AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF
ACADEMICALLY RESILIENT HISPANIC GRADUATE
AND POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS

A thesis presented
by
Mary Ann Benites

to
The School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

in the field of
Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
December 2014
Abstract

This study examined the academic resilience of 14 Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students from across the country. The participants studied a variety of academic disciplines and comprised a broad spectrum of ethnicities. This study applied interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a qualitative tool to investigate the participants’ lived experiences. The research questions focused on academic success from a sociocultural perspective. The data were analyzed through the lens of resilience theory and applied Latino critical race-based constructs as protective barriers. The study revealed that Hispanic students utilized protective factors to remain resilient against several barriers and stressors experienced in educational settings and programs. This study confirmed that Hispanic students acquire academic survival skills primarily from their peers and in communities of minority students, a finding that requires additional investigation. Moreover, this study found that inclusive academic services are needed for Hispanic students to avert discrimination and feelings of isolation. In this study, only half of the participants perceived that their educational environments fulfilled their needs. Furthermore, the study confirmed the findings of literature that family support, or familial capital, is essential to Hispanic students. This study also produced unique findings that require further investigation. The participants remained academically strong by enculturating rather than assimilating into the dominant culture. In essence, they maintained academic resilience by adapting bicultural competence, which produced a desire to aid other Hispanic students and give back to the community by paying it forward, a finding that requires additional research.
Keywords: academic success, bicultural competence, community cultural wealth, community engagement, graduate/post-graduates, Hispanics, interpretative phenomenological analysis, qualitative research, resilience theory.
Acknowledgements

Attaining my doctorate degree was a journey I will never forget. This voyage enlightened me mentally and spiritually. I met wonderful new friends and became more appreciative of my family ties. Thus, I would like to acknowledge several persons who have helped me succeed. First, I would like to thank my loving family. Thank you to my fantastic husband Lance B. Kaplan, who dealt with my numerous hours in front of the computer. I realize this process has challenged us; however, you have been a great support to me. Moreover, thank you to my amazing children Veronica, Christopher, and Nicole. I want you to know that you can achieve your dreams in life. I am proud of your success. I also want to give a special thanks to my beloved pups Prince and Max, who faithfully slept by my feet throughout this journey.

Next, I would like to thank my parents. Your words of wisdom brought me strength throughout my life. Dad, your personal story embodies resilience and the American dream. Mom, your supportive messages kept me strong. Thank you to my sisters: Barbara, I appreciate you letting me vent my frustrations. Carol, I appreciate your motivational advice. Most importantly, grandma I wish you could see this day, but I know you can see me from heaven. Thank you for the wisdom you gave me.

Furthermore, I would like to thank Dr. Joseph McNabb, my thesis adviser. Dr. McNabb I enjoyed three of your courses. You are an amazing educator. Thank you for helping me bring my research from conception to fruition. I will never forget your progressive ideas toward social justice. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Kimberly Nolan, my second reader. I took my first doctoral course with you and enjoyed reading "Ain't No Making It." That book left an impact on my educational accomplishment. A further and grateful acknowledgment goes to Dr. Olivia
Garcia, my outside examiner. Thank you so very much for your friendship, motivation, and support. I would also like to thank my two life-long Northeastern University friends for supporting and motivating me. Thank you to Dr. Nelly Cardinale and Dr. Loretta Adoghe for being such inspirational minority women. I will never forget the support you provided me during this journey. I owe you more than a thank you. I would like to add a special thank you to my friends in Miami, Florida for cheering me on throughout this process. Your support is much appreciated.

Finally, this study on Hispanic graduate and post-graduate academic resilience would not have been possible without the help of my fourteen participants. You are extraordinary persons who make the Hispanic culture proud. Your stories are significant to our culture. Together, as one population we must continue to progress academically and professionally. Yet, remember our success is not individual. As stated by a wise Latina:

One thing has not changed: to doubt the worth of minority students’ achievement when they succeed is really only to present another face of the prejudice that would deny them a chance to even try. It is the same prejudice that insists all those destined for success must be cast from the same mold as those who have succeeded before them, a view that experience has already proven a fallacy.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice, Sonia Sotomayor, *My Beloved World*
Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction ............................................................................................................ 10
  Context and Background: Hispanic Education ................................................................. 11
  Rationale and Significance ........................................................................................................ 14
  Problem Statement .................................................................................................................... 14
  Statement of Purpose and Research Questions ......................................................................... 15
  Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................................. 16
    Foundation of resilience theory ............................................................................................. 16
    Resilience and academic achievement .................................................................................. 19
    Community cultural wealth model. ....................................................................................... 23
  Summary ................................................................................................................................... 27

Chapter Two: Literature Review .................................................................................................. 29
  Latino Critical Race Perspective ............................................................................................... 30
    Discrimination cases .............................................................................................................. 33
  Racial discrimination ................................................................................................................. 34
    Auxiliary impediments to academic achievement ................................................................. 35
  Hispanic Higher Education Attainment .................................................................................... 39
    Popular college majors selected by Hispanics................................................................. 41
  Interpersonal Contributors to Hispanic Achievement ............................................................... 42
    The role of the family ............................................................................................................ 43
  Academic Resilience Studies .................................................................................................... 44
  Environmental Contributors to Academic Achievement .......................................................... 49
    Academic capital ................................................................................................................... 49
    Campus environment ............................................................................................................. 52
  Summary ................................................................................................................................... 53

Chapter Three: Research Design .................................................................................................. 55
  Research Tradition .................................................................................................................... 56
    Phenomenology .................................................................................................................... 57
    Hermeneutics ......................................................................................................................... 58
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idiography</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Method</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positionality statement</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant selection criteria.</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and access</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant profiles</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection method</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data storage</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The data analysis process</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing the analysis</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection of human subjects</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged by Barriers and Stressors</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of educational barriers</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprehensive in campus climate</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive to Injustice</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognizant of negative stereotypes</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive to micro-aggressions</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptive in Constructive Environments</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged by advisers and faculty</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated by diverse friends and peers</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolved through Family</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthened by family adversity</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthened by family support</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially Responsible</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolved sociocultural development</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insightful community leaders</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Participant Characteristics

...
Chapter One: Introduction

The United States reached an important milestone in 2011 when for the first time in the history of the nation, there were more minorities born than White babies (Frey, 2014). This minority population expansion includes Hispanics, a group that has more than doubled in the past 23 years and now comprises 17% of the total population. The July 2013 U.S. Census Estimate Report stated that 53 million Hispanic persons now reside in the United States in comparison to the year 1990, which stated that there were 22 million Hispanics recorded (Bergrad & Klein, 2010).

O’Hare (2013) attributed the recent population growth to an increase in live births rather than to immigration expansion. This has to do, in part, with the young age of Hispanic persons. Frey (2014) attributes this trend to Hispanic immigrants who were younger upon arrival to the nation. Still, although classed as a new minority group, Hispanics have a long history in the United States, given the border proximity with Mexico. Moreover, the newness of this particular minority group stems from the growth of not just the Mexican American population, but of all persons of Hispanic origin, including immigrants and their descendants from other Latin American countries (Frey, 2014).

As a consequence, the United States has encountered a population that maintains both American values and an alternative set of cultural values and language. This shift in racial demographics has led to a new set of issues that affect the nation socially and culturally. Frey (2014) raised the question of how well recently arrived Hispanics will fit into American society given their lower levels of education, and in some cases, their limited English language ability. According to Casellas and Ibarra (2012), 25 million Hispanics are employed in the United States;
those persons who do not complete a form of post-secondary education will remain confined to low-paying sectors such as construction, maintenance, and administrative support. In September 2012, the U.S. Census Public Information Office reported the median income for Hispanics in the United States as $38,624. This figure is low in comparison to the nation’s median income, reported as $50,054. Casellas and Ibarra claimed that without graduate or post-graduate education, Hispanics will be less likely to hold political office; practice law; attain executive positions in business; or work in senior levels of government, academia, or medicine.

Beyond income, language, and education levels, scholars and the Hispanic culture itself debate how to classify persons with Hispanic origins, surnames, and heritage. Passel and Taylor (2009) analyzed the ethnicity categories in a survey on Hispanic identity published by the Pew Research Center. They discovered that 48% of adults self-identified by their country of origin, 26% as Latino or Hispanic, and 24% as American. Moreover, the authors determined that the term *Latino* is likely used by first- and second-generation persons with Latin American ancestry, whereas subsequent generations consider themselves American or Hispanic. Nonetheless, Casellas and Ibarra (2012) posited that Hispanic persons are a pan-ethnic group. Due to the various subcultures associated with the term *Hispanic*, the researcher adopted the U.S. Census identification for the purpose of this study. The participants presented in the study and the literature will be acknowledged as Hispanic unless noted differently by individual authors or the participants themselves.

**Context and Background: Hispanic Education**

According to data from the 2011 American Community Survey Study, 1.2 million Hispanics age 25 and older have attained some graduate or post-graduate education. This
number is low in comparison to the rising Hispanic population. Lopez and Fry (2013) predicted that by the year 2025, one quarter of the nation’s public school children in grades K-8 will be Hispanic. The authors added that Hispanic students have access to free K-12 education, yet most do not achieve similar academic outcomes as the rest of the nation’s children. Moreover, Yosso (2006) posited that within the Hispanic population, Mexican Americans (Chicana/os) represent the single largest minority group in practically every metropolitan area west of the Mississippi River. Yet, within this group, half of individuals under the age of 18 live in poverty and just under 50% graduate from high school. Without greater access to and completion of higher education, this trend will yield negative societal repercussions.

There are several reasons for this situation. First, Hispanics in general historically score lower on college entrance tests and do not have the financial means to pay for advanced education. Of equal importance, lower-income Hispanic K-12 students are not as academically prepared as middle-class students (Hochschild, 2003; Turnbaugh-Lockwood & Secada, 1999). Frequently, language barriers impede academic progress. Many non-English-speaking Hispanic students spend prolonged years in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, which stifles their advancement. Also, many Hispanic parents lack the financial means to pay for preschool and after-school programs, tutoring sessions, and precollege test preparation courses. As a result, Hispanic students enroll in college academically underprepared (Solórzano, Villapando, & Oseguera, 2005).

Turnbaugh-Lockwood and Secada (1999) found that Hispanic students are often negatively labeled as at risk or are stereotyped as lacking intelligence. Schools point toward the students’ parents, who, because of poor economic conditions, have insufficient time or linguistic
ability to become involved in their children’s school activities. These generalizations may be accurate, yet the American K-12 educational system may also be partially responsible. MacLeod (2009) posited that, by perpetuating socioeconomic class-based ideologies, schools reward the sociocultural capital of the dominant classes and devalue the lower classes.

Heaton (2013) identified an additional issue as deficit thinking, which is the process that locates failure within the person, family, or culture of marginalized groups who struggle to meet majority-defined measures of social success. Moreover, Heaton (2013) argued that teachers need to value the sociocultural resources students bring to their classrooms and promote cultural pride as opposed to devaluing students’ backgrounds. This negative mentality contributes to the problem. Without a college education, the growing number of Hispanics will continue to be economically subordinate in American society, which will have an adverse effect on the nation.

On a positive note, in a Pew Hispanic Research study on minority educational attainment, Lopez and Fry (2013) found that 49% of Hispanic high school graduates are currently enrolled in college. This is nearly half of the 69% of Hispanics who graduate from high school. In the 2011-2012 academic year, colleges reported an increase in students who identified themselves as Hispanic first-generation attendees (Lopez & Fry, 2013).

It appears that higher education is now populated by a diverse student body of varying socioeconomic backgrounds, sociocultural perspectives, and levels of academic preparation (Emmis, Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Bell & Bautsch, 2011; Fry, 2010). This transformation on college campuses requires educators to reconsider social and cultural capital theories to support their growing Hispanic student body (Fry & Taylor, 2013). Therefore, this study seeks to examine the experiences of current Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students.
Rationale and Significance

The importance of this study is demonstrated by the fact that Hispanic students in the U.S. have remained a marginalized group historically and for many reasons have not experienced the same levels of academic success as White students. For socioeconomic reasons, many Hispanic students have received lower levels of academic opportunities and have also been held accountable by an educational system that blames the groups that it fails (Heaton, 2013). Nonetheless, there are Hispanic students who have successfully progressed through higher education, graduate and post graduate schooling in particular, despite the many obstacles they have faced. The findings of this study will help educators comprehend the academic challenges as well as the successful outcomes possible for this population. The study’s findings will be shared with education scholars to advance research on Hispanic education and academic resilience.

Problem Statement

It is paramount that American educators develop strategies to increase high school graduation rates and undergraduate degree completion rates and construct policies that further graduate and post-graduate education for Hispanics. In the United States, educational levels determine earning capacity, which affects quality of life. Therefore, gaining a better understanding of Hispanics’ experiences of higher education will assist administrators and community members in addressing the challenges and barriers faced by this population in pursuing advanced levels of education.

When reviewing relevant research for this study, the researcher found that much of the existing literature contains negative perceptions of Hispanics. The little research that has been
conducted on Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students focuses on deficit thinking, which labels Hispanic students as at risk. Research published by Heaton (2013) and Valencia (2010) defines deficit thinking as a person-centered explanation of school failure connected to minority groups and to persons with lower economic status. The researcher intended to challenge such negative perceptions in order to contribute to the literature from a contemporary vantage point that explores the academic resilience of successful Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students.

**Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

This study was designed to investigate the experiences of academically resilient Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students (Hispanic students). To examine this problem, the following research questions and sub-questions were addressed (see also Appendix C):

1. How do Hispanic students remain resilient within their academic environment?
   1.a. How do Hispanic students perceive their previous educational experiences?
   1.b. How do Hispanic students perceive their academic environment?
   1.c. How do Hispanic students perceive campus relationships with peers, administrators, and faculty?

2. How do Hispanic students perceive their sociocultural, environmental, and interpersonal experiences as contributors to their academic success?
   2.a. How do Hispanic students perceive personal and family relationships?
   2.b. How do Hispanic students perceive community relationships?

3. How do Hispanic students make sense of their academic achievement?
3.a. How do Hispanic students make sense of academic success from a sociocultural perspective?

3.b. How do Hispanic students perceive cultural values in relation to their education?

3.c. Do Hispanic students perceive themselves differently from peers who have not attained their academic success?

**Theoretical Framework**

The researcher applied transactional resilience as the theoretical framework for this study (Kumpher, 1999; Morales & Trotman, 2011). This framework includes sociocultural protective barriers that support the academic achievement of Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students. The study of resilience has emerged from a wide range of disciplines. In fact, scholars have addressed the concept of human resilience in various ways. Heaton (2013) cited resilience theories as allowing researchers to demonstrate and explain complexities of power imbalances, social interactions, and responses of racially subjugated individuals. The following sections discuss resilience in connection to Hispanic student academic achievement.

**Foundation of resilience theory.** Studies in psychiatry and psychology have applied the concept of human resilience to measure a person’s risk factors against protective barriers. Such studies originated around 70 years ago when Dr. Norman Garmezy formalized what is known as contemporary resilience to measure human adaptation within a psychosocial construct. Subsequent researchers of resilience have credited Garmezy as the founder of modern resilience research (Masten & Cicchetti, 2012; Brown & D’Emidio-Caston, 2001; Kumpfer, 1999).

Garmezy (1991a, 1991b) indicated that human resilience cannot be established in the absence of stress. He used resilience not as a simile for resistance but as an extension of an
individual’s competencies and coping mechanisms despite internal or external hardships caused by stressful situations. Garmezy’s studies (1991a, 1991b) defined distress as the summation of personal hardships based on negative environmental factors. Thus, resilience has been viewed as the ability to survive despite negative circumstances. Garmezy’s studies and subsequent research on human resilience are quantitative based on coefficient relationships interdependent on personal perceptions of protective barriers. This research focuses on cause and effect relationships that measure risk against protective barriers (Hollister-Wagner, Foshee, & Jackson, 2001).

Hollister et al. (2001) presented four types of human resilience models. Three models quantitatively measure risks and outcomes, and one qualitatively analyzes inquiry. These models are (a) the compensatory model, (b) the challenge model, (c) the risk-protective model, and (d) the protective-protective model. Each model offers analysis to support or mitigate cause-effect situations.

The compensatory model measures quantitative research focused on risk and protective barrier combinations with each variation having an independent coefficient effect on a predicted outcome. This type of resilience model has been applied to predict success and failure rates of poor minority students in urban schools (Morales & Trotman, 2004). Researchers have also applied this quantitative methodology to measure predicted independent variables such as student intellectual functioning against parenting quality (Masten, Hubbard, Gest, Tellegen, Garmezy, & Ramirez, 1999).

The challenge model, a quantitative model, proposes a curvilinear relationship between life risks and personal outcomes. In the challenge model, a certain amount of risk reduces the
likelihood of negative outcomes. The assumption is that protective barriers are stimulated by low levels of risk. For example, when a college student successfully copes with adversity, his or her repertoire of protective barriers is stimulated and strengthened.

The risk-protective model is interactional. It quantifies and measures the strength of predetermined relationships. This model has been used to measure and predict cultural norms, social status, cognitive ability, and genetic predispositions (Hollister-Wagner et al., 2001).

The protective-protective model is used for qualitative research (Kumpfer, 1999). This model is interactional and posits that the presence of personal protective barriers weakens negative connections between risks and outcomes. This model indicates risks will continue to decrease with each protective barrier. It suggests that the presence of a close bond with an adult in combination with strong interpersonal relationships negates life stressors (Hollister-Wagner et al., 2001; Van Breda, 2001; Glantz & Johnson, 1999). The researcher viewed this multidimensional protective process model favorably when investigating the interpersonal relationships of Hispanic students.

The researcher has acknowledged the difficulty of analyzing Hispanic graduate and postgraduate students’ academic resilience. Kumpfer (1999) posited that human resilience studies require transactional situational processes which are stressful experiences construed as person in environment transactions. These transactions depend on the impact of the external stressor and are mediated first by the person’s appraisal of the stressor and second by the social and cultural resources at his or her disposal. Kumpfer cited human resilience as a phenomenon that involves successful adaptation to threats within a person’s development; this phenomenon evolves through personal experiences. Kumpfer’s standpoint contrasts with quantitative human
resilience research. Kumpfer noted that adversity can be best understood by interpreting the lived experiences of an individual’s well-being in qualitative research. In this case, the individual’s well-being is equated with the Hispanic student’s academic success.

At the heart of Kumpfer’s (1999) framework of transactional resilience is consideration for the multidimensional spirit of human nature in a person’s experiences, protective barriers, and life perceptions as living mechanisms. These constructs in the transactional model enable the researcher to listen and learn about Hispanic students’ academic lives and how these students perceive challenges.

**Resilience and academic achievement.** Minimal research has been published on the academic resilience of Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students. To design a theoretical framework, the researcher drew from studies by Kumpfer (1999) and Morales and Trotman (2011) and thus developed a conceptual framework. The researcher explored which critical points were influenced and affected by the academic experience in higher education. A critical point is defined as a Hispanic student’s attempt to complete an academic program. Morales and Trotman compared critical points to adversarial junctions that minority students cross.

Moreover, the researcher found that Kumpfer’s (1999) transactional resilience framework and Morales and Trotman’s (2011) academic resilience research were ideal for this study’s foundation. Both Kumpfer’s and Morales and Trotman’s studies posited that human development should be understood in terms of dynamic social and environmental processes. Kumpfer’s scholarship applies a general environmental, interactional, and internal interdisciplinary framework that has been used for at-risk children, whereas Morales and Trotman’s research addresses the academic resilience of minority students in general.
Kumpfer’s (1999) transactional environmental framework starts accordingly: (a) acute stressors or challenges, (b) external environmental context, (c) person-environment interactional processes, (d) internal self-characteristics, and (e) resilience processes (see Appendix A). This framework is joined with Morales and Trotman’s (2011) wheel diagram model, which contains five spokes: (a) identification of needs and challenges, (b) acquisition of protective factors, (c) protective factors that work in concert, (d) development of self-efficacy, and (e) sustainable motivation (see Appendix B). Table 1 presents the theoretical framework for this study. The table addresses five levels of the academic resiliency process. The framework starts with a person’s judgment about the significance of an event as stressful. The subsequent levels represent internal regulation of the problem that leads to a positive outcome.

Table 1

*Academic Resilience as a Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acute stressors or challenges</td>
<td>Identification of needs and challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External environmental context</td>
<td>Acquisition of protective factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person-environment interactional processes</td>
<td>Protective factors that work in concert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal self-characteristics</td>
<td>Development of self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience processes</td>
<td>Sustainable motivation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Acute stressors or challenges: Identification of needs.** The primary level of the academic resilience process identifies risks, challenges, and hardships that activate stress.
Morales and Trotman (2011) have documented that many minority students have been identified as academically at risk. The challenges they face have been noted as economic, cultural, discriminatory, academic, and linguistic in nature, all of which impede academic achievement. Morales and Trotman have identified the importance of distinguishing these obstacles. The researcher has thus determined that Hispanic minority status is an acute stressor that can interfere with undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate success.

**The external environmental context: Acquisition of protective barriers.** The second level of the academic resilience process is the balance between risk interaction and the application of protective factors from the participant’s environment or critical domain of influence (Kumpfer, 1999). This construct is the student’s ability to identify and respond to perceived risks. Morales and Trotman (2011) affirmed that Hispanic college students value the assistance they receive from others. According to Kumpfer, resilient persons apply their innate intelligence to buffer stress. High-risk students apply achievement motivation as a protective barrier in their path to success (Morales & Trotman, 2011).

**Environment interactional processes: Protective barriers.** The third level of the academic resilience process is interactional human processes that mediate in the environment or strategies directed at changing a situation (Kumpfer, 1999; Morales & Trotman, 2011). In Morales and Trotman’s 2004 and 2011 studies, the authors found that resilient minority students rely on and interact with responsible persons in their environment to acquire protective barriers that contribute to academic fortitude. These conclusions are supported by Kumpfer’s (1999) research, which found that youth living in high-risk environments actively seek alternative support from extended family or community members. These environmental interactional
mechanisms utilize the assistance of peers who serve as positive role models despite the fact that they too may exist in similar circumstances. This sphere of interactional influence is the protective-protective factor of personal resilience (Kumpfer, 1999; Hollister-Wagner, 2001; Yosso, 2005; Morales & Trotman, 2004, 2011).

**Internal resilience: Development of self-efficacy.** At the fourth level of the academic resilience process, both Kumpfer (1999) and Morales and Trotman (2011) identified internal resilience and personal development as the dynamic processes that motivate individuals toward positive outcomes. Morales and Trotman postulated that minority students’ recognition of their potential for academic success incites the process of self-efficacy. Kumpfer agreed that individuals who have attained personal success develop autonomous, self-directed personalities. Self-directed individuals avoid negative peer pressure and focus on goal-directed activities. Morales and Trotman stressed that minority students must become aware and convinced of the importance of their academic achievements to initiate the self-efficacy process. Thus, for this investigation, the researcher explored factors that spur self-efficacy mechanisms and how Hispanic students perceive this process.

**Resilience processes: Sustainable motivation.** The final level of the academic resilience process readdresses resilience as a synergetic process derived from internal characteristics connected to sustainable behaviors. Kumpfer (1999) and Morales and Trotman (2011) define this behavior as motivation, in that students remain encouraged with the development of positive habits and goals. The researcher addressed how Hispanic students remain resilient and transform their positive characteristics into sustainable behaviors. The researcher found Kumpfer’s model relevant for this investigation because it discusses the importance of resilience when faced with
adversity. Kumpfer’s framework is adapted from Garmezy’s (1991a, 1991b) resilience research, which defines resilience as the capacity for recovery and adaptive behaviors following an initial retreat or incapacity caused by a stressful event.

   Kumpfer (1999) surmised that when a person initially fails but then recovers, resilience has occurred. Morales and Trotman (2011) concurred that Hispanic college students who maintain positive campus relationships are able to recover from adverse situations. Morales and Trotman’s research on minority students lends credence to Kumpfer’s transactional framework in that both reiterate the importance of protective barriers as processes paramount to an at-risk individual’s protective field. The resilience academic achievement framework requires protective barrier processes. As such, the researcher has adopted Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth model to inform processes that induce positive emotion, which in turn sustains the resilience process.

   Community cultural wealth model. The researcher found that literature on human resilience discussed a variety of protective barriers associated with positive adaptation under negative circumstances (Kumpfer, 1999; Brown et al., 2001; Van Breda, 2001; Morales & Trotman, 2004, 2011). Therefore, in order to investigate protective barriers to resilient behavior, the investigator applied Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth model to inform this study. Yosso’s (2005) model contains six constructs that offer Hispanic students academic capital in challenging educational environments: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. Personal interactional processes help transform risk situations into protective environments. Yosso’s constructs are paired with Kumpfer’s (1999) protective barrier fields in Table 2.
### Table 2

**Protective Barriers for Hispanic Academic Resilience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspirational capital</td>
<td>Purpose in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic capital</td>
<td>Uniqueness in self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial capital</td>
<td>Personal and academic support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigational capital</td>
<td>Problem-solving skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistant capital</td>
<td>Determination and perseverance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Aspirational capital: Purpose in life.** Yosso (2005) defines aspirational capital as the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in situations of real and perceived hardship. Kumpfer (1999) added that hope and a purpose in life help resilient individuals endure challenging situations. Kumpfer cited purpose-in-life studies conducted on college students in South Carolina. The resilience and protective barrier studies discovered that life purpose was noted as the force that drives resilience. Thus, the researcher found this notation essential in exploring the academic aspirations of Hispanic students.

