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EXPERIENCES OF LATINA FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS:  
EXPLORING RESOURCES SUPPORTING THE BALANCING OF ACADEMIC  
PURSUITS AND FAMILY LIFE

A Dissertation Presented

by

HERCILIA B. CORONA-ORDOÑEZ

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,  
University of Massachusetts Boston,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

June 2013

Clinical Psychology Program

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## ABSTRACT

### EXPERIENCES OF LATINA FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS: EXPLORING RESOURCES SUPPORTING THE BALANCING OF ACADEMIC PURSUITS AND FAMILY LIFE

Hercilia B. Corona-Ordoñez, M.A., University of Massachusetts Boston

Directed by Professor Ester Shapiro

This study used a qualitative interview approach and thematic analysis (Braune and Clark, 2006) to interview first generation college student Latinas, exploring their experiences with higher education, their navigation/negotiation of resources for academic success and for wellness of self and family, and barriers they face as they attempt to both safeguard self and family wellness and reach their academic goals. It also directly explored the potential resources participants would find useful and ways in which colleges/universities might support them in these pursuits.

With this method, this study identified 6 major themes in the lives of first generation college student Latinas: 1) *Contextual stressors / systemic disadvantage*, involving the tendency for participants to be at a disadvantage within higher education than mainstream society, including participant's being the targets of racism/negative stereotypes, complications related to documentation concerns, their need to navigate the college environment without a map, their family's limited understanding of higher education, their need to carry a heavy work load, and their need to attend to family obligations; 2) *education as an obligation to family-motivation*, involving participant's tendency to think of a college education as the passport to family socioeconomic mobility

and wellness, as a way to repay their parents for their sacrifices, and as a way to complete a goal their mothers started but were unable to finish; 3) *the chosen one/to be a role model- motivation*, involving the tendency for participants to hold a sense of responsibility to live up to high expectations as the first in their families to enter college, to break negative stereotypes about Latinas and higher education, and to serve as positive role models to their family, community, and their own children; 4) *Children, present and future*, involving the tendency for participants with parental obligations to place these obligations above all else and to identify their children as a principal source of motivation, and the tendency for participants to postpone having children until after they achieve their academic goals; 5) *impact of important encounters*, involving participants' tendency to identify positive and negative encounters they experienced as important in their development and in the balancing of family and educational goals, to identify the importance of influences of external cultures in their educational trajectory, and to voice a need for mentorship in higher education; and 6) *inner strengths and goals*, involving the tendency for participants to turn to their faith for spiritual support and turn to their church for social support and as a source of trustworthy help, and identify personal qualities they experienced as sources of strength, including *Paciencia* (patience), *Perseverancia* (perseverance), *orgullo* (Pride), *rebeldia* (rebelliousness/defiance), and *sacrificio* (ability to sacrifice). These conclusions highlight the ways that, for the Latinas interviewed, education is thought of in intergenerational terms, where there are legacies of the past and future. Participants expressed an understanding of what they owe their families, and also consider what they will be able to offer their children and how they might contribute to their family's future.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Sergio, and to our son, Santiago. Sergio unwaveringly supported me in pursuing my education—seeing potential in me that no one else did. I will forever be grateful. Santiago accompanied me through this thesis, learning too soon how to share me with this work. You are both my inspiration.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Specific Aims**

The study used in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to explore the experiences of Latina first generation college students with higher education, their navigation/negotiation of resources for academic success and for wellness of self and family, and the barriers participants face as they attempt to both safeguard self and family wellness and reach their academic goals. It also directly explored the potential resources participants would find useful and ways in which colleges/universities might support them in these pursuits.

This study adopted sociopolitically informed cultural and ecosystemic models, along with participatory methods, with the goal of documenting the voices of an ordinarily understudied community of women, and bringing these voices to the scientific community's knowledge base (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). This guiding ecosystemic framework highlights the influence of unequal exposure to stressors and unequal barriers to resources, interacting in multiple systems, on both adaptive and maladaptive outcomes (Perreira et al, 2006; Prilleltensky, 2012; Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky, 2003, 2006; and Shapiro, 2005, 2008). Through in-depth interviews, this project documented the experiences of Latina first generation college students in their own words, providing a rich description of their experiences in higher education, the

meaning these experiences have for them, and their strategies for successfully navigating educational and family worlds. Consistent with Dill and Zambrana's work in intersectionality (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Zambrana & Dill, 2006; Zambrana & MacDonald 2009), the study addressed the need to explore the variation in the lived experience of women of color, examining intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, immigration history, documentation status, and gender, reformulating familiar thinking about Latina's experiences in higher education. Differing from previous studies exploring Latina educational achievement, this study considered first generation college student Latina's experiences in higher education, their exposure to stressors and access and use of resources as they impact their educational pursuits and family obligations simultaneously. This approach conceptualized stressors and resources as impacting these women's ability to successfully balance/negotiate these two important life domains. Further, through thematic analysis, this study highlighted coping themes, and specific resources needed at the college/university level to support these women in successfully balancing family obligations and educational aspirations for their academic success.

Aim 1 : To document the narratives of Latina first generation college students' gendered experiences with balancing family and educational aspirations.

Aim 2 : To explore participants' navigation/negotiation of resources for balancing academic pursuits and the safekeeping of self and family wellness.

Aim 3 : To document the barriers these women face and the resources/supports they turn to as they attempt to balance safeguarding wellness of self and family and reaching their academic goals.

Aim 4: To explore potential resources that these women would find useful and ways in which colleges/universities might support these students in their attempt to simultaneously reach their academic goals and fulfill their family obligations.

### **Background and Significance**

Latinos, representative of a heterogeneous group diverse in both ethnic and racial make-up, are rapidly changing the ethnic composition of the United States. They have replaced African Americans as the largest racial/ethnic minority group, constituting 16% of the U.S. population with a population of 50.5 million people, and accounting for more than half of the growth in the total US population between the years 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This demographic trend is expected to continue burgeoning as Latinos are also the fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the United States, projected to constitute 20.1% of the U.S. population by 2030 and 30% by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Latino's enrollment in higher education also continues to grow. Latinos represented 11% of students enrolled in higher education in 1990, experienced a 30% increase in enrollment between the years 2000 and 2005, a 24% increase between 2009 and 2010, and a 15% increase from 2010 to 2011 alone. With this marked increase, Latinos accounted for almost 75% of the growth in college student enrollments between 2010 and 2011 (Fry & Lopez 2012; Fry, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2007b). The increase experienced between 2010 and 2011 also make Latinos the largest group of ethnic minorities in higher education, for the first time replacing Black students. Also for the first time, Latino's representation in higher education matches their representation in the overall population, as they now make up 16.5% of the nation's 18-24 year old college students. This demonstrates remarkable growth, since as recently as

2006 Latinos accounted for only 11% of 18-24 year old college students. This shift in college enrollment follows record breaking numbers of young Latino students eligible for college, with similar growth experienced in high school completion (Fry & Lopez 2012; Swanson, 2012).

Given this marked increase in Latino's college enrollment, Latino's unfavorable completion rates are alarming. One longitudinal study found that over 80% of Latinos who enrolled in a 4 year college or university left before receiving their degree (Solberg, Scott & Villareal, 1997). Less than 10% of Latinos graduated from a 4 year college or university in the year 2000 (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000), and only 8.3% of bachelor's degrees awarded in 2009 were awarded to Latinos, compared to 9.8% awarded to African Americans and 73.8% awarded to white students (College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, 2011). This figure has only slightly improved to 9% of bachelor degrees awarded to Latino students in 2010, compared to 71% awarded to non-Hispanic Whites, 10% to non-Hispanic Blacks and 7% to non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islanders (Snyder & Dillow, 2012). In fact, in 2009 the proportion of Latinos graduating from colleges and universities had not improved since 1990, unlike improved completion rates for both European Americans and Black Americans (Gloria, 2009). Similarly, recent reports suggest that Latino college completion stands at 19.2%, compared to the national average of 41.1% (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2011). These alarming statistics draw attention to a system that has fallen short of meeting the needs of this growing population.

### **Focus on the special experience of Latino Women**

Of Latinos, women have increased in their representation in higher education more rapidly than their male Latino counterparts, accounting for 60% of all Latinos in higher education (Fry & Lopez 2012; NCES, 2006). Women have also been repeatedly identified as carrying a disproportionate burden when it comes to family wellbeing, “bearing a greater responsibility for the care of others with fewer resources throughout the life cycle” (Shapiro, & Santa, 2005). They are usually not only responsible for their own wellness needs, but are also the ones primarily responsible for fulfilling these wellness needs for their children and family (Chavira-Prado, 1992; Sy & Romero, 2008). In addition, Latina students often experience conflicts around familial expectations and gender-roles, as traditionally the primary expectation for women is getting married and having children (Villarruel, Carlo, Grau, Azmitia, Cabrera, & Chahin, 2009 & Hurtado, Saenz, Santos & Cabrera, 2008). In fact, recent research has identified these culturally driven gender role conflicts as contributors to Latinas’ increased risk for suicide attempts, where one in five Latinas attempts suicide, double the rate than African American and White peers (Zayas, Lester, Cabassa, and Fortuna, 2005). Yet feminist Latina perspectives also suggest that the confrontation and creative resolution of these gendered cultural complexities can result in distinctive strengths that have also been underexplored in the social science literature (Gloria and Castellanos, 2012).

Gender based expectations and obligations experienced by Latinas are often described in the psychology and educational literature through the important cultural constructs of *Familismo* and *Marianismo*. *Familismo* refers to the importance of "solidarity towards members of the family, as well as the notion of the family as an extension of self" (Calzada et al, 2012; Cortes, 1995, Villarruel, et al., 2009). While

family cohesion can serve as a resource, family conflict seems to undermine *familismo*'s protective qualities (Calzada et al, 2012; Smokowski et.al., 2007). The related construct of *Marianismo*, a counterpart to stereotyped male gender roles of "machismo", describes a set of cultural norms that dictate the role of females within traditional Latino culture. *Marianismo* is said to hold up Latinas to the standard of the Virgin Mary, in Catholic tradition (Rivera-Marano, 2000). It encompasses the concepts of self-sacrifice and self-renouncement, sacred duty to family, passivity, honor, sexual morality, caretaking and the Latina's role as a mother (Rivera-Marano, 2000; Cofresi, 2002). *Marianismo*'s call for Latina women to sacrifice their personal goals and aspirations for the benefit of their family, to place marrying and having children as a priority, to not "become an old maid", and to unwaveringly ensure the wellbeing of their families. Recent work on marianismo emphasizes the diversity and complexity of Latina experiences depending on immigration and acculturation status, religious background, sexual preferences, education and other factors. However, even for more acculturated Latinas, the literature suggests that these cultural constructs continue to influence gendered cultural expectations and potentially to impact their experiences within higher education (Gil & Vasquez, 1996; Cofresi, 2002 & Villarruel, et al., 2009).

Related to these important cultural constructs, research exploring the experience of undocumented Mexican immigrant undergraduates found that Latina students experience the negotiation of gender roles with their parents as a stressor (Muñoz, 2008). Additional stressors include home environments where Latina students are expected to care for younger children (Olverez, 2006), exposure to violence near their homes and schools, and attending under-resourced schools where 4-year-college going rates were

less than 10% (Abrego, 2006). Not surprisingly, Latina undergraduates have repeatedly been found to endorse significantly higher distress levels than their male counterparts (Gandara & Osugi, 2004 & Perez, 2009). This research begins to make clear that although Latinas have increased their college enrollment rates more rapidly than Latino males, they also face substantial stressors and demands.

Key psychosociocultural stressors that have emerged in the research literature as important in the experience of Latina college students can be organized into three areas of concern: cultural incongruity, institutional marginalization, and documentation-related concerns. At the heart of cultural incongruity concerns lay Latina's cultural values consistent with both *Familismo* and *Marianismo* (Zayas, L., Gulbas, L., Fedoravicius, N. & Cabassa, L., 2010). These cultural value sets often leave Latina college students with the challenge of negotiating the inherent cultural incongruity between a university's values, based on European-American male values, and their own personal culturally-influenced values (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). While many Latinas value collectivism, cooperation, and family ties (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002), they must negotiate this value set with the contrasting values of academia that reward competition and individualism (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003; Torres, 2001). This divergence in values has been shown to have a negative impact on Latina's wellbeing and academic achievement. The stress associated with this conflict promotes feelings of alienation, despondence and isolation for Latina students. It has also been linked to academic non-persistence (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez & Rosales, 2005; Gloria, 1997).

While Latinas work towards integrating their personal values with those of academia they are often faced with an additional challenge, feelings of marginalization.



Key characteristics that unify Latinas are often devalued both in university settings and society as a whole. These include: their ethnicity, race, gender, socioeconomic status, bilingualism, biculturalism, the education level of their parents, among others. The specific ways that Latinas experience marginalization within the university setting include experiences with racism, sexism, stereotyping, and a broad misunderstanding of their culture and challenges (Rodriguez, 2000). When entering academia, a male-dominated world that has been historically European-American, Latinas are bombarded with explicit and subtle messages reminding them that they do not belong, because of their gender, their ethnicity, their socioeconomic status, etc. The intersection of these multiple race--, class--, and gender-based negative messages lead to an experience of “multiple marginality” (Cuadraz, 1996).

Research on the impact of institutional marginalization on Latinos has confirmed that Latinos feel that they don't belong in the college community (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). Studies by Hurtado (1994) and the more recent work of Gonzalez (2002), also found that Latinos felt a general lack of understanding and tolerance of Latino culture on their campus. In Hurtado's (1994) study, almost 70% of participants endorsed feeling unwelcome because of their culture. This finding is consistent with Cardoza's (1991) study with Latinas, which found that students felt that their institution discounted culture, which resulted in their feeling unwelcomed and alienated. In a review of Latino student educational experiences, Hurtado, Cervantes and Eccleston (2010) emphasize the importance of seeing linguistic and cultural diversity as educational strengths and sources of success rather than deficits and reasons for exclusion.

Institutional experiences of marginalization can have a devastating effect on

Latinas' academic performance and their wellbeing. For Latina students, especially, stereotype-driven low expectations and antagonistic attitudes within a university setting can serve to trigger existing insecurities regarding their academic preparation (Rodriguez, 2000)—sabotaging Latina's chances for academic success. The alienation resulting from institutional marginalization can also grow into feelings of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and even suicidal behavior (Castillo et al, 2004).

For a subgroup of Latina students, documentation concerns intensify feelings of alienation. The recent Presidential Executive decree that undocumented young people (up to age 32) brought to the United States by their parents and enrolled in college or the army would qualify for deferred deportation has brought attention to this population of students. Pew Hispanic Center (2012) estimates that as many as 1.7 million young Latinos qualify for this category. Further, an additional Latino subgroup, citizen children of undocumented parents, experiences significant barriers to accessing social resources (Suarez-Orozco et al, 2011). Some states, including Florida and New Jersey, require that students confirm their parent's legal documentation status before they can qualify for in-state college tuition. Undocumented students, or students with undocumented loved ones, live in constant fear of being discovered. Recent research indicates that over half of all Latinos live in fear that someone close to them could be deported (NCLR, 2010).

The tendency for young adults to learn about their undocumented status for the first time as they transition to adulthood can have a profound impact on young Latina's life trajectory, where many are faced with having to manage what Gonzales (2011) calls "learning to be illegal". This critical transition has been identified as a period of increased distress, as young adults begin to understand new limitations in the context of secrecy

and fear. This transition also places many undocumented young adults at risk of not only being deported but also becoming involved with the justice system as they are forced to make decisions like obtaining false driver's licenses and social security numbers (Suarez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi & Suarez-Orozco, 2011). Learning of these new limitations undoubtedly has an impact on Latina's academic and professional aspirations. In a recent study, Gonzalez (2011) interviewed 150 undocumented Mexican immigrants and explored what he conceptualizes as three transitional periods, discovery of status, "learning to be illegal", and coping. He found that while some of the participants of his study lowered their goals after learning of documentation related limitations, others were able to access resources to overcome the barriers created by their documentation status. Abrego's (2006) study of undocumented Latino adolescents similarly found that some students reported lowering their aspirations and a drop in their motivation and academic performance after learning about their legal status. These students described fearing that their documentation status would lead to undesirable jobs and limited options, regardless of their academic efforts. Previous research exploring undocumented students' college experiences has also highlighted worrisome emotional concerns of undocumented Latino college students, including: fear, loneliness, isolation, depression, frustration, helplessness, and shame (Dozier, 1993; DeLeon, 2005 & Muñoz, 2008, in Perez, 2009).

### **Latina First Generation College Students**

This study focused specifically on Latina women who are also first generation college students, a group demanding of additional attention. While research confirms that the enrollment of first generation college students has sharply increased since the 1920s,

little has been written on the experiences of these students (Orbe, 2004). Latinos, specifically, are more likely to be first generation college students, with 71% of Latinos enrolled in college during the 2003-2004 school year being the first in their families to strive for a bachelor's degree (Santiago & Cunningham, 2005). What is more, first generation college students in general are subject to less than favorable educational outcomes—they are more likely to drop out during their first semester, not return for a second year, and have lower first-semester grades than students whose parents have a college education (Orbe, 2004). It should be noted that these patterns do not occur in a vacuum, and are highly impacted by these students' unique situation, which will be discussed at length in the next section.

Latina first generation college students often face a number of challenges related to being an ethnic minority, women, and the first in their families to enter higher education. These challenges set the stage for a unique, and disproportionately burdensome, college experience. Latina's experience of incongruence, discussed at length above, is further amplified for Latinas who are also the first in their family to enter higher education. Research on first generation college students supports the idea that these students often feel like "outsiders at school as well as at home", where their constant balance of home and college life leads to "trying to live simultaneously in two vastly different worlds" (Orbe, 2004, Pg. 133). Concerns of institutional marginalization are also amplified for first generation college student Latinas, since first generation college students are always forced to "negotiate issues of marginality—on both ends—as they work to bridge the worlds of their homes/families/neighborhoods and college life" (Orbe, 2004). In addition, this special group of students is often faced with a lack of parental

guidance regarding academic pursuits, a substantial financial burden, familial obligations, and sometimes limitations that are raised by their immigration status.

As the first in their families to enter higher education, these students lack the benefit of having parental experience to serve them as a guide. This puts them at a disadvantage both when preparing to initially enter college and throughout their college experience, when they might benefit from guidance regarding what is expected of them (Orbe, 2004; Riehl, 1994).

Beyond lacking parental guidance regarding academic pursuits, first generation college students, Latinos in particular, are more likely to be impacted by financial difficulty and burdensome workloads. Latinas are negatively impacted by the significant disparities in socioeconomic status still plaguing this minority group, with almost 30% of Latino families living below the poverty line (US Census Bureau, 1997). For Latinas specifically, Young (1992) found that female Mexican American college students reported encountering substantial financial limitations, and needing to take time away from school to work. This is consistent with what we know about the employment patterns of first generation college students in general, who spend twice as much time working than do students with parents who graduated from a university/college (Orbe, 2004).

It is notable that disparities in socioeconomic status begin to negatively impact Latina's college experiences well before they enter a college/university setting. These socioeconomic conditions give way to the segregation of school aged Latinos within the public school system, where Latinos are often destined to attend poorly financed schools in their neighborhood. In fact, Latinos are the most segregated ethnic/racial group in the

nation (Chapa & Valencia, 1993). This segregation too often leads to an inadequate college preparation that sets Latinos up for difficult transitions even when they are able to beat the odds and access higher education (Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres & Talbot, 2000).

Closely related to Latina first generation college students' disproportionate financial burden, these women are substantially more likely to be directly financially responsible for dependents. Over one third of Latinas attending college during the 2003-2004 school year reported being responsible for a dependent (Santiago, et. al., 2005). Familial obligations do not end here. Young (1992) reported that, as family caregivers, and consistent with the cultural construct of *Marianismo*, Latinas had constant disruptions to attend to family matters at home, and were severely limited in the time they could dedicate to study. This is consistent with what we know about women more generally, who spend dramatically more hours doing unpaid domestic labor than their male counterparts, which creates a situation where Latinas are forced to divide their time and attention across multiple obligations. Some researchers argue that these hours spent in gender-stereotyped roles have a strong and negative impact on educational progress (Chacon, Cohen, & Strover, 1986).

The final special factor impacting Latina's college experience discussed here is that of immigration status. For undocumented Latinas, their immigration status deeply and negatively impacts their lives, including while they pursue higher education. Undocumented college students report emotional concerns like fear of deportation, loneliness, shame, frustration, helplessness, and depression (Dozier, 1993 & Gonzalez, Plata, Garcia, Torres, & Urrieta, 2003). In addition to emotional distress, immigration

status limits undocumented student's ability to obtain work, or gain work that is not exploitative. To add to the financial impact of being unauthorized to work, undocumented students also do not qualify for federal financial student aid, private loans or state aid (in most states).

Further, undocumented students are more likely to live in conditions that are not conducive to study. These conditions include living in crowded living quarters and being primarily responsible for the care of younger siblings. Over 60% of students in Oliverez's (2006) study of Latino college-bound high school students reported living in crowded homes with six people or more, further, about 90% reported living in studio apartments where everyone slept in the same room (Perez, 2009). Being undocumented has also been shown to negatively impact students' motivation. Some of the undocumented students who participated in Abrego (2006) qualitative study reported a dramatic drop in motivation and academic performance after learning of their legal status. They described being disillusioned, fearing that even if they excelled in school they would end up with few employment options, and lowering their aspirations.

In a context where research specifically about undocumented Latina/o college students is limited, Contreras' (2009) conducted a qualitative study consisting of twenty semi-structured interviews with undocumented Latina/o students in the state of Washington, where the DREAM Act was passed in 2003 allowing undocumented students who met residence requirements to pay in-state tuition. This study aimed to document the experiences and challenges faced by these students in higher education, and to explore the processes by which they pursue higher education and fulfill their academic goals. This study identified five themes:

“(1) the pervasive presence of fear in the lives of undocumented students, for themselves and their families, especially regarding the prospect of separation; (2) the financial difficulty of paying for college with limited access to financial aid; (3) campus experiences that were often discriminatory, as well as exposure to resources and supportive individuals who students could trust to help them navigate college; (4) the will to persist, as seen in the determination to overcome challenges in their personal and academic lives as well as the determination to give back to their communities; and (5) concerns about the future” (Contreras, 2009, pg.9).

Contreras’ (2009) study begins to address the need to include undocumented Latina/o students’ experiences in research and begins to reveal important themes in these experiences.

### **Massachusetts Educational Climate for Latinas**

Given the variability in educational climates across states, this section discusses important issues impacting students in Massachusetts in order to further contextualize the experiences of participants in this study. While Massachusetts’ public school system is often touted as one of the best in the nation, great disparities exist across school districts. As discussed at length in previous sections, Latino students are often destined to attend under-resourced schools within their neighborhoods due to the segregation of school-aged children based on socioeconomic conditions.

In addition to being zoned into poorly financed schools, Latino children who are entering the Massachusetts school system as English learners face additional hardship due to the "English for the Children" initiative, passed during the 2002 elections.

Massachusetts was the third state to approve this initiative, following California (1998) and Arizona (2000). The “English for the Children” initiative mandates an all-English structured immersion program, where English learners are limited to one school year in



this program before being required to join mainstream English-only classrooms (rethinking schools organization, 2003; Baker 2006; Basurto, et al., 2006). This legislation has resulted in anti-child policies that essentially outlaw bilingual education in Massachusetts, taking away children's right to learn in their native-language (Baker 2006; Basurto, et al., 2006).

On a national level, the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) includes additional anti-bilingual components that negatively impact bilingual students in all states and serves to further threaten bilingual education in states approving state level referenda, including Massachusetts. Building on public anti-immigrant sentiment, ESEA forces bilingual schools to focus on English over native-language instruction by requiring that English Language Learners (ELL) take standardized tests in English within three years of entering the U.S. school system. Limiting the amount of bilingual education students receive not only leaves them with an insufficient amount of time to achieve academic English proficiency, it limits their ability to master other material by denying equal access to curriculum in student's native-language.

Together, this context places many Latino students entering the Massachusetts public school system at a great disadvantage, limiting their ability to master academic skills. This context can also help explain the Latino Paradox in education. The "Latino Paradox" (sometimes referred to as the "Immigrant paradox" or the "healthy migrant paradox") summarizes the tendency for Latino immigrants to demonstrate better than expected outcomes when first arriving in the US, and to suffer from more negative outcomes in health, mental health, and education, the longer they spend in the US. According to this finding, immigrants experience cultural, familial, and institutional

protective factors associated with their spending more time during their individual development in their home country, despite sociodemographic markers otherwise associated with suboptimal outcomes (like lower levels of wealth, employment, and socioeconomic status) (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2012; Comas-Díaz, 2006; Rios-Ellis et al, 2005). In education, Latino immigrant students might benefit from spending more time in their home country before entering the US educational system, in part, because they are able to master material in their native language instead of being forced to attend mainstream English-only classes before they have achieved academic English proficiency. Additionally, researchers in the field of education suggest that prolonged exposure to discrimination in the US context and identification with peer cultures engaging in high-risk behaviors and failure to support educational success along with erosion of protective factors such as family cohesion contribute to these findings (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2012; Zambrana, 2011). Given the importance of this contextual variable, participants in this study were mapped according to their point of entry into the US educational system and culture in the demographic table presented in the results section below.

