs, a resistance skill also found in prior studies (Burciaga & Erbstein, 2010). Resisting action sometimes included convincing themselves that they had the ability and the right to go to college.

How did study participants convert resistant capital into civic engagement? As graduate students who no longer had to prove their academic ability or commitment to education, participants mobilized their resistance capital through more complex strategies to achieve broader goals. Yosso (2005) asserts that resistance capital includes the various forms of cultural wealth that can be passed on for transforming oppressive structures. In this study, respondents recognized that their academic achievement placed them in a unique position to support other Latina/o students. Participants engaged in civic life and worked to transform oppressive structures by assisting other Latina/os through mentoring, tutoring, and volunteering.

The majority of respondents were engaged in some type of formal or informal mentoring of undergraduate students. Formal mentoring consisted of volunteering or working at the university's Writing Center and in programs sponsored by the Students Life department. Those who worked earned a stipend, but the monetary value of the activity was minuscule, so money did not appear to be their motivation. Although the Writing Center regularly assisted students with their writing projects and assignments, the Center had no bilingual personnel. These respondents felt compelled to contribute to the success of the Latina/o students referred to the Center due to being bilingual and bicultural. They knew that they could provide a service to Latinas/os that the institution did not.

In addition, some respondents were involved with the university's Latino Center for Excellence, which attracted many Latina/o students seeking mentors and tutors. Many mentees were at risk of dropping out of college or had been referred for remedial services due to language barriers, weak academic performance, or lack of understanding of what it takes to succeed in college. Informal mentoring included helping struggling Latina/o students to develop test-taking skills, sharing information about financial aid options, and advising about how to approach and relate to faculty, or what courses to take in a given semester. Respondents saw their support as a factor to tip the inequality balance in favor of those students. They recognized themselves in their mentees, and saw these students as isolated, as they themselves once were.

Other types of informal mentoring included volunteering at non-for-profit organizations in their community. Civic engagement is defined by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) as "working to make a difference in the civic life of [the] community..." and "...[participating] in activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community" (Ehrlich, 2000, p. vi). Respondents' civic engagement was as much about personal commitment as it was about influencing others and their environments. Just as they were once influenced and supported by others (i.e., professionals in the field who inspired them, family narratives and stories, faculty mentors), these respondents believed they could influence and support others as well. By converting academic and institutional expertise, language proficiency, and cultural competency into civic participation, respondents became more connected with their community, and created positive change in the institution. By passing on the cultural, social and institutional knowledge they had amassed, respondents' resistance took a 'transformative form' (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). In addition, this conversion resulted in greater integration for these respondents into the campus life, as they became recognized for their bilingual, cultural, and academic aptitudes. This, in turn, affirmed their self-confidence and strengthened their motivation to continue contributing to the institutional community.

Mentoring of undergraduate Latina/o students was a way to teach these students to

challenge perceived or actual limits. Hence, this capital was converted into civic engagement by aligning participants' commitment to "give back" with the institutional mission of responsible citizenship. One-fourth of participants also engaged in civic engagement with the broader community, including coaching high school students, math tutoring, and becoming officials for student organizations at the national level.

Resistance capital sometimes was demonstrated through challenging inequality and discrimination through raising one's voice and speaking up in favor of oneself or on behalf of others. One of the participants, Angela, described how she directly challenged her father-in-law for criticizing the role reversal in her household. Angela's husband took care of the household chores and the children while she completed her graduate studies in occupational therapy. In another example, Enrique commented on how he spoke up in class when his fellow classmates laughed at another student's accent.

## Discussion

The results presented here support existing findings concerning Latinas/os' community cultural wealth, or cultural capital. This study also advances unique findings relative to how Latina/o graduate students convert community cultural wealth into educational outcomes, occupational outcomes, and civic engagement. At the time of this writing, with the exception of one student who dropped out of her program due to work conflicts, all other respondents had either graduated or were in the process of completing internship requirements for graduation.

All forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) were found and analyzed in this study. Although specific assets might have had more prominence at a given stage of participants' higher education trajectory, as Yosso (2005) suggests, the forms of cultural capital converged and interacted with one another. The combination of these capitals and the accumulated experience of participants demonstrated that the conversion process was active, incremental, and sustained over time. Conversion was also predicated on respondents' contexts and structural constraints, as suggested by Morrow (1999), and sometimes included using one form of capital to acquire another. For example, although their social and economic position constrained their access to capital, they combined aspirational and linguistic capitals to convert dreams and hopes into successful educational outcomes and career attainment (career capital). This process involved: (a) intentionally integrating life experiences, (b) establishing pragmatic and realistic goals for themselves, and (c) capitalizing on certain personal attributes. Being inspired by a health care professional and the desire to make a contribution to their underserved families and communities were significant life experiences scaffolding this conversion. Participants were attracted to health care professions based on their desire to help others achieve a better life. However, they were even more interested in "making a difference" by offsetting the lack of specialized, culturally competent resources and services for Latina/os. Pragmatic and realistic goals provided a continuous focus, as respondents set out to "carve out a niche" for themselves, integrating bilingual and bicultural skills with professional training.