**Linguistic capital: Uniqueness in self.** Yosso (2005) defines linguistic capital as the intellectual and social skills attained by persons who are able to communicate bilingually. Bilingual Hispanics have an intellectual advantage often ignored in educational environments. Yosso added that students often translate for their parents, and such activity cultivates a
transcultural vocabulary, cross-cultural aptitude, metalinguistic awareness, and greater social skills. Kumpfer (1999) found that diverse environmental cognitive processes afford individuals with a stronger sense of independence, which in turn generates the ability to create positive outcomes. Yosso (2005) concurred that bilingual children have greater social maturity and a greater sense of familial responsibility, which leads to academic success.

**Familial capital: Personal and academic success.** Yosso (2005) referred to familial capital as an important contributor to academic resilience. Hispanic parents transmit positive messages about the importance of education because of their own limited opportunities. Yosso cited that generations of Hispanics utilize kinship ties when faced with adversity. In Hispanic culture, family ties often include extended relatives, friends, and members of the community. Kumpfer (1999) concurred that resilient youth living in challenging situations seek ways to reduce risks by maintaining close ties with family or community members.

**Social capital: Interpersonal relationships.** Yosso (2005) referred to social capital as personal networks and community resources used by Hispanics for support in a system that may not favor them. For Hispanics, social capital is the process of maintaining contact with persons who possess knowledge of society’s institutions. The researcher explored the interpersonal relationships that Hispanic graduates and post-graduate students use in their quest for degree attainment. Kumpfer (1999) referred to the at-risk person’s protective barrier as “street smarts” in the context of finding their way through difficult circumstances.

**Navigational capital: Problem-solving skills.** Yosso (2005) defines navigational capital as the problem-solving skills Hispanics use in social institutions that are not created with communities of color in mind. Yosso drew on resilience research to clarify a set of inner
resources, social competencies, and cultural strategies that permit individuals to survive and thrive in racially hostile situations. Navigational capital requires problem-solving and planning skills. Kumpfer (1999) referred to problem solving as fortitude. These cognitive skills relate to intelligence, which in turn enables at-risk persons to recover after stressful events.

**Resistant capital: Determination and perseverance.** Yosso (2005) drew on the work of Freire (1970) and Giroux (1983) to explain the complex relationship between oppressive social structures and the resistant actions of the oppressed. This provocative construct is rooted in poststructuralist discourse on social institutional power and minority marginalization. Yosso redefines resistant capital as the manner in which oppressed groups resist the oppression of educational systems in ways that are self-defeating, conformist, or transformative. Kumpfer (1999) referred to the importance of coping skills to developing perseverance. This construct has led the researcher to question the campus environment and how Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students cope when faced with perceived or experienced adversity.

This study was organized into five sections: (a) the theoretical framework, (b) the literature review, (c) the research design, (d) the research data, (e) the research findings and implications. In the theoretical framework section, the researcher found resilience as a person in environment transactional process to be the most applicable topic for this inquiry. Human resilience is defined as the ability to cope, face adversity, and solve problems in demanding environments (Kumpfer, 1999; Masten, 2001; Van Breda, 2001). The study of human resilience as a theoretical base emerged within the field of psychology in an attempt to discover how adults and children cope and deal with risk. The researcher informed the protective barriers in the framework with constructs taken from the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005).
In the literature review section, the researcher addressed studies on academic resilience to lend credence to this area of research. The researcher explored impediments to college academic success as well as higher education attainment. The researcher aimed to review literature on minority education that centered on academic achievement issues beginning in K-12 through higher education.

The researcher discussed the research design used to investigate the personal lived experiences of Hispanic students. The research design section incorporates methodological processes including participant recruitment, data collection, analysis processes, and how the human subjects (participants) were ethically safeguarded.

**Summary**

Despite literature indicating that Hispanics lag behind other racial groups in college degree attainment, some graduate and post-graduate Hispanic students have persevered in their academic endeavors. These persons succeeded in spite of educational obstacles, unequal access to financial resources, and perceptions of racial intolerance.

The researcher developed a theoretical framework for this investigation on resilient Hispanic students from Kumpfer’s (1999) transactional resilience model conjoined with constructs from Morales and Trotman’s (2011) research on the academic resilience cycle. The researcher found that discussion of either framework independently would not have provided a sufficient body of knowledge to support this examination of Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students.

As previously stated, resilience must be informed by protective barrier processes. Thus, the researcher deemed the constructs in Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth model and
Kumpfer’s (1999) research fitting to investigate the academic perseverance of Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students. Yosso’s sociocultural constructs provide an enlightened perspective to the protective barrier processes performed by Hispanic students at various points in higher education.

The study’s research questions, combined with the academic resilience theoretical framework, served as the lens to explore studies conducted on Hispanic students in undergraduate and graduate programs. However, there is minimal literature on graduate and post-graduate students. As such, the researcher explored Hispanic secondary and college students through graduate education to provide a background on the challenges they faced. The literature includes studies on Hispanic students who aspired to a better life through higher education. These studies and findings are presented in the subsequent literature review.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review examines Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students’ (Hispanic students) academic resilience and factors that influence it. The literature published reflects a strong emphasis on Hispanic undergraduate education. As a result, the researcher has discussed areas that focus on graduate and post-graduate students to a lesser degree. Due to the lack of research on Hispanic graduate and post-graduate education, the researcher intended to lay groundwork for future scholarship on this topic. This chapter is organized into four literature streams that focus on distinct issues that contribute to risks, and on environments that provide protective barriers.

The first literature stream imparts a brief historical background on Hispanic subjugation from a Latino critical race (LatCrit) perspective. LatCrit researchers have a fundamental commitment to attaining social justice for Hispanics (Bernal Delgado, 2002). Accordingly, this section offers insight into the educational impediments that Hispanics face in the American school system. The second literature stream explores Hispanic educational attainment from a statistical frame of reference. This section sheds light on the changing demographics of Hispanics in higher education, and it illustrates the number of college-educated Hispanics by ethnicity. The third literature stream investigates interpersonal contributors to academic achievement. This section explores the role that Hispanic families play in the lives of their children as college students, and it presents insight into factors that motivate their offspring. The fourth literature stream elaborates on environmental contributors to educational progress and discusses the type of academic and multicultural capital required to promote positive outcomes for Hispanic students in higher education. The last section summarizes the literature.
Latino Critical Race Perspective

In order to comprehend academic resilience as the established theoretical framework for this study, the researcher has addressed racial challenges identified as risk factors perceived by Hispanics in society. LatCrit scholars study racial micro-aggressions and produce research focused on equity and social justice (Bernal Delgado, 2002; Yosso, Villapando, Bernal, & Solorzano, 2001; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). LatCrit scholars have applied LatCrit theory as a conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical framework to account for the role of race and racism against Hispanics in academic environments. LatCrit scholars have analyzed and responded to negative stereotypes such as deficit thinking principles that have been published about Hispanic students. Heaton (2013) defines deficit thinking as the tendency of educators to identify and label people of color in an unconstructive manner. Moreover, Morales and Trotman (2004) define deficit thinking as a process that blames failures on persons and cultures of marginalized groups.

With the growing Hispanic population, the United States is undergoing significant racial transformation in the K-12 public school system. According to Orfield, Kucsera, and Siegel-Hawley (2012), public school enrollment has become increasingly diverse in the past 40 years. At present, on the West Coast and in large cities on the East Coast, only 52% of entering first-grade children registers as Caucasian. This statistic has shifted drastically since 1970, when four out of five students were documented as Caucasian (Orfield et al., 2012). Regardless of these changes in racial demographics, the literature on Hispanic educational attainment remains negative. It is well documented that Hispanic students perform poorer academically than their
White peers, yet the fact that most Hispanics reside in lower-class homes and communities is not taken into consideration.

MacLeod (2005) noted that, by virtue of linguistic and cultural competence, middle-class students are provided with the means of academic accomplishment. Moreover, middle-class children receive educational reinforcement in their homes and communities. In most middle-class families, higher education is viewed as a child’s rite of passage into adulthood; whereas, in low-income Hispanic communities maintain that schools should provide what parents cannot afford. Another contributor to Hispanic students’ lower academic achievement is that many first-generation parents of college students cannot impart knowledge of the higher education system, nor are they able to provide financial resources for higher education (Yosso, 2005).

Socioeconomic school segregation is an additional barrier to academic achievement. According to Gandara (2010), Hispanic and Black students today are often faced with worse school segregation than they experienced 40 years ago. Gonzalez (2007) and Bernal Delgado (2002) cited policymakers who ignore the socioeconomic pattern of increased school segregation when publishing negative educational outcomes of Hispanic students. Even worse, these publications draw achievement comparisons between poor minorities and middle-class White students. Orfield, Bachmeier, James, and Eitle (1997) found that socioeconomic school segregation was not taken into account in the years prior to Brown v. Board of Education (1954), when attorneys for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) designed a legal strategy to challenge racial segregation as opposed to mitigating the socioeconomic inequities between Blacks and Whites.
While *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) is considered a landmark civil rights case that promoted educational equality for all, the United States Supreme Court’s color-blind ruling does not address the socioeconomic segregation that challenges minority students in the American K-12 public school system (Gonzalez, 2007). LatCrit scholars have argued that state governments have the legal responsibility to institute equality in educational policies for Hispanic students. Most importantly, LatCrit scholars seek to expose and transform the ways in which law institutionalizes relations of domination and subordination around essentialist categories such as race, class, gender, education, language, and immigration status (Bernal Delgado, 2002).

Yet more needs to be accomplished. Hispanic students continue to face intensifying socioeconomic segregation in public schools. Orfield et al. (2012) and Gandara (2010) found that in school years 2009 and 2010, K-12 public school segregation increased dramatically. In New Mexico, California, Texas, and Arizona alone, more than 60% of Hispanic students now attend minority majority schools. A minority majority school is defined as an educational facility with an exceptionally racially diverse student body containing over 50% minority students. In most urban minority majority schools, the number exceeds 90%.

Gonzales (2007) and Fuentes (2006) found that Hispanic students in minority majority schools are not provided sufficient academic support to prepare them for college. This dire situation contributes to academic gaps faced in higher education which challenges first-year students on college campuses. In most cases, Hispanic students arrive at universities academically underprepared for advanced education, which in turn causes stress. Fuentes posited that teachers and schools must play a salient role in the academic achievement of Hispanic students. Gonzalez stressed that research is mainly concerned with students who drop
out rather than with academic accomplishment. Fuentes added that despite the growing numbers of successful academic programs that help prepare Latina/os throughout the nation, a large number of schools continue to engage in maladaptive practices such as maintaining lower expectations of Hispanic students.

**Discrimination cases.** School segregation against Spanish-speaking children has impeded the mobility of Mexican Americans. Gonzalez (2007) identified what LatCrit scholars would consider institutional racism in his discussion of two court cases on segregation that predate *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In *Del Rio, Independent School District v. Salvatierra* (1930, 1931), Mexican American parents in Del Rio, Texas lost a segregation suit against the school district. At that time, Texas required “separate but equal” schools for Black and White students, yet this law did not include Hispanics.

According to Gonzalez (2007), the Del Rio district superintendent testified that a separate facility was in the best interest of Mexican American students because of their language ability. This issue prompted Jesus Salvatierra, the plaintiff, to sue the independent school board on grounds that Mexican American students were deprived of equal resources provided to White pupils. The District Court ruled in favor of Salvatierra. However, the Texas Court of Civil Appeals overturned the ruling, and the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review the judgment.

In the same year, *Alvarez v. the Lemon Grove School District* (1931), a racial discrimination case, went to court in California. This time, however, the plaintiff was victorious. In the Alvarez case, the district built a detached school for Mexican American children. Principal Jerome Green acted on orders from the Lemon Grove Board of Trustees and directed English-speaking Mexican American children to attend a school known as *La Caballeriza.* “the
barnyard.” These circumstances resulted in a boycott, with student Roberto Alvarez named as the key plaintiff in this class-action suit. According to Griswold del Castillo (2007), Judge Claude Chambers ruled that school racial segregation would prevent Mexican American children from acquiring the English language and American cultural customs. The judge ruled that, in California, Hispanics were documented as members of the Caucasian race and could not be legally segregated. Gloria, Castellanos, and Kamirmura (2006) concluded that these court cases are seminal to understanding the educational trajectory of Latina/os in education. The authors added that these cases emphasize the manner in which Latina/o education is undervalued.

Marx and Larson (2008) pointed to biased language policies as a method of sociocultural oppression. The authors argued that through the late 20th century, the availability of English-language instruction in public schools had been a form of social domination used to deny minorities the knowledge necessary to educate themselves and channel their political voices in American society. In the *Lau v. Nichols, 414. U.S. 563* (1974) case, the San Francisco School District failed to provide English-language instruction to nearly 1,800 Chinese students. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the San Francisco School District had violated Section 601 of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, which bans discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin. Marx and Larson posited that this landmark case ruling was responsible for ESL instruction being gradually integrated into the American K-12 public school system.

**Racial discrimination.** Although the civil rights movement has had a significant effect on changing racial interactions in society, racism still plagues college campuses in the forms of stereotypes and micro-aggressions, a subtle form of discrimination. According to Gloria, Castellanos, and Kamirmura (2006), the university environment is consistently a White, middle-
class setting that values individualism and competition. The campus environment is a reflection of American society in its most competitive form, and persons who have alternative values or approaches often find it unyielding. Students of color report experiencing tension and hostility, which adds stress.

In Martinez’s (2012) study of Mexican American college-bound students on the Texas border, the researcher sought insight into the perception of stereotypes. Martinez found that participants witnessed real and perceived negative stereotypes of Latina/os and Mexican Americans as uneducated or reluctant to pursue advanced education. The participants overwhelmingly admitted to being motivated to succeed in order to combat negative stereotypes about Latina/os pan ethnically. Beyond the negative stereotypes, Hispanic students have experienced micro-aggressions, defined by Sue et al. (2007) as verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate derogatory racial slights and insult the target person or group. Micro-aggressions are not limited to human encounters alone, but are also within the university campus culture.

**Auxiliary impediments to academic achievement.** United States Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor voiced her opinion on Hispanic hardship: “There are uses to adversity and they don’t reveal themselves until tested. Whether it’s serious illness, financial hardship, or the simple constraint of parents who speak limited English, difficulty can tap unsuspected strength” (2013, p. 11). Justice Sotomayor’s comments raised awareness of the subordination Hispanics face in American schools. Moreover, Orfield et al. (1997) contended that due to socioeconomic segregation, most Hispanic students remain in minority majority K-12 schools.
The costs involved in supporting minority majority schools dissuade administrators from investing in college preparatory programs, which increases academic risk factors. Orfield et al. (1997) argued that in minority majority schools, most expenditures are allocated for ESOL programs, special education, and remedial classes. Gandara (2010) and Marx (2009) stated that Hispanic students who attend minority majority schools may rarely come into contact with college-bound peers or with guidance counselors who can assist with the formation of an academic identity. According to Liou, Anthrop-Gonzalez, and Cooper (2009) and Marx, within the walls of minority majority schools, Hispanic students face unpleasant racially biased stereotypes and low academic expectations from administrators and teachers.

LatCrit scholars Villenas and Deyhle (1999) conducted a six-year ethnographic investigation to uncover the roots of racism in school settings. Villenas and Deyhle investigated a poverty-stricken Mexican American community and explored educational sites from a preschool through a state university program. Their goal was to challenge deficit thinking perceptions that label Hispanic students as at risk. The Villenas and Deyhle investigation primarily explored the notion of a disconnection between school expectations and the family support structure. The study found that there was sufficient middle-class discourse, on the importance of education, among the participants they interviewed. Moreover, the participants throughout all the sites valued education as important. Significantly, Hispanic families reported that they had to learn alternative methods to navigate challenging circumstances when dealing with school administrators (Yosso, 2005).

Liou et al. (2009) focused on the type of college orientation that Hispanic high school students receive from guidance counselors. The researchers investigated two minority majority
schools and found that their guidance counselors possessed low expectations and biased personal opinions of Hispanic students. Moreover, Liou et al. found evidence that college advising was predetermined at ninth grade by categorizing students. This investigation provided examples of racial bias by a high school career counselor and a college preparatory program adviser. Both counselors vocally expressed negative perceptions of Hispanics and English language learners.

The career counselor opined that not every child should go to college:

I don’t believe every kid should go to college. These kids are from families where they have little to live on and the best thing for many of them is to get a job. Look, I need my car mechanic and if everyone goes to college, then where am I going to get my mechanic? And the one I have right now, Miguel, is doing a wonderful job. Our society needs those people too. If a kid comes to me wanting a job, I will not hesitate to refer them to jobs or technical schools. (p. 541)

Liou et al. (2009) suggested that school administrators should pay closer attention to crucial social information networks that students utilize to understand the circumstances of their schooling conditions, which in turn affects their attitude toward educational advancement. Ironically, the Liou et al. research study indicated an obscure relationship between students and guidance counselors. The participant guidance counselors believed every child had received an equal education; whereas, the students believed they had obtained appropriate academic guidance. MacLeod’s (2009) book *Ain’t No Making It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood* argued that the American educational system is subordinate to and reflective of the forces and relations Karl Marx qualified as the capitalist production process. Schools train the wealthy to take places at the pinnacle of society, while the poor are conditioned
to remain in a low status within the class structure. Heaton (2013) cited work from Bowles and Gintis (1976) and noted a capitalist system requires the underachievement of a large portion of the population in order to maintain itself. As racial minorities have historically been part of the working class, they are primary targets in the way that the economic structure uses schools to continue oppressive conditions.

Marx and Larsen (2008) postulated another factor to be that the Hispanic student population has grown considerably, yet the percentage of Caucasian educators remains over 80%. Presently, the number of Hispanic educators in K-12 public education is limited. Hispanics account for close to a quarter of American school children, but a mere 5% of teachers are Latina/o (NEA, 2010). Marx (2009) asserted that both White and minority students are culturally deprived when public schools remain socially segregated because these circumstances do not generate occasions to discover knowledge of other cultures.

Moreover, Nora, Barlow, and Crisp (2006) posited that the types of colleges that Hispanic students attend factors into their retention rates and ultimate success. The authors indicated that for Hispanics, higher education success is based on social, academic, and personal-emotional attachment to the academic institution. In essence, Hispanic students need to perceive a sense of sociocultural connection and welcome from the campus climate to remain motivated. Nora, Barlow, and Crisp found that, without such influential supportive experiences, there is a greater risk of students not completing the academic program.

To conclude, there is no single program or policy that will diminish the educational impediments discussed in this section. However, it is of great importance for educators to be aware of the historical subjection, negative discourse, sociocultural misconceptions, and lack of
academic support on campuses that challenge Hispanic students who are determined to forge a viable future for themselves through higher education.

The subsequent section discusses recent Hispanic educational attainment.

**Hispanic Higher Education Attainment**

According to Bergad and Klein (2010), the United States Census Bureau did not account for Hispanic higher education completion until 1980, when the Nixon administration developed racial and ethnic categories on the U.S. Census to track demographical changes in the population. Prior to 1980 there was no official data published on Hispanics with college degrees. However, the government now documents the educational progress of Hispanics. The National Center for Education Statistics (2012) reported data on Hispanic college students for academic year 2010-2011. The report found that the total number of self-identified Hispanics ages 18-24 enrolled in two- and four-year post-secondary degree-granting institutions reached 21 million. Moreover, according to Pew Hispanic Research Center the number of Hispanic young adults enrolled in college grew by 349,000, compared with an increase of 88,000 Blacks and 43,000 Asian-Americans and a decrease of 320,000 Whites (Fry, 2011).

While these statistics primarily show an increasing number of Hispanic students in undergraduate education, Snyder and Dillow (2012) reported data from the Center for Education Statistics that indicate that the number of Hispanics with master's degrees rose from 4.8 to 7.1% between 2000 and 2010. Cooper (2014) noted that at the University of California, Berkeley, the number of Hispanics with doctoral degrees also rose 160% from 1990 to 2010. Cooper reported that at the start of academic year 2011, there were 385 Hispanic doctoral students actively enrolled at UC Berkeley. Cooper added that UC Berkeley credits the rise in Hispanic post-
graduate advancement to successful completion of undergraduate degrees. The number of
doctoral degrees awarded to Hispanics increased from 5,000 to 8,000 over the course of twenty
years. It is important to note that this rise in Hispanic undergraduate education enrollment is not
universal. Some communities fare better than others educationally. Figure 1 provides statistics
for the number of people with a bachelor’s degree by Hispanic national origin.

![Graph showing the percentage of people with a bachelor's degree by Hispanic national origin.]


Motel and Pattern (2012) corroborated that 14% of Hispanics ages 25 years and older
have a bachelor’s degree. Furthermore, Hispanics as a group have increased their educational
attainment despite the breakdown within each national origin category. These numbers reflect a
growing minority population determined to change the face of higher education in America.
Popular college majors selected by Hispanics. Aud, Fox, and Kewal-Ramani (2010) conducted a study to explore the most popular majors selected by Hispanics and found that Hispanics select majors such as business and education for bachelor’s degree programs, followed by social sciences and engineering-related technologies. Hispanics favor a master’s in business administration (MBA) and a master’s in education over other types of master’s degrees. Hispanic students who pursue doctoral degrees opt for programs in education, health science, and psychology.

In their study on underrepresented Hispanics in mathematics, Villegas and Vincent (2005), both math professors at Washington State University, examined how Hispanics felt about math as a major. The researchers distributed surveys to students at five 4-year public universities and three community colleges in Washington. One hundred forty participants were randomly selected and divided by gender and age range. Villegas and Vincent found that the participants cited negative learning experiences with their K-12 math teachers as a deterrent to pursuing higher education in mathematics. Furthermore, the participants deemed low math grades and a lack of tutors a major cause of disinterest in the discipline. The participants also noted a lack of encouragement to pursue math as a career. Many participants believed a math major would limit them to teaching professions. This study is particularly important because it drew attention to the low number of Hispanic professors in higher education, most notably in mathematics. Villegas and Vincent’s findings support Aud, Fox, and Kewal-Ramani’s (2010) research, which indicates that Hispanics prefer more traditional academic programs.

In sum, the research explored here provides insight into a new trend in higher education. Fry and Taylor (2013) and the Center for Education Statistics (2012) have substantiated that the
higher education landscape has progressed, with Hispanic students ages 18-24 enrolled in colleges and universities at higher rates than other minority groups. While these findings are encouraging, it is higher education institutions’ responsibility to ensure that inclusive education is maintained. This growth in Hispanic enrollment requires institutions to uphold their mission statements and prepare all students for civic and professional responsibilities by providing an equitable and inclusive environment.

The subsequent section examines interpersonal contributors that support academic resilience.

**Interpersonal Contributors to Hispanic Achievement**

According to Ojeda, Edwards, Hardin, and Pina-Watson (2014), Hispanic college students navigate interwoven challenges on college campuses daily. These include academic difficulties, family relationships, financial hardships, entrenched stereotypes, and conflicts between their own cultural heritage and the dominant culture. Scholars have called for solutions to support Hispanic students on their educational paths (Nunez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Caruthers, & Vazquez, 2013; Trumbull & Rothstein-Fish, 2011).

Morales and Trotman (2004) posited that it is vital not to ignore the affective domain when attempting to comprehend issues faced by marginalized minority students. They define the affective domain as a minority student’s cultural values, motivation, attitude, and personal beliefs that contribute to the learning environment. Moreover, Nora, Barlow, and Crisp (2006) proposed an investigation of factors that affect re-enrollment cognitively and emotionally. These factors cannot be understood without a detailed examination of academic and communal experiences.
The role of the family. Morales and Trotman (2004) affirmed that the encouragement that lower-class minority students receive from their parents differs from the support offered by middle-class parents. Ceja (2004) investigated roles that Hispanic parents play in shaping their children’s higher education aspirations. The participants included 20 female college-bound high school seniors from low socioeconomic Mexican American backgrounds. The participants selected were on three distinct academic tracks. Seven students planned to enter the University of California system; another seven planned to enter the California State University system; the remaining six students planned to attend community colleges. The data collection method comprised semi structured interviews. All participants were interviewed three times.

Ceja’s (2004) findings confirmed that, contrary to negative stereotypes of Hispanic parents playing a deficit role in their children’s pursuit of higher education, all of the participants surveyed experienced family support and encouragement of their educational aspirations. All of the participants involved mentioned that family played a significant role in their decision to attend college. The topic of higher education and college attainment was not fully discussed at home, yet educational messages were transmitted through community and family hardships. In some instances, the participants stated that their parents emphasized that a college education was imperative. In other cases, students were conscious of the socioeconomic class within their family.