### **From Deficits to Cultural Strengths: Models and Methods Exploring Resources for Educational Resilience and Wellness**

The strategies and resources used by Latinas to cope with the aforementioned psychosociocultural stressors and barriers have also received little attention. What is more, most of the existing literature exploring Latina's responses suffers from a preoccupation with decontextualized, individual-level, factors. These include the coping "approaches" taken by students, marital status, number of children, and students'

adherence to gender-roles (Aranda, Castaneda, Pey-Jinan & Sobel, 2001; Castillo & Hill, 2004; García-Vásquez, Vásquez, & Huang, 1998; Gloria, 2005; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Gloria, Castellanos & Orozco, 2005; Gloria, 2009). Latina/o students consistently report taking both a planned approach and talking to others about their problems (Mena, et al., 1987; Vásquez & García-Vásquez's, 1995; García-Vásquez, Vásquez, & Huang, 1998, Gloria, 2009). The other protective factors can simply be understood as the absence of individual-level risk factors. That is, where being the parent of *more* children is conceptualized as a risk factor, being the parent of fewer children has been reported as a protective factor (Lasher, 2010).

This disproportionate focus on individually based, decontextualized causes for distress and undesirable outcomes has been described as a “person-blame causal attribution bias in psychological research” (Caplan & Nelson, 1973). This bias results in our tendency to ascribe causal significance to individual-level variables, essentially blaming individuals for their distress, academic failure or difficult situation. By focusing on individual factors, explanations that are situation-centered are overlooked, allowing systemic and structural inequalities to continue unchecked and permitting accountable agencies to escape responsibility.

Much of the existing research is also limited by its reliance on a comparative paradigm that attempts to understand people of color in the U.S. by using a deficit model that focuses on the lower rate at which people of color access higher education when compared to the native-born European-American majority, or differences in educational outcomes comparing first generation college students to students whose parents have a college education. This deficit-driven comparative approach, together with a person-

blame approach, not only fails to bring us closer to contextualizing findings—it perpetuates racist ideologies. Whaley (2003) makes an excellent point, asking, “what type of individual level intervention should be employed to address “being black” as a risk factor for adverse health outcomes?” The same could be said about Latinos and unwanted educational outcomes. What type of individual level intervention should be employed to address being “Latino/Hispanic” as a risk factor for undesirable educational outcomes? This approach to capturing culturally/racially/ethnically-influenced variability does little to move us towards truly understanding the academic challenges of Latinas (Whaley, 2003).

Alternatively, work in intersectionality, defined by Dill and Zambrana as a field of study that “provides a critical analytic lens to interrogate racial, ethnic, class, ability, age, sexuality and gender disparities and to contest existing ways of looking at these structures of inequality, transforming knowledge as well as the social institutions in which they have found themselves” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, xii)”, conceptualizes disparities as occurring in patterns along major social divisions, including race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and immigration status. Intersectional analysis challenges traditional ways of studying these inequalities in isolation, arguing that this tendency leads to simplistic explanations that fail to “accurately represent or explain the lived experiences of poor and racialized women and men in US society” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, pg.275) and leads to “the experience of whole groups [being] ignored, misunderstood or erased, particularly those of women of color” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, pg.1). Alternatively, intersectional analyses aim to understand disparities and social problems as a result of a complex interconnection of multiple dimensions, and this

critical analytic lens is conceptualized as serving social justice (Zambrana & Dill, 2006; Zambrana & MacDonald, 2009).

Exemplifying this critical analytic lens, Frausure and Williams (2009) apply an intersectional analysis to the investigation of the marked decline in civic engagement and political participation in the US. Unlike traditional research on political engagement, which views the political system as uniformly encouraging citizen participation, this perspective begins to explore racial and economic inequalities and their structural origins as contributors to political and civic participation. This intersectional lens reveals that the US political system has historically limited civil participation precisely through the exclusion of groups of people, including the property-less, non-protestant, women, youth, and people of color. What is more, groups were further excluded by the use of disingenuous schemes, like English-only ballots and literacy test requirements, strategies which were sadly utilized as recently as the November 2012 election. In addition to identifying ways that the political system has worked to discourage civic participation, this intersectional analysis reveals how the present system continues to impact inequalities in families, neighborhoods and races by way of policy decisions, policies that continue to create disadvantage, isolation, and lack of resources. Finally, this approach highlights ways that social and economic policies contribute to lower civic participation rates among people of color directly, including the present home mortgage structure, zoning decision, taxation, research funding, etc. In one concrete example, the authors describe the clear connection between residential stability and civic participation rates, suggesting that policies that encourage home ownership would positively impact political participation. The intersectional analysis used in this study recognizes the web of social

structural factors impacting lived experiences of education as they impact educational outcomes, recognizing that factors such as home ownership or belief that one can have a voice and vote in civic life create both direct and indirect effects contributing to interrelated educational, health and mental health outcomes.

The present study addresses the need to explore the variation in the lived experience of Latinas in higher education, examining intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, immigration history, documentation status, and gender. In doing so, it differs from studies that focus on individual factors like race or gender to understand Latina's disparate rates of educational attainment, reformulating familiar thinking about Latina's experience in higher education.

In addition, traditional research with a preoccupation with risk factors also has a clear over-focus on deficits at the neglect of investigation of cultural strengths. Recent research has captured a number of important constructs that are believed to play a critical role in Latino's behavior, and which have been explored for their possible protective role. These constructs include *respeto* and *familismo* (Comas-Díaz, 2006). *Respeto* refers to the importance placed on teaching children the appropriate level of courtesy required in different social contexts. *Familismo*, discussed as a potential burden above, can also be protective, as Latinas turn to family for support. In fact, family cohesion has been repeatedly cited as a factor enhancing mental health and academic outcomes (Perez, et.al. 2009, Smokowski, et al., 2007 & Rivera, et al., 2008). Additional protective qualities within the Latino community include: *aguantarse* (the ability to endure difficult conditions), *confianza* (intimacy/trust in a relationship), *personalismo* (personal relationships), and *sobreponerse* (ability to overcome obstacles) (Comas-Díaz, 2006; La

Roche, 2002). This emerging work begins to address the unquestionable need for an understanding of the Latino population that includes both unequal exposure to stressors and culturally influenced strengths.

One recent study by Ojeda, Flores & Navarro (2011), focuses on these culturally based social cognitions, while at the same time, acknowledging the importance of these cultural strengths in contexts of environmental supports and resources to academic success. Notably, this study focuses on the positive psychological functioning of Mexican American college students with the goal of identifying individual and cultural strengths. This study was the first to test the validity of Lent's (2004) social cognitive model of wellbeing with a sample of Mexican American college students (N=457). Lent's social cognitive model of wellbeing

“unites cognitive, behavioral, social, personality, and affective variables to determine well being. Lent suggested that (a) personal control beliefs, (b) outcome expectations, and (c) goals are significant contributors to well being. The model proposes that (a) personality traits and affective dispositions are related to environmental supports and resources, self-efficacy, domain-specific satisfaction, and overall life satisfaction; (b) environmental supports and resources are linked to self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goal progress; (c) self-efficacy is related to outcome expectations, goal progress, and domain-specific satisfaction; (d) outcome expectations are proposed to influence goal progress and domain-specific satisfaction; (e) goal progress is related to domain-specific satisfaction and overall life satisfaction; and (f) domain-specific satisfaction is linked to overall life satisfaction. In addition, Lent posited bidirectional paths in that overall life satisfaction would relate to domain-specific satisfaction and that goal progress would influence self-efficacy and outcome expectations” (Ojeda, et.al., 2011, pg.2).

To test the model, this study included a series of person-level factors conceptualized as potentially influencing Mexican American college students' wellbeing, which were predicted to relate positively: Positive affect, captured by the 10-item Positive Affect subscale from the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson,

Clark & Tellegen, 1988); enculturation and acculturation, captured by the 30-item Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans II (Cuellar, Arnold & Maldonado, 1995); College self-efficacy, captured by the 20-item College Self-Efficacy Inventory (Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, 1993); College outcome expectations, captured by the 19-item College Outcome Expectation Questionnaire (Flores, Navarro & DeWitz, 2008); Academic goal progress and academic satisfaction, captured by a 7-item scale developed by Lent (Lent, et al., 2005); and life satisfaction, captured by the 5-item Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). The study confirmed the applicability of Lent's (2004) social cognitive model of wellbeing to Mexican American college students of both sexes. It also acknowledged the importance of gender, by examining potential gender differences. In doing so, they found that women were more acculturated and had higher college outcome expectations than Mexican American men.

Research moving beyond the identification of risk/protective factors, centered on students' backgrounds and individual characteristics, has also highlighted important protective factors at the university/college level. These include on-campus extracurricular activities and mentoring activities, which have been proven protective, as students feel a sense of belonging (Perez, 2009). The important role of university climate, staff, and faculty has also been repeatedly identified. Zea, Jarama, and Bianchi (1995) found that the perception of a supportive social context predicted the successful college adjustment of minority students. The special impact of supportive faculty and staff has been documented by the work of de Leon (2005). In addition to finding that students were negatively impacted by the negative treatment of faculty, de Leon (2005) found that college staff and faculty had the potential of serving as important resources of



information and guidance for the undocumented Latino college students in his study. These findings highlight the need for research that explores Latina first generation college students full range of experience in higher education, including: educational challenges and triumphs, barriers and resources, distress and wellness. This exploration must also examine students' integration of traditional resources with culturally relevant resources, and the socio-political and culturally relevant factors that impact this resource use.

Moving towards an understanding of Latina students' academic and wellness needs that include situational-factors in balance with individual-factors begins to hold institutions of higher learning partially responsible for the success of its students. Further, using both participatory and empowerment principles ensures that needs and barriers are identified by those impacted. This shift represents an important first step in the development of an educational environment that supports Latina first generation college students in successfully balancing their family life and academic pursuits.

In sum, this study explored the following aims

Aim 1 : To document the narratives of Latina first generation college students' gendered experiences with balancing family and educational aspirations.

Aim 2 : To explore participants' navigation/negotiation of resources for balancing academic pursuits and the safekeeping of self and family wellness.

Aim 3 : To document the barriers these women face and the resources/supports they turn to as they attempt to balance safeguarding wellness of self and family and reaching their academic goals.

Aim 4: To explore potential resources that these women would find useful and ways in which colleges/universities might support these students in their attempt to simultaneously reach their academic goals and fulfill their family obligations.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

#### **Recruitment Procedures**

Because of the delicate nature of discussing experiences with higher education *within* a university setting, recruitment procedures for this study were especially designed to ensure the privacy of participants. Study advertisements (See Appendix 1 for Recruitment Materials that include sample announcements) were placed around the university and participants and university contacts (peers, professors, students, etc) were invited to refer other participants who might potentially be interested in the study (snowballing). Perhaps speaking to the importance of social networks as vehicles for establishing “confianza” or trust in this population, all participants were recruited through the referral method, while study advertisements yielded no response. Individuals who learned about the study from a professor or a fellow student and stated they were interested in learning more about the study were given a brief general description. Those interested in participating were then screened to ensure that they met inclusion criteria. Individuals that both met the established criteria and were interested in sharing the ways in which they balance their educational goals and family lives and the ways universities/colleges could be supportive of their goals, were scheduled to be interviewed.

### **Incentives**

In order to acknowledge that participants were volunteering valuable time, they received a gift card for each interview in which they participated. The amount of each gift card was \$20, an amount that is both respectful and not coercive. This gift card served as a token of appreciation.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study included sixteen women currently enrolled at UMass Boston. Women who identified as Latina first generation college students, were at least 18 years old, and expressed an interest in sharing the ways in which they balance their educational goals and family lives and ways universities/colleges could be supportive of their goals, were invited to participate. Immigration status played no role in participant selection and was not included in the questions asked. Potential participants were screened with a list of inclusion/exclusion questions in order to ensure that they met all criteria for this study prior to the.

### **Procedure**

#### **Informed consent and participant protection**

Before beginning each research interview, participants were provided with a written informed consent form approved by the human subjects review boards of the University of Massachusetts, Boston (See Appendix 4). Once participants had an opportunity to read over this consent form they were guided through its contents by the interviewer. During this overview the interviewer highlighted that interviews would be audio recorded and transcribed. Participants were also explicitly informed of their right to discontinue their participation at any time and to refuse to answer any question with

no penalty. No participants chose to exercise these rights. Following this overview participants were given the opportunity to ask questions. Only after all questions had been answered, and the consent form signed, did the interview begin.

For participant protection, several precautions were taken to ensure participant confidentiality. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, which was used in all transcripts, text citations, and team discussions. In no instance were participant names included in interview recordings, transcripts, or team discussions. Further, interviews were transcribed verbatim, but included no identifying information (like work place, residence, etc.). Audio recordings were destroyed once transcription was complete. As an added precaution, all study related files (audio recordings, transcripts, notes, etc.) were stored electronically and password protected, and consent forms were kept in a locked filing cabinet containing no interview data.

### **Interview Procedure**

After informed consent, participants were asked to complete a simple demographic form for the purpose of describing participants and helping the investigator frame the context (i.e., understand participants' background) for the interview (See Appendix 3). It is important to note that this form did not ask information regarding participants' immigration status. Once this demographic form was completed, audio recording began along with the interview. Interviews were both exploratory and open-ended, while the same areas of inquiry were addressed across interviews. This allowed participants to generate contextualized, process-oriented and detailed narratives, providing this project with rich data. In addition to investigating each area of inquiry by asking open-ended questions, whenever possible, participants

were encouraged to elaborate on their responses spontaneously. When necessary, follow up questions were asked regarding particular emerging themes or responses participants contributed, and to clarify or probe for more detailed responses, with careful attention given to the clarification of implied meanings. When possible, these follow up questions were asked in ways that were inclusive of all options, for example, asking questions such as, “could you say more about that?” This is in contrast to asking questions that might be potentially leading, or asking participants to confirm or deny working hypotheses.

Immediately after interviews, participants were encouraged to ask further questions. Finally, participants were once again reminded that all information is confidential and were thanked for their participation in the study.

All interviews were conducted by the primary researcher and one bi-lingual and bi-cultural Latina research assistant selected by the UMass Boston Health Promotion Research Team, who was both CITI certified and trained in interview procedures by the primary researcher. Interviews took place in private offices on the UMass Boston campus. Consistent with this study’s participatory approach, interviews were conducted in a way that followed participant’s narrative. Areas of inquiry were therefore pursued differently with each participant based on the individual responses they contributed. It should also be noted that in some cases questions addressed multiple areas of inquiry simultaneously. These interviews ranged from approximately 45 minutes to one and a half hours. Of the sixteen interviews conducted, 14 participants chose to tell their story predominantly in English, while two chose to complete their interviews primarily in Spanish. A brief description of guiding initial questions, which define general areas of

inquiry, are outlined in Figure 1: Guiding Initial Questions (see additional guiding questions & probes in Appendix 2).

**Figure 1: Guiding Initial Questions**

Guiding Initial Questions
1. What motivated you to go to college?
2. Were there things that made the decision to go to college hard?
3. How did members of your family respond to your decision to go to college? <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Did going to college fit with what your family expected?</li><li>Probe for specific examples, if needed</li></ol>
4. How did your friends and other members of your community respond to your decision to go to college? <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Did going to college fit with what your friends/community expected?</li><li>Probe for specific examples, if needed</li></ol>
5. Has “being in college” been what <i>you</i> expected?
6. Do you have people in your life that depend on you? <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Examples of what they depend on you for</li></ol>
7. Do you feel that you take care of your family? <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>How?</li></ol>
8. How has college impacted your life?
9. How has it impacted your relationships with family?
10. How has it impacted the way you take care of your family?
11. How has it impacted your relationship with friends and community members?
12. What are some of the things that make staying in school hard?

13. What are some of the things that make studying and getting good grades hard?
14. How do you balance family and school?
15. Have you felt welcome on this campus?
16. Do you feel that you “belong” here?
17. Do you feel that people you encounter “expect” you to do well in school?
  - a. Probe for specific examples, in needed
18. What are some of the things that help you keep coming to school?
19. What are some of the things that help you get good grades?
20. What/who do you turn to when things get hard?
21. What would make it easier for you to do well in school?
22. What would make you feel more comfortable and connected on campus?

### **Post-interview Procedure**

After the completion of interviews, in addition to encouraging participants to ask further questions, the interviewer also reminded participants that it was possible that they might experience some unexpected thoughts or feelings following the interview. The interviewer also described different options participants had if these thoughts or feelings were uncomfortable, long lasting, or might required professional help for alleviation. Specifically, the interviewer encouraged participants to contact either the primary researcher or the researcher’s faculty supervisor (who is a licensed clinical psychologist) for help if they experienced any distress following their interview. Both the researcher and her faculty supervisor were prepared to make clinical referrals for



participants if this became necessary. No participants contacted the primary researcher or her faculty member for such support.

Interview audio recordings were promptly transcribed by either the primary investigator or a bi-lingual and bi-cultural research assistant selected by the UMass Boston Health Promotion Research Team, who was trained in transcription, CITI certified, and who maintained complete confidentiality of interviews. Once these interviews were transcribed and verified by the interviewer the audio recording was permanently erased. Transcriptions were then assigned a pseudonym and de-identified for participant protection. Demographic forms were also coded with the same pseudonym and de-identified. Coded and de-identified transcriptions, demographic forms, and notes were then stored electronically and password protected.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

In this study, data was organized using thematic analysis. Woodward and Joseph (2003) have described thematic analysis as “part of the interpretive phenomenological approach . . . in that the emphasis is on participants’ own views of the phenomena under investigation. Interpretative phenomenological analytic techniques are increasingly being used in the field of psychology in a bid to understand the participant’s personal view of the phenomena under investigation” (Woodward & Joseph, 2003) (p. 270). Further, Davidson (2003) reminds us that, “For qualitative research to be most useful in informing the development of interventions... studies need to be based on the actual experiences of people living with the conditions of interest, and as much from their own perspective and in their own terms as possible” (p.29). Thematic analysis involves the exploration of qualitative data/interview transcripts with the goal of finding repeated patterns of

meaning. These repeated patterns are organized through the creation of codes, which are later used to identify main themes and sub-themes in the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The study also used an inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge from the narratives, rather than being derived in a pre-conceived way from the existing literature or hypotheses. This approach to data analysis allows patterns to emerge from the voices of participants; particularly appropriate for exploring the experiences of this understudied population. It respects participants as experts of their own experiences, and places an emphasis on description and understanding rather than explanation and prediction (Garko, 1999). In addition, consistent with Prilleltensky and Pilleltensky's variation of an ecosystemic model, this analysis conceptualized wellness in broad terms that include both psychological health and physical health, and acknowledges issues of power, privilege, and the socially rooted nature of health and illness (Prilleltensky & Pilleltensky, 2003).

With this approach, this author analyzed the data for emerging themes using NVivo, a qualitative research analysis software that supports the identification and organization of themes and sub-themes. The first step in data analysis involved a reflection on the data. After participant interviews, the primary researcher reflected on each interview independently and noted immediate reactions. Once the majority of data was collected, the primary researcher began reflecting on the data, including on emerging themes and patterns across interviews. Thematic analysis of the data then moved to the identification of an initial list of emergent themes using the qualitative research analysis software NVivo. These initial themes were then reduced to themes related to this study's

areas of inquiry and to areas that emerged in the thematic analysis as particularly salient to the participants.

The researcher then moved to present this version of themes, along with transcribed interviews, to the UMass Boston Health Promotion Research Team for feedback and discussion. Narratives were then reviewed for conceptually meaningful patterns with members of the research team, who were intimately involved with the project and who reviewed interview transcripts as well as multiple draft summaries of themes. What emerged from this group process was the identification of additional themes and the clarification of presented themes and their relationship. After multiple research team discussions, a list of concrete main themes was produced (see Figure 2 for a list of these main themes). Once these themes were determined, data was re-coded.

This approach to data analysis was based on feminist and cultural narrative analysis methods, which theorize that narrative analysis in the study of lives is especially appropriate for underrepresented narratives such as those of diverse women (Stewart, 1994) and gay fathers (Armesto, 2005; Armesto and Shapiro, 2012). These methods of narrative analysis are consistent with a number of principles of the strengths based sociopolitical approach applied in this research, considered especially important in addressing Latina experiences to include gender, culture and other intersecting dimensions (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Gloria and Castellano 2012). These methods strive to analyze narratives to achieve descriptions emerging in collaboration with the participants being studied, and respecting participants' experiences. However, Stewart (1994) argues that studying underrepresented populations requires specific strategies in

the interview and analysis process. A number of strategies recommended by this culturally informed feminist theoretical orientation were applied in this study.

One of these strategies was to identify participants' strengths as well as their vulnerabilities, by framing interview questions to explore the creative strategies Latino first generation college students utilize while balancing their academic pursuits and their family lives. Identifying both strengths and vulnerabilities not only led to a more holistic view of these women's individual experiences, but captured the "critical and contextual struggles" of participants. This research approach avoids treating participants as "objects" of study, and allows them to speak to us, and us to see them, as exercising agency and as active participants in constructing their experiences and sharing these within the research process (Fine, 1992).

A second strategy involved resisting the dominant definitions of those who are being studied, with the purpose of bringing the life experiences of marginalized groups closer to the center of both political and academic discourse (Stewart, 1994). Consistent with this strategy, this study recognized the complex experience of these women within higher education and within their family and community contexts.

An additional strategy consistent with this study is to avoid producing a unified and coherent experience from participant interviews. This strategy posits that every individual interviewed experiences contexts uniquely and expresses these in a "different voice". This literature cautions against attempting to present these different voices emerging both from unique contexts and unique interpretations of shared contexts as one coherent experience by imposing overly restrictive organizing structures (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; McAdams, 1988; Stewart, 1994). That is, this study attempted

to capture each individual's voice, and suggested patterns or themes that permitted a great deal of variability in individual expression. The results strive to organize these experiences into themes in a way that avoids presenting a single homogeneous account of the experiences of being a "Latina first generation college student", and preserve unique aspects of each participant's experiences of contexts and responses to these contexts.

Finally, because of the nature of qualitative research, careful monitoring of the impact of the researcher's perspective on emergent themes was necessary. This is consistent with a strategy that emerges from feminist and gender-equitable men's studies, which suggests that researchers should analyze their own role/position as it impacts all aspects of the research process (Connell, 1995, 1998; Kimmel, 1997; Marsiglio, 1995, 2003; Scanzoni & Marsiglio, 1993; Silverstein, 1996; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999; Silverstein et al., 2002). Since the researcher acknowledges that she is shaped by her own personal and political history, including her own educational journey, and her experiences with family and community, steps were taken to reflect on the impact of her perspective on themes developed. Sharing the experience of being a Latina first generation college student gave the researcher added sensitivity to the issues addressed by this study and informed the questions asked of the psychology literature. However, this "insider" sensitivity (Naples, 2003) also called for a method that would allow for the researcher's assumptions to be continuously questioned, challenged and shaped by both study participants and research team members. Steps taken to reflect on the impact of the researcher's perspective included the researcher keeping a detailed journal documenting her careful reflection on and active monitoring of her own point of reference and assumptions. It also included ongoing meetings with mentors and peers, and the review

of transcripts by the UMass Boston Health Promotion Research Team, where themes were discussed to ensure critical review from multiple perspectives and where the researcher's rationale for emerging themes was analyzed. These discussions with Research Team members, from diverse backgrounds, created a rich, multi-faceted dialogue exposing multiple perspectives.

For interviews and interview sections conducted in Spanish, interviews were transcribed by the researcher and analyzed in N-Vivo in Spanish. Once preliminary themes were identified, selections were translated into English for further analysis and review with the research team. In the results section, narratives selected from the transcripts are first presented in Spanish in the words of the participants, and then translated into English. Wherever there are multiple meanings represented in Spanish, the translation decisions and potential additional meanings are presented in brackets, as is customary in translation studies. Consistent with the goals of narrative methods used in representing voices of silenced groups, transcripts are in many instances presented holistically to show the constant interrelationship between dimensions of vulnerability, resources, and strength these women described.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

The recruitment procedure for this study was designed to invite women who were interested in speaking about “the ways in which they balance their educational goals and family lives and ways universities/colleges could be supportive of their goals” to participate in interviews on this topic (see Appendix 1 for recruitment materials). The study advertisement was answered by women with a wide range of experiences, and with varying reported family organizations.

In understanding these women’s experiences with higher education, it is useful to map participants’ point of entry into the United States educational system and culture. As noted in the literature review, the research literature on immigrant children’s educational outcomes notes an immigrant advantage, which may be associated with the opportunity to establish basic educational competencies within their language of origin. The women who responded to study advertisements can be grouped into three different categories depending on their age at immigration. This grouping is also useful in contextualizing these women’s experiences within the United States educational system and with consequences of their unequal exposure to this educational system (see Table x for demographic information). Women who exclusively experienced a United States educational system (either natives of the continental US or immigrating before school age) were categorized as native. Women who immigrated before the age of 14, but had

some experience within the educational system of their home country, were categorized as entering early. Finally, the women who immigrated after the age of 14 were categorized as entering late. It was conceptualized that the age of 14 coincided with important emotional and social developments and generally marked students' entry into high school.

