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Mapping the Development of College Going Identities Among Aspirantes
Puertorriqueñas

A Dissertation Presented

by

YEDALIS RUÍZ

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
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DEDICATION

Para mi madre, Carmen Ruíz, mi padre, Rubén Ruíz, my partner, Cristina Huebner Torres and the Huebner family—Raymond, Ileana and Tom. Y para Will K. Wilkins, quien me abrió sus brazos y fue mi mentor desde los 13 años.

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ABSTRACT

MAPPING THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLLEGE GOING IDENTITIES AMONG ASPIRANTES PUERTORRIQUEÑAS

MAY 2019

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Despite constituting the largest group of minoritized students, Latinx students continue to have the lowest educational attainment compared to all other groups in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). While Latinx enrollment in college has increased, the majority of Latinx high school graduates enroll in community college as opposed to 4-year Bachelor's degree granting higher education institutions, and only a small percentage of these students will ever transfer into a 4-year college or university (Excelencia in Education, 2015; Kurlaender, 2006; Perez & Ceja, 2015). Increasing participation in higher education among Latinxs requires a better understanding of college choice process for this group.

To date, college choice models have largely addressed the experiences and trajectories of White middle-class students (Chapman, 1981; 1984; Hanson & Litten, 1982; So, 1987; St. John, 1990), with very little if any attention given to Latinx students. The purpose of this study was to fill this gap in the literature. Using ethnographic methods and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) as an analytic framework, this Study had two interrelated objectives. The first was to unpack the experiences and knowledge base of a group of Puertorriqueña high school students approaching

graduation, a critical juncture in the college choice process. The second was to map the development of their college going identities to better understand the factors that influenced their academic trajectories, higher education aspirations, and their college choice process. The findings conveyed participant narratives of aspiration, resistance and transformation related to the process of developing the concept and identity of college going. These findings emerged in two overarching themes: a) factors that contributed to the development of a concept of college-going; and b) opportunity gaps.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

People say that Puerto Ricans are lazy and don't do well in school, but some have their PhDs and some are doctors. I hate hearing that us Puerto Ricans don't do well. I am Puerto Rican and I'm doing well in school. I want to be a nurse and I am going to try my best to get there. People can say I can't or I won't make it but I feel and know I'll make it...Most of my teachers in middle school told me that [I won't make it] and I ended up passing and coming to high school. I have had the honor roll for two years and I really do want to go to college to prove everyone wrong (Yadira, Essay).

Background

Yadira's narrative is all too familiar to Latina students across the country. It resonates with my personal narrative, and those of many of my Puerto Rican family members, friends, and associates, illustrating the challenge that many Latinas face as they move through high school and into or away from higher education. Although I aspired to attend college immediately after high school graduation, I lacked the knowledge necessary to navigate that process. Moreover, years of being bombarded with negative stereotypes about Latinas and what roles were deemed "acceptable" for females from my community also shaped my academic trajectory in ways that did not lead, at least immediately, to college. Even when Latina high school students have aspirations to earn a bachelor's degree and are positioned to enter post-secondary education, they experience barriers that can affect their participation in higher education. The "aspirations unfulfilled" narrative, while common, lacks, in my opinion, a more nuanced analysis of Latinas' experiences

while engaged in the college choice process. Before I proceed in this chapter, I would like to establish that I will use the term “Latinx” to refer to the collective group of people of Latino descent in the United States. I will use the terms “Puertorriqueñx” specifically when referring to groups of Puerto Rican descent. Additionally, I will use the term minoritized (Irizarry, 2011) as opposed to the more widely use term “minority” to bring awareness to how ethnically, racially and linguistically diverse communities are impacted by the poor treatment espoused upon them in the United States. The use of this term is a deliberate reaction against ascribed, passive labels commonly used to characterize People of Color (POC), including Latinxs, and Spanish speakers, among others, in the United States. Labels such as “language minorities, low income communities,” urban students and communities, and at-risk youth are terms often used in the research literature to refer to and describe individuals of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These terms are used frequently and often without a critical examination of their implications. Raible & Irizarry (2007) caution how the use of these dominant labels may in fact “marginalize, silence, and alienate” communities. Historically in the United States, ethnically, racially and linguistically minoritized student communities have had to navigate arduous educational trajectories. Moreover, minority is often used to refer to a number or percentage of the population. Latinxs are often not the minority in the communities in which they live or the schools they attend. They do, however, experience marginalization because of their “minority” status. Hence, the term minoritized captures the positioning of this community more effectively, and I will use the term in my work to resist and speak back to this mistreatment.

For this study, I borrowed the term “*Aspirante*” (aspirant) from Dr. Antonia Pantoja, a leading figure in the Puerto Rican struggle for educational equity (Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 2007). Born and educated in Puerto Rico, Pantoja dedicated herself and her career to addressing the importance of education as a means for advancement among linguistically diverse communities, and specifically among the Puerto Rican community living in the U.S. mainland. In 1944, at the age of 22, she moved to New York with this goal to improve the educational opportunities of Puerto Rican communities. She earned her bachelor’s degree in 1952 from Hunter College City University of New York and a master’s degree in 1954 from Columbia University. Having experienced childhood poverty, Pantoja believed education was the solution to ending the cycle of poverty and advocated for individuals and families to become educated within the U.S. while maintaining their knowledge and strengths based in Puerto Rican culture. In this way, Pantoja was a pioneer in working toward a culturally relevant model of educational equity for Puerto Ricans in the U.S. In 1961, Pantoja founded ASPIRA, an organization dedicated to investing in Latinx youth. This organization, now a legacy among Puerto Rican and Latinx communities, calls its participants “*Aspirantes*” and the term is described as follows,

“...an *aspirante* is someone who is not limited by the education he or she receives, but instead uses that knowledge he or she is given and seeks ways to gain more...an *aspirante* is someone who appreciates their culture and knows that where they come from is just as important as where they are going.”

As such, the notion of Aspirante serves as a powerful label for the participants in this study, a group of young people immersed in a study of their culture and with aspirations for attending an institution of higher education.

This study was embedded in a larger ethnographic study of the educational experiences and outcomes for Puerto Rican youth who all self-identified as college aspirants. The larger study consisted of a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) collaborative (Principle Investigator: Dr. Jason Irizarry) that stemmed from a course on Puerto Rican History and Education offered at a high school (Knight High School) in Esperanza City with a high concentration of Puerto Rican students.

Statement of the Problem & Significance

Presently, Latinxs constitute 17% (approximately 54 million) of the total U.S. population (Excelencia in Education, 2015; NCS Digest of Education Statistics, 2013; Pew Hispanic Center, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Correspondingly, the Latinx student population in the U.S. has doubled since and now nearly 25% of all K-12 students in the U.S. are Latinx (NCS, Digest of Education Statistics, 2013; Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). For the first time, college enrollment rates among Latinx high school graduates have surpassed other groups' college enrollment rates. Latinx college enrollment increased from 54% in 2004 to 70% in the class of 2012 while among Whites the college enrollment rate was 63% (NCS, Digest of Education Statistics, 2013; Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). While this demonstrates improvement, Latinxs continue to have lower educational attainment compared to all other groups in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; 2016). And, while enrollment rates are increasing, Latinx students are more likely than any other group to enroll in community college as opposed to 4-year, Bachelor's

degree granting higher education institutions (Excelencia in Education, 2015; NCS, Digest of Education Statistics, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Among those Latinxs who do enroll in community college, very few transfer to 4-year institutions or are able to earn an Associate's degree (Kurlaender, 2006; Perez & Ceja, 2015; Solomon, Solomon, & Schiff, 2002).

However, of those Latinx students who are attending college, a disproportionate number are enrolled in two-year public post-secondary institutions, primarily community colleges, and over half of those enrolled are in need of remediation courses (NCS, Digest of Education Statistics, 2013; The Century Foundation Press, 2013). In addition, scholars of higher education have found that many 2-year institutions hinder student academic achievement and transferability to 4-year institutions (Clark, 1980; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn & Terenzini 1998; Rosenbaum et al., 2006) as well as often employ a process of cooling out (Clark, 1980) and warming up (Rosenbaum et al., 2006) in which students can remain stuck with little opportunity for advancement. Furthermore, it has been well established that those with a 4-year degree have greater earning potential and career opportunities than those graduating 2-year degree programs (Dougherty & Keinzl, 2006). Despite their low educational attainment rates, 89% of Latinxs aged 18-25 report a college education is needed to be successful, but only 48% report aspirations to obtain a four-year college degree and far fewer (13%) actually attain a 4-year degree (Pew Research Center, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2011). Primary reasons for not pursuing a 4-year degree or for terminating a bachelor's are related to needing to take care of family (Pew Research Center, 2009).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Education and Training Outlook for Occupations (2012-2022) report, projections indicate there will be three times as many new jobs requiring a Bachelor's degree (3,143) than those requiring an Associate's degree (1,337). Where there are the greatest increases in rates of college going among Latinxs—namely in 2-year Associates degree programs—there are projected to be fewer jobs for those with an Associate's degree. In addition, occupations requiring higher education have higher wages (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Higher educational attainment and related higher wages are associated with higher socioeconomic status which is a common indicator of many important measures of wellbeing including health status, quality of life and life expectancy (CDC, 2015). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Health Disparities & Inequities Report, Latinxs have higher rates of obesity, diabetes, HIV, and teenage birth rates and lower health insurance rates compared to non-Hispanic whites (CDC, 2015). These factors are associated with lower rates of educational attainment levels and unemployment among Latinxs compared with white, non-Hispanics (CDC, 2015).

Among the rapidly growing Latinx population in the U.S. (approximately 54 million), Puerto Ricans are the second largest group (9.4%), second only to Mexicans (64%) (CDC, 2015). The Pew Research Center's demographic report of Puerto Ricans (2011) is based on the Census Bureau's 2009 Puerto Rican Community Survey (PRCS) and American Community Survey (ACS) and provides an important overview of Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. compared to other Latinxs/Hispanics in the U.S. and Puerto Ricans living on the Island of Puerto Rico. As of the 2010 U.S. Census, the number of Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. (4.6 million) has surpassed the number living on the

island (3.6 million). The median age of Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. is 28. Fewer Puerto Ricans in the U.S. have a bachelor's degree (16%) than those living in Puerto Rico (22%). As of 2011, Puerto Ricans on the U.S. mainland have a median annual household income of \$36,000, less than that of all Hispanics (\$39,000) and of all households in the U.S. (\$50,000) (Pew Research Center, 2013). In 2013 Puerto Rican median household income on the Island was \$19,183 (U.S. Census, 2014). Nearly a quarter of all Puerto Ricans in the U.S. (24%) live in poverty—this is more than all other Latinxs/Hispanics in the U.S. (23%). Nearly twice as many Puerto Ricans living on mainland U.S. are without health insurance (15%) as compared to those living on the Island (8%). Puerto Ricans in the U.S. have lower rates of homeownership (39%) compared to both other Latinxs/Hispanics in the U.S. (49%) and Puerto Ricans living on the Island (72%). Enrollment in community colleges among Latinxs ages 18-24 is highest among Mexicans (46%), followed by Puerto Ricans (31%) (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013).¹

Educational attainment among Latinxs and associated national trends in employment, earning capacity, health status and transgenerational effects among Latinx

¹ On September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico. Since that time, more than 135,000 have relocated from the Island to the States (Echenique, 2018). Puerto Rican people have been enduring a critical time from one of the worst disasters in Puerto Rican history. Hurricane Maria devastated the Island leaving ninety-five percent of the Puerto Rican population without power and significantly limiting access to food and drinkable water. It is important to note, future demographic and educational statistics will likely reflect the influx of Puerto Ricans who relocated due to this natural disaster.

households and families further illustrate the significance of increasing 4-year college attainment among this group. However, if more Puerto Ricans in the states are going to attend 4-year colleges and earn Bachelor's degrees, increasing the knowledge base around the college choice process is necessary. The current state of low educational attainment is highest among Latinxs and, with increased job opportunities for individuals with lower educational status that offer lower-wage positions, there will be decreased access to other resources and opportunities—including health insurance and health care resulting in poorer health outcomes among the Latinx community. Therefore, the college choice process among Latinxs is a significant education concern in the U.S. and one that merits increased attention to the particular trends, beliefs, practices and opportunities for specific Latinx populations, such as Puerto Ricans, the focus of my study.

Increased rates in college-going among Latinxs high school graduates can be attributed, at least in part, to high rates of enrollment in community colleges (NCS, Digest of Education Statistics, 2013; Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). Achieving a bachelor's degree is an important educational milestone in the U.S. for the reasons stated above. Students often enroll in community colleges with an aspiration to eventually earn a bachelor's degree but, despite their aspirations, community college students are less likely to earn an undergraduate degree from a 4-year institution than those who go directly to 4-year institutions (Bensimon & Dowd, 2010; Dougherty, 1992; Kurlaender, 2006). Community colleges in the United States have been acknowledged as democratizing access to higher education, particularly for first generation minoritized groups based on their open-admissions policies. That is, any student who has completed high school is eligible for admission into a community college whereas admission into 4-

year institutions is typically more competitive and requires students to complete particular courses and standardized tests prior to admission. Community colleges have been recognized as pioneers in providing diverse higher education opportunities to minoritized students of underrepresented backgrounds (Medsker 1960; Monroe, 1972; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, Person, 2006). The majority of minoritized students who attend community colleges are graduates of underachieving high schools and are of low socio-economic status (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Nora & Rendon, 1990). Because these institutions tailor their academic programs to the needs of local communities, students of underrepresented backgrounds who would otherwise not be able to pursue a college degree have greater access to enroll in and attend community colleges (Lavin & Hyllegard, 2007). However, the effect of open access policies on transferability and academic outcomes, particularly among minoritized students, has been highly contested (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Karabel, 1972; 1986; Pincus, 1974; 1980).

Supporters of community college open-access policies have high regard for the institutions' ability to provide educational access to underprivileged groups while others hold the institutions responsible for deviating students away from college aspirations and outcomes associated with a 4-year college opportunity (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Pincus, 1974). Although the community college has been hailed as a great accomplishment in the field of higher education due to its open access policies and high rates of ethnic minority attendance, community colleges are also criticized for their participation in a process called management of ambition (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 225). According to Clark (1980), community colleges were built to employ a series of practices aimed at

redirecting original aspirations of students with limited academic ability to more achievable goals (not a transfer option). Based on results from a study at a junior college, Clark (1960) coined the “cooling out” function to refer to policies and practices he observed in his research used within counseling services, remediation programming, and testing practices, that redirected students with low academic abilities who had aspirations to transfer to 4-year colleges to remain in 2-year college and not pursue a transfer. In response to much criticism, Clark (1980) clarified later that “cooling out” does not mean to “get rid of” the student, nor does it characterize community colleges as “villains” (p. 25).

However, much later, Rosenbaum et al. (2006; 2008) contested Clark’s (1980) “cooling out” notion. He and his colleagues conducted a mixed-methods study and investigated the academic progress of students enrolled in occupational programs at community colleges. They demonstrated that students at community colleges were in fact experiencing a “warm up” (p.41) in their academic experience. They proposed that community colleges are likely to play a role in increasing students’ academic aspirations rather than lowering of aspirations, or cooling out. They found that the faculty played a significant role in the “warming-up” of students’ aspirations by encouraging the students to plan for transfer options and opportunities.

Since the 1990s, there has been steady growth in Black and Latinx enrollment in community colleges reflecting an increase from 21% to 33% of the community college population (The Century Foundation Press, 2013). This shift is important when compared to the decrease in White student enrollment in community colleges. Since the mid-1990s, White student enrollment dropped from 73% to 58% (The Century Foundation Press,

2013). However, demographic changes at 4-year institutions have remained fairly constant (The Century Foundation Press, 2013). Only a slight decrease is seen among White student enrollment (from 78% to 75%), reflective of the declining proportion of Whites nationally, and minoritized student enrollment has increased only marginally from 11% to 12%, not keeping pace with increases among People of Color (POC) in the general U.S. population (The Century Foundation Press, 2013). In short, this growing rate of minoritized student enrollment at 2-year institutions does not translate to an increase of minoritized students into 4-year colleges.

In the United States, 45% of about eleven million college students are community college students (The Century Foundation Press, 2013). Of these students, 81% expressed a goal to earn a bachelor's degree and identified that enrollment into community college is a primary step toward achieving that goal (The Century Foundation Press, 2013). Strikingly, only 12% accomplish the goal of obtaining a bachelor's degree (The Century Foundation Press, 2013). Among those 12%, it is unclear how long it takes to obtain the 4-year degree after enrolling in a community college. Whether these students represent a unique community college population, these factors (duration of degree attainment and requirements to achieve a bachelor's degree) are important measures of the community college process. This raises the question as to whether community colleges can provide an adequate and supportive transfer environment that can fulfill students' aspirations to earn a bachelor's degree. More specifically, if Latinxs are primarily "choosing" to attend community college, there is no doubt that there is a growing need to better understand the college choice process among Latinxs who are faced with navigating leaky pipelines

between k-12 schools and institutions of higher education, including the transfer process from community college to a 4-year institution.

The college choice process for Latinx students—whether they pursue higher education and whether they pursue admission into a 2-or 4-year institution—must be more closely examined to understand the aforementioned trends. Current research on minoritized high school students and higher education suggests that they are impacted by inadequate college-going information and a lack of college positive messaging (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; McDonough & Fann, 2007; Welton & Martinez, 2013). Latinx students are more likely to be characterized as unqualified for 4-year college admission and have been found to be commonly portrayed as having low college-going aspirations (Antrop Gonzalez, Velez & Garrett, 2005; Carter, 2003; Garcia-Reid, 2007; Irizarry, 2011; Nieto, 2000; Sampson, 2003; Santiago & Callan, 2010; Swail, Cabrera & Williams, 2005). Minoritized students often have limited access to quality K-12 education and attend schools where teachers and counselors are often unprepared, and the curriculum lacks the rigor necessary to prepare students for college (Oakes, 2003). Often referred to as seminal, several college choice models have addressed the experiences and have documented the trajectories, for the most part, of White middle-class students (Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; 1984; Hanson & Litten, 1982; So, 1987; St. John, 1990). The college choice literature has given little attention to Latinxs, generally speaking, and specifically Puerto Ricans. I was able to identify only study that addressed college choice specifically among Puerto Ricans (Sapp et al., 2016). Therefore, while relied on and touted as seminal in the field of higher education, the studies that use the seminal models are largely exclusive and do not speak to the experience of Latinx

students today. Widely accepted college choice theories in higher education treat all students as if they behave in a similar manner with a linear approach to forming aspirations to attend college. They also suggest that students choose where to attend college based on careful consideration and assessment of higher education institutions (Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Hanson & Litten, 1982; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989, 2003; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982; Litten, 1982). However, in order to accomplish this process successfully, a student needs to be positioned with having access to resources and information that would aid them in making informed decisions related to going to college and assumes it is the college going experience that drives the decision (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989; McDonough, 1987) rather than factors related to household or family needs as is often the case among Latinx students (Ceja, 2006; Carey, 2016; Kiyama, 2010). That is, because they focus almost exclusively on White students and say very little about the experiences of other groups, including Latinxs, these dominant models are largely insufficient to explain the educational trajectories of Puertorriqueñxs. One study to specifically address Latinx including Puerto Rican student college choice process (Sapp et al., 2016) found that, despite facing many barriers, Latinas in low-income areas demonstrate activated self-agency, and they identified “support agents” (p.51) from the family and “institutional agents” (p.51) from community-based organizations who served as critical factors associated with accessing college opportunities.

Efforts have been made in the field of higher education to build on traditional models of college choice and to expand understanding of the nuances that complicate college choice process for students of color who have been traditionally underrepresented

in higher education. Such studies, usually quantitative in nature, have identified variables that explain why these students make the decisions they do about attending college (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Callendar & Jackson, 2008; Heller, 1997; Hossler, 2000; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Kern, 2000; Kim, 2004; McDonough, 1997; McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, & Perez, 1998; McDonough, Ventresca, & Outcalt, 2000; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Perna & Titus, 2004; Reay, Davies, David & Ball, 2001; Teranishi, et al., 2004). While these studies are important and have raised awareness of the applicability of seminal college choice theories on the experiences of traditionally underrepresented students in higher education, there remains a need for qualitative research that can offer a more in-depth perspective into the individual college choice process among these students. Moreover, qualitative studies that have a narrower focus, exploring the experiences of particular Latinx subgroups and that parse out gender differences are desperately needed. The findings from these more narrowly focused studies can contribute to the growing body of research on college choice and thus help reveal the systemic barriers that impact college choice for students who continue to be underrepresented in 4-year higher education institutions.

Purpose of the Study

Personal narratives emerging from my earlier work, data that I have drawn from to inform this dissertation, and the experiences of Latinx students that I have worked with, underscore the fact that there is still more work to do in order to support and nurture Latinx students who aspire to attend college and earn a bachelor's degree. As noted earlier, a host of studies have focused on minoritized students in higher education, and the majority of these have been large-scale surveys that treat Latinxs as a pan-ethnic

group (see for example: Barrera, 1997; Contreras 2011; Kao & Tienda, 1998; McDonough, 1997; So, 1987; St. John, 1990). Panethnicity is a term coined by Espiritu (1992) to refer to Asian American groups. This is a political term used to characterize a grouping of ethnic groups that help to secure and mobilize resources, but promotes a notion of collective identity. Latinxs, more specifically, have addressed the complications that the use of the term creates because it can undermine the complexity of identities that exist across the many Latinx groups residing in the U.S. (McDonald & Carrillo, 2009). For example, Mexicans, the largest group, have a distinct history in the U.S. with half of their land taken through U.S. expansion efforts. Mexicans born in Mexico are not U.S. citizens by birth and are considered immigrants when they come to the U.S. Puerto Ricans on the other hand, while also colonized by the U.S., are U.S. citizens by birth and can travel from the Island to the states without restriction. Moving beyond Pan-ethnic labels, this study sought to unpack the experiences and knowledge base of a group of Puertorriqueña high school students—a critical juncture in the college choice process. I chose to focus specifically on Puertorriqueñas to determine the role of gender in the college going identity formation process and to address several assumptions discussed in greater detail below. I followed the students for an entire academic year to critically examine participants’ college choice process. I mapped the development of their college going identities against the traditional college choice frameworks to better understand how they navigated factors that influenced their academic trajectories, higher education aspirations, and college preparatory behaviors.

Positionality

This dissertation is the culmination of my graduate study, although I will certainly

continue to learn and grow as a practitioner/scholar in higher education. However, this work is also deeply personal, as my choice of dissertation topic and the lenses that I bring to the work have been informed not only by my formal preparation in the doctoral program in Higher Education at UMass Amherst but equally by my lived experiences as a Puertorriqueña born on the Island of Puerto Rico and raised in Hartford, Connecticut, and by my prior decade of professional experience working and collaborating on community-based research and educational programs with Latinx, urban middle- and high school students. Hartford, CT is home to the fifth largest concentration of Puerto Ricans in any city outside of the Island and to some of the lowest performing schools in the state (and the country). Consistent with the immigrant narratives of many other ethnic groups, my family came to the United States in search of opportunities. On the Island, my family lived off the land, and we were never confronted with the concept of being poor, particularly in the sense of U.S. urban poverty, to which people ascribe many negative connotations, equating poverty with a host of social ills. Upon arriving in the states, we met hardship and negative stereotypes as we learned to navigate the state systems to access and secure financial assistance that would allow for a stable and safe home life. I was supported on welfare and food stamps until I became an adult. The strong and beautiful Spanish language that rolled so easily off our tongues was an immediate mark of deficit in this new place and our cultural practices were seen as “strange” and “deviant,” particularly in school settings.

The move to the states, or as my family back in Puerto Rico refers to it, “*la mudanza pa’ya fuera*” (the move to the distance space), prompted a new phase of my adolescent identity formation. My family would say, “*estudia pa’ que nos saque de apuro*” (study

so that you can get us out of the pinch) as a way to motivate and support my progress and development. For us, the American dream was inextricably linked to educational success. Unfortunately, accessing high quality education wasn't that simple. Enrolled in an economically challenged district, my high school had lack of resources and high teacher attrition rates. The result for me was a subpar high school education and a complete absence of college counseling or guidance. In fact, the school counselor discouraged me from college, stating that I'd be better off getting a job immediately after high school.

My personal narrative is all too familiar to Latinx students across the country today—approximately 20 years later. This illustrates the ongoing dilemma that many Latinxs face as they strive to navigate multiple environments that may at times lack sufficient resources and support. Within this broader sociopolitical context, how do we begin to understand the college choice process for Latinas? My lived experiences inform certain assumptions I have about college-going. They include:

1. Opportunity—I believe minoritized students (of traditional and non-traditional age) should have choices and access to accurate and informative resources about college-going. They should have the opportunity to make an informed decision to go or not to go to college and to understand the associated benefits of college-attainment. However, because of institutional barriers and other factors, their access to information and thus their choices are often limited.
2. Economic benefit—There is significant economic benefit to earning a college degree. While it isn't all about money, it has been well documented that increased education is associated with higher paying jobs and both, often used to estimate socioeconomic status are linked to health status and other measures of well-being

(CDC, 2015; McDonough, 1997; Wang, 2012). It is important to note that the city in which this study is set is one of the poorest communities in the Northeast.

Many families in this city are struggling to meet basic needs. Seventy-six percent of public school students in the city in which this study is set are considered low-income and the median household income is \$37,954 (U.S. Census, 2017), less than half that of the state's household income. A college degree could help families break the cycle of poverty.

3. Ideological examination and critique—For Puertorriqueñas, like those participating in this study, gendered identities can be informed by cultural ideologies such as machismo and marianismo which may limit one's sense of opportunities based on one's gender and/or family expectations to fulfill specific gendered roles (Acosta-Belen, 1986; Perez, 2003; Pico, 1979). Edna Acosta-Belen (1986) and Isabel Picó (1979) document in their work the origins of the ascribed sex roles based “female subordination” (Acosta-Belen, 1986 p. 15) that are deeply-rooted in the socialization of females within the Puerto Rican culture. I believe that higher education can provide an opportunity to examine these ideologies. It can also be a place where Puertorriqueñas may be confronted with negative ideologies—bringing racism and discrimination into the process. That is, institutional racism is alive and well in higher education (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Oropeza, Reyes, 2011; Kanno & Varghese, 2010). Women of color, in particular, are frequently marginalized when navigating and seeking access to privileged environments (Espinosa, 2011; Ong, Wright, Espinosa & Orfield, 2011; Reyes, 2011). While institutional oppression complicates the educational experience, it is

an opportunity to examine these happenings from a critical perspective.

4. Social capital—If more Puertorriqueñxs go to college, we can help to extinguish the fear of the unknown associated with college going for future generations of Puerto Rican girls and others. In part, this fear is associated with not belonging—neither in the college environment nor in the home/community environment (Knight, Norton, Bentley & Dixon, 2004; Oropeza, Varghese & Kanno, 2010; Rendon, 1994; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). Scholars have established that when Latinx students believe that they can belong in higher education and are able to feel that sense of belonging from the institution or, what is often referred to as *sentido de pertinencia*, they are more likely to integrate successfully into higher education (Alvarez, 2010; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendon, 1994). Latinx students' experiences and educational trajectories vary. Research suggests that support and positive perceptions of teachers, family members, mentors and other significant and influential individuals in students' lives, makes a difference in Latinx students' perceptions of their own capabilities and aspirations (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). More specifically, Latinx students' ability to perceive college going and ability to actualize their aspiration to earn a 4-year college degree is impacted by their exposure to social support and social capital (Gonzalez & Jovel, 2003). In their study, Gonzalez & Jovel (2003) found that Latinas whose experiences in k-12 schools included institutional neglect and abuse, as characterized in their study, were able to uphold their college aspirations because they had supportive teachers and other positive

models that contrasted the negative messaging and fear of the unknown territory of a 4-year college campus experience.

Being a Puertorriqueña who is Spanish-speaking and familiar with many of the cultural norms that shape behavior in Puerto Rican-identified communities allowed me to build relationships based on shared lived experiences with the research participants. I was able to speak with families in the languages of their choosing (including English, Spanish, and Spanglish), and to navigate cultural norms in the Puerto Rican community. But, because I sought to develop an accurate understanding of the students' aspirations and experiences, beyond any shortcomings in my perspectives, I frequently triangulated my findings with the participants. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 Methods regarding the LatCrit Grounded Theory Research approach and epistemology of "cultural intuition" (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Many Latinx high school college aspirants in the U.S. will be the first in their families to seek post-secondary education and view earning a college degree as an opportunity to better themselves and their families (Bui, 2002; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Perez & Ceja, 2015; Saenz et al., 2007). For the majority, their path to earning a 4-year degree begins at community college, where they can benefit from open access policies and other access programs (Adelman, 2002). However, the process of transferring has been critiqued as limiting the opportunity to access the 4-year college degree, especially for minoritized students. Some scholars speculate that choosing to attend a community college may be an outcome of having developed within problematic K-12 educational environments (Halliman, 2000; Kurlaender, 2006). While community colleges provide open access to educational opportunities, this access does not preclude needing to be better informed and prepared in order to fulfill the transfer expectations of 4-year institutions. In the following review of the literature, I will discuss the impact of community college enrollment on Latinx students and review relevant theories on college choice and access in order to situate the importance of this proposed study in the field of higher education. I will conclude with a discussion on Puerto Rican migration as it relates to the themes of the study being proposed.

Choosing Community College

From the start, community college institutions have confronted conflicting expectations of their role within the field of higher education. For example, one

expectation is to provide transfer opportunities to 4-year institutions, thus acting as a connector between the student and the 4-year college (Berinbaum, 1986; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Rosenbaum, 2006). Another is to serve as “the people’s college” (Berinbaum, 1986, p.10) by providing open access to education and opportunities for all people, despite student background, preparation, and transfer goals (Berinbaum, 1986, p.10). Latinxs are significantly underrepresented in 4-year institutions and overrepresented in two-year institutions of higher education (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Excelencia in Education, 2015). Despite a significant increase in Latinx student enrollment in U.S. colleges, there are still wide gaps in bachelor’s degree attainment among this group (Excelencia in Education, 2015; NCS, Digest of Education Statistics, 2013; Santiago, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). While earning an Associate’s degree is an accomplishment, Latinxs who enroll in community colleges with the goal of eventually earning a bachelor’s degree may not be successful in achieving that goal (Brint et al., 1989; Dougherty, 1992; Malcom, 2010; Nora & Rendon, 1990; Pincus, 1980). According to Clark (1980), community colleges employ a series of practices used within counseling services, remediation programming, and testing practices, that redirect the aspirations of students’ who have been characterized as having low academic achievement to more achievable goals—often not including a transfer option. These strategies can hinder students’ academic advancement by delaying student academic goals or redirecting their academic plans. Karabel (1989) also suggested that community college students are often overly ambitious in their aspirations to transfer to a 4-year college or university while lacking the capacity and preparation to realize their academic goals and indicates that the community college practices aid in “management of [student]

ambition” (Brint & Karabel, 1989). In the case of Latinxs, aspiration but not goals may be the motivating elements that drive them to enter community college. However, once there, due to a range of characteristics as detailed in the example that follows, they may find themselves on a pathway that is no longer aligned with their original aspirations to attain a Bachelor’s degree.