Ceja’s (2004) research taught educators how underprivileged Hispanic families provide unconventional methods of encouragement. The study found that families implied the importance of higher education without explicitly mentioning it. One participant described her mother’s strenuous circumstances:
I look at my mom, and she has calluses on her hands. She looks at me and says,
I don’t want this for you. This is why I am sacrificing myself because I don’t want
this for your children, and I don’t want this for your children’s children. (p. 348)

While voiced in an alternative manner to middle class households, the messages
transmitted serve as protective barriers critical to resilience (Kumpfer, 1999; Morales &
Trotman, 2004, 2011). The participants in Ceja’s (2004) study stated that their parents did not
use specific language about education, yet they instilled in them the value of being a college-
educated person in the United States. Yosso (2005) confirmed that the lessons of caring, coping,
and providing inform a child’s emotional, educational, and occupational consciousness.

**Academic Resilience Studies**

Yosso (2005) has identified aspirational capital as a construct of academic resilience.
This construct refers to the ability to remain hopeful in the face of real and perceived challenges.
Olive (2008) and Zalaquett (2006) asserted that students who dream of possibilities beyond their
present situations display motivation that leads to academic achievement. To test this theory,
Olive conducted an investigation of first-generation Hispanic students at a Texas university. The
purpose of this study was to explore the intrinsic motivation of Hispanic students who were
enrolled in an academic support program. Olive used descriptive phenomenological
investigation to gain an understanding of motivational messages in context.

Olive’s (2008) participants comprised three Hispanic students 19 to 22 years of age.
Their academic status ranged from freshman to senior. The first participant (P1), a female,
reported that her ancestry originated from Mexico. P1’s family income was reported as less than
$16,000 per year; neither of P1’s parents were immigrants. The second participant (P2), a
female, described her maternal ancestry as originating from Mexico, while her paternal ancestry was from Spain. P2 estimated that her family income ranged between $16,000 and $20,000; neither parent had immigrated. The third participant (P3), a male, stated that his parents emigrated from Mexico. P3 estimated his family income at $41,000. All three participants listed Spanish as their home language.

During semi structured interviews, students were asked what motivated them. The participants indicated that they did not want to disappoint their families (Olive, 2008). P3 attributed his strong academic aspirations to the fact that he did not want to work as a menial laborer like family members and persons in his community. P3 expressed a strong desire to use his college education to help other Latina/os aspire to success through higher education. All three participants were strongly motivated to succeed and change their lives.

Olive (2008) reported that the participants had a high sense of self and all cited the necessity of future financial security. The participants’ motivation for academic success confirms Yosso’s (2005) construct of resistance capital. Resistance capital resonates from a person’s difficult lived experiences and awareness of struggles. In addition, Olive’s research supported Ceja’s (2004) study, which found that Hispanic families highly respect college degrees. Education is considered a viable option to stave off economic hardships.

Cavazos, Johnson, Fielding, Cavazos, Castro, and Vela (2010) investigated Bandura’s (1994) Theory of Self-efficacy a person’s belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation at a Hispanic-serving institution in the Southwest. A Hispanic-serving institution is defined as a college or university where the number of Hispanic students constitutes at least 25% of the total student body. Eleven participants were selected, and all had goals beyond the
baccalaureate level. The participants self-identified as Chicana/o, Hispanic, and Latina/o. Nine of the 11 participants identified themselves as first-generation college students.

Semi structured interviews were performed to gather insight into the participants’ economic hardships and exposure to racism and to measure perceived expectations of the academic community. Cavazos et al. (2010) reported that personal hardship served as the strongest motivator for participants who perceived challenge as a motivation for creating change. A female participant articulated, “I want to reduce the achievement gap among minorities, and I would like us to be at the same level academically with White people” (p.182). A male participant explained, “I want to rid the stereotype that Mexican Americans are indigent, or they are not capable of reaching the achievements of what others consider superior” (p. 182).

The researchers reported that all 11 participants had close family ties, positive interpersonal relationships, intrinsic motivation, and an internal locus of control. These findings corroborated research by McMillian and Reed (1994), who asserted that the development of self-efficacy requires students to maintain a supportive environment and noted that there is not a universally effective approach.

According to Cavazos et al. (2010), educators must realize that low achievement in high school does not necessarily mean a lack of potential accomplishment in higher education or in other endeavors, for that matter. All participants in the Cavazos et al. investigation reported that they were not the smartest individuals on campus, yet they believed persistence played a greater role in success than intelligence.

Similarly, Cabrera and Padilla’s (2004) study examined the resistance and motivation of two Mexican American Stanford University students. The two participants, Erandi, a 21-year-
old female, and Juan, a 22-year-old male, originated from impoverished households. Semi
structured interviews were used to gain information on the participants’ home, school, and
community environment. Cabrera and Padilla examined the role of racial discrimination,
parental roles, and high school experiences on college preparation. The researchers discovered
that both participants served as parental translators, which develops linguistic capital and higher
order cognitive skills (Yosso, 2005). Erandi received support from Upward Bound, a federally
funded program, and attended public school. Juan received a scholarship from a private school
to complete a college preparatory curriculum. Both participants reported perceived racial
discrimination from White teachers in their K-12 environments. Erandi and Juan reported
feeling uncomfortable in an upper-middle-class higher education environment like Stanford. The
participants both mentioned that they had other plans if they failed at Stanford. Erandi would
transfer to a state university, and Juan stated that he would enter the military.

Cabrera and Padilla (2004) conducted a follow-up interview and discovered that Erandi
and Juan both graduated because they managed to learn cultural capital and alternative values
that most middle-class university students take for granted. The results of this study indicate
that, at some level, class and culture-bound knowledge is required in competitive higher
education. On the other hand, the researchers’ findings did not support the literature with
reference to Hispanic parental roles. Cabrera and Padilla surmised that, while parents’ aspiration
for their children to go to college is paramount, this wish is often insufficient for the student to
attain positive academic outcomes. The researchers concluded that an academic identity must be
formed and resistance behaviors must be sustained. There are limitations to Cabrera and
Padilla’s findings in that they do not discuss the protective barriers Erandi and Juan applied to remain academically motivated.

Morales (2008) and Morales and Trotman (2004) provided greater insight into the sequence of protective barriers as a process, and they posited that personal awareness of specific challenges that students face serves them in higher education. Erandi and Juan comprehended their personal circumstances and limitations, and they both understood the need to succeed at Stanford. Yet they had an alternative pathway that could lead to an equally successful future in the event that their original plans did not unfold as desired, just as the participants in the Cavazos et al. (2010) study were self-aware and stated that hard work and effort played a more important role than mere intelligence in academic success.

In both cases, the participants were conscious of their personal and academic barriers and remained determined to persevere and mitigate difficult circumstances (Kumpfer, 1999). In these investigations, the student participants’ strong desire to change their lives sustained their academic motivation. Morales and Trotman (2004) postulated that once a student resolves to live a different life than current situations allow, he or she forms a different picture of reality. This mental picture initiates the process of bringing the vision to fruition.

In brief, these investigations indicated that, contrary to deficit perceptions of Hispanic families, messages transmitted in family situations and recognition of economic hardship serve as protective barriers in fostering aspiration for a better life through higher education. Moreover, understanding how Hispanic students gain motivation as part of the academic resilience process informs educators about the particular sociocultural needs these students bring to our nation’s college classrooms.
The subsequent section discusses how environmental factors contribute to academic achievement in higher education.

**Environmental Contributors to Academic Achievement**

The literature has yielded promising findings with reference to academic resilience and the motivation of Hispanic students to pursue higher education. According to Morales and Trotman (2004), bringing meaningful academic experiences in the campus environment is essential to academic resilience. Such experiences provide students with the ability to visualize a natural outcome of success. Fry and Lopez (2012) confirmed that due to the rising number of Hispanics in higher education, the realization of positive campus experiences is essential to academic resilience. Liu (2011) and Storlie, Moreno, and Portman (2013) posited that Latina/o college students require more intentional support to aid in the development of a college identity because first-generation parents have often not enrolled in or completed higher education. Thus, educators must create programs and a positive campus environment to sustain educational success.

**Academic capital.** Nunez et al. (2013) suggested that Hispanic college students face monumental challenges when they transition from secondary to post-secondary education. These hardships can be minimized with the development of academic capital. Academic capital is the expansion of relationships within and between educational institutions. Nunez et al. (2013) and Nora and Crisp (2009) stated that academic capital requires advisement and support services to aid Hispanic students in completing their degrees and envisioning an academic identity. Nunez et al. cited mentoring programs as playing a decisive role in helping Hispanic students succeed. Olive (2008) added that educators should use cultural familiarity in the manner they approach
guidance, academic plans, and responsive services. By appreciating Hispanic persons’ desire for social mobility, educators can provide a long-term vision of academic success.

Wasburn-Moses (2007) published a study on the satisfaction of minority students pursuing doctoral degrees in special education. The purpose of this study was to understand how socialization affects minority doctoral students and their potential for becoming future scholars and researchers. Wasburn-Moses defines socialization in the post-graduate school context as the process by which students acquire the attitudes, beliefs, values, and skills needed to participate effectively in the organized activities of their profession. Of particular concern was academic and social integration of minorities into the post-graduate community. Wasburn-Moses (2007) and Castellanos and Orozoco (2005) posited that when considering Hispanic academic socialization, mentors, supportive faculty, and peers are vital to student success.

For the Latina/o doctoral students that Wasburn-Moses (2007) investigated, quality social interactions with peers, administrators, and faculty were clearly linked to increased academic performance and greater feelings of integration. These relationships strengthened and produced academic capital (Nunez et. al, 2013). Segura-Herrera (2006) described her perception of culture shock and isolation as a first-year doctoral student thus:

I was filled with a pervasive sense of shock and disbelief for having been accepted. I was a Mexican American woman from inner-city Chicago and the first in my family to make it this far educationally. The sense of shock deepened to sadness due to numerous life transitions. I couldn’t understand why these highly desired events caused emptiness and isolation. (p. 222)
Segura-Herrera’s (2006) sharing of her feelings of isolation provided insight into the needs of Hispanic graduate students in higher education. The author postulated that Hispanic cultural values of familismo are juxtaposed with the American cultural belief of personal independence and competitiveness. Familismo is the core value that links family, personal relationships, interdependence, cohesiveness, cooperation, and parental authority in Hispanic culture (Quijada & Alvarez, 2006).

Storlie, Moreno, and Portman (2013) discussed the fact that weaknesses in the campus environment for Hispanic students induce challenges, insecurity, and isolation. Ramirez (2011) conducted a qualitative study to identify how race and class affect graduate school access. The researcher analyzed 24 Latina/o doctoral students (12 men and 12 women). The purpose was to capture their experiences in the graduate school application process. The researcher analyzed the perceived barriers and supportive structures that students encountered as they navigated the process.

Ramirez’s (2011) results found flaws in the educational environment that require attention. The participants in the study perceived the application process as obstacle ridden, particularly the written personal statements and application form requirements. Ramirez’s (2011) participants indicated that it was a challenge to access requisite information and obtain guidance from institutional agents within the university. The researcher identified the absence of graduate resources and the lack of connectedness with advisement as potential barriers to Latina/o students’ graduate school access. Some participants alluded to racial discrimination if they attempted to attain graduate school information from faculty advisors. The researcher concluded that institutional agents sometimes play contradictory roles and maintain gatekeeper
functions. The findings correspond with the existing literature in that supportive campus environments are paramount for producing academic capital in Hispanic students.

**Campus environment.** The campus environment goes beyond academic advisement. It refers to a sociocultural climate that is genuinely sensitive to the needs of its diverse student body. Nora and Crisp (2009) and Lopez-Mulnix and Mulnix (2006) asserted that the campus environment hedges the success or failure of minority students. The authors challenged institutions to reject the notion of diversity from the perspective of convenience and establish themselves as colleges of inclusion. Universities pride themselves on diversity and excellence in institutional mottos, yet institutions need to reach beyond the promotion of free-standing multicultural centers to ensure the success of Hispanic students.

Raphael, Pressley, and Kane (2003) conducted a grounded theory investigation of Hispanic undergraduate students at the University of Notre Dame to explore the campus climate and cultural support provided. The University of Notre Dame actively recruits Hispanic students, provides scholarships, offers courses in Latin American studies, and conducts mass in Spanish. The participants consisted of 19 Hispanic students: 12 females and 7 males, 14 of whom were born in the United States. The researchers added a cross-cultural comparative and included an equal number of White students. Raphael et al. (2003) compared student interviews and explored cross-cultural perceptions of the institution’s programs. Hispanic students were interviewed twice, and White students were interviewed once, with the same question sets for both groups. The researchers received similar responses from both Hispanic and White students with reference to support offered at the university. Moreover, consistent with previous findings on the significance of family in Hispanic culture, comments about family and community were
far more prominent in the interviews with Hispanic participants. In the interviews, Hispanic students stated that they missed their families twice as often as White students.

Raphael et al. (2003) found nothing to support Tinto’s (1993) position that college success depends on disassociation from cultural heritage. The researchers concluded that Latina/o students were successful at the University of Notre Dame because of connections between the university’s values and their Catholic cultural values. The findings indicated that Hispanic students perceived that college administrators were responsive to their concerns, which left them feeling less isolated. Indeed, positive campus environments induce academic capital. Raphael et al. (2003) identified environmental contributors beneficial to Hispanic student success. The authors stated that there is room for higher education institutions to implement culturally sensitive practices that recognize values maintained by Hispanic students.

Summary

The researcher analyzed literature that provided insight into challenges faced by Hispanic students in their academic environments. The literature in this section presented evidence of resilience in Hispanic undergraduate and graduate students while they remained cognizant of their challenges. The literature reviewed attempted to create a broader awareness of how resilient Hispanic college students strengthened themselves academically and socially. To varying degrees, the participants discussed exhibited family values, problem solving skills, independence, and a sense of purpose.

The literature available on Hispanic achievement in graduate and post-graduate students remains limited. To date, much of the literature continues to stereotype Hispanic undergraduate students as poverty-stricken, or it is focused on achievement gaps. A significant portion of the
current literature also analyzes Hispanic students in community college settings. The researcher found that examining issues related to Hispanic students from a wide range of backgrounds and educational levels was relevant to the investigation of Hispanic graduate and post-graduate success.

The subsequent chapter details the research design applied in this study.
Chapter Three: Research Design

The goal of the research was to investigate the academic resilience of Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students. A comprehensive review of the literature indicated a need for investigation of Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students. The researcher found it necessary to apply qualitative methodology to gain an understanding to the participants’ experiences and perceptions. The researcher explored academic resilience from three vantage points: educational environment, interpersonal relationships, and perception of academic success, and applied the following overarching research questions.

1. How do Hispanic students remain resilient within their academic environment?
2. How do Hispanic students perceive their sociocultural, environmental, and interpersonal experiences as contributors to their academic success?
3. How do Hispanic students make sense of their academic achievement?

Given the intention of this study, the researcher deemed qualitative research the most appropriate method for this investigation. According to Pascal, Johnson, Dore, and Trainor (2010), when conducting qualitative research, the investigator should consider the nature of truth in a person’s reality. The key to qualitative investigation lies in socially constructed meanings learned from individuals in their interactions with the environment. Pascal et al. provided an elucidating description of qualitative inquiry as a multimethod involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. The researcher studied the participants and attempted to make sense of phenomena emergent in the data. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) conjectured that phenomenology is the primary philosophical tool for the study of experience.
The researcher therefore conducted a phenomenological approach to comprehend Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students’ interpretation of their successful academic experiences.

**Research Tradition**

The researcher found interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to be the most suitable choice for this study. Like phenomenology inquiry, IPA concerns itself with how persons make sense of lived experiences, yet IPA involves a detailed examination of the participants’ life and experience in the world. This medium of phenomenological inquiry is a relatively new research tradition, established in 1996 by Professor Jonathan Smith of the Department of Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London. IPA proponents concern themselves with the human predicament and the engagement and perception of that predicament. IPA is utilized primarily in the field of psychology, yet this method of research design has crossed over to social science disciplines (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Breakwell, Smith, and Wright (2012) have posited that IPA shares a discipline-specific relationship with cognitive psychology and the study of social cognition. Fade (2004) identified IPA as theoretically rooted in critical realism and the social cognition paradigm. Critical realism accepts the fact that stable and enduring features of reality exist independently of human conceptualization. The social cognition paradigm views differences in individual meanings as attached to experiences because they are involved with different parts of reality. IPA research is informed by three key areas of philosophical thinking: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Brocki & Warden, 2006).
**Phenomenology.** IPA research design follows phenomenological inquiry in that it concerns itself with the individual’s subjective reports of events rather than a formulation of objective accounts. The inquiry is divided into two areas: descriptive (Husserl) and interpretive (Heidegger), yet there is overlap between both inquiries (Shosha, 2012; Fade, 2004). Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is considered the central figure in developing phenomenology as a philosophical movement. Husserl’s philosophical work focused on comprehending participants’ lived experiences. The premise of descriptive phenomenology is that experience should be examined as it occurs. Husserl rejected the notion of empirical science as the sole basis for achieving an understanding of the world. For Husserl, an extensive, rigorous phenomenological account of the world as it is experienced is considered the essential precursor to scientific inquiry (Shosha, 2012; Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Later, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a student of Husserl, modified Husserlian phenomenology and proposed a novel perspective of the lived world (Shosha, 2012). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) conjectured that Heidegger was concerned with existence itself and with the daily activities and relationships in which humans participate. Moreover, the Heideggerian concept of the lived world embodies a range of physically grounded possibilities and meanings. The two phenomenological approaches can be distinguished by Husserl’s examination of individual psychological processes such as perception, awareness, and consciousness as opposed to Heidegger’s concern with the question of existence itself and the person-in-context with the experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Both approaches to phenomenological inquiry explore how complex meanings are built out of simple units of direct experience. Merriam (2002) stated that phenomenology is based on the assumption that there is
an essence to the shared experience. The researcher was required to bracket (ignore personal beliefs), analyze, and compare findings to identify the essence of the phenomenon. The phenomenon in this case was the experiences of Hispanic students.

**Hermeneutics.** The second major underpinning of IPA research design is derived from hermeneutics, or the theory of interpretation. Heidegger introduced hermeneutic inquiry to phenomenological philosophy and considered it an explicitly interpretive activity (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Wilcke, 2002). Hermeneutic analysis requires the correct understanding of text. Moustakas (1994) added that the hermeneutic process is the manifestation of textual meaning. Thus, the interpreter’s analysis unmask hidden phenomena. IPA applies hermeneutic science to develop theories for the meanings that groups of individuals attach to particular lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Fade, 2004; Wilcke, 2002).

The researcher was required to apply a reflective interpretation of data obtained through interviews to achieve fuller and more meaningful understandings of the findings. For this process, the researcher applied a dual interpretation (double hermeneutic) process, which entailed observing study participants making sense of their experiences while the researcher attempted to make sense of their world. Moustakas (1994) surmised that the reflective interpretive process includes not only a description of the experience as it appears in consciousness, but also an astute interpretive analysis of underlying historical and aesthetic conditions that account for it. Moustakas posited that the hermeneutic analysis process requires protocol focused on (a) fixation of the meaning, (b) mental dissociation of the author, (c) entire interpretation of the text, and (d) allowance for multiple interpretations. To manage this research design, IPA adapts a general case study approach to in-depth description of participants’
interpretation of their experiences, psychological states, events, and objects (Fade, 2004). The researcher has acknowledged the complexity of the hermeneutic process and found IPA the most evocative method for this study.

**Idiography.** The third major influence of IPA research design is its commitment to idiography. Idiography concerns itself with the particular. Breakwell, Smith, and Wright (2012) cited IPA as resolutely idiographic in that it contrasts with the universal principles applied in traditional empirical work. In IPA methodology, the researcher does not make predesigned claims toward human behavior. The particular requires a double-step analysis at two levels (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). At the primary level, the sense of detail required the researcher to conduct an intensive, in-depth study of each participant’s experience, while at the subsequent level, the researcher analyzed how events, processes, and relationships were perceived by the respondents on their academic journeys in graduate and post-graduate education.

The IPA idiographic process required the researcher to carefully examine each case individually and to use a smaller, purposeful sample. The sampling of 14 participants benefited the idiographic process by allowing exploration of similarities and differences across participant cases. Breakwell, Smith, and Wright (2012) elaborated that an IPA study should allow itself to learn something about both the generic themes in the analysis and the narrative world of the participants who tell their stories. According to Shosha (2012), Brocki and Wearden (2006), and Fade (2004), the main concern of the IPA idiographic process is to do justice to the participant’s account of the experience. The researcher was able to connect intellectually and emotionally with the participants’ experiences in higher education while remaining objective in this process.
Research Method

**Positionality statement.** The relationship of the researcher and participant plays an important role in phenomenological research. Smith and Osborn (2007) emphasized that IPA is a dynamic process with an active responsibility for the researcher. This process required the researcher to become intimately acquainted with the participants’ worlds and to take an insider’s perspective of them. This study explored the lived experiences of Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students, and the researcher identifies herself as a third-generation Hispanic female whose ethnic roots and heritage lie in Spain and Mexico. The researcher also identifies herself as a second-generation college graduate. The researcher viewed her role in connection to the participants objectively, yet she has lived experiences of being a minority female in graduate and post-graduate education.

Pascal et al. (2010) advocated the importance of the phenomenological researcher “being with others.” The authors conjectured that if the relationship between researcher and respondent is divided, respondents’ experiences can be perceived as dissociated from social, cultural, and transitional influences that shape personal experiences. The researcher recognized this symbiotic relationship with the participants as central to this study.

**Participant selection criteria.** The researcher identified participants for this study who met the following criteria: Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students in good academic standing who had completed at least three-quarters of their designated programs or had recently graduated (within one academic year). The researcher required all participants to be of Hispanic origin and either born in the United States or permanent residents. The researcher sought an
equal number of men and women with diverse backgrounds. This study did not include international students (students who study in the United States on a student visa).

**Recruitment and access.** The researcher followed protocol and procedure to obtain approval from the Northeastern University Internal Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study. The researcher obtained access to the participants through academic social networking sites and snowball sampling. Broughton, Foley, Ledermaier, and Cox (2013) posited that online social networking sites have revolutionized communication methods. These sites generate lists of users who share a common connection. The researcher posted an IRB-approved research recruitment poster (see Appendix D). The researcher posted the IRB recruitment flyer on three different sites: Latinas Obtaining Doctorate Degrees, Latina/os in Higher Education Student Affairs, and the National Latino Medical Student Association. Several potential participants responded by contacting the researcher via email and telephone. To attain additional interest, the researcher solicited participants through a snowball sampling technique (Sadler, Lee, Lim, & Fullerton, 2010). The researcher asked personal contacts in higher education organizations whether they could recommend participants for this study. Several participants expressed interest and were introduced to the researcher.

The recruitment and access process was completed in stages. In the first stage, the researcher sought permission and solicited participants. In the second stage, the researcher received email and telephone calls from respondents. A brief telephone call was conducted with each respondent to evaluate participant criteria and present the study. During this screening process, the researcher assessed the respondents based on ethnicity, educational background,
program of study, university setting, and graduation date. No interview questions were asked, and the researcher eliminated persons who did not meet the designated criteria.

The data collection commenced after the researcher found 14 respondents who met the criteria and volunteered to participate. The researcher spoke to the participants again over the phone, emailed consent forms, and scheduled interviews. Traditional and virtual (Skype) interviews were conducted (Hinchcliffe & Gavin, 2009). The researcher attempted to make a personal connection with the respondents prior to the interviews. Sullivan (2012) cited the Internet as providing ample opportunity for the researcher and the participants to connect and conduct meaningful communication in an online forum in various geographic locations throughout the United States. The researcher audio recorded the interviews and thus successfully captured the participants’ experiences.

The interviews were conducted during a one-hour data collection session. The researcher asked participants to read, return and sign the Northeastern University IRB approved consent form (see Appendix E). Students were asked to show a copy of a current class schedule, student ID, or diploma prior to the data collection session. To ensure confidentiality, the participants selected a pseudonym. The data was collected with an audio recorder and immediately transcribed.

**Participant profiles.** A purposeful sampling resulted in the recruitment of 14 graduate, post-graduate, and recent graduate students who had completed the academic year 2013-2014. Seven participants were recent graduates; the remaining seven had completed three-quarters of their programs. The participants comprised seven men and seven women. Their ages spanned from the mid-20s to mid-40s, and their median age was 33.6 years old. Nine participants
reported being first-generation students (the first person in their immediate family to attend or complete higher education). The participants were located throughout the United States and represented a variety of majors and backgrounds. A brief narrative of their academic characteristics and ethnicity is presented below.

**Interview 1—Isabelle.** Isabelle is a first-generation student and a PhD candidate who is completing the fourth chapter of her thesis. Isabelle is in her early 40s and was born in the Dominican Republic. She immigrated to the United States as a child. Isabelle identified herself as Latina, and she is bilingual. She was raised in a two-parent household. Isabelle grew up in the inner city, yet she received scholarships to private K-12 schools. Isabelle graduated with her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from two northeastern liberal arts colleges, and she is completing her PhD at a similar institution. Isabelle works in higher education. She generously discussed her personal experiences.