Differences in Participants' point of entry into the US educational system created a difference in their exposure to racism, their response to negative influences, their perception of higher education's purpose, and their academic foundation. Combined, these factors create an advantage for those who entered the US educational system later. Those that had a prolonged experience in the educational system of their home country were shielded from racism (at least United States' socially constructed hierarchies and racism). Being shielded from the socially constructed racism in the United States also shielded participants that entered the US educational system later from negative stereotypes regarding Latinos' underachievement in education, potentially reducing participant's internalization of these negative stereotypes to improving their educational outcomes. These women also describe being protected from negative influences once they entered school in the United States, as they entered their new school environment with a set of values and customs that they carried with them from their home culture. These protective values and customs are discussed at length in the "Importance of personal qualities" theme dimension, below. They also tended to conceptualize higher education as a privilege, rather than an obligation, and described entering higher education for its inherent benefits (like knowledge) vs. higher paying jobs upon graduation. Finally, students who entered the US educational system after a prolonged



experience within the educational system of their home country mastered academic skills in their native language. This protected women in this category from the experience of attempting to master important basic academic skills while at the same time attempting to learn a foreign language. This pattern is consistent with research finding that Latino students who had spent between 3 and 8 years in the US had higher GPA's than students who had spent 10 years or more in the US (Oliverez, 2006).

One of the Participants illustrates the impact of her late entry into the US educational system (at age 15), on her experience. Claudia, a 25-year-old student, describes feeling that she benefitted from immigrating with a “foundation” at the age of 15. She reports that this foundation helped her reject negative influences, being exposed to these negative influences without “getting off track” and while maintaining an ability to keep “moving towards the goal”. Claudia compares her experience to that of her brother, who entered the US educational system at age 8, and contrasts her ability to decipher right from wrong when her brother was unable to do so.

eh, vine desde (pause) no naci aca, en estados unidos. Naci en [central American country]. Soy [from central American country]. y basicamente, eh, son dos educaciones muy diferentes. La que yo recibí cuando era niña y la que estoy recibiendo (pause) en la que estoy ahora. pero la base realmente fue la que recibí cuando era muy pequeña. ... yo ya traía una base. Eso me ayudo a no influenciarme tanto. A ver cosas al rededor mio que me podian haber desviado. Lo que yo traía desde pequeña- eso me ayudo mucho, a seguir hacia la meta.

porque paso con mi hermano. Porque el vino mas chico. Yo vi la diferencia. Yo vine de 15 años, y el de 8 años. Yo ya sabía lo bueno de lo malo y que llevaba al bien y que llevaba al mal.

... entonces, la educacion que yo recibí ahí, yo creo que fue como mi base. Siempre nos pusieron esa perspectiva de salir adelante. Aunque no tubiesemos los recursos, siempre podrias ganar con esfuerzo, perseverancia, paciencia, tambien bien la religion.

**English Translation:**

Um, I came from (pause) I wasn't born here, in the United States. I was born in [central American country], I'm [from central American country]. And, basically, umm, they are two very different educations. The one that I received when I was a girl and the one I'm receiving now (pause) the one I'm in now. But the foundation was really the one that I received when I was very little. ... I brought a foundation with me. That kept me from being influenced as much. Seeing the things I saw around me, which could have taken me off track. The foundation I brought with me from when I was little, that helped me a lot. To keep moving towards the goal.

Because with my brother, because he came when he was younger, I saw the difference. I came when I was 15 years old, and he was 8 years old. I already knew right from wrong and what would lead to good and what would lead to bad.

...so, the education that I received there, I think was my foundation. They always gave us the perspective of moving forward. Even if we didn't have resources, [we knew] you could always win with effort, perseverance, patience, and also religion.

A demographic table with additional contextualizing information can be found below.

Table 1: Demographics

	Age	entry into school		Age at immigration	Central family caretaker
Gema	23	native	South America	n/a	+
Isabel	30	native	Caribbean	n/a	+
Lisa	22	native	Caribbean	n/a	
Sofia	23	native	Caribbean	n/a	
Susana	21	native	Caribbean	n/a	
Angela	22	entering early	Caribbean	6	+
Denise	22	entering early	South America	6	
Gimena	24	entering early	South America	12	
Karla	23	entering early	South America	3	
Leticia	26	entering early	South America	7	
Luz	24	entering early	South America	12	
Paloma	22	entering early	South America	9	
Carmen	22	entering late	Central America	15	
Claudia	25	entering late	Central America	15	
Liliana	25	entering late	South America	15	+

## **Overview of Major Themes**

The current study used an ecosystemic conceptual framework and intersectional approach to guide questions exploring participants' sense of purpose and life goals (i.e., what motivated you to go to college?), experiences within higher education, and their balancing of family and academic pursuits. Although an ecosystemic framework regards the levels of individual, familial, and social resources as transactional and interdependent, reporting on themes requires a more linear description of these processes. In mapping the major themes emerging from participant interviews, this mapping must begin with an understanding of the ways the first generation college student Latinas who participated in this study describe their experiences of systemic disadvantage and associated concerns and distress. These experiences of disadvantage include areas of intersecting burden, including immigration status, socioeconomic status, first generation college student status, and gendered obligations.

Participants in this study responded to these contexts of disadvantage, motivated by the responsibility they feel to their families and communities. In a context of low college enrollment, participants stood out as the only members of their families and one of the few members in their communities attending college. This disparity in their experience led participants to adopt an identity as the "chosen one", where they experience being singled out by their families and communities as the member who will achieve a college education. With this motivation, participants described a gathering of inner strengths and values permitting them to overcome the difficulties they experience as they attempt to complete their college education and care for their families. They also

shared their perspective on the impact of having access to individuals who held knowledge about higher education on their development.

Notably, gender dynamics intersect with all aspects of participants' experiences. Participants described being motivated by negative stereotypes regarding Latina women specifically, including negative stereotypes regarding Latina's tendency to have children at a young age instead of completing their education. They also described learning from their mother's gendered cautionary tales, where mothers encouraged their daughters to get an education before marrying and starting families. A number of participants, in fact, reported postponing marriage and children for this reason. Further, the women interviewed described caretaking and work obligations that were heavily influenced by their gender. In sum, participants described an experience of pursuing their goals while respecting their familial and cultural contexts.

Major themes are elaborated in Figure 2, which shows dimensions of major themes. The major themes and their dimensions are elaborated in the next sections. In these sections, transcriptions of excerpts from participant interviews are included to illustrate themes and their dimensions. When excerpts include content in Spanish, both original Spanish transcription and its English translation are included. This is thought to give readers fluent in Spanish an opportunity to experience the excerpts in their original form. The transcripts included here also include capitalized words. This capitalization is an attempt to preserve the effect of intensifying vocal inflection present during interviews and their audio recordings.

**Figure 2: Major Themes and Dimensions of Themes**

1. CONTEXTUAL STRESSORS / SYSTEMIC DISADVANTAGE
  - a. Social inequality for family unit
    - i. Documentation concerns
    - ii. Need for heavy workload
    - iii. Targets of racism/ negative stereotypes
  - b. Lacking a map/ institutional marginalization
  - c. Family's multifaceted limited understanding
  - d. Gendered family obligations taking up valuable time
2. EDUCATION AS AN OBLIGATION TO FAMILY- MOTIVATION & STRESSOR
  - a. Education as the passport
  - b. Repay parents' sacrifices
  - c. Finish what mother couldn't
3. THE CHOSEN ONE/TO BE A ROLE MODEL- MOTIVATION & STRESSOR
  - a. The chosen one
  - b. Break negative stereotype
  - c. Role model to family/community/own children
4. CHILDREN, PRESENT AND FUTURE
  - a. Parenting comes first
  - b. As motivation
  - c. Postponing family
5. NAVIGATING ACADEMIA WITHOUT A MAP
  - a. Connecting with other who have a map
  - b. Call for institutionally provided map- formal mentorship
6. INNER STRENGTHS AND GOALS
  - a. Faith as a resource
  - b. Importance of personal qualities: *Paciencia* (patience), *Perseverancia* (perseverance), *orgullo* (Pride), *rebeldia* (rebelliousness/defiance), *sacrificio* (ability to sacrifice).

## Contextual Stressors/Systemic Disadvantage

The interviews with participants in this study were designed to emphasize how these women experienced their balancing of family and the pursuit of their educational goals. In doing so, participants described the context for the pursuit of these goals as one of systemic disadvantage, where they attempt to achieve their goals on an unequal playing field. They described this disadvantage as stemming from the intersection of burdens due to their characteristics as first generation college students, Latinas, and women. Disadvantage was described as originating from social inequalities impacting their family as a unit. It also included participants' sense that they lacked guidance in navigating higher education, family's multifaceted limited understanding of participants' experience, and family obligations closely related to participants' gendered roles within their families.

Throughout their interviews, participants explicitly and implicitly described the ways their **family units as a whole were impacted by social inequalities** (*Theme dimension 1a*). Implicitly, participants described a general sense of struggle, living with parents who worked in low-wage and labor-intensive jobs, at times holding multiple jobs. For example, discussing her motivation to go to college, Denise shared her parents telling her "You don't want to live the same life that I'm living. I work like a slave and I can barely pay the bills." Most explicitly, participants described being impacted by documentation concerns, family financial difficulty that made it necessary for participants to carry a heavy workload, and being targets of racism and negative stereotypes.

For a subset of participants *documentation concerns* (Theme sub-dimension 1a i) contributed to their experience of disadvantage. While immigration status impacts families in complex ways, for those interviewed, documentation concerns were described in the context of students' academic goals and the way being undocumented directly limited participants' access to higher education and led to the inflation in the cost of college education. Of note, participants who chose to reveal documentation concerns did so through selective silences within their interviews. This is consistent with the shame, fear, and pain that surrounds documentation concerns. It is also consistent with the idea that entire communities are forced to live in the shadows.

In the following examples, both Claudia and Gimena describe the way being undocumented impacted their ability to access college and increased the financial burden of higher education.

Claudia said:

CLAUDIA: entonces, yo, el proceso migratorio siempre siguió. Mis padres fueron pedidos, luego me pidieron (pause) y (pause) hasta el día de hoy (long pause) sigue (pause) osea (long pause) aun no lo conseguimos.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: pero, después de q yo entre a la Universidad. Yo me gradúe. Me dure 3 casi 4 años. Me metí a un joint admission (pause) y (pause) me ayudaron a entrar en Umass (pause) y (pause) pero, osea, tomando clase por clase. Mis papas me ayudaron a pagar. porque la escuela es SUPER carísima. Umm. Yo también. Yo me puse a trabajar casi toda la semana (pause) osea que fue (pause) otro, como, osea, el trabajo, el venir a la Universidad pero también tener que ir a trabajar. Llegar a las 2 de la mañana de trabajar en un restaurante a hacer tareas.

**English Translation:**

CLAUDIA: So, I, my migratory process always continued. My parents were petitioned, then they petitioned me, and, even today (long pause), it continues, I mean, (long pause) we still have not gotten it.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: But, after I entered the University. I graduated (high school), then I took 3 almost 4 years, and entered a joint admission program, and, they helped me get into UMass, and, but, I mean, taking class by class. My parents helped me pay. Because school is VERY expensive. Ummm. I too, I started to work almost the whole week, so it was (pause) another, it was like another, the job, coming to the university but also having to go to work. Getting home at 2 in the morning from work at the restaurant to do my homework.

While Gimena shared:

GIMENA: Yo tenia duda de si terminaria llendo a la escuela. Mi proceso (process of immigration documentation) todavia no terminaba (pause) y no queria causarle tanto gasto a mi familia.

**English Translation:**

GIMENA: I had my doubts about whether I would end up going to school. My immigration process was not complete (pause) I didn't want to cause that much financial expense to my family.

In this example, Gimena describes how being undocumented might have prevented her from pursuing higher education and speaks to the added financial burden created by her documentation status. In her passage, Claudia exemplifies not only the ways in which being undocumented has delayed her entry into college and created a situation where school is almost prohibitively expensive, but also the shame that surrounds documentation concerns. She reveals her status through her long pauses and selective silences within the interview.

Later in her interview, Claudia described the way being un-documented clouded her pre-college educational experiences, as she was aware that her efforts in high school might not translate into being able to attend college.

Porque también, lastimosamente, cuando venimos, no teníamos long pause), nuestro proceso migratorio estaba comenzando. En la high school, eso fue un problema para mi- MUY grande. Uno se enfrenta a que uno mira la diferencia. Uno no puede conseguir un buen trabajo. yo miraba otros compañeros que si



podían tener un buen trabajo, y una licencia, y yo no. porque yo no tenía (long pause) no tenía (long pause) todavía, papeles. fue algo muy duro para mi. porque cuando uno ya va saliendo de high school, empiezan las aplicaciones de graduación, y para la Universidad. Y todos hablan, no?, de que” yo voy a aplicar aquí y yo acá”.

y en ese entonces yo pensaba que era la minoría. que era LA UNICA. teniendo también esa mentalidad, ESA TRISTESA, de que aqui me quede. hasta aqui. Ya no mas.

Yo toque muchas puertas. y mi mama me decia, toca otra puerta, y otra, o otra. trate hacer lo mejor en la highschool. Tener muy Buenos grados, y eso. Y ya cuando llegue al final, ya vi que no podria seguir! Y pensaba, PERO, si todo sacrificio tiene recompensa! Como puede ser que no se pueda seguir?! Pero asi era. cuando me decian, “oh no, porque tu no tienes documentos (pause) no puedes”. Basicamente los consejeros de la High School me decian “no puedes”. “Va a ser imposible que tu vayas a la Universidad. Tu NO CUENTAS como una persona que a estudiado en esta escuela.” si. Entonces esa era una gran barrera. Aunque tengas el dinero- que tambien era otra barrera. Aunque tengas el dinero. No vas a poder conseguir el diploma. Y me decían que no podrían mis padres pagarlo. Porque seria muy muy caro. Porque tendría que tomar clases como estudiante internacional.

entonces como que ellos ya. Me pusieron otro obstáculo. Ese fue el obstáculo mayor para mi.

### **English Translation:**

Because, also, unfortunately[pitifully; to our misfortune], when we came, we didn't have (long pause), our migratory process was just starting. In high school, that was a VERY big problem for me. One confronts the fact that one can see the difference. One can't get a good job. I would see other classmates that could get a good job, get a license, and I couldn't, because I didn't (long pause) I didn't have (long pause) I still didn't have, papers. It was something that was very hard for me. Because when one is leaving high school, graduation applications start, and applications for college. And everyone talks about it, right? “I'm going to apply here, or there”

And back then I thought that I was, the minority. That I was the ONLY ONE. Also having that awareness, THAT SADNESS/GRIEF, that this was as far as I could get. Up to here. And now, no more.

I knocked on many doors. My mother would tell me, knock on another door, and another, and another. I tried to do my best in high school. Get really good grades and all of that. And when I got to the end, I saw that I couldn't continue! And I

would think, BUT, all sacrifices bring rewards! How can it be that I can't continue! But that was the truth. When they would tell me "oh no, you can't (apply to college) because you don't have papers, you can't". Basically high school counselors would tell me "you cant". "It is going to be impossible for you to go to College. You DON'T COUNT like a student that studied at this school". So, that was a great barrier. Even if you had the money, which was another barrier. Even if you had the money, you can't get a diploma (high school diploma). And they would tell me that my parents wouldn't be able to pay for it, because it would be too expensive, because I would have to take classes as an international student.

And so, it was as if they said, you are finished. they put up another obstacle. That was my greatest obstacle.

Similarly, Leticia described the way being undocumented negatively impacted her pre-college experience, where she did not allow herself to entertain the possibility of going to college until after her documentation status was resolved. Answering the question "when you were in high school, did you always know that you were going to go to college?", she said:

no, no. not always. I mean, when I was in high school, I went to a catholic high school. When I was in high school, I was thinking about going eventually. But I didn't want to go STRAIGHT out of high school, because, when I was in high school, I wasn't really (silence) I wasn't really (silence) legal. I didn't become legal until I was like, 17 years old. Like, late junior year. It's like, I was discouraged. So, I just thought, when I BECOME (silence, to indicate documented) then I can think about that.

Here, like Claudia, Leticia also expresses with silence the shame that surrounds documentation concerns. For some participants, including Liliana, the shame, fear, and secrecy tied to documentation concerns, itself, had the potential to limit their access to higher education. Liliana, for example, described her reluctance to apply to colleges because she feared having to disclose her documentation status to those helping her process her application paperwork. She stated:

Yo apliqué, pero no teníamos papeles. teníamos que usar solo dinero en efectivo. Fui a la parte de abajo de la librería de Boston a rellenar aplicaciones. Donde ayudan a rellenar aplicaciones. Pero yo le decía a mi mamá, “pero QUE PAPELES METEMOS! SI NO TENEMOS PAPELES!” Yo no quería ni hacerlo. Pero luego vimos que no era tan duro. Porque si uno mete el número para pagar impuestos, pues con ese mismo número. Fui a community college, y cuando conseguimos papeles pase los créditos a la Universidad.

...Y mi mamá, pues, ella está con puros Puerto Riqueños. Y ellos pues, todos sus hijos si estaban en la universidad, y ella no quería, como, que nos quedáramos atrás. Y a ella como que le daba pena que le preguntaban, “pero, y sus hijos que hacen”.

...Pero, aplicando, no teníamos mucha ayuda para rellenar las aplicaciones. Y uno tenía que preguntar, como “y, entonces, que número pongo para el número de social?”. Y era, MUY INCOMODO. Porque uno siempre intenta, como, ocultar, el estatus migratorio.

**English Translation:**

I applied, but we didn't have papers. We had to use only cash. I went to the lower level of the Boston to fill out applications (college applications). Where they help you fill out applications. But I would tell my mother, “but WHAT PAPERS DO WE USE! IF WE DON'T HAVE PAPERS!” I didn't want to even do it. Later we saw that it wasn't that hard. Because one just uses the same number you use to pay taxes. I went to community college, and when we got papers I transferred to the credits to the University.

...and my mom, well, she's with all Puerto Ricans. And they, well, all of their kids were in the University, and she didn't want to, like, that we stay behind. And she was embarrassed when they would ask her, “but, what are your kids doing”.

...but, when one is applying (to college), one has a lot of assistance in filling out applications. And one has to ask, like “um, then, what number should I use for the social security number?”. Its VERY UNCOMFORTABLE. Because one always tries to, like, hide, their immigration status.

Here, Liliana eloquently described the tension she felt when accepting assistance in completing college applications, due to her immigration status. She also described the shame her mother experienced when faced with questions about “what [her] kids were doing” in comparison to the children of her Puerto Rican co-workers who had a

privileged immigration status related to Puerto Rico's political relationship with the continental United States.

Claudia, Leticia and Liliana were not the only participants touched by documentation concerns. In the following excerpts Paloma shared how documentation concerns impacted her and her sister's ability to access higher education, and Luz described the how her documentation status halted her educational trajectory. Both participants exemplified the connection between being undocumented and inflated education costs. In the case of Luz, this inflated cost was the primary reason for her postponing college enrollment.

PALOMA: I have a sister. An older sister. But with her, it was a little bit harder. Because when we got here, she went to high school and she wasn't able to go to college because of her status. So she was really upset. She was depressed for a couple of years. But with ME. I guess I'm lucky to be able to go to college, and that makes my mom feel so much better.

INTERVIEWER: was there ever a doubt in your mind that you would go to college?

PALOMA: well, when I was in high school I was always trying to do my best. Trying to perform my best. But, the same thing as my sister. My legal status. I was so worried that I wouldn't be able to go to school. I was sad, because I had worked really hard. It's a big barrier. You won't be able to go to school. And if you do, you have to pay as an international student! And it's really high. But my mom's boss, they helped me with UMass. And after I got my legal status, it just became so much easier to pay as a state student. It was great. Just to be here is great!

INTERVIEWER: ...So, what about your sister now?

PALOMA: she's going to school. But she's a little bit, she's 25 and she's just starting right now, so, and she was depressed before. Because she was SO SMART. And when you can't do something that you really want, it's heartbreaking.  
... and it's taking me a little bit longer, because I started taking like 2 classes. Because I couldn't afford to do more.

INTERVIEWER: because you were doing international?

PALOMA: mmhm. In the beginning.

INTERVIEWER: so, has there ever been a moment when you questioned whether you were going to be able to finish?

PALOMA: yes

INTERVIEWER: could you tell me about that?

PALOMA: the money! It's a good subject. I mean, to come up with the money every semester is so hard! I mean, I've started taking out loans. But I was holding off, because I don't want to graduate with massive loans. So, just trying to work the most hours possible, trying to pay as much off as I could. PLUS insurance! That's an extra, like 2,000 dollars! So, its just that the money (pause) its very hard.

Luz shared:

When I was in high school, actually (pause) I (pause) um (long silence) I (pause) um (pause) I didn't have (pause) I didn't (pause) I didn't have papers.

when, in my senior year, I couldn't apply to any schools. I just COULDN'T. And that was really tough (I: mmhm), but I KNEW somehow that I was going to make it. And then two years later, that's when we (pause) my whole family (pause) got the papers. And, umm, So I registered at community college.

INTERVIEWER: so, did you know when you were in high school that come the time when you had to register for college, if you still didn't have your papers, you weren't going to be able to? Or did you work hard and then all of a sudden you prepare to register, and you cant?

LUZ: well, um, I sort of knew. That it was a long process. And that I couldn't JUST go to college- like my other friends. I knew. But it was still really tough. Because I was a GOOD STUDENT! So professors where all like "where are you going? We'll write you good recommendation letters, you need to apply". And it was HARD for me to explain (pause) something that, not many people know, or (pause) understand.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm, so, did you still try to keep your grades up? Just in case?

LUZ: oh YEAH! Until the last day! I alwayyys (pause)

INTERVIEWER: so, was there ever a doubt in your mind that you would be able to go to college?

LUZ: yeah! But it was more like I KNEW that I'd have to wait. But, my parents were always very supportive. They actually suggested that I go to a community college and pay as an international student, but, it's A LOT of money! I wasn't going to do that to them. But, my parents were always supportive, in that way.

so, I mean, we knew that, with papers, it would be easier to get, like loans and grants, financial aid.

Related to participants' family context of financial difficulty, which for some was augmented by documentation concerns, was participants' *need to carry a heavy workload* while they pursue their academic goals (*Theme sub-dimension 1a ii*).

Participants shared needing to work in order to continue contributing to family finances, to compensate for the inflated cost of education due to being undocumented, and to continue financially supporting their families in their country of origin. Carrying heavy workloads was described as limiting the amount of time participants could dedicate to academic pursuits, including attending classes, studying, or connecting with their academic community, and as negatively impacting participants' learning experience and academic work.

Not surprisingly, when considering the literature on both first generation college students and Latino/a college students, the participants in this study reported alarming workloads in addition to heavy academic course loads. Luz disclosed working at least 35 hours per week, in addition to being enrolled as a full-time student, while Denise shared how focusing on work led to poor academic performance and nearly led to her dropping out of college altogether.

INTERVIEWER: was it ever a possibility for you not to finish?

DENISE: oh yeah! at my community college, like I told you, I umm started working more and more. And so, I started out doing pretty well. I had a good GPA and then I got caught up into work. And, it wasn't the same experience as coming out here. I would just drive to class and come back home. So I got more and more caught up with work. One semester, I literally was having an emotional breakdown. Because I was working 60 hours, taking 5 classes, and there was lots of personal stuff with my boyfriend and stuff going on, so, I was just (pause) I dropped every single one of my classes. And, didn't tell my parents.

So, I would literally leave the house, pretend I was going to classes, and go to a friends house and sleep all day. Because I KNEW that if I told them that I had dropped all of my classes (pause) they would kill me!

And there was another semester where I dropped every class but two. The two with the history professor I liked. And I ended up not showing up to her classes either! And she called me on my cell phone, like "what's going on?!" and I told her, "I just cant do this".

I failed both her classes, because I just stopped showing up. I had to retake them and umm so, so, I actually left my community college with only 33 credits. To get here.

... another thing is, when I started coming here (UMB), my parents were like, "you shouldn't work any more". When I was going to community college, they didn't think anything of it! but now that I'm coming here. this is like, serious school. This is real college. So, no they're like, you don't need to work. You're doing all of these classes. We can help. You can just help out your mom, and we'll help you out with your bills.

...I get frustrated because I know that I could have gone to maybe like a better school. I mean UMass is great, but there ARE better schools. I had always done well in high school, so, and at the community college, that was when I started working, which affected my grades. I mean, I still left with a 3.2, but I know that I could have done better. Like a, like a 3.9 or something. EASILY. But. I failed a couple of classes, because I just stopped going, because I got overwhelmed with work. You know. Things like that. So, that's why I ended up coming here. Because it was safe. I knew I'd probably get in. that was one of the reasons as well, that she said UMass as opposed to like, Harvard or something (laughs).

... I feel that, when I look back, I didn't NEED to work that much. I didn't even have that many bills to pay! It's just, that's what kids DO. Immigrant kids. You just go, you graduate, you want to make money, you start working full time. You know? You don't bum around the house and go to community college. That's not how it works for us. By the time I graduated high school, I was hanging out with more immigrant kids. So, I knew I had to work. 40-60 hours a week, so, plus school. Plus I was just transitioning. I couldn't wing 4 classes.

In this passage, Denise described the negative toll working 60 hours per week and taking five classes took not only on her academic performance, but also on her wellbeing. She also described the way she understood her excessive workload to have limited her academic options, where working led to a decrease in her GPA which she believed was the reason she was not enrolled at a more selective university, like Harvard. Notably, Denise also gave us insight into her perception that working 40-60 hours per week while going to school was a cultural expectation—something “immigrant kids” do.