Consider a very likely set of circumstances. A Latinx high school graduate with a set of characteristics such as having a lack of pre-college preparation, being a first-generation student, and having low prior academic achievement aspires to transfer to a 4-year institution to pursue a degree in engineering. However, early in her enrollment at the community college, and unbeknownst to the student, she is placed on a non-transfer track due to a series of misguided decisions. Her placement tests land her in remediation where she is placed in “developmental” (Rosenbaum, 2006) classes (a supposedly non-stigmatizing term that has been adopted in community colleges to refer to remedial classes). She remains in these courses under the impression that she is on track with her aspirations of eventually transferring to a 4-year institution. She perceives herself, at this point, to be a college student but is unaware that her developmental courses are not transferrable and earn fewer or no credits compared to non-developmental courses. During this time, her aspirations are fulfilled because she is unaware that her time, efforts, and investment are not propelling her toward her goal of obtaining a bachelor’s degree. This story is common among Latinxs. Rosenbaum (2006) highlights a similar experience of a student who believed he had earned 24 credits toward his 4-year transfer but comes to learn that most of the classes he took were developmental and that they earned no credits. Community colleges are beneficial, especially for minoritized groups,

in terms of increased access and navigability. However, this initial benefit may diminish if the students are not receiving adequate information about the college choice process so that they can better prepare for college going including attending community college in order to achieve their academic goals. Minoritized high school students need to know how they might be “filtered” onto a path of transferability, vocation, remediation, or departure (Kurlaender, 2006; Rosenbaum, 2006) if they choose to attend community college.

First generation Latinx students aspire to earn a college degree and make important and deliberate decisions based on financial factors (Kim, 2004; Perez, 2010), presence of ethnic diversity at the college they want to attend (Perez, 2010), social support from peers, family, teachers and school administrators (Perez, 2007; Perez & McDonough, 2008), and family expectations (Ceja, 2006; Choy, Horn, Nuñez & Chen, 2000; Hossler & Stage, 1992) to stay near to their community and home (Santiago, 2007). The field of higher education needs to have a better understanding of the college choice processes of Latinx high school students in order to identify methods to support students’ actualization of their aspirations into a clear plan with goals and a realistic timeline reflecting the likely time, costs, and steps needed to reach the aspiration. This process should be accurate, informed, educational and engaging and should be no different across student groups, regardless of their background. Latinx students also need to be well informed. This process needs to be done *with* the student but should also include the high school, the community college, and the 4-year institution as partners in the transfer function. Wang (2012) challenges educational policies and practices that are being used to encourage (or derail) minoritized students to transfer to 4-year universities.

She proposes that institutions become more familiar with the educational goals and aspirations of their students in order to better serve them. She indicates that high school is a crucial and unique time to do this, because they are choosing to enroll in community college in high school. Another charge for higher education institutions is to investigate the “disjuncture” that exists between community colleges and secondary schools with potentially high numbers of minoritized students who will become community college enrollees and for these institutions to address the gaps that impact student persistence in the community college (Brown & Niemi, 2007) and their transferability to 4-year institutions (Wang, 2012). An example is to make connections with high school and even middle school students and, at that point, share information related to college (including community college) course requirements, eligibility, and credit-bearing courses. Similarly, Jain and colleagues urge 4-year institutions to develop a transfer receptive culture that partners with community colleges and secondary schools (Jain, Herrera, Bernal & Solorzano, 2011) in order to “normalize” the transfer experiences on both campuses (p.257). For those Latinx students who do pursue higher education, most get trapped in the labyrinth that is community college.

Many Latinx students, despite their college going aspirations, have educational histories marked by attending economically challenged high schools in urban communities that are segregated by race, poverty, and language (Carter & Welner 2013; Contreras, 2011; Irizarry, 2012; Labaree, 2010; Tatum, 2007). These students will have to pursue their educational goals despite having been part of an educational system with limited resources (Carter & Welner, 2013; Labaree, 2010), inadequate teacher preparation (Darling–Hammond, 2008; Sleeter, 2001) and lack of appropriate college

preparatory courses (McDonough, 1997). Additionally, minoritized students are more likely to experience discriminatory experiences while forming a college going identity in high school and while pursuing their college aspirations (Gonzalez, Stone & Jovel, 2003; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Irizarry, 2012; Rendon, 1992; St. John, 2006;). For example, McDonough and Calderone (2006) found that high school counselors had very low expectations of their students influenced by a perception that, because students were from low socioeconomic backgrounds, they would not be prepared or interested in attending college. In this way, Latinx students' academic progress is impacted by teacher expectations and support. High expectations and support from teachers and counselors have positive implication toward college enrollment in Latinx students' educational experiences (Gonzalez & Jovel, 2003; Zarate, 2004). The term "college-bound" is used frequently in educational settings to describe a particular type of student. It is synonymous to being a "good student" with "good behavior" and having high motivation to do well academically (McCall, Zarate & Perez, 2015). Furthermore, McCall et al. (2015) question how indicators that characterize college-bound students that include "academic preparedness" and "achievement" (p.11) influence teachers to marginalize and treat Latinx students differently based on student background (McCall, Zarate & Perez, 2015).

Even when Latinx high school students aspire to pursue a bachelor's degree, they are often unsure of the steps needed to realize that aspiration (Carter, 2003; 2006). The relatively few who navigate the college choice process will most likely have to navigate with limited access to financial aid information (Cabrera and LaNasa, 2001), limited college choice counseling (Ceja, 2006; Perez, 2010), and lack of support and resources

that could help in the transition and preparation to enter college (Bauman, 2013; Carter, 2003). Furthermore, students may feel unprepared to meet the academic rigor of college (Bauman, 2013; Padilla, 2007) and may be unfamiliar with college going culture (Fischer, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). These barriers are not caused by the individuals per se but are rather an outcome of the social reproduction of educational disparities in the U.S. educational system (Berger, 2000; Carter & Welner, 2013; Labaree, 2010; McDonough, 1997). Based on the literature, Latinx high school students are more likely to choose to attend community college after graduation. However, students who graduate from 4-year universities will have career opportunities that will earn higher salaries in comparison to those who attend community colleges. Additionally, those who enroll directly into 4-year colleges or universities are more likely to graduate than those who begin their college career at the community college (Dougherty, 1992; Malcom, 2010; Nora & Rendon, 1990). Access to higher education cannot be completely understood or increased if the work and theoretical approaches are disconnected from the K-12 school experiences that are instrumental in putting Latinx students on pathways either toward or away from accessing college.

The College Choice Process

The concept of “college choice” evolved in the literature to describe factors that lead to the selection of an institution of higher education. While not exhaustive, the following is a brief summary of three categories of college choice. From an economic perspective, college choice is viewed as an investment decision in which students assess their decision to attend college based on the financial costs and benefits of a college education (Bishop, 1977; John & Noell, 1989; Kotler & Fox, 1985; Leslie & Brickman,

1987; Young & Reyes, 1987). For example, Young and Reyes (1987) proposed that cost of a college degree is a significant factor in the college choice process because it involves that the student invest their own personal resources toward their education, thus requiring that the student weigh in on the benefit of their investment in education against the risk of taking on the cost. The second is the psychological perspective that focuses on how the perception of the climate within the higher education institution influences student college choice process (Hearn, 1984; Manski & Wise 1983; McDonough 1997; Nora, 2004). Within this perspective, fit and sense of belonging play an important role in student college choice. Students are expected to make a choice based on their assessment of the higher education institution and of their own personal characteristics. And the third is the sociological perspective which emphasizes other factors related to the individual's background that influence college choice process. Such factors can be related to school contexts (Alwin & Otto, 1977), parental expectations (Attinasi, 1989; Litten & Hall, 1989; Maski & Wise 1983; St. John, 1990) and high school curriculum (Borus, 1984; Hearn, 1984; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987). To date, these perspectives inform college choice and access but draw their conclusions primarily from retrospective self-report data from first-year college student surveys on college choice process and first-year college student experience. Therefore, they largely exclude the range of experiences and perceptions of student groups not adequately represented in the college environment—namely Latinx and other minoritized groups.

One popular model that continues to influence college choice research in the field of higher education was established by Don Hossler, John Braxton and Georgia Coopersmith (1989) and focused on student college choice process. Their model claims

that a student “arrives at a tentative conclusion to pursue, continue, or not continue their formal education after high school graduation” (p. 17) during the predisposition stage of the college choice process. Within this stage, students form their aspiration to attend college and come to a realization that they will pursue a college education. According to seminal research, several significant factors aid in students’ ability to form concrete plans to attend college. Four of these factors are family socioeconomic status (Corrazini et al., 1972; Ekstrom, 1985; Manski & Wise, 1983; Tuttle, 1981), student academic ability and achievement (Bishop, 1975; Jackson, 1982; Manski & Wise, 1983; Tuttle, 1981), race and ethnicity such that White and Asian students are more likely to enroll in post-secondary education than Latinxs and Blacks (Hossler et al., 1989; Manski & Wise, 1983; Tuttle, 1981), and parental levels of education (Carpenter & Fleishman, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1987; Jackson, 1982; Yang, 1981). For students who are academically prepared, have knowledge about college and financial aid and have family support (Adelman 2002; Cerna, Perez & Saenz, 2008; Perna & Kurban, 2013; Perna & Titus, 2004), this is a stage that can feel fairly common and is expected and anticipated. These students are most likely from well-resourced schools and with families and communities that have had the ability to provide the students with the necessary information and preparatory skills needed to actualize their aspirations to attend college.

Very similarly, the second and third stage, “search” and “choice” respectively, require that students employ specific skills and resources gained through an accumulation of knowledge resources in their K-12 school experience in order to embark in an investigative process of higher education institutions to decide which schools they believe may be a good fit and make a decision on where to apply for their college

education. To do this, the student actively engages in an assessment process in order to leverage each institution's characteristics with their own personal needs and qualities toward making a choice. Many Latinx students have had to navigate within an educational system that has failed to provide them with the necessary and adequate preparation that would ensure their ability to actualize their college aspirations. Furthermore, during the choice stage, the student completes college applications and begins to participate in the activities related to the admissions process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Research indicates that low rates of college enrollment are most common in students from low-income families and who are from racial and ethnic minority groups (Cabrera et al., 2006). This is due to systemic conditions that continue to hold back the academic progress of Latinx students who continue to be underrepresented and underprepared for higher education (Gandara 2010; Oliva, 2008; Solorzano, Villalpando & Oseguera, 2005).

Many colleges and universities, particularly 4-year institutions, establish enrollment policies that are modeled after a notion that prospective students explore, experience and activate the college choice process as described by Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model. Because we know that some students are not positioned with the right set of tools to engage an equitable college choice process because they come from communities that have been historically minoritized in the U.S., scholars need to delve deeper still into the experiences of the students while they are in high school to more closely examine their process of forming a college going identity. Some scholars have come forth to contest original theories on college choice to explain how the experiences of students of color do not fit the college choice process as described in

seminal theories. These scholars have suggested alternative theories based on quantitative measures that explain factors that affect college choice processes of minoritized students. Perna and Titus (2004) found that state and school policies related to financial aid, tuition, and K-12 academic preparation directly impact student college choice processes. Social class was also a factor found to influence minoritized student college choice by determining perception of ability to attend a higher education institution (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). Researchers identify socioeconomic status as an indicator for having access to resources such as technology and the ability to pay for private resources that aid students in their college choice process such as private college counselors and coaches (McDonough, Ventresca & Outcalt, 2000). Some researchers have embarked on developing new college choice models that could expand on the foundation of Hossler and Gallaghers' model (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000). And others, like Perna (2006) who developed a new conceptual model of college choice, completely separate from Hossler and Gallaghers' model. Though useful, these fail to explicitly examine college choice from the perspectives of Latinx students. Newer models, though not specifically college choice models, address important, asset-based factors that may contribute to the college choice process including social, human and cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). However, there remains a gap in the literature on college identity formation and the college choice process that captures the lived experiences of Latinx and, specifically Puertorriqueñx students as it relates to their college going process.

Latinx Students and College Choice

The research on Latinx college choice is small but emerging. We do know that prior to considering college, Latinx students are more likely to anticipate financial

insecurities associated with college enrollment, feel obligated to stay near their communities and homes (Desmond & Lopez Turley, 2009) and feel uncertain of their educational abilities (Reyes & Nora, 2012; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf & Yeung, 2007). Perez and McDonough (2008) examined important resources that support Latinxs in their college choice process. They interviewed 106 Latinx students from an area in Los Angeles and found that they depend considerably on their families, friends, and trustworthy school representatives for information, but, more interestingly, they relied the most on their extended family members for information about college. Latinx students also reported that they made their choices to attend colleges based on where the people they know had attended thus creating the “chain migration contacts” (p. 253). In their research, Perez and McDonough (2008) described how these contacts served as informants for the first-generation students who enrolled in college. Consequently, a self-generating support group forms every college year cycle as does an active navigational strategy that draws from their individual and family community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model (CCW) include six forms of capital including aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). These students are activating their agency (Sapp et al., 2016) to surface resources among their community in environments where they are not provided these supports during what is supposed to be the predisposition phase. The “chain migration contacts” framework is considered unique for Latinx students because it conceptualizes a college choice process that extends to a broader context. Tierney and Venegas (2007) refer to this as the “cultural ecology”. They posit that student college choice processes and decision making can be influenced and shaped by students’

environments, community and families. Similarly, other scholars propose that student college expectations and aspirations are constructed through their relationships and interactions with important people in their lives, and as such are considered “institutional agents” (McDonough, 1994; McDonough & Calderone, 2006).

In line with the self-generating support strategy, Jun and Colyar (2002) defined entry points as “roles and expectations of how families are involved in their children’s college-going process” (p.99). It is common for education officials and educators to assume that only certain roles, such as going on college visits and attending college prep workshops and events, are positive demonstrations of entry points. However, as described by the Latinx families in Knight et al.’s (2004) study, support extended beyond the parents to include extended family members and other community members. Their collective narratives provided counterstories of navigational strategies to move through and surpass the hardships they have endured as members of oppressed groups as a means to pave the way for access and opportunities. Traditional college choice milestones do not account for the role that these critical counterstories and narratives shared amongst family and community play in the students’ ability to strategize their own navigation path. As a result, these stories influence a collective responsibility passed on to their children that is used as a tool for motivation and support in their educational trajectory. Similarly, these stories can also develop a sense of “hopefulness” (Gándara, 1999) for students’ view of their future and can encourage them to have educational aspirations to pursue their dreams and to persevere in the presence of oppression.

Puerto Rican Colonial Status and Education

In order to understand the education of Puerto Ricans, it is critical to first understand the Puerto Rican diaspora and the Island's history. Puerto Rico is the oldest colony in the world (Irizarry & Anthrop-Gonzalez, 2013; Trias Monge, 1997) and has been a colony of the United States for 117 years. To date, Puerto Rico remains a commonwealth of the United States, a territory under the territorial clause in the U.S. constitution. On August 12th, 1898, Puerto Rico was seized by the United States in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. In this takeover, however, Puerto Rico assumed a different colonial relationship than the one they experienced with Spain in which the United States presumed dominance of the Island under military control and shifted local economic stability away from the native people of the Island (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006; Wagenheim & Wagenheim, 1973). Puerto Rico was thus characterized a spoil of war (Fernandez, 1996). In 1917, under the Jones-Shafroth Act, Congress granted United States citizenship to all Puerto Ricans born on the Island. The Island of Puerto Rico was considered an organized, but incorporated, territory (Akiboh, 2015) and since, the Island has remained a dependent colony of the United States. Since 1952, Puerto Rico has had limited self-governing agency as a commonwealth. Many Puerto Ricans argue that the transition to commonwealth harshly impacted Puerto Rico and believe that the negotiations and agreements made between Spain and the United States did not reflect the voices of Puerto Ricans.

The colonial relationship of Puerto Rico with the United States has had an impact on the Puerto Rican people by restricting their sovereignty and failing to respond to "their national needs and self-interests rather than those of the North American nation" (Acosta-

Belen & Santiago, 2006 p. 2). Puerto Rico's unique status as a possession of the United States has made the Island and its people vulnerable to American capitalism, its laws and its customs (Duany, 2002 p.12), as evidenced by the current economic crisis. Within their limited form of government, Puerto Ricans on the Island, natural born citizens of the United States, cannot vote in United States federal elections (Fernandez, 1996; Irizarry & Anthrop-Gonzalez, 2013). Puerto Rican people have inherited a tension associated with their rights to full citizenship that implicitly and often times very explicitly has informed their identity on and off the Island. Puerto Rican history is distinct from any other Latinx group in the United States. The United States' control over the Island of Puerto Rico has been characterized as being exploitive and oppressive to the Puerto Rican people (Baker, 2002). Moreover, the commonwealth status creates a significant difference between Puerto Rico and other nations with colonial pasts. Puerto Rico, unlike these other countries, is still a colony (Baker, 2002). Gann & Duignan (1986) criticize the use of the term "commonwealth" in place of the use of "a colony" to refer to the status of Puerto Rico because it does not account for the impact that the colonial status has had on the Puerto Rican people. An important impact of the colonial status has been the consequence of U.S. controlled schools on the Island since 1898 (Negrón de Montilla, 1975; Nieto, 2000). The United States mandated that all Puerto Rican students learn the English language in school (Negrón de Montilla, 1975; Nieto, 2000). It has been suggested in the literature that the Department of Education in Puerto Rico has purposefully propagated American acculturation (Irizarry & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2007; Negrón de Montilla, 1975) and thus, has promoted a practice that has devalued Puerto Ricans' own cultural and linguistic capital in exchange for American language, values

and practices (Irizarry & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2007; Negron de Montilla, 1975; Solis-Jordan, 1994). “Silencing the Puerto Rican culture”, and “Americanizing” the Puerto Rican people is argued to be an aim of the Island’s schools (Irizarry & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2007, p. 40; Irizarry, 2011; Solis-Jordan, 1994).

United States standards have been imparted on the Island through school curricula, educational policies and educational pedagogies that uphold the United States traditions and culture (MacDonald, 2004; Nieto, 2000; Rolon-Dow & Irizarry, 2014). Nieto (2000) placed strong and meaningful emphasis on Osuna’s (1949) commentary regarding Island-based Puerto Rican children’s knowledge of American history being more advanced than U.S. based American children—an observation he made in the late 1940s. Puerto Ricans have had to endure policies and practices that they have little control over for nearly one hundred and twenty years. However, unlike the many immigrant groups that have immigrated to the United States for an opportunity of educational and economic advancement, Puerto Ricans remain in today’s modern society a colonized people who benefit from the birth right of American citizenship while simultaneously unable to claim control or influence over the progress and trajectory of its people as they are subject to the policies and political economy of the U.S. without casting a vote.

Puerto Ricans in the States have not been provided with equitable or adequate educational opportunities and they continue to be one of the most negatively affected minoritized groups by educational inequity (Nieto, 2000; Rolon-Dow, 2007; Rolon-Dow & Irizarry, 2014). Some scholars suggest that the U.S. educational institutions play a role in reinforcing colonial relations and the racialization processes that positions Puerto

Ricans as second-class citizens (Rolon-Dow & Irizarry, 2014; Sokolowski, Anthrop-Gonzalez, & Maldonado, 2010; Walsh, 1998). Puerto Ricans in the United States live within a complex set of circumstances that involves their historical, sociocultural and sociopolitical experiences (Anthrop-Gonzalez & DeJesus, 2006; Duany, 2002; Nieto, 2000; 2004; Quiñonez, 2014). The majority of Puerto Ricans who live in the United States still identify with the Island and share a deep identification with Puerto Rico's history, language, culture and politics (Duany, 2002).

Talking about Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the continental United States as two separate entities is problematic as the borders across these spaces are porous, with migration moving steadily back and forth. Puerto Ricans have moved freely to and from the Island without restriction since 1917 and their migration has been characterized as “*el vaivén*” (the back and forth) (Duany, 2002; Callazo, Ryan & Bauman, 2010; Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006) when compared to other Latinx groups in the United States. Since the early 20th century, Puerto Ricans have had a strong presence in the United States and, since then, they have been successful at constructing strong, predominantly Puerto Rican communities in U.S.-based cities (Irizarry & Anthrop-Gonzalez, 2013). Puerto Ricans in the continental United States, like other immigrant groups, have experienced displacement. They are a part of the diaspora and are often referred to as, “*DiaspoRicans*” (Rolon-Dow & Irizarry, 2014) or a “*commuter nation*” (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 2006) who engage in a circulatory migration pattern in which they travel to and from the Island creating new subgroups of families and children that are considered “*in between*” (Nieto, 2000).

Puerto Rican history and current Island politics inform the experiences of Puerto

Ricans here in the States, and their migratory patterns remain constant as evidenced by the increase in Puerto Ricans in U.S. schools. Many Puerto Ricans who move to the States and transition into the “American” culture refuse to leave behind their cultural contexts that shape and inform their ways of knowing and the ways of supporting their families (Walsh, 2000; Duany, 2002). As a result, many Puerto Ricans experience tension in the American educational institution because of the deeply rooted American expectation for [*im*]migrants to assimilate (Walsh, 2000). Walsh (2000) believes that while Puerto Ricans expect to be integrated into a “multicultural, multifaceted American” culture and community, they also find themselves marginalized in a “singular, national, and universal community” (p. 98) because they continue to live by and value their culture. Thus, they experience a transient process of “re-identification and transformation” (p. 98) in which they re-evaluate who they were in their home country and who they will become in the new place. As Nieto states (2004), “Puerto Ricans represent a striking modern-day case of immigration, displacement, and diaspora” (p.viii). This reality poses significant implications for the educational experience of Puerto Ricans in the United States.

Puerto Ricans are the second largest group of Latinxs in the United States (Rolon-Dow & Irizarry, 2014)—second to Mexicans—and hold a distinct political position in this country. However, there is very little affirmation of Puerto Rican identity in U.S.-based education (Antrop-Gonzalez & DeJesus, 2006; Irizarry, 2011; Rolon-Dow, 2007). Education is an institution that works well to reproduce social stratification (Bowles & Ginitis, 1976; MacLeod, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Walsh, 1998) and as such has the power to enforce deficit models that oppress Latinx communities based on dominant ideologies

that stereotype and stigmatize (Irizarry & Nieto, 2010).

Puerto Rican Education: On the Island and in the Diaspora

The college choice literature has given little attention to Latinxs, generally speaking, and specifically Puerto Ricans. I was able to identify any one study that addressed college choice specifically among Puerto Ricans (Sapp et al, 2016). Because of their distinct history and relationship with the United States, it is important that any study of Puerto Rican students acknowledge the history of education on the Island and in the Diaspora (See Rolon-Dow & Irizarry, 2014). Puerto Rican students have a unique experience in U.S. schools as they navigate their educational trajectories. According to Nieto (2000), Puerto Ricans' educational experiences are impacted by their historical and "colonial experience" (p.8). However, very rarely (if at all) is this history included as part of the education of Puertorriqueñx students in the United States. Puerto Ricans have been educated for more than a century by U.S. controlled schools in Puerto Rico and, though the dominant language spoken on the Island is Spanish, there is still an expectation that students should learn English in order to become more marketable and prepared to later migrate to the U.S. for a better life.

The education of Puertorriqueñxs on and off the Island is fraught with power relations and, in my opinion, they have gotten the proverbial short end of the stick. This sentiment, though personal, is motivated by my study of the topic as well as my own knowledge developed out of lived experiences within the *vaiven* and Puerto Rican diaspora. Currently there are more Puerto Ricans residing in the United States than there are on the Island (Rolon-Dow & Irizarry, 2014). In the United States, Puertorriqueñx occupy two sociopolitical contexts (Irizarry & Antrop- Gonzalez, 2007)—the "colonial

possession of the U.S.” and being natural born citizens (p.39). However, systemically, Puerto Ricans are still occupying an oppressed position based on the Island’s political status (Irizarry & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2007; Nieto, 1998, 2000) and schooling on the Island and in the Diaspora has been and continues to be used as a vehicle for subjugation and assimilation, exalting “American” culture over Puerto Rican culture (Irizarry & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2007; Irizarry & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2013). I remember as a young child learning English words in my school on the Island and can recall the pride I felt when I could recite the following rhyme: “pollito--chicken, gallina—hen, lápiz—pencil y pluma—pen”. Even to my young ears, I could intuit the importance of the English language as a marker of belonging in the U.S. However, as I have studied education, I realize this approach to teaching and learning is problematic.

Puerto Rican colonialism—impacting Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the Diaspora—has had a tremendous influence on the schooling of Puertorriqueñxs on the Island and within the United States but very little recognition has been given to how this unique experience shapes Puerto Rican experiences in the United States. Therefore, I aim to deliberately situate the historical, cultural and familial contextual elements within each Puertorriqueñx student’s educational experience and within their process of developing college going sensibilities.

To best examine Puertorriqueñxs’ educational pathways and include the contextual elements of their cultural and familial influence in their college choice process, this study will employ qualitative methods. It is a useful approach for engaging students in conversation about their lived experiences (Rodriguez, 2010). Rodriguez (2010) describes the method of storytelling as “liberatory work” (p.501). She explains

that when students offer their stories about navigating, resisting and transcending difficult and negative experiences in their educational process, they are challenging dominant narratives, thus, creating counterstories and using and affirming their voice.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study was embedded in a larger ethnographic study of the educational experiences and outcomes for Puertorriqueñx youth who all self-identified as college aspirants. The larger study consisted of a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) collaborative (PI Irizarry) that stemmed from a course on Puerto Rican History and Education offered at a high school (Knight High School) in Esperanza City with a high concentration of Puerto Rican students. As a graduate research assistant on the project, I invited students from the research collaborative to participate in my study. My focus was explicitly on the college choice process among female Puerto Rican students, a group that is virtually absent from the literature on higher education. This study focused on the experiences and knowledge base related to pursuing higher education among a group of Puertorriqueña high school college Aspirantes. My study aimed to address the following two overarching research questions with several sub questions:

1. What factors influence the decision-making process about college going for Puertorriqueña high school college Aspirantes?
 - i. What meaning do Puertorriqueña high school students assign to attending an institution of higher education after high school graduation?
 - ii. How do their identities of race, class and gender inform the concept of college-going?

- iii. How do their identities shape what institutions they aspire to attend?
 - iv. How do they perceive their family and/or community's beliefs about college-going?
2. What does this group of Puertorriqueña high school students know about the college-going process (e.g. college access and choice; application process)?
- i. How do Puertorriqueña high school students access information about college?
 - ii. How do Puertorriqueña high school students identify with the concept of college-going?
 - iii. Where do they aspire to attend college and why?

To address these questions and gain deep insight into the participants' experiences at this important point in their educational trajectories, I used qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis. Qualitative research methodology is instrumental in gathering rich data and is based on the contextualization and interpretation of realities that are socially constructed (Perez, Pinzon, & Luquis, 1998). Given the diverse ethnic/racial and linguistic texture of the city and school where this study was conducted (described in detail in Research Participants and Context below), qualitative research allowed for the implementation and flexibility of specific methods for diverse and rapidly evolving communities (Rossman & Rallis, 2010). In this section, I will describe my rationale for selecting the methods for collecting data. More specifically, I will describe why the selected methods are most appropriate to explore the experiences of Puertorriqueña high school students. I will go on to describe the epistemological

frameworks that guided the study, from design to data collection and analysis. Under the broad umbrella of qualitative research, I used several methods of data collection. This was an ethnographic study in which I was as a participant observer in the Puerto Rican History and Education course and spent the entire 2015-2016 school year embedded in this setting. In addition, I conducted in-depth, phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2013) with the participants and with the key informants that they nominated. Finally, selected student work products served as additional sources of data. These are described in more detail in what follows.

Epistemological Framework and Approach

Informed by “cultural intuition”—a Chicana feminist epistemology that engages the researcher’s personal and academic background, her commitment to social justice transformation, and overall research approach (Delgado Bernal, 1998)—I employed Critical Race-Grounded Theory research. I drew from my personal experiences as a Puertorriqueña born in Gurabo, Puerto Rico and raised in Hartford, CT, as a first-generation college goer who had been told I was not college material by my high school counselor over 20 years prior, and as an educator committed to educational equity for Latinx communities (Malagon, Perez Huber, Velez, 2009).

The Critical Race-Grounded Theory approach as described by Malagon et al. (2009) informed my entire research process, from the development of the research questions, to the sampling method, and ultimately to the overarching goal to “build theory from the lived experiences” (Malagon, Perez Huber et al., 2009) of students of color, namely a group of Puertorriqueña high school students. By aligning the use of LatCrit and Grounded Theory, I was able to spotlight the absence of this group from the

existing literature and build themes that feature the factors and meaning-making relevant to Puertorriqueña Aspirantes' college going identity formation. I employed the LatCrit theoretical tool to identify how racism and other sources of subordination associated with the students' culture, ethnicity, language, migratory patterns, and class intersected to impact their educational experiences and college going identity formation process. By examining this process based on the lived experiences of the Aspirantes and members of their family and community, I expanded on the historically dominant ideology of college going identity formation process in Latinx communities and offered a narrative that is largely unrepresented in the literature specific to Puertorriqueñx. Bernal & Villalpando (2002) refer to this situation as an “apartheid of knowledge” in which “only certain types of knowledge and knowledge production are validated in higher education in the U.S., thus serving to marginalize, distort, and erase the experiences of People of Color, particularly as sources of knowledge” (Delgado, 2002, p.169).

A LatCrit Grounded Theoretical approach provided the theoretical and analytic tools to “deconstruct the narrowly-defined knowledge production” (Malagon et al., 2009, p.258) in higher education literature on college going identity previously dominated primarily by white male scholars who studied white, middle class students, a trend Delgado Bernal et al. (2002) refer to as “imperial scholarship”. This research approach revealed the narratives of Puertorriqueña college Aspirantes that engender a transformative opportunity for knowing about their lived college going identity development. A LatCrit Grounded Theory approach engages the researcher, the participants, and the knowledge generation in “a thoughtful and respectful process” (Malagon et al., 266) that requires reflexivity, reciprocity, and facilitates experiential

critique of narratives that have previously excluded the lives, voices and input of Latinx communities. LatCrit Grounded Theory approach employs theoretical sampling allowing for deep examination among a specific group, rather than a random or representative sample (Malagon et al., 2009), to elicit their lived knowledge to inform an emerging theory. This was particularly important in this study given the near absence of Puertorriqueña high school students—one of the fastest growing populations in the U.S.— from the literature on college going identity formation (Sapp et al., 2016).

Research Design

The development of college-going identity is a fluid process, changing over time as students move through school. To better understand this dynamic process, I conducted an ethnographic study to examine Puertorriqueña high school students' educational experiences as they relate to their college choice process. In addition to allowing for a long-term perspective of students engaged in this process, an ethnographic approach allowed for a critical assessment of the role of race/ethnicity and gender—factors that have been identified as pertinent in students' ability to navigate racialized educational systems and where there are inequities in access to higher education (Irizarry, 2011). As well, it aided in mapping any changes in students' schema that may have occurred over the course of a year regarding college going. My goal was to move beyond general statistical portraits about minoritized groups in the college going process and offer an in-depth perspective into the lived experiences of Puertorriqueña college Aspirantes, with special attention given to the sociocultural, racialized and gendered pathways that students navigate in their educational process.

To achieve this aim, I used critical ethnography (Anderson, 1989; Madison, 2012), phenomenology (Fetterman, 1989; Giorgi, 1975; VanManen, 1999) and Critical Race Theory (CRT)/Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) as epistemological perspectives to guide my investigation. Different from other interpretive and descriptive approaches, critical ethnography situates the research within the actual social context—moving away from heterogeneity and moving toward the collective diversity of knowing that can exist within a community (Anderson, 1989; Madison, 2012). The approach seeks to acknowledge how education is situated within inequitable power structures (Anderson, 1989; Madison, 2012). For example, critical ethnography helps to examine students’ academic outcomes as well as their underrepresentation in higher education and exposes the systemic condition that perpetuates inequity and structures that limit opportunities and choice for Latinx students. More specifically, as stated in the literature review, the education of Puerto Ricans, on and off the Island, is fraught with power relations and inequities.

Critical ethnography positions the researcher as a reflexive practitioner seeking to unveil injustice and challenge the status quo while also being explicit in how her positionality as researcher carries privilege and biases (Nolbit, Flores & Murillo, 2004). Critical ethnography is political and pedagogical (Madison, 2012). My methodological approach is also informed by a phenomenological oriented paradigm (Fetterman, 1989) that promotes the inclusion of participants’ multicultural perspectives and multiple realities (Fetterman, 1989, p.15; Kvale 1996).