**Interview 2—Selena.** Selena is not a first-generation student. She is a full-time MBA student at a private university in the Southeast. Selena is Mexican American and Iranian. Selena self-identified as Latina, and she is bilingual in English and Spanish. Selena was raised by her mother in a single-parent home. Her mother has a PhD. Her father has a bachelor’s degree. Selena attended public and private K-12 schools in the South. She finished her bachelor’s degree at a private southeastern university. Selena spoke candidly about her academic experiences. She did not work at the time of the interview.

**Interview 3—Lisa.** Lisa is a first-generation student who recently completed her PhD in a social science at a public university on the West Coast. Lisa is a Mexican American female in her early 30s. She was raised in a Hispanic community in the western part of the United States.
Lisa identified herself as Latina. She is bilingual and was raised in a two-parent household. Lisa attended public K-12 schools and considered herself a good student. She graduated from a liberal arts college and a state university for her bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Lisa works in higher education. She was refined and gracious during the interview.

**Interview 4—Roberto.** Roberto is a first-generation student who recently completed his doctorate in education at a private university on the East Coast. Roberto is a Mexican American male in his early 40s. He originates from a southwestern state and identified himself as Latino. He is bilingual, and he was raised in a two-parent household. Roberto grew up in a Hispanic community and attended public K-12 schools. He considered himself a good student growing up. Roberto attended a state university and noted that it took him several extra years to complete his bachelor’s degree. Roberto works in higher education. He was very professional and helpful during the interview.

**Interview 5—Alexandria.** Alexandria is not a first-generation student. She is a recent graduate with a JD degree. She is a female in her late 20s of Mexican and Cuban parents. Alexandria identified herself as Hispanic. Alexandria was raised by both parents, and she is bilingual. Her father has an MD, and her mother has a master’s degree. Alexandria attended public K-12 schools in the Southeast. She finished her undergraduate and law degrees at the same southeastern private university. Alexandria was happy to participate in the study. She was poised and spoke openly about her privileged background. Alexandria was preparing for the state bar exam and was not working at the time of the interview.

**Interview 6—Jose.** Jose is a first-generation student. He is a recent graduate with a master’s degree in engineering. Jose is a Mexican American male in his late 20s. Jose identified
himself as Latino. Both of his parents speak Spanish, yet he is not bilingual. Jose was raised in an English-speaking two-parent household. His father attended college but did not complete his degree. Jose attended good public K-12 schools in a southwestern suburb. He obtained his bachelor’s degree from a state university and his master’s degree from a private institution in the Southwest. Jose works as an engineer. He was eager to participate in the study.

**Interview 7—Mike.** Mike is not a first-generation student. He is a full-time MD/PhD student. Mike is a male in his late 20s. His father is Mexican American and his mother is Italian German. Mike identified himself as Hispanic. He is not bilingual. Mike attended public K-12 schools in the Midwest, which he noted were not academically superior. Still, Mike attended a prestigious university on the West Coast for his bachelor’s degree. Mike attends a medical school in the Midwest, and he participates in several Hispanic medical student organizations. He was confident and pleased to participate.

**Interview 8—Miguel.** Miguel is a first-generation student who just completed his master’s degree in education at a public university. Miguel is a Mexican American male in his late 20s. He originates from a large city on the West Coast. Miguel identified himself as Latino. He is bilingual, and he was raised in a two-parent household. Miguel grew up in a Mexican American community and attended public K-12 schools there. Miguel graduated from a private college and a state university on the West Coast. He works in higher education. Miguel was animated and enthusiastic during the interview. He was keen to share his experiences.

**Interview 9—Haylie.** Haylie is a first-generation, full-time student pursuing her doctorate in pharmacy. Haylie is in her late 20s. She identified herself as Hispanic. Haylie is of Cuban and Puerto Rican descent but was born in the United States. She is bilingual. Haylie was
raised by her paternal Cuban grandparents. She attended public K-12 schools and considered herself a good student. Haylie graduated from a state college in the Southeast with her bachelor’s degree. Haylie attends a private university in the Southeast. She was cheerful and pleased to participate in the study.

*Interview 10—Javier.* Javier is not a first-generation student. Javier is a full-time medical student at a university in the Southwest. Javier’s father is a medical doctor and lives in Mexico. His mother does not have a college education. Javier is a Mexican American male in his late 20s. He identified himself as Latino. Javier is bilingual, yet he primarily considers himself a Spanish speaker. He was raised by his mother in a poor Hispanic community. Javier attended public K-12 schools and considered himself a good student. He graduated from a state university in the Southwest with his bachelor’s degree. Javier was humorous during the interview and enthusiastic about sharing his experiences.

*Interview 11—Imelda.* Imelda is a first-generation, full-time PhD student in the social sciences. Imelda is a Salvadorian female in her late 20s. She identified herself as both Latina and Hispanic. Both of Imelda’s parents emigrated from El Salvador, and her parents did not complete elementary school beyond the second grade. Imelda is bilingual. She was raised in a Hispanic community on the West Coast. Imelda attended public K-12 schools and considered herself a good student. She finished her undergraduate and graduate programs at state universities on the West Coast. Imelda currently studies at a large southern research university. Imelda was calm and serious when she spoke of her academic and family experiences. She was pleased to participate.
Interview 12—Anthony. Anthony is a first-generation student. Anthony is a recent graduate with a master’s degree in fine arts. He is a male in his early 40s. Anthony is bilingual. He was born in Puerto Rico and immigrated to the United States as a child with his mother. Anthony was raised in a poor inner-city area in the Midwest. He graduated from a high school that had a 60% drop-out rate. Anthony completed his bachelor’s and master’s degrees at private universities in the Midwest. Anthony was open about his hardships, and he was keen to participate. He is employed in the arts.

Interview 13—Anna. Anna is a first-generation student. Anna holds two master’s degrees in public administration and public health. She recently earned her second degree. Anna is a Salvadorian female in her early 30s. She is bilingual and identified herself as Latina. Anna’s parents emigrated from El Salvador, and she was raised in a poor city on the East Coast. Anna attended public K-12 schools and considered herself a good student. She finished her undergraduate and first graduate programs at a state university on the East Coast. Anna was passionate about her academic and family experiences. She was eager to participate and did not work at the time of the interview.

Interview 14—Tom. Tom is a first-generation student. He is completing his doctorate in education at a private university in the Northeast. Tom is a male in his early 40s. He is bilingual. Tom was born in Puerto Rico and immigrated to the United States as a young adult. Tom considers Spanish his first language. He works in higher education. Tom was very proud of his academic accomplishments. Tom was keen on participating and sharing his educational background and experiences.
**Data collection method.** The researcher completed several steps in the data collection process. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) and Smith and Osborn (2007) concurred that the researcher must establish a well-organized interview schedule prior to data collection. Moreover, Moustakas (1994) recommended that the researcher commence with social conversation to create a more relaxed personal connection prior to the interview. Accordingly, the researcher opened each session with social conversation to develop rapport with all the participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Once the participant appeared relaxed, the researcher sought verbal permission to tape record the interview. During the interview, the researcher maintained eye contact and wrote observational notes. The researcher was able to conduct a Skype interview, make a connection with the participant, and jot notes without difficulty.

In accordance with IPA data collection protocol, the researcher conducted semi structured interviews and attempted to ask questions in a manner that solicited richly described narrative responses about the participants’ academic lives. To do so, the researcher presented the research questions individually and requested that the participants speak openly in an attempt to recapture the essence of their experiences. The participants were informed that if they were uncomfortable with a question, they did not have to respond to it.

Smith and Osborn (2007) posited that semi structured interviews are the exemplary data collection method for IPA research. Rubin and Rubin (2012) specified that qualitative researchers follow a naturalistic approach guided by a social construction strategy focused on how the participants actually perceive their reality. This data collection process required the researcher to listen intently and apply an unbiased interpretation of the participants’ experiences in higher education.
The interviews were semi structured and open-ended, with the researcher employing minimal probing. According to Smith and Osborn (2007), good interview techniques require the researcher to make gentle suggestions rather than being too explicit. As such, the researcher allowed all participants to freely discuss their personal and academic stories and reflect on them at length (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). It was of utmost concern for the researcher to learn what Hispanic students experienced and how they perceived their academic lives. Of equal importance, the qualitative researcher must note any significant observations about the interview and compile memo notes immediately afterward (Saldana, 2013). The researcher maintained a journal during the interviews to write and interpret impressions and emotions that emerged.

**Data storage.** Cresswell (2012) maintained that it is extremely important to store data safely and instructed that all data collected and study-related materials should be managed carefully. The researcher was required to maintain the integrity of all data by protecting it from damage, loss, or theft. Such measures allowed the researcher to carefully manage this project and establish a data management system. Aldridge and Medina (2008) concurred that it is paramount to store and index records carefully. The researcher applied names and dates on file documents and audiotapes. The researcher concurred with Groenewald (2004) that each interview audiotape should be assigned a separate code with participant pseudonyms and interview dates. The researcher has taken precautions and has saved all field notes, audiotapes, and data transcriptions to two external drives. The data are stored in the researcher’s private home office in a locked file cabinet.

To reinforce security, the researcher has not kept data on a shared computer, nor kept any data open on a personal computer. Aldridge and Medina (2008) recommended that researchers
use computers solely to read and analyze data. All data and corresponding materials related to this study have been locked and shall be stored for a period of seven years. Once the seven-year period has elapsed, the data and corresponding materials will be permanently deleted.

**The data analysis process.** To commence the data analysis process, the researcher had the audiotaped interviews professionally transcribed by Rev Corporation. The researcher required a verbatim account of the questions and answers taken from the one-hour interviews. The researcher also requested that the company provide a confidentiality statement, which was kept on file. The researcher listened to the audiotapes and compared them to the transcripts to ensure quality. Once the audiotapes and transcriptions were evaluated, the researcher commenced a lengthy data analysis process. IPA requires the researcher to conduct six steps of analysis as a systematic procedure that identifies essential features, experiences, and perceptions (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The analytical steps required the researcher to read and reread the transcriptions and take copious notes. The researcher examined semantic content and language. According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was one of the first researchers to write about hermeneutics as a generic form that included grammatical and psychological interpretation of text. This grammatical interpretive analysis required the researcher to maintain active engagement with the data by entering the participants’ worlds.

Thus, if a participant code-switched between English and Spanish, the researcher made note of this fact and analyzed it. Furthermore, the researcher maintained an open mind to engage with the process and avidly took descriptive and conceptual notes from the data transcription. Then, the researcher organized, analyzed, and clustered emergent themes. The researcher used
an Excel spreadsheet to note and organize emergent themes. MAXQDA software was also used as an additional tool to investigate the transcript and re-analyze the coded themes. The researcher coded and recoded the data three times and looked for super-ordinate themes that united the participants’ experiences, which revealed patterns related to each individual.

The researcher found the IPA data analysis to be a circular series of iterative and inductive processes. The researcher became aware of the transition from the particular to the shared and from the descriptive to the interpretive (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007; Fade, 2004). This process required an active, unbiased role in comprehending all participant perceptions as Hispanic students. Fade concurred that IPA researchers must suspend predispositions during the data analysis process, yet still comprehend the complexity of meaning from the experience.

**Writing the analysis.** Fade (2004) posited that preparing the final written analysis is challenging because it requires considerable interaction with the data. The researcher presented a descriptive narrative account about each participant. The writing section was concerned with moving from final coded and clustered themes to establishing a narrative and final statement discussing the meanings inherent in the participant’s experience (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The researcher reflected on a thematic chart, re-interpreted it, reread notes, and documented the narratives with verbatim extracts from the transcripts. According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), in reviewing and writing the final analysis, it is important that names given to events, objects, actions, and interactions in the data reflect the content of the respondent’s words. Finally, the researcher continually explored the experience and perceptions and assigned meanings to the findings (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Fade, 2004).
Trustworthiness. The researcher realized that trustworthiness is paramount and requires rigor, reliability, validity, and transparency. Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) posited that without rigor, academic research becomes fiction and loses its utility. The authors referred to research reliability and validity as the process of establishing trustworthiness. Thus, this concept required the researcher to maintain an audit trail when interviewing, coding, categorizing, debriefing, and corroborating information. Shenton (2004) conjectured that the researcher must maintain a reflective commentary of each data collection session and note possible theories for later analysis. The researcher acknowledges the pertinence of these strategies. The researcher found an appropriate sampling of academically resilient Hispanic students and analyzed the data in a methodical fashion. The researcher considered this sampling appropriate in learning how academically resilient Hispanic students are at the national level and how persons with diverse backgrounds view their success from a sociocultural perspective. The researcher analyzed the transcriptions appropriately and performed a stringent cross-referenced review of emergent themes against the data collected. Furthermore, the participants themselves were able to review their transcripts and provide feedback on them. The researcher verifies that the study findings are presented in accordance with IPA protocol.

Protection of human subjects. The researcher sought approval for this study, as required, from the Northeastern University IRB. The researcher complied with the IRB requirements to ensure privacy and confidentiality of each human participant. The researcher concurs with Cresswell (2012) and Chenail (1995) that ethical practices should be at the forefront of every research study. The researcher complied with ethical practices in this study. As previously stated, the researcher required signed consent forms, which are filed with the data
storage. The researcher was culturally sensitive to the participants’ views and advised them that they could withdraw from the project or opt not to respond to questions that made them uncomfortable during the interview. Finally, the researcher acknowledges that all participants were volunteers, and there was no pre-existing knowledge of the participants’ personal or educational backgrounds. As stated in the data storage section, all study-related audiotapes, consent forms, email communications, and documents have been properly safeguarded.

**Limitations of the Study**

With reference to the theoretical framework, Latino critical race theory was not applied to this study because the researcher intended to focus on the topic of academic success, not racism, yet this topic emerged as a theme even though it was not a research question. The researcher took an alternative approach and used a construct of resilience theory to explore the participants’ perceived experiences in higher education. With reference to the participants, data was obtained from a wide cross-section of Hispanic students; however, data was not collected from all national origin groups. As such, the data in this study do not reflect the perceptions of all Hispanic ethnicities.

Moreover, in the theoretical framework, linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) was noted as one protective barrier in the community culture wealth model, but the data did not directly indicate that the ability to speak Spanish was considered a factor in academic resilience. However, it was interpreted as a factor of bicultural competence that afforded the participants the ability to operate between two cultures. Of the 14 participants interviewed, 12 noted they were bilingual. Finally, as noted in the positionality statement, the researcher is Hispanic and asked objective questions. However, qualitative data collection leaves itself open to response bias. Cresswell
(2012) defined response bias as the tendency of participants to provide responses they believe the researcher wants to hear. The researcher believes that the study participants provided candid discussions of their academic experiences, and this was audio recorded and interpreted as such.

**Summary**

This research investigation explored the manner in which Hispanic students experience academic success. This study evolved and delved deeper into the phenomenon of how Hispanic students at various levels perceive their experiences on the road to academic success. As noted in the literature review, Hispanic college students have struggled academically, and the disconnect between undergraduate and graduate education is wide. However, some Hispanic students persevere despite obstacles they experience. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) concurred that IPA is an interpretative method to explore a major experience in a person’s life and how he or she reflects on the significance of it. The researcher found that fulfillment of graduate and post-graduate education is a major milestone in a Hispanic person’s life.

The researcher found that the academic resilience theoretical framework presented in Chapter One supports this investigation. Heaton (2013) identified resilience as a theoretical concept that has evolved as a medium to describe and explore the success of people and groups who face a broad spectrum of challenges that indicate they should fail but do not. Hence, this IPA qualitative study on Hispanic student resilience was necessary to explain how the participants’ personal, sociocultural, and environmental experiences evolved as protective barriers against the negative circumstances that impede success. The researcher affirms that this study is a contribution to educational research on minority college students. In particular, this
study addresses the lack of scholarship published on the experiences of Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students on American university campuses.

The subsequent chapter addresses the study’s findings and analysis of the data obtained from the participants.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Hispanic students remained academically resilient during their educational journeys and how they perceived their higher education experiences. The researcher explored the challenges and adaptive behaviors that contributed to participants’ positive academic outcomes. Their accounts were analyzed from a sociocultural perspective. More specifically, the participants’ accounts were explored as part of a process that analyzed them within their particular academic environment. Fourteen participants were interviewed, and each individual provided detailed accounts of their unique experience in higher education. Specifically, the participants elaborated on their transition between high school and undergraduate education, which led to their experiences in graduate and post-graduate programs. The analysis of the data collected led to six super-ordinate themes and 12 subordinate themes. All six super-ordinate themes resulted from equal or similar statements made by at least eight participants (see Appendix F), with one exception. On the subordinate theme Encouraged by Faculty and Advisors, the participants were equally split. Seven participants perceived encouragement, whereas the remainder reported a lack of support. The super-ordinate themes and subordinate themes analyzed are presented in Table 3.
Table 3

Super-ordinate Themes and Sub-themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenged barriers and stressors</th>
<th>Responsive racial injustice</th>
<th>Receptive constructive environment</th>
<th>Resolved family values</th>
<th>Socially responsible</th>
<th>Enlightened culturally intellectually</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of educational gaps</td>
<td>Cognizant of stereotypes</td>
<td>Encouraged by advisers faculty</td>
<td>Resistant by family adversity</td>
<td>Evolved sociocultural development</td>
<td>Valor and sense of pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprehensive in campus climate</td>
<td>Sensitive to micro-aggressions</td>
<td>Motivated by diverse friends peers</td>
<td>Strengthened by family support</td>
<td>Insightful community leaders</td>
<td>Aspiration to pay it forward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenged by Barriers and Stressors**

The first super-ordinate theme, *Challenged by Barriers and Stressors*, captures the participants’ academic challenges and sociocultural deficiencies when they transitioned from high school into a university setting. The participants perceived themselves as good students in high school. Yet, upon entering higher education, the participants reported feeling as if they had arrived on a foreign planet. They recalled feeling lost, angry, and dumbfounded. Originally, the participants had no idea how to cultivate supportive networks on campus and reported experiencing isolation. The first subordinate theme, *Awareness of Educational Gaps*, illustrates mindfulness of educational deficiencies, and it presents how the participants conquered said deficiencies. The second subordinate theme, *Apprehensive in Campus Climate*, captured the participants’ apprehensiveness resultant from their perception that they were detached from campus climates. The researcher examined the participants’ experiences of their campus climates as undergraduate and graduate students. A campus climate is defined here as relationships with faculty and mentors, as well as perceived assistance from within the institution. The researcher notes that the participants’ stressors were equally interpreted in both undergraduate and graduate environments.
Awareness of educational barriers. The participants reported barriers that stemmed from gaps in academic achievement despite the fact that they perceived themselves as scholastically strong in high school. When exploring the participants’ educational pipeline, the researcher found several explicit references to a lack of academic preparation. These gaps were specific to the participants’ undergraduate experiences, which is the bedrock to graduate and post-graduate education. The data suggested that participants’ unwavering desire to improve their quality of life played a significant role in their decision to remain in a challenging higher education setting. The data also indicated that the participants perceived challenges and stress as freshmen; however, they were proud of their responsiveness and bounced back. Anna’s first year caused her aggravation:

I wasn’t great in math, and there were times I wasn’t great with my English either. I ended up failing a few of my classes my first year in college. I always felt like I was playing catch up. Catch up with my academic studies. I ended up getting tutors. Still it was catch up.

Anna’s reflective description of herself as an undergraduate student, as well as the frustration in her voice as she spoke, constructed a portrait of a brave Latina who did not give up despite numerous educational shortcomings. Lisa also conveyed that her initiation into higher education involved having to work “doubly hard” in comparison to her peers. Lisa experienced her freshman environment as a place where she perceived her peers as “brilliant.” Lisa recalled her pre-college experiences:

I was one of maybe thirty Hispanic Latino students, in my high school, that did not have to work hard to have good grades, but once I got into college I had to work hard just to
I guess I could have quit, but I’m not a quitter. That would have never entered my frame of thought.

Capturing Anna and Lisa’s experiences offered the researcher an interpretation of tenacity emergent in two young women who perceived their freshman year as a race in which they were not prepared to compete. The researcher found that educational gaps were equally distributed in both genders. Anthony stated that teachers in his inner-city high school considered him a top student. “My high school didn’t prepare me. I was speaking and writing in English at the level of an eighth grader and now I’m in college.” The researcher construed disbelief in the manner in which Anna, Lisa, and Anthony spoke about their early college experiences. It was as if they were surprised that these situations had occurred. The participants explained that they were raised in predominately Spanish-speaking households. Jose was the exception, however. Jose experienced educational barriers even though he was raised in an English-speaking, middle-class home. Jose also struggled academically his first year in college:

I was nearly weeded out of my dream of becoming an engineer because my grades weren’t good. I was making Cs. I was barely below the grade point average requirements to advance to mechanical engineering. I was facing a big decision. My adviser pulled me into her office and talked to me about the possibility of switching out of the engineering college.

Jose distinguished the importance of self-awareness during this difficult period and embodied a realistic attitude. Jose found a Latino professor who advised him to shift his interdisciplinary focus and not give up on his dream of becoming an engineer. Similarly, Miguel described his freshman year as traumatic, which led to a heightened level of insecurity. Miguel stated:
I came bawling to a professor, about why was I even there. There was definitely this impostor syndrome that took over me. I’m not worthy. I’m not capable. I wasn’t prepared to read fifty pages of hardcore readings every week. I wasn’t prepared to be writing papers based on research and know APA, MLA, and all those different writing styles. For me, it was definitely overwhelming. So, definitely that first semester was a difficult transition because I knew I wasn’t academically prepared.

Jose and Miguel’s initiation into higher education involved struggle and stressful experiences. Still, they remained on track and avoided failure by seeking a supportive person who could guide them. The researcher interpreted that Jose and Miguel developed a keen cognitive awareness of their inadequacies which allowed them to fight hard to remain on track academically. The participants’ awareness level helped them undertake actions that worked to their advantage, like seeking advice. Anna indicated that one of her survival tactics was to retake courses until she could pass. “I was hanging on by a thread, but I promised myself to take the classes over again and do well.” These statements personified Anna as a fighter.

The participants themselves recruited help from tutors, mentors, and faculty. Lisa recognized, “I had really kind mentors who took the time to say we see potential in you. This is what you have to do.” Miguel’s experience of “bawling to a professor,” as well as Jose’s ability to reach out to a Latino faculty member who he had only met once, indicated unrecognized self-confidence. The participants did not have the educational capital to commence on equal footing with their peers, yet they applied social and behavioral competencies to stay in the game. The participants made sense of their inadequacies, reframed their academic behavior, and remained strong.
Apprehensive in campus climate. Equal to the academic barriers faced by the participants, the researcher also captured experiences of apprehensiveness in the campus climate. The participants reported unease in navigating the higher education system. Apprehension was also interpreted from graduate and post-graduate students as they shared issues faced in their programs. Half of the participants perceived a lack of academic support and shared scenarios they regarded as negative. These scenarios ranged from a lack of dialogue with faculty, to no mentor interaction, to minimal academic advisement. As the participants recalled their experiences, they voiced resentment. Furthermore, the data revealed that all participants affirmed positive academic systemic networks as critical to Latina/o success in higher education. The participants exhibited unease regarding the reasons why the incidents had occurred. Roberto reconstructed his experience navigating his campus system:

I remember I needed to go to Add Drop for registration. I remember my cousin was a sophomore there. I remember calling her, I said, “What do I do?” She said, “Just stand outside your dorm and wait for the shuttle, and when everyone gets on you get on, and when everyone gets off, you get off.” I didn’t even know what a shuttle was… To me it was foreign. I thought she was talking about some space ship. I remember thinking I’m lost, and I just want to go back home.

Roberto reflected on his story vividly as if it had just happened. He self-analyzed his reenactment and used the word “remember” four times, even though his story occurred many years ago. The researcher noted that this type of student isolation was not necessarily associated with parental educational backgrounds. Selena’s parents are both college educated. She
perceived isolation within her academic climate as well. Selena blamed a faculty member for ignoring her academic needs, which led her to change her major:

I’ve never really had a mentor, or an advisor. I’ve had a few maybe classmates. Just help from minority students who made it as far as me. It’s usually students. Not so much professors or anyone like that. When I was an undergraduate, I wanted to complete a premed program, but I was discouraged with the campus environment. The premed program was a weed out situation, and I believe I got discouraged by a professor not being very helpful. Maybe, she was racist or just like that with every student. I just felt like she wasn’t very helpful. I can remember chasing her around the campus trying to get her attention. Because of that one organic chemistry class, I became discouraged and changed my life path.