Also exemplifying this theme dimension, Carmen described immigrating to the United States alone for the purpose of completing her college education here, while her parents remain in a rural region of her country of origin and send her money as they are able. This situation was reported to create a need to work full-time in order to support herself. In the following excerpt, Carmen described the negative impact this need to carry a full-time work load has on her ability to perform well in school. She said:

Living by myself really has pushed me to get a job. Like I used to work at school, and at restaurants, and stuff like that. I don't want to ask my parents for money. I have to get it myself. And its REALLY HARD. When you don't have a bachelors. I guess. I have to do really lousy jobs. Because I used to work full time, I was a server full time, and doing classes, 5 classes (pause) it really affected my grades. I had to re-take a couple of classes and lower my job hours. It was a really big problem. I still have problems balancing. I always take the maximum number of classes, so, like 5. Always end up. Something always ends up happening. I end up withdrawing, or doing pass-fail. BECAUSE of job issues. I want to work more hours! My parents help, but only a little bit, for school. RENT and FOOD, and all of that, I have to take care of MYSELF.

For a sub-set of participants, one salient factor contributing to participant's carrying a heavy workload was related to their documentation status. As described previously, those participants who were under-document described an inflated education



cost caused by their needing to register as international students. This inflated cost in turn necessitated a disproportionately burdensome workload. This dimension is exemplified by Claudia, who revealed working over 30 hours per week while enrolled full time, and described the way her need to take classes as an international student amplified the need to carry a heavy work load.

y, también, otro, cuando uno toma 3 créditos, uno tiene que pagar seguro medico acá. Y yo no tenía seguro medico en ese entonces, entonces, a eso le tenía que añadir 2,500 dólares! ... Entonces, a sido muy difícil! Porque, e tenido que trabajar 30 horas en el trabajo en donde estoy. Ummm. Eh. Vengo a la escuela, es full time. Mi mama también, yo voy, y e ayudo. Ella hace, umm, limpia casas. Me llama, “estoy acá, en tal casa, puedes venir?”. Entonces, si. Es mucho trabajo. MUCHO trabajo.

... pero, después de q yo entre a la Universidad. Yo me gradúe. Me dure 3 casi 4 anos. Me metí a un joint admission (pause) y (pause) me ayudaron a entrar en UMass (pause) y (pause) pero, osea, tomando clase por clase. Mis papas me ayudaron a pagar. porque la escuela es SUPER carísima. Umm. Yo también. Yo me puse a trabajar casi toda la semana (pause) osea que fue (pause) otro, como, osea, el trabajo, el venir a la Universidad pero también tener que ir a trabajar. Llegar a las 2 de la mañana de trabajar en un restaurante a hacer tareas.

**English Translation:**

And also, another thing, when one takes 3 credits, one has to pay for health insurance here. And I didn't have health insurance then, so, on top of that I had to add 2,500 dollars!... so, it has been very difficult! Because, I have had to work 30 hours at the job where I work. Ummm, I come to school, full time. My mother, too, I go and I help her. She does, um, she cleans houses. She will call me, “I'm here, at this house, can you come?”. So, yes. It is a lot of work. A LOT of work.

...But, after I entered the University. I graduated (high school), then I took 3 almost 4 years, and entered a joint admission program, and, they helped me get into UMass, and, but, I mean, taking class by class. My parents helped me pay. Because school is VERY expensive. Ummm. I too, I started to work almost the whole week, so it was (pause) another, it was like another, the job, coming to the university but also having to go to work. Getting home at 2 in the morning from work at the restaurant to do my homework.

In addition to the expenses related to a college education, and the inflated cost of education for the undocumented, participants shared a sense of responsibility to contribute financially to their family. This sense of responsibility also promoted maintaining heavy workloads. Angela exemplifies her sense of obligation to contribute financially to her family in the following passage:

My parents have always, like, I started working when I was 16. As soon as, as soon as I was able to. I worked all throughout high school, college, obviously. I hope retirement comes quick. I was working ever since I was able to. But ½ my check was ALWAYS given to my parents. That was expected of everybody. Like, we would, yeah, ok, you're working for the new sneakers that come out, or whatever it is you want. But ½ our check went to our parents. Every single time. It wasn't until my brother got a little bit older and he moved out the house, that it wasn't it all the time.

But I've been with them the whole time, so, I just wanted to, you know, school was a way to get into debt. This was my mentality back then. A way to get into debt and to prolong the amount of time that I'm not working full time! That's how I kept thinking about it. But I'm not working full time! I'm losing money! That's how I kept thinking about it. Going to school is just impeding me. Its one of those things, you know? I just gotta get through it, so I can work. That's how I've always felt. It hasn't changed. To this day I still help them out and stuff like that.

May can't come soon enough! Summers are crazy for me. Summers I have like two jobs, at any given time. Just to, because I know winter is coming and I have to go back to school.

INTERVIEWER: Has it been harder, since you've been back to school, to contribute enough ( pause) whatever you think ENOUGH is?

ANGELA: yeah! It has been. And ummmmm yeah. its been really hard. I haven't been able to contribute as much as I WANT to. But, you know, I'm working two jobs now. You know? I'm still tryiiiiing to make it. So they don't have to (pause) Mami doesn't have to stay any later at work, or something like that.

INTERVIEWER: so how many hours would you say you're working

ANGELA: it varies, but on a regular week it would be 50. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: and you're full time here (school)?

ANGELA: full time here. Yeah.

In this excerpt, Angela not only described her heavy work load while going to school full time, she also exposed her motivation. She described an established pattern, where her family depends on her income and where failing to contribute financially to her household would lead to an increase in her mother's work burden to compensate.

Leticia revealed a similar motivation for continuing to work while in college, to contribute to her family's income. She said:

I kept my job, and went to community college part time. I mean my parents were like, just leave that! But, I didn't want to. I wanted to keep helping them. I wanted to help THEM. I didn't want them helping ME. (pause) they've already helped me enough.

In addition to contributing to their families financially through external work, participants also described expectations that they contribute to family finances by working in the family business or helping parents with their work obligations. In the above example Claudia described being called upon by her mother to help her clean houses, in addition to her own work obligations:

... Entonces, a sido muy difiici! Porque, e tenido que trabajar 30 horas en el trabajo en donde estoy. Ummm. Eh. Vengo a la escuela, es full time. Mi mama tambien, yo voy, y e alludo. Ella hace, umm, limpia casas. Me llama, "estoy aca, en tal casa, puedes venir?". Entonces, si. Es mucho trabajo. MUCHO trabajo.

INTERVIEWER: y, has tenido alguna vez que decirle que no a tu mama cuando te pide que le ayudes a limpiar casas? (pause) por la escuela?

CLAUDIA: SI! Si . si. Si y yo e visto el, esa es otra cosa. Porque mi mama sufre de osteoporosis (INTERVIEWER: mmhm), entonces, umm, emocionalmente me afecta mucho. Porque yo quiero estar ahi, pero, decirle que no, es, Umm, pero tambien esta la escuela! Y yo le e visto como, "no puedes venire (silence) oooh OK" (disappointed) . No voy, pero durante todo el dia ella me sigue recordando, "oh, como me duele la espalda". Hahaha. O cosas asi. Yo ya se que es porque yo no fui a ayudarla. Emocionalmente me afecta BASTANTE.

**English translation:**

... So, it has been very difficult! Because, I have had to work 30 hours at the job where I work. Ummm, I come to school, full time. My mother, too, I go and I help here. She does, um, she cleans houses. She will call me, "I'm here, at this house, can you come?". So, yes. It is a lot of work. A LOT of work.

INTERVIEWER: and, have you ever had to say no to your mom when she has asked that you come help her clean a house? (pause) because of school?

CLAUDIA: YES! Yes. Yes. Yes and I have seen the, that's another thing. Because my mom suffers from osteoporosis (INTERVIEWER: mmhm), so, umm, emotionally it affects me a lot. Because I want to be there, but telling her no, is, umm, but, there also school! And I have seen how, "you can't come (silence) ooooh OK" (disappointed). I don't go, but during the whole day she keeps reminding me of it. "oh, how my back hurts". Hahaha. Or things like that. And I know that it's because I didn't go help her. Emotionally it affects me A LOT.

In this passage, Claudia shared details about her heavy work load and obligation to contribute to her family by helping her mother at work. She also revealed the conflict between fulfilling this obligation and pursuing her academic goals, including the negative toll this conflict took on her emotional wellbeing.

Similarly, Denise revealed feeling conflict between an obligation to work at her mother's day care (beyond the hours that she is being paid) and her desire to focus on school work.

... We have the daycare. At home. The days I don't have class, I'm expected to help out. That's my primary job, you know? In the summer time, I just work with her, my mom. As an assistant. I have an assistant license and she pays me for that. Especially since that's pretty much my only job, and my mom helps me with my bills, I feel like its my responsibility. You know?

... when I'm helping her out at the day care... it could be time I could be using to do homework and stuff. So SOMETIMES it gets in the way. But, when I have something, like a really pressing (pause) something due the next day or something. I tell my mom "mom. I have to work on this paper". And she's like "fine". And then, I just do little things for her here and there. I help her give lunch to the kids, then she puts them to bed, and I'm free to do my homework. So, but, day to day, it is time that I could be doing my homework. Which I have to end up

having to fit it. I'll be doing things here in between classes, or printing something quickly right before class. (INTERVIEWER: mmhm) sometimes it DOES get in the way. But my mom and dad are really understanding. Just because they want me to get good grades and stuff. So they're really on top of me about my grades, But it does get annoying sometimes.

In Denise's case, she described finding a way to request time for school work and support from her parents, helping to balance her family and educational obligations.

Finally, participants described both explicitly and implicitly the ways that their family as a whole has been negatively impacted by a continuum of *experiences with racism* (Theme sub-dimension 1a iii ). Participants implicitly describe the ways they were given subtle signals alerting them that they were unwelcome or misunderstood in academic settings. In one example, Claudia shared:

yo digo, no, osea, no me arrepiento. Creo que todo pasa por algo. Si me arrepiento (pause) el haber aceptado cuando me dijeron "no". el no haber seguido esos dos años que perdí. Podría haber tomado 2 clases (pause) Cuando alguien te dice "no puedes, te va a costar \$4000 al mes" (pause) uno dice (pause) uhh es verdad. Es mucho. Pero lo hubiese podido hacer! De eso si me arrepiento. De no haber seguido. Y ahora- NADA me a va a parar! Voy por el masters, (laughs)

... Porque también, lastimosamente, cuando venimos, no teníamos (long pause, indicating being undocumented), nuestro proceso migratorio estaba comenzando. en la high school, eso fue un problema para mi- MUY grande. Uno se enfrenta a que uno mira la diferencia. Uno no puede conseguir un buen trabajo. yo miraba otros compañeros que si podían tener un buen trabajo, y una licencia, y yo no. porque yo no tenia (long pause) no tenia (long pause) todavía, papeles. fue algo muy duro para mi. porque cuando uno ya va saliendo de high school, empiezan las aplicaciones de graduación, y para la Universidad. Y todos hablan, no?, de que" yo voy a aplicar aquí y yo acá". y en ese entonces yo pensaba que era la minoría. que era LA UNICA. teniendo también esa mentalidad, ESA TRISTESA, de que aquí me quede. hasta aquí. Ya no mas.

Yo toque muchas puertas. y mi mama me decía, toca otra puerta, y otra, o otra. trate hacer lo mejor en la high school. Tener muy buenos grados, y eso. Y ya cuando llegue al final, ya vi que no podría seguir! Y pensaba, PERO, si todo sacrificio tiene recompensa! Como puede ser que no se pueda seguir?! Pero así era. cuando me decían, "oh no, porque tu no tienes documentos... no puedes". Básicamente los consejeros de la High School me decían "no puedes". "Va a ser

imposible que tu vayas a la Universidad. Tu NO CUENTAS como una persona que a estudiado en esta escuela.” si. Entonces esa era una gran barrera. Aunque tengas el dinero- que también era otra barrera. Aunque tengas el dinero. No vas a poder conseguir el diploma. Y me decían que no podrían mis padres pagarlo. Porque seria muy muy caro. Porque tendría que tomar clases como estudiante internacional. entonces como que ellos ya. Me pusieron otro obstáculo. Ese fue el obstáculo mayor mi.

### **English Translation:**

I say, no, I mean, I don't regret it. I think everything happens for a reason. I do regret (pause) having accepted when they told me “no”. not having continued those two years that I lost. I could have taken two class (pause) when some tells you “you can't, it is going to cost you \$4000 a month” (pause) one says (pause) uhh its true. It's a lot. But I could have done it! I do regret that. That I didn't continue. Now- NOTHING is going to stop me! I'm going for my masters, hahaha.

...Because, also, unfortunately, when we came, we didn't have (long pause, indicating being undocumented), our migratory process was just starting. In high school, that was a VERY big problem for me. One puts in the effort and one can see the difference. One can't get a good job. Y would see other classmates that could get a good job, get a license, and I couldn't. because I didn't (long pause) I didn't have (long pause) I still didn't have, papers. It was something that was very hard for me. Because when one is leaving high school, graduation applications start, and applications for college. And everyone talks about it, right? “I'm going to apply here, or there” And back then I thought that I was, the minority. That I was the ONLY ONE. Also having that mentality, that sadness, that it was as far as I could get. Up to here. And no more.

I knocked on many doors. My mother would tell me, knock on another door, and another, and another. I tried to do my best in high school. Get really good grades and all of that. And when I got to the end, I saw that I couldn't continue! And I would think, BUT, all sacrifices bring rewards! How can it be that I can't continue! But that was the truth. When they would tell me “oh no, you cant (apply to college) because you don't have papers, you cant”. Basically high school counselors would tell me “you cant”. “It is going to be impossible for you to go to College. You DON'T COUNT like a student that studied at this school”. So, that was a great barrier. Even if you had the money, which was another barrier. Even if you had the money, you can't get a diploma (high school diploma). And they would tell me that my parents wouldn't be able to pay for it, because it would be too expensive, because I would have to take classes as an international student. And so, they, they put up another obstacle. That was my greatest obstacle.

Here, Claudia recalls encounters during a critical transition, approaching high school graduation, where high school counselors communicated to her that she could not go to college because of her documentation status. She recalls these encounters as central to her decision to initially abandon her college aspirations, which she now regrets. Painfully, Claudia made clear through context and tone that she interpreted her school counselors' comment that she "[didn't] count like a student" as something other than a comment regarding Claudia not being tallied as a member of the student body. Notably, she understands these encounters as responsible for "[putting] up another obstacle".

The participants interviewed for this study also shared an experience of disadvantage in their sense that they lacked guidance in their navigation of higher education. Participants often described feeling lost in the college environment, as if navigating a new world *without a map* (*Theme dimension 1b*). Denise eloquently describes this experience:

...umm and especially since, pretty much since I feel like, in college, I've been walking around with a blindfold on! You know! I could have gone a different way, done a different major, or you know, I just feel that, now that I'm about to graduate, I feel nervous about my degree! Liberal arts degree? I should have majored in something more specific, so that I could just graduate and find a job right away. Umm, so, I feel like, if I had had more input from them, maybe I would have gone a different way. But who knows what would have happened.

I mean, its like, "don't be me. Go! Go! Go!", and I'm like, "ummmm., ok. I'm going, but (silence)"

...I'm going to be graduating, and like be sitting there. Like, ok, now what. Where do I go, where do I apply? Who wants me? You know? Like, what show I have done differently? You know. Like even when I did an internship, I just did an internship at (law firm), you know, because it was "law". And that was just because of a professor, approached me and was like "hey! I think you'd be great for this. I'm the one that recruits people, so, would you like to do it?". and I was like, umm, sure. If it wasn't for THAT I don't even think that I would have even done an internship! So, umm, it's just hard. It's confusing. It's very, this whole

college world is very confusing. It feels like everybody knows something that I don't! like, they all got the map, and I didn't!

In this passage, Denise described her experience of limited guidance in the college environment. She also shared her perception that her parents, having no college experience, could only support her by urging her not to “be like [them]”, and encouraging her to “go, go, go”. They could not, however, guide her in the process of choosing a major, or support her professional development opportunities.

Lisa describes being impacted by a lack of guidance even as she prepared to apply to college.

well, I went to (school in Boston). You know. I started there in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. And, you know, everyone else was talking about college. Because its supposed to prepare you for college, that was the goal. So, but, I didn't really pay attention to it, because nobody in my family went to college, so, it wasn't until JUNIOR year, that I was like, “oh, snap, everybody's applying to colleges and I haven't”. I guess I have to do it TOO. BEFORE junior year, I didn't think about college AT ALL. I didn't know anything about colleges, about what colleges were out there, or what they had to offer, so.

INTERVIEWER: so, was this a topic talked about within your family?

LISA: not really, no. I can't even remember ever talking about it with my family (pause) I mean, my family, they KNEW that I was smart enough to go into college, but it was not something that we had ever talked about.

INTERVIEWER: so do you think they were expecting you to go to college?

LISA: yeah. They kind of were expecting it, but they didn't know anything ABOUT college, or applying, or how much it would cost, or ANYTHING. So they kinda left it upon me to find out, to figure it out.

As first generation college students, participants not only reported experiencing a lack of guidance within higher education, they also shared experiencing a *multifaceted lack of understanding from their family* (Theme dimension 1c) . This lack of understanding stemmed from participant's family's inexperience leading to an inability to



understand academic obligation and stressors, complexities related to accessing higher education, career paths, and realistic expectations. In the following excerpt Denise exemplifies this theme dimension.

I feel that I (pause) I don't (pause) like my parents don't realize how hard it is to get a job in this economy with [my] degree (laughs). So, I feel like they think that I'm just going to graduate and like get a great job, and everything is going to be great. So, I feel like, if I had had more input from them and more support (pause) especially with the way the economy is. If they were more understanding, If they were like "hey, you know, I know that you might not be able to get a job right away" or something.. I would feel a lot more safe. (laughs)

...Because they haven't gone through it. They think that you're just going to graduate and automatically be making all of this money. And that's just not really how things work.

I'll call [my friends] and tell them "oh, I have so much going on". Because I know my parents don't understand the scope of it, they don't understand how much homework we have, the difference between a 100 level and a 400 level class. They don't get it! when I tell them I have so much homework, they're like "so? Just go do it". they don't understand how stressed out I can be.

...Now that I'm taking 6 classes, its just like, so overwhelming. So much to do. The end of the semester is coming up, and it feels like it was fast forward. I have so many papers due and stuff. Its hard. Its hard to concentrate at home, too. They don't understand when I say "I'm going to go work at the library". They're like "oh, why can't you just work HERE? And help your mom with the daycare. Why do you have to go all the way to the library". Its because I cant concentrate at home! I need like a structured environment.

...don't get it! because they've never been through it! they don't understand what 6 classes really means! They don't understand how much extra work that is.

My mom feels bad when I get home, like tonight I'll be home after 11:00. She'll say she feels sorry that I'm tired. But she doesn't get how tired I really am! And, then I have to wake up tomorrow and help her with the kids, and find time to do my homework. End of semester is coming up, and they don't understand that everything is due at the end of the semester. So many papers, so many finals (INTERVIEWER: mmhm). And everything is due, and so its hard for them to understand. I get frustrated just thinking about it!

...sometimes I feel like there is a language barrier too. Because the words that I use in school, the context of school and the context of home... a lot of times I get frustrated, because I don't know how to explain to them what I'm doing in school.

What, exactly, I have to do. You know? Sometimes I'll just show them my computer screen and tell them "look at this Microsoft word page, I have to write 15 of these by the end of the semester" I'm on like ½ of page one. She'll kind of understand. But she can't understand the thought process (pause) or the organization skills you need to finish a 15 page paper. And all of the research that goes into it.

...well, I knew I wanted to go to college. Especially since my parents were so pro- going to college. But they don't know about good schools or bad schools. They don't know, what I need to get into college. They didn't even know I had to take the SATs. I'm doing an LSAT course this summer. and they're like " oh what is this LSAT thing". It's a VERY IMPORTANT TEST! That can determine the rest of my life! They don't get it. how hard it is! How much you need to study! Especially since it'll be this summer, when I'm supposed to be helping out my mom. I can already see how much time I'm going to be finding to study!

In addition to financial and work obligations, participants also shared having *family obligations with a more salient gender component* (Theme dimension 1d).

Participants described differing expectations for them when compared to male family members, including expectations coinciding with dominant female gender roles. These expectations amplified the context of disadvantage described thus far, as participants were expected to allocate additional time to domestic and caretaking duties—further limiting the time they had available to dedicate to their academic pursuits.

In addition to helping her mother at the family day care, Denise described expectations with a clear gender component:

Like, my room right now is a mess! You know. I feel like, you know, especially since I'm a GIRL. Ummm, my mom's always like "no one is going to want to marry you! Look at your room! It's a mess". Its funny, because she's so independent minded for some things, and then other times she's like, " look at your room. What man is going to want to marry someone with such a messy room." And, so, I tell her "I don't care! I'm not thinking of getting married". I feel like both my parents EXPECT me to do stuff around the house. You know? My mom is always telling me, " you should help me out more!" they expect much less from my brother. I mean, he's just responsible for his room.

INTERVIEWER: so, do you think there's a gender component? Like, because you're a girl...

DENISE: (interrupts). Yeah! I should know how to (silence) I should learn how to mop the floor and how to maintain the house clean. How to clean a bathroom. Because I'm going to be doing that later on. Basically is what they think. (pause) I hope not, though.

In this excerpt, Denise described the discrepancy in her family's expectation of her compared to her brother. She also revealed a conflict between her family's expectations and her own hopes for her future, where she understands her family's expectations that she will one day be responsible for cleaning a house and yet recognized that this is not the vision she holds for her future.

Even when participants were no longer living with their parents, gendered obligations still created situations where participants were expected to complete domestic tasks. In the case of Susana, she was called to fill her mother's role when her mother was unable to do so because of a surgery. Susana shares:

this weekend I have to study! But I have to go home, because my mom is getting surgery. I have to go home, to take care of her. and I have to cook for my brother and my dad, because she cant stand up or do anything.

INTERVIEWER: so, you have to take over and cook because mom can't?

SUSANA: (laughs), yeah. I mean. My dad COULD cook, but, he prefers (pause) you know, being Latino, machismo and marianismo. The woman is expected to cook. That's how we were raised. Like, its like, they obviously, they want me to do ok and not to depend on my husband or whatever if I have one, but they want, but in my house, I have to do, yeah, the women duties. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: like what other "women duties"?

PARTICIPANT: mop the floor, clean the bathroom, clean the dishes. Just clean.

INTERVIEWER: so you still do that now, even though you don't live there

PARTICIPANT: yeah! When I'm there, I have to do that. Clean the rooms. Yeah.

In this passage, Susana revealed having insight into the cultural dynamics of *machismo* and *marianismo*, and the impact these had on family expectations. She also shared insight that her father was capable of cooking, but a continued sense of obligation to go along with her family's established gendered expectations.

For mothers, and those who have adopted mothering roles within their family structure, gendered obligations further limit both the time they spend pursuing their education and the priority their academic goals take in comparison to parenting. This is discussed at length under the major theme of Children, present and future (Major theme 5).

Having spoken to the context of disadvantage under which these women attempt to balance family and academic pursuits, the analysis of themes now turns to the impact of this context on participant's understanding of higher education.

#### Education as an Obligation to Family Motivation

Another major theme in participant narratives was the meaning they ascribed to higher education, and how they have come to understand obtaining a college degree as an obligation to their family. In understanding the depth of this theme, it is important to note the ways this sense of obligation served both as a principal motivator for completion and a stressor.

Participants in this study ascribed meanings of financial and social mobility for both self and family to obtaining a higher education, where a college degree was seen as the key, or the passport, to a different level of economic security and to a different life experience. Notably, participants described their own academic achievements as

passports for their entire families, where their college degree would mean their parents, siblings and children would be taken care of.

Related to participants' belief that their college degree would positively impact their entire families, the women interviewed described a sense of obligation to repay their parents for their sacrifices. This sense of obligation acted both as an important motivator and as a stressor. Highlighting the gender component of these women's experience, participants described feeling a specific obligation to finish college because their mothers were unable to do so.

In the following excerpt, Denise describes her understanding of a college *education as a passport to a better life for the whole family* (Theme dimension 2a), a way to ensure that her parents would be taken care of, and a way to achieve socioeconomic mobility.

I feel like, I'M the ONE. I feel this pressure, like, I'm the one that is going to take care of my parents when they're old. The one that's going to make sure they have a GOOD life. I don't want to send them to like a nursing home. Or anything. I want them to have their own. I want them to be OK for retirement, you know? I don't want them to work hard until they're dead. So, umm, that's one of the big things. especially, since we didn't really know if my brother was going to go to college or not. So, umm, and, all of my cousins that are here (US), are, I have 5 or 6 cousins that are here. None of them are going to school but me. Umm, so, I'm literally the ONE. From my whole family. The one that's going to be successful, and, so, it's kind of. The pressure is really intense. Especially now that I'm going to graduate. I'm like, oh my god. What am I going to do? There's already a lot of pressure when you're graduating, and can't find a job.

...I have a friend who graduated in business, and she works for [insurance company] now. She does recruiting. And was like, I can totally get you a job, here, working for [insurance company]. And she's like, "starting pay is 50,000 dollars a year". I was like COOL I have a backup. I have a plan now! I told my father, and he was like, you'd be making, what? 1,000 dollars a week?! I make that! No no no no no. you're not going to be doing that for the rest of your life" They don't have a plan "oh, you're going to be middle class" NO. they have a plan " you are going to be RICH. You will be RICH. WEALTHY. You are going to have a mansion". They don't think that I'm going to go up from working class

to middle class. They think that I'm going to go all the way up. So. That's. its hard for them to see that, I'm probably not gonna get that far. So. Maybe through [graduate] school. That's what keeps me going. If there weren't so much pressure, I don't think id go on to [graduate] school. I know how much work it is! The [graduate entrance exams]! I mean, I know a lot of people who spend years studying for it! I don't think that I would ever do it. if it weren't for the expectation that I'm going to be rich. Its not like that! You go to college, you graduate, and you're lucky if you start off making 50,000 year. It's a lot.