Some studies have found that families represent an obstacle to undergraduate Latina/o college students (Terenzini & Springer, 1996). Other studies, however, found that mothers played a positive role in their daughters' success in graduate programs (Ceja, 2004; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). The graduate students in the present study did not see their families as barriers, but as contributors. These findings revealed the more nuanced characteristics of familial networks that influenced the attainment of academic and professional goals. Despite the fact that participants' parents had little knowledge of higher education, familial capital was a crucial source of support. Although the role fathers and spouses play in students' success has been less recognized in the literature, their influence was highlighted in this study. As role models and life advisors, fathers were critical in the transmission of familial values such as

sacrifice, altruism, hard work, resilience, self-reliance, and responsibility toward extended family. Husbands often put their own development and plans on hold, providing the flexibility their partners needed to complete graduate school. These counter-stories dispute the myth of Latino patriarchal family and the machismo stereotype often associated with Latino men. Findings also demonstrated that participants transformed familial capital into educational and career outcomes by developing congruence between core values of accomplishment, achievement, and altruism (crucial components of their familial capital), and their attitudes and behaviors. These included motivating themselves to secure new or additional knowledge, and acquiring the necessary skills to attain the career they envisioned. This was especially true for those who decided to go into a health care career after completing undergraduate work in another field.

In their study of undergraduate Latina/o students, Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen (2012) examined students' "trajectory into, through, and beyond college" (p. 181). They found that maintaining ties with their families positively influenced students' adjustment to college. On the other hand, family relationships were not a relevant source of capital beyond students' baccalaureate education. In the current study, however, family ties influenced the decision to enter a graduate program and continued to be relevant for participants throughout graduate school. Participants' counter-stories revealed that, although they created new social networks as well, they continued to rely on familial capital to strategize their success (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012) as graduate students. Familial capital embedded in this network fostered a sense of purpose and the desire for self-improvement, as students' aspirations were nurtured by their families' aspirations for them. It directed them to persist and study harder, and provided strength when respondents felt hopeless or doubtful, or when their dreams of graduating and becoming a health care professional seemed a distant probability. For example, some students got into the graduate program literally without knowing how they were going to pay tuition, care for their children, or meet required internship hours. For the majority of participants, family members marshaled behind them and made it possible to continue. These findings are consistent with Gofen's (2007) "family resilience" (p. 5), a concept that emphasizes the importance of nonmaterial family resources, including priorities, behaviors, and values in shaping and supporting their offspring's higher education goals. Hence, although familial networks did not provide career or professional connections (as this capital is traditionally conceptualized), it was nevertheless fundamental. This is also consistent with Gofen's (2007) value of "family solidarity," which "enables the members of the family to take a chance without being afraid of failure" (Gofen, 2007, p. 22). Thus, investing in the student and getting her or him through graduate school became a whole family undertaking, requiring drive, discipline, patience, and risk-taking.

In this study, participants converted their navigational and social capital into educational outcomes by: a) generating new networks of peers after getting into the graduate program, b) developing purposeful connections with faculty (or strengthening the connections established during their undergraduate years), and c) sharing knowledge of critical institutional resources with other students. Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen (2012) found that students' networks did not extend beyond their undergraduate years. The current study advances this finding by elucidating the significance of faculty on participants' pursuit of a career in health care. Faculty networks played a critical role in nourishing students' passionate but often imprecise, career plans, by working with them to get into a graduate program. This was evident with 75% of the students in this sample, who completed their undergraduate program and moved into master's work because of the active involvement of, and guidance from, faculty.

Purposeful connections with faculty facilitated the acquiring of additional capital needed to get into graduate school and educated students about opportunities in their field. Other research has highlighted the need to examine power issues and dynamics within the

institutionalized contexts where capital conversion can occur (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Faculty is an essential component of how the institutional context can support or hinder students' success in higher education settings. The instrumental relations with faculty (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995) reported in this study transmitted valuable knowledge to students, scaffolding their plans academically from the undergraduate to the graduate program, and facilitating their professional trajectory. The resources and opportunities mobilized and transmitted by faculty as institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995), including grants (and all the entitlements of being in the "grant cohort") and educational and career opportunities, exerted direct influence on participants' conversion action.

This study also shows that helping their peers to access resources (scholarships, grants, helpful faculty) was as much about using navigational capital as it was about cultivating additional social capital. For example, participants used their skills and knowledge accumulated during their undergraduate years (navigational capital) to generate social capital in the graduate program, by receiving and becoming part of networks of support for others. An essential converting strategy was building alliances and networks through disseminating knowledge of institutional resources, essentially becoming cultural brokers (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Two thirds of respondents in this study converted resistant capital into civic engagement by serving the institution, their community, or both. They did so by embracing values of collective responsibility and transforming these values in behaviors and attitudes that promoted the good of other students and the institution. Values, in and of themselves, however, might not have been sufficient to account for this conversion. Others have found that personality traits are important contributors to engagement in civic actions, and that individuals' values mediate the relationship between personality traits and civic engagement (Kanacri, Rosa, & Di Giunta, 2012).