Roberto and Selena shared feelings which reflected isolation from a campus environment that had deserted them. Roberto contemplated whether he should pack up and go home, and Selena reflected aloneness, “I became discouraged and changed my life path.” These situations are not limited to undergraduate education. Imelda affirmed her perception of faculty abandonment in her PhD program. Imelda’s attitude was as indignant as Selena’s disposition. Imelda exclaimed, “My program mentor left me hanging, so I had to find another one. No one was a good fit. So, I found Dr. X.” Imelda discussed her program mentor as supportive in terms of helping her write a grant. Yet, she felt simultaneously unsupported and isolated. Imelda cited, “Dr. X is just a person that checks in on me. He tells me you shouldn’t be doing that, or you should be doing that. I really just want to finish my program.” Imelda views Dr. X as a stoic man who does not care about her emotional well-being. Her comment, “just a person that
checks…” demonstrated an indifferent perception from a woman who does not feel academically supported. Selena’s comment, “I became discouraged” strongly reflected a student’s desire for guidance. The researcher found that Selena and Imelda craved emotional interpersonal connections with faculty. Evidencing similar difficulties, Javier disclosed his experience of not having a faculty mentor in medical school. “I don’t think I found one mentor for me, but there are a lot of people that I look up to.” The researcher noted that, in medical schools, social networks with doctors are considered of utmost importance. Mentors play a pivotal role in student success. Javier is surrounded by medical professionals, but he has not secured a mentorship. Javier explained:

In my mind, I want to be like them, but no, they are not aware of it, maybe I never introduced myself, but I still follow them in terms of where they’re going. No, I don’t have a mentor.

He reflected on his circumstances as if he was standing outside a circle admiring persons from afar, but he seemed to believe that it was a circle into which he could not gain access.

Javier’s inability to confidently secure a mentor relationship may stifle his social development. Anna experienced a similar situation in terms of advisement. “I always felt like the odd ball because I didn’t have an adviser in my program.” Just like Javier, Anna could not express why she felt there was no mentorship available to her. Anna stated, “I don’t know why I did not have one.” She continued, “later, I found out my adviser was the department coordinator.” Anna perceived herself as an outsider because she was left on the margin. Being left on the margin is defined here as having limited social capital, which restricts a desired
relationship with a faculty member or academic adviser. Thus, Anna perceived her campus climate as uncaring:

I just felt no one really cared about my intentions. Finally, when I got a professor adviser, one year later, working with her was difficult because she was so concerned with her own research. She never read my final thesis and graded my draft by mistake.

These participants considered their academic environment unsupportive, and they voiced anxiety and apprehension in regards to their campus climate. Moreover, they perceived the individuals involved in these situations as uncaring for their needs. They longed for stronger bonds within the institution but struggled to cultivate these relationships. The participants also experienced a feeling of disconnection and isolation from campus, an experience which often leads to student departure. Nonetheless, the participants compensated for these difficulties through sheer tenacity and steadfast will-power.

The participants’ accounts related to the super-ordinate theme of *Challenged by Barriers and Stressors* indicated several important findings. Many participants entered college unprepared or underprepared for the academic rigor of higher education. They often lacked the educational capital, social skills, or study skills to compete in an advanced educational environment. Some of the participants’ under-preparation stemmed from linguistic barriers, particularly for those participants who come from predominantly Spanish-speaking households and who recognize that their English proficiency was insufficient for the undergraduate arena.

These educational gaps were widened upon the participants’ entrance into college because there was a notable lack of support and student services infrastructure to “catch” these underprepared students and ensure that they did not fall through systemic cracks. Once the
participants found a way to forge relationships with faculty mentors, upperclassmen peers who served as role models, and tutors, they were able to overcome the adversities they faced and excel. It is clear that student support infrastructure for minority and underrepresented college, graduate, and post-graduate students is severely lacking in the higher education system, and building such systems should be a priority for college administrators across the country.

The second super-ordinate theme is Responsive to Injustice. The two subordinate themes are: Stereotypes and Micro-aggressions.

Responsive to Injustice

The super-ordinate theme Responsive to Injustice emerged primarily within the discussion of the campus environment, yet it was mentioned throughout the data. This topic was not a research question. However, all participants strongly expressed their awareness of negative stereotypes against Hispanics. Besides the stereotypes, the participants were sensitive to the micro-aggressive actions they perceived in their campus climates. The researcher interpreted racism as another barrier for these participants to overcome. Despite this barrier, the participants were ready to prove themselves as equals in higher education and in American society. They made sense of racial injustice as an everyday issue to which they needed to be responsive. The two subordinate themes presented are Cognizant of Negative Stereotypes and Sensitive to Micro-aggressions.

Cognizant of negative stereotypes. The participants were cognizant of negative stereotypes about their culture. They relayed distaste for labels of Latinos as poor urban gang members, as undocumented persons, and as losers who were simply not interested in self-improvement. Roberto highlighted that his experience with racial discrimination did not exist
prior to entering higher education. Roberto stated, “I came from a large Latino community where everything was Mexican American.” He elaborated that it was not until he departed from his home community to a predominantly White college environment where he perceived that society labeled him as a minority. Roberto stated, “In college, I experienced racism and all those other things that went with it.” As Mike discussed the stereotypes, he demonstrated a heightened level of responsiveness through his illustration of his experiences. He offered a methodical and thoughtful perception of his medical school climate:

You still have a set of physicians and administrators who have negative stereotypes about minority students. Whether it’s about what they should look like, or what they should sound like. I’ve done a lot of work with the multi-cultural affairs office, and I serve on committees for different positions in the university. I bring in multiple perspectives. I bring in the perspective of students going through what we are trying to fix. In general, and in medicine, we all get clunked together as the block of minority students.

In a similar tone, Miguel clarified his experiences stemming from an affiliation with his birth city: “Caucasians make jokes about what the media has portrayed my city and Latinos to be.” Miguel then elaborated on comments that have offended him. “I hear things, like oh wow, you’re so articulate, and you speak so well. I’m sure some comments are unintentional, but that still doesn’t remove the impact.” Miguel added, “Why wouldn’t I speak so well?” It appeared that, despite Miguel’s high level of education, he still experiences negative stereotypes associated with his Latino identity. Miguel acknowledged his perception of being a man of color. “I will never be given the benefit of the doubt.”
These experiences have led Miguel to perceive that he is judged by Whites as “Just one of those Latinos that made it out.” Jose shared a similar perspective. “There’s a stereotype that as a Latino you probably don’t need a very good education.” Tom presented his perception of the uneducated Latino stereotype. Tom stated, “At work, you notice people underestimate you because you’re Hispanic. I’m writing my thesis, and people who never spoke to me do so now. You do notice a change.” Tom laughed and shared his perception that his colleagues had originally viewed him as, “An undereducated Latino man with only a bachelor’s degree.”

The participants expressed a high level of responsiveness toward changing negative stereotypes about Latina/os. Their accounts conveyed strong feelings regarding yet another hurdle for Hispanic students in higher education—negative stereotypes: “Just one of those Latinos who made it out”; “We get clunked together as the block of minorities”; “As a Latino you don’t need a good education”; “An undereducated Latino man with only a bachelor’s degree.” The researcher analyzed these comments as one angry voice determined to influence change in society. The participants made sense of stereotypes as a continual battle to prove they are actually worthy of their higher social status.

**Sensitive to micro-aggressions.** The participants made sense of micro-aggressions as situations that went beyond static stereotypes. These situations were perceived as racial oppression, and they produced indignity in the participants. The participants expressed a perception of micro-aggressions in some form. In certain cases, they could not fully elaborate on their perception. Yet, the micro-aggression was felt. The participants acknowledged that they are minorities in their programs, and they reported feelings of discomfort based on perceived views of their ethnicity or socioeconomic standing. Anna angrily relayed her experience with a
micro-aggression that occurred with a white male peer in her graduate program. Anna elaborated:

We had a group project to complete, so I went into the library. I saw my group, and I said, “I’m going to email you, so we could set a time to work on our project.” He was like, “Sure, Jerome, not a problem Jerome, okay Jerome.” I just said, “Excuse me.” This guy was laughing at me, and I kept trying to brush it off. I felt like this is not really happening to me. He was surrounded by a bunch of white peers who just kept laughing at me.

In disbelief, Anna confronted her white peer, but he did not see anything wrong with calling her Jerome. Anna informed him she would report the incident, and he retorted, “Go ahead, nothing will happen to me.” Beyond Anna’s perception of being racially insulted, she conveyed experiencing a lack of support from her program adviser. Anna stated that when she brought this issue to her department, she was ignored. “My perception was they thought of me as an emotional Latina.” Anna threatened to take her complaint to the next level. Only then did she perceive that the issue was taken seriously. “I felt the situation was racist because I grew up in an inner city. I know what black poverty is. That’s how I construed it.”

Imelda, in turn, expressed apprehension about issues faced by minority faculty in her doctoral program. Imelda second guessed her desire to enter academia because of perceived experiences with micro-aggressions in her department. “Diversity is a term that is often heard in our department, but not much has been done to promote it.” Imelda shared feelings of sadness and insecurity regarding whether she was even in the right place as a future scholar. This
watershed moment led to Imelda’s discussion of how White males were favored for tenure at her university:

There are those who haven’t done as much as minority faculty, but Caucasians have been promoted and have gotten tenure. It’s pretty aggressive, in a non-verbal way, how they feel about people who are minorities. The only Latina faculty member in my department did not get tenured and she created some amazing programs. That was unbelievable.

Imelda’s story reflected a heavy burden; one which was difficult for this female Hispanic PhD student to bear.

The participants made sense of the racial climates in their programs in a similar fashion to discrimination faced by minorities in American society. Lisa, a recent PhD graduate, provided her observation: “As a Latina post-graduate teaching assistant, there were micro-aggressions I experienced.” Lisa identified herself as the only female of color in her department. She recalled the day her professor brought in a very large, non-Swiss pocket knife, and slowly peeled an orange in front of her. Lisa stated:

I’m the only female in this room and my White professor brings a large knife to campus and used it as if he had authority. I was very aware of my position, my social position at this institution and my perceptions of it.

The researcher interpreted the participants’ ability to navigate through landmines of racial obstacles as defiance. The participants’ tenacious attitudes were captured in the data through a tone of, “I will succeed in spite of you and not because of you.” Moreover, the participants’ comments coincided regarding the fact that higher education institutions produce messages of
appreciation for diversity, yet they do not always sustain welcoming environments. Selena shared her perception of faculty squelching minority academic achievement:

I have seen some professors’ way more helpful toward Caucasians. I believe, in my opinion, some faculty really don’t want to see other races do well. You just never know walking into a classroom what their intentions are... I just never know. I think being Hispanic, I sometimes feel when I need help, and ask for it, they look at me like of course you would need my help you are a Latina.

Selena’s perception conveyed a strong distrust of faculty. Yet, her attitude was reflective of a tenacious young woman not willing to surrender in her battle to succeed. “My pride has kept me strong.” She elaborated, “I do not ask for help unless I really, really, really need it.”

Across participants, there was a strong sense of indignation toward persons who carry out micro-aggressive actions. This sense of distaste fueled their resistance. The participants’ resistive stance produced an angry motivation in opposition to racism. Moreover, the participants strove to dismantle the negative stereotypes by displaying their successful academic outcomes to the world.

The participants’ experiences related to the super-ordinate theme of Responsive to Injustice were very telling in terms of the institutional apathy towards the existence of racism in higher education, as well as the presence of institutionalized racism embedded in the very system of these institutions. The participants confronted the racial prejudices of faculty, staff, and their peers, and found that they were often underestimated regarding their aptitude or abilities, or completely discounted simply due to their minority status. Colleagues and faculty often viewed
them as an exception to the rule instead of truly acknowledging their individual achievements and capabilities.

From the participants’ perspectives, these institutions, many of which were predominantly White schools, clearly lacked effective diversity initiatives that went beyond a superficial celebration of diversity to teach students, administrators, and faculty alike how to truly foster multicultural awareness and understanding across individuals and groups from different backgrounds. The participants’ experiences with micro-aggressions demonstrated concerning trends of both apathy and racial bias in university faculty and administrators. The administration’s reticence to take immediate action regarding an incident of blatantly racist name-calling indicated to participants that they were part of an apathetic system that relies on passivity, and thus further alienates victims of micro-aggressions while simultaneously encouraging the perpetrators of such aggressions.

The third and subsequent super-ordinate theme is *Receptive in Constructive Environments*. The two subordinate themes are *Encouraged by Advisors and Faculty* and *Motivated by Friends and Peers*.

**Receptive in Constructive Environments**

The third super-ordinate theme is *Constructive Campus Environments*. Half of the participants voiced negative perceptions of their campus climates. Conversely, the other half experienced positive academic environments. The participants reported constructive interconnected relationships with faculty and advisors, which they likened to an academic family. Besides relationships with faculty and advisors, the participants sought diverse friendships with persons who shared similar values and opinions. The researcher interpreted that
the participants experienced interdependent relationships. The participants made sense of their friendships as dutiful and supportive. The two subordinate themes emergent from the data with reference to a positive campus environment were: *Encouraged by Advisors and Faculty* and *Motivated by Diverse Friends and Peers*.

**Encouraged by advisers and faculty.** The participants experienced acceptance, encouragement, and a sense of familial inclusiveness on campus from their interactions with academic advisers and faculty. The participants viewed this encouragement as fundamental to their success. Across seven participants there was an expression of gratitude toward faculty and mentors which left long lasting impressions. The participants described supportive academic climates which validated their desire to remain academically resilient. Haylie discussed her undergraduate experience and identified a specific biology department chairperson as being instrumental in the development of her own self-perception as a successful post-graduate Latina student in science.

Haylie spoke of the chairperson as if she were a family member. The chairperson taught Haylie how to forge campus relationships. Haylie explained, “Now, in my graduate program, I have already established relationships with some of my professors. I can go to them, and I can talk to them.” Miguel shared a challenge he faced during his final year in graduate school: “My father was in I.C.U. and almost died. If my father would have died, I as a Latino male, I would have had to quit my dream to care for my family economically.” Miguel took a semester off to care for his family. However, he returned and finished his master’s degree because his academic advisor Dr. X remained in regular contact with him. Miguel shared, “I am so grateful for his help, after my father improved I decided to go back to finish my program. Dr. X believed in
Isabelle conveyed her perception of familial acceptance from faculty members, which she perceived catapulted her academic self-esteem:

In my master’s program faculty were excellent. They really valued what I had to contribute and interestingly most of them were White, but there must have been something that I brought to the classroom. They didn’t have a Student Affairs component in the courses I took, so I think I brought that experience to my classes. I would check up on my residential life directorship experience. I felt valued. I felt like I had something interesting to bring to the classroom, and it was valued.

Across participants there was a sense of connectedness with campus advisers and faculty which produced high levels of academic motivation.

Tom experienced an inclusive classroom environment, which he interpreted as valuable. Tom recalled a Latina professor who left a lasting impression: “Our professor ended the class with a video she made using the name of each classmate to good rhythmic music. She posted a thank you post card.” Tom characterized the professor as going beyond her job description. He explained that her gesture left a positive impact on him: “That part alone showed how much she valued us with that card.” Tom felt the professor’s actions appealed to class collectivism. Moreover, the participants who received validation from mentors and faculty made sense of these connections from a sociocultural perspective. The researcher defines these familial campus relationships as academic nurturance. Academic nurturance is an interconnected campus relationship. The researcher interpreted that these relationships bolstered scholastic performance.
Motivated by diverse friends and peers. The participants reflected on the importance of cultivating an academic network that consisted of diverse friends and peers. The participants were in agreement that academic success was not easily attainable in isolation. Alexandria spoke of her recent experience as a law school graduate and her perception of the program. She experienced law school as “very White.” Alexandria discussed a few uncomfortable experiences she had with a White sorority and expressed her preference for being involved with a diverse group. Alexandria described her peer group:

We were a very diverse group that just melted together. There was a gay white guy; a Sri Lankan girl; a Black girl; a Canadian girl, and me. We supported each other all the way. I could not see myself in a purely white group because I can’t relate.

Javier expressed his requirement for a Latina/o peer group. He reflected, “I knew I wasn’t going to make it on my own.” When interviewing for medical school, Javier placed importance on finding a diverse and collaborative program. He admitted, “I figured out very early on that I might need emotional or academic support.” Javier selected his program even though he was accepted into a competitive, predominately White medical school: “I needed to have access to peer support if I needed it. That’s why I chose this program, and I’m very happy that I’m here.” He highlighted the higher number of Hispanic students in his class. Javier’s comments are reflective of how he perceives Latino collectivism. Both Alexandria and Javier experienced discomfort in purely White peer groups and spoke openly about their perceptions. Similarly, Mike expressed pride in cultivating a diverse peer network:

At my school, in a class of 120 medical students there might be four African American students and maybe five or six Hispanic students. We often tend to come together and
speak just as like a collective power. I’ve been a part of the Latino medical student group my entire time here and on the regional and national board. Within the African American group, I have been just as active.

Mike perceived his leadership role and involvement within national Hispanic medical student boards and with his African American peers as important. He expressed a tenacious commitment to supporting the progress of his diverse set of peers and friends through medical school. Lisa shared a similar perception of diversity and supportive friendships: “I think by my last year in my doctoral program, I created a woman of color writing group.” Lisa’s group was small, but she valued their collaboration:

We supported each other no matter what. We would trade our writings when we were getting ready to write the prospectus. Then, we would complain and support each other through some of the other emotional stuff we were dealing with.

The participants experienced academic resiliency through nurturance within diverse peer groups who faced similar challenges. The researcher interpreted a sense of collectivism as a protective barrier. Mike portrayed strength when speaking as a “collective power,” and Lisa reinforced her sense of security, as evidenced in her statement, “we supported each other no matter what.” The participants appreciated diversity in their peer networks due to comparable attitudes and opinions. These peer groups were supportive of the participants’ self-worth which aided them in coping with their own issues. Moreover, these networks helped nurture the participants’ sociocultural identity as students in an uncertain campus climate. The researcher interpreted that the participants required synergetic socialization typically not found in
individualist networks. The participants’ collaborative friendships and peer groups validated their emotional needs.

The participants’ responses in support of the super-ordinate theme of Constructive Campus Environments demonstrated the high level of importance they placed on supportive relationships, both with advisers and faculty, and with peers. The participants indicated that encouragement from professors was fundamental to their success; it was important for them to feel validated and appreciated within their program and their classes. Faculty members or advisers who went out of their way to form a connection with the participant had a profound impact on their performance.

In one case, a participant was encouraged to return to the program after a difficult life event because of a professor’s ongoing communication with him. These accounts demonstrate just how imperative positive mentorship and supportive relationships with faculty were to the scholastic performance of these participants. Academic nurturance seems to compel them to excel in a very promising manner. Moreover, the participants’ preference for diverse peer groups indicated that diversity is a priority when it comes to feeling comfortable in a campus environment. As the participants who were apprehensive to the campus climate noted in a previous section, campus culture and atmosphere can be critical determinants of a Hispanic student’s success in an institution of higher learning. It therefore becomes clear that Hispanic students might want to consider including a diverse student body as one of the criteria when deciding which program or school to attend.

The fourth super-ordinate theme emergent is Resolved through Family. The two subordinate themes are: Resistant from Family Adversity and Strengthened by Family Support.
Resolved through Family

The super-ordinate theme *Resolved through Family* emerged with reference to the question of Hispanic culture as a contributor to academic achievement. The participants spoke avidly about the prominence of family in connection to their academic success. The researcher found that the participants viewed culture and family as one entity. Yet, while both subordinate themes focus on family, the findings are dissimilar. In the first subordinate theme, *Resistant from Family Adversity*, nine participants shared that hardship fueled their willpower to flourish academically. The participants shared their parents’ plights and made sense of family suffering as sacrifices that had to be repaid. In the second subordinate theme, in contrast, *Strengthened by Family Support*, all participants reported that vigorous support within their family bolstered their academic strength. The two subordinate themes are: *Resistant from Family Adversity* and *Strengthened by Family Support*.

**Strengthened by family adversity.** Adversity played a strong role in participants’ ability to remain academically resolved. Anna relayed a detailed description of her parents’ lives as early immigrants to the United States. Her parents escaped El Salvador and became refugees in an impoverished inner-city metropolis. Anna highlighted, “My parents were very very poor for a long long time.” Moreover, Anna’s mother did not realize that she was pregnant until she prematurely gave birth to Anna and her twin brother in her seventh month of pregnancy. “As a child I suffered a lot because of asthma. I remember the pain. I remember all that pain, and I remember how I was able to get through it.” Anna sadly conveyed her parents’ story and reflected on the ache which has kept her academically resolved:
I think about my parents. I always think about how my parents have been through so much crap. It was the idea that my parents had to escape a war just to live. Then, I think about my father, and the idea of our father was being asked to give us up for adoption because he didn’t have the money to keep us.

Anna exuded a deep sense of sorrow over her agonizing childhood experiences as she discussed her mother worrying that her father would be taken away by immigration. These childhood memories produced an embodiment of spiritual resolve. Even though Anna faced challenges throughout her academic journey, she appeared valiant. She was determined to make her family proud as a reward for their hardship. Selena also projected a difficult set of family challenges. Selena grew up in a single parent home with a young mother who was unable to spend time with her. However, she spoke about her mother with love and appreciation:

My mother was divorced at twenty one, and she had my sister at seventeen. She worked and took care of me and my sister, as well as educated herself. I remember her standing in a food stamp line when I was little. She worked nights too. She worked full-time and went back to college when I was four and eventually obtained her PhD.

Selena stated, “I think her high level of success is what really motivates me. My mom is very persistent about school.” Selena shared a few stern warnings about avoiding pregnancy and dropping out of high school like her mother did when her sister was born. Her mother’s experiences were vividly embedded into a young woman who was bound and determined not to replicate the same blunders.

Isabelle displayed a similar sense of gratitude as she reflected on her family’s adversity. “I had the benefit of growing up in the inner city and I say benefit.” She continued, “Some
people say, ‘you grew up poor, and you were in the projects.’” However, Isabelle displayed pride in the fact that she had visited the Dominican Republic and met abject poverty there. Isabelle clarified, “My cousins were poor. They had nothing. I came back ‘wow’ I have so much. I felt rich and I have plenty.” She expressed gratitude and insisted that she was indebted to her parents. Isabelle reflected on what her life could have been. Her experiences brought her strength in how she perceived her academic challenges in the United States. Isabelle stated:

We had meat every day, and I had more than one pair of shoes. I think about it all the time. When I go to Dominican Republic, and I see how horrible the hustle is over there I feel really lucky.

Imelda also spoke of her parents’ challenges: “My parents have always instilled in me a sense of self-motivation and pride in that no one is going to pull you up unless you pull yourself up.” Imelda’s parents did not complete elementary school. Her mother has a second grade education and is the head of household, and her father never attended school. Yet, Imelda’s family privileged education as the single road to a better life. Indeed, recollections of family hardship have kept Isabelle and Imelda motivated during their PhD programs. Both women reconciled a strong family belief system in hard work as equivalent to success. The researcher identified a spiritual sense of resolve in the participants as they compared their academic challenges to their parents’ arduous lives.

Javier spoke quietly about his mother and disclosed, “It is my mom. She’s not a U.S. citizen. She’s here illegally. Well, not anymore, she’s in the process of getting all her paperwork done.” Javier’s tone reflected loyalty toward a hardworking resolute woman who, without a social security number and with the constant threat of deportation, cared for three
children. “She was able to give us anything that we needed,” Javier added proudly. In equal fashion, Miguel spoke about his family hardship.

For Miguel, the main issue was being mindful of parental advice: “My parents reminded me a lot this is why we came for you to get an education, ‘Es tu unico trabajo’ (This is your only job).” Miguel’s family emigrated from Mexico and worked as laborers. Their lives were harsh and full of struggle. His parents’ hardships remained a constant reminder to accomplish something in school. Miguel reflected, “They did not know what education looked like, smelt like, or felt like, but they knew it was real.” Miguel believed that it would have been selfish of him not to be grateful for his parents’ suffering and strove to make the most of the opportunities they afforded him.

Across the participants, the researcher interpreted embodied resilience stemming from family adversity. The participants’ voices conveyed profound emotion and resolve. Anna cited sorrow, “I remember all that pain and I remember how I was able to get through it.” Selena revealed pride, “I think her high level of success is what really motivates me.” Isabelle expressed fortuity, “We have meat every day, and I have more than one pair of shoes.” Imelda voiced strength, “No one is going to pull you up unless you pull yourself up.” Miguel embodied duty, “Es tu unico trabajo” (It’s your only job). Throughout the participants’ heartrending stories rang a child’s promise to succeed in life no matter what obstacles presented themselves along the way.

**Strengthened by family support.** The second subordinate theme, *Strengthened by Family Support*, differs from family adversity in that the participants perceived themselves as strengthened by parental *consejos* (advice) and lovingly supported by family expectations
established exclusively for them. In the data collected, not one participant discussed monetary support as a contributor to their academic success. The participants maintained high levels of family values and even credited their extended family for providing a cocoon of concern. When asked about an element of culture that contributed to his accomplishment, Javier immediately expressed his perception of the differences between Hispanic and American standards for success:

How do I see myself? I would say as a minority in the American culture and in the medical culture. So, to me it means that I am a different type of successful. My grandpa, he didn’t even finish elementary school in Mexico, yet he became very successful in his life. He was a very successful business owner. I think if you want to be successful in the American culture you need to have at least a bachelor’s degree. In the American definition, I am heavily successful, so I think I have accomplished that one. I’m a Latino. I’m successful not only by my own standards but also by my family’s standards.