Denise here first described her vision of herself as responsible for the wellbeing of her parents. With this understanding, she moved to describe her understanding of a college degree as definitive of success, and as a vessel for socioeconomic mobility. Of note, she also highlights the conflict between her and her family's understanding of the value of a college education, a new passport, where her family expects mobility into being "rich" and she expects to ascend to "middle class".

Carmen described a similar sense of obligation, where her family has "invest[ed]" in her, sending her to complete her education in the United States instead of in her country of origin, with the understanding that she in turn will be able to get "a good job" and will be able to "help [her parents] get out of [country of origin]". She stated:

I always planned to go to college. It was like a MUST because no one else in my family had ever gone to college. It was like a must, for my parents, for me to go to college. (pause) that's why we moved here (to the US), because they wanted me to go to college here. Not in [country of origin]. "oh you have to move to the US, and take advantage of your citizenship, and have a better education there". My parents really wanted me to go to (private university in Boston). They were disappointed. Mad. Disappointed that I didn't get in.

...I have a very big sense of obligation. Because [country of origin], the rural country, is really poor. So, that's why my parents wanted me to get a better education and get a good job. So that I ultimately can provide for them. Help them. My parents live in [country of origin]. I live here in Boston alone. That's why they expect me to get a good job, take care of myself (pause). They send me money right now, but the money is really limited. So, they really push me to have a better education. Because they sometimes mention "oh, were INVESTING in you. In your education. So you better get good grades. A good job." And then can

help them (pause) get out of [country of origin]. My mom really wants to get out of [country of origin].

Similar to Denise's understanding of the impact of education on socioeconomic mobility, Susana described her understanding that a higher education was equivalent to money, and her belief that money was equivalent to a "nice life". When asked the reason she pursued college, Susana answered:

It was something that they really wanted me to do (to go on to college). The school really wanted me to do. And I wanted to do on my own. You know, because if you have MONEY. If you have a nice Job, you have money, and then you have a nice life. So, that's pretty much the way it was. I grew up knowing.

An additional motivator named by participants was the desire to complete their college education as a way of *repaying their parent for their sacrifices* (*Theme dimension 2b*). Angela exemplifies this theme in the following passage:

INTERVIEWER: que te motivo empezar la escuela?

ANGELA: En verdad, nunca me (pause) la Universidad no era algo que yo quería hacer.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

ANGELA: ah, desde que estaba en highschool yo pensaba (pause) osea, los nenes cuando estaban haciendo en highschool, ummm, college applications, yo en verdad dije, "ok, yo voy a ir para un semestre pero eso no es para mi". Yo quería empezar a trabajar YA!

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

ANGELA: por muchas razones (pause) Pero entonces (pause) Es para el padre mio. Osea, papi, vino a este país con nada. Y trabajo bien duro, como todo el mundo tiene esa historia también. Pero trabajo muy duro (pause) y lo único que el me decía era "Ángela tu tienes que ir a la escuela". "tu tienes que graduarte". Papi le tiene un amor a la educación, que es (pause) yo no entiendo. Mi mami no piensa así. (pause) so, um, eso siempre era bien importante para el.

PERSONALMENTE para mi, no importante. pero lo quería hacer por papi. Para que todo lo que el hizo al llegar (pause) no sea en vano (pause) El diploma es para el! El diploma es para el.

No, osea, mucha gente lo hace por el prestigio (pause) yo quiero decir esto. yo quiero este tipo de trabajo. o lo que sea (pause) NUNCA. En verdad, no me cogio eso. Eso no era un motivator for me, it really wasn't. My major is [social science]! Yo no estoy pensando en hacer mucho dinero! it was never (pause) about that. It's because he saw it as very important. Cuando yo me gradue- ese diploma es para el.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm.

ANGELA: cuando yo empese UMass, empece en negocio. I went to the school of management- me cambie. Porque papi dijo que, el, he wanted me to do business o you know law. And I definitely wasn't going to do sciences. So he said, at least do business. And I did. My major was business management in the beginning (pause) and I switched it (pause) told him "papi, I'm in school and I'm doing this. But I'm miserable (pause) so. Yo me voy a graduar, pero no con lo que tu quieres"

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

### **English Translation**

INTERVIEWER: what motivated you to start school?

ANGELA: The truth is, I never (pause) College was not something I wanted to do.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

ANGELA: um, ever since I was in high school I thought (pause) that is, when kids were doing high school, ummm, college aplicacions, I honestly said "ok, I'm going to go for one semester, but that's not for me". I wanted to start to work RIGHT AWAY!

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

ANGELA: For many reasons (pause) but then (pause) It is for my father. I mean, Papi came to this country with nothing. And worked very hard, like everyone else has that history too. But he worked very hard (pause) and the only thing that he would say was "Angela, you have to go to school". "you have to graduate". Papi has a love for education that is, that is (pause) I don't understand it. My mother is



not like that (pause) so, umm, it was always something that was very important to him.

PERSONALLY, for me, it isn't important. But I wanted to do it for Papi. So that everything he did when he first arrived [to the US] (pause) isn't in vain. (pause) The diploma is for him! The diploma is for him.

It's not, I mean, a lot of people do it for the prestige (pause) "I want to be able to tell people this", "I want this type of job", or whatever (pause) NEVER. The truth is, that never got me. That wasn't a motivator for me, it really wasn't. My major is [social science]! I'm not thinking about making a lot of money! It was never (pause) about that. It's because he saw it as very important. When I graduate- that diploma is for him.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm.

ANGELA: When I started at UMass, I started in business. I went to the school of management- I switched. Because Papi said that he, he wanted me to do business or, you know, law. And I definitely wasn't going to do sciences. So he said, at least do business. And I did. My major was business management in the beginning (pause) and I switched it (pause) told him "Papi, I'm in school and I'm doing this. But I'm miserable (pause) so. I'm going to graduate. But not with the degree that you want"

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

Angela then shifts her responses to English, stating:

ANGELA: I mean, that was another reason, how strong his hold is. even my major.

INTERVIEWER: it definitely sounds like your dad is a big motivator, could you say more about what emotion you think is behind that?

ANGELA: admiration. Its not fear or anything. Cuz I don't think that, you know, if (pause) if I were to mess up or something like that. If I were to not necessarily graduate (pause) I know that would hurt him. But at the end of the day, I'm his daughter and he's gonna be proud of me no matter what. He's told that to me many times. It's never fear. It's more like, admiration, for what he's done. Umm I, you know, I'm very grateful for that. When I think about it, its like, I have 3 older brothers, none of them went to school or even attempted to go to college. So, for me, its kind of interesting to see how every day when we'd go to school or when I'd give him a good report from school or something like that, he'd be like "ok good". Everyday I would hear the word "college". that's what he always used to say to me. But it's weird how it resonated so strongly with me but not with them, I have no idea how they don't even think about it. To this day, my dad still

talks to them about it, “you know, you could have been done with college”. So I know that’s infinitely important to him, and so I’m not gonna mess up. And also, umm, its definitely (pause) I admire what he’s done. Very thankful for that. And the LOVE I have for my dad. So that’s, mostly it.

Here, Angela describes the love and admiration she feels for her father, and her hope that her college degree will serve as repayment for his hard work. Susana and Luz described a similar sense of obligation to repay their parents for their hard work. Susana said:

INTERVIEWER: mmhm. So do you feel that finishing college is, like

PARTICIPANT: (interrupts) a payment! I kind of feel like I OWE IT to them. If I fail, all of that money, all of that work, that could have been put to something else. It’ll be for nothing. Failing for me, at this point, is not an option. I can’t fail. I don’t want to see my parents see me fail. At all. It’s just, I don’t want to be that disappointment in them! I don’t. it would be a huge disappointment.

While Luz said:

It’s, umm, it’s like a weird pressure. Mostly, it’s not like that my parents pressure me (pause) but, its more like I pressure myself. You know? Because my parents, work HARD for me to be able to go to college—in many ways.

In Denise’s case, her parents not only set their struggles as a cautionary tale to motivate her, they also communicate to her that her graduation is an expected repayment for their sacrifices, since they “came [to the US] so that [she] could go to college”.

Answering the question “what motivated you to go to college”, Denise responded:

My parents are like. “GO TO SCHOOL”. “We EXPECT you to go to college. We don’t want ANY excuses from you. We came HERE so you could go to college.” That’s why we came here. They tell me every day. “You don’t want to live the same life that I’m living. I work like a slave and I can barely pay the bills.” So, that’s something that they’ve always always told me. “Do well in school, do well in school, do well in school. “

INTERVIEWER: mmhm, so, your parent’s are using themselves as the example of what could

DENISE: (interrupts) yeah! This is what WILL HAPPEN to you if you don't go to college. My mother has her own daycare and I help her. And she says "if you don't go, you're going to be, you know, changing diapers for the rest of your life. Or, you're going to be like your father". He works at a bakery, so. (pause) "Is that what you want to do for the rest of your life?!" and I say no. so, here I am.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

DENISE: that's what REALLY motivates me a lot. My parents. (silence)

Susana and Paloma shared their desire to graduate in order to be a source of pride for their parents.

SUSANA: And, the thing is, in Latino families, or my family at least, people gossip so much! I hear my mom talking to my aunts! "Oh my god! You know your cousin Cindy\*, yeah, she left la Universidad (English translation: the University)!". I'm sorry.

INTERVIEWER: no, no, spanglish is fine. Don't worry.

SUSANA: yeah, she's like "you know she got out of college for her boyfriend! Can you believe that! She's crazy! She left to live with her boyfriend, oh my god! Now she's just working. Esa muchacha (English Translation: that girl). She was so smart". And then my other cousin Karla\* they're like "yeah, y este (English Translation: this one), he left college, because he doesn't want to go to college, he just wants to buy a car. And he saw that he was making money, so he decided to leave college."

"I can't believe these kids leave school like that! School is so important. Especially in this country! With a degree you could do so much!"  
I don't want to be talked about like that!

I want them to say "oh, yeah, did you hear about Susana? she did it. she went to school, she made it. mirala a ella! Mira a la hija de Lila\* (English Translation: look at her! Look at Lila's\* daughter)". that's how I want to be seen."

That's how they talk about the people that go to school and finish. My mom has a friend, her daughter finished at Umass Boston. And they talk about her. "yeah, she graduated, she has a good job. She moved to [BIG CITY FAR AWAY]. She got an apartment there. She's doing really good for herself".

You know. It's just the way people speak about you.

I want to be like, (pause) I don't know how to say it in English. I want to be *un orgullo* (English Translation: source of pride) or my parents!

INTERVIEWER: a source of pride?

SUSANA: yeah! Yes! That's what I want to be for my parents.

When they talk about me. I can tell. Even know, when she sees people from like her country, like at the supermarket, they'll ask her how I'm doing. I'm there, listening to them. And she's like "oh si, esta en la Universidad! Its her second year. Ella esta haciendo muy bien!" (English Translation: "oh yes, she's in college! It's her second year. She is doing very well"). Its like when they speak about it, its like "oh, esta en la Universidad! (English Translation: oh, she's in college!)

Paloma said:

My mother always tells me that I've always been rebellious. When I was little, in a bad way, but now, in a good way. (laughs). Like, trying to put everything that I have to graduate. To finish school and get a good job. Especially for my mom too! I want to make her proud! She has worked SO much! And has always always been there for us.

INTERVIEWER: do you see your graduation as a form of..

PALOMA: recompensa (English Translation: repayment/reward). She's always so proud for me to get this far. Some parents think its not a big deal. But for my mom. Because she's always pushed me. It's a lot!

Finally, Claudia shared:

también e dejado muchas cosas que yo hubiese querido hacer (pause) para alcanzar esto. Pero también uno ve que todo el proceso que yo pase, y ver como mis papas también reciben todas estas recompensas por su trabajo (pause) que estoy a punto de graduarme. ellos estan super felices. Entonces, umm, mi proceso migratorio ya casi esta tambien, entonces (pause) el ver que no renuncie en ese tiempo que yo debia haber renunciado.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: es un proceso que yo empece. Y ahora lo TENGO que terminar. entonces como que uno, ahí es cuando uno enfrenta la prueba mas grande. Muchos se salen. Se dan por vencidos. Tengo muchos amigos a los que les paso eso.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: entonces uno empieza a pensar en regresar a su país (pause) pero no (pause) no puedo (pause) tengo que terminar! Y el sacrificio de mis papas, que?! Fue una temporada muy difícil.

... como, eh, es tu definición. Lo que tus papas te enseñan es tu definición. Lo que tu eres.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: Entonces mi mama siempre me puso eso en mi mente. "yo quise hacer esto, yo quise hacer lo otro".

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: en nuestros países uno aprende, uno, por ejemplo, no sabe el idioma pero sabe las canciones. Yo mi mama siempre, ella me decía que su sueño era habla ingles.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: Y pues también, lastimosamente nos tuvo a nosotros, soy yo, mi hermano menor y mi hermana mayor. Y pues siempre tuvimos eso de que mi mama quiso seguir con la escuela y no pudo- por nosotros. Entonces, yo en mi mente siempre tuve eso de que ella no lo pudo hacer- pero YO lo puedo hacer. Ella lo empezó- pero no lo termino. Yo lo TENGO que terminar.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: y también uno mira los sacrificios de los papas. Yo no puedo pagarles todo lo que ellos han hecho, pero el estudio es como mi pago para ellos.

...En high school ya no pude seguir la misma rutina de cuando era pequeña. Nuevo país, amigos, cultura, todo eso. Comenzar de cero. Pero siempre no olvidando de donde uno viene. Los sacrificios que se hicieron antes. La familia que se queda atras. Cuanta necesidad que uno mira en nuestros países, mientras que uno se viene acá. Es difícil borrar eso. Es mas que todo me a ayudado a continuar. Uno déjâ primo's, tios, de todos

**English Translation:**

I have also left a lot of things that I would have liked to do (pause) to reach this, but on the other hand one sees the process I went through, and sees how my parents also receive a reward for all of their work (pause) that I'm about to graduate. They are very happy. So, umm, my immigration process is almost

complete too, so (pause) seeing that I didn't give up during a time when I should have given up.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: it is a process that I started (school). And now I HAVE to finish. So, its like, that's when one faces the greatest challenge. A lot of people drop out. They give up. I have a lot of friends who have had that happen.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: so one starts to think about going back to their country (pause) but no (pause) I can't (pause) I have to finish! What about the sacrifices my parents made?! It was a very difficult time.

... it's like, it's your definition. What your parents teach you is your definition. What you are.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: so, my mom always put that in my mind, "I wanted to do this, I wanted to do that".

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: in our countries, one learns, for example, one doesn't know the language but you know the songs. My mom always, she has always said that her dream is to speak English.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: and also, unfortunately she had us, (pause) it's me, my younger brother and my older sister. And well we always had that, that my mother wanted to continue with school and couldn't- because of us. So, in my mind I've always had that, that she couldn't do it- but I can do it. She started it- but I'll finish it. I HAVE to finish.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: and one also sees the sacrifices made by the parents. I can't repay them for what they have done, but studying is like my payment to them.

...In high school I couldn't continue the same routine that I had when I was small. New country, friends, culture, all of that. Starting from zero. But always, not forgetting where one comes from. The sacrifices that were made before. The family that stayed behind. The poverty that one witnesses in our countries, while

we come here (to the US. Suggesting a sense of privilege). It's difficult to erase that. More than anything it has helped me continue. One leaves cousins, uncles, everyone.

Above, Claudia described thinking about achieving her educational goals as a payment for her parents' sacrifices and hard work, as a reward for the difficult immigration path she traveled with her family, and as a way to honor those she left behind in her home country. She also described feeling an obligation to finish college, since her mother's dream of a college education ended with the birth of Claudia and her siblings. Exemplifying the final dimension of this major theme, *finish what mother couldn't* (Theme dimension 2c).

Similarly, Susana and Liliana shared how their mothers' experiences served as a cautionary tale and motivator. In the case of Liliana, she described hoping to be different than her mother not just for her own wellbeing but also for the wellbeing of her daughter.

Susana said:

My mother. Another thing my mother is ALWAYS telling me is—"don't start a family until you're ready. You DON'T want to depend on a MAN like I depend on your FATHER. Have your own career. Make sure YOU are all set before you go on to have kids and get married. Because THEN you're responsible for other people. And you're going to end up depending on a MAN.

Liliana said:

Yo lo hago por mi, pero tambien para que ella vea. Porque si yo no lo hago, yo no quiero, yo recuerdo a mi mama. Si mi mama hubiera estudiado todo seria tan diferente! Si hubiera estudiado, no hubiera tenido que depender de un hombre, podria haber viajado a ver el mundo, hay yo no se. tantas cosas.

English Translation:

I do it for me. But also so that she (daughter) sees it. Because if I don't do it, I don't want to, I remember my mother. If my mother had studied everything would have been so different! If she had studied, she wouldn't have had to depend on a

man, she could have travelled the world, Oh [lamenting]I don't know. So many things.

As has been illustrated in this section, the women interviewed experience their academic goals not as solely their own, but rather as a family goal. Where a college degree is understood to translate to socioeconomic mobility for their family, serve as a repayment for difficult pasts and presents, and is symbolic of the completion of a mother's dream. The following section presents themes associated with the special responsibility these women hold, as the first in their family to attend college.

#### The Chosen One/To Be A Role Model Motivation

A common thread, found across all of the interviews, was participants' sense of responsibility, as first generation college students. This sense of responsibility mostly involved a sense that their families were counting on them, as "the chosen one" to break through the educational glass ceiling, a sense or responsibility to break negative stereotypes about Latinas and higher education, and to serve as role models for their family/community/own children.

As participants described their sense of responsibility to live up to their family's expectation that they be *the ones* (*Theme dimension 3a*) to complete college, it became clear that while the women discussed this expectation in the context of identifying motivators they also highlighted the pressure this expectation created. Claudia, for example, stated:

y te digo otra cosa. La presión, como que los ojos de todos en uno (pause) hermanos, tíos, tías (pause) todo el mundo! "Cuando te vas a graduar?!" Todo el mundo mirando y esperando desde afuera, esperando a que te gradúes. Incluso, para mi graduación, primeramente dios, voy a tener familia que viene de visita.



Todo eso (pause) Tengo que sacar esas ultimas clases porque, que PRESION! Es una presión GRANDE! Enorme!

INTERVIEWER: wow

CLAUDIA: si! Y mi mama también ya esta que (pause) “vas a trabajar? A donde vas a ir? Que vas a hacer?” Mi hermana ya como que haciendo planes. Todos haciendo planes (pause) y yo todavía no e terminado!

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: entonces como que ya.. la carrera se esta terminando. TENGO que terminar. Emocionalmente me siento MUY presionada.

INTERVIEWER: y

CLAUDIA: (interrupts) como que ya estoy en la recta final, y están todos con sus cámaras listos!

**English Translation:**

And I'll tell you another thing. The pressure, it's like all eyes are on me (pause) brothers, uncles, aunts (pause) the whole world! “when are you going to graduate?!” The whole world, looking and waiting, from the outside. Waiting for you to graduate. Even, at my graduation, God willing, I will have family coming to visit. All of it (pause) I have to pass my last classes, because, the PRESSURE! It's A LOT of pressure! Enormous!

INTERVIEWER: wow

CLAUDIA: yes! And my mom is also already (pause) “are you going to work? Where are you going to go? What are you going to do?” My mother is already making plans. They're all making plans (pause) and I haven't finished yet!

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: so, it's like, the race is ending. I HAVE TO finish. Emotionally, I feel VERY pressured.

INTERVIEWER: and

CLAUDIA: (interrupts) Its like I'm at the final stretch, and they're all ready with their cameras!

Here, Claudia described the pressure she experienced as a result of her family's excitement about her upcoming graduation. She eloquently described feeling as though the whole world was watching her, waiting for her success. In Angela's case, she described being expected to fulfill the family's dream of college education, as her family's last chance once her older brothers did not pursue higher education. She said:

I think after my second brother didn't go to college, my dad was kinda like, ANGELA is IT. She HAS TO...I just feel like they expect EVERYTHING from me. They don't expect A LOT. They expect EVERYTHING. Like, I'm supposed to be able to hold down the house, AND do well in school, AND just, (pause) be the perfect daughter.

Similarly, Leticia was expected to fulfill her family's dream of college, and make use of the opportunities she was given, after her older siblings did not pursue higher education. Her parents also used themselves as cautionary tales to communicate their expectation that Leticia be different. Leticia shared:

my parents, I don't know why, out of all of my brothers and sisters, my parents always kept an eye on me. On what I was doing. It wasn't to the point that it was obsessive, but they always told me, "you know, you're gonna have opportunities. You're gonna have opportunities, and we don't want you like, cleaning toilets and stuff like that." They were like, "don't be like your father and your mother! We didn't have the opportunities you had!"

I always kept that in the back of my head.

...It gets to the point, where I'm like, I have sisters, and none of them graduated from college. They graduated from high school, with the exception of my brother who dropped out at 17. So I had that influence, I was like, you know? I see my brother, ok, he dropped out of high school, and he's like, kinda not doing anything with himself. I have my sisters, and they're high school grads and that's it. and they just have a regular job. My sister didn't, because, she had a kid when she was 14 years old! It was another contraception warning! I saw that, and was like, I want better for me! So I never got pregnant.

They (parents) started to get a little worried (after she took 4 years off after high school). But I'm like, they overprotect me a lot, because of my sisters, they overprotected me. They sheltered me a lot. So, yeah, it was weird.

I always had this respect for me. Because they always placed me in a high position. “you have to do better than your brothers and sisters” “ you have to be better” “you’re going to be the first!”.

That motivated me, of course

For some participants, their family’s high expectations were not limited to college graduation. For example, Lisa and Denise described the pressure they experienced as a result of their family’s high expectations far surpassing college completion. Lisa shared:

yeah, everybody has very high expectations of me. I don’t know why (laughs). I think its cuz, in elementary school, middle school, high school, you know, I got good grades, I went to a good high school, so they kind of, like, expect that out of you. Out of ME. To. (pause) They think that I’m gonna be like a DOCTOR or something.

Denise said:

I feel like, I’M the ONE. I feel this pressure, like, I’m the one that is going to take care of my parents when they’re old. The one that’s going to make sure they have a GOOD life. I don’t want to send them to like a nursing home. Or anything. I want them to have their own. I want them to be OK for retirement, you know? I don’t want them to work hard until they’re dead. So, umm, that’s one of the big things. especially, since we didn’t really know if my brother was going to go to college or not. So, umm, and, all of my cousins that are here (US), are, I have 5 or 6 cousins that are here. None of them are going to school but me. Umm, so, I’m literally the ONE. From my whole family. The one that’s going to be successful, and, so, it’s kind of. The pressure is really intense. Especially now that I’m going to graduate. I’m like, oh my god. What am I going to do? There’s already a lot of pressure when you’re graduating, and can’t find a job.

...I have a friend who graduated in business, and she works for [insurance company] now. She does recruiting. And was like, I can totally get you a job, here, working for [insurance company]. And she’s like, “starting pay is 50,000 dollars a year”. I was like COOL I have a backup. I have a plan now! I told my father, and he was like, you’d be making, what? 1,000 dollars a week?! I make that! No no no no no. you’re not going to be doing that for the rest of your life” They don’t have a plan “oh, you’re going to be middle class”

NO. they have a plan “ you are going to be RICH. You will be RICH. WEALTHY. You are going to have a mansion”. They don’t think that I’m going to go up from working class to middle class. They think that I’m going to go all

the way up. So. That's. its hard for them to see that, I'm probably not gonna get that far. So. Maybe through [graduate] school. That's what keeps me going. If there weren't so much pressure, I don't think I'd go on to [graduate] school. I know how much work it is! The [graduate entrance exams]! I mean, I know a lot of people who spend years studying for it! I don't think that I would ever do it. if it weren't for the expectation that I'm going to be rich. Its not like that! You go to college, you graduate, and you're lucky if you start of making 50,000 year. It's a lot.

... They don't get it. you know? Umm, it's going to be a different kind of job, I'll sit in an office, but I'll still make what you make. They don't get that. They don't EXPECT that.

When I said that, they were like WHAT?! NO. you're not going to work there! You're not going to be like HER!. You're not going to have a LITTLE LIFE. This LITTLE LIFE. Working over there, making that money, living in her little house. That's not you! You're not going to have a LITTLE LIFE." That's what they say. So, it's a LOT OF PRESSURE.

INTERVIEWER:mmhm

DENISE: it's a lot of pressure, not to have a "little life". Its just not good enough for them. Especially since I'm "the one". I think that it might be good enough for my brother, but not for me. Ever since I was little, IM THE ONE they've put all of their expectations on. I'm the oldest, I'm the one that's done well in school, I'm the one that, you know, I'm definitely not smarter, but I'm more book smart. Because I read, he doesn't read. So, things like that (silence).

...since I've been all over the place, so many different majors, its like, am I still going to be working at the daycare? Even though I have a degree? I mean, it's like, nobody expects that from me! Everyone in my family is like (pause) I'm going to be the first one in our generation to graduate! And I'm just going to sit there. (pause) It's going to be such a disappointment. That's another reason that I want to go to [graduate] school! like, my parents really want me to go, to continue my education. And that way I wont have to start my real life yet, because I don't know what to do! Where to go! Where to find a job! If I even find a job. And I think also, they expect me to start working and start making like 80,000 dollars a year, or something! (laughs) so. And that's not the real world. Maybe after [graduate] school (pause) hopefully.