These selected paradigms were important for this dissertation research because, in higher education, the literature on the college choice process has largely been developed

based on the experiences of white, middle class students and of college-goers and their experiences have become “the norm” to which all students are compared. Based on my lived experiences and research to date, I believe this perspective falls short and counternarratives are necessary to challenge these majoritarian perspectives that dominate the literature. These theoretical frameworks focus on and support the investigation of diverse experiences and seek to highlight how different groups experience phenomena informed by their culture, community, practices, and experiences. The college choice process is a phenomenon in higher education and, as of yet, there are very few explanations that capture the experiences particular to this group—high school-aged Puertorriqueñas (Sapp et al., 2016).

As an analytical approach, my work is guided by Latino/a Critical Race theory (LatCrit) which expands Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) to focus on aspects beyond race alone and to include factors such as language, ethnicity, class and culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Irizarry, 2011; Rolon-Dow, 2007). Critical race theory (CRT) illustrates and highlights how racism persists in our society, challenges dominant ideology, is rooted in social justice, and acknowledges the lived experiences of POC (Yosso et al., 2009, p.662-663). These perspectives are particularly vital in a field like higher education where the experiences of People of Color are often pushed to the periphery, if addressed at all. CRT is used to examine the multidimensionality of how People of Color navigate, experience and respond to racism and oppression in education (Solórzano, 1997; Yosso et al., 2009). Many scholars have used the framework as an analytical tool in the field of education to investigate the experiences of students of color and have applied the lens to unmask how race influences opportunities for marginalized

students in schools (Chapman, 2007; Espino, 2012; Irizarry, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2008; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). LatCrit moves beyond the Black and White binary and acknowledges the uniqueness and intricacies of the experiences of Latinxs (Malagon et al., 2009). The theory recognizes that there are similarities in the experiences of Latinxs to People of Color, but further complicates this by acknowledging that there are also differences in experiences from People of Color and within the Latinx group themselves (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Johnson, 1997).

More specifically, I used the five tenets of LatCrit frameworks proposed by Delgado Bernal (2002) as I interacted with my data. The five tenets of the framework are as follows: 1) the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination; 2) the challenge of dominant ideology; 3) the commitment to social justice; 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and 5) the transdisciplinary perspective. For example, these tenets captured the Puertorriqueñas' multidimensional identities that positioned them to identify themselves within the context of college going. It provided a lens from which to examine the history, colonialism and linguisticism that require more nuanced approaches to investigation and for making meaning of the experiences of Puertorriqueña students in this study. Because of my intentional focus on the experiences of students of color, specifically Puertorriqueñas, and the ways that race and racism shape their educational experiences—from the funding available to their schools to the ways they are targeted within school reform, LatCrit was well suited as an analytical framework for this study.

Participants and Research Context

Five high school students who all self-identified as Puertorriqueña and having

aspirations of going to college and were enrolled in Knight High School within the mid-sized city of Esperanza City were recruited to participate in the study. The high school students were enrolled in the Puerto Rican History and Education course facilitated by the research team. Informed consent for participation was obtained as part of the informed consent form for participation in the course. Because the development of college going identities is not a solitary process, rather it is informed by others with whom the student interacts, I asked each student to nominate a key informant from their home, school or community to participate in the study as primary members of their social network. To identify the key informants, participants were asked to name individuals who have shaped their college going aspirations and/or have served as a source of information about college going. Informed consent was also obtained from key informants.

Esperanza City has a total population of 40,341 (U.S. Census, 2017) and is comprised of 51.2% Hispanic/Latinxs, 43% white non-Hispanic, 3.8% Black/African American and 1.6% Asian (U.S. Census, 2017). Just over half the population is female (51.1%) (U.S. Census, 2017). Persons ages 18-64 years comprise nearly 62.3% of the population (CensusViewer, 2017) and the median resident age is 35.2 years (City-Data.com, 2015). Nearly fifty percent (47.1%) of the population speaks a language other than English at home (U.S. Census, 2013-2017). While 79.0% of the population has a high school degree or higher, only 24.1% have a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census, 2013-2017). Less than half of the population is a homeowner (40.6%) (U.S. Census, 2013-2017) and 58% of the housing tenure is renter-occupied housing units (Esperanza City Population and Demographics, 2015). The median household income is \$37,954, about half that of the state (\$74,167) (U.S. Census, 2013-2017) and per capita

income is \$22,625 (U.S. Census, 2013-2017). Nearly three times as many people in Esperanza City live below the federal poverty level (28.6%) compared to the state rate (10.5%) (U.S. Census, 2013-2017). Among family households (63.3%), greater than 1 in 5 (22.14%) has a female head of household with no husband present (Esperanza City Population and Demographics, 2015). Based on the statistics captured here, Esperanza City is often described as a primarily low-income, medium-sized urban environment. However, it is also a vibrant, linguistically diverse city with an active and vocal community and local government that advocates for opportunities for growth and that derives strength from the pride and spirit of its residents.

Of the total population in Esperanza City, 48.4% is Hispanic/Latinx (Esperanza City Population and Demographics, 2015) and among those, approximately 85% is Puerto Rican. Puerto Ricans began to migrate in mass to Esperanza City in the 1960s in response to recession on the Island and in search of job opportunities farming in the tobacco fields (Esperanza City.org, 2015).

Of importance to note regarding the demographics of Esperanza City is the effect of Hurricane Maria. Massachusetts has the third highest rates of Puerto Ricans displaced by Hurricane Maria. Of the more than 135,000, 15,208 have relocated to Massachusetts. Because Esperanza city has very strong ties to the Puerto Rican communities living on the Island, the city has been receiving increasing numbers of Puerto Ricans who are now resettling in its local neighborhood communities. Despite the support coming from community-based agencies that have been granted funding to subsidize the basic needs of Puerto Rican evacuees as they resettle, families—such as those whose stories are featured

in this dissertation-- continue to confront significant barriers during these critical transitions.

Based on a summary from Knight High Public Schools District Review report (2014), the following situates Knight High School's performance within the landscape of public schools in Esperanza City and the State ("Knight High" Public Schools District Review, 2014). There are eleven public schools in Esperanza City including two high schools. Knight High is the largest of all of the schools in the City with 1,309 students compared to the other high school which has 403 students and is a technical school. In the last academic year, the student body was comprised of 68% Latinxs, 27% White, 3% Asian and 1% mixed-race. Gender was fairly balanced with 699 male students and 620 female students enrolled. Knight High is in the 11th percentile of high schools. Esperanza City is a Level 4 district and was designated as underperforming by the state Board of Education in 2003 and is in state receivership. The district has underperformed on each of its Composite Performance Index (CPI) targets compared to both district targets and to State rates. These include English Language Acquisition, Math, and Science.

Data Sources

There were multiple sources of data collected to inform this study that allowed access to information through multiple modalities and thus, created a more comprehensive landscape from which to triangulate themes and findings. Using triangulation, I was able to compare emerging themes from simultaneous data sources to address the research questions. This was particularly important among the high school Aspirantes because it provided multiple points of access and context to the ways that they made meaning of the concepts that were presented and investigated and each could be

compared to ensure trustworthiness of the emergent themes.

Field Notes

This was a year-long ethnographic study embedded in a larger YPAR collaborative project. I spent one academic year (September 2015- June 2016) as a participant observer in this setting and engaged in more than 250 hours interacting with participants within the class and research setting, observing and documenting their activities, and participating in additional community and school-based events. Prior to entering the field (the school) each day, I documented my goals for the day and my reflections about my prior observations that were informing my perspectives. Immediately following each class session, I documented my classroom observations through extensive field notes. I collected and analyzed student academic work, such as papers and student research presentations and used video recording from selected class sessions to inform my notes.

As is common in critical ethnographic practices (Madison, 2012), I was intentional in being reflexive in my research by checking my positionality and interrogating any power dynamic that may have existed in my interactions with participants and within the research context. I documented my reflections about how the participants and I negotiated power dynamics and how this influenced data collection. I documented my biases toward the community and its culture as well as how these beliefs and biases changed over the course of the research study. Additionally, I tried to take into account how the research (the activities that I was engaged in) impacted the student participants. And finally, I documented inconsistencies by triangulating my findings and interpretations with the participants in order to check for trustworthiness. I used a variation of field notes in my process of conducting my ethnography (John & Lofland,

1995; Sanjeck, 1990).

In-depth Phenomenological Interviews

To learn more about Puertorriqueña high school students' knowledge, beliefs and attitudes toward college going, I conducted three in-depth, phenomenological interviews with each of the five participants following Seidman's (2013; 2006) data-gathering process. I obtained written informed consent from each participant prior to conducting the video-recorded interviews. Per Seidman's protocol, the first semi-structured interview provided the participant with the opportunity to share important aspects of her life story that, according to her, best illustrated who she is and what experiences and relationships have been most integral in shaping her identity thus far. The second interview focused on details of the participant's educational experiences and included a semi-structured interview protocol to focus the interview on how these experiences informed her college going process and aspirations. The third interview provided an opportunity for the participant to reflect and make sense of her experiences particularly as they related to her perception of and meaning making about college going. I also conducted one semi-structured interview with a key informant nominated by each participant totaling five additional interviews. This person was a family member, a friend, or a mentor. I initially asked each participant to nominate a person who had some proximity and influence in their educational experiences and college aspirations. Interviews with key informants took place in a designated space identified by the interviewee and varied from the local public library, the school and their home. Interviews lasted approximately 4.5 hours over 3 sessions (Seidman, 2013).

Participant Observations and Student Work

Ethnographers have immersed themselves in participant cultures for decades and have moved into participants' communities, learned their language and have learned the "basic beliefs, fears, hopes and expectations of the people under study" (Van Manen, 1996, p.45). As a Puertorriqueña with ties to a similar culture and community, I anticipated feeling some comfort and familiarity with the language and practices within the participant cultures. I immersed myself in the participants' lives as much as it was appropriate and as much as they allowed. I spent time to develop relationships that not only contributed to overall experiences in the classroom but also transcended the barriers of the traditional school day leading to time with each participant outside of the classroom. I engaged in multiple modes of communication with the students, such as texting, emailing and short phone calls as a method for gathering additional data. The number of classroom contact hours exceed 220 hours. Moreover, students work assignments served as data sources. These included students' educational autobiographical essays, baseline assessment of their knowledge about college (for example, college application and financial aid, college choice and admission) and reflection essays on their identities, aspirations, hopes and dreams.

Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using NVivo Version 11. Data analysis began as soon as I started the ethnographic investigation, and it was a continuous process of meaning making throughout the study. Analysis started as the interviews and the observation were being conducted and were followed by these stages of analysis: transcription, open coding, focused coding, categorizing, theme building, and theory

formation (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). Throughout the duration of my research I observed and recorded participants' body language and noted in my field notes my observations of the emotional and non-verbal communication with participants. Also, because identities are performed through discourse (Gee, 2000), I documented how participants performed their identities through their gestures, expressions, and emotional responses and included these responses in my triangulation of the multiple data sources.

I viewed the video recording of each interview multiple times to ensure deep familiarity with the content and to facilitate accurate verbatim transcription. A total of 20 interviews (3 in-depth interviews per participant and 1 in-depth interviews with their key informants) were conducted and transcribed. As each interview was completed, I transcribed it and added in my notes and participant observations during the interviews that were notable. During the transcription stage, I re-listened to the participant's narrative and by listening and re- listening, I gained deeper understanding an aimed at obtaining accurate transcriptions of expressions and comments made by each participant.

I used constant comparison of data through several sequential steps (Strauss & Corbins, 1990). The process of the data analysis included open coding of the data, selecting codes for further analysis, clustering codes into categories, identifying themes that showed relationship with the categories and finally, building a theoretical framework that addresses the research questions. I triangulated emerging themes across the multiple data sources allowing comparison for consistency and trustworthiness.

I conducted open coding and used line-by-line analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) which allowed me to divide the text into meaning units which represented particular concepts. Concepts were then given labels as codes. As I analyzed each

transcript, I assigned these codes in the margin next to the concept identified. After establishing my direction with open coding, I used focused coding to cluster segments of the data into categories (Charmaz, 2006). In addition to triangulation, I used the “constant comparison” method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to relate the categories to one another and to generate the patterns identified in the data. In the next step of analysis, I developed themes from the relationships between categories and/or categories and concepts.

In addition to the rapport I developed with the study participants and their key informants (Irizarry, 2011), I developed network displays for the multiple data sources in order to determine whether the themes were “trustworthy” (Anfara et al., 2002). In the final stage of analysis, I developed two overarching thematic findings and seven major findings within them that responded to the research questions.

Furthermore, I incorporated reflexive practice to keep an awareness of my presuppositions since these can influence inquiry. Guillemin and Guillam (2004) suggest that a researcher practice reflexivity so that her role is critically and actively evaluated. In this ethnography, I had proximity to the participants’ experiences. I interacted with members of their communities and families and grew close to them. This allowed me to understand the topic of interest from their vantage point. To do this in a reflexive way, I kept reflective field notes and considered these in the data analysis.

Limitations

While the findings of this work might resonate with other Puertorriqueñxs or other Latinxs, the goal of my study was to generate a depth of knowledge about this particular group of students in this particular community. Therefore, generalizability is not the goal of this research. A study with a larger selection of participants may present

additional themes about Puerto Rican experiences with education and college going. In this study sample, all participants expressed a desire or aspiration to attend college. This may not be true of all Puerto Rican students in the city. Therefore, this research does not provide information about gaps in college aspirations, as those individuals without existing college aspirations were not included in the study. To learn more about how and whether an individual forms college aspirations, additional research is needed and would need to include all Puertorriqueñx high school junior-aged students, not just those with college aspirations.

Ethical Considerations

Communities can offer rich insight into the trends that researchers aim to examine. As a researcher, I tried to practice sensibility and carefully considered how the information I gathered was going to be utilized. Paris & Winn (2014) propose the concept of the “worthy witness” to refer to qualitative researchers that seek to unveil systems of inequality in their work with youth who are marginalized. They provide frameworks that I was guided by that situate what it means to “humanize research” in order to build caring relationships and consciousness between researcher and participant (Paris & Winn, 2014). From the inception of my research, I intentionally considered the following critical questions: “Is my study credible? Do the data reflect the participants’ views? Do I as the researcher reflect on my role? Can another researcher follow the internal logic in developing conclusions?” (Rossman & Rallis, 2010, p. 7). Because data were collected through a variety of “social interactions” and the analysis was based on explanations and interpretations, there was “no ‘pure’ or ‘raw’ data” (Freeman et al., 2007, p. 27). Therefore, the analysis of the qualitative data is a “reconstruction” (p.27) of the

interpretations that I and the research participants created. The information that participants shared with me was considered to be non-neutral data. Thus, the data was part of a specific situation and culturally relative position (Freeman et al., 2007). As a qualitative researcher, I was an active participant in the research process. I aimed to develop rapport with the research participants. It was my responsibility to be transparent with myself as well as with the participants about the relationship that we were creating and maintained awareness of the possible power imbalance between them and I, especially when our connections were so organic and seemed easy (Etherington, 2007).

Participant Auto-Profiles

In the first phenomenological in-depth interview that focused on their background, each participant was asked to tell me about themselves. Below are direct quotes from their narratives centering their voices on what was salient for them. Notably, when asked to share about themselves, each narrated a story detailing important aspects of their experiences.

Luz

I was born in Cayey, PR. I moved here when I was really young. That is why I speak more English than Spanish because I was put here in school since very young. Both my grandparents have farms. I always mention it because both sides of my family still to this day have farms. I consider myself a good student. I do pretty good in school. I do good in Spanish class. I have an A in that class and I am doing AP next year, so it means I have to speak Spanish. I like school, personally. I know that there are people that say, "I hate school"... I have had

nursing in mind since the 8th grade when the nursing club happened. We got to try things out with the fake babies.

I grew up in Esperanza city for the most part. There were three years that I lived in [nearby city]. I remember that. That was really good. I lived in a really quiet neighborhood near the hospital. And my best friend lived like five minutes away. I had a dog and we always had a lot of parties and get-togethers.

In my neighborhood, we are all very connected. It is just one long street where I live. We all know each other and I feel like kind of safe and nothing bad that I know of has happened on that street. If anything, bad does happen, you can go to your next-door neighbor's house and they will help you out. Where I used to live, it was scary because people got stabbed in that area and assaulted. I remember that we lived upstairs from my mom's aunt. But the neighborhoods are still very family oriented and that is comforting. There is always family or someone you know around, so even when bad things happen there is still a sense of safety.

My dad was born here but his parents were both born on the Island. My parents are the best, they are very nice. I remember I used to go with my family to PR and stay with my grandparents and I use to go every morning to get the eggs from the chickens. My mom was born in Puerto Rico and she had it tough in school. (Luz, First Interview)

Yadira

I was a preemie, I was born four months early and I went through like a lot of hardship in my life. I had a g-tube from 5 years old until I was sixteen. I still had to do that in school. I had to schedule feeding with the nurse to get it done. It was very stressful. We took it out when I was 16, my first day of my sophomore year. I was born [at the local] Hospital and was raised in Esperanza city. I have been here for 16 years. Nursing has always been a passion ever since I was little and visited a lot of the hospitals. I like the way that they help me so I always wanted to be a nurse after that experience...I wanted to treat people the way that they treated me in the hospital.

In my community, there's a lot of violence. Like even around where I live, there is a lot of gunshots. A few weeks ago, there were some gunshots outside when me and my little sister was outside walking towards it. So, that kind of thing worries me and scares me. There is so much violence some people have guns. I don't see it always, but I definitely hear it often.

We have a big family. My mom's side of the family is bigger than my dad side of the family. My dad supports me a lot. He wants me to go to college and he tells me don't let it be like it was for me and your mom. I want you to do much better than us. No one in my family has been to college. So, they want me and my sister to really go to college and to do something good for ourselves and for the family. My parents always tell me go to college so that you don't end up like they did.

My mother doesn't want me to end up living off of welfare and all of the other support that they get. She wants me to learn how to do it on my own and live with my own earnings. (Yadira, First Interview)

Yazmín

I have always loved learning different things. My father has influenced me for the most part, like about my education and everything. He grew up in a family of three. My mother, she grew up in Puerto Rico in Canobanas with six siblings and she had her mom and her dad.

One of my dreams, I guess you can say, is that I want to be a voice actress. I love singing. I sing all the time, that is something I do a lot. Every time I watch musicals like Grease, I know that this is something I love so much. I love music so much. I kind of love the fact that you play around with your voice and singing while you act. I just find that fun. Like I find acting fun. I kind of heard that you can study things like this in college. I dream that I could do that there too.

I don't really see my community as bad, but I guess that from what people are telling me, they say, "oh but you live in the highlands... But it is like, the highlands are supposed to be a nice place where there is a lot of houses. I guess people can say that is where the white people live because they have houses but I live there and I am surrounded by nothing but houses. There are some buildings, but not that many. And then there is this big project of apartments.

Melody

I am a middle child which means that I probably fall under the stereotype of the middle child—that makes me more prone to do the right thing in my family. I like to read. I have quite a big collection of books. I like to watch musicals. There are times when I am quiet. I am not the partier because I don't feel like I need to do it. I don't feel the pressure to do it like everyone else. Like drinking and smoking—I stay true to who I am and don't let peer pressure get to me.

I have been considering being a nurse practitioner but I have also been considering teaching. But I don't know if I have the patience. I want to help people. I think that is because my mom works in a nursing home and my grandma died of diabetes. I am also fascinated by nursing but I don't think I can be a doctor.

I grew up in Esperanza city and I have been in Esperanza city all of my life. I feel like, Esperanza city could be worse to be honest. But I feel that it isn't that bad. There is obviously that person that knows everyone in Esperanza city. That is what I like about it. So many people know each other and you can just be like, "oh you know cousin!".

My mom was in school in Puerto Rico until high school and then she dropped out her junior or senior year and then got her GED. My dad graduated high school

and he spent a year in college (Local Community College) and then he had to drop out because of financial issues.

Damaris

I live with my mom, my brother and my sister. I have a huge family. I am a cheerleader and also did it in middle school. I competed in high school. I was born in Puerto Rico. In Guayama. [My mom] finished high school in PR and she had me when she was 17 years old. We moved back and forth a lot. Then I wasn't doing good in the school when we were there because I didn't know how to speak Spanish that well and she moved back. We only stayed for about 6 months. We moved to Esperanza city and we lived with my grandma for a few months and then we moved to our own apartment.

I want to be a nurse. I want to start as an RN and then I will probably go further. I want to be a nurse because I like helping people and because my mom wanted to be a nurse and now she is a CNA and I see the communication she has with people and I like that. I love working with people. For example, I work in Burger King but I rather be babysitting or working helping people.

There are some bad parts [in my community] but I don't think it is the worst city because there hasn't been that many bad stuff happening lately. I think that it is very small and everyone knows each other. Where I live, it is near the mountain and it is nice. The people are good people.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This study was guided by Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) which expands critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) to focus on aspects beyond race alone and includes factors such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, class and culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Irizarry, 2011; Rolon-Dow, 2007). It highlights how racism persists in our society, it challenges dominant ideology, is rooted in social justice, and acknowledges the lived experiences of People of Color (Yosso et al., 2009, p.662-663). As I noted earlier in Chapter 3, the five tenets of the framework are: 1) the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination 2) the challenge of dominant ideology 3) the commitment to social justice 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge and 5) the interdisciplinary perspective. These five tenets provided a lens to examine the history, colonialism and linguicism that require more nuanced approaches to investigation and for making meaning of the experiences of Puertorriqueña students with regard to their college going identity formation. The framework helped reveal how the process of learning about college for these students was fraught with inconsistent access to college-going preparatory opportunities. For this group, learning the college-going vocabulary and culture was akin to learning a new cultural language. Thus, their development of a college-going identity, while being part of the Puerto Rican diaspora, was comprised of experiences not accounted for by conventional expectations of the college-going process.

Their educational experiences and their college-going identity development was

influenced by intersecting factors of race, ethnicity, and language and by their experiences with straddling both family and school-based cultural domains. While the participants referred on occasion to their identity as “a girl”, the data did not reveal gender as a primary factor in their college going identity. Gender did not appear to be independently central to their narrative but rather a part of the primary identity as Puertorriqueñas. As part of the role of family values in their identity as Puerto Rican students, they refer to care taking responsibility, however, neither they nor their key informants refer to these roles from a gendered perspective but rather as part of their role part of a Puerto Rican family and as part of their role as the eldest sibling in most cases. In multiple instances, similar roles of caretaking and overall family responsibility were mentioned for their brothers and other members of the family. Similarly, findings related to seeking colleges that were proximate to the family were again linked to their membership and connection with their family and related to an overall absence of a range of options rather than as a result of their gender identity.

The statement below was shared by Damaris as part of an essay assignment focused on Latinxs’ experience in education. In this assignment, all students in the class were asked to express their thoughts about their educational experiences as Puerto Rican students in the United States. She wrote,

Many people believe that us Latinos do not care about education and can’t go to college. We are said to be lazy and dumb...I know I don’t fit into this narrative. I am good in school. I am a very respectful student. I come to school all the time and I have never failed a class...Some of the challenges I faced with education was that I was not informed about the

great opportunities and I didn't have the best teachers. There aren't that many teachers that care about us [Latinos]. If I would've known about the great opportunities, I would have been better. (Damaris, Essay)

In her essay, Damaris expressed her concerns about the type of education offered at her high school. One concern she expressed was how she has had to push against the dominant narrative (Irizarry, 2011)—the deficit perspective of Latinx students in education—which perpetuates negative stereotypes of Puerto Rican students in her high school. Similarly, in another class assignment focused on college and future goals, Luz described a fear she had regarding the potential impact that the negative stereotypes targeting Puerto Rican students at her school could have on her overall college choice process. She wrote,

I fear that the way that teachers in my school see us [Puerto Ricans] as being lazy and not smart enough will make me not qualify for any colleges because teachers will not want to recommend me... It sucks because they just don't get to know you. (Damaris, College questionnaire assignment)

Damaris and Luz's narratives provide a lens into how students' experience the impact of negative labels on their overall educational experiences at Knight High School. These powerful quotes are representative of the young women's experiences and the findings that emerged through my ethnographic study and affirm the literature that highlights how negative stereotyping and labeling of minoritized students in education can cause students to internalize negative beliefs associated with their potential to do well in school. These deficit-driven dominant narratives will affect students' ability to feel prepared for the demands of college going (Oakes, 2003; Sapp, Marquez Kiyama & Dache-Gerbino,

2015; Steele, C., 1997; Steinberg, L., 1996). The data in this study also revealed that even though participants reported being aware of the negative labeling and stereotypes in their school, they were also actively resisting those labels. This topic among others is at the core of participants' process of developing a concept of college going. There is a need to better understand the experiences of Puertorriqueña high school students and their aspirations to attend college. The lives and experiences of students in this study were impacted by racism, limited access to opportunities and inadequate resources and information about college-going. This qualitative study explicitly focused on the college choice process among five Puertorriqueña urban high school students, a group that is virtually absent from the literature in higher education.

Two interrelated aims motivated this study. One, was to unpack the experiences and knowledge base of a group of Puertorriqueña high school students approaching graduation—a critical juncture in the college-choice process. The second was to map the development of their college-going identities to better understand the factors that influenced their academic trajectories, higher education aspirations, and their college choice process. Centering participant voices, the findings in this chapter respond to the research questions and provide a critical examination of students' educational experiences and the processes through which these five students began to develop a college-going identity. Because college-going identity is described in the literature as being college ready (Conely, 2010; Liou et al., 2009) and having the knowledge and the skills necessary to access and to navigate the college-going culture (Conely, 2010), I sought to answer the following two overarching research questions:

- 1) What factors influence the decision-making process about college going

for Puertorriqueña high school college Aspirantes?

2)What does this group of Puertorriqueña high school students know about the college-going process (i.e. college access and choice; application process)?

The findings speak to the strength of participants' cultural identities and the roles these play in the process of forming a college-going identity. The findings convey participant narratives of aspiration, resistance and transformation related to the process of developing the concept and identity of college going.

Overall Summary of Findings

Early in the data collection, it was evident that participants had in fact begun to construct a concept around college going and it was clear that their concept was interrelated with other parts of their identities. The data also revealed that their evolving college-going concepts had been informed by several social contexts in their educational experiences, such as their family, peer groups, community and school. Because the data yielded evidence that participants did experience a college-going identity formation process, I further investigated the factors that influenced that process. The data showed that the primary motivating factor for college-going was their family and community. This emerged in several ways. One important factor was having access to caring individuals, often within their own families, who provided participants with friendship, mentorship, understanding and motivation during their process of thinking and planning to go to college. Another finding indicated that participants were motivated to fulfill the expectation that they would be going to college in order to improve their families' current socio-economic condition. All participants expressed feeling a sense of uncertainty about

their and their families' future and were hopeful that earning a college degree would provide better opportunities. In a class assignment, Yadira responded to a prompt asking the following question: What does going to college mean to you? Yadira responded:

“College is the key to my family’s success and the door out of poverty. I know I have to make sure I get to go.”

This sentiment was shared by the other participants whose goal to go to college was wrapped up in a desire to do well by their family. Because going to college was a pivotal goal for all participants, I assessed how much they knew about the process and examined where they accessed the necessary prerequisite information needed to prepare themselves for college. It was evident in the data that participants had limited knowledge of the college-going process. For example, participants indicated that there were very limited opportunities to access information about college in their school. They shared that instead they gathered information through word of mouth and in random encounters with their counselors. Overall, participants received incomplete college preparatory information during their college choice process and had pieced together fragmented knowledge about the college-going process.

Each participant activated their agency in order to create successful educational pathways and to maintain high aspirations toward their goal of going to college despite not having access to adequate college preparatory resources and support. The narratives that participants shared in this study yielded rich and valuable “insider knowledge” (Irizarry & Raible, 2014, p.435) that can serve to inform the study of college access and choice in the field of higher education to better understand the experiences and perspectives of Puerto Rican high school students in inner-city public schools. The five Puerto Rican

students in this study provided insight related to their dynamic experiences relative to the context in which they live. Consistent with the core principals of LatCrit and centered in students' experiences as they prepared for college, I focused my research analysis on the racialized aspects of students' experiences, paying special attention to how race intersects with other identities such as culture, class, gender and ethnicity (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012; Irizarry, 2011; Rolon-Dow, 2007). The data revealed the ways in which this group of Puertorriqueña students made meaning of the concept of college going. Their perspectives shaped my analysis and prompted an expanded definition of 'college-going identity' for *Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas*.

In this study, participants described the concept of going to college as going to an ambiguous, far-off place disconnected from their community (Irizarry & Ruiz, 2016). However, 'college' to them, embodied a profound goal of accomplishment and symbolized "the key to success", as Yadira, Melody and Yazmín stated in their interviews. Though different from the expected process, the data collected through interviews, observations and student class work, indicated that there is indeed a college going identity development process for the participants of this study. Race and racism played a role in shaping their educational experiences leading toward the development of their college going aspirations. Participants' concept of college going was centered in their experiences as Puerto Rican students in Knight High School. "College-going" for these students was viewed as a culture and a value system separate from their own culture and values.

The findings emerged into seven interrelated themes and were categorized into two sections. The first section is titled *Influential Factors Contributing to the Development of a Concept of College-going*. This section highlights the factors that motivated the participants

to aspire to attend college and responds to the first overarching research question “what factors influence the decision-making process about college going for Puertorriqueña high school *Aspirantes*?”. The second section theme is titled, *Opportunity Gaps* and addresses the second overarching research question “what does this group of Puertorriqueña high school students know about the college-going process?” and offers explanations of the meaning *Aspirantes* ascribed to college going, insight to how participants navigate an environment complicated by resource-related barriers, negative perceptions, and—despite these factors—the students’ capacity and strength to retain their aspirations and seek opportunities. In what follows, I offer a summary of each emergent theme and then I describe and analyze each in depth in the rest of the chapter.

The first section, *Influential Factors Contributing to the Development of a Concept of College-going* includes the first three themes. The first theme, *Multiple Motivating Factors Associated with College Going*, revealed several key factors that motivated participants’ aspirations for college. The most significant motivating factor was parental encouragement. Parents motivated participants by championing their academic potential and by preparing them to fight against possible negative stereotyping they could experience in schools. Participants shared that their parents wanted them to have access to better opportunities. This stands in contrast to a dominant narrative that suggests that Puerto Rican parents in U.S. schools are uninvolved in their children’s educational experiences. These parents were not only encouraging their daughters, they were also actively countering the deficit perspective of Puertorriqueñ high school students. Because participants were the first to break the stereotype and had been identified as being “the one” to go to college (see Theme 3), they expressed being fearful of failing to fulfill that important role. This fear, however, served to

motivate participants to forge toward their ultimate goal. Lastly, while the research suggests parents play a vital role, the data showed that in addition to parents, participants felt motivated by other “family-like” individuals. Each participant identified at least one influential person who played an important role in their process of thinking about college. These individuals expressed interest in their overall wellbeing and needs. The care demonstrated by these individuals was meaningful to participants’ sense of being valued as students.

The second theme, *Bien Educada: The Role of Family*, revealed that family practices and expectations played a central role in participants’ educational trajectory and decisions. Participants shared that their parents felt a great amount of *orgullo* (pride) about their daughters’ ability to become *bien educadas* (well educated) and placed emphasis on the significance of education. *Bien educada* in this study did not just mean academic achievement. Being well educated also meant the ability to retain the important cultural values held by the family rather than assimilating to the dominant cultural norms that is endorsed through the college going process. In a sophisticated approach, participants shared how they retained a collection of family and cultural values focused on moral development and imparted by the parents within the family context while also upholding the value that attaining an education in the U.S. was as essential reason for their decisions to migrate from the Island. The data also revealed that participants and their families feared a potential loss of moral and cultural values in the process of being educated in the “American” cultural context.