Javier thanked God and perceived his accomplishment as a blessing. In contrast, Haylie focused on her grandmother, aunts, and uncles who avidly participate in her academics as a doctoral student. “I come from a very big Cuban family, and my grandmother is one of eight children.” Haylie explained that her family constantly asks her what she plans to do next. Haylie stated, “I feel I am very supported by everyone. Everybody’s super involved, and I am super supported.” She exhibited pride in her family’s involvement in her scholarship. The researcher found that Haylie did not perceive that it was abnormal for her family to guide her academic endeavors. Haylie continued, “That’s just the way they are. My family has been a challenge, but at the same time they are my biggest support.” Haylie pushes herself
academically because of their high expectations, and she credited her family for her academic
achievements several times. Selena also spoke of her family’s expectations. She discussed the
time she took a year off graduate school:

I just needed a break. I knew when I took the break, it was a break and it wasn’t forever. Then, I felt like I can’t start something and not finish it. My Latina stubbornness, my pride, my ego made me go back. I didn’t want to disappoint them. I get a lot of encouragement from my mother, my father, and my grandparents. The messages my family says are strong. They just always talk about school, go to school, go to school, finish your school, how is school? They all come to my graduations, from wherever they are from all across the country. They have all been very supportive.

Javier, Haylie, and Selena experience high family expectations that have upheld their desire to continue on their academic paths. Haylie and Selena have very involved family members, and they do not want to disappoint them.

The researcher interpreted the participants’ appreciation and loyalty toward family as familismo (family bonds). Statements like, “Everyone is super involved, and I am super supported,” and “I get a lot of encouragement from my mother, my father, and my grandparents” revealed an unyielding sense of closeness. These devoted family relationships have served these students as sources of academic motivation. Across participants, family sustenance was perceived as a shield against hardship in higher education. The sense of family support was intense and not only limited to a mother and father. The participants also spoke about extended family members as equally important sources of support, including brothers, sisters,
grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles. Comments like “they all come to my graduations from wherever they are from all across the country” demonstrated powerful family allegiance.

The super-ordinate theme of Resolved through Family was supported by participants’ expressions of the two contrasting ways in which their families spurred them to scholastic achievement. The participants associated with Resistant from Family Adversity found inspiration in their own parents’ sacrifices and struggles that drove them to educational commitment and excellence. There was an expression of gratitude towards their parents and a desire to prove that they were making the most of the opportunities their families had worked so hard for them to reach. Some participants expressed emotional resolve and a sense of duty regarding their academic future, and all embodied a resilience instilled in them by their family’s adversity.

In contrast, those participants associated with Strengthened by Family Support regarded their families as positive sources of support and encouragement for their academic careers. These participants’ family members were intimately involved in their academic endeavors, and were available for emotional support when they faced challenges in their education. The existence of different definitions of success between Hispanic and American cultures was also acknowledged, and a sense of pride was exuded in these participants’ abilities to succeed under the terms of both cultures. These dissimilar responses clearly suggest that family is a central motivating factor for these participants, whether that motivation stems from a source of hardship and adversity or from allegiance and support. The familial sense of duty emerged as a strong determinant of the participants’ educational success.

The fifth super-ordinate theme is Socially Responsible. The two subordinate themes are: Evolved Sociocultural Development and Insightful Community Leaders.
Socially Responsible

The super-ordinate theme *Socially Responsible* discusses the participants in terms of an interpreted evolution of cultural identity and personal maturity. The participants were asked where they saw themselves from a sociocultural perspective now that they had achieved high levels of academic success. The participants made sense of their cultural identity as shifting closer to the dominant culture, but this transference did not change their perceptions of themselves as proud Hispanics. The participants regarded their success as being able to work successfully in two cultures, which produced enlightened sociocultural development. The participants also maintained an informed intellectual consciousness that extended into leadership roles within their academic sphere of influence. The subordinate themes are *Evolved Sociocultural development* and *Insightful Community Leaders*.

**Evolved sociocultural development.** The participants exhibited high levels of self-esteem. Moreover, sociocultural maturity was expressed by the participants. The researcher interpreted that the participants still viewed themselves as distinctly Hispanic, yet they were capable of coping successfully in an environment they once perceived as foreign. This process led to an evolved “bicultural identity” which in turn helped fuel academic resilience. Evolved bicultural maturity requires a fluid shift between two cultures. The participants’ responses were detailed and varied. Alexandria grew up in an economically privileged home and viewed herself as a third culture child. She did not fully identify with the Hispanic or Caucasian culture. “I think my Hispanic side flavors me and adds to who I am.” Alexandria did not define herself as a Latina, and she drew her identity from both cultures. In some areas she perceived herself as Hispanic and in other areas she did not. Reflecting on culture, Alexandria recalled her law
school collaborations with White peers: “As Hispanics we can build friendships quite easily, yet I feel there are three walls to finally get to a White person.” Conversely, Alexandria could not identify with urban Hispanics either. “I see myself as a person who has a hint of Hispanic, but it is not my full identity.” She elaborated, “I don’t see myself as super Hispanic or super American.” Alexandria is a bilingual woman who defined herself as belonging within a narrow scope in terms of her sociocultural identity.

On the other hand, Anthony broadly defined himself as a bicultural person. Anthony experienced poverty in an inner city neighborhood surrounded by minorities. Yet, he learned to embrace his Latino identity and adapt fully to American cultural values. The researcher interpreted Anthony’s experience as a strong example of bicultural identity. Anthony stated, “I know I am Latino. I don’t have a chip on my shoulder. I see people as people. I don’t see them as Latino, white or whatever. I am able to work equally within both cultures.” Tom reflected a similar perception of himself, “I like my culture, and I embrace it.” He expressed a strong sense of intellectual pride in his ability to shift successfully between the Hispanic and American cultures.

Selena confidently stated, “I think I fit into both cultures because I speak two languages, Spanish and English.” Selena perceived being a bilingual Latina with an advanced degree as having the upper hand, and she credited her education and language skills: “I think I have an upper hand compared to Caucasians because I am able to communicate worldwide.” Selena exemplified even more self-confidence, “In the American culture I have a lot more on my plate, and I can bring it to the table.” She finalized her self-assessment and added, “I think in the Latino community being educated is definitely an advantage too.” Across participants, there was
a sense of self-satisfaction in being able to function highly in two cultures. The participants had entered the process of biculturalism, which contributed to their success. Still, the researcher found some perceptions of discomfort with the process. Lisa noted:

I don’t think I’ve ever identified as Caucasian until now when I finished my PhD and realized what this really means for my socioeconomic status. I would say there isn’t a moment I don’t know I’m the Hispanic, a Latina woman in the room. I still feel incredibly like my identity’s very fluid and didn’t solidify.

Lisa expressed her hope that her education would provide a clearer resolution to her cultural identity, and she acknowledged that it did. Later she added, “It’s not closer to one or to the other, but it’s enhanced I would say equally in both at different times.” The researcher noted that biculturalism does not entail a solid identification of preferring one culture over another. It is the ability to successfully shift between two cultures fluidly.

Anna’s response was complicated even though she viewed herself as a bicultural person. Anna stated, “Sometimes I have a hard time with my own identity because of being a Latina born in the U.S. I have had to assimilate to both cultures.” Anna saw herself as having to straddle two cultures and try to assimilate into both:

There are times where I have to compromise my values. I see myself differently because I don’t go along with certain values in the Latino culture either. I feel alone at times. I feel alone even though I’ve achieved so much.

Anna sadly compared her achievement to sitting alone on top of a mountain. The researcher found that she had difficulty navigating fluidly between the two cultures. Imelda perceived herself in a similar fashion: “It’s been challenging, especially at this level of graduate training
because I’ve gotten to interact with people who are high up in academia. Invariably, they’re always Caucasian.” Imelda has been able to work within the Caucasian culture, yet she addressed areas of cross-cultural difficulty. Imelda stated:

The way I express myself and the way that they express themselves is very different. It seems like sometimes the way I express myself is perceived as aggressive or confrontational. I feel like in the Latino culture it’s much more straightforward, our communication style.

Imelda exhibited a level of comfort when discussing her perception of “our communication style” with the researcher. The researcher interpreted that Anna and Imelda were shifting gears slowly when attempting to cross between the two cultures.

Conversely, Jose expressed confidence in maintaining his cultural identity as a Latino engineer while working in the mainstream culture: “Being a Latino engineer is definitely a minority. It’s not going to separate me in any way. I’ve had to meet and work with different cultures and people from various ethnic backgrounds.” Jose perceived himself as fortunate in that he has gotten to learn about other cultures. Haylie also maintained positive experiences as a bilingual post-graduate student. Haylie recalled: “In the pharmacy where I did my summer rotations nobody spoke Spanish. I was able to help which meant a lot to me. Working with White Americans has been interesting in the sense we’ve been able to share cultures.” Jose and Haylie take pride in their ability to function and participate in the dominant culture.

The researcher interpreted Mike as an anomaly in terms of his cultural identity. Mike’s father is Hispanic and his mother is not. Mike was raised in an English-speaking, middle-class,
Midwestern home, and he was not raised with the Hispanic culture. Still, he discovered his Hispanic cultural identity when he entered college. Mike’s story set a tone for Hispanic pride:

My perception of being Hispanic has definitely changed over time. I started to feel it was when I attended my undergraduate program at an elite university. I started broadening my definition of what it meant to be Hispanic because we had a wide range of people. It went through a variety of students who were first gen and multiple generations like me who didn’t speak Spanish. I started coming around to understanding it. That there is a wide range of what it means, and that’s really when it started to kick in.

In coming to terms with what it means to be a successful Hispanic, Mike perceived himself as culturally evolved, and he expressed confidence and pride in his heritage.

Across most participants, the researcher perceived that bicultural competence was the result of a regenerating process that sustained success in higher education and beyond. This process requires enculturation as a tool to help fuel resilient behavior. The participants did not acculturate to the mainstream society entirely, nor were they expected to. Yet, they maintained a strong sense of Hispanic values and learned alternative skills to navigate within their environments. This process requires the ability to balance and appreciate both cultures. Beyond an emerged bicultural identity, the researcher interpreted a high level of sociocultural maturity which reflected itself in leadership.

**Insightful community leaders.** With reference to the question regarding contributors to academic success, the participants responded in terms of leadership. Across participants, the researcher found a heightened sense of civic engagement. The participants had volunteered on campus or in their home community in various roles. Lisa offered her story: “I finished my
master’s and practiced. I was with a large, well respected non-profit on the east coast, and I did research there.” Moreover, Lisa interned for a professional association and became interested in race and politics. This internship led her to pursue her PhD in Social Science at a top university. Imelda also became involved as a leader in the community through an outreach program. Imelda shared:

I have worked in a Latino organization in my PhD program. It really helped me to connect with people in the community. I’ve also developed my friendships there that have been important. I think that’s what’s kept me connected to the research project I’m doing now. It’s strange to hear myself say that work is what has connected me, but I think I like that fact that it does contribute to me staying connected.

Imelda perceives herself as a community leader who is invested in a mutually beneficial environment. She provides clinical expertise and derives fulfillment from it. Haylie perceived her on-campus roles as largely involved: “I’m in six other clubs at school. It’s a lot of time I have to dedicate aside from being an actual student, but it’s important.” Haylie’s involvement consumes her time, yet she gains rewards from it. Haylie acknowledged that these roles have motivated her to stay on track academically.

Isabella spoke proudly about the leadership roles she has assumed in different academic settings: “I was a very well rounded leader. I was a resident assistant, and I was the President of the Latin American Student Union.” Jose also examined his continuing leadership roles. “Well, since my undergraduate education, I have been part of a Latino fraternity.” Jose’s fraternity has lent itself to the advancement of Hispanic people. “Today, I’m still part of the alumni chapter where I continue to serve.” In addition, Mike was proud of his leadership roles, and he clarified
a number of organizations in which he perceives himself as a stakeholder: “For a long time, I’ve worked in different leadership positions. I work a lot with the committee at rush. I do a lot of work with the curriculum. I serve on committees throughout and outside of the university.”

Across participants, the researcher interpreted strong moral reasoning in the discussion of community and leadership roles. The participants made sense of their education as a social responsibility and continue to serve within their schools and neighborhoods. They acknowledged the importance of civic engagement, demonstrating socially responsive behaviors that help them sustain academic resiliency. The participants’ sense of community was omnipresent.

The participants’ accounts thoroughly reinforced the super-ordinate theme of *Socially Responsible*. All participants demonstrated a heightened understanding of their identity in terms of straddling and moving fluidly between two cultures. Many embodied a bicultural maturity and exhibited an intellectual pride in their biculturalism. The participants demonstrated how important an evolved sociocultural understanding of one’s place in the world is to the educational success of Hispanic students. Those students who displayed confidence and pride in their identity and heritage demonstrated resilient behavior resulting from the enculturation process. Some participants also emphasized the importance of speaking two languages as an advantage to their career and ability to excel in higher education. Certain participants did struggle to shift between the two cultures and felt that at times they were forced to compromise the values of one culture over another, which left them feeling alone. The presence of these cross-cultural difficulties seemed to negatively affect the regenerating process afforded by biculturalism. It is therefore clear that a heightened understanding of and comfort with one’s
bicultural and (often) bilingual identity is a factor in these participants’ scholastic achievement. The participants also demonstrated a high level of civic engagement, proving themselves capable and powerful leaders committed to making changes both on and off-campus. Many participants expressed that their involvement in leadership roles further motivated them to excel academically and brought meaning to their work and research. These findings indicate the powerful effect that engagement with the community can have on the resilience and prolonged success of Hispanic students.

The sixth and last super-ordinate theme is *Enlightened Culturally and Intellectually*. The two subordinate themes are: *Valor and Pride in Accomplishment* and *Aspiration to Pay it Forward*.

**Enlightened Culturally and Intellectually**

In the final super-ordinate theme, *Enlightened Culturally and Intellectually*, the researcher interpreted that the participants had evolved into persons with a heightened sense of cultural and intellectual pride. The participants maintained a unique belief in themselves. They were proud of their academic accomplishments, for they conquered countless obstacles and reached notable milestones. Still, across participants there was an expression of humility which the researcher interpreted as valor and not conceit. The participants appeared to make sense of their success in an enlightened fashion that reflected deep concern for Hispanic students who had not made it as far them. Beyond their reflection of personal pride in accomplishment, the participants spoke several times about the importance of paying it forward.

The researcher interpreted pay it forward differently than civic engagement related to school. The participants were interested in going above and beyond community service and
helping other Hispanic students avoid pitfalls in higher education. The researcher noted that the participants expressed remarkable aspiration to become guides for young Hispanics in education. The two subordinate themes are Valor and Sense of Pride in Accomplishment and the Aspiration to Pay it Forward.

**Valor and sense of pride in accomplishment.** Across participants, a humble sense of pride was present in regards to academic achievement. The researcher interpreted a combination of valor, pride, and responsibility in the manner in which the participants spoke about overcoming their academic challenges. The participants reflected on how they saw themselves in relation to their success. Isabelle elaborated:

> I think there are a lot of people struggling to obtain their PhD I know I’m not special in my struggle in trying to get it finished. I think what makes me special as a Latina is that I know the numbers of us in PhD programs are low and pathetic. This pushes me to finish. I just know and have that extra responsibility.

Roberto responded similarly as a Hispanic male with a doctorate degree. Roberto expressed concern over the low numbers of Hispanic post graduates. Still, he was equally proud of his achievements. “I know the stats of how many Latinos have a doctorate degree and it’s less than one percent.”

The researcher interpreted that Isabelle and Roberto both exhibited personal pride combined with societal concern. The data also indicated that first-generation family members perceived the participants’ academic achievements as brave. Tom cited his family experiences when he completed his master’s degree. No one in his family had dared travel his distance
academically. It was as if Tom had courageously entered an unknown abyss. Tom reflected on his doctoral mission:

The thesis you have to create is an overwhelming and scary process. Knowing that I finished classes in English has been an accomplishment that serves as a model for others. Right now, it is my reputation because my doctorate program is from a top university, so it is now about my reputation. If I can make it here, it is wow.

Tom was proud and determined to complete his thesis no matter what. Still, the researcher interpreted a certain level of reservation and hesitation in Tom, as if he did not want to jinx himself.

Imelda was soft-spoken and equally proud when she shared her research project. Imelda is the first Latina PhD candidate to enter the clinical program at her university. She recognized, “There aren’t many of us that are Latina.” Tom and Imelda are first-generation students who appeared motivated because “all eyes are on them.” Tom spoke of his personal reputation, and Imelda shared pride in being the first Latina in her program; both spoke in calm, self-assured tones. Moreover, Selena modestly expressed pride in her success, “It is the level of respect you get from people when you tell them you have a degree or you are in college. Knowing I have worked hard and people can see it.” The participants’ perceptions of themselves reflected pride and humility in their unique achievements. Javier embraced semi-satisfaction as a medical school student. He reflected personal pride in the steps he took to enter medical school.

However, Javier does not regard himself as accomplished:

My life goal is to be a physician. That has been my goal since I was a little kid. My goal was not just to go to class. My goal was not to only finish college. My goal was not to
get into medical school. My goal is to be a physician. I always knew what the next step was for me, and I always knew that I had to be ready.

Javier’s tone expressed wistfulness as if he had experienced personal hardship which required him to cautiously calculate his path to medical school. This interpretation was noted from his tone when stating, “I always knew I had to be ready.” The participants made sense of their success in terms of humility, gratitude, and pride. Their achievement was interpreted as non-pretentious, and they were apprehensive about gloating.

Aspiration to pay it forward. In this final subordinate theme, the participants expressed solidarity and commitment to helping other Hispanic students succeed. The participants referred to their duty as “paying it forward,” and directly voiced their resolve. They interpreted academic achievement as a gift to be shared. Moreover, the researcher sensed urgency. Anna elaborated emotionally on the fact that there are not many Latina women in the sciences and spoke like a dutiful soldier waiting to be called to action. Anna cited:

They’re not studying statistics, they’re not studying engineering. We’re unfortunately underrepresented. I need to mentor them because I’m paying it forward. My goal is to help the community who is interested in STEM. I feel it’s important. I think that’s the reason why I’ve been able to succeed. There’s a reason I have lived the life I have. God knows…

Anna perceived her academic success as a gift from God that required repayment. She reflected on her hardship as spiritual lessons learned. Imelda, in turn, expressed that she entered her clinical program to be of assistance to Latina/os. “That sense of needing to help each other is why I went into the helping profession.” Imelda was adamant about the clinical services she
gives to the Hispanic community: “It’s important because there are so many Latinos that need services that just are not available. That’s something that I’ve found especially in the South where the Latino presence, while strong, are still an invisible presence.” Lisa was equally committed to paying it forward. She added, “It’s a huge responsibility. I have a responsibility to give back to the Latino community. Remember it’s all about paying it forward.” Lisa reminded current Latino leaders to, “Consider the tools that can be passed on to someone else, so new scholars don’t have it as bad as they did.”

Anna, Imelda, and Lisa are first-generation Latinas with high levels of education who are strongly committed to paying it forward. Jose added, “I think what it means is I have a responsibility as someone who is not very common.” Jose believed that it would be selfish of him to keep his education to himself, and he deemed that he has a responsibility to give back and help others. “I need to definitely keep this as a personal vendetta. I need to help younger people succeed and help my people as a whole.” Javier spoke on equally fervent terms of paying it forward. On his own time, he and his peers provide free health screenings to impoverished Latina/os in a border town. Javier self-realized his work:

We go from place to place and see if there are people that we can help people with their basic blood screening, pressure and cholesterol. I talk to them about things that can lead to health improvement. Hey, I actually have this knowledge, and I’m able to give back.

That is one thing I have done to make my … the Hispanic culture proud. Miguel also perceived paying it forward as a public responsibility. He related a touching story about his gratitude toward his family and to the Latino society:
I remember graduating and receiving my bachelor’s degree. It was for my family. So, I gave my diploma to my mom. It was the day before Mother’s Day. So, I was like, here Happy Mother’s Day. This was something you wanted from all of us, and this is what I can give you. It was the same when I completed grad school. It was again for my family, but this time I was more cognizant because this time it was for La Raza.

Miguel shared his perception of the educational pipeline and what it says about Latina/os. He spoke in a tone of astonishment at his own achievements. “Now, I’m finally part of that two percent.” Miguel questioned himself twice. “What does that mean for me? What does that mean for me?” Then, digging deeper into his thoughts, he shared, “I learned in my program being a man of color, being a Latino in higher education... being a Latino.” Miguel elongated the word “Latino” and reflected in wonderment. “What do the statistics show about who I am and where I should be? I shouldn’t be here,” he laughed.

Collectively, the participants perceived an urgency to pay it forward to help Hispanic students and the Latino community progress. Ultimately, the participants made sense of their academic success as a desire to spur the upward mobility of Hispanic society. The researcher found that the importance of paying it forward was unmistakable. This drive was poignantly captured in one participants’ words, “I need to help the younger people succeed and help my people as a whole.” Even more notable was the participants’ desire to elevate “La Raza.” This desire was illuminated extensively throughout the data collected.

The final super-ordinate theme of *Enlightened Culturally and Intellectually* was evidenced in the participants’ translation of their cultural and intellectual pride into concrete
action aimed at paying it forward to other Hispanic students and the larger community. The participants’ astonishment at and humble acknowledgement of their own success informed their conviction that their education should serve a higher purpose. This purpose was manifested in different ways, through mentorship, direct work in the community, and free health screenings.

The participants displayed a keen awareness of their exceptionalism, and regarded it as a serious responsibility, demonstrating their solidarity with the Hispanic community and a broader concern for their community’s future. The participants recognized the enormous level of respect their accomplishments had earned them from their families, acquaintances, and the community at large, but also displayed a certain level of hesitation about their achievements, with some participants stressing the fact that they still had farther to go. One participant saw her purpose as paving the way for new minority scholars to ensure that their path was easier than hers had been. These accounts testify to the participants’ high level of commitment to serving as role models and sources of support and inspiration in their communities. To them, paying it forward is a natural outcome of their own individual success, and they wish to share that success with the broader community.

**Summary**

The purpose of this investigation was to explore how Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students advanced through the educational pipeline and remained academically resilient from a sociocultural perspective. The researcher examined the interview data, which reflected true accomplishment and a progression of resilient behavior. Most importantly, the data generated perspectives that shed light on how the participants made sense of their success as first-, second-, and third-generation students based on their experiences in higher education.
At the beginning of their journey, practically all participants faced challenges and questioned their abilities. They strove to obtain advanced degrees, yet they did not fully grasp how to proceed through cultural misgivings and educational gaps. The participants experienced surprise in their initial achievement gaps, for they were considered above average students in high school. These barriers shook their self-esteem and produced high levels of anxiety. The participants shared similar experiences facing countless obstacles that threatened to block their path to success. Nonetheless, they made sense of the obstacles through tutoring sessions, studying hard, mentorship, and retaking courses until they could pass. The participants experienced feelings of limited self-worth and imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is defined as a feeling of not belonging or a sense of guilt for belonging. Spurred by family hardship as well as family allegiance and support, the participants exhibited a hunger to advance their life standing. The participants perceived a bachelor’s degree as a tunnel to escape hardship, and they regarded graduate education as a means to achieve social equity.

Moreover, the participants identified discrimination as a novel experience, for they had not perceived such levels of racial consciousness or prejudice in their home communities. Although the participants understood what it meant to be a minority, they were not prepared to face micro-aggressions nor hear negative racial stereotypes about their culture. Such situations produced emotional reactions of surprise and anger. Most of the participants experienced exposure to subtle micro-aggressions which added an extra burden to overcome. The participants were determined to alter negative perceptions and stereotypes of Hispanics. None of the participants exhibited negative feelings or practiced racism against Whites, they merely did not experience or mention many social interactions with them outside of the classroom.
The data reflected a perceived lack of faculty support and mentorship. The participants voiced experiences of feeling lost when navigating through what was viewed as foreign territory. These feelings of apprehension were perceived in half of the participants who characterized their undergraduate and or graduate programs as unsupportive to their emotional needs. The remaining participants credited particular faculty and mentors who guided them to their current positions as scholars and recent graduates. These influential persons were regarded as extremely influential and received fervent praise from the participants.

All participants experienced self-sufficiency and motivation through collaborative peer networks. These networks helped the participants form and maintain positive feelings about themselves and their abilities. The participants experienced friendships with other Hispanics and diverse students who were defined as international. These social networks are reflective of Hispanic students’ interdependent involvement, and the participants made sense of these relationships as one collective power.

When questioned about Hispanic culture and academic success, the participants experienced culture and family as one entity. Moreover, they reflected on adversity and used familial hardship as motivation to continue academically. The participants shared stories of trials and tribulations that fostered their commitment and determination to excel scholastically. They compared their challenges to their parents’ hardships, which fueled a greater will to succeed. Moreover, the participants understood that it was their duty to make their family proud, and they viewed higher education as a vehicle through which to do so. The participants experienced interdependency from family members who voiced an abundance of support with high expectations of them as students. The researcher noted that the participants never mentioned
financial support. The participants’ perception of family support was purely emotional. Most participants felt surrounded by several family members who cheered for them from the sidelines as if they were running a marathon.