In these excerpts, both Lisa and Denise give us insight into the pressure and conflict they experience as a result of their family's high expectations being incongruent with their vision of the future. Lisa stresses "*they think that I'm gonna be like a doctor*",

suggesting that perhaps she does not believe the same thing. Denise more explicitly speaks to her family's disapproval of her having a "little life". She reports her worry that she will disappoint them. She also shares her plan to continue with her education, in part, to delay entering the work force, where she might disappoint her family.

In addition to reporting a sense of responsibility in response to their families' high expectations, the women interviewed for this study also reported a sense of responsibility to *break negative stereotypes* (Theme dimension 3b) about Latinas and higher education.

When asked what motivated her to go to college, Isabel responded:

yeah. There are several reasons, into what motivated me. I don't want to say (pause) I had children at a young age, and I don't want to say that they're my ONLY motivation. Umm I know, that Latinas are really well known for having children at a young age, and dropping out, and continuing the poverty level. It's just a cycle. Since I DIDN'T break that cycle of having kids at a young age, I wanted to at least try to break the cycle in what I did with the rest of my life, what I have control of.

Similarly, Lisa and Claudia described being aware of the negative stereotypes regarding Latinas and higher education, and both describe a commitment to break that stereotype and resist becoming part of the statistic. Lisa said:

I mean, now, everybody is going to college. If you don't go to college, you looked down upon. I mean especially if you're Latina. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: could you talk more about that? Like what do you think being Latina

LISA: (interrupts) well, kinda, like everybody has these stereotypes about Latinas. That they're drop outs, that they get pregnant, that they won't amount to anything. So I think its important for ME to break that stereotype. To break that!

Claudia said:

la cultura, eh, como nosotros de latinos somos vistos como (pause) como tu sabes (pause) no añadimos a la estadística de que (pause) nosotros empezamos- pero no terminamos. Eh, nos graduamos. Y creo que la unificación de decir, SI PODEMOS.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: incluso los obstáculos que tal vez la gente NO SABE que uno tiene (pause) porque solo dicen, “no van a la Universidad” pero no existe uno.. no dicen el porque. No hay ayuda realmente a estudiantes.. (Pause—to indicate undocumented). Y hasta ahora, no lo han querido dar! (pause) Mi motivación es ESA! El probar que NO SOY UNA MAS (pause) que no me uno a la estadística! Poner como mis valores religiosos, de familia, sociales primero. Y el querer ser un buen ejemplo para otros. Todo eso, yo creo, es lo que me ha motivado. A salir adelante.

... todo me ayudo a poner todo en conjunto. Y a decir... yo no voy a añadir a una estadística!

**English Translation:**

The culture, like, we as Latinos are seen as (pause) like you know (pause) we don't add to the statistic that (pause) we start (school)- but we don't finish. Um, we don't graduate. And I think it's about the unification of saying YES WE CAN.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: even the obstacles that maybe people DON'T KNOW that one has (pause) because they just say, “they don't go to college” but what doesn't exist (pause) they don't say why. There isn't any real help for (pause, to indicate undocumented) students. And until now, they haven't wanted to give it! (pause) THAT'S my motivation! Proving that I'M NOT ONE MORE (pause) that I don't join the statistic! Putting my religious, family, and social values first. And wanting to be a good example for others. All of that, I think, has motivated me. To keep moving forward.

...all of it helped me put things together. And say, I'm not going to add to a statistic!

Similarly, Susana and Paloma described being motivated to go to college, in part, by the paths that other Latinas in their community have taken instead of pursuing higher education. Susana said:

Just given, our, being Latino, and seeing a lot of young girls get pregnant at like 13, I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and there were girls having babies! That was something that they (parents) just didn't want for me! They didn't want me to struggle. They say, you know, “and then school is going to become” (pause) not my priority. Less of

a priority. Because the baby comes first, if I had gotten pregnant or anything. They didn't want me to end up like those girls.

Paloma said:

well, it's just what I see in the streets. Or in the social world right now. You see Latinas, working in retail, waiters, or (pause). They didn't finish school, they got pregnant, **or (silence)**. I don't judge them! But I don't want to see myself doing that. I think that I'm capable of doing ANYTHING that I put my mind to. And I just don't want to get to that point, when I'm just gonna quit. I'm NOT a quitter. And working a job where I'm not gonna be happy!

INTERVIEWER: so, you see Latinas out in the world, do you feel like they serve as a motivator because they're kind of a cautionary tale?

PALOMA: yes! And I'm sure, maybe they could have finished school. But I'm sure most of them, something must have happened. That they COULDN'T get a college education. Its sad. Because, if you look at other groups, the girls graduate college and get good jobs. WHY do we have to be lower than them?! Why do WE have to get the lower paying jobs?! It's a mission. To succeed. Not be one of the ones, that doesn't!

Related to the sense of obligation to break negative stereotypes about Latinas in higher education reported by participants, the women interviewed also described a sense of responsibility to serve as a positive influence, to be a *role model to their communities, families and their own children* (Theme 3c). For example, Claudia described a sense of responsibility to peers who have also been limited by their documentation status, in addition to a direct responsibility to her younger brother. She said:

Ahora que yo tengo (pause, indicating that she now has documentation) por ejemplo, puedo trabajar, puedo estudiar, tengo como una responsabilidad también. con todos esos jóvenes que yo e visto. Los que también querían hacer lo mismo. A los que conocí durante todo este proceso. Y creo que es justo que ellos también vean que si se puede. Que yo, Que yo, no vaya a defraudarles. Que yo pueda decirles "SI se puede. Pero, porque YO lo hice! yo estuve en sus zapatos".

... Y ver también, por ejemplo, tengo un hermano menor (pause) y, como, ver, como, o (pause) a mi no me gustaría que me vieran como un (pause)role model. Pero, creo que también, que ellos vean que yo puedo.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: Porque también, después de mi (pause) sigue el.

**English Translation:**

Now that I have (Pause, indicating that she now has documentation) for example, I can work, I can go to school, I have a responsibility too. To all of those young people that I've come across. The ones that wanted to do the same thing (go to college). The ones that I met during this process (immigration process). And I think that its fair for them to see that it *is* possible. That I, That I, don't let them down. That I can say, "YES, it's possible. But, because I did it! I was in your shoes".

... And also, for example, I have one younger brother (pause) and, like, to see, like, or (pause) I wouldn't want anyone to see me as a (pause) role model. But, I think that, at the same time, they see that I can do it.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: Because, also, after me (pause) he's next.

Similarly, Susana described feeling that she is a role model for her brother and her entire family, highlighting that this responsibility serves as motivator. She stated:

INTERVIEWER: so, how has being in school impacted your relationship with your brother?

SUSANA: umm. I feel like I'm being a role model for him, and for my whole family! Because I see that all of my cousins have dropped out of college. That's one of the main reasons that I want to graduate! I see that all of my cousins started, and then quit.

Leticia described a sense of responsibility to "pave the way" for her younger sister and for all of her nieces and nephews, reflecting on the negative impact seeing her siblings not pursue higher education had on her own academic goals. She said:

I thought, you know, if seeing that my brothers and sisters didn't go to college affected me. And made me not make college a priority, you know what, I don't want that for my nieces and nephews! I have a lot of nieces and nephews, like 5 and one on the way.



I want to kind of, pave the way for them! I want them to see me!  
And I have a younger sister. She's 15 years old. I want her to SEE THAT. So that she can eventually, you know, follow my steps and patters. Follow my path.

For Isabel, mother of two (10 and 13), the responsibility to set a good example for her children is a powerful motivator. Discussing what motivated her to go to college, she shared:

yeah. There are several reasons, into what motivated me. I don't want to say... I had children at a young age, and I don't want to say that they're my ONLY motivation. Umm I know, that Latinas are really well known for having children at a young age, and dropping out, and continuing the poverty level. Its just a cycle. Since I DIDN'T break that cycle of having kids at a young age, I wanted to at least try to break the cycle in what I did with the rest of my life, what I have control of.

I said, I have to get a good career! I have to be able to provide for my kids. I have to able to set a good example for them. So that hopefully THEY can break the cycle, and realize how important education is in their lives. And how important it is to have a good career, before you have your family. To be able to provide BETTER for them. And so, it was a little of all of those things.

Wanting to break the cycle, wanting to set the example for my children, wanting to provide for them. I mean, hopefully, if I graduate, I'll be able to put THEM through college, with my career.

And, you know, just a mixture of all of those things told me, I HAVE to do this. That's basically what motivated me.

...They see that mama works really hard, comes home and does homework and stuff. That's the example that I want to set! And, like, look, I wouldn't have to do this if I had done this before I had you guys, so maybe you should try doing it the other way around.

And my son is already, and I know that he's only 13 and things can change as he gets older, but he already has it in his mind "I'm going to college DIRECTLY after high school, and THEN after I'm done with college, THEN I'll think about marriage." And although that may change, the fact that he already understands the importance of education, I've already met my goal with that alone.

In addition to motivation, however, Isabel's sense of responsibility to her children and other family members presents as a stressor. She described the pressure this obligation creates and her worry that she will fail, saying:

I do. I feel A LOT of pressure. Sometimes it gets overwhelming, and I say "I can't do this. I don't think I can, I probably will have to hold off for another few years". But I feel like not only will I be failing myself, but I'll be failing all of those people looking up to me! Like, my parents saying "oh my god, I never would have actually imagined this! Our daughter is doing extremely well!"

...Anyhow, I feel like I would be letting them down in that aspect. I feel like I would be letting my kids down! You know, like "you're telling US education is so important, but you dropped out". That sort of thing. And I also talked my younger sister into coming to UMass as well, and she's going to school and she's loving it, like, you know, it's all for it. I feel like I would be letting A LOT of people down. And it does apply an incredible amount of pressure on me.

Having discussed participants' sense of obligation to complete a college education, largely influenced by their intersecting roles as first generation college students and Latinas, the following section moves to explore themes related to participants' balancing of educational goals and children.

#### Children, Present and Future

The topic of children is worthy of special attention. For those 2 participants in a parenting role, their parenting responsibilities are described as taking priority. In a context where participants described having competing obligations to their academic goals, these competing obligations were multiplied by their role as parents. For participant's who were not parents, the possibility of having children took on a different meaning, where having children before the completion of their degree was actively avoided. Relatedly, the women who were not yet parents identified graduation as a necessary foundation that needed to be completed before they would consider starting their own families.

Isabel, mother of two (10 and 13) describes how parenting takes priority over achieving her educational goals. While earlier, when discussing Isabel's hope to be a role model for her children (*Theme dimension 3c*), she identified her children as a key motivator, Isabel also shared how her parenting obligations take priority over her educational goals. Exemplifying Theme dimension 4a, *Parenting comes first*. Discussing her decision to postpone going back to school until her kids were older, she said:

INTERVIEWER: so, it sound like you're being very careful not to take too much time and money away from

ISABEL: (interrupts) away from them (children), away from the family. Right, because, of course number 1 is family! One thing my parents made sure was, whether or not we were poor, whether or not we were in a bad situation, they always made sure to instill the MORALS and VALUES that they stood by. They made sure that we got that if nothing else. And so, I'm gonna carry on that. That I realize how important that actually is. And I feel that that's part of why I'm so motivated, because of those values that they instilled in me.

I feel that my kids should NOT suffer the consequences of ME not having a career before I had them. So, I kinda don't want one to interfere with the other.

I know that it sounds unrealistic, but I guess that I want try to do that to the best of my ability. I mean, if I can take LESS time away from them, I'll do that. And, um, so, that's what I'm doing. I take my classes during my working hours, while they're in school, and that way, even if I'm at home doing homework I'm still available to them, I'm still there. There's still that ability to teach them right from wrong, to help them with their homework, you know. Things that, can only happen when the parent is home.

I'm not really big on having a nanny or a babysitter, because they don't share the same beliefs. Its just NOT the same. Its not.

... People kept asking "why don't you go back to school?!", " why don't you do this, why don't you do that, because if this is what you want to do, this is how you have to do it!". and I said to myself, oh, you know, I don't really have the time right now! I DO plan on doing it. but I just don't have the time right now, because of the kids, because of my financial situation.

... I'm not taking too much time away from them (children). Umm, I don't, and because I've put them first. If I have to neglect a homework and turn it in late, I'll do that. And I know that that's not the BEST approach, because, its not, BUT at the end of the day, they do have to come first. Because I don't want them to be, I

don't want it to have a negative impact on them! Because I didn't address their needs they're not doing so well in school, that sort of thing. Or they might be misbehaving because they're seeking attention from me, you know? That sort of thing. Like, it's a tough call, because, yes I want to set a good example for them. But I also have to be a mom! So, you have to sort of choose your battles. What's worth it, what isn't. Some things, do have to lack. I can't be good in every area. I just learned that recently. I used to think that I could just be great at everything I laid my hands on! And no. Some things have to lack and some things have to be forgotten. Only 24 hours in a day. So, you know what if I have to turn something in late, or I can't work on my paper until AFTER they go to bed, that sort of thing- I will do that.

My son right now, he likes to sing, he writes songs, he records them, and I want to be able to support him in that. It's not something I'm willing to neglect. Just yesterday he opened up for a famous star, and I was there yesterday, instead of working on my paper.

INTERVIEWER: so, when you prioritize

ISABEL: it's clear, yeah.

... Sometimes they do make me feel guilty. Umm, (sighs). Financially, I can't say that I am where I want to be, or where I would like to be. So I also work on the weekends. Umm, sometimes I'll work in the evenings, and they'll make me feel guilty. But I do it out of my house! I'm still available to them if they need me. That's very important to me. But, sometimes they make me feel guilty because, yes, mom, you're taking on more than you should. "you don't have to go to school, we're doing fine". That sort of thing.

My daughter sometimes says that my clients and my school take HER time, but I think she's just very VERY needy. I'm there all the time! She's very very needy. But I've tried more and more, like, I've taken less clients, I've done less of other things to try to be there for her. And yeah. Yeah. That whole balance thing is just HARD. To try to figure out when it's ok, and when is it not. Because at the same time, kids, don't realize, how hard it is to balance things out. They think, "hey, I wanna spend time with mom and just watch movies", not, how me not taking any clients means not a good birthday. You know what I mean? They don't look at it like that! They don't think, these are sacrifices that mom has to make, for ME! Because again, in the end, it's all for THEM. It's all for THEM. But they don't look at it that way. So, yes, they make me feel guilty, ALL THE TIME. And I try to explain it to them, but, they're kids, they can only understand so much. And so, you know, I try my best to juggle everything. But it doesn't always fall through that way.

Here, Isabel described the struggles she faced while balancing her educational goals and her parental obligations. She also highlighted how her attempt to safeguard her

children from feeling any negative consequences related to her pursuing a college degree impacted her decision to return to school, her ability to complete school work, and more generally her ability to embrace academic activities free of guilt. Later, Isabel also noted the importance of being a single mother on her experience. She said: “So really, if I had more support from family, including husband, I would be better off. I’m the sole provider of attention, love, money, time, everything.”

Liliana described her mother’s warning that she should not have children until she finished school, and the difficulties she experienced while trying to balance the birth of her daughter with her educational goals. The difficulty of this experience prompted her to opt for surgical sterilization to avoid future pregnancies, even when she previously imagined herself the mother of multiple children. She said:

Mi madre siempre me decía “estudie estudie, no vayas a salir embarazada! Estudie”. ..Pero, ahora, (pause) Yo tengo una niña. Pero no me quiero casar. Estoy estudiando para mi trabajo. Mi niña la cría una tía mia que vive con nosotros. Tengo ayuda. Se queda con mi tía. Pero es muy difícil. Yo tuve a mi hija hace 3 años, y yo estaba estudiando. Y eso empezó, a los dos meses, yo decía, “YO NO PUEDO! YO NO PUEDO balancear! NO PUEDO estudiar, trabajar, ser mama. NO PUEDO! Me opero. Me opero y no tengo mas hijos!” A los 15 días me opere. No tengo mas hijos. Y yo quería 5 hijos! Pero no puedo. Es muy difícil. MUY DIFICIL balancear las cosas!

**English Translation:**

My mother would always say “study, study, don get pregnant! Study”. ...But, now (pause) I have one daughter. But I don’t want to get married. I’m studying for my job. My aunt who lives with us raises my daughter. I have help. She (daughter) stays with my aunt. But it is very difficult. I had my daughter 3 years ago, and I was studying. And that started, two months later, I would say, “I CAN’T! I CAN’T balance! I CAN’T study, work, and be a mom. I CANT! I’ll have surgery. I’ll have surgery and won’t have any more children!” 15 days later I had surgery. I don’t have any more children. I wanted 5 children! But I can’t. it’s very difficult. VERY DIFFICULT balancing things!

Notably, the tendency to hold parenting responsibilities as a priority was not limited to participants who were mothers. Angela, although not herself a biological parent, describes adopting a parenting role towards her school-age nephew. In response to questions regarding factors that negatively impact her academic performance, she describes her role as co-parent:

INTERVIEWER: what kind of things have made it HARD for you to stick with it?

ANGELA: umm, apart from, like, just the jobs and things like that. I feel like (pause) my nephew lives with us as well. And my parents, I'm not a parent, so I don't, I know I can't necessarily tell them how to raise him. They raised ME. So it feels wrong telling my parents how they should raise him. (pause) But, they raised me in another atmosphere. Another country, period. A different time!

I feel like how they're raising my nephew nowww, its like (pause) I try to be there for him as much as possible! For instance, they let him watch entirely too much TV! That's something that bothers me! We never had one growing up. Yes I understand, it's different times, and this is how it works (pause) y esta encerrado (English translation: and he's locked up [referring to not being able to go outside]). But I feel like he watches entirely too much TV. They don't sit with him in a corner and draw with him for a second. Or anything like that. You know? And (pause) my mom didn't know how to register him for school. I registered him last month, for kindergarten. Or I'll, you know, like I said, Easter is coming up (pause) so we had a little pot where you plant a seed. You know. Just little activities that I feel he should be doing. Instead of sitting in front of the TV the whole time!

So that's another thing (pause) that I've taken upon myself. But, if other things have to suffer because of that—that's fine! Because I really feel like (pause) I feel like he's not getting what he needs from my parents. They're older. They don't understand. How things SHOULD be.

INTERVIEWER: so it sounds like you've taken on a co-parenting role with him. (pause) Has it been taking a toll? Has it been making stuff harder for you?

ANGELA: oh yeah! I mean, if he wakes up in the middle of the night crying. (pause) Before, when he would wake up, when there were baby things that were going on that I didn't understand---like my mom knows when he needs to be burped or something. Before, my mom would get up.

Now, Mami doesn't. now it's like Angela is going to come get him. You know? And he'll come into my bed and we'll address whatever the problem is, and he'll go back to sleep. That's making me lose sleep, though! I wake up tired, or whatever it is. But yeah, I (pause) it definitely. Now, recently, cuz he's going to school and he's learning a lot more, and I feel that he needs a lot more attention and guidance, I feel (pause) now is when it's becoming a problem. Well not a problem. But it's more time consuming now- than how it was before.

...And also, my mom just doesn't know things. "he's old enough- how is he gonna go to school". What do you mean! We have to register him and do this and do that. Fill out the paperwork, make sure he has his physical, you know. She's like "chequealo en internet". That's her thing. "check the internet". My mother says that to me like 70,000 times a day! Do it on the internet. "cant you just fix his school on the internet"? no Mami! They have to give him an assessment, then they tell you what school he should go to, stuff like that. Now he's registered.

But, even simple things like that. She has like NO idea. She raised her kids in a third world country! I mean, register them for school? What?! I just sent them last time.

Here, Angela described how she adopted a parenting role, caring for her nephew. She also gives us insight into the complexities associated with her and her mother's disparate levels of acculturation. As her nephew's caretaker, Angela described a similar prioritization of childcare responsibilities as did Isabel, where caring for her nephew is her top priority. She said: "My heart is there. He's my priority. I'll miss class or not come to school – if something is wrong with him. I don't even think about it! it's just not (pause) not a contest".

Gema described a similar experience, adopting a caretaker role towards her severely disabled brother. She also reported adopting this role in response to questions regarding factors that negatively impact her academic performance. When asked "what [made] it hard for [her] to do well in school", Gema answered:

My family life. The stress. My parent's marital problems, my brother, changing his medication, calming him down because his mood gets affected and has like 4 tantrums a day. The tantrums are UNBEARABLE because he just SCREAMS

and stomps his feet. Even if I WANTED to study on those days. Its just impossible. And for a period in time, his epilepsy was really bad, like 1 a week. And everybody was on edge. And just family responsibilities. Like I have to create my school schedule to match their work schedule to make sure there is always someone home. With my brother. Pretty much just living with them, in general. Has been difficult. They definitely EXPECT me to be there to help, when they can't be there. It has been more difficult since my sister went away to school. Because it's just me, and them.

Like, today, my mom didn't want to send my brother to school. So, she asked me to stay home. And I had to be like, no mom, I have to be at school by 11:00. And then she ROLLS HER EYES at me. And says "oh, is that REALLY what you're doing?". You know? Like I'm lying to get out of helping. It's just obnoxious.

In addition to describing her caretaker role towards her brother as making it more difficult for her to do well in school, she also names him and her desire to take the burden of his care off of his parents as a primary motivator. She said:

... My parents are going to be able to take care of my brother forever. And, I mean, he's very impacted. He's non-verbal and has some mental retardation as well. So, if I'm comfortable in my life with finances, resources. Then I can help better take care of him. Take some burden off of them. So that they can retire in PEACE. And hopefully go back to [country of origin] to retire. I don't want them to die here, alone. So. That's definitely been a motivation. If I'm comfortable, I can take care of them. I can send them off to [country of origin] and handle my brother!

For participants who did not presently hold a parental role, parenting was still salient in their experience, as they considered the potential impact of parenting responsibilities on their ability to achieve their educational goals. For these women, postponing marrying and having children was described as key and a college degree was conceptualized as a necessary foundation. Claudia reported postponing marrying her partner of six years and starting a family until she completes her degree. She described understanding a college degree as foundational in having a family responsibly, and shared how her deep respect for family guided her decision. Claudia said:



INTERVIEWER: Y mencionaste que hay algunas cosas que has tenido que poner a un lado (pause) para poder lograr esta meta?

CLAUDIA: umm, tengo 25 años! Yo, osea, pudiera estar ahorita tomando viajes pudiera o estar gastando mi dinero en otras cosas, no? son cosas vanas, pero yo no pago clases para aprender otro idioma (pause) o para ir a un gimnasio. Incluso, CASARME! Ya empezar a formar mi familia. Y poder empezar en un futuro. No puedo ver el futuro porque... primero es mi presente.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA:... entonces, eh, tengo un novio de casi 6 años! Todos, TODOS, me están siempre preguntando.. cuando? Cuando? Cuando va a ser el casamiento?! Si. Yo creo que e dejado eso. Que no puedo ni PENSAR en esas cosas ahora- en casarme, en tener familia (Pause) porque, vienen otros gastos. Eh. Creo que mi meta ahora es eso! Graduarme! después de llegar a esa meta (pause) ya veremos que hacemos.  
(long pause)

INTERVIEWER: y tu crees que es INCOMPATIBLE el casarte y tener familia con el terminar y hacer tus estudios? Para ti no van juntas las dos cosas a la vez?

CLAUDIA: en MI situación. NO. yo creo que todo vuelve a lo mismo (pause) que yo no QUIERO hacer lo mismo que yo he visto (pause) lo mismo que muchas personas hacen. Creo que uno tiene que saber hasta donde puede uno. Osea, si yo me metiera ahorita mismo a tener una familia y todo eso (pause) umm (pause) yo respeto mucho todo lo que tiene que ver con tener una familia. Creo que si yo (pause) tengo que ser responsable.

... Si se puede, PERO yo quiero enfocarme primero en el estudio. Porque yo quiero tener primero una base. Ahorita yo creo que mi profesión será mi base. Cuando ya tenga mi certificado, después de haber conseguido un trabajo full-time, y tal (pause) entonces puedo pensar en tener una familia. también porque quiero tener el tiempo y los recursos económicos. Seria muy irresponsable de mi parte ahorita. Y injusto. Porque le dejaría toda la carga al hombre. Tener una base primero (pause) para poder estar los dos preparados como pareja para comenzar. Valoro lo de la familia, creo que es muy importante, MUY MUY importante. Quiero poder dedicarme a ellos (pause) a mis hijos (pause) creo que eso es lo que yo estoy esperando. Estar bien establecida para yo realmente tener tiempo para emprender eso de tener una familia- y estar ahí.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: Incluso lo veo en mi caso, en mi familia, con mi hermana. Ella tiene sus hijos, y todo, y hace lo imposible porque ellos tengan todos. Pero no puede darles tiempo. Y el tiempo es calidad. Es como un apoyo muy importante. Desde

pequeños. Ese tiempo de uno a uno. Yo creo que uno empieza a valorar. Mi mama siempre nos hablaba de lo que ella paso. Y yo quiero hacer lo mismo

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

PARTICIPANT: si podría ir junto (pause) como te digo (pause) pero, en MI situación, NO.

**English Translation:**

INTERVIEWER: and, you mentioned that there were some things that you have had to put aside (pause) to be able to reach this goal?