Personality traits (McCrae & Costa, 1990) are consistent and habitual patterns of behavior, thought, and action. These include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience, though other models have emerged in the social psychology field. Fentress and Collopy (2011) found that some personality traits (i.e., shyness) might influence first-generation students' ability to access social capital on campus. The literature on personality traits is extensive and cannot be adequately discussed here, but researchers found a correlation between civic actions and extraversion, agreeableness (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Schwartz, 1999), and openness to experience (Bekkers, 2005). These traits are congruent with values of sociability, altruism and cooperation, and being open to various experiences, all of which were demonstrated by the counter-stories reported in this study. Although this study did not explore the conversion of civic engagement into capital, values and personality traits appear to be relevant variables to the discussion of how capital is accumulated.

In their study of the accumulation and differentiating features of career capital for knowledge workers, Lamb and Sutherland (2010) found that "consistency in values" (p. 303) and emotional intelligence (EQ) are key factors in the accumulation of career capital. Emotional intelligence constitutes the ability to identify, assess, and manage oneself, relationships, and the environment effectively (Goleman, 2005). It includes self-awareness and confidence, social awareness and skill in navigating social contexts and influencing others, and recognition of one's strengths and weaknesses (Goleman, 2005). In this study, both value consistency and EQ were essential for the conversion of cultural capital into educational outcomes and career attainment.

For some participants, converting resistant capital necessitated integration into the campus services and programs. Research on integration and acculturation in higher education

has focused mostly on undergraduate students (Tinto, 1993), purporting that integration entails a process of separation from previous communities in order to adjust and achieve academic success. However, in her study of Northern Arapaho women who earned undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Wyoming, Lindley (2009) found that a transcultural perspective better explained American Indians' successful college outcomes. Transculturation is a form of resistance where individuals identify with their own culture, but also incorporate beliefs, values, and norms of another culture (Ortiz-Torres, Serrano-Garcia, & Torres-Burgos, 2000). Similarly in this study, respondents did not renounce cherished personal, familial, or cultural values in order to integrate, but broadened their integration to express transformational resistance (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Hence, they used their mentoring, tutoring, and bilingual skills to help Latina/o students who were at risk of dropping out, passed on their institutional knowledge about vital financial resources, and continued to sustain hope for themselves and their families. These resistant actions were vital to their sense of responsibility and cultural integrity, as they utilized their knowledge and experience to help guide others (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

### **Recommendations for Practice and Future Research**

Results showed support for existing research regarding Latina/o students' community cultural wealth. Students from other cultural backgrounds might employ some of the strategies described here. For example, in his study of undergraduate African American male students, Harper (2006) found that those who succeeded in college developed significant relationships with faculty and peers and had extensive leadership involvement on campus. On the other hand, this study contributes unique and nuanced findings about how Latinas/os graduate students convert cultural capital into educational outcomes, career attainment, and civic engagement. Conversion of capital is not accomplished with a single action or through the influence of a single factor. It requires discipline, motivation, intentional action, planning, and self-knowledge, but also requires supports in institutional, familial, and personal contexts. For Latina/o graduate students, awareness of one's strengths and challenges, personal vision, and relationship building at all levels of the institution, will contribute to academic achievement and professional outcomes. Capitalizing on personal attributes, such as bilingual ability, might also contribute to their ability to serve a wider range of client populations.

Studies indicate that increasing the number of Latinas/os in health care professions is an effective way of addressing health disparities. The findings in this study suggested that career aspirations developed early and were cultivated within a context where, despite limited opportunity, health professionals helped shape the hopes and intentions of Latinas/os. Hence health care professionals have the potential to influence young individuals' interest in the health care field, as experts and mentors and, therefore, ensuring that their aspirations are not fleeting and their goals not temporary.

Advisers, career counselors are in a position to better recognize forms of community cultural wealth that Latina/o students possess, but also to support their efforts converting capital into educational and professional outcomes. Providing a broad range of financial support that would allow for a seamless transition between undergraduate and graduate programs can be vital for both recruiting and retaining Latina/o students. More research is needed on the mechanisms and structures that support this transition for Latina/o students. Also, more research is needed that focus on the capital students amass during their undergraduate studies that can be converted into the capital necessary to complete graduate programs. Faculty members also have a unique role in supporting Latina/o students. Higher education institutions might consider training faculty to advise and mentor Latina/o students in ways that help these students gain confidence and competence. Personalized attention from faculty can have a profound impact on

students' conversion of navigational capital into educational outcomes. Further research should investigate the mediating role of these relationships on students' ability to pursue career goals.

For several respondents, attending a community college played an important role in furthering their aspirations by providing an opportunity to learn more about health professions early in their development. Since 60% of Latinas/os begin their postsecondary education at community colleges, these institutions are well positioned to help Latinos merge their academic goals with their professional aspirations.

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#### **Article Citation**

Zell, M. C. (2014). Converting capital: The experiences of Latinas/os in graduate health care programs. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(85), 1-26. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR19/zell85.pdf>

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