The third theme, “*Hay que Superarse!*”(translated: You Have to Overcome!”): *Being “The One” to Go to College* illustrates the responsibility that each participant felt they

needed to uphold for their family. All five participants described an inherited role of “being the one” who would be able to improve their family’s social condition by going to college. They all used the same exact phrase “being the one” in their narratives. Each of the participants described their family’s as being low income and having limited resources to meet basic needs. By going to college and earning a degree, participants hoped to be able to help their families break out of the cycle of poverty and felt pride to be the ones who their parents believed could achieve that objective. However, the work that it required for each participant to prepare to attend college with limited access to college preparatory resources proved to be very difficult.

The second section, *Opportunity Gaps*, includes themes four through seven. The fourth theme, *The Meaning of College for Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas*, revealed that the meaning participants assigned to the concept of college going was informed by their Puerto Rican culture, their family cultural context and their positionality within their communities. College represented a collective accomplishment that they planned to share with their families and for several participants, the accomplishment of going to college was supported and celebrated by other members of their community. According to participants, college meant freedom, success, legitimization, and resistance.

The fifth theme, *Traversing Minefields and Resisting Negative Labels*, arose from participants’ narratives about having to negotiate marginalizing spaces in their school communities. The data revealed that participants did not feel that their culture and language was valued in certain environments in the school, such as, in higher academic level courses, student government, academic related clubs, in science and in math. They expressed frustration with the racial climate in their high school and having to resist stereotypes and

navigate unpleasant experiences in school. According to them, being Puertorriqueñas and from Esperanza City triggered negative stereotyping about who they were as students. They felt that their Puerto Rican culture and their language practices were devalued. Participants indicated that some of the negative treatment they experienced seemed associated with the negative assumptions teachers and their student counterparts made about the communities and neighborhoods where they lived. These experiences, however, while hurtful, served as a source of strength and motivation for participants to continue forging ahead toward their goal of going to college.

The sixth theme, “*Making the best of what you got*”: *Bridging the Gaps and Seeking Opportunities for College-going*, revealed participants’ experiences of having to navigate an educational environment that they felt was undermining their potential to thrive academically. The data showed that participants had to become their own self-advocates in order to access opportunities that would help them prepare for college. In contrast to college access and choice frameworks that suggest that the resources and information needed for students to successfully navigate the college going preparation process should be accessible and provided in their school environments, all participants believed that many teachers and administrators in their high school were intentionally keeping them from accessing better quality educational opportunities. They felt that negative stereotypes that characterize low income Puerto Rican students as low achieving were also influencing teacher perceptions and assumptions of who they were as students, making it almost impossible to be seen as the strong students that they really were. The data also revealed that participants were very conscious about the impact of not having access to the necessary resources to prepare well for college and were aware of the drawback of being persistently discouraged from higher

academic courses. Yet, they all expressed the same sentiment, as Luz put it, “making the best of what you got”.

The seventh theme, “*Lo que la escuela no me enseñó*”: *College Choice for Puertorriqueñx High School Students*, described the college choice process that participants experience while in Knight High School. Like, Yazmín, who said, “*yo me tuve que enseñar lo que la escuela no me enseñó*” (I had to teach myself what the school didn’t teach me), this theme presented evidence that participants in this study navigated the college choice process on their own and created their own pathways for accessing the information and experience because guidance through this process was never available.

In the next section, I will discuss each of the seven emergent themes in detail and will use direct quotes to provide evidence of the findings. After each thematic discussion, I will analyze the findings using a LatCrit analytic lens.

Thematic Findings

Section One: Influential Factors Contributing to the Development of a Concept of College-going

Theme 1: Multiple Motivating Factors Associated with College Going

The data revealed that there are several interrelated sub-themes that motivated participants’ aspirations for college. They include: 1a) Parental Encouragement; 1b) Countering the Dominant Narrative; and 1c) Caring Individuals.

1a. Parental Encouragement

The most prominent motivator was the encouragement and support that participants received from their parents. All five participants shared that, since a very early age, their parents promoted education and placed value on school and academic achievement.

Contrary to commonly held views of Latinx parental involvement that Latinx parents devalue education and that they are uninvolved (Auerbach, 2007; Ceballo, Suarez & Aretakis, 2014; Drummond & Stipek, 2004) in their children's education, participants characterized their parents' involvement as a very intentional practice in their family. They shared that their parents' encouragement to do well in school was effective and motivated them to do well and influenced their process of preparing for college. In her interview, Luz described how her mother encouraged her aspirations for college going. In her description, Luz became very animated. She positioned herself to role play how her mother would motivate her to think about going to college. Luz straightened her body up on her chair, raised her arms and changed her tone of voice to mimic her mother's voice and stated:

My mom always talked to me about going to college. She always said, YOU HAVE to go to college. She has said this to me since I was a little girl. (Luz, Second Interview)

Luz explained that her mother spoke to her about college in a serious manner and that she respected this greatly. Melody's parents did the same. She described that the most important value in her family has always been to strive for excellence in school and to believe that she could do anything she wanted to do. Melody shared:

My parents were like, "You have to get good grades so that you can go to college. *Esto es uno de nuestros valores, Melody*". (This is one of our values, Melody). From a young age, I figured I was going to go to college. They always made me believe that I can do anything I put my mind to. (Melody, Interview)

Participants' parents encouraged their daughters to have aspirations for college primarily because they couldn't access higher education when they were young and they wanted to ensure that their daughters could have access to better opportunities. Each participant confirmed that their parents had not been able to attend college due to various circumstances related to family responsibilities and economic struggle. However, in turn, parents provided a lot of encouragement in the hopes that their daughters could have access to better academic opportunities that could lead to higher education. Luz provided the following response when I asked her about the origin of her aspirations for college. She stated:

Yeah, my aspirations are connected to my family because I don't know anyone who has gone to college. And no one in my family went and I will be the first. (Luz, Second Interview)

In a similar way, when I asked Yazmín to share how her aspirations for college developed, she talked about her father. As she considered her response, Yazmín became emotional and said:

My father. I feel he mostly influences me because of his story. He wanted to be a pilot and even though he had the grades, he also went through that stage of being in urban high school... And so since he couldn't accomplish that, he always used his experience to show me that I should take any opportunity in school. He expects me to go to college. It would be important for me and for my family to go. (Yazmín, Second Interview)

In the passage above we can note that similar to Luz and Melody, Yazmín's aspirations to attend college were informed and encouraged by her family. More specifically, her

aspirations were also informed by her father's educational experiences. In my interview with Yazmín, I witnessed her emotion as she described her aspirations for going to college and how she attributed her aspirations to her father's experiences in inner-city public schools. Yazmín spoke at length about the negative impact that a "bad school system" had on her father's aspirations. She said:

The public school system didn't provide support for my father when he was young. He had the grades to go but he had to take care of my grandmother. No one ever knew what type of responsibility he had at home. There was no support. I want to go [to college] and do something for my life. We live the life of the struggle. My parents taught me that knowledge is everything and college is that key to success. I feel that is what I should strive for. (Yazmín, First Interview)

Like Yazmín, Damaris shared that her aspiration for college developed at an early age and was inspired by her mother's own aspiration of becoming a nurse. Damaris explained:

My aspirations for college came from my mother. She always wanted to be a nurse and she could only get to CNA [certified nurse assistant]. She has always motivated me to go for it because she couldn't make it. She has always believed in me and I want to make her proud. (Damaris, Field Notes-In class discussion).

Damaris explained to me that going to college was a goal yet to be realized by anyone in her family and becoming a nurse would be a great accomplishment and a gift to her mother. Though Damaris motivation to pursuing a college degree and becoming a nurse

is influenced by her mother's encouragement and also by the desire to combat the barriers that her mother faced, Damaris will have to persist against many odds in her pursuit to actualizing her college going aspiration given the on-going lack of opportunities (Sapp, Marquez Kiyama & Dache Gerbino, 2016).

College-going was a concept that was discussed frequently in participants' homes and participants' aspirations for college going also originated in the home. However, the development of the concept of college going was activated amid their encounters with educational disparities and opportunity gaps (as will be discussed in greater depth in Section 2). The data revealed that participants were developing a concept of college-going while also asserting their awareness of the limitations the educational system had on their parents' lives and how current limitations could potentially impact their own educational opportunities and trajectory. Because of this, another motivating factor to college going was to counter the commonly held negative views that Puerto Rican students aren't motivated to go to college or that they don't value education.

1b. Countering Dominant Narrative

The overall deficit perspectives and negative expectations of Puerto Rican students and their families resonated deeply in participants' narratives. The range of deficit and negative expectations include the belief that parents are uninterested and uninvolved in their children's education; the perception that Puerto Rican students aren't able to succeed in school or have aspirations to pursue higher education; and the expectation that Puerto Rican students will fail. Each of these has become a dominant narrative in the city's public schools. Participants indicated that they and their families were conscious of the impact of racism on the educational experience of Puerto Ricans in

Esperanza city and that one of the best ways to combat this was to successfully go to college. Participants fought against the negative stereotyping and the lack of opportunities they experienced in their schools. Yazmín shared that being Puertorriqueña is what motivates her to want to go to college. She affirmed:

My father says that it is hard for Puertorriqueños to get ahead because the system already believes that we can't succeed and can't get an education in the U.S. ... But I am going to work hard because my parents already made the first steps and did their best. I can break the stereotype and get into college. (Yazmín, Field Notes-In class discussion)

Yazmín, was creating a counterstory to the dominant narrative about the Puertorriqueña high school student in Esperanza City. The concept of college-going for Yazmín and for other participants in the study was also motivated by a consciousness of educational inequity. Even though participants identified as being college aspirants, they also identified as being the inheritors of a history of racism and disparities in the U.S. educational system. In my first interview with Yazmín, she shared her philosophy about the education system in the city where she lives. I was struck by the criticality of her statement. She stated:

This is an urban city but people of color are the ones that mostly endure the struggles and the hard times and since the whites don't have all that oppression, the support is not there. That is something that holds a barrier. They don't understand the situation. Society makes that barrier and the oppression puts us in that spot. This is how I think about my education. (Yazmín, First Interview)

It has been well established that historically quality education and resources have been unequally distributed in the U.S. (Oakes, 2003). Yazmín, Melody, Damaris, Yadira and Luz are students in a district where the disproportionate distribution of educational resources has impacted their community. Participants have expressed feeling the burden of what it means to be a student in Esperanza city and from a school that was taken over by the state. Despite their aspirations for college, they are aware that they have not had access to critical resources to ensure they are well prepared for college. Thus, this awareness also created fear among participants.

Having aspirations for college generated worry that participants described as fear. They feared the possibility of failing to fulfill the goal of going to college for themselves and for their families. Their goals were linked to the hopes that their parents had for their futures. For example, Luz explained that even though she is motivated to go to college by her parents, she is also fears that she isn't able to make it into college based on the anticipated barriers related to the lack of college preparatory resources. She said:

I want to go and I feel like I have to go. I don't want to struggle. I don't want my parents to struggle. I feel that college is a way to prevent it. But I am scared that I don't have what it takes to make it there.

However, the fear served to motivate participants to forge ahead in their plans toward their college going goal. Melody was aware of the limited resources that her school district offered and felt tentative about her preparedness. She also felt fear about her ability to gain admission into college. However, she explained that, despite the barriers, she found motivation to find a way. In a class discussion on hopes and fears about

college, Melody, who was usually fairly shy in the spotlight, shared the following with the group:

Not a lot of women who are Puerto Rican or of color have the opportunity to go to college because the schools that they are in don't prepare them well. That happened to my mother and I want to be one of those people that do go to college and succeed. I am scared that I don't know what I don't know but because of that, I am going to try my best. (Melody, Hopes and Fears About College Class Discussion)

Melody's hands were shaking as she held her palms together and shared her statement with the class. From across the room, Yadira nodded her head in agreement and raised her hand immediately after Melody finished talking. Yadira bellowed, "I know what you are talking about!" "I feel you!" Yadira said emphatically:

You don't know how much I worry about my future. I want to do good and I work hard and get good grades, but when I find out that what I am doing is not good enough, that scares me. But I feel what you are saying, Melody. I work even harder to make the point that I can even though I am from the projects of Esperanza city. (Yadira, Hopes and Fears About College Class Discussion)

I was struck by both students' contributions. Each was often shy and less frequently shared their ideas outwardly, let alone with such intention and emphasis. Their statements indicate a clear consciousness of their reality as aspiring to go to college knowing that their educational experiences have lacked potentially critical opportunities and resources and, while maintaining their passion and drive to be the one to attend college, they also

held a transgenerational fear that these obstacles could ultimately keep them from achieving their goal. As high school juniors having faced the navigational and opportunity barriers they have, the students articulate their positionality and are deeply reflexive and aware of its complexity.

Using the LatCrit analytic lens, there are several critical points worth noting. First, participants described how disparities and limitations are embedded into the educational system and expressed ways in which this is embodied as the experience of attending an urban high school. This speaks to the perpetuity of racism, a critical aspect of CRT and LatCrit. For example, Yazmín described her father's inability to achieve his aspiration to become a pilot as a "stage of being in urban school" and a result of the lack of support provided to him while he supported his family. This is an example of the way in which race, racism and oppression are embedded in systems and "normalized" as if it is reasonable and customary (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Rolon-Dow, 2005, p. 88) for certain groups to go without the resources and support needed to achieve success.

Second, the participants described having college going aspirations and that their motivation to go to college stemmed directly from their sense of responsibility to realize their parents' unfulfilled aspirations. Yosso's (2005) "community cultural wealth" framework was developed using a CRT framework and identifies six forms of capital (CCW) including aspirational capital. As illustrated by the experiences of participants in this study, aspirational capital is "the ability to sustain high aspirations" even in the face of significant barriers (Yosso & Garcia, 2007, p.69). Yazmín refers to her father's aspiration to become a pilot and Damaris to her mother's aspiration to become a nurse.

Both were unable to achieve their aspirations. This legacy of having aspirations and being faced with the possibility or the reality of not being able to actualize them is the experiential knowledge of their parents shared to motivate the participants toward their own college going goals. However, participants also indicated that they are not sure or do not know how they will achieve their aspirations because they too—like their parents 20-years prior—are faced with having inadequate preparation and resources for college going.

This reveals the long-lasting structural and systemic barriers that have limited Puerto Rican college going for over generations. Additionally, the experiential knowledge that is both shared by parents and lived by the participants is coupled with a keen awareness and consciousness of the limitations and inequities. As framed by LatCrit, this is an example of the “race consciousness” and “insider knowledge” (Irizarry & Raible, 2014) among Puerto Ricans that motivates them to challenge the dominant ideology and structures. This is illustrated by the participants’ commitment and conviction that they will realize their goal and their parents’ goal for them to attend college. While they are conscious of the lack of preparation they’ve been provided and aware of the fact that they do not know how they will accomplish their goal and even despite the fear that these conditions incite, the participants are committed to transforming their families’ narrative about college going with the ultimate goal of making their parents’ proud. Yadira exclaimed: “I work even harder to make the point that I can [go to college] even though I am from the projects of Esperanza city”. Akin to the “critical consciousness” described in Irizarry & Raible (2014), the participants in this study embody the transferred aspiration of college going from their parents which serves

as deep motivation and an acute awareness of their potential limitations based on the educational circumstances they have experienced which translates into fear. They harness both the motivation and the fear and remain deeply committed to achieving their own aspirations for college going despite the vast unknown associated with their goal.

1c. Caring Individuals

Another important motivating factor for college-going that emerged in the data, was the effect that caring individuals had on participants' motivation to embark in the college-going process. For this study, each participant was asked to nominate one person (key informant) who they felt had played an important role in their process of thinking about college. This person, in turn, was invited to participate in the study and, if consented, was interviewed. Participants described these individuals as having expressed interest in their overall wellbeing and needs during critical periods throughout their education. Similar to the agents of support characterized in Sapp et al. (2016), the Aspirantes in this study activated their agency to locate and ensure points of access and support from these individuals in order to secure opportunities for college going in the underresourced educational environment in which they were navigating. The Latina students in Sapp et al.'s (2016) study identified their parents as the most influential and supportive in their development of college aspirations. Positive parental and familial influence for Latinx students is a trend that has been identified in prominent research (see Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Perna & Titus, 2005; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Tierney & Auerbach, 2004;), has been referred to as authentic caring (Rolón-Dow, 2005) and is consistent with the findings in this study. Furthermore, the notion of family for the Aspirantes in this study, expanded to include caring

individuals who fulfilled a consistent caring support system that was culturally familiar and who in their support, countered the absence of care that participants were experiencing in the educational environment. Participants described feeling acknowledged and affirmed by these caring individuals who they felt saw them as strong, intelligent *Aspirantes* Puertorriqueñas. This affirmation was an essential factor in their motivation as college *Aspirantes*.

In the following section, I describe each nominated key informant, I provide a summary of the support the participant received from the informant, and a summary of the informants' perceptions of the participants with regard to their college-going aspirations and processes. The informants' perceptions of the participants knowledge about college was helpful in situating each participant within the context in which they were navigating. These individuals bore witness to the participants experiences in the school and provided another lens for analysis. Following the summary of the five key informants, I provide an analysis of the findings from this third Motivating Factors sub-theme—*Caring Individuals*.

Yolanda. When I asked Damaris to nominate an individual who had influenced her ideas about college, she sat back in her chair, paused thoughtfully to contemplate and—with a concerned look asked me, “do they have to be an official person from the school?” “No, not at all!” I responded. Damaris quickly responded:

Oh, okay then, because I don't have anyone in the school who has really helped me to plan for college. The only person who has believed in me and has made me want to go to college is my mother. (Damaris, Field Notes- Initial Introductory Meeting)

Damaris nominated her mother, Yolanda, as the person who has provided the most support and encouragement related to college-going. Damaris clearly stated that she had received almost no college counseling throughout her middle school and high school education. Nevertheless, Yolanda has always tried to fill the gap by encouraging Damaris to believe in herself and in her potential to succeed amidst the many barriers. Damaris disclaimed to me that, before I invite her mother into the study, I should know that even though she has been her primary motivator who has promoted college, she doesn't have a lot of the college information. She explained that instead, Yolanda, had provided her with strength and encouragement to believe in herself. Damaris explained:

My mother couldn't go to college to go all the way to nursing, but she told me that I would be able to make it. She doesn't know all the steps and where to get the information that I need to do the "official" process [she gestured air quotes]. But, she has done the most important thing, which is to motivate me to go for it and she sees that I am a smart girl and get good grades and have always been a good student. No one in the school sees what she sees. I do get good grades but no one is telling me that I should go to college. (Damaris, Field Notes-Initial Introductory Meeting)

Yolanda lived most of her life in Puerto Rico but moved back and forth three to four times before settling in the states for the past 11 years. She has three kids—another daughter who is a year younger than Damaris and an 11-year old son. She shared that in Puerto Rico she struggled a lot:

Yo pasé la de Caín. [English interpretation of the Spanish saying: I endured a lot]. I am from Guayama. I was living over there in a small

apartment in a small bedroom, just me and the kids and my aunt was renting it for \$250 and even though I was struggling, she wanted the \$250. I was working but I couldn't survive. Over there I was working, but I was leaving my daughters with my grandmother and my son with a babysitter and I was just not seeing my kids. *Yo trabajaba en esas fabricas para ya en Cayey* [Translation: I worked in the factories over there in Cayey, Puerto Rico] that are far in whatever place and it was not worth it. I had to be with my kids and find a better life for them. I decided to bundle up all the money, and I came over here [to the states]. (Yolanda, Interview)

In her interview, Yolanda described herself as being a strong woman because she had to confront very difficult situations as a single mother with no support from her family. She stated that she wanted to motivate her daughters to be as strong as she had to be, but also wanted to ameliorate the struggle as much as possible for them as they grew up and went to school. At one point, Yolanda paused, she waved her hands to interrupt the interview and asked for a moment so she could clarify something important to her. She stated:

I did go to college, I did. I tried going to college when the kids were little. I was going to community college but it was so stressful that I couldn't stay. I would go to work and then to class and I would fall asleep. I also didn't want my kids to have a mom that couldn't be here for them. I needed to see my kids if I wanted a good future for them. I am thinking of going back for nursing now that they are getting big... (Yolanda, Interview).

Yolanda was eager to talk with me about Damaris. Yolanda described Damaris as a very smart young woman with a determined and willful personality. Yolanda was very proud of Damaris' accomplishments. Yolanda shared:

Damaris has gotten good grades since the first time she got a report card. From that moment I told her, you are smart and you are going to go to college. (Yolanda, Interview)

Yolanda commented that Damaris knows what she wants and is determined to make it happen. However, she worries about the lack of support provided to Damaris from teachers and counselors in her school. Yolanda admitted that she has become frustrated with the resources in the school because, from her perspective, they don't offer enough opportunities to Damaris. She was critical of how Damaris was experiencing the college choice process. Yolanda explained:

Damaris knows what she wants and she knows how to go for it. But I wish they showed her more options. I like where she has chosen to go because she is going to be near and I can be a support when she needs, but I think she would have liked to see more options. So that she can see how good she really is. I tell her but she wants to hear it from the people in the school. (Yolanda, Field Notes-Home visit)

Damaris shared that her mother provided her with the support and strength that she needed to get through her education, especially through the process of thinking about college.

Adriana. Adriana was nominated by Luz. She is the director of an in-school/afterschool program focused on Restorative Justice where Luz is a participant.

Luz described Adriana as her “mentor of everything”. She attributed her overall motivation for school to her relationship with Adriana. Luz did not hesitate when I asked her to nominate a key informant. She said the following:

Oh, that is easy, you can invite Adriana. She knows me the best in this school. It wasn't until I started to work with her that I became confident with my voice. She has put me to do things that I never thought I could do. Like, now I train students and teachers on topics that are hard to talk about in school. Like racism and discrimination. I took trainings to do this work. It has changed me completely. (Luz, Field Notes-Initial Meeting)

Luz explained that Adriana, who is also Latina, is the example of what she can become in her future. She explained that because Adriana is Latina and has gone to college, she has started to trust that she too can go to college. She also shared that Adriana “sees who I am”. I asked Luz to explain what she meant by that statement and she described the following:

Look, I am doing good in school. I have good grades and I don't get into any trouble or drama. But, teachers don't see me. It is like I am invisible. I have so much to say and I think a lot but no one gives me the space. Adriana met me and she saw my potential. She sees who I am. She gave me responsibilities and now I get to teach teachers about important topics. She wants me to go to college and has taught me to trust in my voice. (Luz, Field Notes-Initial Meeting)

Adriana is from California originally and has worked in public schools for 18 years. As a Latina urban public school student, she shared that she never thought that she was going to have a prosperous future. She stated:

You know, I couldn't see myself living past 18. I wasn't given any seed that I could do anything in the future beyond what I was living. I didn't have a lot of role models. But somehow in my senior year I ended up in a moderate to severe special education class and I loved it. I love not only the world that the teacher had created in that space but I also liked that I was in an environment with different people with different learning styles. I felt very embraced by that space. That is how I decided to work with students like that in that type of environment.

Adriana shared that after that, she ended up in community college, still with very little guidance but having to figure it out on her own. She eventually earned her bachelor's and master's degrees and worked in inner-city schools. Because of her own personal experiences as a student in under-resourced schools and based on her work in schools in similar environments, over the years she became politicized and active in educational policy work. She shared:

My work gave me a platform to understand oppression and education and how a person's whole trajectory gets impacted by the educational system. And so I got involved in school change work to change all of the negative experiences caused by oppressive educational structures. I ended up building a college access program for Black and Brown students in the schools in that district that had very little resources. (Adriana, Interview)

When I met Adriana for the first time for our interview, she embraced me with a hug and expressed gratitude for including her in the study. While she hugged me, she said that she felt honored about the nomination from Luz. Even before we formally began the interview, she expressed:

Luz is an incredible young woman. She is amazing and I feel so lucky to be working with her. (Adriana, Interview)

As I shared with Adriana the reason for her nomination, her eyes watered and as she held back her tears. She described the work they do in the program and told me about her relationship with Luz:

I am teaching students to lead a student-led Restorative Justice program. We call it restorative justice because it is what people can handle. But the work is really transformative justice, which is the work to completely challenge the way that the institution is marginalizing and disenfranchising young people and in particular here, young people of color. The program sets up a context for students to have voice and to challenge power. Luz, was recommended by a teacher and she attended our first workshop this past summer in which we did a lot of exercises... And she was stellar. The whole summer I saw her come out of a quiet shell and ever since, she has been committed. She is amazing. We wouldn't have the program that we have now without her. She is a superstar. (Adriana, Interview)

Adriana referred to Luz as a work partner. She shared that there have been moments where she had to lean on her in the work and she has taken leadership. Adriana

characterized Luz as being incredibly adaptable, self-directed, clear about her purpose and strong. She shared that in the sessions in the program, she is the one with the notebook out and taking notes, while all the other students are on their phones and need to be reminded to focus. On the other hand, when I asked Adriana about Luz' academic rapport, she shifted around in her seat looking disconcerted as if I had asked her something troubling. She proceeded to explain:

Luz is a model student. She has a great report card and a high GPA. She is serious about her work and is very respectful. However, just last week I saw her walking down the hallway looking very distressed and I stopped her and asked her what was wrong. She was out of breath and told me that her teacher had randomly given her a Form 2, which is like a referral to the principal. She was physically shaking and crying. I had never seen her like that. She explained that the teacher, without any discussion, told her that she was talking instead of doing her work—weeks ago. But Luz asserted that she never does that and on top of it that, because it was weeks ago, she couldn't even remember the context. She was able to navigate the situation but it bothers me that even students like Luz get misunderstood and mischaracterized. (Adriana, Interview)

Adriana believes that, with the appropriate support and resources, Luz could gain access to excellent opportunities for college. However, she is concerned about the current landscape of what is available to Luz. Adriana characterizes Luz as a stellar student and is worried about the risk of missing an opportunity that could catapult her into higher education. She explained that beyond aspiring to go to college, students like Luz don't

know any of the “how tos” in order to actualize their aspirations. Shaking her head in disbelief, she clarified:

Strong students like Luz here haven’t visited the local universities. They don’t know about their next steps. They don’t know anything about the process. We just talked about this in our program and there needs to be something set up. If we lose our excellent students, how are we going to help and motivate the ones that are needing some help?

Adriana is committed to supporting and mentoring Luz and hopes she can achieve everything she is aspiring to do.

Emma. Emma is a student teacher in Melody’s Spanish class. Melody nominated her because she was inspired by Emma’s life trajectory and became her role model. Emma is from Argentina and was earning a bachelor’s degree at Mount Holyoke College. Melody described her to me as one of the better teachers she has had in a long time. What mostly stood out about Emma for Melody was her caring approach to teaching. Melody described Emma as “a compassionate strong Latina woman”—a characteristic that Melody admires. Emma, like the other key informants, felt honored to be nominated by Melody. When I met with her, she shared with me that she was excited to talk about Melody. It was very apparent that Emma was also very impressed by Melody in class. When I shared with Emma the reason for her nomination, her eyes welled up and asked me to turn off the recorder. I turned off the recorder until she regained her composure and then we resumed the interview. She shared with me that she has grown very fond of the students she had been working with during that academic year. Melody was one student for whom she felt the most concern. I asked her why she was concerned about Melody

and she explained to me that she feared that her aspirations for college wouldn't be actualized because of the limited resources at her school. Emma, like other key informants, had certain sensibilities related to her own educational trajectory about the lack of access Latinas have to higher education. She came to the U.S in 2009 after she completed her tenure in the Coast Guard and worked as an Au Pair. During her time with the family, she enrolled at a community college, learned English and later was able to apply and was accepted to Mount Holyoke College as part of the Frances Perkins program—an undergraduate bachelor's program for students of non-traditional age. Access to higher education was also limited for Emma in Argentina, which is why she has chosen to be a teacher and work in a school like Knight High school.

Emma shared that she only had spent a limited amount of time working with Melody and, as a result, she shared that she was surprised that she had been nominated for this interview. She had been in the school since that September but only saw Melody on Wednesdays for about an hour at a time. She described Melody as “a sweet girl” who is “dedicated, responsible and reliable”. She said:

I kind of didn't know that we were so close until she told me the other day that she had nominated me to do the interview because I had influenced her to going to college. I was like wow, I didn't know I was that close. Because for me it was natural.

She shared with me that what she noticed while working in the school was how many teachers didn't acknowledge the students. I asked her to explain what she meant and she said:

For example, I emailed the students each week to share with them the agenda for class. In the same email, I also shared something about myself and asked them how their weekend was and invited them to share with me. I don't think some teachers actually take the time to learn about their students or share with their students about who they are... (Emma, Interview)

She believes that because of her approach to Melody's class, Melody developed trust and felt comfortable with sharing more about her experiences in school and her future plans. Throughout the year that Emma worked at the school, she learned a lot about each of her students and, while it was rewarding to develop close mentorship relationships, she was also saddened that she was going to leave after her term ended. Emma shared that many of her students were navigating difficult circumstances while trying their best to do well in school. According to Emma, Melody was one of her strongest students but she still worried about her future. She explained this worry in the following statement and asked if she could say it partly in Spanish because she felt she could articulate what she wanted to say better that way:

Yo me preocupo que se puede desilucionar. Porque creo que ella tiene mucha gran ambición [I worry because she can become disillusioned.

Because I believe she has great ambition], but nobody told her what is out there or is preparing her to choose what is best for her. They don't tell students that they would be competing with students who have received a big amount of support and not just money but people have told them what to expect and how to prepare. I think that sometimes we are creating false

hope for students and it is more than what you do in the classroom. I tell them to take an AP course even if they get a B because it is better than a regular course but then they say that their counselor doesn't want them to take the course. And I say, okay, how are we going to help them?

Emma had high hopes that Melody would find her way into a good school that will support her and provide her with caring professors and advisors.

Andrea. Yadira nominated Andrea—her school counselor—because, according to Yadira, “she is one of the very few counselors in the school who actually cares about her students.” Yadira also described Andrea as “down to earth” and “knows what’s up” (Yadira, Class Discussion). Andrea was born and raised in Esperanza city and also went to high school at Knight High. She learned Spanish at the high school and in the community. She went to college in New York and after college she moved to Mexico for three years. For Andrea, a white woman, it was really important to immerse herself in the Spanish language because she knew she wanted to return to her hometown to live and work within the community which is predominantly Puerto Rican. Andrea was candid about the shortcomings she notices among some faculty and administrators at Knight high school and described these as cultural disconnections or misunderstanding of the cultural practices among many of the Puerto Rican students and their families.

Before becoming a counselor, Andrea worked for Upward Bound—a college access program for first generation, low income high school students—and it was there that she met Yadira. She interviewed Yadira for Upward Bound which had very limited spaces available. At the time, Yadira was a sophomore and, as a result, was placed on the waiting list. However, Andrea noted Yadira’s persistence when Yadira continued to visit

Andrea to ask her college related questions. The following year, Andrea became a guidance counselor and Yadira began the Upward Bound program. Throughout that time, they continued to build their relationship and their college preparation talks became more frequent. When I asked Andrea about Yadira's aspiration for college, she stated:

Yadira is extremely organized. She comes with a list of questions in her notebook and leads the meeting to gain the knowledge she needs. There are times that she and I can sit and joke around but for the most time, she is only down to business. She is so serious about her future. For example, she wants to be a nurse and she came into my office wanting to know more about any internships that may be available. But before I could share the information I had, she pulled out her notes from a conversation she already had with a hospital internship representative. She had called herself to gather the information. They called her and she did the orientation and everything. She didn't really need my help. What she mostly needed from me was the confirmation that she did it right. (Andrea, Interview)

Andrea also shared that she has witnessed Yadira persevere through family hardship and not give up focus and commitment to do as best as she can academically in order to get into college. She affirmed: "Yadira is set on achieving her dreams in life" and further explained:

I don't have a doubt that Yadira is going to get herself into college, she has already decided that. She wouldn't have it any other way. Yadira has an older sister, just one year older and she is also as organized and

determined as Yadira. I think she has a good role model. Both the sisters talk about how their parents were the ones to motivate them to go to college since they were very young. So Yadira has her older sister, her parents who didn't go to college but who have really motivated her to pursue that dream. She has the self-motivation. So I guess as her guidance counselor, I believe she is going to college. (Andrea, Interview)

What worries Andrea most about Yadira is her overall preparation and experience in higher level courses. Andrea shared that Yadira is very close with her family and if she wants to go somewhere else other than the community college, she believes that Yadira and the family will struggle. Andrea expressed her desire to continue providing Yadira with the most support she can offer.