CLAUDIA: umm, I'm 25 yeas old! I, I mean, I could be traveling right now. I could be spending my money on other things, no? they are vain things, but, I don't pay for classes to learn other languages. (pause) Or to go to the gym. Even, GET MARRIED! To start my own family. To be able to start my future. I cant see the future because, first is my present.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: ...so, um, I have had a boyfriend for almost 6 years! Everyone, EVERYONE is always asking me, "when? When? When is the wedding?!" yes. I think that I've left that aside. That I can't even THINK about those things now- getting married, having a family (pause) because other expenses are coming. I think that that is my goal now! Graduate! After I reach that goal (pause) then we'll see what we'll do.  
(long pause)

INTERVIEWER: and do you think that getting married and having a family are INCOMPATIBLE with finishing your studies? For you, can the two things happen at the same time?

CLAUDIA: in MY situation. NO. I think that everything comes back to the same thing (pause) that I DON'T WANT TO do the same thing that I've seen. (pause) the same that a lot of people do. I think one needs to know what one is capable of. I mean, If I got myself into starting a family and all of that right now (pause) umm, I respect everything that has to do with having a family too much. I think that if I (pause) I have to be responsible.

..it is possible, BUT, I want to first focus on my studies. Because first I want to have a base. Right now I think that my profession will be my base. When I have my degree, after I've obtained a full time job, and such (pause) then I can think about a family. Also because I want to have the time and economic resources. It would be very irresponsible on my part right now. and unfair. Because I would be putting all of the responsibility on the man. Having a base first (pause) for both to

be prepared to start. I value family, I think it's very important VERY VERY important. I want to be able to dedicate myself to them (pause) my children. I think that what I'm waiting for. To be well established so that I can really have time to take on having a family- and be there.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: I even see it in my case, in my family, with my sister. She has her kids, and does what she can for them to have everything. But she can't give them time. And time is quality. It's a very important support. Since they are small. It's time, one by one. I think that one starts to value. my mother always told us what she went through. And I want to do the same.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: it could go together (children and school) (silence) like I've told you (pause) but NOT in MY situation.

Related to *theme dimension 3b*, participant's sense of obligation to ***break negative stereotypes*** about Latinas in higher education, here Claudia describes being motivated to postpone starting a family because of her wish to avoid "[doing] the same thing that she has seen". Susana and Paloma echoed this sentiment. Susana said:

INTERVIEWER: mmhm. So, do you guys (Participant and parents) have conversations about, you starting your own family, or

SUSANA: (interrupts) when I finish! They always say, when you finish your career. When you have a career. That was like their main focus. They were like, oh, you know, no boyfriends, don't focus on boys right now, focus on school. When you finish your career, then you can do that.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm, why do you think they think that way?

SUSANA: because, just given, our, being Latino and seeing a lot of young girls get pregnant at like 13, I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and there were girls having babies! That was something that they just didn't want for me! They didn't want me to struggle. They say, you know "and then school is going to become" (pause) not my priority. Less of a priority. Because the baby comes first, if I had gotten pregnant or anything.

They didn't want me to end up like those girls

INTERVIEWER: do you think it would be POSSIBLE to have a baby and go to school.

SUSANA: umm, I guess yes. But, no no I don't want a baby. School wouldn't be my main focus. School would be something on the side. I wouldn't be able to. And also, with a baby, you have to pay for like diapers, and all this stuff. And I'm like NO I DON'T WANT THAT. Not at all.

Paloma said:

INTERVIEWER: mmhm. And are there any things that you can think of that might make it harder for you to balance

PALOMA: (interrupts) well, besides money, maybe kids? I mean, having kids at this young age, you have a baby, its VERY hard. Especially because, I live with my mom, I could never see myself having a baby and going to school! Because I just think it would be impossible to do all of those things at the same time.

INTERVIEWER: so for you, the possibility of having both doesn't exist?

PALOMA: I mean, if I can barely, I'm so busy right now, I wouldn't imagine myself being responsible for like, a baby!

INTERVIEWER: is it something that you think about?

PALOMA: oh yeah! I actively think about it. like I told you, some of my friends who didn't go to college, they have babies, and its SO hard for them. I mean, even if they wanted to go to college, they're just not able. They don't have the time. They're responsible for somebody else. Somebody else is depending on them.

Leticia described postponing having children as a key difference between her and her sister, who did not enter college after having a child at age 14. She describes her sister's experience as a "contraception warning".

...It gets to the point, where I'm like, I have sisters, and none of them graduated from college. They graduated from high school, with the exception of my brother who dropped out at 17. So I had that influence, I was like, you know? I see my brother, ok, he dropped out of high school, and he's like, kinda not doing anything with himself. I have my sisters, and they're high school grads and that's it. and they just have a regular job. My sister didn't, because, she had a kid when she was 14 years old! It was another contraception warning! I saw that, and was like, I want better for me! So I never got pregnant.

Finally, Gema described the painful experience of terminating a pregnancy during her freshman year for the sake of completing her education. When asked “do you live at home” Gema responded:

Yeah (laughs) yeah. (laughs) I, umm (pause) I moved out freshman year. And, they told me, “you move out, you have to pay for it yourself”. That’s how they are. So I worked on the weekends and went to school during the week. But, it was too hard financially. I didn’t have enough to do anything except pay my bills and eat food. And, umm, I, umm ended up getting pregnant. Freshman year. And, I umm, had to (silence) end up having to deal with that. And then they brought me back home. You know? They told me “oh, you can’t HANDLE being out of the house”. So they brought me back home, and I’ve been there (pause) ever since. (silence)

INTERVIEWER: when you say, they said “you can’t HANDLE”, can you tell me more about what you mean

GEMA: that’s what they say. I think what they meant was “we want you at the house, to watch you. To make sure you don’t mess up” you know? But, (pause) it was an accident. You know.

INTERVIEWER: do you think it’s something that you feel you could have dealt with, and stayed in school?

GEMA: Umm. Yeah. That’s what I WANTED TO DO. But (pause) I (pause) had pressure from them. (pause) and from my boyfriend at the time’s family. Who was also Latino. It was just like the END OF THE WORLD for everybody! They were like “you’re going to RUIN your education! What are you guys going to do?! You’re going to have to work!” you know. Bla bla bla bla bla. And the fact that everybody was so negative, and unsupportive. You know? And I was young. I was like 18. You know. So, I just made the decision that would make everybody happy. And then they were using the fact that, “oh, you know. You’re going to ruin HIS life”. You know. So. (pause) whatever. EVERYONE made it seem like it was IMPOSSIBLE. They figured that I would drop out. They didn’t think I would finish.

INTERVIEWER: do you think they were right?

GEMA: umm (long silence). I have no idea. You know? Because, I mean, I will never know. But. I was pretty motivated. You know. And if I had a child, I think that it would be extra motivation to get a degree. You know? It’s hard to know at this point (pause) what could have been. (long silence) I probably could have. At 18 you don’t really know. But. There was NOBODY supporting me.

...I think if I was a boy, it would be different. I definitely think they wouldn't. I don't think they would expect as much, or complain about me not doing as much if I was a male. And I feel like they would be a little bit off my case. I feel like they're ALWAYS on my case you know? Yeah. I definitely think that if I was a guy I would have it easier. They would just let me come and go and let me do my thing. And not harass me all the time. It think because I'm a girl (pause) and because I did (pause) get pregnant when I was younger. I think they're always like, freaked out about it. thinking that I'm going to SCREW UP.

... INTERVIEWER: Ever a time you doubted if you would finish?

GEMA: DEFINITELY! Freshman year. I was so depressed. After I had the abortion. That I, didn't want to do ANYTHING. I didn't want to get out of bed! All I wanted to do was get away from everybody. I was seriously contemplating withdrawing and just leaving. Just running away from everybody. And there have been other times when I've wondered if I can do this. If I can finish. But they haven't been that serious. Where I've seriously thought of withdrawing. Except for that freshman year. I just wanted to drop everything.

Now, if ever I'm frustrated, I think back to that. Just think of all of the things you've overcome, and now you're stressed over a stupid paper. After THAT happened. It was like. I JUST feel like. I have to just get that stupid diploma! So that it's worth (tearful) so that it's worth the sacrifice. The decision that I let OTHER PEOPLE make for me.

And every Latina wants to avoid being that stereotype. Having babies young and not doing anything with your life but have tons of babies. You know? And I'm not gonna be that stereotype. (tearful) The single Latina mom in state housing, with no education. I think that's what REALLY pissed off at my parents too. We're gonna have one of those daughters! It was a let down for them. Absolutely. They bring it up all the time. They don't say it exactly. They say "when you screwed up freshman year" or "we gave you a chance to move out, and you screwed it up". You know? It was like the END OF THE WORLD for them.

Here, Gema described the experience of terminating a pregnancy for the sake of completing her education. Notably, she described her un-planned pregnancy as "messing up" and as being a source of disappointment for her parents. In part, this disappointment is reported to stem from a failed desire to break the negative stereotype of the "single Latina mom in state housing, with no education". In this excerpt, Gema also shared the painful conflict between her belief that she could have possibly successfully balanced

having a child and her education with, her parent's belief that her pregnancy was "the end of the world" and would necessarily lead to her dropping out of school. Gema's decision to terminate her pregnancy differs from the experiences of both Isabel and Liliana, who attempt to balance parenting obligations with their academic goals. In the case of Liliana, her decision to pursue an education came after years of caring for her children on her own. Her decision was, in part, motivated by her experiences of difficulty providing for her children. In contrast, Isabel's decision to have her daughter while attending college was influenced by the support of her family. Unlike Gema's family, Isabel's family encouraged her to have her daughter and offered their support in raising her.

Keeping with participants' tendency to frame their difficulties in terms of accompanying motivation, Gema shared finding strength in her painful experience terminating a pregnancy. In the above excerpt she described a period of emotional distress following the termination, which almost led to her withdrawing from college. At the same time, she also described turning to this past experience for motivation, where she is motivated to finish her degree in order to justify the "sacrifice" she made.

Having discussed themes related to participants' balancing of academic goals and children, the analysis of themes now turns to the influence of external factors, like significant positive and negative encounters, influences from external cultures, and participants' call for guidance.

### Navigating Academia Without A Map

Closely related to participant's experience of feeling lost in a new environment when attempting to navigate higher education without a map (*Theme dimension 1b*),

participants described the ways they were able to access the resources they needed though their **connection with others who had this metaphorical map** (*theme dimension 5a*). Exemplifying this theme dimension, Denise described feeling that she greatly benefitted from being in contact with peers in her honors classes, understanding this experience as central to her following a path towards higher education. Denise said:

I was always (pause) I always did well in school. Even when I was a little kid. Elementary school, Middle school, High school. So, I think, with ME they always expected I would go on to school. Just because I had always done well. But with my little brother, he had not done well in school. You know, hung out with all of the other (pause) you know, I didn't hang out with all of the other immigrant kids in high school, because I took all of the honors classes, and (pause) you know (pause) they weren't in the honors classes. And that's where I made friends. You know? But my brother, he hung out with people like THAT. So they would skip school together, he would get in trouble at school, detention, get suspended, you know? So they never expected that from HIM. Because he was, you know. He wasn't doing very well. He dropped out. He got a GED later on, but he dropped out. So. It was (pause) kinda weird. So I was (pause) the GOOD ONE.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm.. so do you feel that that was a key experience, to be separated (PARTICIPANT: yeah!) from the other "immigrant kids".

PARTICIPANT: yeah, yeah! I think it was. Because, the (pause) a lot of (Pause) it wasn't like they were all skipping school because they were all bad kids. But a lot of them had a hard time with the language. They wanted to be around the other immigrant kids and THEY were all cutting class. They were stuck in ESL classes! Were they learn nothing! They just go over colors or something (pause) they were bored, and didn't speak the language, and a lot of the teachers, especially the teachers in the lower levels (pause) you know (pause) treated them with hostility. So (pause) they didn't really see a need to go to school. Especially the boys. They could get a construction job, or a flooring job (pause) and be making like 16 dollars an hour! Which to them, you know, they're RICH. Because they're not paying bills. So (pause) a lot of them. I think that if I had gone that route, and hung out with people like THAT. You know? I would have ended up the same way. Yeah.

Here, Denise both described the benefit she experienced by connecting with peers who were academically inclined and held knowledge regarding higher education, and contrasted this experience with her brother's experience of immersion in a peer culture



with negative views and attitudes towards education. She credits this access to academically focused and informed classmates for her choice to follow a path towards higher education, while her brother dropped out of high school. Notably, Denise pauses repeatedly during this passage, making clear a hesitation to name this experience, and gives us insight into factors that contribute to differences across peer groups, including systemic inadequacy and racism.

Sofia shared a similar experience, where as a result of her connection to her father's family she was able to access resources that her half-sisters were not. In her case, Sofia described benefitting from her paternal family's financial security, knowledge about higher education, and support. In the following excerpt, she described the impact having access to individuals with these resources had on her educational aspirations and opportunities. She also revealed how she understands having access to these resources as a key difference between her experience and the experience of her half-sisters.

My dad's side of the family was financially and emotionally supportive. And they, umm, they had means to give me language lessons! To pay for me to go to an institute to take language lessons! To pay for French books! To say, WE'LL HELP YOU. If you need ANYTHING for college, WE'LL HELP YOU. And they HAVE paid for my books the whole time I've been in college. So, that support that my own family COULDN'T give me, because I'm the first one to go to college, has made my experience, I think, a very good one. In terms of having some kind of SUPPORT!

INTERVIEWER: so when you say that your family couldn't give you support, you mean

SOFIA: my mom, my father, my sisters

INTERVIEWER: when you say that they're not able to support you, could you say more about what you mean by that?

SOFIA: um. That traces all the way back to when I was in elementary school. I think I was in like the third grade! And I was telling my mom "oh Mami I need your help with this homework". And she was like "oh, I CAN'T help you. I don't

know what this is”. And that was the only time I asked. And the only time she said no, she couldn’t. and that was it. I had to be on my own.

My mom has helped me in the sense of taking me to school when I miss the bus, or picking me up, (deep sigh) I think that’s about IT. I could never talk to her about, how I’m doing or what course I’m taking or what grade I got. I would show her my report card but, (pause) its not that she didn’t care, but she was never a parent that was like “how are you doing?! How was your day? Did you get an A on that project?!”. No. she would just see that I was doing my work, and she’d assume I was doing fine. So, she doesn’t really ask me how I’m doing. Just assumes I’m doing ok. My dad too. Which HURTS me and BOTHERS me.

And my mom doesn’t really know what I’m doing. I try to explain to her what I’m studying, that I’ve done this and that, that I’m going for this kind of program. For the longest time! She was just like “Sofia, when are you going to graduate?! Where are you going to work?! How much money are you going to make?! What are you going to do?!” And I’m like, Mami, I don’t really know!” her world. Doesn’t quite capture what it is I’m doing, because she doesn’t really know what I’m doing, and sometimes I don’t even have the language to explain it to her! In THAT sense, I feel that, I mean, she’s PROUD of me. But I don’t really have the support, the questions about what it is I’m doing that SHOWS me that she’s engaged and really understands what I’m doing. She just knows that I’m doing really well, and that I travel here or there. Go to this conference, or whatever, but as far as the details, and WHY I’m doing it! The BIGGER reason! Besides my studies! That still needs to get connected for her. She knows I’m focused and motivated and excellent academically. She knows that I’m passionate about school, but doesn’t get that I need to be in school for a long time to do what I want to do. And she doesn’t even understand what it is I want to do. (pause) so.

She wants me to be a lawyer! Always, since I was little “help the immigrants! Help those who are suffering! You know? Being unjustly treated”. I’m all ABOUT social justice, but I’m doing something different.

When discussing her siblings, Sofia said:

Talk about a GAP. In outcomes, experiences, and expectations. My mom does NOT have the same expectations of them. It HURTS ME and my sisters have vocalized this about my mom. Just last night I had a conversation with my sister, who is going to community college, and she said “Mami told me, you could NEVER be like Sofia, never be like Sofia. no matter what you do, you cant match her”. And that’s NOT the support Mami is supposed to give to them! It should be like, “I want you to be successful too! Name did it, lets all do it together”. This is a family. Not a competitive thing. My younger sister wants to do her own thing, pursue her own path. And my mom, I think, at the end of the day will support her in whatever she does. But the way she communicates her expectations to my

sisters is not the healthiest way. It puts things in a competitive instead of a cooperative, sphere.

One of my sisters, academically, I mean, she has been kicked back twice! To see where I am, and where my sister is, the disconnect, to ME is UNACCEPTABLE. Where is the DISCONNECT!?! Where is the support, the unity? I don't see that, and it hurts me. My mom is not the warmest person, and so, I don't want that to be my sisters path! She could end up pregnant by the time she's in high school, or just drop out.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think was the key difference in your experience?

SOFIA: Yeah, I was the oldest, and I got a lot of attention. I was different. And, I (pause) I had my dad's side of the family. (pause) who I met when I was 10. and really took me under their wings, they were economically SECURE. My grandmother rode horses, paid for me to have lessons. My grandfather golfed, and played tennis, gave me lessons. See? Like that's not something a kid from the INNER CITY gets to do on a regular basis! And so, having THAT. And and atmosphere of SUPPORT. Asking me what my grades were! Asking me what I was going to do after high school! Those conversations, they transmit an EXPECTATION and goals that a child really, at certain points in their lives are CRITICAL to have! People EXPECT me to do this. I can do this! My sisters didn't GET that. They're different. Half [Caribbean], half [central American]. I was raised by their father. So, I'm like, the education component is so tied to how my family dynamics worked! I was the "other child". I was from a different dad, from a different family, I went off on the weekends to visit them. You know? My sisters were connected by their father and Mami, and they wanted to be their own family. And I was kind of ousted. I could never be like them. That was the mentality. You can't be like Sofia, you're not full sisters. I was always different. It makes it hard for them to see me as a role model. I was different.

In a final example, Paloma described a crucial relationship, where she was able to access the resources she needed through her connection to her mother's boss and his wife. She described them as playing a central role in helping her navigate the UMass system, where they were invested in helping her succeed and held the knowledge regarding entry requirements and steps necessary to reach her destination. This was particularly important to Paloma, as it renewed her hope of going to college when she feared her documentation status would prevent her from enrolling, since these individuals

held the knowledge necessary to navigate the legal restrictions associated with Paloma's documentation status. Paloma said:

INTERVIEWER: was there ever a doubt in your mind, that you would go to college?

PARTICIPANT: well, when I was in high school I was always trying to do my best. Trying to perform my best. But, the same thing as my sister. My legal status. I was so worried that I wouldn't be able to go to school. I was sad, because I had worked really hard. It's a big barrier. You won't be able to go to school. And if you do, you have to pay as an international student! And it's really high. But my mom's boss, they helped me with UMass. And after I got my legal status, it just became so much easier to pay as a state student. It was great. Just to be here is great!

INTERVIEWER: so, you somehow were able to get in before your legal status was resolved?

PARTICIPANT: mmhm. I had a process in immigration. So, I guess all the documents that got sent here, and then the process got approved, and I got my residence. So it was fine. But, in that time, I was able to take credits, and advance a little bit more.

INTERVIEWER: so how did your mom's boss (pause) how did you know that you could go to him to help you with that?

PARTICIPANT: he just. He always wanted me to go to school. So he was always following me, always telling me "you have to go to school, you have to go to school". And, he's just, his wife, she had her PhD in UMass, and she kind of knew the rules, and if there was an opportunity to get into the school, she would help me. So they were very very helpful. They're a blessing!

Finally, consistent with participants reported experience of navigating higher education with limited guidance, the women interviewed for this study made a call for true and personal mentorship. In essence, the women interviewed highlighted the need for an *institutionally provided map in the form of formal mentorship* (Theme dimension 5b) to help them navigate higher education. For example, discussing possible resources she would find valuable in attempting to balance family and academic goals, Paloma shared:

I think. Advising. They should improve the advising program. Because when I started here, I was taking classes that I didn't even need. Maybe it's because I didn't know to look for advising. Or they didn't follow up. I didn't get what I needed. I mean. It feels rushed. You meet with a different person every time, and it's just like, to get the hold of. It feels like there's no time. I would be afraid to like, ask questions (laughs). You know?

INTERVIEWER: mmhm so do you think it would help If it was like a more personal relationship?

PALOMA: yes! Like a mentorship. Someone to guide you.

Lisa shared a similar experience with multiple advisors without personal mentorship:

umm, the professors are good at teaching. But, there's so many, the classes are so large that, you don't really feel like they're specifically paying attention to YOU. Umm, advisors, they, I've had so many advisors in this school, it's kind of hard to keep track. So, I don't think they help that much. I think it's just important to find people you can relate to. And find strength within each other, as students.

Isabel echoes the call for mentorship and gives insight into what she understands this mentorship would accomplish. She also highlights the need for mentorship and guidance in response to being a first generation college student, describing how she has been forced to learn to navigate the complexities of higher education through making mistakes.

Because I would like it if I had a mentor, that would be able to tell me, which classes are good to take or not. Which ones are CRUCIAL for what I want. You know? Umm and that sort of thing... So I feel like, I do (wish she had a mentor). It's something that I really really wish that I had. Some guidance where to go, what to do, how to do it. that sort of thing. I've been learning (pause) *debajo el fuego. A las malas.* (English Translation: Under fire. In the worst/hardest way) that's how my mom would say it. so, and it's tough. I know that it builds your character. By I don't have time to build more character. At what point do you say "this is how you do it" and it's ACTUALLY how it's done. And, the bureaucracy here at school is tough. Lots of stuff to learn

The three excerpts above reveal participant's identification of a need for institutional guidance to compensate for the lack of guidance they experience as first

generation college students. Additionally, participants above also highlight the importance of trusted adults and authority figures in their community networks as potential mentors. While their families may lack the educational experiences that support higher education, key figures in their extended networks can play critical supportive roles. These trusted figures promote participant's adaptive identification and use of natural community supports and resources towards navigating higher education. In the case of Paloma, she was able to access her mother's boss as a key resource. Similarly, Claudia turned to her pastor. The final major theme discusses inner strengths and personal qualities supporting participant's ability to successfully balance family and educational aspirations.

### Inner Strengths and Goals

A common thread, found across all of the interviews, was participants' tendency to frame their challenges in terms of the strengths they required, as they developed the abilities to overcome the barriers they encountered and hardships they experienced. The women interviewed consistently described their sources of support and strength that allowed them to continue working toward their goals. As described in detail in previous themes, participant goals mostly involved maintaining family wellness while simultaneously obtaining a college degree with the hopes of improving their living conditions and the living conditions of their family, of honoring their parents' sacrifices, of living up to family and community expectations, and of serving as positive role models.

The sources of inner-strength described by participants as helping them overcome the obstacles they faced as they worked towards their academic goals while simultaneously pursuing wellness for their families included their faith and a number of personal qualities, endurance, *perseverancia* (perseverance), *orgullo* (pride), and *rebeldia* (rebelliousness/defiance). Throughout her interview, Lisa described both *turning to her faith* (theme dimension 6a) and relying on her endurance to help her overcome obstacles and cope with stress. She said:

...I um, go to church every Sunday, that's something that I make a PART of my schedule. For sure, for sure

... umm, I get stressed out a lot. I'll talk to my family about it. They're great motivators. They just tell me to keep on going. They push me. Umm, I pray to God, that he gives me strength. And usually, it happens. I get the strength that I need. But I have a lot of endurance, I have a lot of strength, for myself. So. I've never gotten to that point where I'm like, I'm gonna fail. So. I think I'm ok

INTERVIEWER: so what do you do to cope with stress?

LISA: to COPE with stress? I just take deep breaths. Put my priorities straight. And take one thing at a time. I pray. And just focus on one thing at a time. That it. I don't do any (pause) meditation. I don't do any yoga, or anything like that. I just pray and prioritize.

... INTERVIEWER: I know I sort of just asked this before, but who do you turn to when things get hard?

LISA: I umm turn to, um, I turn to everybody, I turn to my mom, to my boyfriend, to my sister, to God. But just basically the people who are around me, closest to me.

Similarly, Claudia described invoking her faith when facing obstacles. In the following excerpt, Claudia credits faith and her involvement in youth ministries for keeping her away from bad influences. She also revealed her pastor as a source of trustworthy support and possible connection to resources when attempting to enroll in college as an undocumented student. Claudia also described turning to faith to cope with

uncertainty, reflecting on her belief that “God has made everything come together thus far” and trusting that God will continue to ensure positive outcomes. Notably, in this excerpt, Claudia exemplifies the tendency for participants to frame their challenges in terms of their personal growth. She said:

yo estoy en un ministerio de adolescentes. Me a ayudado mucho. Porque yo se lo difícil que es. Todo lo que uno pasa, no? y todas las malas influencias y todo ... también vienen ahora los pagos de la Universidad. No se COMO (pause) como voy a (pause indicating she doesn't know how she is going to be able to pay back her student loans) Primeramente Dios. Si sabes como. Con fe.

INTERVIEWER:mmhm

CLAUDIA: Sabes que tienes, tu fe. Dios, a hecho que todo vaya encajando. también creo que todo esto fue un proceso de aprendizaje para mi. de crecimiento personal.  
... eh, pero creo que me ayudo mucho mis creencias religiosas. Tener fe siempre. Nunca darse por vencida.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: Y yo platique con mi pastor. El hizo unas llamadas. Pero en ese tiempo, si era como- imposible (referring to being able to attend college while undocumented).

**English Translation:**

I'm in a youth ministry. It has helped me a lot. Because I know how hard it is. Everything that one goes through, no? and all of the bad influences and all.