The data indicated the emergence of a third identity defined as biculturalism. All of the participants became enculturated and not assimilated. The researcher found that, for the most part, the participants’ cultural identities did not solidify during their experience with higher education, but rather remained fluid to varying degrees. Their perception of a balanced cultural identity kept them motivated, which in turn generated a sense of cultural pride and humility. The participants did not brag about their accomplishments, but rather regarded them as instilling a greater responsibility to serve as role models and leaders in their community and the larger society. This perception cultivated an enlightened sense of sociocultural intelligence and a strong desire to pay it forward.

As is discussed further in Chapter Five, several interpretations can be drawn from these findings. The participants’ accounts indicate a clear need for the development of more effective and pervasive student support infrastructure for minority students at institutions of higher learning. The participants’ experiences with stereotypes and micro-aggression also evidence the existence of an institutional apathy towards racially-motivated incidents, and there was also the suggestion of institutionalized racism in the internal governance of one university, which is concerning indeed. The presence of micro-aggressions points to the lack of well-developed diversity initiatives to inculcate an appreciation and understanding of multiculturalism and diversity in students, faculty, and staff at the higher education level. The participants also testified to the importance of positive mentorship for Hispanic students, and they demonstrated
that campus culture and atmosphere can indeed be critical determinants of Hispanic success. The participants’ accounts suggested that Hispanic students appreciate the presence of a diverse student body which promotes collaborative and supportive peer networks.

Moreover, the participants clearly demonstrated the importance of family as a principal motivating factor for Hispanic students, which suggests that a familial sense of duty is a potential determinant of students’ educational success. The participants also evidenced the positive influence that an evolved sociocultural understanding of one’s place in the world, informed by a bicultural and (potentially) bilingual identity, can have on Hispanic students. This presented bicultural competence as a prominent factor in the participants’ educational resilience. Furthermore, civic engagement was proven to have a profound effect on the prolonged achievements of the population. Finally, the participants revealed that they regard paying it forward as a natural outcome to their individual success, demonstrating a conviction that their own education should serve a higher purpose.

The subsequent chapter discusses the research findings and recommendations for future research.
Chapter Five: Discussion of Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of academically resilient Hispanic graduates and post-graduates (Hispanic students). The theoretical framework applied in this study, academic resilience process, was constructed from Kumpfer (1999) and Morales’ and Trotman’s (2011) research on human and academic resilience, which posits that it is not purely innate ability that promotes academic success. This framework analyzes the participants from the lens of persons within their higher education environment and from a sociocultural perspective, and it interprets human development in terms of dynamic transactional processes that consist of risk stressors and protective barriers. A qualitative research methodology was employed in this study given that this approach is recommended for studies on academic resilience (Kumpfer, 1999; Morales & Trotman, 2011). Moreover, the researcher affirms that human development is best explored by applying qualitative investigation to gather insight into a student’s life experiences. As such, this study applied IPA to explore the lives of Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students. The researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ lived experiences was also informed by the CCW model (Yosso, 2005). Yosso’s CCW model was applied to inform this study through an investigation of how protective barriers guard against academic stressors.

As demonstrated in the literature review, there is limited data available regarding the academic resilience of Hispanic graduates and post-graduates. Hence, the findings of this study are aimed at expanding the existing research base regarding this population’s academic resilience. The participants for this investigation were 14 students. Seven participants were close to graduation and seven had recently graduated. The participants differed in terms of sub-
cultures, college majors, socioeconomic backgrounds, and educational generation status. Six themes emerged from this study and aligned to the participants’ challenges, protective barriers, and adaptation as components of an integral process that led to their academic success.

Based on the participant interviews, six super-ordinate themes, with two corresponding subordinate themes each, emerged in response to the research questions. The super-ordinate themes included: (a) Challenged by Barriers, (b) Responsive to Racial Injustice, (c) Receptive in Constructive Environments, (d) Resolved through Family, (e) Socially Responsible, and (f) Enlightened Culturally and Intellectually. The two subordinate themes for Challenged by Barriers included Awareness of Educational Gaps and Apprehensive in Campus Climate. Corresponding to the super-ordinate theme of Responsive to Racial Injustice were the subordinate themes of Cognizant of Stereotypes and Sensitive to Micro-Aggressions. The super-ordinate theme of Receptive in Constructive Environments yielded the subordinate themes Encouraged by Advisers and Faculty and Motivated by Friends and Peers. The subordinate themes for Resolved through Family included Resistant from Family Adversity and Strengthened by Family Support. Corresponding to the super-ordinate theme of Socially Responsible were the subordinate themes Evolved Sociocultural Development and Insightful Community Leaders. The final super-ordinate theme of Enlightened Culturally and Intellectually yielded the subordinate themes of Valor and Pride in Accomplishment and Aspiration to Pay it Forward.

What follows is a thematic elaboration of the research findings relevant to the participants’ academic achievement. The findings for each corresponding super-ordinate and subordinate theme are reviewed in relation to existing literature. The conclusions of this study are then presented in relation to the thematic findings. The final sections offer recommendations...
for practice, including specific examples for their application in a practice setting and recommendations for future research.

Thematic Findings

**Challenged by barriers and stressors.** Kumpfer (1999) and Morales and Trotman (2011) stated that incoming stimuli activate the resilience process and create disequilibrium in the individual which causes stressful conditions perceived from the environment. In the higher education setting, the data revealed that participants experienced stressful barriers and challenges that they struggled to overcome. This data emerged from the research question: How do Hispanic students remain resilient within their academic environment? The participants discussed the two primary challenges they faced in undergraduate and graduate education which brought forth the subordinate themes *Awareness of Educational Gaps* and *Apprehensive in Campus Climate*, discussed below.

**Awareness of educational gaps.** The participants’ responses suggested that they measured their current success based on hardships experienced on their educational journeys. In particular, the participants viewed hardship as not being able to navigate the system. The researcher interpreted that the participants’ stressful experience of their introduction to higher education stemmed from a lack of familiarity with the environment, which they required to seek support for themselves. Yosso (2005) posited that, for Hispanics, social capital is the process of acquiring contacts with persons who can help them acquire knowledge of the institution. At the outset of the participants’ undergraduate career, they did not possess the social capital required to guide them in their early academic experiences. Furthermore, the participants noted that they were academically underprepared and they perceived that the campus climate specifically
activated their stress. The participants shared that their grades were low and that their knowledge base was weak. Thus, in order to remain on track, most participants were forced to seek tutors and also retake courses until they could pass.

In the data collected, the participants identified stressful academic challenges as undergraduates even though they were considered good students in high school. The data indicated that most participants attended inner-city or minority-majority high schools; they were unaware there would be challenging academic environments beyond high school. This finding corroborates the research of Gandara (2010), as well as that of Liou, Anthrop-Gonzalez, and Cooper (2009), which found that within minority-majority schools, Hispanic students graduate with limited academic skills due to lower academic expectations. Moreover, the researcher interpreted that the participants’ high school experiences were similar to MacLeod’s (2009) statements which compared the American educational system to a capitalist production process of the wealthy and the poor. Most of the participants came from lower income homes. This finding is also in line with the work of Marx (2009), who found that when students of color who were raised in socioeconomically segregated environments enter higher education, they are culturally deprived of the dominate culture. Given that the majority of the participants in this study were raised in Hispanic communities, they expressed a feeling of cultural alienation on campus, as if they were in foreign territory as freshman students.

Morales and Trotman’s (2011) attitude achievement paradox can be related to the subordinate theme of Awareness of Educational Gaps. This paradox implies that low-income minority students tend to have unrealistic goals with reference to their academic and career objectives. When students harbor unrealistic expectations and fail to succeed academically, they
tend to give up. However, the participants in this study were extremely adept at assessing their academic strengths and weaknesses and addressing their problem areas in a realistic manner in order to continue progressing through their educational journey successfully.

**Apprehensive in campus climate.** In addition to awareness of personal achievement gaps, half of the participants reported feelings of apprehension in the campus climate due to a perceived lack of collaboration with advisers and faculty. These participants stated experiencing limited dialogue with faculty and minimal interaction with academic advisers. Moreover, the participants reported that they were unable to secure mentorships and they felt as if they were on the outside of their programs looking in even though they were active students. This situation corroborates findings cited by Nora, Barlow, and Crisp (2006) stating that, in order to adjust well to campus environments, Latina/o graduate and undergraduate students require guidance and support from mature individuals rather than their peers. Nora et al.’s (2006) finding is consistent with this study’s data regarding the need for stronger academic support and mentorship to guide Hispanic students in higher education environments.

Although one half of the participants struggled with campus climate upon entering higher education, they remained resilient without a mature individual to guide them in their programs. The researcher found that the participants may have fared better with a mature individual on campus to support them, yet they nevertheless applied personal resistance skills to succeed academically (Kumpfer, 1999). The participants credited peers for supporting them during challenging times, indicating an interpersonal connection that helped them navigate the system. Yosso (2005) discussed navigational capital as a set of inner resources and cultural strategies applied to thrive in environments perceived as hostile. Interpersonal connections with peers
could therefore be interpreted as functioning as a form of navigational capital for these participants.

With reference to graduate education, the participants reflected on their specific programs rather than on the larger campus environment. The data revealed that the participants were apprehensive due to perceptions of minimal faculty support and lack of mentorship. Davis (2007) posited that lack of support may influence the academic progress of some non-White students who aspire to join the professoriate. Moreover, Davis (2007) cited Schuster (1990) and Boyles and Boices’s (1998) research on effective graduate departments, which indicated that professional schools and their faculty play a key role in transmitting academic culture and in modeling professional ethics within academia. Most importantly, Davis (2007) stated that department-sponsored orientations, timely and appropriate feedback, and mentorships have been found to be the best practices for fostering the enculturation of minority graduate students. Indeed, this may be true, but half of the participants in this study did not experience such support.

The data indicated that the participants felt alienated from their academic programs and were unsure how to attain academic endorsement from faculty and advisers. Davis (2007) noted that racism is one barrier that blocks effective mentorship at predominantly White institutions. Furthermore, Scheurich and Young (2002) implied that overt and covert racism accompanies broader forms of discrimination within institution of higher education. LatCrit scholars Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, and Solorzano (2006) refer to this experience as marginality, which they define as a complex and contentious status of racial subordination. Watford et al. (2006) indicated that marginality is manifested in the form of dominant structures, practices, and beliefs used to push
persons of color out of the mainstream and into the margins of society. The participants’
experience of feeling like outsiders in their programs might thus be reflective of marginality
(Watford et al., 2006). Perhaps related to the uneven power dynamics at play, the participants
were unable to fully elaborate or comprehend why they did not have a mentor to support their
academic goals. These participants clearly felt marginalized within their programs.

Still, the data revealed the participants’ survival strategy as amounting to sheer willpower
to complete their programs. Kumpfer (1999) defined resiliency as the ability to focus on a goal,
and Morales and Trotman’s (2011) research illustrated the importance of honest awareness.
Supporting the findings of these researchers, the data indicated that although these participants
faced barriers and challenges as undergraduate and graduate students, they remained resilient by
focusing on goals and maintaining a candid awareness of the challenges they confronted
(Kumpfer, 1999; Morales & Trotman, 2011). They applied self-reliant behaviors to navigate a
system they regarded as challenging terrain. These self-reliant behaviors could also be
considered a form of navigational capital that the participants learned in order to operate within
the higher education setting (Yosso, 2005).

The findings in this theme are not unique, as it is well documented that Hispanic students
experience academic gaps as freshmen in college (Morales & Trotman, 2004). Furthermore, the
literature indicates that mentorship promotes academic capital (Nora et al., 2006). Yet, half of
the participants did not have a mentor. Hence, these findings shed further light on the academic
resilience of Hispanic students who succeeded in spite of not having the support of a mentor.
The researcher found that these students instead drew strength from personal invulnerability.
The participants realistically assessed their deficient areas, reflected on previous success, and
drew strength from their pride. They also found support through interpersonal connections with peers from diverse backgrounds. Kumpfer (1999) stated that persistence permits persons to recover in stressful situations. Thus, the participants in this study had the tenacity to challenge negative campus climates and applied personal internal drive to overcome the stress such negativity engendered. The subsequent theme identified in this study is related to the participants’ experiences with racial injustice.

**Responsive to racial injustice.** The theme of racial injustice presented itself repeatedly in the data collected, though it was not a research question in this study. The data revealed that all participants were cognizant of the presence of racism in higher education. Two forms of racial bigotry emerged. The first type was direct knowledge or experience of negative stereotypes, while the second type was micro-aggressions.

**Cognizant of stereotypes.** The participants reported various types of negative stereotypes, including: Latinos do not require higher education, Latinos as urban gangster types, Latinos as undocumented persons, and Latinos as losers who were simply not interested in self-improvement. The participants expressed a high level of awareness that persons on campus used stereotypes to guide their perceptions and judgments about Hispanics in society. It is important to note that the researcher does not associate stereotype threat with the participants in this study. Brown and Lee (2005) distinguish between stereotype threat and stigma consciousness, indicating that stereotype threat involves a stigmatized person being pushed into performance pressure which causes anxiety; in contrast, stigma consciousness is associated with heightened discriminatory experiences. The findings indicate that these participants experienced stigma
consciousness as heightened attention towards their race on college campuses which was expressed as personal attention to stereotypes.

Related to this study’s findings, the researcher explored Brown and Lee’s (2005) study on stigma consciousness, race, and academic achievement. They analyzed 128 undergraduate students in New England, and compared White, Asian, Black, and Hispanic students. Twenty-three Hispanics participated in total. The study compared participants’ stigma consciousness to their grade point average (GPA). Brown and Lee’s (2005) results indicated that higher stigma consciousness led to lower academic performance. However, the researcher found that Brown and Lee’s (2005) findings did not fully elaborate whether lower performance by Black and Hispanic students resulted from anxiety, the type of institution, or non-identification with the campus climate. Thus, the researcher found that Brown and Lee’s (2005) hypothesis of negative results on the part of Hispanic students may in turn contribute to the problems faced by them in higher education.

Furthermore, the data in this study affirmed that negative racial discrimination was perceived in both undergraduate and graduate programs. Situations such as being blocked together as one minority group and being ignored when faced with direct racial insults contribute to the issue as hand. In the literature review, Gonzalez (2007) discussed historical negative experiences of Hispanics in education, and presented racial discrimination court cases which shed light on the presence of bigotry in the American educational system. Gonzalez (2007) reminded educators that even though the Civil Rights Movement ushered in significant changes to ensure equity in education, not enough has been done, for negative perceptions of Hispanics and academic achievement exist. Martinez (2012) conducted research examining Hispanic
undergraduate students’ perceptions of negative stereotypes in the U.S. southwest, and found that the participants remained academically resilient in order to avoid being typecast. The findings from the current study are congruent with Martinez’s (2012) research. This study’s findings indicate that Hispanic college students are academically motivated to combat negative stereotypes about them even though racial discrimination in higher education is a challenging burden. Castellanos and Orozco’s (2005) research on racial discrimination on college campuses revealing that students of color experience racial tension also supports the findings of this study. The participants in this study recognized a heightened attention towards their race in the higher education setting, yet that awareness did not interfere with their academic achievement.

**Sensitive to micro-aggressions.** In addition to negative stereotypes, the data reflected participant perceptions of micro-aggressions. Micro-aggressions are yet another form of racism. Sue et al. (2007) defined micro-aggressions as subtle forms of racism which include verbal and non-verbal insults directed toward people of color. Micro-aggressions are delivered in the form of snubs, dismissive looks, gestures, and tones. Research on negative interpersonal experiences such as perceptions of micro-aggressions on college campuses is supported by Gloria et al. (2005), who suggested that, for Hispanic students, the college environment is a microcosm of American society.

The findings in this study corroborate Ramirez’s (2014) research on discrimination against Latina/o students in graduate programs, and the work of Sue et al. (2007) on sociocultural marginalization in institutional settings. Ramirez (2014) documented micro-aggressions faced by Hispanic post-graduate students and noted that Latina doctoral students experience discrimination, marginalization, and low expectations from professors both within
and outside of the classroom. The participants in this study cited perceptions of feeling like “just another Latino who made it out.” Another participant conveyed a feeling of societal domination when watching a professor slowly peel an orange with a large knife. Furthermore, Sue et al. (2007) asserted that micro-insults are part of racial subordination and occur in the form of insensitivity toward marginalized persons. One participant expressed feeling unsure when entering a college classroom, “You just never know what their [faculty] intentions are…”

The researcher also found that Hispanic cultural values are in conflict with the predominantly-White institution of academia. Ramirez’s (2014) research supports this finding and posits that Hispanic persons place a premium on cooperation, humility, and emotional expressiveness, whereas the culture of White academia supports individualism, personal competition, and scientific thinking. Thus, the data was consistent with literature on Hispanic graduate and post-graduate experiences regarding the sociocultural differences between the participants and the dominant culture. Moreover, this study’s findings support the extant literature indicating that cross-cultural misgivings have the potential to generate feelings of isolation among minority students (Torres, 2006; Watford et al., 2006; Daniel, 2007; Ramirez, 2014).

Overall, the researcher found that the participants were quite aware of the discrimination experienced by Hispanic students in undergraduate and graduate programs. Yet, these Hispanic students were determined to reflect change in society based on their own achievement. These findings support those of Kumpfer (1999) indicating that resilient persons apply innate intelligence to buffer life stressors. Moreover, the findings corroborate the work of Yosso (2005) asserting that resistance capital provides Hispanic students with determination and perseverance.
**Receptive in constructive environments.** The data reaffirmed that Hispanic college students face monumental barriers and challenges in higher education. However, the participants in this study were able to remain academically resolved. They also reported that positive on-campus relationships kept them strong. This data emerged from the research question: How do Hispanic students remain resilient within their academic environment? One half of the participants experienced encouraging relationships with faculty and mentors (*Encouraged by Advisers and Faculty*), while all participants credited peer groups as motivators of their success (*Motivated by Friends and Peers*). Thus, the researcher found that positive interpersonal relationships promote academic success.

*Encouraged by advisers and faculty.* The finding of this study that one half of the participants were motivated by faculty and mentors is supported by the research of Wasburn-Moses (2007) who explored relationships between minority students and faculty members. The study found that quality social interactions with administrators and faculty increase academic performance among underrepresented students. The data in the current study revealed that positive interactions with professors and advisers served as protective buffers against the academic barriers experienced by participants. One female participant in this study referred to her department’s chairperson multiple times and credited this person for her academic success. Moreover, Nora and Crisp (2009), and Lopez-Mulnix (2006) indicated that campuses which are sensitive to the needs of diverse students often regulate their success and failure. The findings in this study further inform their research (Nora & Crisp, 2009; Lopez-Mulnix, 2006), linking participants’ academic success to positive and strong interpersonal connections with faculty and mentors.
This study also found that the participants needed to feel that their opinions were welcomed and valued. This finding aligns with Raphael et al.’s (2003) research on Hispanic student cultural values and the academy, which indicated that those students who perceive college administrators and faculty as sensitive and feel that they value their cultural needs experience fewer feelings of isolation within specific programs and on the general campus. The data indicated that comments like, “I had really kind mentors who took the time to say we see potential in you” are conducive to academic success. The researcher acknowledges that the participants’ interpersonal skills may have functioned as a prerequisite to attracting social capital, which they interpreted as communication with faculty and mentors.

Motivated by friends and peers. Besides the affirmation of positive campus relationships with faculty and mentors, the findings reveal that participants were motivated by their interpersonal relationships with peers. The data indicated the participants felt supported by their peer groups and these relationships were strong. “My group was pretty international ... It just melded together.” In the Hispanic culture, behavior focused on relationships is known as *familismo*. This concept is defined as loyalty toward family and the extended community and is a core value of the Hispanic culture (Ramirez, 2014). Moreover, this core value has received attention with reference to health studies and psychological adjustment (Steidel & Contreras, 2003; Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). Yet, research on *familismo* in terms of peer influence and Hispanic success in higher education is only mentioned sporadically in the literature and thus presents a limited research topic. This study’s indication that participants’ interpersonal relationships with peers conjoined with the cultural construct of *familismo* to determine their academic achievement represents a new and significant finding and an area for further
exploration. In essence, this data suggests that measuring the relationship between Hispanic peer influence, collectivism, and academic success is warranted.

Steidel and Contreras (2003) discuss three types of \textit{familismo}: structural, behavioral, and attitudinal. When analyzing the influence of friends and peers, the researcher discovered that the attitudinal construct aligned with the data. The attitudinal dimension denotes collectivist commitment, which is defined as involvement, strong identification, and attachment to the group. Steidel and Contreras (2003) cited Burgess, Locke, and Thomas (1963) who described attitudinal \textit{familismo} as integration of individual activities for the achievement of the group, overarching objectives, and willingness to rally in support of a group member. The data supports this finding and states, “In a class of 120 medical students there might be four African Americans and maybe five or six Hispanic students. We often come together and speak just like a collective power.” The research in this study found that the participants formed strong peer networks with many of the qualities of attitudinal \textit{familismo} that served as valuable forms of social capital and provided support that in turn facilitated participants’ accomplishment of goals.

The work of Kumpfer (1999) further supports these findings, which cites that individuals’ identification with prosocial persons who engage in positive actions aids in transforming a high-risk situation into a protective environment. Moreover, Yosso (2005) demonstrated that peer and social contacts, like those developed by the participants in this study, provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate societal institutions. The researcher found that, for the participants, these supportive peer networks provided emotional reassurance that they were not alone on their journey to obtain a higher education.
In this study, the peer networks formed by participants included Hispanic, African American, gay, and international students. There was no indication of collectivist collaboration with White students other than the mention of one White gay male. It is important to note that the researcher found no negative discourse regarding White students in general. Yet, the participants experienced a sensation of wellbeing working with Hispanic and minority students as opposed to White peers.

**Resolved through family values.** Steidel and Contreras (2003) cited that the Hispanic behavioral dimension of *familismo* is strongly associated with emotional feelings and attitudes about the family. This study’s findings revealed two types of Hispanic family values that correlated to academic success in graduate and post-graduate education. The results emerged from the research question: How do Hispanic students perceive their sociocultural, environmental, and interpersonal experiences as contributors to their academic success? The participants received strength either through family hardship or family support, as discussed below.

**Resistant from family adversity.** One group of participants discussed their experiences with family hardship and credited their parents’ challenges as a major factor in their own academic resilience. Family adversity that led to tenacity was reflected in the findings. This finding confirms the literature and research by Ceja (2004) which revealed that underprivileged Hispanic families provide unconventional methods of emotional support and encouragement to help their children succeed in life. The researcher found that most participants were able to remain academically resolved through these messages and memories. Kumpfer (1999) indicated that an important psychological characteristic of resilient persons who live in high-risk
environments such as poverty is the ability to dream of a better tomorrow. The participants in
the current study worked hard to improve their future through higher education in order to
provide better lives for themselves and their families. Moreover, Kumpfer (1999) cited human
survival research conducted by Frankel (1959) and Segal (1986) demonstrating that resilient
persons acquire a purpose in life. This life perception helps at-risk individuals believe that it is
possible to complete a predetermined mission such as higher education. The researcher
interpreted that the participants in the current study possess a similar life perception, inculcated
in them through their family’s adversity, to persevere in higher education.

Yosso (2005) identified aspirational capital as one’s ability to maintain hopes and dreams
for the future as important to Hispanic student motivation and success. The participants stated
that hardship and the ability to aspire were paramount. They also spoke about life lessons
learned from their parent’s adversity, “My parents have always instilled in me a sense of self-
motivation and pride in that no one is going to pull you up unless you pull yourself up.” These
messages helped strengthen the participants when faced with challenges in their programs.

**Strengthened by family support.** In addition to the revelation of family hardship, the
researcher found that all participants in this study experienced supportive family values that
spurred them toward success in higher education. Torres (2006) posited that in the Latina/o
culture, the importance of family and the desire to please them is central. Data from Torres’s
(2006) study revealed that Latina/o parents, despite a lack of higher education, maintained high
aspirations toward their children’s academic achievement. Similarly, the participants in this
current study revealed motivation and a desire to please a supportive network of family
members, including parents with ambitious goals for their advanced education, thus corroborating Torres’s (2006) research.

The current data also confirms research by Ceja (2004) who examined the role that Hispanic parents play in their children’s development toward higher education. The current findings are in line with Ceja’s (2004) results; the majority of Latino parents in both studies had no previous higher education experience, yet they found unique ways to support and influence their children to succeed academically. Furthermore, Yosso (2005) referred to familial capital as a kinship model that includes support from aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. This study’s participants evidenced such familial capital, as many cited the support of extended family members, including aunts, cousins, and grandparents, as central to their success. In Yosso’s model, lessons of caring and coping inform one’s emotional, moral, educational, and occupational consciousness. The researcher of this study interpreted that these participants likely possessed a similar type of consciousness built upon familial kinship and support, which functioned as academic motivation.