Ismael. Ismael is Yazmín's father. She nominated him because she has always been inspired by his story growing up. She shared that her father who wanted to be a pilot when he was little wasn't able to pursue his dream because of family obligations and because he didn't have access to adequate resources and opportunities to actualize his aspirations. Because of this, Yazmín shares that her father has always supported and encouraged her to pursue her dreams and has promoted going to college since she was very young. She shared that he frequently says to her, "Yazmín supérate! You can do anything you put your mind to. You have to believe" (Yazmín, 1st interview) and that his words and her respect for him motivated her to do her best and excel.

Ismael shared that he felt very proud to learn that Yazmín nominated him as a person who has had the most influence on her college aspirations. However, he also

expressed some disappointment that she didn't have someone in school she could nominate. Ismael stated about Yazmín's motivation and plans to go to college:

Yazmín wants to do things perfect. She strives for the best. I think she is going to be something big because she is determined. I tell her that if she wants the finer things in life, she is going to have to work hard. But I also tell her that once she gets to high places, not to forget about others just like yourself. I tell her you need to live to help yourself but also to help others. And I always say to her, I can't give you everything you want, but I can give you everything you need.

Ismael shared with me that he often feels like he can't really help or support Yazmín the way he wished he could or the way he imagined she needs. But, he believes that with the love and encouragement that he knows he can provide, Yazmín would be able to find her way. When I asked him how he encouraged her about college, he responded that he did nothing. He said that all he did is engage her in conversation and listen to her process of thinking. He was clear with me that he didn't place expectations on her to pursue any specific degree or profession, but instead he encouraged her to explore, imagine and to try out new opportunities. He also shared that he does encourage Yazmín to always conserve her cultural and family values even if they are different from what she is learning in school out of respect for her family. Ismael is hopeful for Yazmín that she will be able to be successful in getting into college and able to earn a college degree.

Yazmín is very close to her father and also cares a lot for her mother who has several health issues. She shared that even though her father has had the most influence

on her college aspirations, she still feels like she has had to learn the necessary procedures for college choice process on her own.

This third sub-theme—*Caring Individuals*—presents several key areas for analysis. Research has identified that having caring individuals is important among Latino students for Latino participation in higher education. Stanton-Salazar (1997) describes caring adults as “institutional agents” and defines them as “those individuals who have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of, institutional resources and opportunities” (McDonough, 1994; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p.6). However, these institutional agents or caring adults have not typically included family, extended family, community or non-professional individuals. This sample of participants identify both school-based (Adriana—the in-school/after-school program director; Andrea—the school guidance counselor; and Emma—the student teacher) and family-based caring individuals (Yolanda-Damaris’ mother; Ismael-Yazmín’s father). While they served as role models and as a motivating factor to the participants, most did not provide direct tools, resources or guidance to inform the college going process. Instead, there were several key roles that the caring individuals played in each participant’s process of developing their college going aspirations.

The findings revealed a common reason for nominating the specific caring individual was that the student felt they were “being seen” rather than the more common experience of feeling invisible among school teachers and other school-based personnel. Multiple participants refer to their caring individual as someone who sees their strengths, their abilities, and has offered opportunities for growth that they otherwise would not be

offered. (The concept of opportunities and opportunity gaps will be discussed in the second section of the findings “Opportunity Gaps”). For example, when discussing her daughter and the college choice process offered in the school, Yolanda states: “I think she [Damaris] would have liked to see more options. So that she can see how good she really is. I tell her but she wants to hear it from the people in the school.” Similarly, in her description of why she selected Adriana—the in-school/after-school program director—as her caring individual, Luz indicated she is not seen by her teachers and that “It is like I am invisible.” She indicates having so much to share and say but never being given the opportunity. In contrast, she states that Adriana recognized her potential and provided her with the opportunity to participate in a stimulating training that positions her to teach students and teachers about racism and other institutional factors that impact education. All but one of the nominated caring individuals expressed how honored they were to be nominated for the interview. One parent, Ismael, was proud to have the opportunity to speak about his daughter Yazmín’s college going plans and hopes. However, he expressed concern and disappointment that his nomination was an indication that there was no one from the school who was playing this important role for his daughter. Similarly, Emma—the student teacher nominated by Melody—was surprised by the nomination since she only spent one hour per week with Melody and didn’t realize how profoundly she was impacting Melody’s college going aspirations.

In an environment where Puerto Rican female students report being overlooked or invisible, the concept of “being seen” and having their strengths and abilities acknowledged was the primary driver for how students identified their key informants. Key informants provided confirmation of each student’s excellent academic record and

potential. However, they also acknowledged their concern and worry that each participant was not receiving the necessary preparation, support and resources to ensure their college going aspirations would be fulfilled. From an educational institutional perspective, key informants admit even when students are qualified and motivated to pursue college preparatory opportunities (e.g., AP classes), they are blatantly turned away and denied access to these opportunities. This is evidence of the embedded racism and normalization of the dominant ideology that Puerto Rican students are underachievers or underperformers not worthy of recognition or recommendation for advanced learning and other college preparatory opportunities. Evidence of this is when Luz was unexpectedly handed a Form-2 (referral to the principal) for allegedly talking during class weeks prior. Despite her actual academic achievements and performance including her role as a trained leader in addressing issues of racism in the school system, Luz is mischaracterized. Adriana—her mentor—highlights this experience to describe her disappointment about how such high potential students are mistreated and misunderstood no matter their actual performance.

A second driver for how the participants nominated their key informants was their respect for each of these individuals as role models. Four of the five were Latino, three of the five were college-educated professionals thus acting as a unique and important role model for the students to envision the possibility of also becoming college-educated. While the two parent nominees were not college educated, they had emphasized the importance of college since their daughters were small children and used their own unfulfilled aspirational narratives to motivate and drive their daughter's college aspirations. These characteristics act as both experiential knowledge that is shared with

the participants and serve as a way to challenge the dominant ideology by visioning individuals who have similar backgrounds and have achieved the aspired outcomes.

However, even among a group of nominated role models, the students are still self-directing their access to opportunities and experience little actual support or connection to resources associated with college going. For example, Yadira, interested in a nursing career, scheduled a meeting with her guidance counselor—Andrea. However, prior to the meeting she had already contacted and met with a hospital representative to secure an internship. Andrea recounts this experience with Yadira indicating “she didn’t really need my help. What she mostly needed from me was confirmation that she did it right” and refers to Yadira’s drive to achieve her goals. She stated: “I don’t have a doubt that Yadira will get herself into college. Yadira has already decided that.” Not only does this narrative indicate that Andrea did not feel the need to provide any additional tools or resources to support Yadira’s efforts but it also reveals that the school guidance counselor expects Yadira is capable and will get *herself* into college. While it is clear she thinks positively of Yadira’s capacity, it is unfortunately another example of the lack of resources and support provided to high achieving, self-motivated Latina students who are actively seeking ways and opportunities to advance themselves toward their goal of college-going. In this same narrative, Andrea reflects that it is Yadira who steers their meetings and curtails any joking around in order to maximize the time and purpose of their encounters. This is concerning given that one would expect the school guidance counselor to model a serious and guided approach to college going preparatory steps and choice process. This concern was raised by both parent key informants, Yolanda—Damaris’ mother—and Ismael, Yazmín’s father. Each reported that they would like to see

their daughters being provided additional opportunities by the school.

The key informants' data and analysis confirms a significant problem that excellent Puertorriqueña students don't have access to adults in their school system who can provide them with comprehensive resources, guidance or education about the college going process. They confirm what the students are experiencing—an absolutely dire need to be seen for the excellent students they are and to have their aspirations supported. However, even these identified caring individuals, are unable to provide sufficient resources, guidance, tools and information that the students need to actualize their college going aspirations. The caring individuals demonstrate the importance of providing culturally-relevant role modeling, affirmation of the student's strengths and capacity, and acknowledgement of lack and, at times, active withholding of resources. Their role is critical to the Puertorriqueña students' narrative of how they activate opportunity seeking and persevere to meet their goals even in the absence actual college guidance and preparation. From a LatCrit perspective, the caring individuals meet at least four of the five core tenets. First, they witness and confirm the role of race and racism that the students experience; 2) they support the students' college aspirations and join them in challenging the dominant narrative that Puertorriqueña students are not college material; 3) they represent a commitment to social justice in their championing of these students' goals to attend college; and 4) they bear witness and affirm the students' experiential knowledge of how they are exceptional students but go unseen and, worse still, often mischaracterized and many are directed away from college-supportive academic opportunities. While the caring individuals act as family-like cultural members of the students' support network at the individual level, the barriers they confirm do not get

translated into systems-level responses and therefore the students continue to experience inadequate institutional support.

Theme 2: Bien Educada: The Role of Family Values

Participant family and cultural values inform participants development of identity of as college Aspirantes. Because parental encouragement was a prominent motivating factor for college-going in participants' experiences, the family's cultural expectations and values were also a part of participants' development of a college-going concept. One of the research questions for this study was, "What meaning do Puertorriqueña high school students assign to attending an institution of higher education after high school? The second theme, *Bien Educada: The Role of Family Values*, revealed that family played a central role in participants' process of creating a concept of what it means to be going to college as a Puertorriqueña. Participants shared that their parents felt a great amount of *orgullo* (pride) about their ability to become *bien educadas* (well educated) and placed emphasis on the significance of education. In this study, *bien educada* embodied a collection of family and cultural values focused on moral development and imparted by the parents within the family context. According to Sandra Quiñonez (2012), the concept of *bien educada* for Latinxs in her research represented a "bicultural-bilingual" (p.27) interpretation "where the "Spanish" sense of being *bien educada* are foundational to an "English" sense of being well educated." In a similar way, participants in this study were confronting an expectation to become *Americanizadas* (Americanized) and considering how to navigate it as they developed a concept around college-going. Like Quiñonez (2012) found that Puerto Rican participants in her study negotiated "entangled contradictions around being *bien educada* and well educated amidst multiple roles and changing contexts" (p.27), participants in this study also negotiated

such intersectional roles and meanings of *bien educada*. More specifically for the five Puertorriqueñas in this study, they negotiated their roles as they formed yet another concept of *bien educada* as they developed an identity around college-going. The participants in this study, like it was revealed in other several studies (Sy & Brittain, 2008; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005), upheld their family's obligations as caretakers and other gendering roles but these roles did not hinder or reduce the encouragement or support that they were receiving related to their college going aspiration. This speaks to the participants' ability to sustain both the cultural family values as she aspires to succeed educationally.

The data revealed that parents had a lot of pride regarding their daughters' academic potential and accomplishments. Additionally, because parents expected that their daughters would be going to college, they imparted a sense of responsibility to their daughters that was culturally- and family-based. For example, Yazmín shared with me that her father would give her advice about how to prepare to go to college. His advice was centered on how to keep both her family and cultural values while she goes away to college to become more educated. The following was the advice from Yazmín's father, Ismael. She shared:

My dad always said that he wanted me to be educated in college but he did not want me to forget who I was when I was there. He would say, "*Yazmín, tu eres bien educada, no se te olvides. Los valores de esta cultura son diferentes que los valores de nosotros*" (Translation: Yazmín, you are "bien educada", don't forget that. The values of that culture [American college culture] are different than our values). (Yazmín, Field Notes-Meeting at the library).

Based on the data, participants' ability to uphold family and cultural values was represented as being "*bien educada*" and its designated components were strikingly similar across each

of their narratives. Ismael defines it in the following way, “nuestros valores son el respeto, portarse bien, ser una persona amable, y honorable y sin vicios” (Translation: Our values are respect, being well behaved, being a kind person, honorable and without addictions). (Ismael, Field Notes-Public Library).

Luz shared that her parents were very proud of her educational accomplishments but they also advised her to “have pride in who you are and where you came from and never lose touch from where your family came from” (Luz, Interview). Participants’ families expressed that college going could present a potential loss of the moral and cultural values of being “*bien educada*”. This collection of values was characterized by participants’ parents as the most salient forms of culturally-based education by which parents fostered the moral development of their children and their values for *una familia unida* (a united family) (Valenzuela, 1999). In contrast, ‘being well educated’ in the U.S. is often related to a measure of intelligence and academic achievement. Although Puerto Rico is a part of the United States, participants shared having to navigate two dominant cultures. Yazmín explains having to negotiate a different cultural context when she goes away to college. She said:

It is like I am going to have to be different people. I can’t be too Puerto Rican in the school because I won’t get into the advanced classes and I can’t be too “American” at home because I don’t want to make my parents feel like I am separating from our culture. Plus, I don’t want them to think that they can’t understand me because I am getting too Americanized. You know what I mean? I just don’t know people that I can talk to that have gone to college and that know about my culture and have gone through these things. (Yazmín, Third Interview)

Similarly, Luz shared in her third interview the following anecdote about a worry she had about her perception of how her parents might feel when she moves away for college. Luz said:

My dad was born here but his parents were both born on the Island and they moved back to live in PR when he was little. My mom was born there too. My parents are the best, they are very nice and they are so proud of me. But they want my brother and I to be raised like they were, kind of innocent and happy. I remember I used to go with my family to PR and stay with my grandparents and I use to go every morning to get the eggs from the chickens. My parents think that living here will make us lose our culture, especially if we go away for college but they wanted us to get a good education (Luz, Third Interview).

This theme arose from participants' strong feelings about their Puerto Rican culture based on the importance that their parents placed on family values and the high expectations to be proud of their background and staying close to their families. Participants shared that their parents felt nostalgic about the way life used to be in Puerto Rico. They also shared that their parents believe that communities in the States are nothing like the communities in Puerto Rico, even when their experiences had some hardship. Damaris shared with me the following in a conversation we had after school one day about what it would mean to live on a college campus:

Even though my mother suffered in Puerto Rico, she still believes that the way people are raised there is better for our culture. People stay close to family and wanting to be with family to help them out, help each other out. She thinks

people here don't stay to help their family out. She feels alone here. But she is here for us. (Damaris, Field Notes-Afterschool Meeting)

Melody also explained that while her parents pushed her to think about going to college they also advised her to not neglect her cultural background as she became part of a college culture. Melody said:

I was always told advice like don't change because you are going to college. Don't become someone that you are not when you go. Don't forget where you come from. Your culture and the way you were raised are the most important.

“Going” to college can present a preoccupation that was evident in participant narratives. They grappled with the notion of “moving away” because this seemed contrary to the cultural practices that were valued by their Puerto Rican families. Their parents moved to the states—away from their culture and families in Puerto Rico in order to access better educational opportunities. But, this is a complex situation and one that was evident that each participant considered closely. I watched each of them make sense and create meaning as part of their unique college-going identity as Puertorriqueñas. Participants trusted in their parents' encouragement toward their college-going aspiration and respected their caution regarding the potential loss of culture. Therefore, they worked hard to maintain both as they embarked on the college choice process.

Yadira has already had to negotiate what she describes as “doing two cultures in one”. In her interview she stated that the school culture is completely different from her Puerto Rican culture at home. She described the difference in the following statement:

Because I am Puerto Rican and a girl, I have more responsibility to stay close to my family. It is just our culture, you know. My mom sometimes has things going wrong with her and coming home from school is sometimes hard because school couldn't be my priority. I have to help my parents sometimes. People in school don't understand that. They think that it is a problem for me that I have to stay close to the family, but for us is normal. You just take care of your family (Yadira, Second Interview).

Yazmín also shared a similar dual cultural approach to schooling. She said:

See my family who are Puerto Rican come from Puerto Rico and a lot of poverty and I come from that background of poverty. Also my grandfather, he was really poor, they never even went to high school. The same with my father's side. So, my father always tells me to reflect on my family and how they have been in their lives and take it into consideration in your education. Who does that in my school, maybe other Puerto Ricans...He says to remember at the struggles that they have gone through and you don't want that but you must respect what they did because that is why I am here. Education can take you places but it can also separate you from your culture's experience. I need to do better and maintain my family's roots alive (Yazmín, Second Interview).

The data revealed that there is a central expectation to stay united with the family which includes honoring the struggles and celebrating accomplishments that one experiences with the family. It also appeared that participants' parents anticipated that U.S. public school systems were modeled from a different set of values than their own. It has been documented

that U.S. public school systems are built on individualistic and meritocratic practices (Trueba, 1988; Young, 1994). Latino families and students may find it challenging to acclimate to norms that are based in individualism, particularly because an individualistic culture is a stark contrast to the collective nature of Latino families who may have traveled together to the United States in search for something better for the whole family not just the individual (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). Often, their experience has been challenged by the differences in cultural expectations in the States (Perreira, Chapman & Stein, 2006).

Participants shared that education was their primary reasons for their migratory decisions from the Island, however, the data revealed that parents still feared a potential loss of moral and cultural values in the process of being educated in the “American” context. Based on historical accounts of the schooling of Puerto Rican students in the U.S., “Americanization” has been an educational objective that was expected of the increasing Latinx student population and their parents residing in urban and rural communities in the States (Garcia, 2001; Irizarry & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2007; Negron de Montilla, 1975). The desired outcome of this approach was to “socialize and acculturate” the increasingly diverse communities (Garcia, 2001, p.49) and to “merge small ethnic and linguistically diverse communities into a single dominant national institutional structure and culture” (p.50). Moreover, as Puertorriqueñx students in the Diaspora, American acculturation has promoted a practice that has devalued Puerto Ricans’ own cultural and linguistic capital in exchange for American language, values and practices (Irizarry & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2007; Negron de Montilla, 1975; Solis-Jordan, 1994). It is no surprise that the parents of the participants in this study advise their daughters on how to preserve their culture within the American

context. In this way, this group of Puertorriqueñxs and their families are in the process of expanding the concept of “bien educada” to include not just the moral and family values but also the concept of college going. While that was the primary motivation for the migratory decisions of many Puerto Rican families—to seek better educational opportunities for their children—it still poses a challenge to integrate the two aims of being both bien educada and a college goer.

While the school and surrounding city is predominantly comprised of Puerto Ricans, the school curriculum and practices do not include a Puerto Rican cultural or historical context. Apart from the Puerto Rican history course that was part of a collaborative initiative and from which this study stems, no such course has ever been offered and Puerto Rican culture and values are largely invisible in the school. As described in theme 1, the invisibility of the cultural values and practices translates into the Puerto Rican students feeling invisible and unseen by their teachers and other school staff. The theme of Bien Educada: The Role of Family Values illustrates a central tension faced by the students and their families as they confront the intersectionality of their identities as bien educada (Quiñones, 2012) from a Puerto Rican cultural perspective and well educated from a dominant American perspective based on being a college aspirante and hopefully college goer. Elements at play include the students’ racial/ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity as Puertorriqueña students within an Americanized school system.

Theme 3: “Hay que Superarse!” Being “The One” to Go to College

This theme explains the responsibility participants felt to fulfill a goal to succeed for their family. They shared having a sense of “obligation” to give back to their families and their communities. Participants reported that in their educational experience they have had to

balance several differing cultural expectations. In a class discussion about future plans, Yadira stated:

“Hay que superarse (you have to overcome) and you can make it better, my mom always said to me. I want to be ‘the one’ to make a change for my family”
(Yadira, Class Discussion)

Like Yadira, the other participants shared accounts of when they realized that they were given the important role of being ‘the one’ that would make a positive change in their family’s well-being. Impacted by poverty and by living in a community plagued by violence and other economic pressures, participants’ families sought opportunities to improve their family’s situation. All parents had moved from Puerto Rico to the states seeking to position their children with better opportunities than they had and hoping to access better schooling and educational preparation. Each participant asserted that education was the way out of the cycle of poverty and each of them identified as being ‘the ones’ who will try to break the cycle by going to college. In an interview, Damaris shared about the choices and sacrifices that her mom had to make while she had her at age 14 and raised her. She shared that one of her mother’s biggest sacrifices was to drop out of school to care for the family, but that decision took her away from being able to achieve a nursing degree. Damaris was proud of her mother’s choices because it allowed more opportunities to spend time with her mother and to receive her support as she grew and went to school. She shared the following:

My mom had me young and she had to stop going to school because she had to work and take care of me. She moved from Puerto Rico to here so that I wasn’t raised in the ghettos with violence and drugs. When we moved here she was alone but felt better for me. She would always tell me that I was going to college

and that I was going to be able to do the things she couldn't do. But she feels proud because she was able to support me. I am happy that I am going to college and that I will be *the one* to make it better for my family. I feel like it is my turn for my little brother and sister (Damaris, First Interview).

Like Damaris, each of the young women in this study had taken on the responsibility to be the first in their family to pursue a college education. There was, however, tension associated with trying to uphold this level of responsibility. On the one hand, being better educated facilitated the possibility of being a better advocate for the entire family. While on the other hand, education can be isolating for the participant. Thus, participants shared feeling a burden as well as a privilege of being 'the one' to go to college. Luz shared the following as she described how she negotiated her conflicting feelings about being the oldest in her family and the one who would focus on realizing her aspirations of going to college. She said:

I am the oldest in my family and even though my brother is not that much younger than me, I am the one who has to focus on my goals. Since my parents... they never went to college and they never did what they wanted to do, I want to actually do what I plan to do, for them, my brother and for me. But sometimes I get tired and frustrated because it is a lot of pressure. Sometimes I don't know how to do things about college and I don't want to make my parents feel bad because they don't know. I have to say, I am okay when I am not (Luz, Second Interview)

Similarly, Yazmín articulated her process of reconciling her understanding and worries of what it would take to realize her goal with her parents' encouragement and hope for her to succeed. Yazmín shared:

My parents have always been encouraging for my education. College has been held very high in my family. It has always been college this and college that. But the idea lingers in my mind that I may not know how to do it [college]. I know that I want it because I feel it, but it is like, then I look at our life and wonder, how am I really going to do this? How am I going to college? How am I going to pay for it? It is just like I am stuck.

Yazmín wiped her tears as she shared with me the realities that she believes would keep her from actualizing her aspirations. In her interview, she paused and warned that she was going to be brutally honest for the first time in a long time. She explained:

Look, to be really honest, I do believe that college would be the answer to many of my needs, but I am tired of trying to make it happen for myself. My father is counting on me to go far, but we can't afford anything. I haven't been able to attend the one and only college program that the school has because I have to rush back home to care for my mother who is sick. I have only visited one college, The Community College, and I am applying to the one other college my friend told me about but I can't afford to pay for the fees in the application process. My parents don't know how I feel because I don't want to worry them. I just keep it all inside.

Participants in the study had been very motivated and supported by their parents and felt a great deal of pride and respect about their families' efforts toward ensuring that they would be better positioned for receiving a better education. Each participant acknowledged that they were in fact in a better educational position than their parents were at their age. However, they each felt the burden of the responsibility of doing it all on their own. The five

Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas in this study approached the college going process knowing that they were going to be confronted with barriers.

“Hay que Superarse!” expresses need to move forward, to do better and to surpass not only for your own accomplishments but for those in your family, and for these Puerto Rican young women, it means to surpass an expectation against societal barriers. For example, Adriana, who is Luz’s mentor, warned Luz that the college process for Latinxs in urban communities is impacted by oppression and thus students end up struggling in the system. Adriana shared:

Us Latinos, we carry this legacy of working against the barriers. Students like Luz, they know that if they want something, they will have to work really hard for it. They know it from their own families and when they look around, they can see how hard it is for other Latinos as well. I share with my students that I had to struggle against barriers for my own education. I went to community college because no one ever talked to me about college. Seriously, in high school, one day, a group of us were herded into the cafeteria and made us take the placement test for the community college down the road from our school and a couple weeks later I get a letter at my house that listed the classes I was going to take that fall. I had no direction and I didn’t even enroll in the right classes. I was totally lost. Now, I am completely dedicated to working for change in schools.

Participants’ aspirations to go to college were intrinsically connected to the strength and the pride related to the hard work and resiliency that they and their parents have experienced in their transitions to the states. *“Hay que Superarse!”* symbolized a commitment to work hard and accept the responsibility to take the next step toward a better

future (Luz, Yadira, Yazmín, Interviews). Luz in the following statement indicated that she will take the next step even though she knows it will be hard for her to accomplish. She wrote the following in an essay:

My parents want me to be financially stable and not have to struggle the way they did. They don't want me to never have to worry or struggle. I know they also need me and I want to be able to help them. This is why I am going to do my best to get into college. I am okay for me to struggle now and work hard, like they did for me (Luz, Essay).

Parents and mentors shared their own educational experiences with the participants as a way to preserve the memory of their hard work—because they felt that these memories were unique to their group and were also valuable as lessons to pass on and to inspire students to follow suit in their pursuit of a college education. Sharing stories about their own educational experiences was a common way participants captured the lived experiences of their Puerto Rican family as they have navigated through hard moments in their lives, such as establishing a living in an unknown city, learning the English language, adapting to a new culture, confronting stereotypes, discrimination, and experiencing many other types of inequities in the states. Therefore, by leaving Puerto Rico in search of better educational opportunities, the participants' families find themselves “fitting”—culturally and linguistically—into a community where there are many who share a similar past and migratory path but who now face a similarly intersectional set of barriers to obtaining the academic and economic advancement linked to the push-pull factors (Irizarry, 2011) that both cause the diaspora from the island and lead to the economic woes of Esperanza City.

For Yazmín, her family's ability to move through struggles and persevere motivates her to continue to "work hard" even if seems difficult to do so. All participants believed that her accomplishments were not just for themselves but rather an accomplishment of the family. In an interview Melody stated:

I know this may sound weird but, my mother always says "*este es mi consejo para ti, si tú no te ayudas, nadie te va a ayudar*" (Translation: This is my advice for you, if you don't help yourself, no one will help you). (Melody, First Interview).

Being "The One" to go to college is linked to participants' family migratory narrative—each very unique and yet similar in many ways. They all relocated their lives from Puerto Rico to the states and after having moved from the Island, they moved from state to state in search for a better life. It was evident that participants felt proud of their parents' choices because even though their living conditions were less than desirable, their children's future was worth the sacrifice. Yazmín expressed that she feels very badly for her family because she can tell that her parents try to make living as best as possible for her and for her brothers, but to her it seems like they can never get ahead. She worries about the limited budget her family has to manage in order to meet the basic needs of their household. For Yazmín, being the one to go to college provides an opportunity for the family to get ahead. Yazmín shared:

Since my parents moved from Puerto Rico, we are not always able to buy clothes when we need it and everything. We can't go out to restaurants, you know. I realize that can be different. I see people now and they get Jordans and stuff like that and I can't have that. Or these fancy carteras (purses) and all of those stuff. I don't mind, because I was raised to be humble and to be

grateful with whatever we get.... We struggle so much. My mom struggles to pay the bills on time and she is always behind... I think about it and I see how my parents barely buy clothes for themselves. And we literally go to Savers or the Goodwill I am being honest, it is true. Being the one to go to college can change all of this for my parents and I know they are betting on that.

For participants, going to college and earning a college degree was an opportunity for themselves and their families to break out of the cycle of poverty. While rooted in the “American dream” narrative (Noguera, 2000), the participants described a Puerto Rican version in which college going may be identified as the responsibility of the individual child but is understood and expected that the identity and associated benefits and opportunities for advancement are collectively experienced by the entire family. Participants felt responsible for their families’ social mobility. Ismael, Yazmín’s father, confirmed this in his interview. He stated:

I knew she will be the one to help our family to do better, to do good in school and to go to college. I know she will make it happen. This is why I tell her to take all of the opportunities she can get and to be strong because it isn’t going to be easy. I know she can do it. She is making us proud (Ismael, Interview).

Like Ismael, other parents championed their daughters’ academic success and hoped that their daughter’s success would impact the family in a positive way. For example, Damaris described the following about her mother, Yolanda. She said:

My mom wanted me to learn proper English and be able to get a good education so that I can go to college and get a good job in my future. She didn't think that I was going to be able to do that in Puerto Rico. She left everything and I was the oldest and now I should do my best to help my family out. She always said, "you are going to college!" (Damaris, First Interview).

For participants, going to college was the only way they could improve the family's socio-economic status. Each participant expressed a desire to acquire opportunities to be positioned well socially and economically after college in order to help their families economically. Yadira explained that she has worked to help her family ever since she was in middle school. She explained that going to college would provide her with the skills she needs to be a better support for her family. She stated:

My mom sometimes has things going on with her mental health and I have to help her a lot. I want to become a nurse and I know that if I become a nurse, I can make good money and also know how to care for her health. That is why I think college is the way to go (Yadira, First Interview).

The belief in "*hay que superarse!*" contributes to the meaning that participants assign to the concept of going to college. It puts emphasis on the hope that if they get to go to college, they would gain access to a better quality of life for themselves and for their families. The participants are motivated to go to college and to be "the one" to improve their family's experience largely by the parents' accounts of both their and prior generations' experience of poverty and disenfranchisement in Puerto Rico and in the states. The parents' historical burden is shared as experiential knowledge and passed on to their daughters in the hopes that

they will be better positioned from these sacrifices and migration to the states to lead a better life. However, the students report experiencing a silent burden—one that is deeply worrisome and yet one that they choose not to share with their parents in an effort to minimize any additional worry for their parents. The experiential knowledge ends up being one-directional from the parents to the daughters and the daughters’ experiential knowledge is translated into her resilience (Stanton-Salazar & Espina, 2000), resistance, and self-dependence. While navigating intersectional identities of race, class and gender, the students have developed a consciousness of their marginality and a general distrust that opportunities for support will be offered. Therefore, like Melody’s mother often states “Nadie te va a ayudar” (No one is going to help you), the students have learned to be independently responsible for achieving their goals. Despite their best efforts to self-advocate and be high achievers, the students are caught in a system with limited school-based resources and practices that have demonstrated themselves to be unresponsive to the accomplishments and needs of students of color, particularly Puertorriqueñas.

Section Two: Opportunity Gaps

Theme 4: The Meaning of College for Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas

In the interview, I asked every participant to describe what college meant to them. The following are the immediate responses they shared to describe college:

It means the opportunity to have a better life than most of my family has had (Luz, Third Interview).

It is like the only way you can be successful and have a good job and not have to worry about your future. (Melody, Third Interview).

It is what will help me reach my goal in nursing and help me succeed and do something successful in life (Damaris, Third Interview).

Education is the key to success (Yazmín, Third Interview).

It means that you are certified for this specific thing and nobody then can't tell you that you are legit (Yadira, Third Interview).

Overall, participants described “college” as freedom, *orgullo* (pride), legitimatization, success and resistance. Expecting to be the first in their family to be going to college generated pride from their family and for a couple students the pride extended into their community. Participants’ concept of college going was intrinsically tied to a desire to achieve a better life and future for themselves and for their families. They anticipated that going to college would increase access to better opportunities. They longed for the day they could achieve what their parents weren’t able to achieve—a college degree. Utilizing the LatCrit lens and its emphasis on the importance of experiential knowledge of Latinx communities, I learned that the meaning these Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas ascribed to college was in some ways based on an idea and a hope of what college would be and would offer but with little real-world experience or contact with people who have experienced attending 4-year college. It was based on a projected accomplishment—one that was yet to be actualized. The meaning they created was not based on the tangible outputs of a college education. For example, they did not emphasize short-term college-going related milestones like successfully applying, receiving an acceptance letter, considering classes or a major. Instead,

their college going identity began to crystalize with their narrative of aspirations and their families' narratives of pride that their child was going to go to college. This narrative was the driver of their college going identity and was described as the way to transform and break the cycle of poverty.