...also, payments for college are coming up (student loan repayment). I don't know HOW (pause) how I'm going to (pause, indicating she doesn't know how she is going to be able to pack back her student loans). God willing. You do know how (speaking of self in third person). With faith.

INTERVIEWER:mmhm

CLAUDIA: you know that you have, your faith. God, has made everything come together thus far. I also think that this was all a learning process for me. Towards personal growth.  
...umm, but I think that my religious beliefs helped me a lot. Always having faith. Never giving up.



INTERVIEWER:mmhm

CLAUDIA: I talked to my pastor. He made a few phone calls. But back then, it was – impossible (referring to being able to attend college while undocumented).

Isabel also credited God for guiding her life and helping her identify an opportunity that would allow her to simultaneously care for her children as a single parent and return to school. She shared:

INTERVIEWER: so how did you find a job that would allow you to fulfill your needs? That would allow you to support your family and at the same time allow you to continue going to school at your own pace? How did you do that?!

ISABEL: this is where my religious beliefs come in! I feel like God knew. He knew my heart. He knew what I wanted, he knew how I wanted to do that.

Isabel also exemplifies participants' tendency to reframe difficulties in a positive way. In the following excerpt she described feeling that God was guiding her, and accepting past difficulties as part of God's larger plan for her life. After listing a series of obstacles she has faced while attempting to care for her children and work towards her academic goals, she said:

But, again, I believe in God. So, I feel like, He knows the direction I'm supposed to be heading in. so I feel like things are just letting me know the path that I'm supposed to be on. Maybe that wasn't for me, maybe this is for me. And accepting it. so far, I haven't been misled. I feel like I've landed in the right places with the right people. So, I trust that I'll be ok.

In addition to their faith, participants also reported a series of *personal qualities* (*Theme dimension 7b*) that they considered to be sources of inner-strength and which they described as helping them overcome the difficulties they faced while attempting to protect wellness for their families and achieve their educational goals. These personal qualities included, *paciencia* (patience), *perseverancia* (perseverance), *orgullo* (pride),

*rebeldia* (rebelliousness/defiance) and *sacrificio* (ability to sacrifice). Throughout her interview, Claudia exemplified this theme dimension, identifying both *paciencia* (patience) and *perseverancia* (perseverance) as important personal qualities that she considered to be a source of strength. She said:

eh, dicen que la *paciencia* (pause) no (pause) como dicen? Que la *paciencia* es sabiduría, uno (pause) hace que uno tenga sabiduría. (pause) porque uno aprende de tantas cosas.

Entonces, yo ahora veo que el haber sido *perseverante* y el haber sido *paciente*, me hizo la persona que soy ahora! (INTERVIEWER:mhm) Pues si. Trato de ser responsable, trato también de ayudar a otros, porque (pause) creo que (pause) uno puede hacer la diferencia.

... y ver también, umm, como yo, tantas cosas que yo pensé que no iba a poder (pause) si están pasando. Osea, tuvo un proceso (pause) de casi 8 años. Pero SI lo voy a hacer. Los obstáculos estuvieron ahí (pause) pero la *perseverancia* (pause) el tener una *paciencia* (pause) la familia (INTERVIEWER:mmhm) todas esas cosas que uno pasa de pequeño- que uno no lo olvida porque uno lo tiene como muy (pause) umm (pause) inculcado. Creo que es muy difícil ignorarlo completamente. Yo creo que todo eso hizo que yo (pause) como que fue mi empuje.

...y entonces, también, desde pequeña e tenido ese pensamiento de “failure”. Yo NO lo quiero tener. Eso como que me a ayudado (pause) no puedo hacer eso (pause) no puedo aceptar la derrota! (INTERVIEWER: mmhm) no creo que esa la MEJOR estudiante. Pero (pause) creo que (pause) soy *perseverante*. Si no puedo hacer una tarea (pause) hago lo imposible para solucionar. O, yo creo que eso me a ayudado también. No soy de las personas que empieza algo y no lo termina.

#### **English Translation:**

Um, they say that *perseverancia* (perseverance) (pause) no (pause) what do they say? That *paciencia* (patience) is wisdom, one (pause) it makes one wise. (pause) because one learns from so many things.

So, I now see that having been *perseverante* (perseverant) and having been *paciente* (patient), made me the person that I am today! (INTERVIEWER: mhm) Well, yes. I try to be responsible, I also try to help others, because (pause) I think (pause) one can make the difference.

... and also, umm, how I, all of the things that I thought I wasn't going to be able to (pause) they are happening. I mean, it took a process (pause) of almost 8 years.

But I AM going to do it (graduate). The obstacles were there (pause) put the *perseverancia* (perseverance) (pause) having patience (pause) family (INTERVIEWER:mmhm) all of those things that one goes through when one is little- that one doesn't forget because one has it very (pause) umm (pause) instilled. I think it is very difficult to completely ignore. I think that all of that made me (pause) was my drive.

...and then, also, since I was little I've had that thought of "failure". I DON'T want to be that. That has helped me (pause) I can't be that (pause) I can't accept defeat! (INTERVIEWER: mmhm) I don't think that I'm the BEST student. But (pause) I think that (pause) I'm *perseverante* (perseverant). If I can't do a homework (pause) I do the impossible to resolve it. Or, I think that that has helped me too. I'm not someone who starts something and then doesn't finish it.

Similarly, Paloma describes *perseverancia* (perseverance) as an important source of strength, linking the need for perseverance to her experiences as a Latino woman. She shared:

when it comes to my personality. I think that as women, and especially being Latinas, I think that we should be very strong! Not let anyone put us down, because of our race or our phenotypes. We're all so different, but, just to have a strong personality. Have *perseverancia*. And never quit. That's number 1. If you quit, in 10 years, you'll ask yourself, how come I quit, I'm here right now- what would have happened if I finished?! You don't want to be that person that's just going to regret things. *Perseverancia*.

In the following excerpt, Angela exemplifies crediting the personal quality of *orgullo* (pride) as a source of strength. Angela said:

INTERVIEWER: do you feel that, that "orgullo" piece, the pride piece, helps you get everything done? Helps you stick with it?

ANGELA: OH YEAH! Yeah. Absolutely! I mean, If I have to go to work sick or something (pause) which a lot of people just say " oh, just call out" (pause) I have NEVER. IN MY LIFE. Called out! EVER. And it's not necessarily because I NEED the money. Because I don't HAVE TO give my parents money. They don't Demand it. My thing is just (pause) pride (pause) I HAVE TO do it. I have to go ahead and do it.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm. So, do you have that same attitude towards school?

ANGELA: Yeah! Like, it's so hard. Sometimes I'll come here and I won't even. I don't know why I come, cuz I'll be half way asleep in class. You know? And I'm

just (pause) why did I just (pause) I should have just stayed home, taken a day off, and just slept! You know?! But, no. I'll still make it to class. Even though, I missed everything that was given to me. Everything that the teacher was telling us. I just didn't take any notes, or I was just out of it. but I'll still be in class! That's how I see it!

Here, Angela described her understanding that her pride motivated her to accomplish more at both work and school, giving her the strength to attend work when sick and attend classes when tired. Similarly, Paloma describes finding strength in her rebellious nature, which she believes gives her the strength to “put everything that [she has] to graduate.” When describing her character, she said:

INTERVIEWER: mmhm do you feel that it's in your character?

PALOMA: Yes! And it has always been in me. My mother always tells me that I've always been rebellious. When I was little, in a bad way, but now, in a good way. (laughs). Like, trying to put everything that I have to graduate. To finish school and get a good job. Especially for my mom too! I want to make her proud! She has worked SO much! And has always always been there for us.

Finally, the women interviewed for this study described turning to their ability to sacrifice, and their belief that sacrifices bring rewards, for strength. Claudia exemplifies this theme dimension:

yo no tenia lujos, como hablabamos, de salir fines de semana. Incluso amistades. No podia compartir como el resto de las amigas. Porque como mis papas decian, a lo mejor ahora vas a tener un sacrificio (pause) siempre me ponian eso (pause) ahora vas a tener que hacer un sacrificio, pero a largo rato tu vas a ver que todo sacrificio trae una recompensa.

...yo trate de tomar ventaja de TODO lo que me han ofrecido. creo que viene de que somos de paises donde la educacion no es gratis. Llegar aca y ver que tenemos una habitacion llena de computadoras, gratis. Clases para aprender el idioma, gratis.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: yo queria aprovechar todo eso. Y mi madre siempre nos recordaba que teniamos que aprovechar todo eso.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: No habia descanso. El descanso solo queria decir cambiar de actividad. Mi madre siempre nos ha inculcado, sacarle el maximo a toda oportunidad. No importa lo que te den. Si te dan limones, pues te haces limonada.

**English Translation:**

I didn't have luxuries, like we were discussing, of going out on weekends. Even friends. I couldn't go out with the rest of my friends. Because like my parents would say, maybe now you will have to make a sacrifice (pause) they would always say that (pause) now you will have to make a sacrifice, but in the long run you will see that every sacrifice brings a reward.

...I tried to take advantage of EVERYTHING that I was offered. I think that it comes from, that we come from a country where education is not free. Coming here and seeing that we had a room full of computers, for free. English classes, for free.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: I wanted to take advantage of all of that. My mother would always remind us that we had to take advantage of all of that.

INTERVIEWER: mmhm

CLAUDIA: there was no resting. Resting only meant changing activities. My mother always instilled in us, take the maximum from every opportunity. It doesn't matter what they give you. If they give you lemons, then make lemonade.

Having spoken to the themes describing participant's description of sources of support and inner strength, including their faith and important personal qualities, the analysis of themes now turns to a summary of all themes.

**Summary of Themes:**

This study used thematic analysis of interviews with Latino first generation college students to achieve four main goals. It sought to document the narratives of Latina first generation college students' gendered experiences with balancing family and educational aspirations and explore their navigation/negotiation of resources for this balancing. It also attempted to document both barriers and resources/supports used as the

women interviewed attempt to balance safeguarding wellness of self and family and reaching their academic goals. Finally, it sought to explore potential resources that these women would find useful and ways in which colleges/universities might support these students in their attempt to simultaneously reach their academic goals and fulfill their family obligations.

This thematic analysis yielded 6 major themes, and 20 sub-themes or dimensions of the themes discussed by at least some of the participants. *Contextual stressors / systemic disadvantage*, involving the tendency for participants to be at a disadvantage within higher education than mainstream society, including participant's being the targets of racism/negative stereotypes, complications related to documentation concerns, their need to navigate the college environment without a map, their family's limited understanding of higher education, their need to carry a heavy work load, and their need to attend to family obligations; *education as an obligation to family-motivation*, involving participant's tendency to think of a college education as the passport to family socioeconomic mobility and wellness, as a way to repay their parents for their sacrifices, and as a way to complete a goal their mothers started but were unable to finish; *the chosen one/to be a role model- motivation*, involving the tendency for participants to hold a sense of responsibility to live up to high expectations as the first in their families to enter college, to break negative stereotypes about Latinas and higher education, and to serve as positive role models to their family, community, and their own children; *Children, present and future*, involving the tendency for participants with parental obligations to place these obligations above all else and to identify their children as a principal source of motivation, and the tendency for participants to postpone having

children until after they achieve their academic goals; *impact of important encounters*, involving participants' tendency to identify positive and negative encounters they experienced as important in their development and in the balancing of family and educational goals, to identify the importance of influences of external cultures in their educational trajectory, and to voice a need for mentorship in higher education; and lastly, *inner strengths and goals*, involving the tendency for participants to turn to their faith for spiritual support and turn to their church for social support and as a source of trustworthy help, and identify personal qualities they experienced as sources of strength, including *Paciencia* (patience), *Perseverancia* (perseverance), *orgullo* (Pride), *rebeldia* (rebelliousness/defiance), and *sacrificio* (ability to sacrifice).

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

This study used a qualitative interview approach and thematic analysis (Braune and Clark, 2006) to explore the experiences of Latina first generation college students with higher education, and their balancing of family wellness and academic pursuits. It also directly explored ways in which colleges/universities might support them in these goals. With this method, this study found that the Latina students interviewed pursued their academic and family wellness goals in a context of systemic disadvantage, yet creatively used and mobilized resources and strengths to achieve these goals. This study also revealed the ways that gender shaped these students' experiences.

While gender permeated every aspect of these women's' experience, a number of themes stand out as particularly colored by gender: Gendered family obligations taking up valuable time (Theme dimension 1d), Finish what mother couldn't (Theme dimension 2c), Break negative stereotype (Theme dimension 3b), Role model to family/community/own children (Theme dimension 3c), Parenting comes first (Theme dimension 4a), Children as motivation (Theme dimension 4b), and Postponing family (Theme dimension 4c). Throughout these theme dimensions, the Latina students interviewed describe the ways being a Latino woman have determined family/cultural/societal expectations, and the ways they attempt to achieve their academic



goals and gain some individuality while maintaining and respecting culturally influenced familial expectations and preserving family functioning.

The themes identified by this study also add to our understanding of the impact of *Familismo* on educational attainment for Latina first generation college students. As noted in the background and significance section, the construct of *Familismo* has been identified as both a protective and a risk factor for college completion in this population. The present study adds to our understanding of these contradictory findings.

First, this study suggests that the concept of *Familismo* needs to include the importance of solidarity to members outside of one's immediate family, to include extended family and community members. This study also highlights the complex impact of this solidarity on educational attainment. Theme dimensions 1c *Family's multifaceted limited understanding*, 1d *Gendered family obligations taking up valuable time*, and 4a *Parenting comes first* demonstrate the potential for *Familismo* to further burden students with obligations and pressures outside of their educational pursuits. Meanwhile major theme 2 *Education as an obligation to family- motivation and stressor* and subtheme 4b *Children as motivation* demonstrate the potential for viewing ones family as an extension of self to serve as a key motivator, and the potential for family cohesion to serve as a resource. Finally, major theme 3 *The chosen one/ to be a role model- motivation and stressor* further highlights the complex impact of *Familismo* on educational pursuits, as participants described the pressure and honor of being chosen to carry their families forward.

Consistent with Dill and Zambrana's work in intersectionality (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Zambrana & Dill, 2006; Zambrana & MacDonald 2009), this study also attempted

to address the need to explore the variation in the lived experience of women of color, examining intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, immigration history, documentation status, and gender with the goal of contributing new knowledge towards the reformulation of familiar thinking about Latina's experiences in higher education. This approach leads us to examine the disparate rates of college completion in Latinas as a phenomenon impacted by racial, ethnic, cultural, political, economic, and gendered inequalities.

Interviews highlighted the impact of government/immigration policies contributing to lack of access and affordability, where policies directly and purposefully limited undocumented students' access to education by creating obstacles for enrollment and by exponentially inflating costs. These policies exist due to an unwarranted link between immigration policy, which is a homeland security issue, and education. This link is allowed to exist, and serves to systematically oppress immigrants and children of immigrants, despite no similar link existing for other categories of "offenders". Educational institutions, for example, do not exclude students who themselves have criminal histories or whose parents have criminal histories, nor are they obligated to inquire about outstanding warrants for criminal offenses prior to accepting students or awarding them aid. It is important to note that these, and other, discriminatory inconsistencies in policy are allowed to continue unchallenged in part due to widespread anti-immigrant and anti-Latino/a sentiment still present in our society. As we see in participant narratives, and supported by the literature, these anti-immigrant policies communicate to all Latino students, not just those who lack documentation, that they do not belong in college and are regarded as second-class citizens.

Other discriminative government policies negatively impacting Latina's educational attainment, and building on anti-immigrant sentiment, include those designed to limit bilingual education. Existing both at federal and state levels, in states including Massachusetts, these policies limit the amount of bilingual education students receive, taking away children's right to learn in their native-language. Essentially, these policies leave children with both an insufficient amount of time to achieve academic English proficiency, and limit their ability to master other material by denying equal access to curriculum in student's native-language. Together, the negative impact of these policies greatly detract from Latino/a immigrant children's college preparedness.

Additional factors contributing to students entering higher education with inadequate academic preparation are related to the intersection of race, ethnicity, immigration status, and socioeconomic status. As previously noted, Latino/a students are often destined to attend under-resourced schools within their neighborhoods due to the segregation of school-aged children based on socioeconomic conditions. This pattern helps to perpetuate poverty and minority under-education, where funding for appropriate college preparation is only afforded to the children of those with greater financial resources who themselves are often college graduates.

As this study highlighted, the impact of economic disadvantage on access to education and on student's ability to perform well academically does not end with poorly-resources schools and its impact on academic preparation. Familial economic disadvantage obligates students to carry heavy workloads and contribute to family businesses in order to be able to afford education and survive as a family unit. It also

contributes to students living in environments not conducive to study. In multifaceted ways, economic disadvantage negatively impacts these students' academic achievement.

Racist and anti-immigrant sentiment existing within the educational system also negatively impacts student success. Participants of this study highlighted experiences of micro-aggressions within educational contexts, including being subject to low expectations for their achievement. Even when encountering well-intended individuals, participants described experiencing micro-aggressions when these individuals lacked sensitivity around issues impacting Latino students, including concerns around documentation.

Finally, at the familial level, a general lack of experience and understanding should be considered as impacting Latina's experience of higher education. As first generation college students, participants in this study highlighted the experience of needing additional guidance. These students also described the different expectations families held for them, including gender expectations that they continue to contribute to their household in addition to being students.

### **Recommendations**

As the findings of this study demonstrate, interventions designed to improve Latina college enrollment and completion are needed at multiple levels. At the broadest level, racist, sexist, and anti-immigrant sentiment needs to continue to be addressed, as its underlying presence allows for the continued existence of discriminatory policies and treatment of Latina's in our society. Similarly, continuing to address the poverty level in our society would have great implications on Latina's college success, as many of the

areas of disadvantage highlighted in this study are directly related to Latino children's disproportionate likelihood to live in poverty.

At a government/immigration policy level, Latina's educational achievement would greatly benefit from governmental policies that encouraged higher education for all, instead of purposefully limiting students from accessing education on the basis of ethnicity, race, or immigration status. To this end, breaking the link between documentation concerns and the educational system would be an important change. In addition, policies that support bilingual education would allow students to gain English proficiency while allowing students to master academic material in their own language, better preparing these students for the academic demands of college.

While the DREAM act, which allows undocumented students who meet residence requirements to pay in-state tuition and defer deportation, addresses some of these concerns, it has not been adopted equally across all states. It also does not address undocumented student's need for financial assistance. In addition, discriminatory state level policies that limit bilingual education counteract the benefits of this policy, as they place English Learners at a disadvantage that negatively impacts their ability to perform at a college level.

Ensuring students' adequate preparation for higher education also requires multiple simultaneous interventions. These interventions include appropriately funding schools, independent of neighborhood socioeconomic patterns. It also includes the intensive assessment or readiness both prior to exiting high-school and upon arrival to any higher-education institution. Assessing readiness would then lead to appropriate remediation, supporting students in being prepared to succeed. Also improving student's

possibilities for success, school staff, particularly advising and school personnel, could benefit from universal training regarding multicultural sensitivity. These trainings should address the negative impact of micro-aggressions, including racism in the form of low expectations, on student's academic attainment. Training should also address special issues impacting Latino and other minority students, including preparing staff to assist students with documentation concerns in navigating college admission and attendance.

Pre-college educational institutions, including public elementary, middle, and high schools, would also be a natural place to educate and engage parents and families around supporting their children in their education. Engaging parents around college preparation, application and admission processes, and college success would allow families and communities to actively support their youth. Beginning these interventions at the middle-school level would allow families to consider the importance of high-school performance and its important effect on educational trajectories.

At a University level, in addition to assessing and ensuring academic preparedness, interviews suggest that Latina students would benefit from staff sensitive to cultural and immigration concerns and a disposition to encourage academic enrollment and completion. Hurtado, Cervantes and Eccleston (2010) suggest that challenging discriminatory deficit perspectives and appreciating cultural and linguistic diversities as strengths begins to create the educational contexts within which Latino college students can thrive.

Those interviewed also explicitly call for mentorship, where these students would greatly benefit from advising from someone who they could experience as invested in their success. This level of mentorship could be achieved through changes in advising

procedures. Students could be assigned an advisor during the initial admission phase with the expectation that this same advisor would be responsible for following the student's progress until graduation. Advising requirements would include mandatory meeting every semester that included a minimum meeting time, structured topics to cover, and went beyond removing registration holds. Together, these changes at a university level could encourage institutions to truly take more responsibility for student success.

APPENDIX 1  
RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.



## APPENDIX 2

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What motivated you to go to college?
2. Were there things that made the decision to go to college hard?
3. How did members of your family respond to your decision to go to college?
  - a. Did going to college fit with what your family expected?
  - b. Probe for specific examples, if needed
4. How did your friends and other members of your community respond to your decision to go to college?
  - a. Did going to college fit with what your friends/community expected?
  - b. Probe for specific examples, if needed
5. Has “being in college” been what *you* expected?
6. Do you have people in your life that depend on you?
  - a. Examples of what they depend on you for
7. Do you feel that you take care of your family?
  - a. How?
8. How has college impacted your life?
9. How has it impacted your relationships with family?
10. How has it impacted the way you take care of your family?
11. How has it impacted your relationship with friends and community members?
12. What are some of the things that make staying in school hard?
13. What are some of the things that make studying and getting good grades hard?
14. How do you balance family and school?
15. Have you felt welcome on this campus?

16. Do you feel that you “belong” here?
17. Do you feel that people you encounter “expect” you to do well in school?
  - a. Probe for specific examples, in needed
18. What are some of the things that help you keep coming to school?
19. What are some of the things that help you get good grades?
20. What/who do you turn to when things get hard?
21. What would make it easier for you to do well in school?
22. What would make you feel more comfortable and connected on campus?

APPENDIX 3

PERSONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM

**Age/edad:**

**Gender/Sexo:** Man / Woman / Transgender

**Ethnicity/etnicidad** (e.g., African American, Wampanoag, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, Haitian American, Asian American, European American, Cape Verdean American, etc.):

**Race/raza** (e.g., Native American, Black, Latino/a, White, Asian, Arab, mixed, etc):

**Country of origin/País natal:**

**Approximately when did you arrive in the U.S.** (if applicable)*Cuando llegó Ud a los EEUU?*

**Employment/Occupation/Empleo** (if applicable):

**Family Information:** Who do you consider to be in your family (Family roles/not names)? *Quién considera Ud parte de su familia?*

**Living arrangements:** who do you live with?

**High school information:** where did you go to high school? (name of school, city, state & country)

## APPENDIX 4

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM: UMB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

University of Massachusetts Boston  
Department of Psychology  
100 Morrissey Boulevard  
Boston, MA. 02125-3393

**Project Title: Experiences of Latina first generation college students: Exploring resources supporting the balancing of academic pursuits and family life.**

You are asked to take part in a research project exploring Latina first generation college students' experiences with higher education. If you have further questions, you can contact the researcher, Hercilia Corona-Ordoñez by email at Hercilia.Corona@gmail.com or by phone at (617)287-6425.

**Description of the Project:**

In this study, we are interested in learning more about the experiences of Latina first generation college students within higher education, and the role of supports in balancing their family lives and academic goals. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to fill out a short form indicating demographic information and to participate in an initial 60-90 minute interview. In the interviews, you will be asked to talk with an interviewer, about your experiences in college, and the resources you have found helpful (or would find helpful) in balancing your family life and your educational pursuits. As a token of our appreciation for your time and effort, you will be given a \$20 gift card for a retail store for each interview in which you participate.

**Risks or Discomforts and Voluntary Participation**

In signing this form, you are indicating that you understand that there is minimal risk associated with this study. The primary risk is the possibility of experiencing some distress when participating in the interview. You are encouraged to speak with the interviewer, the principal investigator (Hercilia Corona-Ordoñez (617)287-6425) or faculty supervisor (Ester Shapiro at ester.shapiro@umb.edu or 617-287-6360), to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation.

In addition, the decision whether or not to take part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you can decide to stop participating at any time or not to answer any specific questions and may keep the gift card token of appreciation. If you wish to stop participating, you should tell the interviewer. Or, if you decide that you want to withdraw your participation after the interview, you should contact Hercilia Corona-Ordoñez. Whatever you decide will not result in any penalty to you.

**Recording the Interview**

In addition to deciding to participate in the interview, you are also deciding to agree to being recorded. The interview will be recorded electronically. Immediately following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to have the recording erased if you decide you don't agree to participate in the study or to be audio recorded. The recording will be transcribed (written down word for word) and erased once the transcription is checked for accuracy. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the recording or the transcript. Only the research team will be able to listen to the recordings. The recording of your interview will be destroyed no later than a year from today.

The written words of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or your picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

**Confidentiality:**

Your part in this research is confidential. That is, the information gathered for this project will not include information that specifically identifies you such as your name or telephone number and will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Only the research team will be able to listen to the recordings. After transcribing and checking for accuracy, the recording will be erased and there will be no way of linking your identity to the data collected. Information gathered for this project will be stored in a locked file cabinet and/or password protected on a private computer and only the research team will have access to the data.

**Participation Rights and Questions**

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you begin the interview and at any time during the study. You can reach Hercilia Corona-Ordoñez by email at Hercilia.Corona@gmail.com or by phone at (617)287-6425. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or email at 617-287-5370 or human.subjects@umb.edu.

**Signatures**

*I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM INDICATES THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.*

The consent for audio recording is effective until the following date: 9/20/2013. On or before that date, the recordings will be destroyed.

_____ Signature of Participant	_____ Date	_____ Signature of Researcher
_____ Printed Name of Participant	_____ Date	_____ Printed Name of Researcher

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