The findings regarding the motivational factor of conventional and unconventional family support further the study of Hispanic students. This study corroborates the literature indicating that powerful memories of adversity and struggle, as well as a push toward higher education, are highly influential in the participants’ decision to seek a higher education.

**Socially responsible.** The findings for this super-ordinate theme were also in response to the research question: How do Hispanic students make sense of their academic success? The data revealed that the participants made sense of their success with fortified social responsibility, combined with the evolution of a bicultural identity which in turn promoted leadership roles.
The two subordinate themes are discussed in dialogue with the existing literature in the following sections.

**Evolved sociocultural development.** The participants’ reference to sociocultural identity confirms Torres’s (2006) study on Latina/os in doctoral programs, which asserted the complexity of the personal choices that individuals make about their identity, indicating that those choices become further complicated when the person is part of an ethnic or racial minority group. With reference to sociocultural identity development, the participants stated feeling the same level of closeness to both cultures. Furthermore, both Torres (2006) and the researcher challenge Rodriguez’s (1975) finding suggesting that Hispanics must choose between two worlds if they intend to succeed as students in higher education. The researcher disagrees with literature stating that assimilation is required to be academically successful. The findings of this study indicate that most of the participants were able to maintain Latina/o identities and succeed in the academic culture by acquiring a bicultural identity. However, the researcher recognizes that three participants struggled with their identity more than the rest.

It is important to note that the purpose of this study did not encompass investigating student identity. The researcher’s intention was to explore how the participants viewed themselves as highly educated Hispanics in terms of culture. Torres (2006) insisted that research which focuses on the developmental processes of Latino/a graduate students in relation to their ethnic identity should be explored. This study’s findings support Torres’s (2006) assertion, revealing the interrelationship between the participants’ academic achievement and their ethnic identity. This data indicates that, among participants, an emergent bicultural identity served them well. The finding was resultant from comments like, “In the American culture I have a lot
more on my plate, and I can bring it to the table”; and “I think in the Latino community being educated is definitely an advantage too.” Most participants expressed confidence in being able to maneuver between two cultures.

Furthermore, this study’s findings support Vargas-Reighley’s (2004) research indicating that individuals differ in their sociocultural growth and that human development should be understood as a transactional dynamic process between a person and their environment (Kumpfer, 1999)—an understanding that was applied as part of the theoretical framework for this investigation. Vargas-Reighley (2004) compared various cultural models including assimilation, multi-culturalism, and acculturation, and ultimately insisted that the focus should be on the alternation model when investigating academically resilient immigrants. Although the participants in this study are not immigrants, the alternation model was found appropriate for the data collected. The alternation model assumes that it is possible for an individual to comprehend two cultures and alter one’s behavior to fit the environmental context. Moreover, the individual can select the degree and manner to which they will affiliate with a given culture. Vargas-Reighley noted that it is possible to have a sense of belonging in two cultures without compromising one’s identity.

Moreover, the alternation model posits a bidirectional relationship between an individual’s primary culture and the second culture they are exposed to, with no hierarchical association present. The researcher found that the alternation model best supports this study, given that this study’s participants did not favor one culture over another. The participants were unique in that they applied bicultural competence in the form of cross-cultural behavior to succeed academically. Moreover, the data also indicated that academic success was achieved
through bicultural competence, defined as the maintenance of personal cultural values in connection to enculturation. Vargas-Reighley (2004) defines enculturation as the process of functioning within a given set of values and cultural norms. Thus, the researcher found that academic resilience was achieved through the participants’ understanding of their strengths and an ability to successfully maintain equilibrium between two distinct cultures. Given the relative dearth of research on this issue, further investigation is needed to examine the developmental process of a bicultural identity in connection to Hispanic students’ academic resilience in higher education.

**Insightful community leaders.** Besides revealing an enhanced bicultural identity among participants, the data also identified personal development that evolved into leadership roles. This study’s findings indicate that the participants became leaders within their educational and social environment. The participants’ sense of empowerment to become leaders required a high level of resilience and socially responsible behavior (Kumpfer, 1999). Dungan and Komives (2010) introduced value definitions in their social change model that highlight student leadership development. However, this model was not designed specifically for Hispanic students. The findings in this study indicate that examining the relationship between Latina/o academic resilience and leadership roles is a new research topic. Nevertheless, factors in Dungan and Komives’s social change leadership research were analyzed in comparison with this study’s findings.

The constructs from Dungan and Komives’s (2010) social change model include: consciousness of self, congruence, and commitment as factors in a values-based process. Related to consciousness of self, the literature affirms that a positive awareness of beliefs,
values, attitudes, and emotions motivate one to take action (Kumpfer, 1999). The findings of this study indicate that the participants had a desire to volunteer within their local community and stressed the importance of service. The data reveal positive and proud accomplishments. These findings reflect congruence. Congruence is referred to as thinking, feeling, and behaving with consistency toward others (Kumpfer, 1999). The data reveal that the participants were committed to their civic engagement.

Dungan and Komives’s (2010) study also addresses the roles of faculty and mentors in developing student leadership. Their data indicates that socially responsible leadership develops through encouragement of meaningful relationships between students and faculty. While Dungan and Komives’s findings are supported by literature on student leadership and faculty involvement, this study’s findings do not support that literature. The data reveal that faculty were not recognized as being influential in the participants’ desire to provide leadership to the Hispanic community. The researcher believes that further exploration is warranted to analyze different sociocultural factors that motivate Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students to leadership in the Latina/o community. The unique nature of this finding in comparison to extant literature indicates it as an area open for future investigation.

**Enlightened culturally and intellectually.** The findings of this study indicated that the participants maintained academic resilience and displayed a sense of humility and personal pride in their achievement. The results also emerged from the research question: How do Hispanic students make sense of their academic achievement? Moreover, the data revealed a common purpose among participants of paying it forward. These two subordinate themes are discussed in the following sections.
**Valor and pride in accomplishment.** The findings indicated that the participants were proud of their academic accomplishments, particularly in light of the numerous barriers and stressors they faced at the beginning of their journeys. Morales and Trotman (2011) postulated that academic resilience should incorporate the two dispositional protective factors of persistence and internal locus of control. Moreover, their research suggested that students will continuously expend effort (persistence) only if they believe their efforts will be rewarded (internal locus of control). The findings of this study corroborate Morales and Trotman’s (2011) research, indicating that the participants did not give up and were able to effectively move through their programs and higher educational pursuits—thus demonstrating persistence and internal locus of control. The data reveal that the participants were able to reflect on their challenges and aspire toward success.

Moreover, the data reveal that participants acquired academic self-esteem over a period of time. This finding once again corroborates Morales and Trotman’s (2011) research, which indicated that the development of academic self-esteem requires reflection on and identification of previous experiences when not giving up and taking action produced desirable results. Yosso (2005) defines aspirational capital as an individual’s ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future in the face of real and perceived barriers. The researcher interprets that this study’s participants thus employed aspirational capital by proudly and persistently pursuing higher education and focusing on a better tomorrow. Furthermore, the researcher noted a unique finding, which revealed that Hispanic students exhibited character strengths such as humility and valor in regards to their academic achievement. To provide additional clarification on the
emotions of humility and pride in achievement identified in this study’s participants, the researcher aligned the data to Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) criteria for strength of character. Peterson and Seligman identified six categories of a person’s core virtues; the researcher found two distinct character strengths that were applicable to the current data. In particular, the researcher found that high levels of courage and temperance were in alignment with participants’ personal pride in achievement. Related to the courage construct, the data in this study indicated that participants’ emotional strength was exercised as a will to accomplish goals in the face of adversity. This construct includes valor as the ability to remain strong when confronting challenges. Related to the temperance construct, the researcher discovered that the participants in this study reflected humility and modesty by allowing their personal accomplishments to speak for themselves. The participants spoke humbly of their success, and they were conscientious about issues faced by the Hispanic population. Considering these findings, the researcher believes that more research on the personal development of Hispanic students in relation to strength in character and academic success is warranted.

**Aspiration to pay it forward.** The researcher found that, in addition to enhanced strength in character, the data reveal participants’ desire to pay it forward. This also represents a unique finding. The participants expressed a sense of duty to help other Hispanic students with similar socioeconomic backgrounds attain academic success. Kumpfer (1999) posited that one product of higher intellectual thought is higher moral reasoning toward others. This moral reasoning is acquired through a higher state of resiliency and strength. This study’s findings support Kumpfer’s (1999) research in its identification of a strong level of moral reasoning among the participants.
Moreover, to ground the findings discovered in this study, the researcher reviewed the work of Peterson and Seligman (2004) who produced the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS). This assessment compared an individual’s values to their strengths; the inventory was administered to 250 adults in the general population. It is important to note that the VIA-IS is not ethnic group specific. Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) research indicated that individuals who recover from serious physical or psychological difficulties scored higher on gratitude and hope. This study’s findings are in alignment with Peterson and Seligman’s results derived from the VIA-IS, given that the participants’ ability to overcome academic adversity seemed to correlate with heightened levels of gratitude and a desire to pay it forward.

Of relevance to this finding is Yosso’s application (2005) of Franklin’s (2002) analysis of cultural capital and African American education. In Franklin’s scholarship, cultural capital is defined as group consciousness and collective identity, and it serves as a resource aimed at the advancement of an entire group. Moreover, Franklin’s (2002) scholarship identifies Black cultural capital as a requirement for survival and success in a world perceived as segregated. Yosso (2005) applied Franklin’s discourse to bring attention to the advancement of Hispanics as a group and not as individuals. The researcher found that the participants in this study similarly relied on cultural capital as a resource to apply toward the advancement of the larger Hispanic community.

The participants in this study were not purely focused on themselves. They revealed a high level of strength in character and were ready to assume social responsibility as mentors in order to ensure that other Hispanics would not encounter as many difficulties as they did.
Though some research examines cultural responsibility among other ethnic groups (Yosso, 2005), the existing literature does not address Hispanic graduate and post-graduate academic success in connection with culture and community responsibility. As such, this study’s data represents a unique finding and indicates an area for future research on Hispanic academic success, cultural capital, and social responsibility.

Conclusion

This study was guided by three primary research questions: (1) How do Hispanic students remain resilient within their academic environment?; (2) How do Hispanic students perceive their sociocultural, environmental, and interpersonal experiences as contributors to their academic success?; and (3) How do Hispanic students make sense of their academic achievement? Through these questions, this study sought to explore the experiences of academically resilient Hispanic students enrolled in a variety of graduate and post-graduate programs across the United States. The researcher applied a qualitative interpretative analysis (IPA) research design which interpreted the participants’ various perceptions of experiences from undergraduate through graduate education.

Congruent with the literature review completed as part of this study, several key findings remained constant in terms of Hispanic family support, student academic deficits, and racial challenges faced in higher education today. The rich data elicited from participants in this study corroborates the literature with reference to educational gaps, perceived racism, lack of faculty support, and challenging campus climate. It also substantiates research published by LatCrit scholars on racism in higher education (Ramirez, 2014; Yosso, 2005; Bernal Delgado, 2002; Yosso, Villapando, Bernal, & Solorzano, 2001; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). This study also
revealed that several Hispanic students struggle with their cultural identity in higher education (Torres, 2006). However, the data generated in this study reveal several unique findings that contributed valuable new research to the extant literature.

Presenting new data that expands upon the existing literature, the research demonstrated that Hispanic academic resilience is a value-laden and culturally-sensitive transactional process. The findings demonstrated that the participants applied specific transactional strategies such as dedicated minority peer groups, leadership in Hispanic organizations, bicultural competence, and civic engagement toward culture and community to remain academically resilient. Furthermore, this study established a greater understanding of the diverse cultural factors that contribute to the academic success of Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students. Specifically, data indicate that Hispanic students enter campuses not only with academic gaps, but also with significant cultural insecurities. Most first-generation college students have not experienced relationships with persons within the dominant culture. Moreover, it was found that many Hispanic students enter university settings from humble origins and experience culture shock and imposter syndrome. The significant number of new and unique findings generated by this study has concrete implications for practice and future research, which are discussed below.

Recommendations for Practice

The profile of higher education is changing, yet the annals of the institution have remained constant. This study analyzed risks, protective barriers, vulnerable areas, and strategies that Hispanics in higher education applied to succeed (see Appendix G). Thus, it is paramount for scholar practitioners to pay greater attention to these affected areas as opposed to focusing solely on one size fits all retention programs. The results of this study imply the need for greater
sociocultural awareness on the part of institutions and faculty to support educational outcomes for Hispanic students in undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate education.

The data indicated that faculty and mentors have a large impact on Hispanic students’ perceptions of themselves academically, particularly within campus climates from which they feel alienated. As such, first-year faculty-driven mentorship programs should be developed. Such programs can connect students to campus tutoring centers to help close achievement gaps. These programs should be provided to first-generation college students as part of the freshman experience program. Furthermore, within such programs, the focus should be on academics, cross-cultural expectations, and navigational strategies. Faculty mentors should promote academic capital and model how to use available resources and infrastructure. Collaboration of minority faculty and staff in these mentorship programs is of particular importance, for the participants expressed that they felt more at ease with diverse individuals.

With reference to graduate and post-graduate programs, university officials should require that departments focus on understanding the sociocultural elements of Hispanic students. Support programs should be available to provide Hispanic students with counseling to overcome identity crises and other cross-cultural misgivings. Most importantly, institutions need to design culturally-sensitive programs that encourage Hispanic students to perceive themselves as successful in higher education. Such programs might include seminars or information sessions on how to select a major, and student affairs sponsored workshops to help bridge undergraduate and graduate education.

Furthermore, the data from this study indicate that the participants experienced challenges and barriers related to their race and ethnicity. This finding points to the need for an
immediate shift in practice. Only half of the participants reported a positive campus climate in
their undergraduate and graduate programs. While this study focused on a small sampling of
participants, even within a limited sample, the researcher believes that positive campus climate
outcomes should have reported higher. It is clear that more concrete steps need to be taken to
transform campus climate in order to make the higher education setting less alienating and
hostile to the Hispanic student. No minority student should experience barriers and stressors
with reference to challenging campus climates in our nation’s colleges. Higher education
institutions are advised to implement diversity initiatives within the university’s schools. A
series of informal sessions which host successful minority leaders who address sensitive topics
related to diversity and inclusion is needed in higher education. This series would be open to
faculty, staff, administrators, students, and the community.

It is important to note that diversity and inclusion goes beyond a free-standing
multicultural center that promotes the celebration of Hispanic Heritage month on campus. A
learning environment that embraces diversity and inclusion does not demand acculturation, but
rather invites enculturation. Scholar practitioners need to support their students’ sociocultural
identity in order to avoid placing them on the margin. Thus, the researcher recommends the
integration of courses which promote a diverse society such as Hispanic and minority literature,
and ethnic and cultural studies, into the general education curriculum. Far more can be
accomplished if institutions make diversity and inclusion a desired and measurable learning
outcome.

Finally, much of racial bigotry stems from misunderstandings about a culture based on
negative stereotypes. The data revealed the presence of negative discourse on campus regarding
Hispanic students. Thus, an implication for practice is to cultivate educational awareness of Hispanic students as persons who can succeed in higher education. This requires educators to stop treating Hispanics as if they cannot succeed. The researcher recommends educating administrators on this issue in order to reframe their understanding of the potential of Hispanics and other minorities. This entails hiring more minority staff and faculty to cultivate an environment of inclusion.

The current literature focuses on contrasting academic achievement between middle-class Whites and lower income Hispanic students, and these negative outcomes generate low expectations that contribute to stereotypes. Educators should instead be exposed to studies that reveal the resilience of Hispanic students as self-reliant, motivated individuals who bring valid and diverse perspectives into the classroom. This process of inclusion leads to positive student characteristics (see Appendix H). Thus, educating higher education stakeholders regarding the countless positive attributes that Hispanic students contribute to the classroom will help close negative perceptions and achievement gaps.

Finally, this study also indicated the commitment of Hispanic students to leadership roles aimed at advancing their community. Hispanic students’ strong conviction to pay it forward should be supported by institutions of higher education. Their leadership might prove especially useful in schools’ retention and recruitment efforts as a method to develop academic capital in at-risk Hispanic students. This leadership tendency might best lend itself to peer mentorship opportunities on-campus, as well as to outreach efforts involving successful upperclassmen speaking at local schools in order to demonstrate academic resilience among the Hispanic student population to younger generations. Moreover, schools might consider implementing
initiatives that provide diverse students—Hispanic students among them—with opportunities to collaborate on community projects that support social equity and racial justice.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The majority of extant studies on Hispanic students focus on racism, achievement gaps, and retention. However, the researcher recommends future studies that analyze the academic resilience of Hispanic students from an alternative vantage point.

The researcher endorses additional investigation to comprehend Hispanic student academic resilience in terms of bicultural competence. While bicultural competence has been measured among broader immigrant populations as an adaptive process to cope with challenging situations in foreign environments, the researcher recommends investigating it within a higher education setting. Future studies might focus on the levels of bicultural competence exhibited by Hispanic undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate students in relation to their personal and academic success. An IPA study might examine Hispanic student bicultural competence as a transactional process with the potential to lead toward academic success.

The researcher also recommends that future research investigate the role that Hispanic peers play as potentially protective barriers in higher education. Given the current study’s findings that half of the participants reported apprehensiveness in campus climates yet remained resilient due to peer support, further studies are warranted to generate additional data on this issue. Thus, another IPA qualitative study would explore the power of peer groups on Hispanic student success in higher education. As noted in this study, Hispanic culture is collectivist and heavily reliant on group membership; this study would measure how positive student behavior
effects group membership. The research would also examine the relationship between academic
and social integration from a sociocultural perspective.

The researcher’s final recommendation is to examine Hispanic student character strength
as it relates to socially responsible community leadership. Given this study’s unique finding
regarding participants’ desire to pay it forward, more investigation is needed into this trend.
Researchers might focus on the motivating factors behind Hispanic students’ desire and ability to
engage in community leadership based on their academic success. This type of study would also
be qualitative but would explore the participants from an ethnographic viewpoint. The
researchers would use a case study approach to follow a group of leaders and also analyze the
effects of community involvement.
References


*Educational Studies, 45*, 534–555.


Appendix A: Kumpfer Resilience Model

As shown in Figure 2, outcome research on resilience was organized into six predictor areas of the resiliency framework: a) stressors/challenges, b) environmental context, c) person environment interactional processes, d) internal self characteristics or resiliency factors, e) resiliency processes, and f) the personal outcome (Kumpfer, 1999).

The academic resilience cycle in Figure 3 is a theoretical framework that captures major sequential steps in the process of exceptional academic achievement of at-risk students. It focuses on process, rather than identifying isolated variables (Morales & Trotman, 2011).
Appendix C: Research Questions

This study was designed to investigate the experiences of academically resilient Hispanic graduate and post-graduate students (Hispanic students). To examine this problem, the following research questions and sub-questions were addressed:

1. How do Hispanic students remain resilient within their academic environment?
   1.a. How do Hispanic students perceive their previous educational experiences?
   1.b. How do Hispanic students perceive their academic environment?
   1.c. How do Hispanic students perceive campus relationships with peers, administrators, and faculty?

2. How do Hispanic students perceive their sociocultural, environmental, and interpersonal experiences as contributors to their academic success?
   2.a. How do Hispanic students perceive personal and family relationships?
   2.b. How do Hispanic students perceive community relationships?

3. How do Hispanic students make sense of their academic achievement?
   3.a. How do Hispanic students make sense of academic success from a sociocultural perspective?
   3.b. How do Hispanic students perceive cultural values in relation to their education?
   3.c. Do Hispanic students perceive themselves differently from peers who have not attained their academic success?
Hispanic Student Volunteers Needed for Research Study!

Title: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis on Hispanic Graduate and Post-graduate Students

The purpose of this qualitative research investigation is to explore academic resilience of Hispanic university students. Participants must identify as being of Hispanic/Latino/a origin and currently be active or just completed a graduate or post-graduate program.

The criterion requires that students have completed 75% of their program or have recently graduated within one calendar year. Hispanic student participants must be permanent U.S. residents or American citizens. All majors and both male and female respondents are needed.

The researcher will conduct two short 10-15 sessions and a 1 hour data collection interview. The sessions and data collection will take place face to face or via Skype. “All data collected will be strictly confidential.” To learn more about this volunteer research investigation, please contact Ms. Mary Ann Benites, Doctorate Student Investigator, at: 678-488-6446 – Benites.m@huskey.neu.edu

This research is conducted under the direction of Northeastern University.
College of Professional Studies – Education Department. The Principal Investigator is Dr. Joseph McNabb PhD. J.McNabb@neu.edu
Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigators: Dr. Joseph McNabb PhD Principal Investigator; Mary Ann Benites Doctoral Student Researcher
Title of Project: An Interpretative Phemenological Analysis on Hispanic Graduate and Post-graduate Students

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
We are asking you to participate in this study because you are considered a successful Hispanic graduate or post-graduate student who has completed 75% of your course work or have recently graduated within one year.

Why is this research study being done? 
The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore academic resiliency of Hispanic students. The researcher would like to investigate contributors to academic success in order to develop a model that can be analyzed to support academic retention of Hispanic students in higher education.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to interview with the researcher. The researcher is interested in learning about your academic, socio-cultural and personal experiences that have led to your academic success.

You are required to meet with the researcher either in person or via Skype. The first session is simply a question and answer session to inform you about the project. The second session is a 1 hour recorded interview with the researcher. This data collection session can be either in person or via Skype. Once the interview has been transcribed, you will be allowed to read it and provide feedback for discussion. This will required a brief 15 minute debriefing with the researcher to review the data collected.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
The researcher intends to apply the following study procedures. Here is a description of the interview schedule. No observations will be conducted.

Informal initial interview: 15 minute “getting to know you”
- Discuss the study and respond to questions
- Request signing of consent form
- Request to view student validity prior to data collection
- No data collection questions asked
- Schedule the formal interview

Data collection interview: “60 minute semi-structured interview”
- Check to see if consent form was signed appropriately
- Conduct the formal interview either in person or via Skype

Member checking session: 15 minute validity/debriefing session
- Each participant will receive a copy of their transcript via email
- The participant will review provide feedback on the transcript

Source of data collection:
- Audiotape and researcher notes
- Personal interviews

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**
There will be no personal or physical risk to you. All the data collected will be strictly confidential. You will be assigned a pseudo name, and your identity, location, and school(s) discussed with be kept confidential. Should you mention persons in your life, they will also be assigned a pseudo name. All of the data collected will be managed and stored safely; the data collected will be destroyed after a period of three years. You will be allowed to read the transcript interview once it has been transcribed and coded to check it for validity. You are allowed to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. "However, the information learned from this study may help educators comprehend academic resiliency of Hispanic students in higher education.

**Who will see the information about me?**
Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.

The data collected in the interview notes, audiotapes, and transcript will be provided a pseudo name and an identification number. Your real name will not be used at all in this study. The data
will be stored securely on two external drives and locked in a file cabinet. No data will be kept on a desktop or laptop. No unauthorized persons will be allowed to read the data collected or materials affiliated with it. (We would only permit people who are authorized such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board) to see this information if required.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question during the interview. Once you begin the study, you may quit at any time.
Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact:
Mary Ann Benites Student Investigator– Phone 678-488-6446, Benites.m@huskey.neu.edu
Dr. McNabb PhD Principal Investigator– Phone 857-205-9598, j.mcnabb@neu.edu

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?
This is voluntary participation

Will it cost me anything to participate?
No

Is there anything else I need to know?
You must be at least 18 years old to participate; be 75% complete with your program or have recently graduated in the last year. This study is focused on Hispanic students who are permanent residents or American citizens.

I agree to take part in this research.

____________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part  Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent  Date
Depending upon the nature of your research, you may also be required to provide information about one or more of the following if it is applicable:

1. A statement that the particular treatment or procedure may involve risks to the subject (or to the embryo or fetus, if the subject is or may become pregnant) which are currently unforeseeable.

2. Anticipated circumstances under which the subject’s participation may be terminated by the investigator without regard to the subject’s consent.

3. Any additional costs to the subject that may result from participation in the research.

4. The consequences of a subject’s decision to withdraw from the research and procedures for orderly termination of participation by the subject.

5. A statement that significant new finding(s) developed during the course of the research which may be related to the subject’s willingness to continue participation will be provided to the subject.

6. The approximate number of subjects involved in the study.
### Appendix F: Participant Themes

#### Table 4: Participant Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Apprehensive</th>
<th>Cognizant</th>
<th>Sensitive</th>
<th>Encouraged</th>
<th>Motivated</th>
<th>Resistant</th>
<th>Strengthened</th>
<th>Evolved</th>
<th>Insightful</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Aspired</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandra</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayley</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imelda</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabelle</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javier</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miko</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selena</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G: Data Findings

Within the progression shown in Figure 4, the student acquires social capital through advisers, faculty, and peer groups. The researcher found social capital does not require assimilation. It requires enculturation the ability to work in another environment without devaluing one's own culture. Bi-cultural characteristics led to academic resiliency. Linguistic capital and Navigational capital are considered personal skills and are not part of the resilience process.
Appendix H: Participant Characteristics

The chart in Figure 5 reflects the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ internal and interpersonal resilience characteristics based on their academic experiences.