Damaris shared with me that even though she hadn't been accepted to college, she was already experiencing her mother's *orgullo*. She said that she felt something good that she could not describe. "It is like I am doing something extra and out of the normal", she tried her best to explain the emotion she was experiencing and stated that "college means, everything, it means making my mother proud". Damaris stated:

It means pride for me and for my family. They are already so happy and so proud. They bring it up out of nowhere and tell other people, oh my niece is going to be a nurse. My mom posts it on Facebook and everyone comments on it. They say, "that is my niece!" and they say congratulations and that they are proud (Damaris, Third Interview).

Damaris also explained that even though she gets embarrassed when her mother talks about her to others, she understands why her mother shares it. She explained:

You know, to my family, it is like they can prove that not all of us are deadbeats and they would be able to say that we have people in our family that are successful and have a better future... (Damaris, Third Interview).

She also added:

The reason why it means a lot is because I am the first one in my family to do it. I want to make them all proud. They are going to be super proud. They will be happy to see that one of their kids didn't fail and that they

actually got through life and did really good. Especially for my mom, all of her three kids are really smart and she is super proud and happy (Damaris, Third Interview).

Similarly, Yazmín shared that in her family college was highly regarded and that her family is prideful of her potential to be going to college. Yazmín said:

College has been held very high in my family. It has always been, college this and college that. They have always been encouraging for my education and are proud that I am going. College means everything to me and to them (Yazmín, third Interview).

For Melody, college meant the accomplishment of the entire family. She said,

College means that we made it. My parents have wanted this since they were in high school, and I want to make it. College is an open door to many opportunities for my family (Melody, Field Notes, After School Meeting).

Yadira felt the *orgullo* from her community. She described the following to illustrate her point:

So, college is like pride for the whole community. Me going to college makes me feel like I have made a major trend change to happen because now they can see that I, as a Puertorriqueña from our community, went to college. It feels good. The neighbors ask about it and they get excited too.

College also symbolized success for participants. For some participants, to achieve success as Puertorriqueñas in their school meant that by going to college, they would have achieved a counter identity to the negative stereotype that they were

accustomed. This concept illustrates the LatCrit tenet to challenge the dominant ideology and, in this case, reflects how these participants challenged the perception that Puertorriqueñas cannot be college goers. Damaris expressed this idea:

Going to college will show that our kids are doing something for themselves. You know, Esperanza city has so many negative stereotypes. Us doing good and going to college can show that schools are not that bad and that kids are doing good and are going to great colleges. I want to make that change (Damaris, Third Interview).

In a similar way, Yazmín explained how she sees college as a symbol of success related to the ability to resist oppression. She stated,

College is success. I feel like when you there, you won't feel that oppression as much as you felt it in my high school. When you are there, you can be seen like you have made it (Yazmin, Third Interview).

Yadira also assigned the meaning of success to college and explained:

College means that I can tell them that I have my degree. No one can't say that you can't do something because you have the paper to prove it...Most of the people in my community either dropped out of school or didn't go to college. So no one really expects you to do it. That is success. College for me is success. (Yadira, Field Notes After School Meeting).

It has been noted that Latinx students' academic experiences are impacted by the pervasive deficit perspectives in U.S. schools which have negatively impacted their educational experiences (Flores-González, 2002; Irizarry, 2015; Nieto, 2000). These participants want to combat the impact of the deficit perspective. They emphasize that

going to college means being successful and therefore by going to college their success as Puertorriqueñas will literally embody this counternarrative for themselves, their families and communities.

Damaris explained that college meant being successful and will facilitate upward social mobility. She said:

College means being successful and making more money... But in my family, if you go to college, you are rich... It means like being successful and to get further in life and to have a good life you need college

(Damaris, Third Interview)

As a first-generation college graduate Puertorriqueña, I was conscious of the prominence of this theme during my yearlong ethnography in Esperanza City. Being Puertorriqueña was equated with being poor and going to college was defined as the way that a Puertorriqueña can change her and her family's long-standing identity of being poor. For Luz, college meant an opportunity to alleviate the worry she believes her parents feel about her. She explained that she has been intentional about finding work while she is in high school to lessen the burden she perceives her parents experience. For Luz, college may even provide some opportunity for her family to experience new things such as going on family trips. Luz said:

Going to college also means that my parents will never see me stuck like they did. I want to get a nice house, car and be able to go on trips with my family. We have never been able to do that (Luz, Third Interview).

Lastly, participants assigned meaning to college related to what they hoped to experience once they got to college. Damaris looked forward to the opportunity to meet new people and to have access to new experiences. She said:

College to me means meeting new people and gaining more experience. Getting prepared to be out in the world more. And then reaching for your goal and reaching what you want to do for the rest of your life (Damaris, Field Notes-In Class College Activity).

Yazmín also ascribed meaning to college based on what she hopes to be able to gain and experience when she goes. She explained:

College lets you do things in your way and it gives you more space for creativity and my high school doesn't do that. I think it limits me. College is an open door to creativity and success I see it as a place of an escape. You know everyone wants to succeed in life, to do well and I also want that too. I think it would help me do what I want to do and help me find myself. (Yazmín, Third Interview).

She also described college as an opportunity to be free. She explained that in Esperanza city she often feels trapped. As we were walking to the interview room, she said, "My mind feels trapped here in the school, I feel trapped in my neighborhood, I feel trapped in my own house". In the interview, I asked her to explain more what she meant and she said:

I think that college is freedom. When you get there, you get that freedom. I will use my knowledge for my advantage and I like that. I feel like here in my high school no one takes me serious (Yazmín, Third Interview).

Going to college is primarily associated with personal and family pride and the plan to go to college and any career plans are shared widely with extended family, neighbors and community as a symbol of family success and arrival at the ultimate achievement. Being identified as a college *aspirante* among many including family, community and peers, who have not attended college and have never had the opportunity, the concept of college going encompasses multiple milestone phases including planning, entering, completing and successfully achieving a career even before the actual college application process has begun. The student had to rely on the information they have been able to gather themselves. As a direct result of being a student in a school with little college preparatory resources, the students are unaware of the many detailed steps associated with the college going process. For example, Luz speaks frequently about her plans to become a nurse and she takes active measures to create as many nursing-related opportunities for herself in preparation for her goal to go to college for a career in nursing. However, she nor any of the students spoke specifically about the relationship between college planning and how their college education will translate into future job opportunities and career tracks. For instance, none of the students have had access to college choice, planning and preparatory opportunities that would provide them with the roadmap of how to successfully anticipate and plan so that their college aspirations result in actual college enrollment. None of the students was receiving strategic guidance or information to help them through the college planning and application process. Despite their best efforts to be high achieving students and their excellent academic records, the circumstance of their positionality is a product of being a student in an underserved, under-resourced predominantly Puerto Rican high school in an urban, low-income community. The chasm

between their aspirations and their concrete knowledge about the college going process is a product of the embedded racism that results in the stratification of resources and inequitable access to quality education, college preparation and access to higher education. Prior research has found that when students experience limited access to quality education and resources and poor college preparatory opportunities their college going aspirations are negatively impacted (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Nuñez, 2009). In this study, college aspirations remained strong despite these factors, however, these circumstances may negatively impact actual college planning and college enrollment. As indicated by Yosso (2005), aspiration capital—maintaining college aspirations despite many barriers—is essential to the college going process and the participants in this study illustrate this.

Theme 5: Traversing Minefields and Resisting Negative Labels

This theme developed from the experiences that participants shared about having to navigate and negotiate marginalizing spaces in their school communities. The data revealed that participants experienced discrimination and felt a disregard of their Puerto Rican culture and language in their school. Luz explained her experience with trying to understand how her ethnic background fit within the construct of race. She said,

People don't put us in a specific category, it is like we don't belong anywhere. Most people say to me that I am Puerto Rican, but some when they try to categorize me as White is mostly because I have good grades and speak good English or because I have an iPhone, UGGs or because I have stuff they don't think Puerto Ricans here can afford (Luz, Second Interview).

There are stereotypes associated with being Puerto Rican at the school. These stereotypes marginalize the experiences of students like Luz. When she stated that the only time that she may be considered to be White based on her good grades and because she speaks good English, she reveals a racist ideology that associates Whiteness with markers of wealth and being “good”. Participants were aware of the negative labels that exist in their school environment and how these are ascribed specifically to Puerto Ricans in their city. Yazmín explained how she sees these manifest in the education system in Esperanza City. She said,

I look at the system of education and what not, and I think about it a lot and I may not be the perfect student, but I don't think that it is fair. And I think about how those education people think and say “oh those kids are just terrible” But it is like, you don't live our life, you don't know what we have to go through. You haven't raised us. You know what I mean? To know how we live and all this stuff. There are people that give up. Even me, I give up on myself so freaking much, so much. Someone can tell me, “oh you are stupid”, that stays on my mind. Most of the time I don't let it get to me, but sometimes it does (Yazmín, First Interview).

Building on what Claude Steele (1997) coined as “stereotype threat”—the idea that students' feel vulnerable to the negative stereotypes and fear the possibility of conforming to them in the academic setting (e.g., by performing poorly in educational assessments), the participants in this study believed in their ability to perform well in school. They feared that their ethnicity played a role in how teachers perceived their academic abilities. Participants all expressed concerns that the commonly held views that

Puerto Rican students don't fare well academically and don't care about their education, among many other stereotypes, would prevent teachers and administrators to see their true potential. Though Yazmín tried to persevere against the negative stereotypes, she explained:

And when I let it get to me [negative stereotypes], I question myself. That is how my mind is...these things when I let them take me over, I question it and I feel very alone (Yazmín, Second interview).

Luz also explained how she rationalizes her decisions to stay quiet and not to attract any attention during her classes. She is, however, critical of this and explained her experience as an example. She said:

White kids can speak their minds in class. Like you are supposed to learn how to be critical and how to advocate for yourself. But, like for me, I am part of the National Honors Society and if I throw a fit and speak my mind, that is going to reflect negatively on me and probably reinforced stereotypes and lose my position on the honor roll. So sometimes when I do feel like speaking up about things that are wrong that people do, I think about what I have now and I ask myself, is it worth it? You know what I mean? It is messed up because I don't feel like I can really feel and do what I really feel. But that is how it is (Luz, Field Notes-Class Discussion).

In Luz's account we can see how she has been silenced in her learning environment. She is aware of what is causing the silencing but she doesn't seem to know how to remedy the situation. The concept of silencing Latinx students' voices is not new. Quiroz conducted

an ethnography (2001) that identified “school-sponsored silencing” of Latinx middle and high school students and linked the experience of their silencing over the course of educational trajectory with factors like drop-out rates (Quiroz, 2001, p.326). Quiroz’s ethnography aimed to “give witness” to the Latinx student voice, hear their messages, and call to action interventions to address negative school environments and associated outcomes. Irizarry led Project FUERTE (Future Urban Educators conducting Research to Transform Education) specifically in an effort to address the “students’ oft-silenced perspectives in the conversation around improving education” (Irizarry, 2015, p.66).

In a class discussion on Puerto Rican pride, Yazmín and Yadira shared that a common word being used to label Puerto Rican students that appears to have strong cultural ties to their Puerto Rican culture, such as having parents that speak primarily Spanish at home or being primarily Spanish-speaking themselves is the term “linguis”. This term is a modern version of the derogatory term “spic” that has been historically used to describe a Spanish speaking person. An added complexity to the function of this new term that I observed was the division among Puerto Ricans and an effort among Puerto Ricans who had been in Esperanza City longer to affirm they were not a “linguis.” Therefore, this distancing from the term among longer-residing Puerto Ricans emphasized the purpose of the term to identify, isolate, and shame new arrivers from Puerto Rico. Damaris added to the discussion that in the school she has witnessed Puerto Rican students being directly addressed with derogatory terms. She shared,

Kids in school call us Spics and say dumb comments like we are stupid and we should go back to the Island (Damaris, Field Notes-Class Discussion).

Yazmín provided another example where the newer term comes into play:

Non-Hispanic students make fun of Spanish and people who speak Spanish that just came from the Island and they called them *linguis*. They also make fun of Spanish people in general with stereotypes. They literally talk about us like we are dumb and things like that. Sometimes in front of the teachers (Yazmín, Second Interview).

The students are existing in a racist and discriminatory environment where they actively choose to remain quiet in order to deflect and avoid assignment of stereotypes, derogatory names and overall negative attention. There is a general sentiment among the participants that the school had a preference for white students and that white students are treated better than Puerto Rican students.

There is still that separation between the white kids and the Puerto Ricans. You hear the Spanish kids talking about the white kids and you hear them talking about us. The teacher hears them too and they do nothing about it. They [Whites] say that we are not smart, and they say that we are not going to make it... I was told in my face that I was a Latina and that I wasn't going to make it anywhere. Because they have a stereotype that I am going to get pregnant because I am a Puerto Rican and I am young. They also think that I am not going to be in the same classes that they are in because I am not white. I know teachers believe this too because I can see it on their face (Yadira, Second Interview).

In both of these examples, Yazmín and Yadira indicate failure of the teachers to be advocates of a safe environment or to demonstrate intolerance of any bias or

discrimination. In fact, the teachers' passivity and non-responsiveness to these actions are evidence of passive racism. Yadira rationalizes her experience and explained,

Most of the teachers here are white, they are not going to care about what you are feeling. They are not going to get what you are experiencing. Because they have a whole different experience than we do. They have that good, perfect life and we have that ghetto life (Yadira, Second Interview).

Yadira's comment raises the question as to what, in fact, are teachers' perceptions of students like Yadira and the other Puertorriqueña students. Do they have a racist perspective about the students and are they creating a hostile learning environment? Or, do they have a fairly neutral perception and, based on the workings of stereotype threat, the students self-impose a racist perception from the teachers. Having spent a year teaching and conducting research in the school on numerous occasions, I witnessed passive and active racism by teachers directed at Puerto Rican students. There were teachers that used discriminatory practices in their classrooms that often targeted Puerto Rican students which led to a hostile learning environment. Given the predominantly Puerto Rican student-body and the lack of overall resources it would be reasonable to expect white teachers, as part of their pedagogical approach, to make it exceptionally clear that their classroom is a safe space built on a framework of educational equity and justice. This was not occurring. An effort to demonstrate support and interest in the students', their backgrounds, and their goals was missing from the teacher landscape as evidenced by the examples provided by the participants. Yazmín described a situation that illustrates teachers' overt bias. She said:

This one time, I was standing behind a teacher and she never knew I was there. She was telling another teacher that a student had gotten a good grade on a homework problem and said to the other teacher “can you believe she [the student] is Puerto Rican? I wonder how she did it...” I know they think that we cheat. You are screwed if you do good and screwed if you do bad... (Yazmín, Field Notes-Class Discussion).

In a similar scenario, Yadira recounts hearing a teacher speak negatively about Latina students. She stated:

Most teachers are white and when they see me I know they say, “oh she is a Latina and how is she taking this class?”. Sometimes I feel like these teachers just don’t like us. Some of them don’t want to help you just for the simple fact that you are a Latina. I think is from all the brainwashed things they have on their minds about us. I always hear teachers that say “can you believe she is a Latina” when you do something good. I have heard and been like, “what?”. It makes me feel like saying, you are a teacher, what is wrong with you? I forgot what teacher it was, I overheard her saying that in the hallway. In the science class that I take, most of the students are white. The same with AP classes (Yadira, Second Interview).

As Yazmín and Yadira both illustrate, even excellent performance results in negative stereotypes by the teachers. This behavior extends to ascribing negative behaviors and consequences to high performing students based on their ethnicity. Luz recounts a scenario she experienced:

I remember I was doing my work and I looked up for about two seconds and my teacher yelled at me “what are you doing?”. I was silent and she sent me to a disciplining room. I was doing nothing, I just raised my head. I was so embarrassed and scared. I was always so well behaved, I never got a bad comment or had to be disciplined in my schools, never. But that day, that happened. I was terrified. I just got a feeling that it was because I was Puerto Rican (Luz, Second Interview).

Even when faced with having mistakenly assigned blame for something, teachers don't seem willing to acknowledge their error. Yazmín described a situation in which she was wrongly accused:

I remember that I got in trouble for something I didn't do. For printing something in the printer without permission. I told her I didn't do it, but she would not believe me. Even when the girl that really did it told her, she didn't believe it. She put me down and yelled at me until I cried. ... I was like, really? I don't even understand until this day. The teacher was White (Yazmín, Second Interview).

While not all teachers fit this description, positive teacher role models appear to be few and far between. There are some that the participants report being important and supportive of their college aspirations. Yadira described a math teacher who was supportive. She stated:

If most of my teachers had been like one math teacher. He would always tell us that we should go to college and that he believed in us to get through high school and do good to get to college. He always wanted the

best for us. He pushed me and helped me when I didn't understand but would tell me that I should continue to work hard so that I can do an honors math. This is one of maybe three teachers that were good to me and other students (Yadira, Second Interview).

Damaris reflected on another supportive teacher:

I have a good teacher. She is my English teacher and she likes helping me. She actually told me that I am a smart girl and she encourages me to believe in myself. She is White too. She is a teacher that really cares about us making it in life. Too bad that all teachers can't be like that... (Damaris, Second Interview).

Luz reflected about the possible reasons teachers react negatively and considers the fact that they too may be faced with a complicated teaching environment. She stated:

There are teachers that aren't the best but the few teachers that are good can make it interesting. But a lot of teachers have an I don't care about you attitude. And I feel that this is about what happens around us. Some people are struggling in different ways and teachers don't understand what is happening so they ignore all of us (Luz, Second Interview).

In addition to the school environment that is fairly laden with stereotypes from peers and teachers, students are faced with navigating and resisting negative stereotypes associated with the built environments where they live. Yadira states:

For me I struggle because there's a lot of violence. Like even around where I live, there is a lot of gunshots. A few weeks ago, there were some gunshots outside and my little sister was outside walking towards it. So,

that kind of thing worries me and scares me. In the flats where my father lives I hate having to walk from school to where he lives. Even if it's a little walk I don't like it. There is so much violence some people have guns. I don't see it always, but I definitely hear it often. I've read about it in the news and so it gets me really nervous and I worry about it. I worry that something bad is going to happen to me because I walked all the time. Sometimes you see inside the cars and there are people that you just don't get a good feeling about. I have seen people have guns and I know people that have guns ... I don't want to be around that (Yadira, First Interview).

Luz describes the challenge of being perceived based on where the students live. She stated:

Us Puerto Ricans here have to work hard if we want the good life. The good life is having good money, and a good house. But the thing that they put on us is that we are just not going to make it anywhere because we grew up in the projects and everybody is not doing good. But the thing is that we do hustle and we do what we have to do (Luz, Second Interview).

A bunch of things happened here in Esperanza City. The white kids don't have to endure all of those troubles. I think about how the white kids have so much privilege that they don't realize how much we Latinas and Latinos struggle. They don't understand. One day my parents and I were driving to my aunt's house. There was a man that was stabbed on the street and it was before the ambulance and everything had gotten there. I

was like “Oh my god.” We then watched the news and I was praying all day that the guy wouldn’t die. It turns out he died a day later (Yazmín, Second Interview).

She goes on to say later in the interview:

Everyone thinks we are involved with drug dealing, just like being in a gang, things like that. ... But we are not all involved, even my dad will tell me, “you have to watch out with people like that... you got to be careful. Like that. I also don’t want to be involved in that (Yazmín, Second Interview).

Yazmín stated:

I have experienced many types of discrimination and learning. People don’t even want us to speak Spanish. I want people in school to know that I am not part of the stereotype and I can actively reject the stereotype (Yazmín, Third Interview).

These students are trying to create a college going identity within an environment that does not acknowledge their true potential and actual achievements and doesn’t recognize them as students that should be college bound. Teachers and their negative stereotypes actually depict them as the opposite. They are left with having to navigate through the unpredictable educational environment where they are already positioned to expect negative feedback and reactions and simultaneously trying to contextualize why they are treated as they are.

The students decide to find sources of strength in other ways in order to continue to pursue their path of aspiring to go to college. To this point, Melody states:

There are so many stereotypes of us but instead I have a rich culture and a long history that I don't really get to experience in school. But, I can be an example... (Melody, Excerpt from Essay).

As a counternarrative to the stereotypes often faced, Damaris clarifies who she is in this context:

I am Puerto Rican but have my own personality. I am hardworking, we are hardworking, Puerto Ricans are hard working. We are smart. I am definitely not the stereotypical loud one, I am more quiet. But the stereotypes are not good and don't feel good. I am hard working and I work hard to prove wrong the people that have a negative stereotype about us not working hard and I try to be successful (Damaris, Second Interview).

She continued by extending this to address her desire to help other women like her:

It makes me want to try harder and help other PR females believe they can go to college.
(Damaris, Second Interview).

Yazmín described her efforts as a Puerto Rican woman:

I move around in school by being strong and proud. You know, reflecting how my education would go so far with being a Puertorriqueña is like even though we are stereotyped with being uneducated, I am trying my best to show that me being a Puertorriqueña, especially a woman, that I can go against that and make my own counternarrative against that. And being proud of being from Puerto Rico. (Yazmin, Third Interview).

Yadira finds part of her motivation in being able to counter negative expectations:

Sometimes it just makes me stronger to prove people wrong. Because I believe I do more work than they do? I feel like I have power because I am Puerto Rican (Yadira, Third Interview).

Yazmín considers her goal as a Puerto Rican to counter expectations as well:

I see some girls that are pregnant. Seeing all of that, makes me think about all the struggles that we go through as woman. I also take that into consideration and create another type of counternarrative. I am not going to get pregnant (there is nothing wrong with it) but I want to continue getting my education and be focused with nothing else in my life I don't mean in a bad way, you know what I mean. I feel strong even regardless of that stuff, I feel strong. I feel that there is a lot more us women can do (Yazmin, Third Interview).

The participants use counternarratives (Castro-Salazar- Bagley, 2010) to resist the negative stereotypes they regularly experience in school. They are conscious of themselves as female and Puerto Rican and all of the deficits that are commonly associated with these identities (like teen pregnancy). In the school environment, Puerto Rican identities are conflated with disbelief of their ability to do well, expectation to misbehave and through these negative stereotypes they are silenced. However, the participants also have personal strategies to counter and resist through their own sources of strength.

In my year of observation, I witnessed these excellent Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas having to resist and actively counter negative labels and a hostile learning environment

while doing their best to do well in school and create a strong academic record in order to ensure opportunities that they had identified as part of a college going process. Using LatCrit helped to unveil how the participants' experiences in school were shaped by the racism and the negative stereotypes of their racial identity. The students stated that teachers didn't like or support them because they were Puerto Rican and I witnessed the truth to these narratives. It didn't matter the actual complexity of each of their identities because the stereotype of Puerto Rican student in Knight High School overshadowed any opportunity for getting to know the students, understanding their circumstances, and finding ways to highlight and showcase their potential toward their goal as college Aspirantes. The students were navigating difficult living environments and even in school there were no outlets where to process the challenges they confront in terms of the risks they face just walking home or the level of care-taking responsibility they had to manage once home. LatCrit helped to understand students' navigation of their educational experiences based on their experiential knowledge. If we know that Puerto Rican students like the participants in this study and based on prior similar studies, are going to confront environments that challenge their goals, it makes sense to use frameworks like LatCrit to better anticipate and contextualize how best to see, hear, learn from Latinx students.

Theme Six: "Making the best of what you got": Bridging the Gaps and Seeking Opportunities for College-going

This theme revealed that students are aware of an opportunity gap to resources and educational preparation that can contribute to their college going plans. Luz came to her second interview and had already prepared a rap specifically for this study to describe what is going on in the high school in regard to Puerto Rican students and their academic

potential. She told me that she had stayed thinking about the content of our first interview and expressed she doesn't have words to tell the school administration and teachers what she feels but instead she was able to put her thoughts into a rap. Luz rapped:

Knight high

I know that Knight guy

Holy smokes can you tell me where the high grades hide

Ricans don't rise cuz we're only told lies

Now I solely pray to God that graduation rates rise

The dominant narrative don't kill

My counter one will

Go lodge my intelligence down your throat like an ecstasy pill

Just know if you say I'm stupid then we enemies still

Then I'ma summon my GPA that shows my knowledge could kill.

(Luz, Field Notes-After School Conversation)

Afterwards, Luz followed her rap by summarizing:

They [teachers] only focused on the negative and talked to us like we were already failures. ... (Luz, Second Interview).

Luz has an excellent GPA and aspirations to attend college but clearly states that opportunities are being withheld. She expressed her belief that there is a conspiracy that the school doesn't want Puerto Ricans to do well which she captured in her line "Ricans don't rise cuz we're only told lies". In her interview, she indicated that she and her peers are counselled to all start at the same community college. Melody affirmed a similar experience. She stated:

I feel like because I am Puerto Rican, I don't get the same opportunities as everyone else. The opportunities are limited (Melody, Second Interview).

Yadira too recounted her experiences with being recommended for opportunities:

Like my English teacher told me straight out, "there isn't any Latino students in AP English but I am going to recommend you because you can do it". I was glad that she was honest and happy because I knew I could do it. (Yadira, Second Interview).

She goes on to explain:

It is hard for Latino kids to get into AP and be able to be recommended. I accepted the opportunity. I wasn't going to shy away from it. I made sure that I took that class. I was happy that she recommended me because one, is not just because is more credit, but a college would be happy to look at that. It will let them know that I am prepared to take a college course. But then, you are not going to believe this... So even though I was recommended to take the AP English class, I get an A in history the whole year and I find out that I didn't get recommended for AP. How does that happen? You can prove yourself but as a Latino student, you don't get recommended. I was told that it would be too much for me. The teacher told me that she didn't think I could do it to my face. I was like, let me make that decision (Yadira, Second Interview).

Luz and Melody had similar experiences regarding AP class opportunities. Luz stated:

Flat out I have been told that I am better off if I don't take honors or AP courses. It is like they keep us back on purpose (Luz, Field Notes-Class Discussion).

Melody stated:

Some people would say that you should be prepared to take the better classes (AP and Honors) so that you can get into college but I was discouraged to ask for a recommendation to those classes. I don't know why because I was getting good grades (Melody, Second Interview).

There is an on-going dominant narrative that the Puerto Rican student is not able to excel in an AP course or to take on additional academic challenges for which they have qualified. Whereas high academic achievement among white students resulted in encouragement for increased workload and high expectations, the students reported that their high academic achievement served as a signal or a warning to teachers that they should not strive for increased academic rigor in order to not jeopardize their current success. In other words, some teachers essentially put the brakes on Puerto Rican student capacity for advanced achievement and therefore communicated lower expectations which resulted in fewer recommendations for advanced placement. This is very concerning given that advanced placement is highly regarded by the college admission process.

Additionally, Damaris commented on the lack of guidance about what extracurricular and other opportunities should be sought to improve chances of college acceptance. She stated:

I could have gained a lot of experience if I had been given the opportunity to know more. In cheer, we volunteered and I wouldn't have done that if I hadn't joined cheerleading. I didn't know that you needed that for college, and because I had been in cheer, I had the experience to share with the college I am applying for. It helped me a lot but I would have done other things if I had known (Damaris, Third Interview).

Similarly, Yazmín described a teacher who discouraged pursuing a bachelor's degree:

One of my teachers discourages us. He tells us not to go to college because he believes we should go to community college and not apply to 4-year colleges (Yazmín, Third Interview).

Reflecting on the prior findings regarding the meaning students assign to college going, such as freedom and an opportunity to break the poverty cycle and provide a better life for themselves and their families, participants have not been able to activate their agency in their academic process because they have not been informed or encouraged to seek existing opportunities that would position them to successfully attain their college going aspirations. Based on these data, the dominant ideology indicates that being a Puerto Rican student results in not be offered, encouraged or informed of existing opportunities that are known markers of academic excellence and college preparatory material. Simply stated, Puerto Rican students are oppressed in their school environment and they are both conscious of the oppression and are actively naming and resisting the dominant ideology. According to LatCrit theorists, "Traditional paradigms act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society" (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Calmore, 1992). The students questioned this process and shined a light on the

power structures that apparently strategically withhold resources from an entire group thereby naming the source and mechanism of the educational disparities they experience. These students are meeting the required expectations set by the educational system to qualify for opportunities that lead to higher education. They not only have the capacity to meet them, but they have met them in an environment that actively withholds academic achievement opportunities. Let's be crystal clear of what is going on exactly. Yadira worked diligently for a year to obtain high grades in her junior year history course with the plan to qualify for AP History in her senior year because she knew this would strengthen her chances to be accepted into college (she did the same for English and succeeded). According to the traditional college choice models (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), Yadira demonstrated her adherence to the recognized steps for college preparation, but her steadfast efforts were curtailed by her history teacher who strategically limited her opportunity to continue on a path of high achievement. This is injustice in action. Melody articulates this finding clearly:

To give everyone equal opportunity no matter what their race or gender, sexual orientation. That it should all be equal. This would make the students feel that they are not beneath anyone else just because of who they are. I want to be an example that Puerto Rican women can be successful and go to a college they choose because they are strong students (Melody, Third Interview).

Given the participants' consciousness of the dominant ideology that withholds information about opportunities for advancement and given their deeply held conviction that they will go to college to meet both their and their families' goals, the students have

learned to be their own self-advocates. Within a LatCrit lens, this response by the students is evidence of their transformational resistance (Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). Instead of allowing the system of oppression to defeat or deter their goals, the data indicate that the students are actively seeking resources and opportunities without the usual sources of support and guidance provided by school teachers and staff while simultaneously naming and questioning the oppression they face. Damaris illustrates this activated transformational resistance. She stated:

I make sure that I tell other kids that even if they don't have the best grades and they think they can't do it, I want to tell them to force teachers to give them help. They may think they are not good enough or their guidance counselor probably told them that probably can't go to college so not to bother applying. Kids can doubt themselves from what people are telling them and from their experiences in school. Counselors can be discouraging. You have to move to the next one that is going to help you (Damaris, Third Interview).

Yadira spoke to the importance of tracking your own steps and ensuring that you obtain all the necessary information regardless of what others do or don't do to help. She said:

I tell my friends to start early and don't let these people take you or hold you down. Look at the requirements and then check if you have everything and if not, make plans to get everything you need to have to apply (Yadira, Third Interview).

Yazmín expressly named the oppression she experiences and how she chooses to not allow it to hold her back. She explained:

For me, I know that this is all going on and I do get depressed but I just let things be and focus on what I want. You have to learn to push things away from you, that oppression stuff. I have to try to get it out of my way because what I want is something greater than the stuff that is putting me down (Yadira, Third Interview).

Melody voiced her decision to not allow the oppression to defeat her. While she is aware that she, like many others, could be discouraged, she emphasizes that it is up to her to decide to have a different outcome. She shared:

Some people believe that college is not for them. They say, “college is not for me”. Or they feel that they won’t fit in. Other people feel down about it because people have told them that they can’t be successful. I could be one of those people. But you have to look out for yourself and come out on top (Melody, Third Interview).

The students clearly vocalized their awareness of how, as Puerto Rican students, they are treated differently and are not offered or encouraged to pursue existing opportunities that they qualify for and that would improve their chances for college entrance. Not only are they conscious of this process but they named the oppression and recounted the ways in which they are actively challenging the dominant ideology. As Luz stated, “Miss, you got to make the best of what you got”. Her statement summarizes the reality they face and indicates that she will still act toward her goals despite the lack information and resources provided.

Theme 7: “Lo que la escuela no me enseñó”: College Choice for Puertorriqueña High School Students

This theme emerged in the data and was named based on a direct statement by Yazmín, who said, “*Yo me tuve que enseñar lo que la escuela no me enseñó*” (I had to teach myself what the school didn’t teach me). Each of the students identified key steps associated with the college going process that they have had to learn and accomplish without any guidance or information. Building on the prior theme of Making the Best of What You Got, this theme is further evidence that the students forge forward with their aims to attend college even though the specific details of that process were never shared with them. Keeping in mind that all of the participants come from an under-resourced school system and have experienced lack of access to college preparatory resources, this theme further illustrates the consciousness that the students have about their reality and that they must be self-reliant to realize their aspirations for college.

Participants revealed aspects of the college going process that were unfamiliar to them. Damaris described what she didn’t know about the college going process. She stated:

What I know about college? Ha! Being from here, it is going to be hard, you don’t know you have to volunteer (I didn’t know that) and get experiences that will make you look good. You have to keep your grades up and start thinking about college as soon as you can. It is like they don’t want you to make it because they don’t tell you. I now know you have to make a list and do the research. This is hard because the computers in school barely have access to the internet and I don’t have a computer at

home and it is hard to do searches on the phone. I already told my sister that she had to start this year (she is a junior) and she needs to be bold and ask for what she needs. Talk to your guidance counselor and ask the questions because no one is going to come and tell you (Damaris, Third Interview).

Melody described her limited experience of learning about college campus tours and commented:

I have been to only one college tour and the school was empty. I wish I could have gone to other colleges so that I know where I am going when I make the decision. The only thing that seems to be offered are the two community colleges and the nursing program at [a nearby 4-year college] (Melody, College Questionnaire).

Even for the students who were part of Upward Bound, a college access program that serves low income first generation students, resources were limited and program goals did not seem to align with a college going agenda. Yazmín reflected:

I am mostly worried and nervous that I won't make it... I want to do good in my program but it is like even now that I am in Upward Bound, they don't really help me get to where I want to go and study that I want to study. ... So, I am making all the calls even if I don't sound all professional but I have to because no one here acts like they want to help you (Yazmín, Third Interview).

In class, Yadira shared that she was confused about how to handle a time conflict that she was experiencing. She was a participant in the Upward Bound program and was also

receiving tutoring for her math class to improve her grade and stay on the honor role. Her math teacher needed to meet with her at the same time that she was supposed to be in Upward Bound. The program communicated that their funding is based on student attendance and so she should not be absent. She came to me not sure how to navigate this seemingly contradictory predicament. She asked me how the Upward Bound program could be so inflexible when her absence was in order to maintain a high and college-appropriate grade in math. She stated:

They are not really sitting down and giving me tutoring or the help I need to keep up good grades. Right now, they are reading a book about discrimination and it is good but I need help from my math teacher. That is the grade that is going to get me to college (Yadira, third Interview).

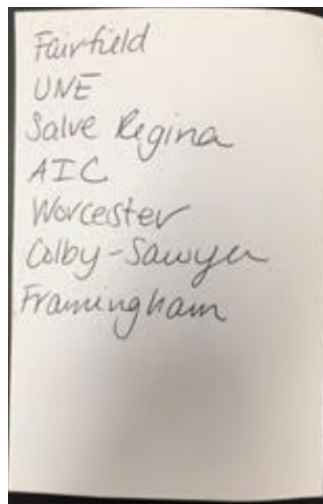
Not only are students discouraged or kept from opportunities to support their college going aspirations but even when tailored programing and resources are available, like Upward Bound, somehow the students are made responsible for the program funding and sustainability. In addition, while the students clearly report feeling oppressed by the educational system and teachers, they are sophisticated in discerning when it is of most importance to get the practical support they need (e.g., tutoring) to meet a required grade point for college entrance rather than spending their time reading about discrimination within a college-access program.

When students have approached their guidance counselors for support with the college going process, they reported receiving little to no guidance. Damaris reflected about her experience with her guidance counselor and stated:

It was like it came out of nowhere. My guidance counselor last year didn't talk to me about college and the process at all. He never informed on the stuff I had to do (Damaris, Third Interview).

She later stated:

The counselor just gave me a list [pictured below] of stuff and I didn't know what they were or how to start doing them (Damaris, Field Notes-In class discussion).



Damaris brought this list to class to share with me and explained that she had requested help from her guidance counselor about the college going process. She explained that the counselor met with her, jotted these names on a scrap piece of paper and handed it to her. That was the end of the meeting. Damaris asked me if I knew any of the colleges and what she should do next.

For these students, the college choice process is a mystery. They know they want to go to college, but beyond that, the rest of the process is essentially unknown. Luz stated:

I don't really know what I have to do exactly to get into college. I just know that I want to go and I just do what I have to do. When I came here [high school], I just learned what it was that I needed to do by asking friends that were in higher grades and I have focused on doing that. I am not failing anything, I am actually getting good grades and that is it. I focus myself and do well in high school. I think that will pay off. (Luz, Third Interview)

Luz later stated:

For me, the first step was to actually get myself wanting to go, being determined to go for it, learn how to apply to it and make sure I know what I want. But I don't really know more than knowing that. I guess I have to keep trying to keep my grades as high as I can get them. Try to not be over stressed when it is senior year and I will try to apply to everything that I think is good and learn how to write essays (Luz, Third Interview).

Without realizing it, Luz identifies several of the key steps in the college choice process as defined by Hossler & Gallagher (1987). She refers to “getting myself wanting to go” (predisposition), “learn how to apply to it [college]” (search), “and make sure I know what I want” (choice). According to this model, it is expected that students support network have knowledge and/or experience with the college choice process. While none of the participants' parents have gone to college, all of their teachers have gone and yet only one teacher was identified as having mentioned college to this group of students. According to McDonough (1997) whose research focuses on how academic opportunities are impacted by social class and school structures, these students lack the cultural capital

relevant to the college choice process. Though this group of students has strong aspirations and support from family and have clearly begun to develop a concept around college going and college going identity, they are still not incorporated into the college going practices within the school system. In order for the students to continue developing a college going identity, the school needs to invest in creating a college going culture inclusive of their aspirations, their high achievements and cultural beliefs, values and practices (Oakes, 2003). Specifically, the school-based college going culture needs to provide information, access to resources, and guidance thoroughly and equitably with the aim of supporting college going aspirants to actualize their goals in a planned, timely, and informed manner. However, this process was distinct for these girls because their educational institution is failing them by not providing the resources necessary to actualize their aspirations for going to college.

Without an inclusive college going culture in place, students report alternative steps they have taken to prepare for the college choice process. Melody stated:

I am part of Gear Up. I got myself in to this program because it is kind of a college readiness. If I have a question about college, I go to them. I have a better relationship with them than with the counselor. They help the students not only in high school but after getting into college they stay with you and help you. This is the only thing I have that can teach me about college (Melody, Third Interview).

As it turns out, though Melody was enrolled in Gear Up, the program was not able to meet that fall and she was hopeful the program would resume again in the spring.

Damaris added:

I was just like, I am going to get it done. I wrote my essay in one day—my college essay. But it came out to be really good. And then I was just doing things stressed. But I had to be determined (Damaris, Field Notes-In class discussion).

She continued:

I am going to go to college but I haven't been shown or talked to about how the college is like, so I am imagining it and use what I see in movies. I think getting used to the environment is going to be challenging (Damaris, Third Interview).

Students' narratives reveal important insights about the condition of the school from their experience and perspective. It is important to acknowledge, from an ecological perspective, that the disparity and lack of resources experienced by the students are evidence of disparities that exist at multiple levels including the region where the school is located, the school itself, its teachers and counselors. Each of those levels/individuals are also likely faced with how to perform with inadequate resources, information, and support to meet the goals they are held accountable to achieving. This overall disparity is further evidence of embedded racism and oppression given that the region is comprised of predominantly low-income Puerto Rican residents.

After each final interview, the participants were asked to share anything else they would like to add. What emerged from this question was a theme of change elements the participants identify as needed to improve future opportunities for college going among Puertorriqueñx students. In alignment with LatCrit theory, these responses are the

students' commitment to social justice and transformation of the current dominant ideology. Yadira shared:

I feel that parents should also learn about what college is. You know, more than just knowing that it is good that their kids go. My parents think that college is like high school but that you have to pay to get in. I don't think that they realize how many years you have to be in college to get that degree. Or how much work you have to do and how much you have to spend. I remember the day that I found out from a kid that I know in a college that you have to pay hundreds of dollars in books—what is that? That isn't something that we think about. I mean, that sucks you have been working your butt off since high school and then you get into college and you struggle to have to pay for a book. That is scary (Yadira, Third Interview).

Luz said:

I would change everyone outside's thinking about the school and Puerto Rican people. I would change the negative stereotype that everyone in the school can't accomplish anything. Only because we are Puerto Ricans doesn't mean that we only experience bad things and feel hopeless. It doesn't have to be negative. We don't only have to struggle. We can be successful. If we could only move from a positive image (Luz, Third Interview).

Yadira stated:

Definitely the teachers. They should motivate the kids. And the guidance counselors, they should try their best to help students, even if it seems impossible, they should try to help them and keep them believing that they can. It will push students to be successful and pursue something that they like and do better in life. Kids need to be motivated more and show them the things they can have (resources) that are out there rather than hiding them like so many teachers here do. If kids, especially Latino kids knew about the goals they could achieve, they would want to push for achieving them (Yadira, Third Interview).

Yazmín added:

I wish we could talk about our culture in class given that there are so many Puerto Ricans in our school. And I think that our culture should be a school subject for us to learn about. We don't talk about privilege and all this stuff and if they do talk about it, they sugar coat it. I would ask teachers to try to help kids out and influence them to be successful. I think schools should be more real and more relatable. Our teachers don't have passion to teach students. I think teachers should share their stories because it would be helpful for students to relate to them (Yazmín, Third Interview).

CHAPTER 5

“AY, MISS, WHY BOTHER PLAYING A GAME THAT IS RIGGED FOR US?”: IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Introduction

One afternoon, after our last interview, Yazmín and I walked back from the library where we had finished a productive two-hour meeting to plan the rest of her schedule for her senior year in anticipation for her transition to college. As we went down a flight of stairs into the second-floor hallway, she slowed her gait and took in a deep breath, so deep that it seemed to reverberate against the lockers. I turned to acknowledge her and, with a mournful gaze, she signaled with a gesture to stop. She leaned against the brick wall and told me she had something important to share with me. She appeared discouraged as if something negative had suddenly triggered her emotionally. I became concerned and wasn't sure what had just happened since we had such a good connection in our meeting. We had collaboratively made an agreement that she was going to continue to work hard in all her classes and seek guidance and support from a group of mentors we identified together. We also created a timeline to ensure she could meet the requirements toward her college going plans. It included strategies for her to stay on top of the deadlines of her work and her college applications. We were pumped about her plan. After our meeting, Yazmín enthusiastically suggested we start regular “mentoring meetings” where we could invite other Puerto Rican students to join in the conversations. She explained that meeting with me and participating in this study was the first time she had ever met regularly with an adult in the school to talk about her aspirations to going to college. She was already at the school for 3 years when we initiated our work together.

But in that moment in the hallway where we were standing, I could tell that something was troubling her and I asked if she could share it with me. She disclaimed that what she was about to tell me was not directed at me, but rather that she had been triggered by the positive affirmation and motivation she had received from our meeting. She explained that despite feeling motivated and encouraged, she couldn't get herself to truly believe that she could be successful academically and that one day she could earn a college degree.

With tears in her eyes she said,

Even though I have tried and tried to do well in school and you are encouraging me to do the best I can and I focus myself to do the right thing, it still feels impossible to get ahead. This place isn't created for us to do good and to be successful. People say, do your best, learn to play the game, fight and don't give up. But, ay, miss, why bother playing a game that is rigged for us?

After a moment of silence, we embraced with a hug. She cried and I found myself without a response. Yazmín was speaking her truth and, in doing so, she was speaking the reality of many Puerto Rican students at the high school. Yazmín believed that the odds were already against her. The concept of “the game being rigged” as she explained is evidence of her keen awareness and critical understanding of the impact of oppression on her experiences in school—day in and day out. It should be a major concern that the students we want and need to support, who we encourage to do well in school, and whose aspirations to go to college could be actualized if given the opportunity and the sustainable resources needed for a successful academic process, are the same students

who feel like they don't have a chance. Yazmín asked me to share with her “the tricks of the trade.” In her experience, I was the only one she had known who had been able to “get out”. According to her, I must have done some things right to have figured out the “hidden trick” to earn multiple higher education degrees as a Puerto Rican woman from a similar background. Yazmín's and the other participants' narratives continue to resonate with me.

It was more than twenty years since I had been in high school and yet the educational condition of Knight High School was afflicted by the same resource limitations and other significant barriers that I had experienced in my high school. This study reflects both my emic perspective as a first-generation Puertorriqueña woman and as a scholar/practitioner committed to eliminating educational disparities among Latinx and other minoritized groups by addressing access and equity through policy, practice, research, and education. Having experienced my high school guidance counselor tell me I was not college material and that I would be better off getting a job after graduation, I was uniquely familiar and positioned to conduct this year-long ethnography. As a bilingual/bicultural Puertorriqueña and second language learner of English, I am deeply familiar with the cultural values of being “bien educada” and yet having to fight for the right and access to higher education. I retain the Spanish words and phrases as stated by the participants in this study to name key themes throughout the dissertation to convey the centrality of the cultural and linguistic grounding and meaning of the findings and implications and to situate them, first and foremost, as directly responsive to the Puertorriqueña college Aspirantes and their cultural values. The Aspirantes' voices speak a truth that needs to be widely shared because it informs and inspires change in how we

can better address college access and choice for Puerto Rican students in the U.S. mainland.

Why Does This Matter?

This study is noteworthy in its contribution to the existing literature of a unique account of college going identity among Puertorriqueña college Aspirantes. Examined through a LatCrit theoretical and analytical lens, the lives and experiences of the minoritized Puertorriqueña student participants are plagued by limited access to opportunities and inadequate resources and information about college-going. Using LatCrit theory, this study considered Puertorriqueña Aspirantes college identity formation process by addressing factors beyond race alone to include the racialization of their language, cultural values, migration, socioeconomic status, and transgenerational experiential knowledge (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012; Irizarry, 2011; Rolon-Dow, 2007) to better understand the school-based barriers that the students confronted while continuing to summon self-directed agency to sustain their hopes and aspirations to attend college. The LatCrit lenses of race, racism, and intersectionality; of challenging the dominant ideology; and of experiential knowledge were instrumental to disentangle the racialized mistreatment, active withholding of college promoting academic opportunities, and unacceptably sub-par college preparatory guidance and resources the Aspirantes experienced. It is our responsibility as higher education scholars, practitioners, researchers, and policy makers to better understand what keeps Puertorriqueña college Aspirantes from achieving their potential and to find ways to ameliorate these challenges in order to support them to actualize their goals. It is equally critical to understand the

factors that drive them and how they envision their future as college-goers. This study is one step on that journey.

The findings from this study provide insight into a group of understudied Puertorriqueña students and have implications for research, practice and policy. Based on the rapidly growing numbers of Puertorriqueñx students in the U.S., it is essential to understand the unique college going identity formation among this group. The college choice process should be an exciting, life changing, risky (in a healthy way), progressive and fulfilling journey. However, this journey looks differently for the Puertorriqueña aspirante participants in this study. Their college identity development and their college choice process was systematically burdened and generated uncertainties and tremendous fear. These data provide a first step in improving the way we consider eliminating barriers and increasing access to higher education among Puertorriqueña students.

Being an aspirante embodied the sentiment of Dr. Antonia Pantoja (1962) that described an Aspirante “as someone who is not limited by the education he or she receives, but instead uses that knowledge he or she is given and seeks ways to gain more” (Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 2007). She also explained that an Aspirante is someone who “appreciates their culture and knows that where they come from is just as important as where they are going” (Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 2007). The college-going identity for each Aspirante represented a desire to earn a college degree, an accomplishment that they hoped to share with their families. For some, this achievement would be the source of motivation for other members of their communities. Additionally, since there is little to no representation of how this process is experienced by similar students, they felt it was important to share their narratives in the hopes that they would

be able to educate and inform the literature.

In this chapter, I present major findings from the study and highlight several new contributions to the literature on college identity formation and the college choice process of Puertoorriqueña college Aspirantes. I map the current state of Puertoorriqueña Aspirantes educational experiences as it corresponds with their college identity formation process as identified in the major findings. I then compare their current state with Hossler and Gallagher's college choice process model (1987) and with Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model (2005) as a way to further unpack critical contributions from this study of Puertoorriqueña Aspirantes college going identity. I then provide recommendations and share recommendations provided by the Aspirantes to address the research, practice and policy implications of the findings. I conclude the chapter with final remarks.

Summary of Major Findings and Implications from a LatCrit Theoretical Perspective

Section 1 Themes: Influential Factors Contributing to the Development of a Concept of College-going

The themes that emerged in Section One were the primary factors to influence the development of a college going identity among this group of Puertoorriqueña Aspirantes. The students were aware of the resource limitations, the impact of limitations on their educational opportunities, and were motivated to counter the commonly held negative views of Puertoorriqueñx students.

A major finding of this section was parents' long-standing support and involvement in the participants' educational experiences and college going identity. Each identified their parents as a significant influence in their college-going aspirations. From a LatCrit theoretical perspective, participants' narratives illustrated how parental

involvement countered the dominant narrative that Puerto Rican parents are uninvolved or not caring about education (Lopez, 2001; Sapp et al. 2016) and this was consistent with the literature that parental involvement positively impacted their children's academic achievement (Arzubiaga et al., 2002; Delgado-Gaitan 1994, Nieto, 1998; Ramos, 2003; Trueba, 1988).

This finding is important because I found that parents were the primary motivators of students' college going since an early age but lack access to needed resources or lived experience of college going themselves to support their daughters' process. The role of parents is worth investigating more because it can inform future methods for comprehensive engagement of the students so that they are better able to integrate the process into their lived experience. Additionally, practitioners should offer educational tools and opportunities to bridge informational gaps that may exist among parents about the college going process (i.e. the steps and resources involved) to take advantage of the already strong support systems that are fruitful and familiar to the student and are therefore sustainable. Parents can become mentors to other parents toward a goal of increased community engagement in collage access among Puerto Rican students.

The Aspirantes offered recommendations for change elements needed to improve future opportunities for college going among Puertorriqueñx students. Yadira stated:

I feel that parents should also learn about what college is. You know, more than just knowing that it is good that their kids go. My parents think that college is like high school but that you have to pay to get in. I don't think that they realize how many years you have to be in college to get that

degree. Or how much work you have to do and how much you have to spend. (Yadira, Third Interview).

1b. The “one” and challenging the dominant narrative

The participants were high achieving students with limited linkage to college preparatory support and guidance. Expanding on the parent support, the participants identified key informants who played an important role in their college going identity process. According to the participants, each of the key informants was selected because of the caring support they provided. These individuals affirmed participants strengths, acknowledged and celebrated their academic capacity, and the participants reported feeling “seen” and “heard”. Additionally, several of the caring individuals also provided a model of a Latinx person with a college education. This finding was consistent with Sapp et al., 2016 characterization of agents of support. As high school students, the participants are subject to the structural environment and its resources. In this case, this equated an unavailability of counselors and mentors within the high school. Low rates of Latina students in college may be a result of this dearth of college preparatory support and care (see McDonough, 1997; 2004; Sapp et al., 2016). Similar to Sapp et al. (2016) who conducted a qualitative study of Latina high school students in their process of securing access to college, Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas in this study also activated their agency to ensure that they could navigate a college going process. In addition to agents of support, Sapp et al. identified institutional agents who provided support to the Latina students to access college. In contrast, the Aspirantes who identified caring individuals who were part of the high school leadership did not receive comparable actionable support beyond what they gathered themselves. Even among these caring individuals

identified for their supportive role, the Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas self-directed their college going process and, based on their being seen as high achievers and self-motivated and directed, the caring individuals' encouragement did not translate into actionable support. This divergence from Sapp et al.'s finding is important and distinguishes the support resources available to the Aspirantes.

Yadira's recommendation speaks directly to the need for additional in-school support. She stated:

Definitely the teachers. They should motivate the kids. And the guidance counselors, they should try their best to help students...If kids, especially Latino kids knew about the goals they could achieve, they would want to push for achieving them (Yadira, Third Interview).

Another influential factor contributing to the development of a concept of college going was the notion of being bien educadas and the role of family values. They negotiated a central tension essential to maintaining their goals to seek higher education while remaining aligned with their Puerto Rican cultural values. They were not rejecting family values; on the contrary, the family values motivated them and they wanted to maintain their connection. Aspirantes and their families anticipated that college student culture might distance them from the family and Puerto Rican values. This concept of wanting to remain proximate and the anticipated tension of distance (both culturally and geographically) associated with college going is central to the Aspirante Puertorriqueñas' college going identity formation and not something that they are going to abandon.

Historically, higher education has excluded POC from attending college and has expected culturally diverse students to disengage from their cultural identities in order to

fully integrate in college (Serna & Woulfe, 2017; Tierney, 1999). Generations of educational disparities in higher education have allowed the culture of higher education obscure the cultures of the students entering into higher education. From an historical perspective and coming from a Diaspora, the Aspirantes and their families appear to be navigating the tension of an emerging intersectional and interdisciplinary cultural identity to engage in the American educational culture which is largely independent and individual while retaining their foundational Puerto Rican cultural values of being family-oriented and –centered. Bien educadas also challenges the dominant ideology of college going as a process that separates a college goer from her nuclear family. An implication of this cultural tension is that the student may try to navigate and maintain both. The potential for having to code-switch may result in partial membership in both spaces. Another possible implication is that Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas will opt to attend local colleges allowing them to commute or be in more frequent contact with family. While this may be the right decision for some, it could also lead to a general limiting of academic opportunity if the best fit for her academic and profession goals would be met by a college or university that is outside the local area. This is worth further investigation and merits attention among higher education scholars and practitioners particularly in college-based student support programs.

The theme “Hay Que Superarse!” (translated: You Have to Overcome) addresses the Aspirantes sentiments of “being the one” and the first in the family to go to college. This theme contributes to the meaning participants assigned to college going identity formation process and both their and their parents’ resistance of the stereotype that Puertorriqueñas are not college bound or able to succeed. They perceived their success as

future college goers as an extension of their parents' lived experiences of unfulfilled aspirations. Based on this historical inequity, it is possible that these students have justifiably generated a general distrust of the educational system—what Yazmín refers to as a “game that is rigged”. We must understand and acknowledge the human agency (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995) they have manifested in order to engage in a college choice process. The Aspirantes are motivated to go to college and to be “the one” to achieve this for the family based largely on their parents' and prior generations' experiences of intersectional race, class, language, and migratory oppression. Resistant theory (Solorzano, Delgado-Bernal, 2001) helps to understand “human agency” (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995) the Aspirantes exert on their navigational process not only sidestepping institutional and environmental barriers to continue toward their goal but critiquing the structures and their detriment to their educational experience along the way. This has been understood as transformational resistance in which their awareness of the need to self-direct their achievements is linked to an underlying social justice goal to prove that Puertorriqueñas “can be successful” (Luz, Third Interview).

Aspirantes stated that they wanted to share their narratives as a source of information regarding the systematic condition that impacted their process. They were critical of the educational system and yet were preparing themselves to continue to navigate within it. When minoritized students develop and uphold aspirations for academic success, their achievement is assiduous and their intentionality around their educational process is built on resilience. However, in response to systematic oppression, many minoritized students internalize a belief that “educational success is unattainable” (Pizzolato, 2006, pg. 58). Despite these beliefs, many students are still able to aspire.

Informed by Yosso's community cultural wealth framework (2005), the Aspirantes college-going identity, as evident in this study, occurred within and asset-based identity formation process. In other words, each Aspirante was empowered by their lived experiences. They had developed keen critical awareness of the realities in which they were experiencing the educational process and therefore, they anticipated the barriers they would need to confront to embark on a pursuit of higher education and sought to counter and achieve what no one in their families had been able to achieve due to the systematic barriers. Each participant used assets that facilitated her navigation through the process of college choice with a hope for actualizing her college aspirations.

We know that Latinx students make choices to attend college where the people they know have attended—chain migration contacts (Perez & McDonough, 2008)—and this study found they seek caring individuals similar to agents of support (Sapp et al, 2016) in their commitment to be successful college goers. Because the Aspirantes have explicitly asked (Yazmín, Field Notes) to bring Latinx college role models to meet with other Puerto Rican students at Knight High School, there is an opportunity to respond meaningfully to their call to action. Current collaborative efforts are underway to bridge resources for college access and to support students in their college going process at Knight High School. This collaboration includes higher education scholars and practitioners and high school leadership, teachers, and program directors. This initiative aims to maximize sustainable resources and is based on each participants commitment to transformational social justice of access and equity for high school students at Knight High School who are predominantly Puerto Rican. Extending from this initiative in progress, Aspirantes would be well positioned to serve as peer leaders to share their

motivation and college going identity formation information with other Puertorriqueñ Aspirants. Though a long-term goal is to change the policy and structure that drives educational disparities, mentorship efforts like the ones we are exploring work within the existing structure and draw on the insider knowledge of the Aspirantes.

Section 2 Themes: Opportunity Gaps

In section two, the four themes focused on resisting negative labels while maintaining aspirations in the face of both limited resources and active withholding of college supportive experiences. The Aspirantes maintained their drive based on the meaning they ascribe to college going which was informed by the themes discussed in section one and self-directed their action steps to learn the process when the school failed to provide the guidance they needed.

The LatCrit theoretical framework of intersectional oppression, helped to identify the role of racism, linguicism, Puerto Rican migration, and poverty experienced by the Aspirantes and its centrality in their college going identity formation process. Having spent a year teaching and conducting research in the school, on numerous occasions I witnessed passive and active racism by teachers directed at Puerto Rican students. There were teachers that used discriminatory practices in their classrooms that often targeted Puerto Rican students which led to a hostile learning environment. During the year of the study, I witnessed teachers tell Puerto Rican students directly that there was no hope for them in their classroom. These teachers had superficial understanding of the students' background and experiences, they articulated having no interest in Puerto Rican students' educational experiences in and out of the school. I witnessed the cultural disconnection between teachers and Puerto Rican students. For example, in a hallway full of

predominantly Puerto Rican students, two teachers publicly addressed two Puerto Rican students who had apparently left their classroom while class was still in session. They said, “we don’t care if you leave and if you fail the class, we will still get paid”. I took that opportunity to engage with one of the teachers. She explained:

These students (her emphasis) come from Puerto Rico in the middle of the year, they lack the motivation to learn English and to work hard academically to get good grades. They have no hope...

(Field Notes, Teachers in the hallway)

She further explained that she was tired of trying to communicate with students from Puerto Rico when it was clear to her that there was a language barrier and a cultural disconnection and what she perceived to be a disinterest in learning. She said with frustration:

They don’t want to be here and so they don’t do the work. That is very frustrating and we can’t help all of them. (Field Notes, Teachers in the hallway).

There is no a doubt that teachers’ efforts to bridge the gaps that students may need in their educational transitions may be at times taxing and possibly frustrating largely due to the systems-level resource deficits including an absence of proper professional training in areas like cultural humility and/or bridging culturally appropriate learning environments. Students’ cultural and educational experiences are misunderstood and devalued at Knight High School.

The intersectional racism was also evident in teachers’ active withholding of college promoting academic opportunities that the high achieving Puertorriqueña Aspirantes were both qualified for and had set goals to achieve. The Aspirantes reported multiple accounts of

not being allowed to take advanced placement courses, incidents of negative mischaracterization, and misplaced punishment by the teachers.

There was also evidence of intersectional racism toward Puerto Ricans among students. The Aspirantes reported that students had developed a derogatory term “linguis” to describe newly arriving Puerto Rican students who were either monolingual Spanish-speakers or who had heavy Spanish accents. The racism created a divisive environment and, to avoid being targeted, longer-residing Puerto Ricans would clarify they were *not* a linguist to distance themselves from those who were perceived as newly arrived.

Pervasive intersectional racism as evidenced in this study can have major implications for Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas college going identify formation and process. The Aspirantes frequently reported “fear” and “worry” about the impact of being withheld college-bound opportunities or the lasting effects of being mischaracterized might have on their ability to get into college.

The findings in the Opportunity Gaps section spotlight an overt mischaracterization of Puerto Rican students. Knight High school is working to increase partnerships with the Universities to promote the development of college access bridge programs. However, the environmental context is challenged by being under state receivership, experiencing frequent turnover of super intendants and principles, and being required to focus performance benchmarks. There is dire a need for antiracism and cultural humility training among teachers and guidance counselors to actively address the racialized targeting and withholding of resources from Puerto Rican students. The broader community in Esperanza City has voiced serious concern about the state of the public school system. Recent public meetings have focused directly at Knight High

School. In a recent town hall meeting that I attended focused on the current state of Latino education in Esperanza City, a 20-year-long volunteer parent advocate voiced the long-time injustices that have transpired in the school system. A parent-couple that I sat near said to me “Estamos aquí perdiendo tiempo” (Translation: We are wasting time here.). Another parent stated: “We need more bilingual teachers who are willing to work with our kids and our parents who do want to be involved but who often times do not know the language or are not made to feel comfortable going to their child’s school” (MassLive, 2018).

Both this study and the broader community has identified a need to engage teachers and parents to advocate for and support Puertorriqueñx students. Because of the overt mischaracterization by teachers, it is clear that teacher training to address racism in the school is an essential step toward building a teacher/parent advocacy team that can begin to address these issues from within a dishearteningly troubled school and district.

Community Cultural Wealth and the Narrowing Opportunity Structure

The culture of higher education is rooted in an history of discrimination (Levine, 1996) and practices that perpetuate inequitable access to college resources for marginalized and minoritized groups (Contreras, 2011). Too often, Latinx students are at a disadvantage because they are unable to find adequate and culturally relevant transitional tools that will help them navigate the college identity formation and choice process. To address these differences and ameliorate the barriers that students experience in their transitions, we need frameworks that respond to students’ needs as they navigate through the process by bridging information gaps and translating the cultural practices and value from both institutional and individual-based capital. Additionally, the role of

family as well as other aspects of their social identities need to be recognized as a meaningful influence of the process.

The data collected provided evidence that the six forms of capital defined by Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model (CCW) were critical factors in the Aspirantes college choice process. CCW frames assets that students of color acquire in various home, community, and cultural domains as capital that they use to traverse their educational trajectories. According to the data and consistent with the literature (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Ritzer, 2008), these forms of capital served as facilitators or barriers to Aspirantes' educational processes as they cautiously navigated conflicting identities of race, class, and gender during their college choice process. The forms of CCW used by the Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas were aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). Each of the forms of capital used by each Aspirante, though tied to an element of pride when considering the families' efforts to seek a better life, were not catalyzing the students' goals. Even though, according to the literature, each form of capital is an asset, there was a lack of congruence between the Aspirantes' sources of capital and the capital that is valued in the process of college choice. For example, their sources of capital were not transformed into access to college preparatory academic programming and resources—an example of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; McDonough, 1997). The Aspirantes described having to constantly push against stereotypes and barriers and to side-step obstacles during their educational experiences while their narratives still reflected their use of CCW.

El Embudo de College Choice: Mapping the Current State of the College Choice Process
for the Aspirantes

Equipped with their developing college-going identity, the Aspirantes confronted challenging conditions toward the process of college choice. El Embudo de College Choice (See Figure 2), illustrates how the college choice model manifested in the lives of the Aspirantes. Instead of the linear process with distinct stages (as modeled by Hossler and Gallagher in their seminal college choice model), their process is better illustrated as funneling through a series of barriers. The Aspirantes anticipated that the process of college choice would be difficult to navigate and they were determined to do their best to find a way through the process. Based on the data, El Embudo included three conditions (though not limited to only these) that Aspirantes needed to reconcile as they engaged in their college choice process. These three conditions, *Context Matters*, *Buscando una Aguja en un Pajar*, and the *Illusion of Choice* contrast the three distinct stages of the Hossler and Gallagher model *Predisposition*, *Search and Choice*. The conditions inside El Embudo illustrated how the Aspirantes, based on their positionality, explained having to constantly work against stereotypes and to side-step obstacles. It isn't surprising that the Aspirantes would feel lost and discouraged (not disinterested and unmotivated) in the college going process. The following is a discussion of the three conditions within El Embudo de College Choice.

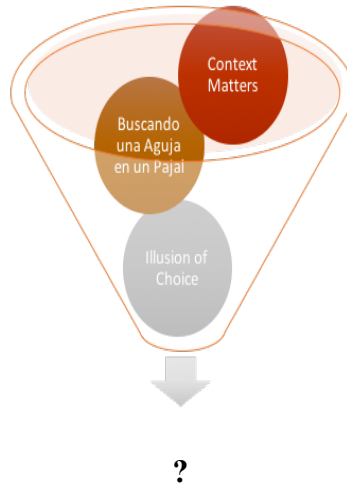


Figure 1. El Embudo de (the funnel of) College Choice

Context Matters in Predisposition

They each developed a college-going identity that was responsive and adapted to the challenging conditions of their context by activating their capital related to their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Context mattered in their college choice process. They had not received guidance about what college-going is and how it occurs. They had not visited any colleges or universities. In fact, the local area colleges and universities in the surrounding area had never visited or recruited students from Knight High School.

The Search for Una Aguja en Un Pajar

For the Aspirantes, college-going and the college choice process were only notions/imaginations and they did not have concrete examples or opportunities to engage in the actual steps of the college choice process. The “search for a needle in a haystack” is symbolic of the Aspirantes’ college choice process. Without a college going culture in place, the Aspirantes reported alternative steps they had to take to prepare for the college

choice process. Melody, who found support in the GEAR UP program, shared disappointment that the program was cut for the fall when she needed it the most. She shared that she was hopeful the program would resume again in the spring but it was never re-instated due to a limited school budget. The Aspirantes shared their frustration of having to “jump through hoops” and of having to “figure it all out as [they] go”. For example, they did not know what they needed to do in order to prepare for the career they wanted. They were always trying to piece together college information. One Aspirante shared with me that she felt that it would be best to just apply to the community college that everyone was applying to because she knew she would be accepted. Without having been provided any information about possible colleges or about how to search for potential colleges, none of the Aspirantes conducted a formal college search and none had a strategy for a search process.

Illusion of Choice

As discussed in the literature review, open-access policies at community colleges provide educational access to underprivileged groups and are well regarded among supporters of open access policy. However, this study confirmed the critique that community colleges engage students in the management of ambition process that is believed to deviate students away from college aspirations and outcomes associated with a 4-year college opportunity (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 225; Pincus, 1974). Instead of “Choice”, their aspirations are controlled and tempered through the management of ambition (Brint & Karabel, 1989) and instead they experience an illusion of choice.

Having from none to one choice is not a *choice set* for college and is inadequate for students who aspire to go to college. When asked about the colleges they had visited,

the Aspirantes could only recount two local community colleges in the area. Those two community colleges were located with the same proximity to the high school as two other 4-year colleges and just several miles away from three other higher education institutions. None of these institutions reached out to the student population at Knight High School for recruitment or distribution of college-going resources. Institutions of higher education use college choice models to inform their recruitment practices and to reach prospective students who are participating in the college choice process. It is a symbiotic relationship, of sorts, in which *choice* is meant to ultimately reflect the best fit both for the student and for the institution. However, the Aspirantes had no access to the schools that they aspired to attend. They were planning to apply to colleges and universities that they had never visited and had only gathered basic information from general internet searches. Scholars and practitioners: Are we agreeing to the classic notion put forth by Clark in 1980 when he described the process of redirecting students with low academic skills but who had aspirations to transfer to 4-year colleges to remain in 2-year college as “cooling out”? It seemed like the Aspirantes were receiving messages that their only options would be to attend community college. While community college is an essential part of the high education spectrum of opportunities, a college choice process including only two local community colleges is incomplete. For example, two students who were pursuing a career in nursing knew only about one program within one college in the area despite there being many nursing programs in the region.

Researchers have examined important factors that impact and inform Latinxs in their college choice process. They have found that they depend considerably on their families, friends, and trustworthy school representatives for information. The “chain

migration contacts” was coined to illustrate how Latinx students rely the most on their extended family members for information about college and make their choices to attend college based on where the people they know had attended (Jun and Colyar, 2002; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; McDonough, 1994; Perez and McDonough, 2008;). Similarly, other scholars propose that student college expectations and aspirations are constructed through their relationships and interactions with important people in their lives, and as such are considered “institutional agents” (McDonough & Calderone, 2006; McDonough, 1994;) and agents of support (Sapp et al., 2016). Though consistent with the findings in this study, the current framework illustrates responsibility laying within the individual and is not considered from an institutional accountability. We have a crisis and higher education needs to assume institutional responsibility for best practices that can bridge and yield access to quality education, resources for a successful college choice process that is culturally responsive and sustaining for students like the Aspirantes in this study.

The Complexity of College “Choice”

The concept of college choice in higher education assumes that in order to successfully participate in the college choice process, a student must be able to share in the values espoused within the academic community and thus be aware of the markers and symbols that are a part of that culture. Some scholars postulate that students’ expectations of their potential college experiences and their ability to prepare for college are shaped by what they learn in their environment prior to transitioning into higher education (Tierney, 1997; Tinto, 1987). As a result, many students who do not have access to the cultural capital associated with the college going process, are at risk of not

being able to fully participate and benefit from the college going experience (McDonough, 1997). For example, minoritized students, like the Aspirantes in this study, whose educational experiences are affected by conditions of an under-resourced school district, have limited to no access to the resources that more affluent students acquire during their educational experiences from an early age (Tierney & Colyar, 2009; Tinto, 1987, p.87;). These students are at a significant disadvantage to successfully secure admission to a four-year college or university. Moreover, the opportunity to actualize a process in which they can participate in by making choices regarding college going is considerably deterred.

The original concept of “college choice” designates a specific process that leads students through stages of selecting an institution of higher education. However, the process for each Aspirante did not map onto the original model of college choice as presented by Hossler and Gallaguer (1987). Each Aspirante was the first in their family who was navigating the process of college choice, primarily on their own and with a primary intention to break the cycle of poverty. Furthermore, even though they all felt fear of failing, they were determined to find their way through their process of college choice.

A sustainable model for a college choice process and access initiative between higher education and schools would include university supported programmatic partnerships to provide resources, education and research about the specific and required steps to successfully attend college. It would engage students in college positive messaging, education about the college choice process, and would document the narratives of college Aspirantes who are largely excluded from current theoretical

frameworks for college choice process. These narratives will unmask the true navigational strategies of the Aspirantes and can inform more representative frameworks to create culturally relevant policy for outreach, engagement, and retention of Puerto Rican Aspirantes and other minoritized student groups in college. Only then will the college choice process yield the outcome it is intended to achieve among Aspirantes Puertorriqueños.

Summary of Recommendations and Next Steps

First, the educational institutions—both secondary and higher education—must involve the families including their values, strengths and capacity to support and shape the students’ college going aspirations. Each of the students’ reported their aspiration to go to college stemmed from their parents’ well-established college positive messaging from an early age at home. By involving the students’ parents and family-based social networks, the educational institutions can create opportunities to demystify the college going process because—while supportive of the goals—they too are frequently uninformed about the process. Therefore, the students and their families would be better able to make informed decisions based on true and accurate information rather than the process remaining an imagined and hoped for but otherwise unknown and often unrealized goal.

We face a double-edged sword with the implications of this finding and associated recommendations. On the one hand, engaging the parents and families is essential based on the meaning-making that students’ have about the origin and overall purpose for pursuing higher education, namely to be “the one” to catapult the family forward both economically and socially. On the other hand, if the students—and by

extension their families—are approaching college going with community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), a source of capital that is often undervalued, there is a fundamental chasm between how they are arriving at the goal to attend college and the actual expectations from higher education to independicize for individual advancement. Therefore, to rectify this misalignment in college going between Aspirantes and their families from the higher educational frameworks, we must actually engage the families in cultural capital deep dive to provide context of the misalignment in a culturally meaningful way. This would by definition be an indoctrination into the code-switching practices their children have become familiar with in school but they—the parents and families—have likely not been able to fully understand the need, the context and the strategies for adopting or mastering the practice.

More specifically, bridging access from the university would include representation from several important sectors of the institution. This would include the undergraduate student population to provide mentorship opportunities and access to Aspirantes to truly know rather than imagine the lived experiences and requirements of a first-generation college student. The collaboration would also include academic affairs as mentioned and admissions leadership to provide comprehensive information about the college application and admission process. This collaborative higher education leadership would provide wrap-around college choice process education and resources and would actively seek to engage Puerto Rican Aspirantes shifting the burden of disparity from the individual students to the higher education institution. Currently, university efforts to engage Puerto Rican Aspirantes and other first generation, minoritized student groups is fragmented with little to no sustainable funding since most are grant funded creating

inconsistent and transient programs that students cannot count on being available when they need them. As a result, there is not an opportunity in the current structure to scaffold on the learning, both institutional and individual. However, there are campus initiatives to increase student diversity. This is an opportunity to institutionalize a sustainable funding stream to support this college choice and access collaborative bridging initiative. The schools where Puerto Rican Aspirantes and other similar students are completing secondary education are struggling. Being under state receivership, for example, illustrates the gravity of school environments and they are unable to provide the support and resources needed to increase college choice and access. Therefore, if higher education institutions aim to increase student diversity and, specifically, if higher education institutions aim to engage the fastest growing population in the United States, it is incumbent on the universities to take action.

During the time of this research study, for example, I witnessed such faculty engender opportunities to connect with Puerto Rican students and other first-generation students of color and prioritize building partnerships and long-term mentorship despite the absence of any corresponding gains in their tenure-track process. Simultaneous to the need to engage the families, we must engage our first generation teachers and faculty of color who are likely success stories among their families and communities and whose achievements are frequently the definition of resistant capital. Like the Aspirantes, they seek to support and, for many of them, having been an Aspirante facing similar barriers at one point, their commitment to this work is in addition to the fundamental requirements of all tenure-track faculty. In other words, they continue to have to work more than their counterparts in order to fulfill their commitment to a similar promise of being “the one”

to help their family [translation: community] advance. These faculty are knowledgeable, both first-hand and through their research and partnership, of the educational inequities and are unified in their acknowledgement and commitment to address the disparity making them collaborative agents of change with the Aspirantes.

Finally, researchers and practitioners should continue exploring what a collective- and family-oriented approach to the college going process may look like so that college aspirants can maintain their cultural identity and values and uphold their family responsibilities within the context of being a college student. If we aim to provide a holistic experience to the Aspirantes, it requires applying in depth understanding of the family values and incorporating this into the approach for college going. Additionally, parents and extended families of college goers should be engaged in the college preparatory process to educate families about the potential for college-related experiences like living further from the family and amidst a diverse array of cultures. Families should be connected with the higher education student affairs leaders and practitioners who address access and engagement to cultural groups and resources on campus so that parents and families understand the opportunity for sustaining the bien educada values even if/while living at a distance or becoming integrated into a college going culture.

Concluding Remarks

There is a paucity of research about Puertorriqueñx high school students' educational experiences and their aspirations to attend college. I embarked on this research process committed to using my platform as a researcher to conduct humanistic research (Paris & Winn, 2014) and with a goal to address both a gap in the existing literature and to inform research, practice and policy aimed at increasing access to higher

education for Puertorriqueñx students and Latinxs in general. Puerto Rican students in the United States most often experience an educational system fraught with inequities and curricula that marginalizes and dehumanizes their experiences on a daily basis (Irizarry, 2011; Nieto, 2000; Solis-Jordan, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). Systematically, the educational system is structured to underserve Latinx students in the U.S. They should not have to tolerate these conditions. For at least seventy years, efforts to address educational inequities among Puertorriqueñx have been underway (Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 2007). How many students have gone through high school and were told they wouldn't amount to anything, that they are better off getting a job, they aren't college material, or have been handed incomplete information about college? When will there be acknowledgement that we are failing our Puertorriqueñx students?

Beyond the participants in this study, Puerto Rican students who I got to know throughout the year expressed a need for a collaborative way to bridge the gaps they were experiencing. After concluding the study, I continued to volunteer at Knight High School and joined efforts with several faculty and community stakeholders to develop a college access and positive messaging program at Knight High School. The program has met weekly for the past year and is developing opportunities for tiered mentorship to pair high school students with college student mentors as part of an undergraduate educational access and equity course.

The participants in this study endured a system that underestimated their academic potential. However, the findings conveyed participant narratives of aspiration, resistance and transformation related to the process of developing the concept and identity of college going. Damaris, Luz, Yadira, Yazmín, and Melody have actualized

their aspirations and continue to activate their agency, eyes wide open, fueled by their internal resources of cultural pride, committed to being representatives for their families and communities in educational attainment and justice.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE AND SCRIPT

I will announce the opportunity to participate in the study during class and will invite all the female students to participate. All participants in the classroom identify as Puerto Rican and as having college going aspirations. This meets the study inclusion criteria. I will say the following:

“Class, I am conducting a study on Puerto Rican female high school student educational experiences and their college going identities. This research is part of my doctoral dissertation from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I have been given permission by your principal to conduct this study within Project CACIQUE. I would like to invite the female students in this class to take part of this research study because I want to learn from you about how you think about college. I am also inviting you to be in the study because you have expressed interest in going to college. You do not need to participate in this study if you don’t want to. If you choose to be in the study, you will be invited to participate in 3 interviews and each will last 60-90 minutes. With your permission, I will videotape or audio record the interviews so that I can analyze them at a later date. The recording will only be used to analyze the interviews and will not be shared with anyone outside of the project. If you prefer to not be recorded, I will take notes to document the interviews. I will continue to be in class and, as part of the study, I will pay special attention to class activities related to topics regarding college going and will record what I observe in my notes. I will also collect and review your class work. As part of your participation, I will also ask you to nominate two adults (18 or older) for me to interview. These two people can be family members, friends, mentors or teachers. They should be people that you identify as having influenced your education and your ideas about college. I will explain this process in greater detail if you are interested in participating in the study.

If you are interested, I will be available to speak with and/or meet with you and your parent/legal guardian after school to answer any questions and explain the process of participating. I will provide you and your parent/legal guardian both an assent form and permission form to be reviewed and signed by you both if you choose to participate. Both forms will need to be signed prior to engaging in any study activities. Throughout the duration of the study, I will be available to speak with you or your parent/legal guardian to respond to any questions or concerns that may arise.”

APPENDIX B

KEY INFORMANT RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE AND SCRIPT

To recruit key informants, I will ask each participant to elect two adults from their family, friends, mentor or teacher network that they identify as having influenced their education and their ideas about college. I will request that the participant inform their selected adults of the opportunity to participate in the study. I will request that the participant obtain their nominated adults' preferred mode of contact (e.g. cell phone, home phone, email) so that I can reach out to them to formally invite them into the study. Once I receive the contact information from the participant for each of their adult nominees, I will contact them and say:

“Hi, my name is Yedalis Ruiz and I have been a part of Project CACIQUE at Knight High School since September as part of [*Participant Name's*] class. I am conducting a study on Puerto Rican female high school student educational experiences and their college going identities. This research is part of my doctoral dissertation from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I have been given permission by the principal of the school to conduct this study within Project CACIQUE. All of the female students in this classroom were invited to participate because they all self-identify as Puerto Rican and as being interested in attending college. You were identified by [*Participant Name*] as someone who has influenced her education and her ideas about college. I am inviting you to participate in a 60-minute interview here at the high school after school hours. Your participation is completely voluntary. The interview will be about [*Participant Name's*] education and her college going plans. This research may not have any direct benefit to participants, but it will provide important information that will help future students. Do you have any questions about the study or about the opportunity to participate? I am happy to answer any questions that you may have. If you are interested in participating in the study, I would like to plan a mutually agreeable time to meet and we will review and complete the informed consent form and then I will conduct the interview.”

APPENDIX C INFORMED CONSENT FORM (ASPIRANTES)

Informed Consent Form University of Massachusetts Amherst

Title of the Study: Mapping the Development of College Going Identities among Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas

Principal Investigator: Yedalis Ruiz, Doctoral Candidate
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
(860)604-8324

You are receiving this form as an invitation to participate in this study because you have been nominated by [Participant Name] to share with me information about her educational experiences. She has identified you as a key informant because you have served as a source of information in her education and about college going goals and planning. This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about your participation in this study.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to critically examine how high school students experience school and develop college-going identities.

Procedures to of the Study: Your participation in this study will include the following:

- a. I will **interview** you once and the interview will last 60-90 minutes. I will conduct the interview with you in the school after school hours. With your permission, I will videotape or audio record the interview so that I can analyze it at a later date. The recording will only be used to analyze the interview and will not be shared with anyone outside of the project. If you prefer to not be recorded, I will take notes to document the interview. Please check one of the boxes below to tell me which option is okay.

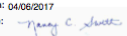
- I give permission to video record me during my interview
- I give permission to only audio record my interview
- I do not give permission to video or audio record my interview but will still choose to participate in the interview.

2. **Benefits and Risks of Study:** This study will help me learn more about student college aspirations and about their current educational experiences. There is minimal to no risk associated with this study. The information I gather will help other students someday, however, you or [Participant Name] may not directly benefit from participating in this study.

3. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. I will not share identifying information about you in any way.

- a. Instead if using your real name, I will use a pseudonym (a fake name that you choose) when I publish the results of this research.

- b. I will store all information shared with me in a locked file cabinet in a locked room or in a password protected computer stored in a locked room.

University of Massachusetts Amherst-IRB (413) 545-3428	
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IRB Signature: 	

- c. I will destroy all recordings within six years of the end of the research. During the length of the study, I will keep these recordings filed under a coding system.
4. **Right to Ask Questions:** You are welcome to ask questions before, during or after the study. Please contact me, Yedalis Ruiz at (860) 604-8324 with questions or concerns about this study. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.
 5. **Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can stop your participation at any time without any consequence. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.
 6. **Institutional Review Board:** If you have questions or comments regarding the study, please feel free to contact me, Yedalis Ruiz at (860) 604-8324 or yruiz@educ.umass.edu. You may also contact Dr. Jason G. Irizarry, Chairperson of the Dissertation Research, at (413) 545-1186 or jirizarry@educ.umass.edu. Or contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

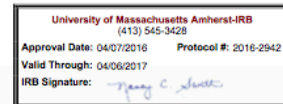
Please sign below if you agree to take part in this research study. A copy of this form will be provided to you for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Date



APPENDIX D

INFORMED ASSENT FORM

Informed Assent Form
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Title of the Study: Mapping the Development of College Going Identities among Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas

Principal Investigator: Yedalis Ruiz, Doctoral Candidate
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
(860)604-8324

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to critically examine how high school students experience school and develop college-going identities. You are being asked to take part of this research study because I want to learn from students about how they think about college.


I am inviting you to be in the study because you are a student in Project CACIQUE and have expressed interest in going to college. About 4-6 participants will be part of this study. You do not need to participate in this study if you don't want to. No one will be upset with you if you don't want to be in the study. If you don't want to be in the study, you just have to tell me. It is up to you.

Procedures of the Study: I want to tell you about some things that you will be asked to do if you agree to be part of the study. This study will use participant observations, interviews, and document analysis of student work.

- a. You will be in the study throughout the duration of the school year and until we complete three interviews. You will participate in 3 *interviews* and each will last 60-90 minutes. With your permission, I will videotape or audio record the interviews so that I can analyze them at a later date. The recording will only be used to analyze the interviews and will not be shared with anyone outside of the project. If you prefer to not be recorded, I will take notes to document the interviews. Please check one of the boxes below to tell me which option is okay.
 - I give permission to video record me during my interviews
 - I give permission to only audio record my interviews
 - I do not give permission to video or audio record my interviews but will still choose to participate in the interviews.
- b. I will conduct *participant observations*. I will observe what happens in the classroom and record what I see in my notes.
- c. *Document analysis*: I will also collect and review the class work that you complete in Project CACIQUE.
- d. I will ask you to nominate two adults (18 or older) for me to interview. These two people can be family members, friends, mentors or teachers. They should be people that you identify as having influenced your education and your ideas about college.

2. **Benefits and Risks of Study:** This study will help me learn more about student college aspirations and about their current educational experiences. The information I gather will help other students someday, however, you may not directly benefit from participating in this study. There is minimal to no risk associated with this study. The study

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Yedalis Ruiz-Modified on 3.17.16
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was explained to your parents and they have granted permission for you to participate in the study. If you decide to participate in the study, your parents will need to sign this form too.

3. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. I will not share any identifying information about you in any way. The information collected about you during the study will be kept safely locked up. Nobody will have access to it except for me and Dr. Jason G. Irizarry.
 - a. Instead of using your real name, I will use a fake name that you will choose when I publish the results of this research.
 - b. I will store all information shared with me in a locked file cabinet in a locked room or in a password protected computer stored in a locked room.
 - c. I will destroy all recordings within six years of the end of the research. During the length of the study, I will keep these recordings filed under a coding system.
4. **Participants under the Age of Eighteen:** If you are under the age of eighteen, your parent(s) or guardian(s) need to provide permission. You and a parent or guardian will need to sign this form.
5. **Right to Ask Questions:** You are welcome to ask questions before, during or after the study. Please feel free to contact me, Yedalis Ruiz at (860) 604-8324 with questions or concerns about this study. You can also take more time to think about being in the study and also talk some more with your parents about being in the study before signing. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.
6. **Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can stop your participation at any time without any consequence. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.
7. **Institutional Review Board:** If you have questions or comments regarding the study, please feel free to contact me, Yedalis Ruiz at (860) 604-8324 or yruiz@educ.umass.edu. You may also contact Dr. Jason G. Irizarry, Chairperson of the Dissertation Research, at (413) 545-1186 or jirizarry@educ.umass.edu. Or contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

Please sign below if you agree to take part in this research study. Remember that you can change your mind and stop being part of it at any time. All you have to do is tell me or Dr. Irizarry. It's okay. You will be given a copy of this paper to keep.

Participant Signature

Date

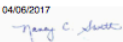
Parent or Guardian (if under eighteen)

Date

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

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APPENDIX E

PARENT PERMISSION FOR MINOR TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

University of Massachusetts Amherst

PARENT PERMISSION FOR MINOR TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of the Study: Mapping the Development of College Going Identities among Aspirantes Puertorriqueñas

Principal Investigator: Yedalis Ruiz, Doctoral Candidate
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
(860)604-8324


Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Jason G. Irizarry, Chairperson of the Dissertation Research
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
(413) 545-1186

Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because she is a student in Project CACIQUE class at Holyoke High School and has expressed interest in going to college. I am inviting her to take part in this research study because I want to learn from students about how they think about college.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to critically examine how high school students experience school and develop college-going identities.

Procedures to of the Study: If your child chooses to participate in the study and you grant her permission to participate, she will be asked to participate in the following procedures:

- a. She will participate in the study throughout the duration of the school year and until we complete three interviews. She will participate in 3 *interviews* and each will last 60-90 minutes. With her permission, I will videotape or audio record the interviews so that I can analyze them at a later date. The recording will only be used to analyze the interviews and will not be shared with anyone outside of the project. If she prefers not to be recorded, I will take notes to document the interviews.
 - b. I will conduct *participant observations*. I will observe what happens in the classroom and record what I see in my notes.
 - c. *Document analysis*: I will also collect and review the class work that she completes in Project CACIQUE.
 - d. I will ask her to nominate two adults (18 or older) for me to interview. These two people can be family members, friends, mentors or teachers. They should be people that she identifies as having influenced her education and her ideas about college.
2. **Benefits and Risks of Study:** This study will help me learn more about student college aspirations and about their current educational experiences. There is minimal to no risk associated with this study. The information I gather will help other students someday, however, she may not directly benefit from participating in this study.

University of Massachusetts Amherst-IRB (413) 545-3428	
Approval Date: 04/07/2016	Protocol #: 2016-2942
Valid Through: 04/06/2017	
IRB Signature: 	

3. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Her participation in this research is confidential. I will not share identifying information about her in any way.
- a. I will use a pseudonym (a fake name that she chooses) when I publish the results of this research.
 - b. I will store all information shared with me in a locked file cabinet in a locked room or in a password protected computer stored in a locked room.
 - c. I will destroy all recordings within six years of the end of the research. During the length of the study, I will keep these recordings filed under a coding system.
4. **Right to Ask Questions:** You and [Participant Name] are welcome to ask questions before, during or after the study. Please contact me, Yedalis Ruiz at (860) 604-8324 with questions or concerns about this study. If you have any concerns about [Participant Name] rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.
5. **Voluntary Participation:** Her participation in this study is completely voluntary. She can stop her participation at any time without any consequence. She does not have to answer any questions she does not want to answer.
6. **Institutional Review Board:** If you or [Participant Name] have questions or comments regarding the study, please feel free to contact me, Yedalis Ruiz at (860) 604-8324 or yruiz@educ.umass.edu. You may also contact Dr. Jason G. Irizarry, Chairperson of the Dissertation Research, at (413) 545-1186 or jirizarry@educ.umass.edu. Or contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

If you agree to have [Participant Name] participate in the study, please sign below. **You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.**

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN

Name of Child

Name of Parent or Legal Guardian

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

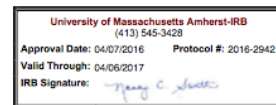
Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date



APPENDIX F

ASPIRANTES PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

- I. Prior to entering the Research Site
 - a. I will reflect on my expectations and will include the following:
 - i. Presuppositions
 - ii. Assumptions
 - b. I will document my expectations in a Reflexive Memo

- II. During the Observation
 - a. I will document in Field Notes the following:
 - i. The site
 - ii. Time (time the observation began, time observation ended)
 - iii. My goals
 - b. I will structure my notes in the following method:
 - i. In the *Observation* section
 1. I will chronologically document what I observe. The following are some examples:
 - a. Description of space (with sketches if appropriate)
 - i. Objects
 - ii. Artifacts
 - iii. Structure and organization of space
 - iv. Temperature
 - b. Description of participants
 - c. Description of participant's behaviors
 - d. Participant interactions
 - ii. In the *Activities* section
 1. I will document participant's involvement in the following regard:
 - a. Sequence of the activity (ies)
 - b. Instructions given
 - c. Instructions followed
 - d. Participant level of participation
 - iii. In the *Reflection* section
 1. I will record my impressions during the observation
 - a. Reflexive comments

2. I will document questions and note any items that needs follow up
 3. I will note any questions or concerns regarding my study methods
 - iv. In the *interpretation* section
 1. I will document preliminary analysis
 - III. After the observation
 - a. I will process and further document my observations in thorough field notes
 - b. I will document any questions or concerns that require follow up

APPENDIX G

ASPIRANTES INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Overview of study and interview

First Interview-Background Information

2. Can you tell me a little about yourself?

[Follow up questions if they don't come up in her narrative]

a. When and where were you born?

b. Where did you grow up?

c. What are your interests?

3. What would you like to be when you grow up? Career aspirations?

4. How would you describe your community in (Esperanza)?

5. Can you tell me about your family?

a. Who lives in your home?

b. Briefly, please describe the educational attainment/experiences of each of the members of your household.

c. What language do you speak most often at home?

d. What language do other people speak in your home?

e. What language do you speak in school?

f. What language do you speak with your friends?

6. How do you identify yourself ethnically?

i. What cultural practices do you engage in with your family?

Second Interview- Participant Educational Experiences

7. Thinking back, how would you describe yourself as a student in elementary school?
 - a. What about your elementary school experience do you remember most?
 - b. Did anyone in your family, school or community ever mention college to you when you were in elementary school? If so, what did they say?
8. How would you describe yourself as a student in middle school?
 - a. What about your middle school experience do you remember most?
 - b. Did anyone in your family, school or community ever mention college to you when you were in middle school? If so, what did they say?
9. How would you describe your high school?
10. How would you describe your high school experience so far?
 - a. Tell me about any extracurricular program or activity/club that you participate in?
 - i. Why do you participate?
 - ii. What do you gain from your participation?
 - b. What do you see as your academic strengths?
 - c. What do you see as your academic challenges?
 - d. What has been the greatest educational accomplishment?
 - i. What was your family's reaction to these accomplishments?
 - e. What are some challenges you have encountered while navigating school?
 - i. How have you responded to these challenges?
 - f. Can you tell me about any programs or specific teachers/counselors that provide you with support as a student?
 - g. Can you tell me about any programs or people you feel are not supportive to you as a student?
11. What are your career aspirations?
 - a. What schooling/education do you need to reach those goals?
12. Can you describe what college is in your own words?
13. Do you want to go to college and, if so, where?
14. What does earning a college degree mean to you? To your family?
15. When did you first realize you wanted to go to college?

- a. Why do you want to go to college?
16. Who are the people you talk to about college and about going to college?
- a. In school
 - b. Out of school
17. What person has most influenced your interest in college?
- a. What do they do?
 - b. Did they go to college? If so, where?
18. Can you describe where you would like to go to college?
- a. Why this place?
19. Are there any colleges you know that you don't want to go to?
- a. Why not?
20. Do you know the major you want to pursue? If so, what?
21. What is the highest degree you would like to earn?
22. What advice have you gotten about going to college from members of your community?
- a. Has any of the advice you have received addressed what it might be like to attend college as a Puertorriqueña?
 - b. Who gave this advice? How do they know?
23. How does your family (guardians/parents/other members of your household) perceive college-going?
24. Describe any challenges you anticipate in your process of preparing for college?
25. Pretend I didn't know anything about college-going and tell me the steps you need to take to go to college.
- a. When did the process of thinking about college start for you?
 - b. How did you choose the colleges you are considering?
 - c. What are the steps you need to take to gain admission into the college of your choice?
26. What more do you want to know about going to college?
- a. How do you plan to obtain this information?

Third Interview-Intersectionality of Identity and College-going

27. What, if any, impact does being a Puertorriqueña student has on the way you are supported as a student?
28. What does being Puertorriqueña [race and gender] mean to you?
 - a. How does being Puertorriqueña [race and gender] influence the way you think about who you are as a student?
29. How does being Puertorriqueña [race and gender] impact your experiences in school?
30. How does being Puertorriqueña [race and gender] inform your aspirations to go to college?
31. How does being Puertorriqueña [race and gender] influence your interest in the major you would like to pursue in college?
32. What does college mean to you?
33. What would going to college mean to you as a Puertorriqueña student?
 - a. What does it mean to your family?
 - b. What does it mean to your community?
34. Has there been a specific event, experience or person that has changed the way you think about college in the past couple of years?
35. Think about another Puertorriqueña student at your school or one of your friends who isn't planning to go to college. Why do you think their experience is different?
36. Why do you think there are so few Puertorriqueñas in college?
37. If you had the power to change one thing in your school, what would that be?
38. What else would you like me to know about your experience as a Puertorriqueña who aspires to go to college?

APPENDIX H

ASPIRANTES KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Overview of the Study
2. Can you tell me about yourself?
 - a. When and where were you born?
 - b. Where did you grow up?
 - c. What do you do for work?
 - d. What is the highest educational level you have achieved?
3. How do you know _____ [participant's name]? What is your relationship?
 - a. For how long have you known her?
4. Tell me about _____ [participant's name] as a student.
5. Do you think she is going to college? Why? Why not?
6. What do you do to encourage her to go to college?
7. What are your concerns about her going to college?
8. What are your dreams for her?
9. How do you support her dreams?
10. What do you think will be her greatest challenge on her road to college?
11. What college do you want her to attend? Why those colleges?
12. What else do you want me to know?

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